Graduate Market Trends

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Note from the editor

The issue broadly concentrates on two interrelated themes, both integral to the economic health of a developed state: careers policy and further education policy. Sub themes of social mobility, higher qualifications regulation, autonomy, lifelong accounts and localism weave individual contributions together. What results is a united cry which must not be ignored. Our aim is not only to inspire you (indeed us) practitioners, managers and policy makers but to lodge our mission deep in the heart of the political debate.

We begin with an interview with the Association of Colleges’ HE Policy Manager Nick Davy, who projects his vision of FE into the new era. You can also catch Nick later in the issue with a think-piece in which he sets out AoC’s position on stimulating technical and professional education. Nick’s contribution on FE in this issue is complemented by a terrific article from the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges. Chair of MEG John Widdowson and MEG Co-ordinator Madeleine King show how autonomous colleges can go further than polytechnics ever did in delivering higher level qualifications and to helping fill the skills gap.

In ‘One Direction for Higher Education’, Associate Vice President for Public Affairs at The University of Manchester and departing Guild HE CEO Andrew Westwood comments on the state of the sector in the build up to the election. His review holds nothing back.

The Sutton Trust’s Director of Research and Communications, Conor Ryan presents the case for social mobility as the linchpin of higher education and careers policy in the next Parliament. Head of iCeGS Tristram Hooley’s polemic about careers guidance policy in 2015 follows on, with a dynamic presentation of a universal system of IAG provision. The two pieces form a dynamic combination.

Finally, our regular HEA employability update can be found as always on the back cover.

Enjoy this issue and see you in the next Parliament!

Aphrodite Papadatou
GMT Editor

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Note from the editor

GMT Election special
The spring weather is as volatile as the political climate; one minute soft breezes brush your face with the delicacy of a gently wafted manifesto and the next the heavens open with the force of a thousand battle buses roaring through a marginal seat.

Welcome to an Election-special edition of GMT brimming with sector manifestos and fresh policy insights. We are as honoured to guest an exquisite selection of contributors as I am delighted to return to the editorial helm of GMT, to curate and present to you such important debates.
NEWS IN BRIEF

• The Association of Graduate Recruiters predicts a buoyant labour market (vacancies up 11.9%) for graduates in 2015. More on the latest AGR survey at www.agr.org.uk

• Best of Both Worlds is the title of a new guide from the CBI, sponsored by Middlesex University, showing how HE and business can work together on skills and innovation. It talks about how to get started and succeed and how companies and universities are already seeing the benefits. Find the report at www.cbi.org.uk

• According to the latest UCAS statistics university applications are up 2% from last year. In other news the university admissions agency announced that it will be reforming its system to enable UK students apply to EU Universities. More at www.ucas.com

• Engineering UK 2015: The sector’s latest annual report calls for a big increase in engineering apprentices and graduates needed to fill an annual current shortfall of 55,000 skilled workers. Go to www.engineeringuk.com

• The National Voice for Lifelong Learning (NIACE) proposed that £100m of skills and careers funding should be used to create a National Advancement Service to help people with careers advice and job opportunities. More at www.niace.org.uk

• Work experience: A new report by UKCES, Catch 16-24: Youth Employment Challenge, highlights the Catch-22 effect on young people told to get work experience but finding employers not offering it. Find it at www.gov.uk

• Labour Party pre-election pledges: Work experience: promise for 14-16 year olds; Apprenticeships: pledge to create 80,000 more a year; HE tuition fees: confirms plans to cut fees by a third. These and more pledges at www.labour.org.uk

• Meanwhile the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests six other ways that Labour’s higher education ‘money’ might be better used such as supporting careers guidance and skills training. Find out more at www.jrf.org.uk

• The Wolf Report: Final progress report issued by DfE shows that 20 recommendations are now in full implementation with six more to go. The report lives at www.gov.uk

• HEFCE reports on ‘Global demand for English higher education’ and shows that numbers are slightly up for 2013 but with a heavy reliance on recruits from China and Malaysia. Get it at www.hefce.ac.uk

• The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission’s new report Bridging the Social Divide calls on any incoming government to take action in five priority areas including education. More at www.gov.uk

• Teach First: Charity publishes awaited report, Careers Education in the Classroom, which shows why all schools need trained careers advisers. Find it at www.teachfirst.org.uk

• The Russell Group has announced a change in leadership. Sir David Greenaway, Vice-Chancellor at Nottingham University will take over as chair of the mission group from this September. More news at www.russellgroup.ac.uk

• The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) publishes a range of essays from ten institutions setting out what graduates get in return from their investment. You can get What Do I Get? at www.hepi.ac.uk
GMT Interview
A STRONG FE IN THE NEW ERA

WITH NICK DAVY

Aphrodite Papadotou catches up with the Association of Colleges (AoC) HE Policy Manager Nick Davy about all things FE. Nick, a highly regarded public figure in the field, discusses the future of the sector going forward at a very timely moment. The message is simple: if the sector is to play a pivotal role in supplying the labour market of the future, it needs to be strengthened with autonomy and investment. Prospects is working with the AoC to deliver its resources to the FE sector as part of its expanded graduate employability strategy.

