

Policy on local provision of HE with partner FECs

University of Sunderland

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Local Provision of Higher Education with Further Education College Partners

This paper has been developed by the University in accordance with its commitment to the Council to provide a statement relating to its strategy for development of its links with FE colleges in support of the £708,706 of Restructuring and Collaboration Funding allocated in 2001 / 2002 for this purpose.

1 The Need for a Local Provision Policy

1.1 Participation in higher education has since 1996/7 become increasingly regionalised. This is due in the main to the changes made in student support leading to a higher percentage of students choosing to study closer to their place of origin. The effect on higher education institutions in the North East region, traditionally a net importer of higher education, has been to reduce the numbers of the students in all five institutions originating from outside the North East region.

1.2 The region's universities have a well-developed collaborative approach to widening participation at regional level based upon the Universities for the North East Partnership. At sub-regional level the three Universities and six FE institutions in Tyne & Wear work closely together supported by the FE/HE joint project. These initiatives will be further developed through the regional Partnerships for Progression Business Plan. At the local level individual institutions are working with colleges and schools in Excellence in Cities/Education Action Zones, to address the issues of aspiration raising, progression and retention as they affect young people. Local Learning Partnerships are helping to co-ordinate approaches to vocational education and training and involvement of adults in learning.

It is against this rich background of collaboration that the University's plans for Local Provision of Higher Education are being developed.

1.3 The University has an outstanding record in Widening Participation and continues to invest in its further development within an overall strategy which emphasises vocational relevance and teaching quality in a research active environment.

This investment, which the current Restructuring and Collaboration Fund contribution of £708,706 supports includes, in 2001/2002:

- A franchise programme to the value of £1,362,000 involving 23 colleges and 925 students.
- A recruitment team with staff who focus principally or exclusively upon the FE sector.
- A focus at Executive and Senior Management level upon strengthening strategic links with key FE partners.
- An Information Service which has developed collaborative links with FE colleges through TWIRL (Tyne & Wear Information Resources for Learning) to promote access, electronic services and staff training.
- A School of Education which provides college based professional development programmes to several hundred FE staff within the NE region and beyond leading to Cert. Ed, B Ed and PGCE qualifications.
- A Life Long Learning team who work across the FE/HE divide to provide entry, link and progression to HE routes for local people

- A Learning Development Service which enables franchise partners, through the University's VLE to benefit from the advanced learning support infrastructure which is currently being developed through the R&C funded 'Plus 2' project.
- An IT and Communication Service which supports the region's FE IT network services.
- A partnership agreement with the City of Sunderland College which extends to shared development of support service facilities including, in 2001/02 a jointly operated Print and Reprographics Service.
- Support to East Durham and Houghall College's HE provision which from 2001/02 is indirectly funded via the University.
- Quality Support Services to collaborative partner FE institutions at which the University's programmes are delivered.
- Partnership working with FE colleagues for example in
 - Excellence in Cities/Excellence Challenge
 - Education Action Zones
 - Learning Partnerships
 - Local Strategic Partnerships
 - EU Structural Fund Partnerships (ESF/ERDF)
 - Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships

1.4 The trend toward regionalisation is a reflection of changing higher education student demographics. Students from less affluent backgrounds will form an increasing percentage of the total student complement. They tend to prefer to study within their region of origin and all things being equal are likely to opt for the institution closest to their home area.

If the government's target of 50% HE participation of the under 30 age group is to be realised by 2010 there will have to be a significant increase in the levels of participation of social classes C,D and E. If young people from these social groups are to enter HE in greater numbers they are likely to

- (a) enter via FE and non 'A' level routes
- (b) seek to combine learning with employment
- (c) opt for vocational programmes which link well with their post 16 learning experiences and
- (d) choose to study as close to their locality of origin.

1.5 The University's current strategic direction, stemming from the Quality and Distinctiveness Policy Paper, places emphasis upon employability and enterprise and sees the national market in terms of niche strengths. Academic Areas have been identified as growth points on which investment is being focussed. These areas map on to the regional economic strategy and are designed with the region's enterprise and skills needs in mind.

1.6 It is acknowledged that to extend participation beyond current limits requires new approaches and a long term commitment. The University has established strategic links with colleges and schools (working with LSCs and Local Learning Partnerships) to address the underlying issues. The University is committed to a collaborative approach recognising that all agencies and institutions have a role to play and that results are greatly enhanced if there is a common strategy.

