

# Contents

- Introduction** ..... 2
- Section 1**  
Funding Higher  
Education in Further  
Education Colleges ..... 6
- Section 2**  
Quality Assurance and  
Enhancement ..... 16
- Section 3**  
Information about HE ..... 21
- Section 4**  
Fair Access/  
Widening Participation ..... 26
- Section 5**  
Working in Partnership ..... 33
- Section 6**  
Working in the  
International Market ..... 38
- Section 7**  
Student Experience ..... 39
- Section 8**  
Marketing ..... 44
- Section 9**  
Scholarship ..... 56
- Section 10**  
Admissions ..... 61

## College HE Guide

This on-line guide has been developed in response to requests from Colleges for guidance about recent and proposed changes to the higher education (HE) system.



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Introduction: Context and using the guide

### Context

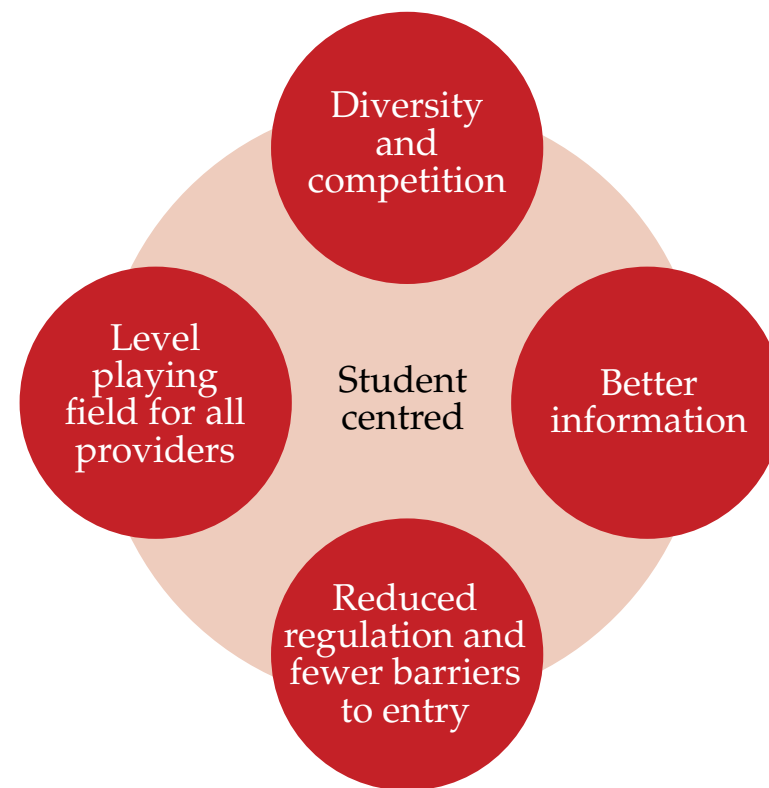
This guide has been developed in response to requests from Colleges for guidance about recent and proposed changes to the higher education (HE) system.

Following *The Browne Review* of 2009-10<sup>1</sup>, the Government published its HE White Paper, *Students at the heart of the system* (2011)<sup>2</sup>, and a technical consultation, *A new, fit-for-purpose regulatory framework for the higher education sector*<sup>3</sup>. These documents set out proposals for fundamental changes to the financing and regulation of HE, as well as the Government's broader vision for HE.

*The Browne Review* recommended that, rather than providing a block grant to Universities and Colleges to support the cost of teaching, the funding should follow the student. Following this, the Government introduced reforms for 2012-13 to increase the cap on tuition fees, reduce the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) block grant and replace funding with a system of student loans, with repayment on an income contingent basis. The White Paper contains additional plans for reforms and sets out the vision for the future of HE. The vision – see figure 1 below – is underpinned by a philosophy

of relying increasingly on competition between institutions, greater diversity of institutions and price, and increased choice for students which, it is argued, will improve quality and lead to greater social equity and mobility.

**Figure 1**  
**Government's Vision for HE in England**



<sup>1</sup> *Securing a sustainable future for higher education: an independent review of higher education funding and student finance*, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, Cm 8122. London, 2011

<sup>3</sup> BIS Technical Consultation – *A new, fit-for-purpose regulatory framework for the Higher Education sector*, 2011

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
Section 1 Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
Section 2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
Section 3 Information about HE .....	21
Section 4 Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
Section 5 Working in Partnership .....	33
Section 6 Working in the International Market .....	38
Section 7 Student Experience .....	39
Section 8 Marketing .....	44
Section 9 Scholarship .....	56
Section 10 Admissions .....	61

The White Paper marks out an important role for Further Education Colleges (FECS) in delivering HE, contributing to the diversity of the sector through providing choice for students and their particular strengths in reaching out to non-traditional HE learners, and in delivering locally-relevant, vocational HE and lifelong learning. The barriers to fair competition and entry for Colleges through, for example, funding and validation arrangements with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), are recognised, and there are proposals for a number of reforms to create a level playing field and reduce barriers for entry and to alternative providers.

To promote greater diversity and competition, and support student choice, the White Paper described changes to the way in which student number controls would operate in 2012-13. The first change allowed unrestricted recruitment of high-achieving students and the second allowed providers that ‘combine good quality with value for money’, and whose average fee was below £7,500, to bid for a share of 20,000 places. The places were to be created through reducing student numbers from the ‘core’ allocation of all providers to produce a ‘margin’ for redistribution through a competitive process. This reform was implemented a few months after the publication of the White Paper. As a result of the bidding process the 20,000 places were divided between 190 Universities and Colleges: circa 9,500 places between 35 HEIs, and circa 10,500 places between 155 FECs. The FEC beneficiaries include 65 Colleges new to direct funding with HEFCE. The second round of the ‘core and margin’ process for 2013-14 is a more limited exercise involving the redistribution of only 5,000 undergraduate places. Institutions that are eligible for margin numbers, and are already funded

by HEFCE for full-time undergraduate provision, will be allocated student places by formula. Institutions not currently funded by HEFCE for full-time undergraduate provision will be able to bid for between 25 and 50 places for 2013-14 – see *Student number controls for 2013-14: Guidance and invitation to bid*, available at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk).

In 2012-13 the Government allowed unrestricted recruitment of students with AAB+ or equivalent qualifications. For 2013-14 the tariff threshold will be reduced to ABB+. However, combinations of qualifications are not exempted from the student number controls (for example, a student holding both a BTEC and an A-level). More information, and the complete list of A-level grades and equivalences, can be found at: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – *Students outside the student number control in 2013-14: Exemptions list*.

In addition to the funding reforms outlined above, other changes have been, or are, in the process of being introduced to take forward the Government’s vision for HE. For example:

- During 2012 HEFCE consulted on the future of funding of HE from 2013-14 onwards. The results of the consultation can be found at: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – *Student number controls and teaching funding in 2013-14 and beyond*. The results include the decision to exclude from the student number control students who: are topping up from a Foundation degree or a Higher National Diploma; are joining an honours programme that does not exceed 1.3 years of full-time study, and have been HEFCE-fundable (at any institution) during either of the preceding two academic years.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
Section 1 Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
Section 2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
Section 3 Information about HE .....	21
Section 4 Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
Section 5 Working in Partnership .....	33
Section 6 Working in the International Market .....	38
Section 7 Student Experience .....	39
Section 8 Marketing .....	44
Section 9 Scholarship .....	56
Section 10 Admissions .....	61

- The introduction of student loans for part-time students from academic year 2012-13.
- The introduction of the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) from 2012-13.
- The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and HEFCE are working together to develop a shared strategy for promoting access to HE. Discussion includes developing an evidence-based assessment of what works in respect of widening access; ways of further integrating monitoring of access agreements and widening participation strategic assessment; evaluation of the NSP and consideration of options for future allocation. More detail on the development of the strategy can be found at: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – **National strategy for access and student success**.
- The introduction of Key Information Sets (KISs) and wider information about HE in order to improve information for the market, stimulate competition and promote diversity. From 2014 Colleges will have to pay for the cost of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey which forms part of the KIS.
- A new quality assurance method for HE in FE, aligned to institutional review for HEIs.
- The introduction of the *UK Quality Code* to replace the *Academic Infrastructure* from 2013.
- During 2012 HEFCE consulted on risk-based approaches to quality assurance. The results of the consultation are available at: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – ***A risk-based approach to quality assurance: Outcomes of consultation and next steps***.
- In its response to the outcome of the White Paper in June 2012, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) announced its intention to introduce measures to bring alternative providers, and those FE Colleges that do not receive HEFCE funding, into the formal student number control system, alongside other providers. The consultation has now been published and is available at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) – ***Applying student number controls to alternative providers with designated courses: consultation***.

The content of this guide addresses these changes.

## Using the Guide

The content of this guide focuses on changes and issues relating to HE which fall within HEFCE's remit. Change in HE, and the context in which Colleges provide HE, is likely to continue at a rapid pace and this guide will be regularly updated in its on-line format.

The guide is intended to support a range of readers. It can be used by Colleges new to HEFCE funding, colleagues new to HE at Colleges, and Colleges, individuals and agencies who need to be aware of the changing HE in FE landscape. The main function is as a reference source providing information about aspects of such issues as funding, public information and quality assurance, as well as guidance about where further information can be found on web-sites and in publications. Institutions may wish to refer to the document in its entirety to ensure procedures are in place to respond to the requirements of delivering HEFCE-funded HE. Colleagues who are new to HE at Colleges which already have HEFCE-funded



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

provision may wish to refer to the whole document or to relevant sections depending on their role within the institution.

Many of the sections focus on operational matters to assist Colleges in understanding the requirements of key external bodies such as HEFCE, the Student Loans Company (SLC), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), and in developing effective working relationships with these organisations. All sections, however, raise issues of relevance to strategic management, and it is hoped that those responsible for managing HE will find the guide useful in planning and in developing organisational capacity to support HE.

The sections are:

- **Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges**
- **Quality Assurance and Enhancement**
- **Information about HE**
- **Fair Access/Widening Participation**
- **Working in Partnership**
- **Working in the International Market**
- **Student Experience**
- **Marketing**
- **Scholarship**
- **Admissions**

Each section summarises key information and issues, and signposts readers to additional guidance and detail.

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 1 Funding HE in FECs

### Introduction

Public funding for teaching costs comes from two main sources: tuition fees paid by students; and grants from public sources, including HEFCE and SFA.

HEFCE is only empowered to fund 'prescribed'<sup>4</sup> courses of HE in FECs. These include HNCs, HNDs, Foundation degrees, Bachelors degrees, Postgraduate degrees and certain teacher training qualifications; the awarding bodies include HEIs and Edexcel, and those FECs with the power to award degrees. Prescribed courses do not include other HE courses at FECs, such courses at Level 4 and above accredited by professional bodies. These courses are the funding responsibility of the SFA – the funding body for Further Education. This section will focus on funding arrangements for 'prescribed' HE overseen by HEFCE.

New funding arrangements for Universities and Colleges were introduced for the new intake of students in 2012-13. HEFCE funding for teaching started to decrease, with Universities and Colleges more dependent on funding from publicly-funded student loans. Teaching funding from HEFCE will increasingly be focused on those costs incurred by Universities and Colleges which cannot be met

<sup>4</sup> Prescribed courses of HE are defined in legislation, but broadly relate to courses of at least one year's duration when studied full-time and which lead, on successful completion, to the award of certain HE qualifications by certain awarding bodies. See paragraph 37d and '*Higher Education in Further Education Colleges; HEFCE's funding powers*' (HEFCE Circular Letter 22/2008) for more information.

entirely by tuition fees, e.g. supporting high-cost and vulnerable subjects, and widening participation. HEFCE will retain a pivotal role in the allocation of funding and publicly-funded student places to institutions.

Colleges and Universities are responsible for setting their own tuition fees. For some groups of students attending publicly-funded institutions (mostly undergraduates and students on HNDs and Foundation degrees), there are overall limits set out by law on the fees that can be charged (*see further details in Section 1*). Publicly-funded tuition fee loans are available to eligible students, so that there is no up-front cost to them. The Student Loans Company (SLC) administers the payment of tuition fees to Colleges and Universities.

This section will now discuss the role of HEFCE and the SLC, and provide an overview of how Colleges are required to interact with these agencies in order to discharge their responsibilities and maximise funding.

### HEFCE's funding powers and responsibilities

HEFCE was established by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and this sets out its powers. In broad terms, HEFCE is empowered to fund teaching, research and related activities of HEIs, and 'prescribed' courses of HE at FECs. For further information read: '**Guide to funding: how HEFCE allocates its funds**' which can be found at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)).

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Direct and indirect funding arrangements

HEFCE allocates student numbers and funding to FECs to support HE teaching directly and indirectly, the latter normally through an agreement with an institution (generally and HEI). In many cases FECs have both directly and indirectly-funded students, and agreements with several institutions.

If a College has directly-funded places then it is fully responsible for all aspects of finance and administration, and is required to enter data on these students in the annual Higher Education in Further Education: Student Survey (HEIFES) return (*see below*). The student numbers remain with the FEC and it can keep them if it decides to work with a different validating HEI.

If a College has indirectly-funded students, the student numbers belong to the institution providing the numbers. This institution is responsible for these students and must enter them in its Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey (HESES) return.

HEFCE expects indirectly-funded institutions to have a minimum period of security over student numbers and funding, normally at least three years (*see discussion on working in partnership in Section 5*). Any agreement, however, is a contract between the two institutions and the conditions of the agreement are for the institutions to decide.

## Institutional funding allocations and student number controls

Each year HEFCE draws up a funding agreement with each of the Colleges it funds directly. Since

2010-11 HEFCE has stipulated a maximum number of HEFCE-fundable admissions. This is referred to as student number control (SNC). There is no longer a 'contract range' – the grant will depend on actual student numbers. There are implications for institutions which recruit above the SNC, usually in the form of a grant reduction – this will be such that institutions do not gain financially from over-recruiting.

In 2011 HEFCE introduced changes to the way in which SNC limits are set for institutions through creating a 'margin' of up to 20,000 places by reducing the 'core' student number population. For the 2012-13 academic year these places were redistributed to Colleges and HEIs through a bidding exercise. The second round of the 'core and margin' process for 2013-14 is a more limited exercise involving the redistribution of only 5,000 undergraduate places. Institutions that are eligible for margin numbers, and are already funded by HEFCE for full-time undergraduate provision, will be allocated student places by formula. Institutions not currently funded by HEFCE for full-time undergraduate provision will be able to bid for between 25 and 50 places for 2013-14 – see *Student number controls for 2013-14: Guidance and invitation to bid*, available at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk).

During 2012 HEFCE consulted on student number controls and teaching funding. The results of the consultation were published in July 2012 – [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – *Student number controls and teaching funding in 2013-14 and beyond*. Full-time student number controls will continue. HEFCE will continue to provide targeted allocations for widening access and improving retention (student opportunity), support high-cost subjects, and support the additional costs of part-time study in high-cost

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

subjects only. The results also include the decision to exclude from the student number control students who: are topping up from a Foundation degree or a Higher National Diploma; are joining an honours programme that does not exceed 1.3 years of full-time study, and have been HEFCE-fundable (at any institution) during either of the preceding two academic years.

For 2013-14 undergraduates with entry qualifications equivalent to grades ABB+ at A level, or higher, are excluded from the SNC. Providers are therefore unrestricted in how many students with these qualifications they can recruit. However, Colleges need to take care with regard to estimating ABB+ equivalence because there are some combinations or qualifications which institutions treat as ABB+ equivalent for their own admissions purposes but which are still within the SNC. More information and the complete list of A-level grades and equivalences can be found at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – *Students outside the student number control in 2013-14: Exemptions list*.

The recently published letter from the BIS to HEFCE – the grant letter – contains additional information about how funding and student numbers will be managed in 2013-14 – see **Funding for higher education in England for 2013-14: HEFCE grant letter from BIS**. Penalties for over-recruitment against the student number controls are set at the level of the average fee (taking into consideration fee waivers) less £1000 and will not take into consideration maintenance loans and grant costs. In order to assist Colleges and Universities in managing recruitment in the context of the possibility of reductions resulting from over-recruitment, institutions will be allowed to recruit up to 3% above their total recruitment of HEFCE fundable students. The letter contains the

news that places allocated for the 5,000 margin for 2013-14 do not need to be deducted from the total pot for Colleges and Universities. HEFCE is also asked to further liberalise the allocation of student numbers in 2014-15, and to consider increasing the flexibility of institutions with high demand for student places.

HEFCE contacts directly-funded institutions usually in January with provisional figures/Student Number Controls and in March of each year with actual details of their funding and numbers. It provides detailed technical guidance which explains, in detail, how grant allocations have been derived. It is important that those with responsibility for finance and planning in Colleges read this guidance carefully to assist with their own institution's planning and ensure they are familiar with grant conditions.