Nick, we have worked together for a while now in support of each other’s organisational missions so first and foremost I would like to say what an absolute pleasure it is to be interviewing you for an election-special edition of GMT! I think it is very important to have an insight on the future of FE at this very moment. What needs to be addressed by a new government, the FE sector, and employers alike?

Thanks Aphrodite. It has been a pleasure working with you and Prospects over the past couple of years and it was great to see Prospects sponsoring and your stand busy at the recent AoC annual college HE conference. I hope more colleges will be talking to you and signing up to access the services you can provide for FE and HE in FE learners.

The key to the future of colleges is re-imagining how colleges can ensure that learners are ready for the work-place. This means continuing to improve our local labour market intelligence, working even more closely with employers and developing the courses that will lead to employment.

How do we get to the position you have just described?
It probably needs several changes. First of all, improving careers advice in schools and colleges which means improved investment. Second, we need improved understanding of local labour markets.

AoC is working on that with the University of Warwick, UKCES and RCU. Last but by no means least, colleges must be provided with powers to award their own technical qualifications at education levels 3, 4 and 5 – underpinned by lifelong learning accounts. In that way we can begin to create a proper lifelong learning system that does not privilege academic education over vocational and technical.

Now let’s get more personal. Where does your passion for education stem from and what drives you now?
This is a difficult question to answer, especially as I recently turned a certain age where one tends to look a little more closely at pensions policy than previously! Actually, a couple of times in my career I have tried to turn my hand to other things, but I have always come back to FE and HE – I just seem unable to generate the same commitment to other potential areas!

I really don’t know why that is the case, but it does seem quite endemic to education. The creativity and determination of so many people in the sector pulls you along. To give an example: we recently won a HEFCE Catalyst Fund bid to enhance scholarship and technical learning, and the creativity of some of the college practitioners in this field is incredible – often with very limited resources. First, it’s great to be part of that and second, the work of these colleagues pushes you on because you don’t want to let them down. And of course FE prides itself on giving chance to people who often ‘failed’ at school and improving their chances – this is a great motivator.

FE has been hit harder by the spending cuts than HE or schools. How has the sector managed overall in your opinion?
It has been a very difficult five years for colleges, particularly for those colleges with large adult student populations, and the next five years according to recent announcements could be equally as hard. There will be continuing college mergers and colleges seeking new markets in apprenticeships, 14-16 years, higher education and, for some, international work. Yet colleges are resilient. There have been numerous tales of imminent disaster over the past 50 years but they always pull through. In that period many colleges have become more ‘comprehensive’ – taking in LDD students, level 1 and 2 students, expanding apprenticeships and higher education and developing stronger links with employers. Now the country is facing some fundamental changes in the labour market, which could be to the advantage of college provision.

What should be the principles for educational spending going forward?
Tricky question. I still think we need to develop vocational and technical provision, and that means investment. We also need to equalise spending between the different vertical structures of education – early years, primary, secondary and tertiary. I think the universities were a little opportunistic in setting most of their fees at £9,000 in a period of austerity, especially when they were receiving far less than that for many of their humanities and social science courses previously. The government was possibly a little naïve but even so, I believe that was a wrong decision, especially as most of that debt will now fall on the individual. I am sympathetic to Labour’s proposal to decrease fees to £6k but it is not entirely progressive – and we do need to find a formula that allows appropriate spending on HE without loading all the costs onto loans and debt. It will be interesting to see what happens to the payback threshold over the coming years; plus I think there is rightly a question mark over bursaries policy which doesn’t seem to have much influence on behaviour. For colleges, the maintenance of the student opportunity grant is critical – as it makes up about 15% of all college HE income.

So what would you say is equitable funding for education?
On a broad front I think it is dangerous if the State continues to withdraw from
fundamentally funding provision post-18. Markets can obviously bring some provider efficiencies and creative behaviour, although I am unsure how much we have seen in the past five years. However I strongly believe that tertiary education needs some form of State steer. Why? First of all applicants can only ever have partial information. Then there is evidence that some new entrants are only putting on bog-standard courses with very little notice of labour market need. In a fast-changing labour market it is the responsibility of governments to ensure provision is broadly in line with those changes.

What is the future of mixed economy provision and why does it seem to be now more important than ever?