1.7 Within this framework the University is seeking to strengthen its partnership with the key local FE institutions in its immediate sub region i.e. institutions from which a substantial number of students progress to the University. Following a series of strategic meetings involving college Principals and the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor Partnership Agreements are being prepared which will include, inter alia, the following areas of collaboration:

- Progression Pathways
- Co-operation in Targeted Wider Participation
- Collaborative Programmes (Validation and Funding)
- Specialisation/Supporting Centres of Vocational Excellence
- Joint Staff Development and Staff Deployment
- Capital Developments
- Joint Funding Approaches

Targeting

The University and the colleges within the grouping will jointly agree widening participation and progression targets and implementation strategies. These will be specifically targeted upon those localities (wards/communities) and groups (gender/age/disability/ethnicity) where rates of participation and progression are lowest. These initiatives will be linked into Local Strategic Partnership strategies and will draw upon Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, EiC and EAZ sources and the resources available through the EU Structural Funds (Objectives 2 and 3).

Partnership

The HE FE grouping referred to above will provide the core on which wider partnership approaches can be based. These, building on existing Local Learning Partnerships, will encompass Schools and the Connexions service as well as the appropriate local education authorities. Much of this structure is already in place and is currently being considered within overall Local Strategic Partnership structures.

Resources and Commitments

The Partnership agreements referred to above will include the University's newly developed scheme for funding HE in partner FE institutions. This methodology is applicable to indirectly funded institutions and to those supported via franchise agreements. It draws upon the Council's methodology in that it sets, for each institution, an overall level of funding within which numbers can be varied subject to meeting the implied weighted FTE allowing for variations in resource share and price group. The expectations and obligations of both parties will be clearly defined in each Partnership agreement.

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

The Partnership Colleges in most cases already participate in FE staff development programmes leading to the University's Cert. Ed B.ed and PGCE qualifications. This provides an opportunity to address cross sector issues relating to teaching and

assessment practices and standards. The deeper partnership arrangements currently being developed will extend this to joint working on curriculum issues to ensure that discontinuities between FE and HE curricula are addressed subject by subject and that routes are developed in those, mainly vocational, fields where progression is currently minimal.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The University and Partner Colleges, having set targets, will jointly monitor the outputs and outcomes of their collaboration. This will extend beyond the collection of monitoring information into 'action research' which will seek a greater understanding of underlying factors leading to or militating against success.

2. Development of a Policy for Local Provision

2.1 The University plans to develop even closer collaboration with FE colleges to develop common approaches to the extension of participation. On the principle that provision should meet learners' preferences appropriate Higher Education will have to be provided when and where it is wanted.

2.2 FE colleges are well placed to meet the needs of those who come from backgrounds where participation in HE is not the norm.

FE colleges are already significant providers of HE in the region. HEFCE has allocated direct funding to the following institutions in the Tynewear and Co.Durham sub-regions for 2002-3:

- City of Sunderland College	£ 558,037
- Gateshead College	£ 816,480
- New College Durham	£3,192,602
- Newcastle College	£7,171,963
- North Tyneside College	£ 588,676
- South Tyneside College	£1,688,659
- Tynemouth College	£ 51,930

In total **£14,098,347**

In addition most colleges receive other HE funding usually in the form of franchise payments from Universities. The payments made by the University of Sunderland in 2001-02 add a further £1.6m to the above and include £300,000 paid to East Durham and Houghall College which is indirectly funded via the University of Sunderland.

Colleges which have been successful in recruitment of HE students can seek to expand either by applying for additional funded numbers directly from HEFCE or indirectly from universities. Only Newcastle College out of the above has been awarded additional numbers directly from HEFCE for 2002-03.

3. Local Provision of Higher Education - Conclusions

The development of a Local Provision Strategy assumes that a significant element of HE participation will consist of students wishing to study close to home (probably associated with proximity to place of employment). The University aims to play a full part in meeting this growing demand, and plans to provide for local needs through a mix of on and off campus facilities in collaboration with FE partners.