## Tuition fees and student support

There are a number of regulations (Statutory Instruments) that govern the charging of tuition fees and the availability of publicly-funded student support. Definitive guidance on these regulations should be sought from the SLC – see below – or BIS:

- Fees and Awards Regulations
- Qualifying Courses and Persons Regulations
- HE (Basic Amount)/(Higher Amount) Regulations and the Student Fees (Amounts) Regulations
- Student Fees (Exceptions) Regulations
- Education (Student Support) Regulations

All the above are available from:  
[www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk).



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Funding for widening access and improving retention – student opportunity

Alongside the main funding for teaching, HEFCE allocates funds to recognise the additional costs to providers of addressing inequalities in HE, and of raising the attainment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and enabling them to succeed in HE. This funding is distinct from, but complementary to, the expenditure arising from Access agreements with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), which is provided predominantly in the form of direct financial support by Colleges and Universities who charge fees above the basic level to students through fee waivers, bursaries and scholarships (*see Section 4 and information about the National Scholarship Programme below in this section*). The HEFCE allocation of funding to widen access and participation comprises three main elements: allocations for widening access, improving retention of full- and part-time students, and allocations to support disabled students. Information on how these allocations are calculated **can be found at this link on HEFCE’s website**.

## National Scholarship Programme

The National Scholarship Programme (NSP) is a Government programme designed to benefit individual students from disadvantaged backgrounds as they enter HE. It is funded through a mixture of Government and institutional funding (match funding).

Unlike other widening participation programmes, which may focus on outreach, the NSP is designed

to provide direct benefit to individual students. The Government has provided a ‘menu’ of options from which institutions can choose how to offer their scholarships.

These are:

- A fee waiver or fee discount
- A free foundation year
- Discounted accommodation or other similar institutional service
- A financial scholarship or bursary, capped as a cash award at £1,000

Participation in the programme is compulsory if the institution intends to charge over the basic rate for courses in 2013-14, (that is, any institution that is required to have an access agreement with OFFA – *see Section 8*). It is not compulsory for institutions who intend to charge at, or below, the basic rate in 2013-14. These institutions may choose to opt in or out of the programme.

HEFCE has published guidance for the 2014-15 National Scholarship Programme (NSP). The guidance provides information about provisional NSP allocations for the academic year 2014-15 and guidance to institutions about the programme. The document informs institutions about a change in the funding method for the NSP in 2014-15 and consequent revisions to the arrangements for matched funding. Importantly for Colleges, many of whom are not charging above the basic rate, the guidance contains the information that institutions which intend to charge less than the minimum fee threshold for all their full-time and part-time courses will no longer be expected to offer any institutional

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

financial contribution towards the programme, although they may do so if they wish. The deadline for submitting the return setting out institutional intentions for the 2014-15 NSP is Monday 8 April 2013. The 2014-15 NSP guidance (HEFCE 2013/02) can be found **at this link on HEFCE's website**.

Discussions about future methods of allocating the NSP are ongoing as part of the work being undertaken by OFFA, HEFCE and BIS to develop a national strategy for access and student success. These discussions are exploring funding models where NSP monies are allocated according to disadvantage and include part-time students. An interim report on access and widening participation is due in mid January, with the final report expected in autumn 2013.

## DATA REPORTING TO HEFCE

### Directly-funded students

The funding agreement between HEFCE and the College contains sections on providing information as part of the terms and conditions. There are two main data returns that HEFCE use to inform teaching funding for FECs. These are the HEIFES survey and

the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returned to the Data Service. *FECs are also required to submit student contact details to enable the Council, or its agents, to conduct the National Student Survey. They are also required to submit data to enable the Council, or its agents, to make public the Key Information Sets (KIS) – see Section 3.*

The HEIFES is the survey of students on HE courses, submitted to HEFCE annually in November at the beginning of the academic year. All students enrolled on *directly*-funded courses at Colleges are reported. The data provides an early indication of the number of students on 'recognised' HE courses – (see text box below for the definition of 'recognised' in the context of data reporting). This enables HEFCE to monitor the achievement of funding agreement targets and informs the allocation of teaching funds.

Although HEIFES is primarily intended to collect information on students counted for funding purposes, it also collects information on other students aiming for recognised HE qualifications as well, such as those from overseas or funded by other public bodies. This helps to provide a more complete picture of Colleges' HE activities.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

HEFCE expects FECs that receive direct HEFCE funding to be familiar with, and refer to, HEFCE's published annual HEIFES request for data when completing the survey. The request is published in September each year and sets out the timetable and process, guidance on completing the survey (including examples of survey tables), and provides detailed answers to questions needed for accurate data reporting. This includes, for example, explanation of:

**Recognised HE courses.** This sets out the courses that HEFCE fund and which (depending on other criteria) may be counted towards the Student Number Control.

**Student Number Control population.** This provides guidance on the students that count towards the SNC limit.

**Residential and funding status.** This provides our definitions of which student places are 'HEFCE-fundable', 'HEFCE non-fundable' or 'Island and overseas'. Only those meeting the definition of HEFCE-fundable are counted towards funding allocations and towards the SNC limit.

**Price groups.** There are three price groups that apply to FECs: price groups B, C and D. Provision is mapped to price groups using Learn direct subject codes. Only provision that fell within price group B attracted funding for new-regime students in high-cost subjects in 2012-13. HEFCE has created a new price group – C1 – which includes archaeology, media studies, design and creative arts, and information technology. Students in these subjects will attract funding at the new price group C1 rate from 2013-14 onwards,

**Mode of study.** This provides definitions of the three modes of study HEFCE use for funding purposes: 'full-time', 'sandwich year-out' and 'part-time'. The SNC applies to students starting full-time study only.

**Level of study.** This provides definitions of the two levels of study HEFCE use in funding FECs: undergraduate and postgraduate. With the exception of Postgraduate/Professional Graduate Certificate in Education courses, the SNC applies to students starting undergraduate study only.

Survey returns must be uploaded to the HEFCE extranet by a specified date in November. Further information about the HEIFES return **can be read on HEFCE's website**.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

The Individualised Learner Record (**ILR**) is returned to the Data Service at the end of the academic year. HEFCE use this data to inform final allocations of teaching funding for the year. It collects information about student characteristics that are used, for example, in funding allocations for widening participation. HEFCE also use it to reconcile against the HEIFES data previously provided by Colleges. It is received by HEFCE approximately 12 months after the equivalent HEIFES data. Information about the ILR is available **from this link on the Data Service's website**.

At the end of each year, HEFCE compares Colleges' HEIFES return to the outturn position reported on their ILR return. Where the differences between these returns exceed certain threshold criteria relating to the funding agreement, institutions are asked to explain the reasons for the differences. Where HEFCE finds, either through reconciliations with ILR data or through any data audit, that erroneous data have resulted in institutions receiving incorrect funding allocations – including funds for widening access and participation – it will adjust their funding accordingly, subject to the appeals process and availability of funds.

## **ILR funding and monitoring data: web facility.**

To assist Colleges in returning accurate data on the ILR, HEFCE provides a web facility that replicates the reconciliation they will perform on receipt of the ILR data. Use of the web facility is optional but the Data Service and HEFCE strongly encourage Colleges to use it as part of their data quality processes. It will help Colleges verify and correct, where appropriate, their ILR data prior to signing off their data with the Data Service. Past reviews by HEFCE have confirmed that Colleges which do not use the facility are more likely to be selected for complex reconciliation exercises which may have funding consequences for them. This facility is normally made available in September each year. A letter is sent annually to each College principal notifying the release of the facility and providing guidance on use and links to more detailed information available on HEFCE's website. Further information about data reporting the reconciliation exercises can be read at **this link on HEFCE's website**.



# Contents

- Introduction ..... 2
- Section 1  
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges ..... 6
- Section 2  
Quality Assurance and Enhancement ..... 16
- Section 3  
Information about HE ..... 21
- Section 4  
Fair Access/  
Widening Participation ..... 26
- Section 5  
Working in Partnership ..... 33
- Section 6  
Working in the International Market ..... 38
- Section 7  
Student Experience ..... 39
- Section 8  
Marketing ..... 44
- Section 9  
Scholarship ..... 56
- Section 10  
Admissions ..... 61

## Reporting arrangements for indirectly-funded students

College students who are indirectly-funded through an agreement with an HEI are reported to HEFCE by that institution. Colleges will need to ensure that they have appropriate systems in place to effectively transfer data to the institution which will be reporting on the numbers. HEIs make equivalent data returns to Colleges. These are the Higher Education Students Early Statistics survey (HESES), (the equivalent of HEIFES) and the Individualised Student Record (ISR), which is submitted to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and is the equivalent of the ILR.

## HEFCE funding calendar (timing may vary from year to year)

<b>November</b>	1 November – Return HEIFES data for academic year just started  End November/beginning December – validation and credibility checks by HEFCE  End November/beginning December – HEFCE writes to Colleges, asking them to verify the data, answer any questions about the data and submit any appeals against formulaic grant adjustments. Colleges will have <b>five working days</b> to answer questions about data
<b>December</b>	Colleges must have signed off their HEIFES data as being correct at 1 November

<b>January</b>	Deadline for submission of appeals  It is intended that provisional student number control limits for 2013-14 will have been notified to institutions by <b>18 January 2013</b> , subject to the timing of HEFCE’s annual grant letter from BIS – the letter was published on 14 January – <b>see this link on HEFCE’s website for more information.</b>  The limits will be provisional only, because they are subject to appeal. The provisional allocation will include any places awarded through the core and margin process
<b>February</b>	Colleges notified of final grant adjustments for current academic year, including the outcome of appeals  The deadline for the submission of appeals regarding provisional SNC limits is <b>1 February 2013</b>
<b>March</b>	Colleges notified of initial allocations of recurrent grant for the next academic year
<b>July</b>	Colleges receive their funding agreements and, where appropriate, amended initial allocations for the next academic year
<b>September</b>	Release of web facility

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Setting tuition fees

Colleges and Universities are responsible for setting their own tuition fees. For some groups of students attending publicly-funded institutions (mostly undergraduates and students on HNs and Foundation degrees), there are overall limits set out by law on the fees that can be charged – this is currently £9,000 per annum for full-time study. Colleges and HEIs who wish to charge over £6,000 per year must have an approved access agreement – *for more details see Section 4.*

## The role of the SLC in the funding process

As more public funding for HE is put into student loans it is important that Colleges understand the role of, and engage with, the SLC to maximise fee income and undertake effective financial planning.

The SLC is a non-profit making Government-owned organisation set up in 1989 to provide loans and grants to students in Universities and Colleges in the UK. It plays a number of roles in paying loans (for tuition fees and living costs) and grants, and in collecting loan repayments, i.e.:

- Pay loans and grants to students
- Pay tuition fees to Colleges and Universities
- Work with HM Revenue and Customs to collect loan repayments
- Pay bursaries and scholarships on behalf of Universities and Colleges
- Run all the administration and processing associated with these activities

## Directly-funded courses

Colleges offering directly-funded courses need to register with the SLC and provide information about courses and fees via the HE Portal. The SLC provides a number of services via the Portal which support the delivery of the HE student finance system, help Colleges maximise fee income and assist institutions' financial planning.

## Fee Service – reporting and payment of tuition fees to institutions

SLC make tuition fee payments directly to institutions if a student has requested a tuition fee loan. Tuition fee loans will be paid to institutions in three instalments during the academic year. The payment schedule is based upon the course start date, for autumn starters payments are made third week in October (25%), first week in February (25%) and first week in May (50%). The student must be in attendance at the HEI throughout the year to receive the full tuition fee payment.

## Courses Service

The Courses Service is a central repository of institution details managed by SLC. It contains key information on all UK-based institutions and the courses that they provide, and allows individual institutions to access and maintain their own data.

The information provided is used by awarding authorities to assess students for statutory support and, as such, institutions are requested to update their course information on an annual basis. Once this has been completed and their course information has been “promoted” to the live environment, it becomes

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

available for awarding authorities to complete student assessments.

## Student Information Service

The Student Information Service (SIS) enables HEIs to view student information, confirm student registration, confirm ongoing attendance, complete change of circumstance notifications and view financial reports on-line.

## Maximising fee payments

The SIS is used to view student information, and for the attendance reporting and payment of fees to institutions.

In order to maximise the receipt of tuition fee payments in a timely manner, the SLC encourages Colleges and HEIs through best practice to:

- Assist student application by highlighting the necessity to provide evidence of identity and return the student declaration form
- Pro-actively view student data at the earliest possible time and identify those student applications with invalid or missing National Insurance Numbers
- Pro-actively view student data and submit Change of Circumstances via functionality within the SIS for course or fee mismatches, including any assessments against temporary courses, in advance of student registration and/or attendance confirmation

- Submit a Change of Circumstance notification advising of a 'transfer in' should a student arrive at the College or HEI requesting acceptance on a course, having previously applied to another institution
- Undertake attendance confirmations at earliest opportunity, prior to payment dates

## Indirectly-funded courses

Colleges and Universities can together choose whether franchise courses are administered in the student finance system by the College or the University.

The institution that performs this function will need to supply course information, manage attendance confirmations, check student application data and change it where necessary, and receive fee payments. The apportionment of fee income between the franchising University and the College must be done outside the student finance system.

SLC will be able to advise on the implications of the decision.

More information about the SLC and the services it offers to students can be read at: [www.slc.co.uk](http://www.slc.co.uk). The SLC has produced a 'Joining Pack' for Colleges and HEIs which are new to the SLC or for new colleagues within institutions who need to understand and engage with the SLC. This provides further details and important information about responsibilities and key timings and **is available at this link** on the HEI Services section of the SLC website.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement

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### Introduction

HE in FE is subject to external scrutiny by the QAA, acting on behalf of HEFCE which has statutory responsibility for ensuring that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided by institutions it funds. The expectation is that each College offering 'prescribed' HE – regardless of whether it is directly or indirectly funded – will be able to demonstrate that:

- It manages the academic standards and quality of its provision appropriately
- It manages the quality of public information, including that produced for students and applicants, appropriately
- It is concerned to improve and enhance its provision

Non-prescribed HE is inspected by Ofsted at the same time as other FE provision.

From 2013 there will be a new review method for HE in FE. At the same time the *UK Quality Code* is being introduced as a reference to help assure the standards and quality of awards. The Quality Code will replace the *Academic Infrastructure*. QAA review teams make use of the *UK Quality Code* in making judgements, and awarding bodies make use of the Code in developing their collaborative arrangements with partner Colleges.

In addition to the review activities carried out by the QAA and the *UK Quality Code* there are other elements of the quality assurance system for HE. This includes, for example, the College's own internal systems, external examining arrangements, and public information (*see Section 3*). This section will provide an overview of the key features of the QAA review used in College HE, and the new *UK Quality Code*.

Consideration will also be given to how Colleges should prepare for review, reflecting on lessons learned from previous review methods, and will identify sources of guidance on good practice in quality assurance and enhancement.

### QAA review methods in HE in FE

Between 2007-08 – 2011-12 the process of review used in Colleges in England was called the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER). The method was developed specifically for Colleges. From 2013 there will be a new method for College HE which will apply to Colleges in England.

The new method for College HE and the method used in HEIs will converge around a common review framework to ensure comparability of standards and quality across HE providers.

During 2012 HEFCE consulted on the development of a risk-based approach to quality assurance. Following consultation, HEFCE has confirmed its intention to move to a more risk-based approach to quality assurance from 2013-14. The consultation contained consideration of the frequency of review and concluded that review should normally take place at six year intervals. However, for providers that have



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

a shorter track record of quality assurance and have not yet undergone two successful external institution-wide reviews, HEFCE have asked the QAA to ensure that an institution's next review take place within 4 years. This decision will apply to most Colleges. Once the College has undergone a second successful external review, the next review will normally be scheduled for six years. For further information on the outcomes of the proposal, see: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – *A risk-based approach to quality assurance: Outcomes of consultation and next steps*.

The key features of the review method used in Colleges are described below. Further details of review methods used in Colleges can be found on the QAA website at this link – How we review higher education – *Review of higher education in further education colleges (HE in FE)*.

## The UK Quality Code for HE

The QAA are currently working closely with the UK HE sector to develop the Quality Code. It will replace the set of national reference points known as the Academic Infrastructure from the 2012-13 academic year. The *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* (the Quality Code) sets out the Expectations all providers of UK HE are required to meet. More information regarding The *UK Quality Code* can be read on [QAA's website at this link](#).

The Code gives all HE providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their HE awards and programmes, and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. Individual education

providers are expected to engage with the Quality Code to design their policies for maintaining academic standards and quality. The Quality Code is structured in three parts: standards; quality; and information.