I think college HE is viewed as important for several reasons. It provides a local HE service for those unable or unwilling to travel, it can provide a technical and professional education service to local labour markets and employers and it is a crucial service for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who did less well in the statutory education system. On this last point, there will be some new research commissioned by BIS soon which will demonstrate how well colleges do at getting level 2 students and those with no previous qualifications through HE – a really fantastic achievement – which also demystifies some of the exclusionary nature of HE study.

A lot has been said about technical education in recent education policy, especially from the Labour side. Where will it sit in the educational landscape of the future?

The future has to be more technical and professional education offered by all providers. There is now increasing anecdotal evidence of more graduates moving into vocational and technical courses to gain jobs. One wonders if in the future, as employment rises, they will go straight to the technical and miss out the ‘academic’, especially as debt levels rise. Labour market signals will play a part, especially if providers improve their labour market intelligence. Applicants are already moving in this direction, with more taking ‘vocational’ degree options. I also think we need to re-think the ‘transformational’ nature of the HE experience since undoubtedly many people gain an enormous amount from academic study, the really transformational aspect is that they achieve a stimulating and well paid job post-graduation. That is what transforms lives: not the attainment of a degree per se but how that degree attainment has opened up new job and career opportunities.

The problems is that in England we have put all our eggs (or too many) in the three-year full-time residential degree and it will take several successive governments, committed to part-time and flexible technical education, to turn that around. So we need to look at the supply by, for example, allowing colleges to award their own technical education awards. However, governments also need to stimulate demand – better careers advice, promotion of technical education and, if necessary, incentives such as technical education lifelong learning accounts and tax breaks for SMEs to invest in this type of education.

It is not a one-size solution. FE needs several years of support and a multi-pronged approach – similar to the support academic HE has received for sixty years. And I guess your organisation has a role in this.

Thanks Nick – I think we do! So how should education respond to the ‘hourglass’ labour market?

The hourglass is quite complex, as there will be more than three million retiring over the next ten years who are functioning around levels 4 and 5. So although there is a demand for the highly skilled and those in less skilled jobs (care and catering, for example) we also need to factor in the demand for level 4 and 5 jobs. This relates to the need for more courses at intermediate level including level 3 – which is the ‘technical’ level we have been discussing. I think at that level colleges are probably the best to deliver as all the evidence throughout the world is that universities are less interested in sub-degree provision. HEFCE evidence supports this claim for England. So the need for the tertiary system is possibly even more acute.

How has employability been an embedded mission of college education historically and is it more important for colleges to deliver employability now? From our experience at Prospects traditionally large graduate employers are now keener than ever to recruit talent straight out of FE, or even straight out of school. Colleges are working hard on the employability agenda. In some ways we need to go back to the past to see how the future could work. Traditionally the strength of many colleges was in its level 3, 4 and 5 courses (the intermediate or technical) and we need to get back to that so that local communities begin to see more clearly that colleges are the route to get a new job, achieve promotion or start a new company. This means working even harder with local employers, recruitment agencies and organisations like Prospects to achieve these goals. Colleges need the autonomy, like universities, to make their own technical education awards – like they used to.

Are there now, and will there be, graduate-level jobs in the economy?

Yes, of course. In addition many graduates are very entrepreneurial and will create new graduate jobs! It is sometimes forgotten that there are significant graduate jobs in health, teaching, many professional roles and local government. These are jobs and careers which every advanced economy will always need.
ONE DIRECTION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION?

‘I am having trouble keeping up with the stresses and strains facing individual members of One Direction. As I write this, I hear that one of them – Zayn Malik – has just left. Presumably it’s because of ‘musical differences’. We asked Andy Westwood, Associate Vice President for Public Affairs at The University of Manchester and recently departed CEO of Guild HE to comment on the state of the sector in the build up to the election. In his richly knowledgeable account of events the author states his own position with a seat-grabbing review of the order of the political status quo in higher education policy.

You might expect more differences and different directions between our politicians with just a few weeks to the General Election. But that doesn’t look likely because they are singing a very similar tune. It may not be the Best Song Ever, but it’s familiar and quite catchy. It certainly deserves a wider and more appreciative audience.

Vince Cable gave a speech at Cambridge University in April last year entitled ‘A Future for Further and Higher Education’. Most people, including those in FE and HE won’t have read it. But it is worth doing so, because it captures a growing consensus about the UK’s biggest deficit in post-school education - that of the technical or vocational route to higher-level skills and applied research close to market and to employers. Arguably, it has been missing for hundreds of years – Samuelson, Forster and Butler all went looking for it long before Crosland. Most cast an envious eye to the productivity and training or partnerships cultures in Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia and pretty much anywhere else in Europe and the OECD.

