

# Re-conceptualising identity: scholarly activity and the HE in FE professional

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# Overview



- Background
  - The FE *professional*
  - Expansion of HE in FE
- University of Plymouth Colleges
- HELP CETL
- Scholarly Activity – the current research
- Perceptions of HE
- Implications of expansion
- Impact of scholarly activity
- Conclusions

# The FE *Professional*



- FECs **traditionally** associated with:
  - Academic, vocational & recreation courses
  - Assessed, validated & quality assured by external agencies
  - Local communities
    - Mature, part time learners
    - Those who did not succeed at school
- Identity associated with **role as teachers** & ensuring students succeed
  - Emphasis on **learner support**

# Expansion of HE



- Longstanding commitment to HE – HNC/Ds
- Change in lecturers working practices
  - New qualification: quality systems
  - Freedom to develop courses
  - Adapt to new collaborative partnerships

# Expansion of HE



- Opportunities to undertake HE related staff development
  - e.g. scholarly activity
- Renewed period of **growth/investment** to create an environment & ethos for HE

# University of Plymouth Colleges



- HE in FE supported by UoP since 1978; UPC formed in 2003, largest faculty by 2008
- 21 partner institutions
  - 15 FECs
  - 464 approved programmes
  - 7,000 students (FTE) (2007-08)
  - 1,800 lecturing & support staff
  - 468 students progressed on to UoP (2007/8)

# HELP CETL



- Enhance the experience of HE in FE students
  - Opportunities for the CPD and scholarly activity & research
  - Establish functioning Communities of Practice to promote sharing of resources, communication & research
- Award Holder Scheme
  - Recognise & reward contributions to T&L
  - Opportunities to engage with scholarly activity/CPD
  - Supportive environment

# Award Holder Scheme



- Over 75 lecturing & support staff
- Across disciplines/support areas
- Research into areas such as:
  - WBL, EE, student support, progression
- CPD Activities
  - Conference presentations, industrial secondments, professional updating

# Research...



- AH – First 2 years of the AHS
- Questionnaire
- Semi-structured interviews with 14 AH
  - Role in the college
  - Perceptions of (traditional) HE
  - Impact of expansion in HE on the college and the Award Holders
  - Role of scholarly activity & research in HE in FE
  - Impact of engaging with scholarly activity & research

# Perceptions of HE based on their own experiences

# Perceptions of HE



- Associated with own experiences of HE
- HE – a **holistic experience**
- Scholarly activity – **key to university lecturer's identity**
  - Researcher first, teacher second
  - Current subject knowledge
  - Academic communities – beyond university

# Perceptions of HE



*“...challenging attitudes, approaches and ideas  
without getting into trouble for it, daring to go  
down a different path.”*

# Experiences of teaching HE in FE

# Experiences of HE in FE



Mixed...level of commitment?

*“...generally a **receptive atmosphere**...at the minute, (but) there is always the sense that **it might change** cos [sic] it is not within the (college) structure...”*

# Experiences of HE in FE



## Competing demands – conflicting agendas

- Teaching across courses & levels
- Multiple roles & responsibilities
- Contrasting governance & management systems  
e.g. timetables, registers, LRC access

# Experiences of HE in FE



- Influence of learner profile:

*“...I think a lot of it has also got to do with the **kind of students** that are attracted to do FDs. They often come from a different culture often from vocational courses and they've got very different attitudes towards study.”*

- Non traditional students with wider commitments (e.g. work/family)

# Experiences of HE in FE



- Lack of recognition

Limited understanding from FE colleagues/managers

*“I think managers **don't always acknowledge** the amount of time for preparation and the level of HE that is required from the staff delivering HE and try to impose an FE model.”*

# Scholarly Activity & Research

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*“...but if you’re doing scholarly activity there is **no learner in front of you** so it is not in the system to be recognised as a justifiable way of spending your time.”*

# Scholarly Activity & Research



- Primarily associated with staff development & developing self (CPD)
- Viewed as low priority

*“lost in the everydayness”*

# Impact of engaging with Scholarly Activity & Research

# Impact of engagement



- **Boosted confidence** – carrying out research, teaching HE

*“I always thought that (research) was a bit above me but actually I've seen a lot of presentations and read papers and thought **"I can do that"**. I won't claim I'm the best of presenters or the best of writers, **but I don't think I'm out of my league either.**”*

# Impact of engagement



- Legitimacy – validated role

*“It gave me knowledge which (I) had not previously had, as it was an unknown club that I wasn’t part of. Although I taught on HE I was never privy to meetings or any of that stuff, the paper work etc. was kept secret. Knowledge is power as they say, I was allowed to go and ask as I was doing research.”*

# Impact of engagement



- Promoted a sense of inclusion/belonging

*“Just very **simply opportunity to move out of your institution and collaborate with others who have similar issues...** You feel so **isolated** sometimes especially in certain subject areas **as an HE in FE lecturer** and you don’t get much opportunity to test things out, so you can be lacking in confidence, so having the opportunity just gives you that needed bit of confidence.”*

# Impact of engagement



- Space, time & freedom to think, reflect...

*“It was just **good to have the time to stand back** and I think most people in FE will say we are always in a hurry. It is just a difference of approach and I think that for me it gave the opportunity to stand back and reflect and really think I wonder, am I doing the best for my students...?”*

# Implications...

- New opportunities...new challenges?
- Limited recognition of their role(s) as HE lectures
  - College vs. University
- Engaging with the HELP CETL/scholarly activity
  - Space to reconsider and/or re-conceptualise their identity

# Implications...



- Performed a **unique** role
- Identity in **flux**
- FE lecturer by **association/employment**
- **Secondary identity** as an HE lecturer

# Points for discussion



Consider your own experiences of being involved with scholarly activity:

- What are you involved with/have you done?
- What has been the impact on you personally?
- What has been the impact on you professionally?
- What has been the contribution to your role?

- Thank you for listening and contributing to this session

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