Each part of the Quality Code is sub-divided into sections covering a different topic. For example, Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality, contains sections on admissions, teaching and learning, student support, student engagement, assessment, monitoring and review, and managing HE with others. Each section includes a statement of 'expectation' which providers of HE are required to meet, as well as 'indicators of good practice'.

The new Quality Code is one of the key reference points which will be used in the QAA review when considering a College's approach to academic standards, quality, information and enhancement of provision. Review teams will be looking for evidence that Colleges have:

- Carefully considered the purpose and intentions of the elements of the Code
- Reflected on the impact of the elements on College practice
- Taken, or are taking, any necessary measures to achieve better alignment between College practice, and the expectations and guidance provided by the Code

When teams make their judgments they will take into account whether broad expectations, as stated in the UK Code, have been met.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Key features of the quality assurance review of College HE

A detailed **Handbook for the review of higher education in Colleges** is available on the QAA website to support Colleges and review teams in preparing for review.

### Scope and content

Quality assurance review focuses on the College's management of its HEFCE-funded HE – directly and indirectly funded – wherever and however delivered by a College. The review is an evidence-based peer review of a College's performance of its responsibilities, as delegated by the awarding body, or set by Colleges with Foundation degree Awarding Powers (FDAP), or Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP), and the impact on students' education. The review will result in a published report and an action plan.

Quality review will examine the effectiveness of the policies, structures and processes that the College uses to:

- Fulfil its responsibilities for maintaining the threshold standards of HE programmes set by its awarding bodies
- Manage the quality of students' learning opportunities
- Manage the quality of public information, including that produced for students and applicants (*this will include the KISs, and other information at College and programme level which the College is responsible for publishing*)

- Enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities

Review teams will make judgements on each of the above themes. The review team will also identify features of good practice and make recommendations for action.

### The role of students in the review process

Students are central to review of HE. There are a number of opportunities for the College's students to take part in the review, including:

- Contributing to the student submission
- Attending the preparatory meeting
- Participating in meetings during the review

The student role has recently been enhanced with the opportunity for a student to perform the role of a *lead student representative* – the student equivalent of the staff role of review facilitator. The role is voluntary.

The review team will also contain a *student reviewer* who will be recruited from another HE provider by QAA.

### Preparing for review

Colleges will need to engage in a variety of activities to effectively prepare for review. In addition to consulting the briefing materials and guidance on the review method provided through the QAA website, activities will include:

- Identifying the College facilitator
- Writing the self evaluation

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

- Supporting the students’ written submission
- Collecting evidence to support the self evaluation
- Preparing staff
- Preparing students – including identification of a lead student representative if this is agreed within the College
- Preparing employers

Guidance on supporting the students’ written submission and preparing students for the role of lead student representative is available on the QAA website **at this link**. The QAA will also provide briefing events on the role and responsibilities of the College facilitator and lead student representative.

The self-evaluation and portfolio of evidence forms the basis of review. The method handbook – which is available **on the QAA website** – will set out guidelines for producing the self-evaluation. Good practice guidelines on self evaluation developed in the context of the IQER still hold true in the context of the RHEFE. The following guidelines for writing the self evaluation are adapted from *Supporting higher education in further education colleges*, available to read **at this link on HEFCE’s website**.

An effective self-evaluation demonstrates:

- Evaluation and analysis
- Team work
- A self-critical account of strengths and weaknesses
- Evidence for claims
- A focus on the management of the HE provision linked to the core themes

- Reflection on internal review, evaluation and enhancement processes, not just description
- That the *UK Quality Code* is being considered and implemented

As a working document for the review team the self-evaluation, and its associated evidence, needs:

- Good layout following published guidelines in the method handbook
- Clear headings
- Paragraph and page numbers
- Clear references to evidence cited
- To be succinct and to keep to the word limit

## Commentaries and guidance on quality management and enhancement in HE in FE

Over many years the QAA has conducted reviews and analysis of the outcomes of the various methods used in HE in FE as part of its commitment to disseminate good practice. In addition to the published individual institutional review reports which are available on the QAA website, these analytical reports make useful reading for Colleges, as part of staff development and to signpost staff involved in HE towards enhancing their practice. For example, the Outcomes series of publications analyses the findings of the IQER Summative Review reports for Further Education Colleges in England from 2008. The Outcomes papers can be **read at this link on QAA’s website**.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

One of the papers in the Outcomes from IQER series focuses on *College management of higher education*. The report demonstrates that IQER has had a considerable positive impact on Colleges' arrangements for HE quality management and enhancement, encouraging closer working relationships with awarding bodies and the involvement of students. The report highlights how a growing number of Colleges have identified a need to differentiate their management and quality assurance systems for HE from those used in the management of FE programmes. Larger Colleges have systems, policies and procedures developed specifically for HE programmes. Colleges with smaller HE provision are more likely to use their further education quality systems, making adaptations where necessary. The full report can be read [at this link on the QAA website](#).

Further IQER Outcomes reports are available on *Staff Development* and *The Student Voice*. The reports can be read [at this link on the QAA website](#).

Further guidance on the management and enhancement of standards and quality in HE in FE can be found in the HEFCE Good Practice Guide, *Supporting higher education in further education; Policy, practice and prospects*. First produced in 2003, the guide was substantially revised in 2009 with case studies and contributions from 47 Colleges and 20 related organisations. Although many more changes have taken place since the revised edition in 2009 – e.g. in relation to funding arrangements and quality assurance methods – the guide nevertheless provides a useful resource with detailed examples of how Colleges assure their HE standards and quality, including management and committee structures, and practical arrangements for the delivery and enhancement of programmes. The guide can be read [at this link on HEFCE's website](#).



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 3 Information about HE

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### Introduction and background

Information that Colleges and HEIs provide about HE has become increasingly significant and is a key concern for the current Government. The HE White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System* (June 2011), focuses on delivering policy changes so that HE is more responsive to students and employers; provides a better student experience; and helps to improve social mobility. Central to these changes is improving and expanding the information available on the quality of HE and, in particular, to give prospective students information that will help them to choose what, and where, to study. Public information is also used as evidence for quality assurance processes in institutions.

### Key Information Sets and wider information

From September 2012, Universities and Colleges are required to publish Key Information Sets (KISs) for undergraduate courses, whether full- or part-time. KISs and the new Unistats search facility have been introduced to improve the accessibility and usefulness of information published by all Higher and Further Education institutions in England that are subject to review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The KIS has been developed through extensive consultation and user testing, with advice and guidance from expert working groups, the National Union of Students

(NUS) and employers to ensure that it provides useful information for stakeholders.

The KIS is a standardized set of key facts for each course. They are available on the **Unistats website**, and course pages on institutions' websites contain a "widget" or KISs advertisement, which links directly to the KISs page for that course on Unistats. The KISs include information on student satisfaction, graduate outcomes, learning and teaching activities, assessment methods, tuition fees and student finance, accommodation and professional accreditation. The current KISs relate to courses offered in 2013-14 and are intended to facilitate comparisons of course statistics across institutions for prospective students and other stakeholders.

Information gathered from the National Student Survey (NSS) results and on destinations of leavers from HE are currently provided on the Unistats website. The KISs will incorporate this information.

In addition to KISs, institutions are expected to provide a wider information set for students and stakeholders. The wider information set includes information on institutional context, information about courses and awards, and information on the quality and standards of programmes. For more detail on what is contained in the wider information set see: **[www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – Providing information about HE – The wider information set**. From 2012-13 onwards the QAA considers this information part of the way they assess how institutions manage their public information – see below.

Additional information requirements and good practice are also being considered. This includes, for example, encouraging institutions to produce a HE Achievement Report (HEAR), discussions relating

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

to the publication of staff teaching qualifications for prospective and current students, and the production of student charters. For more information about the HEAR see: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) – **Higher Education Achievement Report**.

## Quality Assurance and Public Information

The KISs will be part of a broader range of public information published by Colleges and Universities relating to courses and the institution, some of which is also considered as evidence by QAA review. For several years the accuracy and completeness of public information has been subject to scrutiny within the context of QAA review of HE. The new QAA review methods for both Colleges and HEIs include new judgments on the completeness, currency, reliability and accessibility of the information provided by institutions, and on the usefulness of the information to potential students, employers and the wider public. However, reviewers will not be expected to make a judgment on the accuracy of the detailed information in the KISs.

Expectations relating to public information are defined in a new section of the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* (Part C). All UK HE providers will now be required to meet the following Expectation: ‘Higher Education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.’ The Code makes reference to specific national requirements, (for example, the Key Information Set (KIS) and Wider Information Set). For more details on the review method for College HE and the *UK Quality Code*, see *Section 2 in this guide* or go to [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

## KEY INFORMATION SETS (KISS)

### What is required?

A KIS is needed for all undergraduate courses planned for 2013-14 delivered by HEIs or FE Colleges (FEC)s, or non-publicly funded providers of HE programmes that subscribe to the QAA. However, there are some courses at institutions for which no KIS information is required at all, these are:

- Courses where the total FTE of the course is one year or less when studied full-time (i.e.120 credits or less for its entirety) – e.g. ‘top-up’ to honours unless longer than one year full-time equivalent, HNCs
- Closed courses – courses that are not open to any suitably qualified candidate and will typically be courses offered only to employees of particular organisations
- Courses offered mainly overseas with a location of study predominantly overseas, which the funding body has not specifically sanctioned as eligible for funding
- Part-time courses that are also offered on a full-time basis where a KIS is produced for the full-time course
- A course that is run in the UK but only for international students

KISs should be produced for full- and part-time courses at undergraduate level, including (two-year) Foundation degrees and Higher National Diplomas. Where a course is available both full and part-time, one KIS should be provided, covering both. Where courses are available on a part-time basis only or where separate programmes of study are offered

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

for part-time cohorts, it is expected that a KIS be provided that includes part-time data only.

## The contents of the KISs

The KISs will contain areas of information that students have identified as useful. These areas are:

- Student satisfaction
- Course information
- Employment and salary data
- Accommodation costs
- Financial information, such as fees
- Students' union information.

Some of the KIS information items are sourced from national data sets, such as the NSS and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. However, data on learning and teaching activities, assessment methods, financial support and accommodation costs will be collected from all institutions by HEFCE for the first year (that is, for KISs published in September 2012). From the 2013/14 KIS onwards the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) will manage the collection for HEIs through the HESA submission system. HEFCE are working with the Information Authority to establish a long-term collection solution for FECs.

## Who is responsible for the KISs?

HEFCE expect KISs to be published according to where a course is delivered, regardless of funding

arrangements. In the case of provision funded indirectly in FECs, partners should discuss the information together. HEFCE expects the KISs to be published at the point of delivery, with data supplied by the franchiser. Institutions delivering programmes in partnership may wish to consider including the responsibility for providing public information in their partnership agreements.

## Publication of the KISs

The KISs are available to potential students in the following ways:

1. Accessed 'in context' on the websites of Universities and Colleges via a KIS \*'widget'.
2. On a new website that enables users to search and compare both KISs and Unistats data.
3. Via a link from the redeveloped UCAS course search website to the Unistats site.
4. Through comparison websites and facilities provided by other organisations. The KIS dataset will be freely available to other organisations to use within their own products. Organisations must respect the KIS brand and so cannot manipulate data.

\*The 'widget' is a small graphic with three pieces of information from the KIS, specifically about the course the user is viewing. When a user clicks on the widget they are presented with the full KIS information for that course (see **HEFCE's website** for a mock-up of what the full KIS might look like).

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Guidance on completing the KISs

General guidance on the KIS **can be found at this link on HEFCE's website**. HEFCE's Circular Letter, published in 2011 – 23/2011 – provides a useful summary of the context and background to the KIS. Current information on the KIS can be found **at this link on HEFCE's website**.

Detailed technical guidance is available by going to **this link on HESA's website**. This site also hosts a **KIS Support Centre at the same location**, with FAQs, and contains slides from seminars held with HE providers in 2012 given to introduce and clarify the KIS. Access all this information at this link on HESA's website.

Any queries not answered by the above can be raised by emailing **kis@hefce.ac.uk**. HESA is unable to answer queries from FECs.

## Impact of the KISs – some implications for Colleges

Production and implementation of the KISs is technically complex and poses some challenges in terms of institution management and organisation. Given the breadth of information required, and the processes associated with submitting data, it is likely that the KIS will involve a range of personnel, including those working in marketing, IT support, management information systems and student support. Colleges will need to give some consideration to how the introduction of the KIS is going to be overseen and managed.

The content of the KIS is broad and Colleges will need to consult the guidance available through the HESA website to properly interpret the information requests. This may be especially challenging with such issues as calculating accommodation costs, where Colleges have not previously collected such information, and calculating assessment methods and learning and teaching methods to ensure consistency across the institution.

Finally, there are some issues relating to the definition of courses, and the publication requirements of NSS and DHLE data which are of concern to Colleges and make the intention to use the KIS for comparative purposes across HE providers problematic. For example, full-time equivalent courses of 120 credits or less are not included. This results in no information for courses such as HNCs and 'top-ups', which make up a significant amount of College provision overall, in particular subject areas and those of interest to part-time, work-based students and employers. The current publication thresholds for NSS and DHLE data at course level may result in incomplete information available through the 'widget' due to small cohort numbers.

In response to Colleges' concerns, the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPSIG) has considered the wording for the website to ensure this is sensitive and to make it clear that 'No data' is not an indication of poor quality. Where Colleges anticipate gaps it is recommended that course pages are well written with lots of alternative information. Also the KIS are aggregating data in a



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

rising scale (details can be found on HESA’s website – [www.hesa.ac.uk](http://www.hesa.ac.uk)) before “No data” becomes an option. There will also be clear guidance on the reasons why there is no data available, to ensure that users are given every opportunity to understand that no negative connotations should be attached. Because of the issues raised above, HEFCE are consulting on possible changes to the rules governing what data can be allowed to be publicised on KIS and the Unistats website.

From 2014 Colleges will have to pay for the cost of the DLHE survey. The cost is presently estimated at approximately £10 per student but could become lower if Colleges organise the survey themselves within guidelines. Further details on how the ‘College DLHE’ will work will be published in late summer 2013.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access / Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 4 Fair Access / Widening Participation

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### Introduction

Fair access and improving the participation of those from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE has been a policy focus for many years. The White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*, sets out the current Government’s commitment to social mobility, and outlines a range of measures to remove barriers to participation and to promote fair access.

Central to the Government’s approach is the creation of what is described as a framework which places more responsibility on Universities and Colleges to widen participation. This is underpinned by measures to ensure that widening participation for students from all backgrounds remains a key strategic objective for all HE providers. Two of the mechanisms to achieve this described in the White Paper are, firstly, the requirement that all Universities and Colleges in receipt of direct HEFCE funding must produce a Widening Participation Strategic Statement (WPSS) and, secondly, that institutions who charge tuition fees above the basic level (2012/13 – £6,000) must have an approved access agreement, detailing what more they will do to attract students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. It is notable that the vast majority of FECs are charging below the basic tuition fee in 2012/13.

WPSSs and access agreements are, of course, not new and many Colleges are familiar with the monitoring requirements set up by OFFA and HEFCE. However, the HE landscape is changing. It is expected that institutions should take a planned and proactive approach to widening participation, be accountable for the funding they receive for this purpose and undertake evaluation of the impact of activities to widen participation. OFFA and HEFCE have been asked by the Government to develop a national strategy for access and student success. Central to this is research and analysis to improve the evidence base of what works in widening participation to ensure resources are targeted effectively and bring value for money.

This section will briefly describe funding and monitoring arrangements for fair access and widening participation, before outlining the role of WPSSs and access agreements in promoting and supporting widening participation activities. The section will also outline some of the issues which Colleges need to consider in developing their approaches to widening participation, and suggest resources to support planning and practice.

### Funding for fair access and widening participation

HEFCE allocates funds to support access, retention and the support of disabled students – *see details in Section 1 of this guide*. The funding is associated with the additional costs providers face in supporting students through to successful completion of their courses. HEFCE funding is distinct from, but complements, the additional expenditure on widening participation measures outlined in access

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

agreements. These are supported through income from higher level fees to provide, for example, financial support for students as well as additional outreach and retention activities. Only Colleges and HEIs which charge fees above the basic level are required to have an access agreement approved through OFFA – see below. Since 2012-13 the Government has also made funding available to institutions to allocate directly to individual students through the NSP. Details of the NSP can be found **at this link on HEFCE's website**. Monitoring of institutions' NSP allocation is through the OFFA/HEFCE access agreement and WPSA monitoring returns.