White heat

Wilson and Crosland also came from a time when they wanted higher education to drive the ‘white heat’ of technological and industrial change. But the era of ‘picking winners’ also fell out of favour to be followed by three decades of free market orthodoxy. Industrial policy was a term that couldn’t be said or hummed out loud. That too, however, has also come full circle. Cable and David Willetts, his erstwhile Minister of State for Science and HE, had also rediscovered the role of both in driving a reinvention of industrial policy.

In both the speech and the consultation Cable takes inspiration from Tony Crosland’s famous Woolwich speech in 1965 that gave birth to an expansion of higher education through the creation of polytechnics. Crosland was Education Secretary in Harold Wilson’s Labour Government at the time and they received the recommendations of the Robbins Committee of 1963. This unleashed unprecedented growth in higher education via the opening of York, Lancaster, Kent and Warwick Universities and also the conversion of others such as Aston and Surrey. Famously, Wilson also created the Open University. All thrive to this day, but not in the binary system that they created at the time. Neither Polytechnics nor Colleges of Advanced Technology lasted for very long – at least not as institutional labels.

To Cable’s credit he doesn’t bemoan that such institutions have now become ‘excellent universities’ but rather a sector which we have lost in the process. A sector that arguably never really established itself: a strongly vocationally orientated, technical system offering high-level skills and applied research close to market and to employers. Arguably, it has been missing for hundreds of years – Samuelson, Forster and Butler all went looking for it long before Crosland. Most cast an envious eye to the productivity and training or partnerships cultures in Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia and pretty much anywhere else in Europe and the OECD.

Homogenous and monolithic

But in Vince Cable’s and David Willetts’s time at BIS the HE sector has become increasingly homogenous and monolithic. The three-year full-time undergraduate degree has become much more dominant. The honours degree with its £9k unit of resource has devoured everything in its path – from part-time to postgraduate. As John Gill said in the Times Higher Education, ‘the relentless focus on funding the 18-year-old full-time undergraduate has been at the expense of coherent policy in other areas’. The fact is that the UK (and England especially) has a ‘one size fits all’ system. In the OECD, it is the least diverse system in terms of age, mode of study or qualification. And arguably this is also the case with research as it too has coalesced around certain types of institution and activity.

Even in part-time study it seems that the full degree has dominated – all other HE qualifications have withered dramatically. And these are the types of study – such as Foundation Degrees and HNDs – that Cable champions in his Cambridge speech. Despite what he says, FE hasn’t done particularly well either. It’s been cut to shreds in both pre- and post-19 funding and diminished in stature and capacity. Apprenticeships have expanded – although there remain concerns about both definition and quality, and FE colleges deliver less than half of them. And I suspect that Cable knows that apprenticeships aren’t all they are cracked up to be – just 2% are at higher levels (equivalent to a degree or HND/HNC level). In volume terms that’s just 10,000 out of around 500,000 apprenticeship starts.
So what do they want to see instead? Credit where credit is due. Cable does recognise the shortcomings of the current system. While Willetts was arguing for an expansion in the style of Robbins, Cable wants that expansion in the style of Crosland. One vision is rooted in the LSE and the other in Woolwich Polytechnic. When George Osborne announced the expansion in December 2013, Cable was conspicuously silent – only weeks before he’d said at the Liberal Democrat party conference that he didn’t see the case for expanding HE, as any extra place offered only a marginal rather than an average return.

**Fixing the broken bridge**

Politics of all parties have plans for FE and HE and most involve some radical changes. It is significant that Labour have also talked about developing such specialist provision – from the Husbands Review to Lord Glasman’s call for the rebirth of similar technical institutions. Liam Byrne too has been calling for an ‘earn while you learn’ revolution and a fixing of the ‘broken bridge’ between lower and higher-level skills as well as that between the supply and demand sides. Labour, alongside a reduction of the headline undergraduate tuition fee from £9k to £6k, also want new institutions and new qualifications. They have made the forgotten 50% a major campaigning theme – and announced support for a Technical Baccalaureate and newly licensed Institutes of Technical Excellence in FE as well as Technical Degrees and Technical Universities in HE. This suggests that any shift in fees will be accompanied by real pressures and incentives to diversify provision in both sectors and to specifically incentivise more provision in employer-facing technical provision.

Vince Cable has decided that a new generation of National Colleges is needed to support growth sectors across the economy. The Conservatives too have made much of a new generation of specialist colleges delivering HS2 and the like. Lord Baker and successive skills ministers including John Hayes, Matthew Hancock and Nick Boles have extolled the value of applied technical learning and especially apprenticeships. University Technical Colleges and new technical qualifications have also formed an important part of their schools reform programme. Together the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have ushered in Catapult Centres and an increase in partnership research funding as well as more near-to-market cash for Innovate UK, the rebranded Technology Strategy Board.