3.1 The elements of a common strategy should include

- ? A range of common Foundation and Top Up Programmes available at a variety of centres in TyneWear and Co.Durham.
- ? Unified progression pathways building a 'colleges to University of Sunderland pyramid' as the principal progression route for the core group of FE partner institutions' graduates, with curriculum linkage from NVQ 3 to NVQ 4, new HE programmes to extend vocational routes beyond NVQ3.
- ? A joint approach to widening participation with the University and partner colleges pooling work with schools and communities to address aspiration raising and achievement levels in schools. The University would work with partner colleges to target particular low participation problem areas in conjunction with local community organisations and basic skills providers.
- ? A degree of specialisation based upon academic and infrastructure strengths and linked to FE Centres of Vocational Excellence specialisms. In practice this might mean that the University would choose to locate all its provision at a partner institution's premises.
- ? Collaboration in deployment of resources including staff working across the HE FE divide, co-ordination of student support and learning resource provision.
- ? Concerted capital developments to provide a comprehensive network of high quality Local HE Centres.
- ? Concerted approaches to HEFCE funding with co-operative or joint bidding for widening participation and additional number allocations.
Further consideration would have to be given to indirect and direct funding mechanisms.
- ? Co-operation in staff development including developments based on the established University of Sunderland franchised Cert FE and HE awards

3.2 Common Programmes

The development of Foundation Degrees provides an opportunity for the University in partnership with its network of 'core' colleges to offer students in the region / sub-region a standard product in an number of its academic areas available at an HE Centre within easy travelling distance from their home / place of work.

Currently we can make such an offer in the following academic areas:

Arts and Design:	Fine Art , Performance Arts
Culture:	Travel and Tourism

Automotive Technology :	Mech Eng with Management
Computing:	IT for Business, Network Computing

Education:	Early Childhood Studies,
Lifelong Learning:	Training and Development

Health, Society and Environment:	Health and Social Care
Sport and Leisure:	Sports and Exercise Development

Business and Management:	E-business
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Additional Sunderland FDs to be offered at local FE Colleges may include:

- Photography
- Automotive Engineering, Electrical Engineering
- Internet Computing
- Aboricultuure
- Health Studies (Safety)

Consideration will be given to developing FDs in the academic areas where such provision is currently lacking.

The role of Top Up Degree programmes delivered by FE colleges within the region will also be considered.

The Cert Ed FE , BA Education and PGCE programmes are meeting the needs of FE staff and will play an important part in consolidating the University's partnership with the core colleges group.

3.3 Unified Progression Pathways

The University will work with the 'core' colleges to ensure that any barriers to progression from FE to HE level in terms of curriculum, learning style and learning support are addressed. This may involve review of current University HE programmes It will also involve working with colleges to review the content and delivery of FE programmes particularly those which do not currently generate significant numbers progressing from NVQ3.

3.4 Joint approaches to widening participation

The University is already working with partners in the Excellence in Cities programme in Sunderland and in South Shields. The development of a common strategy for widening participation is emerging from the Local Learning Partnership structures in both areas. The next step will be for the University to pool its widening participation activities with those of the City of Sunderland College and South Tyneside College in Sunderland and South Tyneside respectively. A county wide approach could be followed in Durham working with East Durham and Houghall Community College and New College Durham in partnership with the Durham LSC.

3.5 Specialisation / Centres of Vocational Excellence

The University will work closely with colleges to support and develop them in their chosen areas of specialism. Examples include:

- Performance Arts
- Engineering
- Sport
- IT (New Technology Institutes)

3.6 Staff Development and Deployment

The University will provide opportunities for its academic staff to be placed with colleges and will be developing a cadre of staff qualified and experienced in working across the FE HE interface. College staff will have similar opportunities through the Excellence Fellowship scheme.

The University is already substantially involved in FE staff development through the franchised Cert.Ed programme. The University will discuss with 'core' partner colleges a joint scheme for staff development and exchange which would include research and reach out as well as teaching and learning support activities.

3.7 Capital Developments

The University will work with 'core' college partners in the development of HE Centres in local communities with the aim of establishing a comprehensive network incorporating specialist facilities as well as general learning resources. The University already plays a key role in the development, provision and support of colleges' access and use of internet and ICT systems and services.

3.8 Concerted HEFCE and LSC Funding

The University will work with 'core' college partners to co-ordinate access to and use of HEFCE funding. Bids for additional numbers based on widening participation and local / regional needs and demand require a strategic approach and understanding of supply and demand factors. The University working with 'core' partner colleges will have an in-depth understanding of the underlying factors and trends.

The University will seek to develop a strategic approach which would focus development on areas of specialist strength and strong demand with mechanisms which would allow for flexibility in the deployment of HE numbers across institutions.

The University is a significant provider of FE programmes and will relate its FE work to the contribution made by partner colleges.

4. List of Institutions to be involved: (Provisional)

Provision List of Institutions to be involved in Core Grouping

- City of Sunderland College
- East Durham & Houghall Community College
- Gateshead College
- New College Durham
- South Tyneside College