In 2012 HEFCE consulted on the arrangements for teaching funding for 2013-14 and beyond<sup>5</sup>. The outcome of the consultation confirms HEFCE's intention to provide funding for fair access and widening participation through a Student Opportunity allocation which will replace the current allocations for access, retention, and the support of disabled students – **see this link on HEFCE's website**. The original consultation document provides a useful overview of the kinds of activities that providers could use their Student Opportunity funding for:

- Long-term collaboration/engagement with schools and communities
- Specific interventions for mature learners
- Development of ways to support part-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds more effectively

- Activities to ensure inclusive teaching and learning for all those with 'protected characteristics' under the 2010 Equality Act
- Evaluating, and gathering/analysing evidence on the impact of, widening participation activities
- Tracking and supporting the transition of students from disadvantaged backgrounds into postgraduate study or employment, including into the professions
- Collaboration to support progression for learners with vocational or other alternative qualifications
- A strategic programme of interventions throughout the student lifecycle to improve retention and completion
- Additional teaching for students requiring more support

## Monitoring the use of funding for fair access and widening participation

Currently, institutions' overall funding committed to widening participation activities and the proportion committed to access raised through higher level fees when there is an access agreement in place, as well as the National Scholarship Programme (NSP), are monitored annually in returns to OFFA and HEFCE – See, for example, the document ***How to complete your monitoring return: Access agreements and WPSA's 2011-12, and NSP 2012-13 (in-year) on OFFA's website***.

OFFA and HEFCE are working together to develop a national strategy for access and student success (for details see **this link on OFFA's website**). As part of this work, HEFCE and OFFA have set out joint

<sup>5</sup> HEFCE *Student number controls and teaching funding: Consultation on arrangements for 2013-14 and beyond*. Ref 2012/04

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

plans to integrate access agreements and widening participation strategic statements in future years ([see this link on the HEFCE website](#)). The aim is to create a single framework within which institutions can set their strategies, commitments and targets for widening access and student success. The integrated document will initially cover OFFA requirements for 2015-16 and HEFCE requirements for 2014-17.

Guidance for the integrated document will be published in early 2014. The guidance will be developed in parallel with the national strategy for access and student success.

## Widening Participation Strategic Statements (WPSSs)

In January 2009 HEFCE asked HEIs, and those FECs with more than 100 FTE directly-funded HE students, to submit WPSSs by June 2009<sup>6</sup>. WPSSs were seen as: a means of improving information about how widening participation was being integrated into the policies, processes and cultures of institutions; as a developmental tool; and as a means of enabling dialogue between institutions, HEFCE and OFFA. Submission of a WPSA was made a condition of continued receipt of the HEFCE widening participation allocation.

When WPSSs were submitted in 2009 it was intended that they would run for three years. HEFCE originally intended to request new three-year statements in 2012, but recognised that changes within the HE system, and upcoming changes to the method for funding teaching from 2013-14, meant that institutions would be better placed to respond

to a request for full, three-year strategic statements in another 12 months. HEFCE requested an interim strategic statement from institutions in 2012 – go [to this link on HEFCE's website](#). Guidance will be issued in 2013 for three-year widening participation strategic statements to cover the period 2013-14 to 2016-17.

## Access agreements

OFFA helps safeguard fair access for those from low income backgrounds or other under-represented groups. All English HE providers wishing to charge fees above the basic level must have an annual access agreement, approved by OFFA, in which they must commit a proportion of their higher fee income to outreach or, from 2012, retention activity or financial support for individual students. These agreements include targets to reflect each provider's circumstances.

From 2012-13, full-time undergraduate 'basic' and 'higher' tuition fee amounts for home and EU students have been increased by Parliament to £6,000 and £9,000 per year respectively. For part-time entrants, the basic fee is £4,500 and the maximum fee is £6,750 in an academic year. As a result of these changes, all institutions wishing to charge fees above £6,000 per year for undergraduate entrants need to have a new access agreement.

OFFA have published new guidance for Universities and Colleges setting out what access agreements will need to cover if institutions charge more than the basic fee in 2014-15. The new guidance is available at [this link on OFFA's website](#). The deadline for submitting access agreement for 2014-15 is Monday 8 April 2013. OFFA's guidance for 2014-15 access

<sup>6</sup> HEFCE *Request for widening participation strategic assessments* 2009. Ref: 2009/01



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

agreements follows similar key principles to previous years, but the following areas have been developed and strengthened:

- an increased focus on evidence and evaluation
- demonstrating a strategic approach
- greater challenge around outcomes
- growth in outreach
- stronger collaboration
- equality and diversity
- student voice.

These areas reflect the development of OFFA’s thinking and priorities, which will be elaborated upon in the strategy for access and student success which will be published later in 2013.

OFFA has a responsibility to ensure that Universities and Colleges are meeting their commitments to individual students and are moving towards the milestones and targets set out in their access agreements. OFFA does this by monitoring access agreements on an annual basis. The monitoring report is done at the same time as providing information on widening participation activities – see above.

The access agreement is the responsibility of the institution which holds the contract with HEFCE for the student numbers covered by the agreement. Colleges involved in indirectly-funded partnerships with HEIs should engage in dialogue with partners regarding the details of the agreement.

## Thinking strategically about fair access and widening participation

It is evident that, in future years OFFA and HEFCE will be placing a greater emphasis on strategic approaches to widening participation with the expectation that institutions have clear plans and targets, and the means of evaluating activities.

Analysis of WPSAs submitted in 2009<sup>7</sup> shows that most Colleges view widening participation as central to their mission. Providing opportunities for all learners, not just HE students, is regarded as being at the core of Colleges’ missions and inseparable from the Colleges’ values. The majority of Colleges see their FE and HE programmes as already delivering to under-represented or disadvantaged students, whether in the community or the work place. Colleges are undertaking a wide range of activities to widen access and participation. Much of this is in collaboration with other providers, schools, Colleges, employers and wider stakeholders.

Recently published statistics show that College HE makes a substantial contribution to widening participation. In 2012 HEFCE published statistics relating to widening participation to HE in Colleges for the first time – see: [www.heface.ac.uk](http://www.heface.ac.uk) – *Widening participation and non-continuation indicators for further education in colleges: overview of trends*. The report shows that, in England in 2009-10, the proportions of young, full-time entrants registered at FECs who were from low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs) were higher than the equivalent proportions among entrants registered at HEIs. While 10.9 per cent of young entrants to full-

<sup>7</sup> Action on Access 2011, *Review of Further Education Colleges’ Widening Participation Strategic Assessments 2009*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

time undergraduate provision registered at HEIs in England were from an LPN in 2009-10, the report shows that 21.5% of the equivalent entrants were registered at FECs. More than half FECs had more than one fifth of their young full-time first degree entrants coming from LPNs, and a number of FECs had over 40 per cent such entrants coming from LPNs. By contrast, 43 per cent of HEIs in England had between 5.1 per cent and 10 per cent of their young full-time first degree entrants coming from LPNs. No HEI was seen to have had more than 30 per cent of such entrants in 2009-10 coming from LPNs.

At the same time the WPSAs submitted in 2009 demonstrate that Colleges are at different stages of development with regards to such matters as the planning, targeting, monitoring and evaluation of widening participation activities. Very few Colleges had detailed policies, plans or strategy documents on widening participation to HE<sup>8</sup>.

The longer-term strategy documents that HEFCE will request from 2013-14 (see discussion above relating to WPSA) will need to provide a framework of accountability for the funding HEFCE will continue to deliver for widening participation and student success through its proposed Student Opportunity allocation. These documents will need to articulate institutions' strategic aims and objectives for widening participation over the three years, taking into account commitments in access agreements and the NSP, and outline how institutions intend to measure progress and demonstrate the impact of their widening participation activity and approaches.

<sup>8</sup> Action on Access 2011, *Review of Further Education Colleges' Widening Participation Strategic Assessments* 2009

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

The documents will also need to describe how the investments made in widening participation from a range of sources contribute to the delivery of long-term successful outcomes throughout the student life-cycle.

The outcomes from the Action on Access report<sup>9</sup> on WPSAs submitted in 2009 strongly suggest that in developing their plans for future submission of widening participation strategic statements Colleges need to:

- Develop clear institutional aims with regards to widening participation in HE, to ensure effective targeting and maximum benefit from available funding
- Plan carefully to ensure that activities are beneficial to students and reflect their needs throughout the student lifecycle – where Colleges are already successful in attracting high proportions of students from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups it may be beneficial to focus on supporting students on-programme through, for example, additional study skills support, strategies to improve employability or the provision of enrichment activities
- Develop systems to evaluate and gather evidence on the impact of widening participation activities – see Good Practice resources on monitoring and evaluation, below
- Work to maintain and develop collaborative approaches to support progression into, and through, HE. Colleges have very good track records of working in collaboration on progression to, and through, HE. However, with the end of funding for Aimhigher and Lifelong

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

Learning Networks, as well as pressures on partnership working brought about by SNCs and competition, successful collaboration to support students may necessitate new strategies.

## Good practice resources

All College and University access agreements are available to view [at this link on OFFA's website](#).

HEA has recently published four toolkits offering practical guidance to those working in HE outreach and widening participation. The toolkits are web-based and are available on the HEA website – **Higher education outreach to widen participation: toolkits for practitioners**. The **toolkits** are designed to support the effective strategy, management and delivery of outreach work to encourage progression to HE. They draw on existing outreach methods and resources, most notably those produced by the Aimhigher partnerships. They focus on four themes:

- Targeting activities
- Partnership building
- Delivering programmes
- Undertaking evaluation.

## Thinking strategically

In 2007 Action on Access implemented a programme with institutions to assist HE providers to 'mainstream and sustain' widening participation. The final report has some lessons which may be useful in writing widening participation strategies and access agreements. Action on Access, *Mainstreaming and Sustaining Widening Participation in Institutions, 2009*.

## Monitoring and evaluating widening participation activities

In 2010 HEFCE wrote to institutions with guidance on developing evaluative approaches to widening participation activities, and commitments to assist Colleges and Universities in completing their WPSAs. [Go to this link on HEFCE's website](#) to read '**Widening participation strategic assessments: Guidance on developing evaluative approaches to widening participation activities and commitments**'.

Also, see Part 4 of the recently published toolkit available on the HEA website (see above) – undertaking evaluation.

## Supporting students through the student lifecycle

The final report of the What works? Student Retention and Success Programme was published by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation on the 26 July 2012. *Building student engagement and belonging in higher Education at a time of change: Final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*. An Executive summary is also available: *Summary of findings and recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*.

The HEFCE publication *Supporting higher education in further education Colleges: Policy, practice and prospects (2009)* contains a helpful section on supporting HE students in FECs, with case-studies from Colleges illustrating practice.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

**Action on Access** is the national coordination team for widening participation in HE and provides advice, information and support to institutions on their strategies and plans. See their website at [www.actiononaccess.org](http://www.actiononaccess.org).

The **Aimhigher programme**, established to encourage progression to HE, closed in July 2011. The programme developed a range of good practice resources to support and encourage progression to HE. These are currently available at: [www.aimhigher.ac.uk](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk) and through the HEA's website – [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk).

**Lifelong Learning Networks** were established in 2005 with the intention of improving progression for vocational learners through building on partnerships between FE and HE institutions. The Lifelong Learning Networks National Forum website provides access to a range of materials to support progression into HE for vocational learners: [www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk](http://www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk).

**Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE)** is a useful widening participation network aimed at practitioners and influencing widening participation policy: [www.f-a-c-e.org.uk](http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk).

## Admissions to HE

The **Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA)** programme (See *Section 10* of this Guide) was established in 2006 and works closely with HEIs and Colleges, and other stakeholders on the continuing development of fair admissions and good practice in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation across the UK HE sector. The work of SPA can be found at: [www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk). SPA provides a range of good practice guidance and examples, and has a specific HE in FE section on their website.

Section B2 of the new *UK Quality Code* relates to admissions. It is intended to help institutions to 'assure themselves and others that the policies and procedures they use to attract, recruit, select, admit and enroll students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied'. This can be read at [this link on QAA's website](#).



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 5 Working in Partnership

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### Introduction

In the wider HE policy context the drivers for FEC/HEI partnerships have focussed around improving access to HE for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, improving employability and supplying economically valuable skills – arguments around social justice and economic competitiveness. The White Paper on *The Future of Higher Education* (2003)<sup>10</sup> made proposals for the expansion of new Foundation degrees, with FECs expected to play a significant role in delivering this growth. Partnerships between Colleges and Universities were identified as the primary vehicles to achieve these aims. HEFCE’s 2006 consultation on the role of HE in FECs<sup>11</sup> highlighted widening participation and delivery of higher level skills as key purposes of HE in FE, and demonstrated HEFCE’s support and promotion of effective partnerships between Colleges and Universities. The BIS paper, *Higher Ambitions* (October 2009)<sup>12</sup> made reference to ‘innovative partnerships’ between Universities and FECs that will deliver flexible, accessible HE, focused on skills development.

For FECs, working with an HEI is a way of increasing their HE provision; providing locally accessible progression routes into, and through, HE; and an

opportunity to develop relevant HE courses to meet local economic and social needs. For HEIs the reasons for entering into partnership with a College may include widening participation and increasing access; responding to the local and regional agenda through employer and social engagement and developing new curricula; and increasing their student numbers.

Some FE/HE partnerships have come under pressure in recent years as funding for partnership working, e.g. through Lifelong Learning Networks, has come to an end and a cap on student numbers has been introduced. These tensions have been exacerbated in the last two years in the run up to a new funding regime from 2012 and late publication of the current HE White Paper explaining how a new market in HE will operate. The recent imposition of a competitive bidding process for student numbers (the ‘core-margin’ process) has added to the tension. There are examples of HEIs withdrawing from funding and validation relationships with College partners, and many more examples of HEIs reviewing their partnership strategies and the charges they make for their services.

FECs work with a range of partners to support the HE student experience and promote progression. This includes working with HEIs and employers, with networks and with awarding organisations such as Edexcel. Although the landscape of HE provision is changing with the prospect of new awarding organisations, relationships with HEIs still play a pivotal role in funding and award delivery for a large proportion of publicly-funded Colleges delivering HE in England. In the current context Colleges and HEIs face new challenges in forming and sustaining the kinds of partnership models that will take collaboration forward for the benefit of students.

<sup>10</sup> Department for Education and Skills, *The Future of Higher Education*, 2003. Cm 5735

<sup>11</sup> HEFCE *Higher education in further education colleges – Consultation on HEFCE policy*, 2006. November 2006/48

<sup>12</sup> BIS *Higher Ambitions*, 2009. BIS/11/09/0.5k/NP URN 09/1447

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

This section will focus primarily on establishing partnerships with HEIs, although many of the issues discussed will apply equally to other types of partnership. It is primarily aimed at those Colleges or individuals within institutions new to working collaboratively with HEIs. However, it may be of use to ‘old hands’ as they review their HE strategies and partnership arrangements.

## Types of partnership

There are many different reasons for Colleges and Universities to work collaboratively and, as a consequence, many types and models of partnership. Funding and award delivery form key elements of partnerships between FECs and HEIs. Since 2009 HE student entrant numbers have been capped – called Student Number Control (SNC), (*see Section 1 on funding for more detail*). The following categories of partnership, relating to funding and the delivery of awards, are common in the current landscape:

- **Indirect funding or franchising where the FEC delivers an HEI award.** In this model the HEI owns, and is responsible to HEFCE for the student numbers. Typically in this kind of relationship the awarding institution agrees to authorise the FEC to deliver (and sometimes assess) part, or all, of one (or more) of its own approved programmes. Often, the awarding institution retains direct responsibility for the programme content, the teaching and assessment strategy, the assessment regime, and quality assurance.
- **Indirect funding where the FEC develops an award.** In this model the FEC develops a case for a new award and seeks validation for the award

by a partner HEI. The HEI still controls the student numbers.

- **Direct funding:** the FEC has a direct contract with HEFCE and owns, and is responsible for, the student numbers. Courses are designed by the College – e.g. Foundation degrees in response to local need; ‘top-ups’ to honours for internal progression. The HEI approves the programme to be of an appropriate standard and quality to lead to one of its awards.

There are also other examples of partnership. Some Colleges use their directly-funded numbers to deliver ‘franchised’ awards from HEIs, and there are jointly-delivered programmes between Colleges and Universities, and engagement with employers in the delivery of curriculum.

Many Colleges have both direct numbers with HEFCE and indirect numbers via an HEI. A College may choose to engage in a number of partnership arrangements involving different HEIs and FECs, and including Edexcel. Another College may have a single HEI partner and also be the sole FEC partner of that HEI.