**Rebuilding the system**

All parties - including UKIP, the SNP and Plaid Cymru - are calling for increased provision of higher apprenticeships and more collaboration and co-funding between employers and colleges and universities. We might even be able to call this a political and economic consensus. A desire to build or rebuild a vocational system that has withered or been subject to a hierarchy or snobbery based on the superiority of academic tracks and pathways.

The Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) is a partnership between Sheffield University, Sheffield College and Boeing that features a National College, a Catapult Centre, Degree Apprenticeships and much more besides. The Warwick Manufacturing Group at Warwick University brings together research and training at the University with Jaguar Land Rover and others from their supply chains. It too offers applied research, higher apprenticeships and a number of bespoke initiatives that bring supply and demand closer together. They provide two of the best examples of what might be done. But these examples have grown up in spite of either VET or HE policy and not exactly because of it. At a national level, policymakers are often rather keener on scale and roll out. Look at SSCs and NSAs, CoVEs, Foundation Degrees and the like. Good in the beginning, meaningless when expanded to meet targets, but too often missing the point?

Vince Cable’s Conservative colleagues might be more reluctant to see such institutions emerge through diktat. For them, higher education is best diversified and shaped by the market with competition and new providers driving choice as well as value for money. But there is little evidence of that so far. Cable is clearly unconvinced by such an approach. He wants expansion but predominantly in a specialised, niche part of FE and HE. Like Crosland as well as Miliband and Byrne, he thinks it will require the state to make it happen. One might reasonably assume that they would all be happy to see it develop at the expense of some existing higher education provision.

Ideologically, the Conservatives are more comfortable with a less hands-on approach. The market should deliver this kind of thing. Instinctively, they are more Robbins than Crosland, even though it was David Willetts who pointed Cable in the direction of the Woolwich speech. The abolition of SNCS and the ensuing competition should be expected to deliver diversity including through these kinds of routes, shouldn’t it? Not so far as this approach has led to a more monolithic system ossifying around the traditional three-year full-time model meaning less, not more diversity.

Whilst there might be some ideological differences and varying proposals for the labels of incentives, there’s little doubt that the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats would all like this to happen. Similarly this appears to be a consensus that spreads across borders to nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales and to UKIP in England. Looking elsewhere to developed economies in Europe and across the world, it should be hard not to agree that this is a priority for FE and HE reform in the UK.

Line up Greg Clark, David Willetts, Liam Byrne, Vince Cable and Ed Miliband and it might not be the most appealing boy band in the world. I wouldn’t put money on them winning the X Factor (or even coming third). But on this issue they are definitely worth listening to. Hopefully whatever government emerges from the 2015 General Election will see such consensus survive any coalition or confidence and supply’ arrangements. One way or another.
If it doesn’t drive social mobility, higher education policy is a tin of empty promises that doesn’t deliver what it promises on the label. In order that inequality doesn’t deepen further, argues the Sutton Trust’s Conor Ryan, the next government must remedy serious deficiencies in guidance and training provision – all in a climate of shrinking budgets.

We don’t know what a new government post-May 7th will mean for higher education or careers policy but whatever policies are adopted, it is vital that they address social mobility. Patchy careers guidance, imperfect access to our best universities and an inadequate supply of decent apprenticeships all contribute to a lack of equality of opportunity in higher education. While there is a growing consensus on the need to improve careers guidance in schools, there are notable differences in approach between the parties on universities and apprenticeships.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats strongly defend their approach to higher education funding. Although university applications declined overall in the first year of tuition fees, there have been growing numbers of 18 and 19 year-olds going to university since then, with some further narrowing of the gap between rich and poor students, in part as a result of removing funding caps on the numbers of students each university can recruit. They believe that the system is working well for young people and universities.

By contrast, Labour highlights the impact of student debt, and would use £2.7 billion from changes to pension tax relief to fund a reduction in tuition fees from the current maximum of £9,000 to £6,000, with the cash compensating universities for lost fee income. They would also increase maintenance grants by £400 for students in families earning less than £42,620 a year.

So what has really happened to higher education, and will any party do what is required? While it is true that the proportion of young people going to university has not been adversely affected by the higher fees, and that the gap between students from the richest and poorest fifth of neighbourhoods has narrowed, richer students are still 2.5 times more likely to enter higher education than poorer ones, and that gap rises to six-fold for Russell Group universities and more than nine-fold for the 13 most selective universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. There has also been a substantial dip in part-time student numbers and the numbers of mature students have declined again this year.

**Double debt trap**

At the same time, the system has produced a double debt trap. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, in a report for the Sutton Trust last year, calculated that the typical student will leave university with a debt of £44,000 after three years (based on loans for fees and living costs, with interest). But the Exchequer will not be much better off despite the trebling of tuition fees. Most graduates will be repaying their loans into their early fifties, and three quarters will not repay the full debt. The result, as the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills has recently conceded, is that 45% of all debts will be written off. Indeed, if that level of write off (known as the RAB charge) went much higher, the Government would be no better off than had it simply left fees as they were.