## Entering into partnership

For partnerships to work there has to be clarity of purpose and clear benefits to partners, as well as the maintenance or enhancement of financial performance and institutional reputation. Collaboration carries risk for all partners and it is important to assess the risks and manage these appropriately. Colleges frequently draw attention to the inherently asymmetric nature of partnerships with HEIs, due to dependence on funding and

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
Section 1 Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
Section 2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
Section 3 Information about HE .....	21
Section 4 Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
Section 5 Working in Partnership .....	33
Section 6 Working in the International Market .....	38
Section 7 Student Experience .....	39
Section 8 Marketing .....	44
Section 9 Scholarship .....	56
Section 10 Admissions .....	61

validation services, and the impact this has on the ability to establish genuine partnerships and sustainability over time. Notwithstanding the current uncertainties and tensions brought about by funding reforms and policy changes, partnerships must organise themselves for what is always a changing context.

Colleges need to ensure that they have adequate resources and staff to undertake not only the initial investigation, negotiation and development stages of partnership working, but also the ongoing oversight of collaborative activity. This will involve staff with an understanding of quality assurance and those with the necessary financial, legal and management skills, as well as the relevant academic skills and knowledge, to deliver provision. There also needs to be a clear locus of responsibility for management and oversight of the partnership activity within the institution.

Before entering into partnership it is prudent for Colleges to ask a number of fundamental questions relating to their strategies for HE and organisational capacity to support collaboration in order to establish the grounds for working with an HEI, identifying the right kind of partner, and the most suitable working model.

The Mixed Economy Group of Colleges (MEG) has recently published a checklist for FEC/HEI collaboration aimed especially at Colleges new to offering HE – more experienced Colleges may find the checklist a useful stimulus for reviewing partnership arrangements. **The checklist** offers a series of prompts for Colleges to consider before entering into partnership.

## Partnership agreements

All collaborative models require transparency and written formal agreement between partners on a range of issues. In broad terms the partnership agreement should:

- State the purpose of the agreement and the objectives of the partnership
- Specify the arrangements for managing the agreement
- Specify the respective responsibilities of the HEI and the FEC
- Specify the financial basis of the agreement
- In the case of an indirectly-funded partnership, specify the procedures for the HEI to remove student numbers from the FEC, and in all cases specify arrangements for termination of the agreement.

The details of the agreement will vary depending on the nature of the collaboration but will typically include information about, for example: the duration of the agreement; the costs of services; how funding will flow between partners; how tuition fees are set; quality assurance arrangements; responsibility for ownership and development of curriculum; responsibility for assessment; responsibility for student recruitment, selection, admission, induction and guidance; provision for staff development; access to, and mutual responsibilities for, learning resources; arrangements for collecting and acting on student feedback; student appeals and complaints; responsibility for providing programme information for students; and responsibility for public information, marketing and publicity.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

This is not an exhaustive list and in a rapidly changing environment new areas will emerge for FEC/HEI partnerships to discuss and clarify. From 2012-13, for example, this will include agreement on how partners will work with the SLC for the administration and collection of student tuition fee loan payments – see *Section 1 on funding*.

## Quality assurance and FEC/HEI partnerships

The HEI is responsible for the academic standards and quality of learning delivered on its behalf, wherever this takes place. However, Colleges have responsibilities delegated by their awarding bodies for managing quality and standards within the context of their partnership agreement – see above.

The discharge of the HEI’s responsibilities is scrutinised by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the context of institutional review, guided by the expectations and indicators of good practice contained in the **UK Quality Code, Chapter B 10: *Managing higher education with others***, to be found on QAA’s website. This section of the Quality Code addresses the responsibilities of HEIs and awarding institutions in collaborative activity, and is intended to help institutions to manage the risks of collaborative activity effectively. It is also intended to ensure that the quality of their collaborative provision and the academic standard of the awards to which such provision leads are adequately safeguarded. At the same time it is a useful guide for Colleges in understanding the responsibilities of HEIs, highlighting recommended good practice in conducting partnerships, expectations regarding

the management of quality and standards within partnerships, and the implications for FECs as partners.

The QAA review of HE in FE examines the effectiveness of the policies, structures and processes that the College uses to fulfill its responsibilities as stated in the partnership agreement – see *Section 2*. It is incumbent on the College and the HEI to ensure that the former fully understands and implements its responsibilities for managing quality and standards. **Colleges with more than one partner or more than one partnership agreement will almost certainly have to implement different, complex quality assurance systems.**

## Successful partnerships: Summary Checklist

The revised ***HE in FE HEFCE Good Practice Guide*** (2009)<sup>13</sup> emphasises that building and sustaining productive and beneficial partnerships is both time consuming and labour intensive. Outlined below is a list of the features that the Guide highlights as contributing to effective partnerships:

*Pre-requisites:*

- *Clarity of purpose – a clear, shared understanding of why the partnership should exist and what it is seeking to achieve*
- *A commitment to collaborative working at all levels, including senior management and the board or corporation*
- *Real benefits for all partners*

<sup>13</sup> HEFCE *Supporting higher education in further education colleges*, March 2009/05



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

- *Informed awareness of the costs of working in partnership, especially in terms of time;*
- *Clear roles and responsibilities*
- *Clear communication structures*
- *Clear financial and service agreements*

## *Ethos:*

- *Collaborative arrangements that recognise the equality of all partners*
- *Openness and transparency*
- *Shared resources and responsibilities*
- *Willingness to compromise*
- *Partners who are alert to potential areas of conflict of interest and competition*

## *Structure:*

- *Building on existing or prior networks*
- *Some central co-ordination for partnerships in both the College and the HEI*
- *Appropriate administrative support*
- *The involvement, in some capacity, of all categories of staff*
- *Creation of sub-groups and working parties, bringing together FE and HE staff around topics of mutual interest to build effective relationships*

## *Process:*

- *Focus on a limited number of key issues*
- *Initial concentration on practical issues should not result in the loss of a more strategic perspective*
- *Flexibility to respond creatively to changing external circumstances is an important characteristic of successful partnerships*
- *An agreed mechanism for dealing with conflicts or disagreements is very helpful*

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 6 Working in the International Market

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Working internationally has become increasingly important to Colleges in England. Colleges that already provide a high quality learning experience to their home students may wish to consider entering the international market. Benefits can include increased income for the College and cultural enrichment of the students and wider communities that the College serves.

Institutions can work internationally in a variety of ways including:

Recruitment of students from markets abroad

Formation of partnerships with education institutions abroad in order to facilitate student and staff exchanges

Working directly with industry abroad to support the learning needs of their workforces, for example, by designing bespoke training programmes

Colleges interested in entering the international market can contact AoC's international team for advice (020 7034 9900). Guidance and support is also available from organisations such as **the British Council, UK Trade and Investment** and **Technical and Vocational Education and Training UK**.

Colleges that wish to recruit international students must adhere to regulations set out by the UK Border Agency (UKBA). In order to study at UK institutions, adult students from outside of the European Economic Area require a Tier 4 visa. In order to recruit such students, the College must apply to UKBA for a **Tier 4 Sponsor Licence**. If UKBA approve the College's application, it will provide the College with a licence and add it to its register of Tier 4 sponsors. As a Tier 4 sponsor, the College must comply with a number of duties. In order to recruit students studying at National Qualification Framework Level 3 and above (for programmes exceeding 11 months), the College must also apply to UKBA for **Highly Trusted Sponsor status**. Please consult **the UKBA website** for current information on its regulations.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 7 Student Experience

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### Introduction

There are many different ‘types’ of student on HE programmes in FECs, including:

- Local school or College leavers
- People in full-time employment undertaking part-time study related to their work
- Students progressing from FE to HE in the same institution
- International students
- Students seeking a ‘niche’ course

These groups will typically include mature as well as younger learners, different ethnic and cultural groups, those from backgrounds without a tradition of HE participation, as well as those whose entry was through the accreditation of prior learning for qualifications and experience gained elsewhere. Students will be on different modes of study – part-time, full-time, distance learning. Such a diverse student body will have different needs and may not have linear or straightforward student experiences.

There are key points in the student’s journey which the College needs to address in order to ensure the participation and progress of students. HE students in FECs typically make up a small proportion of the College student community but their journey will involve contact with a wide range of College functions and staff. A strategic approach is needed to ensure that the support systems and learning

processes encountered by students are coherent, and address their specific needs as individuals and as students engaged on HE programmes.

In FEC/HEI partnerships it is important to have clarity about arrangements and mutual responsibilities for student support and learning opportunities.

The discussion, below, addresses the key stages in the student lifecycle and identifies activities and interventions needed to secure the College’s relationship with the student. Resources to support Colleges in developing their practices are highlighted.

This section does not touch on issues such as developing the curriculum, teaching and assessment, and the use of resources to develop students’ higher level learning. The HEFCE publication, *Supporting higher education in further education colleges* (2009), provides useful discussion and case studies relating to some of these issues.

### Pre-entry guidance, application and admissions

College approaches to providing pre-entry guidance and information must be developed in recognition of the different needs of stakeholders. Relationships will need to be built to support students’ applications, and to assist employers and other stakeholders in their understanding of HE study at the College. Students and stakeholders should be given clear advice on the admissions and applications process, and entry requirements.

As the funding method shifts to publicly-funded loans, Colleges will need to provide students, and employers, with a range of complex information

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

relating to fees and financial support, including the availability of loans and grants, arrangements for bursaries and fee discounts, and the allocation of funds from the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) (where relevant). Guidance staff and course tutors involved in advising and guiding prospective students and their sponsors will need to understand, for example:

- How students can apply for loans and grants
- Eligibility for financial support
- How disabled students can apply for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

Colleges should be mindful of **Part C of the UK Quality Code** which relates to information about HE, and provides indicators of good practice on the provision of information to prospective and current students. Also, the section of this Guide on Information on Higher Education (*Section 3*) contains guidance about the KIS and information Colleges are required to provide for prospective students.

In addition to the provision of information about courses and finance, pre-entry guidance and support should also take into account students' individual needs for assistance in understanding and making the transition to higher level study. This could include, for example, diagnostic testing, opportunities to post queries to a discussion board overseen by tutors/staff, early access to course and study skills materials through the VLE, or the provision of short courses designed to prepare students for higher level study.

**Chapter B2 of the UK Quality Code** relates to admissions to HE. It is 'intended to help institutions to assure themselves and others that the policies and procedures they use to attract, recruit, select,

admit and enroll students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied'.

The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme was established in 2006 and works closely with HEIs and Colleges on the continuing development of fair admissions and good practice in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation across the UK HE sector – *see Section 10 of this Guide* The work of SPA can be found at: [www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk).

Widening Participation Strategic Statements also need to include information about initiatives to recruit 'widening participation' students. For those Colleges who are submitting access agreements, more detailed outreach activities are required – *see Section 4* on Fair Access and Widening Participation in this Guide.

## Induction

Induction assists transition and integration, and may enhance student progress and outcomes. Approaches to induction will differ depending on student numbers, mode of study and the way in which HE delivery is organised within the College. Whatever the approach, students require a range of information from the induction process to prepare for study. The following list summarises some key areas:

- Course information – key contact information; programme aims, outcomes and structure; module outlines; attendance requirements; programme management, including complaints and appeals procedures; professional accreditation; teaching, learning and assessment (for example, assessment regulations; timetable information)



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

- Arrangements for academic support and learning skills development
- An understanding of the relationship with the awarding body, including entitlements with regard to access to learning resources at the HEI
- Processes of student feedback and representation
- How to access library/learning resource centre and IT facilities in the College, and partner HEI if appropriate
- How to access and use the VLE
- Arrangements for careers education, information and guidance
- Opportunities to develop employability skills
- Financial arrangements and support for HE students
- Student welfare services

## On course support

Features of an effective system of on-course support include:

- Support for work-based learners where appropriate
- Practices which sustain motivation and encourage retention
- The provision of accessible, up-to-date and detailed information to support learning and assist students in making the most of their HE opportunities
- Opportunities to develop employability skills
- Career education, information and guidance

Funding to support retention is currently provided through the HEFCE allocation for widening access, teaching enhancement and student success – see the sections on Funding (1) and Fair Access and Widening Participation (8) in this Guide. Colleges are advised to use this funding and additional resource in supporting the retention of HE students, especially in the first year. Within the new funding arrangements, the SLC will make student loan payments to Colleges in three instalments (25%, 25% and 50%) during the year – failure to retain students will lead to immediate loss of income.

Support for retention can be through the provision of a programme of study skills support; early feedback on assessment; regular tutorials; and the provision of a programme of enrichment activities. Bursaries and other forms of financial support may also be beneficial to support retention and encourage progression.

Chapter B3 of the *UK Quality Code* relates to learning and teaching, provides guidance on the management of work-based and placement learning, and good practice in supporting students.

Chapter B4 of the *Code* relates to student support, learning resources, career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG).

## Student feedback and representation

Students have an important role to play in assuring and enhancing the quality of the learning experience.

Students in directly-funded Colleges participate in the National Students Survey (NSS) – data from this will now form part of the KIS, (see Section 3 on Public Information in this Guide). Arrangements

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

for obtaining student feedback on the quality of the learning experience, and the ways in which Colleges involve students and use feedback to improve experience, is an important feature of QAA review of HE in FE. The new method for review, which will be introduced in 2013, will also have enhanced opportunities for students to play roles in the review process, at institutional level through becoming a 'lead student' and nationally as members of review teams – see *Section 2* on Quality Assurance and Enhancement in this Guide. A Chapter of the *UK Quality Code* has been developed relating to student engagement and is intended to recognise the value of student engagement in quality assurance, and the important role that students can play in enhancing their learning experience.

The QAA Outcomes from IQER series of publications includes a paper on 'The Student Voice' which will be published on the QAA website ([www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)) in June 2012.

Student involvement in these activities is a vital part of the HE student experience, and often poses significant problems for Colleges as the majority of the sector's students are part-time and often in employment. Colleges need to seek innovative solutions to involving students in feedback and representational activities, including the use of social media and wiki software solutions.

## Support for students with disabilities

Chapter B4 of the *UK Quality Code* relates to student support and Section 2 addresses opportunities for disabled students. This section of the *Code* provides a useful summary of the legal context within which institutions operate, as well as detailed guidance on meeting the needs of disabled students. Support should be given to students to apply for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), and information included in pre-entry guidance and admissions procedures to ensure that support is in place at the start of the course.

HEFCE currently provides funding to assist Colleges in supporting disabled students. The calculation is related to the number of students in receipt of the DSA.

There is now extensive policy and research literature on HE student progression, transition, support, retention and success:

The **HEFCE Widening Participation section on its website** includes information about funding, barriers to progression, transition and retention, and research it has commissioned in these areas.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

The HEA has a Retention and Success section which can be found **at this link on their website**. This includes several archives of organisations active in this field, such as Action on Access, FDF, Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks. The **Action on Access website** has useful guidance documents, such as advice on work-based learner progression to HE – these can be found under **Resources / Publications**.

The **Student Transition and Retention (STAR) project**, based at the University of Ulster, also has some useful resources.

JISC has a Progression and Retention Coordination group, exploring IT-based solutions. Details **can be found at this link** on **www.jisc.ac.uk**.

**Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (HELP CETL)** based at the University of Plymouth – a useful repository of HE and FE partnership working.

**QAA IQER reports** published on its website identify a wide range of good practice in supporting the HE student experience in FECs.

QAA has also recently published guidance on good practice in supporting international students' experiences of studying in the UK – QAA (2012), *International students studying in the UK: Guidance for UK higher education providers*.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 8 Marketing

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### Introduction

Most Colleges have specialist marketing teams whose purpose is to promote the College and its courses. They do so in what is an increasingly competitive local environment and are thus attuned to the best way of promoting the College. In the past, some Colleges may have made little, or no, distinction between promoting their FE offer and the HE programmes delivered on the same site.

For Colleges new to HE, developing a distinctive brand in a competitive environment can be particularly difficult.

College marketing teams and HE managers/directors need to agree a strategy for the promotion of College-based HE. Whilst some factors will be shared with FE marketing approaches, enabling some commonalities, promoting HE will involve a different evidence base and different promotional techniques. Most Colleges will have a HE strategy which will be updated annually in the light of experience, new funding/finance regulations from HEFCE, SFA, UKBA and SLC, and changes in local and national demand patterns.

This section assesses the impact of changes in the HE landscape on College marketing strategies, and suggests some short- and long-term responses to these new challenges. It should be read in conjunction with existing, more general information, such as that contained within *Supporting higher education in further education colleges*<sup>14</sup>. This contains a useful summary of points to consider when marketing HE.

### External requirements

- **Relationship with awarding bodies.** Colleges have formal partnership agreements with their validating and awarding University, setting out expectations and responsibilities with regards to the marketing of courses, use of logos, the production of course information, and the description of the links between the College and the HEI.
- **Funding agreement with HEFCE.** Colleges are required to provide information for prospective students, (i.e. Public Information (*see Section 3* for more detail)):
  - The KIS – a set of information about every eligible HE course, and mainly drawn from the NSS and the DLHE (*see Section 3* for more information on KISs)
  - The WIS – expanding on the KIS to include a much wider range of public information for students and stakeholders – details are to be finalised
  - An HE Student Charter describing mutual expectations – to be introduced in 2013
- **QAA.** Colleges which deliver HE must also be mindful of the expectations and indicators of good practice set out in the QAA *UK Quality Code*<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> HEFCE *Supporting higher education in further education colleges*, March 2009/05

<sup>15</sup> QAA *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
Section 1	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
Section 2	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
Section 3	
Information about HE .....	21
Section 4	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
Section 5	
Working in Partnership .....	33
Section 6	
Working in the International Market .....	38
Section 7	
Student Experience .....	39
Section 8	
Marketing .....	44
Section 9	
Scholarship .....	56
Section 10	
Admissions .....	61

The Code sets out the expectation that

HE providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Engagement with the expectations and good practice indicators set out in the Code form part of the QAA's review of HE in Colleges – see Section 2 on Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

## HE in FE

HE in FE is distinctive, largely vocational, often local employer-led, and with a greater contact between College delivery staff and employers. Whilst there are some exceptions to this – notably in rural areas and 'cold spots'<sup>16 17</sup> where HE in FE offers the only opportunity to access HE of any kind, including the more traditional academic offering – a common characteristic of all HE in FE is smaller classes, greater contact with teaching staff, and a more personalised approach to learning. Staff meet the needs of their students (who are much less likely to come from families with a tradition of HE) by adopting a more directed approach to study, whilst progressively instilling the independent learning skills that enable such students to progress to honours qualifications at nearby Universities.

<sup>16</sup> 'Cold spots' is the term used by HEFCE to describe areas with significantly lower than average participation in HE. It can also refer to areas where particular types or modes of provision are not available, e.g. little or no part-time provision or lack of provision in specialised vocational programmes.

<sup>17</sup> Guild HE. Westwood A. *Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: A Position Paper for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills* 2011

Nationally:

- 50% of all Foundation degree students are taught in Colleges
- 67% of Colleges teach Foundation degrees
- Colleges deliver 81% of HNCs and 59% of HNDs
- 171,000 students study HE in a College (prescribed and non-prescribed)
- 266 Colleges provide undergraduate and postgraduate level courses
- Over 40% of institutions recruiting through UCAS are FECs
- Over half of HE in FE applicants only apply to a single choice (compared to 15% of all applicants)
- Over 70% of those accepted to HE in FE live within 25 miles of their chosen College (compared to fewer than 40% of all HE acceptances)
- Over 80% of those accepted to HE in FE have qualifications other than A Level (compared to fewer than 50% of all HE acceptances)

A survey by AoC in June 2011 indicates the tuition fees policy of Colleges – (the survey results **can be found here on AoC's website**). The survey commented that the vast majority of HE in FECs intend to offer fees at, or below, £6,000. It is anticipated that circa 25 Colleges will be setting fees above £6,000 in 2012/13, based on access agreement returns.

Despite the rapid growth of Foundation degrees, HN awards continue to be strongly represented, particularly in sectors such as Construction and

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

Engineering where the qualifications have wide recognition and support from employers. Some carry exemption from the lower levels of Professional Body qualifications. Foundation degrees are more strongly represented in “new” areas of higher-level provision, such as Education and Arts and Design, and are articulated to Honours provision, providing progression.

In general most marketing professionals will use the accepted framework for developing their HE marketing strategy – Price, Product, Place and Promotion.

## Price

Much of the discussion of the new funding arrangements has centred on price. Many Universities have chosen to charge at, or near, the full fee of £9,000 pa, accompanied by an OFFA-approved access agreement. In contrast, the vast majority of Colleges are charging below £6,000, and some Universities have chosen to set their fees at £7,500 or less, giving them access to the Core and Margin process.

It may be helpful, at this point, to summarise the public debate around pricing. On the one hand institutions setting higher fees have argued that not only are those fees necessary to fund an enhanced student experience and outreach activities but they also give a clear message that the provision offered is of high quality. On the other hand, those institutions setting lower fees have based their pricing decisions on issues of affordability, linked to debt aversion in some potential students or the lower cost of delivery. This is based on either a lower College cost base or provision that is cheaper to deliver.

The reality of the situation will only emerge following the decisions students make in autumn 2012. The existing evidence base around price sensitivity in College-delivered HE suggests that under the previous fees regime, capped at £3,200, the fee charged appeared to make little difference to College recruitment. Most of those Colleges charging lower fees revised them upwards as the impact of fewer resources on delivery became apparent. The validity of this approach can only be tested once the pattern of student choices is known. However, what is certain is that whatever the fee charged, students will expect a clear statement of what that fee purchases, and an assurance that they are receiving value for money.

Setting the price for part-time provision will raise related but different issues. Many institutions planned initially to set a fee that is a pro-rata equivalent to that charged for full-time provision. In most cases this can result in a significant increase in prices once HEFCE funding is withdrawn. Where institutions have explored a module or credit-funded approach, the impact can be even more marked. However, in the light of these potentially large increases in price, and their possible impact on part-time students and their employers, some Colleges are moderating their approach. Many are charging a lower fee, to not discourage enrolment, and seeking to avoid price increases that might not be fully understood by students or employers.

The true price sensitivity of part-time provision is yet to be tested. It is possible that a more price-sensitive and price-driven market may emerge here, making part-time pricing decisions particularly challenging.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

As we will see later in this chapter, many Colleges now realise the importance of emphasising the existence of means-tested maintenance and tuition fee grants in their promotional material.

## Product

Most HE in FE courses are vocational or skills-based and draw students from a relatively local area. As with many other aspects of HE in FE it can be difficult to reach general conclusions about the factors that promote enrolments to HE in FE. The following section should, therefore, be read in the context of individual Colleges, the scale of their HE offer and their local circumstances.

Analysis of the HE in FE market has been attempted on several occasions.<sup>18 19</sup> These studies all take into account local competition, cold spots for certain types/modes of provision, and the curriculum strength or specialism of the College itself. Direct competition with Universities, or even larger College providers, may not always be the best strategy, especially for new entrants to the HE market. In such circumstances Colleges are unlikely to be able to compete on equal grounds. Strategies more likely to succeed include identification of a specialist or niche curriculum area, preferably one for which there is demand (expressed by the existence of successful feeder provision, see below, or significant and supportive local employers) and which is not currently provided for in the area.

## New College Nottingham

We are revisiting our HE strategy to reflect our touchstones of excellence, employability and enterprise. We anticipate significant changes in curriculum over the next three years, plus new work-based and part-time routes being introduced. We will almost certainly seek other validating partners for areas of the curriculum which our partner University doesn't cover. We anticipate, also, that we will have to adjust our marketing strategies and publicity materials to ensure that our USPs are fully understood locally, and to ensure that our potential students understand what value for money they are getting with us.

<sup>18</sup> University of Sheffield, March 2011. Rashid S, Parry G, Thompson A, and Brooks G. *Patterns of further and higher education in colleges and universities in England: a statistical summary and technical commentary.*

<sup>19</sup> BIS (2012) *Understanding higher education in further education institutions*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

Progression from College-based FE courses to College-based HE is a growing area of activity. Historically many Colleges found it difficult to recruit their own FE students to College HE. A number of reasons were given for this, including the benefits of study in another institution (perhaps away from home) or a mismatch between the FE and HE curriculum. The changed environment of HE, and the

cost associated with higher-level study, has brought significant change. Colleges now see FE students as a key source of supply for HE in related disciplines and staff actively work to recruit students from their own FE provision. Coupled with effective progression pathways to top-up Honours study, this can present an attractive and cost-effective option.

## Newcastle College

In order to support recruitment and the retention of current students we have, this year, invested time and resources to increase our marketing activity to include a sharp focus on internal students in order to increase aspiration and encourage L3 students to progress to L4 Foundation Degrees within Newcastle College. This has involved a variety of marketing activities, alongside a series of student/parent Open Days and Evenings including finance talks aimed specifically at an internal audience.

Additionally the College has adopted a wider approach in relation to recruitment and retention, with the formation of a Task Group for Progression, Recruitment and Retention (PRR).

The main objective and strategy of the PRR Task Group is to future proof HE in relation to recruitment, ensuring the College hits its target for HE numbers and income in 2012/13, and is sustainable beyond. Newcastle College is facing a challenging new landscape that requires a move towards a culture in which all staff at all levels support the strategy's objectives. Ultimately actions arising from the strategy document must give confidence and reassurance to NCG about next year's HE enrolment.

The College needs a clear, robust and comprehensive plan that converts potential students into enrolments, persuades employers to invest in the training and up-skilling of their staff, and emphasis and reinforces the quality and affordability of HE provision at the College. In addition to addressing the challenges associated with HE recruitment, the changes in funding associated with student retention in-year require the College, in particular school budget managers, to consider how this may impact on their income projections and to consider how to minimise the impact of any lost income on the organisation through student attrition.



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

In addition to curriculum cold spots, FECs have identified and developed distinctive delivery models. These may be based on modes of study, for example, in those locations where competition for FT students forms the greater part of the local HE market. Colleges are able to build on the opportunities that this presents for part-time or flexible modes.

Colleges also have areas of specialist expertise, the most obvious examples of which include land-based studies. Specialism can also find expression in areas of study not normally associated with higher-level study at a University. These can include disciplines such as personal services (hairdressing, beauty therapy, fitness etc) or complementary therapies. In many cases Universities will not have similar “off the shelf” provision available. As a downside to this, it can sometimes be difficult to find a University partner that is willing to validate provision which they themselves do not offer.

Research undertaken by MEG<sup>20</sup> showed that the majority of young students who took part in the study actively chose to pursue their HE in FE. For those students, HE in FE was not a second best alternative following a failure to gain entry to a University. In the past, many students who moved from FE to College-based HE would not have applied through UCAS, seeing no purpose in paying the UCAS fee to make only one application. As a result, the true extent of first choice applications is probably under-estimated. New regulations linking access to student loans with the UCAS process will enable a better understanding of the pattern of student preferences.

Many students make this choice because the College offers the vocational course that they want, at an affordable price. Overwhelmingly, most are local to the College and specifically want to study near to their homes and families. Many also value the opportunity to continue to study with teaching staff they already know, in a supportive environment.

Students on related College provision are increasingly staying on at College to study HE. For some mature students the increasing cost of higher-level study (which includes not only higher course fees but the ancillary costs of materials, transport and childcare or family responsibility) can make HE in FE an attractive option.

## Positioning and developing the brand

Five stages have been identified to develop an institutional brand: (1) understanding constituent needs; (2) segmenting a College’s market; (3) identifying brand attributes; (4) positioning the brand effectively among competitors; and (5) communicating the essence of the brand with relevance to each market segment.

*Constituent needs* involve an analysis of why a student attends the institution and what services need to be introduced to meet that identified need. This could involve indicators such as the College’s values, success rates, geographical location, and historical employment destinations.

Segmenting a market is known to all marketing practitioners – and can include segmentation based on: geography; demography; lifestyle; and behavioural attributes related to study, such as a desire to gain a well-paid job.

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20 Ibid

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

Branding is fundamentally about understanding your institutional and course selling points and positioning in the market – elite; good-value for money; vocational/excellent career prospects. Each College will decide on its own brand, taking into account factors such as its strengths and geographical position in relationship to competitors and reputation. In most cases Colleges have the in-house expertise to carry out this type of analysis – but several private consultancies can help, and AoC and MEG have College marketing networks.

Unfortunately many Colleges may find themselves in the weakest position – *Commodity Positioning*. Among the five positioning styles<sup>21</sup>, this one is the least desirable because many of the brand attributes are outside the control of the institution and are primarily non-academic. Students selecting commodity Colleges do so on the basis of factors such as convenience, proximity to home or work, affordability, availability of financial assistance, and cost of living.

Other positions include: (a) elite – academic reputation; (b) outcome – employment prospects; (c) quality of the campus; and (d) student centred – small class sizes, friendliness, caring staff, respect for individuality, academic support, and focus on student success.

Clearly Colleges need to develop appropriate strategies that will position themselves in the more favourable categories indicated above. As stated earlier, HE in FE is predominantly vocational, developing high level skills alongside relevant

knowledge. For many students this is a powerful message and can be linked directly to employment and career development. HE in FE is also characterised by small class sizes, high levels of student/teacher contact, and tuition from staff who are often both qualified teachers and active practitioners in their original profession. The high levels of access to this expertise, when compared to other sectors offering HE, can be a plus point in most marketing strategies. (Ample evidence of the extent to which this is appreciated by students can be found in research undertaken by MEG in 2010<sup>22</sup>.)

Colleges will usually seek to price competitively, certainly when compared with Universities. When not handled proficiently this can lead to accusations of “cut price” or poor quality provision. It is important that this is recognised and taken into account when promoting the College offer as “cost effective” or “quality at an affordable price”. Close links with local employers can be a powerful tool, especially if those employers are prepared to endorse College courses, offer work placements or employ College graduates. Examples of stories such as success in gaining relevant employment will also be very useful in promoting College provision.

Linking HE provision to the College FE offer presents further opportunities to develop clear vocational progression routes, in effect offering a one-stop-shop throughout the student’s career. In the case of part-time students sponsored by employers, the College is able to promote a full range of provision available at critical points in the careers of their employees.

<sup>21</sup> London, Ontario: Academica Group. Steele, K (2008). *Classifying universities: Institutional brands from the market’s perspective*, Academica Group White Paper, May 2008

<sup>22</sup> MEG *Strategic Options, Operational Challenges: A study of Higher Education delivered in a Further Education setting*. March 2010

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

Based on research undertaken by MEG in 2010<sup>23</sup>, HE in FE students are greatly motivated by the impact of their chosen courses on employment prospects and income. Although some may undertake study for the intrinsic pleasure and satisfaction it brings, most see a direct link between their chosen study and their career. This means that a direct marketing message stressing the benefits of higher-level qualifications (but without raising exaggerated expectations) can be used. Given the uncertainties over fees, more attention than common hitherto should be given to the total package. This means not simply extolling the virtues of the College, or even the course, but accepting that there will be issues and concerns around funding which have to be included in any support or advice the student requires.

In other words, paying for the course may become as important as choosing the right course as far as student decision making is concerned. Colleges will need to respond by providing sound financial advice on HE loans and procedures, rather than leaving such matters to be dealt with by the student – who may have very little direct support and often no experience or knowledge of such matters.

## Place

For new providers of HE in FE, identifying and securing a distinctive place can be challenging. In many cases, local circumstances will determine the precise nature of the College offer. As an example, many Colleges seek to develop their work in market segments which are less competitive and where gaps in provision have been identified. Such cold spots can manifest themselves in different ways: a local area may be well-served for full-time provision, but neighbouring HEIs may not have given priority to the needs of part-time students. This creates an opportunity for the College to work closely with employers to meet that need. Geography may also be a factor, especially in rural areas or where the lack of public transport (or its cost) acts as a disincentive to participation for some types of student. This may be of particular significance to mature students, or those with family responsibilities or particularly close ties to their communities. In this case the College may be able to offer a range of provision which, although also offered by local HEIs, is not easily accessible.

Finally, Colleges can respond to the demand for progression opportunities from their own students on Level 3 vocational provision. This can be particularly important when local HEIs either do not offer opportunities in these specialised curriculum areas or even, in extreme cases, do not consider those curriculum areas to be suitable for higher-level study.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, MEG

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Leeds City College

We are focussing on our internal and local students. We are trying to raise awareness about the new funding regime and trying to get the message across about not paying fees up front.

Also, we are courting students more during the application process, e.g. responding immediately with a courtesy email/text/letter, getting tutors to make a decision within three weeks and then looking at ways of keeping students warm until September so that they do not go anywhere else.

We also want to try to recruit as many part-time students in 2012-13 in case pt numbers are capped in 2013-14 – in which case this year’s numbers might become the new benchmark for any future recruitment.

Colleges can also be expected to respond to developing areas of HE provision, in particular supporting Higher Apprenticeships. Given Government encouragement of this whole area of work, the existing expertise of many Colleges in offering Apprenticeships to Level 3, and the lack of experience shown by most HEIs, this could prove to be an important and growing area of College-led HE activity.

As indicated elsewhere in this chapter, many Colleges are working hard to increase their rate of recruitment from their own FE provision. This has been a neglected area in the past, even in some of the larger providers of HE in FE. Two important strategies have been adopted. Firstly, Colleges have analysed their Level 3 FE provision to track the HE destinations of their students. Where gaps have been identified the College has moved to fill them. Reasons for such gaps

include absence of direct progression pathways in curriculum areas where the FE offer is strong, e.g. beauty therapy and social care, or the absence of HE provision which is employer and employment focussed rather than overly academic. This can help to promote overtly vocational courses such as Construction or some specialist Cultural, Creative and Media programmes. Secondly, Colleges have sought to stress the internal pathway to HE within the College at the time the student joins the related FE provision. This establishes the thought of staying on at an early stage. Of equal importance is the involvement of specialist marketing and IAG staff in promoting the College offer internally by progression events, and compacts offering guaranteed places.