Whoever is elected will need to review the funding system, or at least the repayments. But the Sutton Trust argues for two other changes.

The first is that fees should be means-tested. We have welcomed plans to cut fees generally, but we believe that just as students from poorer families receive non-repayable maintenance grants (as well as loans) they should be charged a lower fee than other students, reducing the levels of debt they pay back after graduation.

The second is that there should be a new body, separate from individual universities, to co-ordinate evidence based outreach programmes with more contextual admissions – where a pupil’s school and background are recognised in the process – to improve access. At present, more than £700million a year is spent by universities on such initiatives, including summer schools run with universities by the Sutton Trust. We have good contact with schools and colleges, but many other initiatives are too hard for students and teachers to access. At the same time, there is too little research on what works best.

**Apprenticeships**

Another important area is apprenticeships. Successive governments have bragged about the numbers of new apprenticeships they have created, but the quality of what is available, particularly to young people, has suffered as a result. A report by the Boston Consulting Group for the Sutton Trust, drawing on evidence from successful systems in Europe and elsewhere, concluded that too many training opportunities were being called apprenticeships, and that advanced – level 3 – should be the minimum level of qualification. Those who currently do level 2 – intermediate standard – apprenticeships should progress to level 3 within a single qualification, with three years being the norm rather than one - two years (or less) at present.

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BCG argued that we needed 150-300,000 more level 3 apprenticeships each year for 16-24 year-olds. Since their report, numbers of level 3 apprenticeships for young people have grown to around 100,000 a year, but a further 180,000 are at level 2. BCG calculated that the proposed expansion of advanced and higher apprenticeships could boost the economy by £8billion a year and reduce public spending by £2.5billion, after initial upfront costs to boost employer engagement. But it would also require a strong campaign to change parental and
teacher scepticism, in part caused by the poor quality of too many apprenticeships on offer today.

The Conservatives accept the need for more level 3 apprenticeships for young people, and the coalition has already banned new apprenticeships shorter than one year, but they argue that level 2 apprenticeships should continue, a stance backed by a recent Select Committee report on the issue. They have pledged to create three million new apprenticeships over the next parliament, though they haven’t specified how many of those would be advanced or higher level. Labour has said that it would guarantee all school leavers with good grades the choice of a good apprenticeship or a university place, promising an extra 80,000 a year by 2020 at advanced level. Both parties want to increase the number of higher level apprenticeships from its current total of 3,600 annual starts with Labour also promising new technical degrees.

Careers advice and guidance
Access and apprenticeships both depend on good careers advice. There is agreement across the parties that the advice on offer to young people in too many schools is poor, and has been for some time. Sutton Trust polling has shown, for example, reluctance by teachers to advise students to consider apprenticeships whilst four in ten teachers would rarely or never consider advising bright students in state schools to apply to Oxford or Cambridge.

A report by Professor Tristram Hooley from the University of Derby for the Sutton Trust last year showed a link between effective career guidance and attendance, attainment and progression in schools, including with access to leading universities. But the report also found that provision is patchy, and the duty on schools to provide good impartial careers guidance means different things to different schools.

All the parties are committed to improving career guidance. The Education Secretary Nicky Morgan recently gave details of how a £20million fund provided by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement would be used to create a new careers and enterprise company for schools under Christine Hodgson, chair of Cap Gemini UK, to engage employers with schools and colleges. The new company is intended to ‘act as an umbrella organisation to help employers, schools and colleges and other organisations navigate their way through the existing landscape,’ she said, and it will use the £20million as start-up funding in 2015-16, with £5million used to promote innovation and good practice, backed by a network of advisors to broker support. Labour has said that it will fund improved careers guidance in areas with high youth unemployment, and will consider proposals from its skills taskforce that schools should be more responsible for the destinations of students and that there should be a national framework for careers advice, brokered by local enterprise partnerships.

The Sutton Trust argues that there should be a guaranteed entitlement for young people to good quality personalised education and careers guidance, with the National Careers Service strengthened to provide specialist support to schools and students, particularly on issues such as access to the best universities (and the subjects to study at GCSE and A-level) and the range of apprenticeships on offer. Such support would complement the employer links that the parties are keen to foster. Trust research has also shown the growing importance of internships, and calculated that a young person taking an unpaid internship would have to find £926 to live on (assuming travel is paid). Given their importance, the Trust argues that any internship over a month should be paid at the minimum wage, and that the legislation should be properly enforced.

Social mobility in Britain has stagnated in recent years and any government committed to improving the opportunities for low and middle income young people to get on should have a clear commitment to improved advice, access and apprenticeships. Whoever wins the May election will face real funding challenges, and education is unlikely to be spared from significant cuts. Yet with the right investment in skills and improved use of existing resources for access and advice, a lot can be done to address inequalities of opportunity over the next five years.
CAREERING TOWARDS A WALL? Careers guidance policy and Election 2015

Professor Tristram Hooley, Professor of Career Education and Head of IceGS at the University of Derby reviews recent careers guidance policy and argues that the main political parties must do better in 2015.

Election fever is gripping the nation. The volume of political noise is growing. So far this noise has focused on issues like Ed Miliband’s kitchens and the fact that a seagull stole David Cameron’s sandwich. But, as the election gets closer the political parties might start to talk more seriously about policy. The question is whether careers guidance will be one of the policies talked about.

The last five years have seen the destruction of young people’s careers services. In 2015 most of the population has little or no access to careers support. The fact that such changes have taken place alongside increases in fees for further and higher education, a challenging youth labour market and ever lengthening school to work transitions is particularly concerning.

Such changes hit graduates twice. Firstly, they are unlikely to have received any careers support before they make university choices. Secondly, although careers support within universities is usually good, once they leave, if they are unable to access their former university careers services, they are unlikely to be entitled to any careers support. This article will look at how policy makers have brought about this situation and ask whether any party is likely to do anything about it following Election 2015.

How did we get here?
The last election was a decisive one for careers work in England, although it would have been difficult to guess this from pre-election scrutiny of the manifestos. The Conservatives were elected on a promise to create an all-age careers service drawing together the best of Connexions (young people) and Next Step (adults). However, a year into the coalition careers were seen as an easy place to wield the knife when cutting services.

Careers support for young people ebbed away as funding was cut and the situation worsened as the Education Act 2011 endorsed Michael Gove’s commitment to ‘school autonomy’. Schools were now seen as sovereign with any education funding in local authorities (including that devoted to careers) cut to the bone. It was not just Connexions that suffered. Education Business Partnerships and Aimhigher were also cut in this period. Careers support for young people in England has been in serious decline ever since (Hooley et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, the adult careers service was rebranded as the National Careers Service and its funding largely maintained. This puts England in the strange position of providing more public funding for adult careers than for young people. This situation has come about largely because of different priorities that exist in the Department of Education, where careers has been under attack, and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, where it has been seen as part of a broader skills policy.

The National Careers Service has been one of the high points of the government’s careers policy as it has maintained a visible public careers service for citizens in England. However, there are a number of criticisms that can be made about the service (CSSA, 2012) including that it has been poorly marketed and overly focused on the unemployed. For graduates this has meant that the service has been largely invisible and that the opportunity to access careers support has been limited.

Given the importance of careers support, and its mishandling during both the coalition government and the previous Labour government (Watts, 2013), we might expect that it would be a hot political issue. However, career development is low on the political pecking order. The current government has been criticised for its careers policy, most notably from the redoubtable Graham Stuart (Chair of the Education Select Committee), but it has been a niggling issue rather than one that has made or broken any political careers. After years of being challenged on this issue there was a sudden U-turn following the departure of Michael Gove, with an injection of £20million and the formation of a new careers company (Morgan, 2014). This was better than nothing, but was insufficient in scale (around £200 million of annual funding was lost in 2010/2011) and lacked a strategic understanding of the problem or likely solutions.

Election 2015
As the election campaign starts there is no sign that careers guidance will be a big issue. Having announced the launch of the new careers company, the Conservative Party have probably arrived at their careers policy. They will be arguing that the new company should be allowed to develop and that the rest of the status quo should be preserved.

Labour has been quick to criticise the government on its policies. The Party’s education spokesman Tristram Hunt said ‘the careers guidance reforms are very, very damaging’ (Bawden, 2013) but has been slow in announcing what he will do if elected. The Liberal Democrats have also been vague, saying that they believe careers guidance is important, without making any firm commitments.

The Green Party has a fairly strong tradition of supporting careers work (with their MP Caroline Lucas a key critic of the government’s cuts to Connexions). However, like the bigger parties they have yet to announce any specific policies on careers. UKIP has, as far as I can see, never said anything about careers guidance.

A close examination of political parties’ thinking on careers guidance is disappointing. Six weeks before an election almost none of them has given any serious thought to the issue. In fact, all parties are sticking to top-level headlines which are short on specifics. As soon as you start to interrogate the policies in detail they tend to fall away,
leaving the realisation that no real commitments have been made.

What will the next government do?

Even if we could guess who was likely to win the next election, the current policies provide us with few clues about what the parties might do if elected. The May 2015 website suggests that a hung Parliament is the most likely outcome, making the future even more difficult to predict.