Some Colleges have amicable relationships with their local schools and still draw from this source of recruitment.



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Leeds City College

We are using the school links department to promote HE to local schools. We have developed leaflets to raise awareness of our provision and the funding arrangements. We are hoping to catch those students who are still a little undecided about either which institution or whether to go into HE at all.

Promoting the College HE offer to schools can provide an alternative and less contentious market than perceived competition for post-16 students.

Part-time students make up a higher proportion of HE students in FECs than across the HE system as a whole. (50% compared to 16% in Universities and Colleges of HE.) Many Colleges have identified part-time provision as an area for development and growth, building on their strengths and contacts with local employers. The proposed introduction of loans for part-time students from 2013 will introduce a new dimension to the market: if accompanied by increases in fees as many predict, this may cause some uncertainty with regards to higher study. This may be compounded as employers react to the new loans regime: many may decide not to offer financial support to their employees, instead requiring them to take the loan, perhaps in exchange for time off to study.

Finally, Colleges are beginning to explore opportunities to work with international students, either on campus or by delivering overseas. Difficulties can be experienced with partner validating HEIs in securing approval to deliver abroad, given the perceived risks to quality and the obvious issues of competition. Status with UKBA and the perception of College-based provision in the eyes of foreign partners, prospective students or their Governments, can also make exploitation of HE in FE overseas problematic.

Even if these barriers are overcome, the College must ask itself if it can create a welcoming environment for such students, including dealing with issues such as accommodation and any language or cultural problems which may arise. The approach and skills of College staff is a key factor in the success of developing such a market: inexperience in working with international students can undermine the best of intentions.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Promotion: Prospectus or social media?

### City of Bristol College

We left the HE prospectus for 2012 until the very last minute – we completed in the autumn. We made a big effort to promote all of the higher-level work, making sure that we talked about professional courses and NVQs, not just the HEFCE-funded work. We decided to include a couple of courses subject to validation that we hoped we would recruit to if we had funded numbers. We have decided to make this our last detailed prospectus and do more of a summary format pushing people towards our website. That means we can make changes more rapidly in future – and some students are much more likely to use this than a traditional prospectus.

During 2011 Solihull College implemented a radically different communications strategy by launching an interactive online magazine for its 16-18 market. It replaced the traditional prospectus and is progressively digitalising the College’s communication channels. As an integral part of the College website, the magazine allows users to

decide the content they want to see. The change to this style of prospectus was driven by the growing number of online, rather than mailed, applications; together with research highlighting the fact that students need to see more of what they are going to do and with whom.

### Solihull College

In early 2012 we launched a HE version, which focused on the strengths of the College offer. Uniquely, the College has its own Halls of Residence, and being located in a suburb of Birmingham students can have the whole University experience if they wish, at a significantly reduced cost. Under the banner ‘Affordable Excellence’, specially created videos were produced and introduced by a popular Birmingham personality. The interactive magazine allows students to select the video they want to see and this time, also select the route they want to follow – full-time, part-time, HNC, HND, Degree etc. They can then take one more click to see the cost of their chosen course and the savings they can make, against a similar outcome from traditional HE providers.

Aware of the potential lifestyle of this target group and their reliance on smart phone technology, a mobile site was launched so that a slimmed down version could be viewed and this was promoted through a small Z-card. Again, research was a significant driver for these changes with few, if any; current students saying the prospectus was part of their decision process, instead the vast majority cited the website as a key information tool.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

The increased (and increasing use) of social media, such as Facebook, by students can be a key factor. Many Colleges now have their own Facebook presence and seek to promote positive messages through that route and channels such as Twitter. Peer-to-peer technology also enables current students to talk to potential ones. One inevitable consequence of developing the use of such media is the question of editorial control. Although the College can exercise such control over its own sites and feeds, students will also use the media to share views, impressions and opinions of their College experience. In many ways Colleges and other educational institutions are facing an environment in which their official message will be seen in parallel with a virtual live “prospectus”. Consideration will have to be given to how, if at all, this can be managed.

As a minimum, Colleges will need to be rapid in their response to issues and problems identified in social media by prospective and current students. The power of these messages and the speed of transmission may require staff time to be devoted to monitoring and responding to matters as they arise. As such sites are largely unregulated, their content may be defamatory or contain other potentially damaging material.

Although no College or University has yet decided to redeploy resources away from traditional media, such as printed prospectuses and web sites, it is likely that a greater proportion of the resources devoted to marketing HE in FE provision will have to be used in this way.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 9 Scholarship

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### Introduction

FECs are primarily teaching institutions, and traditional research published in peer-referenced journals will never be a major part of their activities. They are also experienced at developing their staff mainly in an FE context, externally inspected by Ofsted.

However, all Colleges are also involved in research and development projects, internal research into their practice, and a wide array of other activities that could be classified as scholarship and research. In many cases such activities are recorded as staff development.

All Colleges expect their teaching and support staff to engage in scholarly activity, such as keeping up-to-date on the subject they teach, profession they belong to, or knowledge and skills to undertake their job. Indeed membership of the Institute for Learning (IfL) includes a requirement to maintain a yearly CPD record. Similar requirements exist for other professional bodies that FE teachers belong to. There is also a long tradition in the sector of individuals, or groups, undertaking research related to pedagogy, sometimes in association with HE/FE teacher training networks. Plus, of course, many individuals complete Masters and Doctoral qualifications that can lead to publication and further ‘traditional’ research.

In a minority of Colleges with large HE student numbers a more comprehensive approach can be taken, including a central budget for research,

possibly an internal College research publication, and the development of some form of academic research community. In a few Colleges seeking TDAP or FDAP there is an expectation that they will create a “well founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards”<sup>24</sup>.

All Colleges with HE who have been through the QAA IQER process have provided evidence of staff development arrangements, and examples of scholarly activity to support academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. In general, QAA IQER found many examples of good practice: clear HE staff development strategies; customised development programmes for HE staff; specific HE staff development posts; joint development activities with awarding body staff; peer review teaching systems.

However, a QAA IQER Outcomes paper on Staff Development<sup>25</sup> also comments: “Colleges were reported as often having support for staff development related to their further education provision but few, if any, opportunities related specifically to their HE activity.”

In Colleges with small HE provision this will always be a challenge – but it is important to note that scholarship can take many forms, as indicated previously.

In summary, scholarship in Colleges with HE will look different in different contexts dependent on the number of HE students, strategic aims, history and

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<sup>24</sup> QAA *Applications for the grant of Foundation Degree-Awarding Powers: Guidance and criteria for applicant further education institutions in England and Wales* (1 October 2010)

<sup>25</sup> QAA *Outcomes from IQER: 2008-10 Staff Development* 2011



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

culture. There is no ‘one size fits all’ – although cognisance needs to be taken of the external environment, in particular the QAA Quality Code, QAA reports, the new external quality review system for HE in FE – RHEFE (see Section 1), and other agencies’ advice and guidance in this area.

The starting points are:

- QAA RHEFE Handbook, to be published in July/ August 2012
- **QAA Outcomes from IQER: 2008-10 Staff Development** provides a very useful overview of College-based HE staff development, informed by three years of IQER reviews
- **HEFCE Supporting HE in FEC: Policy, practice and prospects (2009)...**
- **HEA (2011) UK Professional Standards Framework**

The descriptors for HE qualifications at different levels are also a useful resource – indicating what students must demonstrate to achieve an award. Available in Part A of the Quality Code – **Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards – Chapter A1 ‘The National Level’**.

The **UK Professional Standards Framework** (UKPSF) is a particularly important document since it will be used as a reference for QAA Review and, with the recent publication of the interim **Lingfield Report**<sup>26</sup>, it seems likely that FE could be moving towards an HE model of professional development.

<sup>26</sup> BIS *Professionalism in Further Education Interim Report of the Independent Review Panel* 2012. URN 12/670

## Definitions and Practice

Several organisations such as HEFCE have attempted to describe research and scholarly activity in FE (see Appendix 1 below); the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) have produced a short report exploring practice in the sector and identified three broad categories from College practice<sup>27</sup> and, in another document, definitions of research, scholarly activity and scholarship (Appendix 2). The QAA ‘**Guidance and Criteria for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers** (FDAP)’ states that for a College to achieve FDAP it is expected to demonstrate the existence of “a well founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards”. The Academic Infrastructure – recently re-named and undergoing an update as the **UK Quality Code for Higher Education** – indicates the need for scholarship in the delivery of HE awards. Several development agencies – HEA, Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (HELP CETL), ESCalate and Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) – have worked with the HE in FE sector to develop practice on the ground and, of course, many Colleges have developed internal definitions to support their HE strategic and staff development plans, partly as a response to IQER. There are also definitions in the wider academic literature, such as the work of Boyer<sup>28</sup> and others<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> MEG *Report on MEG survey on Research, Scholarship and Scholarly Activity* MEG 2009

<sup>28</sup> Boyer E L. *Scholarship Reconsidered* San Francisco CA Josey Bass 1990

<sup>29</sup> HEA. Healey M and Jenkins A. *Developing Undergraduate Research and Inquiry* York 2009

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

Discussions with QAA, HEA, the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), IfL and key College leaders in this field indicate that attempting to identify a definition for the whole HE in FE sector would be fruitless. Each College needs to identify its own forms and type of scholarship based on its history, culture, staff development policies and practices, and quantity and type of HE provision. For example, for those Colleges with significant degree provision delivering third year honours, the development of an engaged academic community is critical; for those with mainly vocationally-orientated HNC/D and Foundation degrees there is likely to be more emphasis on professional and higher vocational updating with demonstrable outputs, such as presentations to professional conferences and responsible roles in a professional association. The latter two examples have long been central to many HE in FE practitioners' professional role. Regular recorded links and discussions with employers identifying learning and possible impacts on the curriculum and teaching, befitting the vocational nature of Foundation degrees, is also a form of scholarship. Plus, of course, all FE and HE practitioners are expected to keep abreast of pedagogical advances, reflect and apply where appropriate.

There has also been a long tradition in strategic HE/FE partnerships of University-based staff, with more time to undertake research, passing on their knowledge informally as link or liaison tutors, or more formally in joint subject conferences. In the stronger partnerships, subject communities of practice have emerged and research grant funding has been sought.

## Conclusion

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' scholarship definition or policy. It is likely a scholarship policy will develop in keeping with the College's strategic plan and HE strategy, staff development strategies, expectations of partner awarding bodies and externalities such as QAA review.

It is worth noting that the IQER process has identified several areas for College improvement, notably: ensuring strong recording processes; ensuring staff development is sufficiently focussed on HE matters; evaluating the impact of scholarship; including part-time staff in staff development strategies and implementing systems of teaching observation appropriate to HE delivery.

All Colleges who have been reviewed by IQER processes will have already developed some policies and practices in the area. It is worth discussing with other Colleges, the HEA, LSIS, and your partner awarding body to inform your approach. MEG also has knowledge and expertise. Also several documents have been referred to in this section that will be worth reading.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Appendix 1

### HEFCE Definition

Colleges offering HE generally have a broader definition of what constitutes scholarly activity than HEIs. In FECs, scholarly activity is taken to cover any, or all, of the following:

- Keeping up-to-date with the subject
- Curriculum development, particularly Foundation degrees, often with HEIs
- Curriculum development that involves research
- Updating ICT skills
- Taking higher qualifications – masters, doctorates and teaching qualifications
- Consultancy to industry and other agencies
- Industrial secondments or work shadowing
- Involvement with SSCs
- Research and publications
- Practitioner/applied research
- Personal development – action research and reading
- Attending staff development events within the College
- Attending conferences and workshops externally

## Appendix 2

### MEG definitions

**Research:** original enquiry into a matter of academic or professional interest, resulting in publication in peer referenced journals etc.

**Scholarship:** academic or professional activity which develops or promotes staff expertise in their discipline.

**Scholarly activity:** academic or professional activity aimed at developing the individual by undertaking study or other professional development to support and inform their teaching, and to maintain currency in their profession.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Appendix 3

### FDAP Guidance

Any College considering an application for FDAP will need to pay attention to Criterion C1 of *'Applications for the grant of FDAP: Guidance for applicant further education institutions in England and Wales'* (1 October 2010). This lists the evidence required for all teaching staff engaged in the delivery of HE programmes:

- Academic and/or professional expertise
- Engagement with the pedagogic development of their discipline
- Knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area at a level appropriate to a Foundation degree, and that directly informs and enhances their teaching
- Staff development and appraisal opportunities aimed at enabling them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship. While there are no generally agreed definitions, there appears to be a consensus about the distinction between scholarly activity as a broad collection of activities and the more narrow focus of research as described in HEIs.



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Section 10 Admissions

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### Introduction

This note is intended for all those concerned with admissions to HE courses and programmes in a College, from senior management to ‘front-line’ admissions staff, and is intended to act as an initial source of guidance for Colleges considering how to deal with admissions to HE. It has been developed in cooperation with associations of Colleges round the UK, particularly AoC in England, and forms the ‘Admissions’ chapter of AoC’s online ‘HE in FE Guide’<sup>30</sup>. SPA, working with AoC is continuing to develop guidance on HE in FE admissions, and would be delighted to hear from colleagues with questions and examples of good practice.

Colleges already follow very high standards in their admissions processes. Their close relationship with students and applicants means that their practice in many areas is highly innovative and supportive, for example in the inclusive and advisory role of interviews. However, both senior and admissions staff may find the following principles of value in demonstrating a College’s high standards and in giving a structure against which good practice can be measured.

This note will be mainly concerned with admissions to full-time undergraduate courses across the UK, although many of the points made also apply to the admission of part-time and postgraduate students, and to international as well as UK/EU students.

### Why is admissions important?

Access to HE and the fairness of the admissions process are topics of interest to applicants, their families and advisers, to the public at large, to politicians, and to the media. The wider admissions process, which extends from the pre-application stage up to and including enrolment, is also critical in establishing a good relationship between applicants and HE providers, and can assist HE providers in ensuring that they reach their target and retain their students.

HE in FE is an important and growing area of HE. In England many FECs are receiving numbers direct from HEFCE for the first time and have the challenge of undertaking their own admissions, in Scotland Colleges are considering collaboration and mergers, while the HE and admissions landscape is also changing in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Once FECs have decided to offer HE provision they are likely to find that they encounter a large number of obligations. A recent example of this is the requirement to complete the **KIS** which has many obligations and requirements for data which Colleges are unlikely to have encountered previously. The same applies to admissions to HE; once the decision to offer HE is taken, the need for admissions IT systems and the setting of appropriate academic requirements follow. Colleges are also keen to meet the requirements of the QAA and will wish to pay close attention to the **UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B – Chapter B2: Admissions**.

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<sup>30</sup> AoC members can log into the site at <http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/policy-and-advice/higher-education/>

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

Admissions is also an area where all HE providers may encounter criticism and challenge – including, possibly, legal challenge. Colleges are justifiably proud of the close personal relationships they have with their applicants and students but there is now an expectation that procedures, policies and obligations should be clearly set out, not only for the benefit of applicants, their families and advisers but also to protect each College.

## Who is responsible for admissions to HE?

Admissions are the responsibility of individual Universities and Colleges. Institutions are able to set their own criteria, choose their own assessment methods, and select their own students<sup>31</sup>.

## Good Practice Principles for admissions to HE

While admission to HE is the responsibility of each institution, there are some principles of good practice that are generally accepted across the HE sector. These were contained in the independent 2004 report, *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for good practice*<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> This is set out for England and Wales in the *Higher Education Act 2004, Part 3, Section 32, subsection 2 (b)* and for Scotland in the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, Section 98 Subsections 1, 2 and 12 (b) (ii)* (accessed 14 September 2012)

<sup>32</sup> *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for good practice* 2004 (often referred to as the Schwartz Report) (accessed 14 September 2012)

This recommends that in their admissions processes, HE providers should:

1. Be transparent
2. Select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and their potential
3. Strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
4. Seek to minimise barriers to applicants
5. Be professional in every respect and be underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes

**Appendix A** gives these in greater detail.

## Organisation

There is no one way to organise HE admissions; it will depend on the size of the college and of its intake, on relationships with partner universities and colleges, the mix between FE and HE courses and a range of other factors. However, there are some aspects of HE admissions where there seems to be a measure of agreement. These include:

### Senior Management commitment and involvement

It is important that senior management is committed to HE in the college.

They will have a vision of the importance of HE in the college's plans, be able to emphasise to staff that this is an important activity and have the authority to make decisions affecting resources and student numbers.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

It is also often considered useful to have a Director of Higher Education who is responsible for HE on a cross-institution basis. The Director may be associated with a particular department, or academic unit, but will still have College-wide responsibilities.

## Internal Communication

Many (though not all) Colleges are relatively small institutions with good informal personal relationships between colleagues. The work of admissions is complex, however, and it is important to ensure that there is good communication between all staff involved with applicants and new students. Staff and offices involved may include:

- Academic staff
- Accommodation (if offered by the college)
- Admissions
- Information Technology
- International Office
- Marketing and Recruitment
- Partner Institutions
- Planning
- Quality Assurance
- Senior Management
- Widening Inclusion

For guidance on who should be involved in admissions you may find it useful to look at SPA's **Admissions Action Plan**; page 5 looks at who may be involved in admissions planning and although some categories may not be relevant to you, you may find it helpful as a start.

## Admissions decision-making

### In Colleges

In some Colleges (as in some Universities) decisions on applications are made by academic staff, while in others they are made by administrative staff using criteria established by academic staff. There is no 'single best way' to organise admissions and each College will decide on the solution which is best for it.

Whatever solution is decided on, both academic and administrative staff should always be involved in the setting of criteria. This should be on the basis of robust data and should take into account information on both the performance of students on courses and the position of the College and course in the market.

### In partnership with HE partners

Arrangements for admissions decisions between FECs and HE partners can vary widely. In some cases all decisions are made by the HE partner and the role of the FEC is to receive a list of students at the beginning of the academic year; in others, all decisions are made by the FECs, who also input the decisions through UCAS. Others have a mixture of the two.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Admissions Administration

It is important to note that the admissions function does not include only decision-making but also a range of associated issues including:

- Guidance on policy related to HE admissions
- Information about qualifications
- Responses to consultations from Government and other organisations, that may have an effect on admissions
- Knowledge of admissions systems used, including UCAS

Information on developments in any of these areas must be shared by the Admissions Office in the College, or by the HE partner, with all those staff who need to know.

## Documented and transparent procedures

Admissions processes and policies should be clearly laid out in agreements and plans, both within Colleges and between Colleges and HE partners. They must be transparent to potential applicants, applicants and their advisers. This is both helpful to the admissions operation and in accordance with the QAA's recommendations<sup>33</sup>.

## Considering the application

In considering the application admissions selectors will take into account a range of factors including:

- Academic qualifications
- Skills in areas such as creative subjects
- Interviews and auditions
- Requirements of professional bodies
- Progression
- The requirements and procedures of partner Universities
- Equality, diversity and disability policies
- Criminal convictions

In viewing applications, individual factors (such as qualifications or school performance) should not be considered in isolation but should be viewed in relation to each other, as part of a whole (sometimes referred to as 'holistic' consideration). Information on such 'contextual data' can be found on the SPA website<sup>34</sup>.

If applicants are unsuccessful, Colleges should offer feedback if requested, and there should be an established complaints procedure. Policies on these (and other issues) should be transparent and easily found (as noted in *Section 6*, above).

<sup>33</sup> See the *QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part B – Chapter B2: Admissions, Indicator 5* (accessed 14 September 2012)

<sup>34</sup> *SPA website contextual data pages* (accessed 17 September 2012)



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Admissions Policies

All institutions should have admissions policies dealing with what they are looking for and how admissions will be conducted. In some FECs, one policy will cover both FE and HE admissions while in others there will be separate policies for the two groups (and possibly others, such as part-time students). There is currently no 'best model' for how policies should be divided in this way and SPA will continue to work on this issue.

In some institutions there will be one large policy with sections covering many different topics while in others while in others there will be a number of separate policies. A couple of sentences or paragraphs on many of these topics may suffice, while others may need to be longer, possibly even being separate policies in their own right.

Full information is given on the SPA website in the **SPA Good Practice Statement on Admissions Policies**.

## Data and its use

It is important that the performance of students on course is monitored against entry requirements. This will enable colleges to understand if requirements are correct, or if any changes are required in the subjects asked for or the level of performance required. At course and college level, robust data ensures that staff are able to understand the changing demand for different subjects.

Good data is also a key part of public information, including the **KIS** and it is important that all parts of the College – including admissions and planning – work together to ensure that data is of good quality and available at the right time.

## Information for applicants

Colleges have long experience of providing information for prospective students, both for progression within the college itself and for recruitment from a wider area. While there are new requirements for public information – for example, the Key Information Set – colleges will be aware of and understand the principles behind the need for information, and how it is to be collected.

## Partners – and links

There may be links with partner Universities, through either a validation or a franchising arrangement. It is appreciated that these links can be highly complex, and can vary according to the number of HE partners, the modes of study and specific courses. Links may also be at many levels and between many offices, including admissions, marketing and recruitment, quality assurance, senior management and any special offices dealing with partnership arrangements.

It is important that lines of communication between all parts of the two institutions are very clear.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Staff resources

Staff dealing with HE admissions may encounter a range of different challenges. They may:

- Need to learn about different IT systems
- Require training on UCAS systems (if these are used)
- Encounter a different range of qualifications from those previously dealt with
- Need to attend update events on issues significant to HE admissions (e.g. Student Number Controls)
- Find that the key times and deadlines for HE admission may not be the same as those for FE admissions (for example, in late August when only guidance staff were previously involved).

Senior staff in the college must be aware of these issues, the demands on staff time and the resources which may be required (e.g. to attend events).

## SPA – Who we are and what we can offer

SPA is the UK’s independent and objective voice on admissions to HE. They are a free, impartial, independent, central shared service, offering expertise and advice on policy and procedures in admissions, widening inclusion and student recruitment.

They are not auditors or regulators, but offer support to institutions to enable them to enhance and develop their HE admissions policy and procedures.

What can SPA offer HE providers?

- Expertise on admissions to HE
- A wide range of examples of good practice and a free resource for institutions who wish to enhance excellence in admissions, recruitment and widening inclusion
- The provision of advice to, and answering queries from, admissions practitioners and managers, HE stakeholders, national policy makers and others on specific questions, current issues and on policy developments in HE admissions
- Broker between policy and practice: Drawing on experience working in institutions and established sector networks, SPA regularly provides a practitioner voice on policy issues and vice versa

SPA make regular visits to HE providers, put information on their website, [www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk), issue regular e-bulletins and publications, make presentations, conduct workshops and attend events.

For further information please visit the website, contact the SPA team at [enquiries@spa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@spa.ac.uk), or call 01242 544891.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## UCAS

Those Colleges recruiting large numbers of full-time undergraduate students from outside their own and immediate geographical area may wish to join UCAS. Many Colleges find it of value in view of UCAS' clear procedures and established systems, the exposure to their courses given to prospective students, and practical benefits such as access to the Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) system (which transmits the results of many examinations through UCAS to their HE members). Part-time students are not admitted through UCAS, although UCAS may be considering systems for publicising part-time study options.

Of course, UCAS membership is not obligatory and Colleges may prefer to continue to undertake admissions by direct application. Colleges will wish to make a detailed study of these issues, including the costs involved, and decide on the best solution for them.

Even those HE providers who are not members of UCAS may still find that the UCAS website has information of use and interest to them, for example in the sections for **HE staff** (although some of these may require passwords) or the **Statistics Information**. UCAS also offers a comprehensive staff training programme which Colleges may find of interest.

## Developing admissions for HE

Many Colleges will have well-developed systems for admitting HE students, either with a partner institution or independently.

If a College is new to undertaking HE admissions independently (without the involvement of a partner institution) it is important to consider the resources required (including time) to develop policies and procedures on every topic and build these into a plan. For example, you may decide that it is essential to give priority to official requirements, or you could decide that the areas that would give greatest information to, and transparency for, applicants are most important. Identify any remaining topics not yet covered, establish a timeline for reviewing them and include them in your policies and procedures over subsequent years.

SPA

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Appendix A

### Admissions to HE – Good Practice Principles

These principles to all types of applicants (full and part time; undergraduate and postgraduate; home, EU and international; young and mature etc) and to all parts of the UK.

#### Principle 1: Be transparent

*Universities and colleges should provide, consistently and efficiently the information applicants need to make an informed choice. This should include the institution's admissions policy and detailed criteria for admission to courses, along with an explanation of admissions processes. It should include a general indication of the weight given to prior academic achievement and potential demonstrated by other means.*

#### Principle 2: Enable institutions to select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and potential

*In assessing applicants' merit and potential, institutions may legitimately consider other factors in addition to examination results, including: the educational context of an applicant's formal achievement; other indicators of potential and capability (such as the results of additional testing or assessment, including interviews, or non-academic experiences and relevant skills); and how an individual applicant's experiences, skills and perspectives could contribute to the learning environment.*

#### Principle 3: Strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid

*Assessment can legitimately include a broad range of factors. Some of these factors are amenable to 'hard' quantifiable measures, while others rely on qualitative judgements.*

*Admissions policies and procedures should be informed and guided by current research and good practice. Where possible, universities and colleges using quantifiable measures should use tests and approaches that have already been shown to predict undergraduate success. Universities and colleges should monitor and evaluate the link between their admissions policies and undergraduate performance and retention, and review their policies to address any issues identified.*

#### Principle 4: Seek to minimise barriers to applicants

*Admissions processes should seek to minimise any barriers that are irrelevant to satisfying admissions requirements. This could include barriers arising from the means of assessment; the varying resources and support available to applicants; disability; and the type of an applicant's qualifications (e.g. vocational or academic).*

#### Principle 5: Be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes

*An institution's structures and processes should be designed to facilitate a high quality, efficient admissions system and a professional service to applicants. Structures and processes should feature: clear lines of responsibility across the institution to ensure consistency; allocation of resources appropriate to the task; and clear guidelines for the appointment, training and induction of all staff involved in admissions. The suggestion was made that institutions would find it simpler and cheaper to implement these guidelines if at least part of the admissions process were conducted by centrally located staff.*

### *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice*

Admissions to HE Steering Group, September 2004



# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Appendix B

Colleges are not alone in facing a range of challenges. Some sources of advice and guidance are as follows:

- **AoC.** Seek advice from AoC. Many Colleges are currently considering how to develop their HE provision and AoC may offer guidance, or be holding conferences, on these issues.
- **Other Colleges.** Use the opportunity of conferences and other events to talk to colleagues from other Colleges – particularly those who are not in competition with you – to understand their questions and the answers which they have developed.
- **Speak to partner Universities.** If you are continuing to work closely with partner Universities for some of your courses, while admitting directly to others, it may be helpful to see if you can use some of the same systems and procedures they do. Ask if you can have copies of their admissions guides to develop for your own use.

- **UCAS.** If you are considering admitting through UCAS, speak to them to obtain details of costs and other requirements. Even if you do not intend to join, have a look at their website to see if there is useful information or if they have events for Colleges and/or admissions staff that you may be able to attend.
- **Marketing.** Your College marketing staff may be involved in the **College Marketing Network (CMN)**. Also speak to recruitment staff at your partner University who may be involved in the **Higher Education Liaison Officers' Association (HELOA)**.
- Seek advice from **Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA)**.

SPA is a national, independent source of advice, guidance and good practice on admissions issues. They are always happy to offer advice and guidance, so feel free to contact them at [enquiries@spa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@spa.ac.uk), telephone 01242 544891 or **consult the SPA website**.

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Appendix C

### Admissions to HE – Useful Links

HEFCE has published useful guidance on *Supporting higher education in further education colleges (2009/05)*; Chapter 5, in particular, deals with Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions. Although intended for English FECs, it has general guidance that will be of interest to Colleges across the UK.

## College Groups and Associations

England: **Association of Colleges (AoC)**

Northern Ireland: **Colleges Northern Ireland**

Scotland: **Scotland’s Colleges**

Wales: **Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru**

### Mixed Economy Group

157 Group

## Funding for Institutions

Funding Councils often give very important guidance on student number issues. Indeed recent direction on student number controls means that it is vital to follow their guidance closely. It is worth signing up for their bulletins and newsletters to keep abreast of developments.

England: **Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)**

Northern Ireland: **Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI)**

Scotland: **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)**

Wales: **Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)**

## Funding for Students

**Student Loan Company (SLC)**, in particular the sections on **Services for HE Partners**

**Student Finance England**

**Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)**

**Student Finance NI**

**Student Finance Wales/Cyllid Myfyrwyr Cymru**

## Statistics

**Higher Education Statistics Agency**

## Marketing

**College Marketing Network.** Marketing staff in FECs

**Higher Education Liaison Officers’ Association (HELOA)** Currently, for HEIs, but the representative from your partner HEI may be able to assist.

## Professional Requirements

Professional bodies linked to particular courses may have a role in setting and monitoring entry requirements. Academic members of staff in departments will be able to give guidance on these.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

A key and authoritative resource and source of guidance for HE is the **UK Quality Code for Higher Education**. For admissions, the sections of particular interest are:

*Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality  
Chapter B2: Admissions*

*Part C: Information about higher education  
provision*

## UCAS

If your institution is a member of UCAS the named contact, the 'UCAS Correspondent', will receive regular briefings and notes from UCAS on a wide variety of issues. It is important that the UCAS Correspondent shares information with everyone in the institution who needs to know it. The **UCAS Professional Development Team** offers a range of specialist training for HE admissions staff while the **UCAS website** has a great deal of useful information in many sections, even for those Colleges which are not members.

## Appendix D

HE in FE Admissions Policies – good practice examples

These are examples of admissions policies currently used by FECs, which may be of interest to FECs and to HE institutions with FE partners.

SPA would be delighted to receive further examples of good practice; please contact [enquiries@spa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@spa.ac.uk), 01242 544891.

### **Borders College**

City of Westminster College

*HE Admissions Policy*

Newcastle College

*Higher Education Admissions Policy*

**University Centre Grimsby**

FECs

# Contents

Introduction .....	2
<b>Section 1</b>	
Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b>	
Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b>	
Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b>	
Fair Access/Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b>	
Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b>	
Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b>	
Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b>	
Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b>	
Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b>	
Admissions .....	61

## Appendix E

### SPA Good Practice Statements and Guidance

#### Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme (SPA)

The SPA Programme was set up in 2006, and is now the UK's leading independent and objective voice on fair admissions to HE. SPA is a free central shared source of expertise and advice for the sector on strategy, policy and practice on a wide range of admissions issues. SPA develops and leads on the development of fair admissions, providing an evidence base and recommendations for good practice, and helps Universities and Colleges maintain and enhance excellence and professionalism in admissions, student recruitment and widening participation/access. SPA works closely with institutions offering HE and other stakeholders to provide outputs as a resource for institutions which wish to develop and update their admissions practice and policy to enhance quality, transparency, reputation and fairness. Full information on SPA and its work can be found at [www.spa.ac.uk](http://www.spa.ac.uk).

### SPA Guidance and Good Practice Statement

This guidance has been prepared by SPA in response to requests from institutions offering HE courses. SPA's objective is to provide good practice which has been derived from the analysis of evidence collected by them from discussions with staff on visits to institutions, at conferences, meetings, evidence from institutions' policy and practice, and from desk-based research. There are a number of SPA good practice statements which aim to provide a wide range of staff in Universities and Colleges with principles and examples to consider to enable them to review and update their own policies and practices. Heads and deputy heads of institutions, senior managers, admissions and registry staff, student services staff, equality and diversity practitioners, and student officers and representatives may find the statement of value and assistance.

In the UK, admissions standards, requirements, procedures, policies and decisions are the responsibility of each individual HEI. This principle was affirmed in the Schwartz Report on Fair Admissions (2004)<sup>35</sup> and is set out in law.

<sup>35</sup> *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice – The Schwartz Report, September 2004* (accessed 15 May 2012)



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Section 1</b> Funding Higher Education in Further Education Colleges .....	6
<b>Section 2</b> Quality Assurance and Enhancement .....	16
<b>Section 3</b> Information about HE .....	21
<b>Section 4</b> Fair Access/ Widening Participation .....	26
<b>Section 5</b> Working in Partnership .....	33
<b>Section 6</b> Working in the International Market .....	38
<b>Section 7</b> Student Experience .....	39
<b>Section 8</b> Marketing .....	44
<b>Section 9</b> Scholarship .....	56
<b>Section 10</b> Admissions .....	61

## Disclaimer

This good practice statement is for general guidance only, and should not be taken as a list of obligations or a legal document. SPA emphasises that it does not offer legal advice and cannot take any responsibility for actions taken based on this information. Institutions must always take their own legal advice as they see appropriate.

SPA good practice statements are kept under review and updated as appropriate. Your comments or updates are invited and appreciated, please contact [enquiries@spa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@spa.ac.uk)