As most parties have given careers a low priority throughout the current Parliament it seems unlikely that careers guidance will feature in a 2015 coalition agreement. Instead the horse-trading is likely to focus on Scotland (where there is a much stronger careers support system than in England). This is a shame as careers guidance is an issue on which it is possible to command cross-party support. The cross-party Education Select Committee has come up with some strong proposals about how it should be taken forward. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013)

Given the lack of both clarity and priority on careers guidance, an educated guess about the future would be that the current arrangements roll on regardless of who is elected. The current fragmented situation where we have a National Careers Service for adults, a careers company for young people, university careers services for students and a very patchy entitlement for graduates is likely to endure.

What SHOULD the next government do?

Given the uninspiring future predicted above it is worth considering the counter-factual. What would careers guidance look like if the next government took it seriously?

Following a period of intense negotiations the leaders of the new coalition would emerge and announce to the world that the government would support every citizen to realise their potential. A key part of this would be a new national strategy for careers linking up a fragmented system and providing a universal, lifelong entitlement to careers support. Such a strategy would lead to cost savings as overlap is minimised and such savings could be invested in the development of the system alongside appropriate new resources. The system would be underpinned by a National Careers Service which would eventually become as mainstream a part of our political system as the NHS.

The new strategy would ensure that all young people whether they were in schools, colleges, universities, work or unemployed could access dedicated careers support. To achieve this, new funding would be found, statutory guidance tightened up and career development aims would be included in the key performance metrics of all educational organisations.

The strategy would also make it clear that career development was not just for young people and reinvigorate the support that exists for adults. This would include dedicated support for low skill workers, for new graduates and for those in late career (building on the current ‘mid-life career review’ project (NIACE, 2014)). It would also support professionalism within the careers field affirming that careers education and guidance are skilled activities which require appropriate qualifications.

Utopian dreams aside, careers guidance has been a problematic political issue for the coalition throughout its period in government. However, an analysis of current party positions on the issue suggests that little has been learnt.

Those of us who care about careers work need to make sure that this does not remain the case throughout the election and in its immediate aftermath. There is a desperate need to make some noise about the importance of career development and to try and ensure that all parties move it up their priority lists.

References


Are colleges the new polytechnics? John Widdowson and Madeleine King from the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges (MEG) argue that they can in fact go much further that. Further education colleges are ideally placed to fill the growing higher-level skills gap but to do so they need to be given greater autonomy as validators and providers in the newly-created HE system.

One of the few areas of agreement between all political parties is that higher-level skills are a vital component of a modern economy. However, the reforms to higher education appear to have served the needs of full-time students, and those institutions catering for them, rather than the more immediate demands of businesses of all sizes.

This in turn has been reflected in significant reductions in part-time HE study (largely by those in employment) between 2010-11 and 2013-14. Some commentators have noted the apparent gap in the market caused by the demise of the polytechnics, institutions which were considered to have a grip on the higher-level skills needs of their markets and communities.

Opportunities for colleges

More than 300 FE colleges deliver higher education. In most cases this is in response to clearly-identified local needs for higher-level vocational education and training. Offering HE courses is far from new for some colleges. Many have a history of teaching at higher level which goes back decades, building on the traditions of Mechanics Institutes and other specialist vocational institutions. For others, offering HE is a new experience, bringing with it particular challenges and demands. Although the college HE offer is mainly confined to vocational disciplines, it covers a wide range of subjects and levels. These include Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, Foundation and Honours degrees and even in some cases postgraduate qualifications. There are also often-overlooked courses leading to qualifications awarded by professional bodies. Colleges are acknowledged for the contribution that they make to widening participation in HE, having large numbers of mature and part-time learners amongst their students. At the same time, some universities are becoming increasingly less diverse, being more likely to offer a diet of three-year full-time Honours degrees to school leavers than part-time provision to adults. They may also choose to develop international provision or focus on research. As the new markets for HE evolve, the gap between the strategies of institutions and the needs of the communities and the economy at local regional and national level may widen. Taken together it’s easy to see from this why colleges are being identified as effective replacements for the polytechnics.

Potential constraints

Colleges offering HE must address a number of issues. In many cases they must forge new relationships with partner universities to secure accreditation for their courses and progression routes for their students. Such relationships can be difficult, raising issues of funding, quality assurance and potential competition. Colleges have been able to apply for the power to award their own Foundation degrees since 2007, but only four have completed the process. None have full degree-awarding powers. One factor limiting the growth of college-validated HE has been the constraint placed on consortium working. Every college seeking to achieve awarding powers must make an individual application, with the consequent duplication of effort and expense and the imposition of additional bureaucratic burdens on regulatory bodies.

To succeed, colleges must be clear about why they are offering HE and how that offer articulates with their Further Education provision. In an increasingly competitive market they must offer value for money – and their own unique student experience.

More colleges now have registered Access Agreements with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) indicating their intention to charge more than £6,000 per annum for their courses. Although no college has so far set a fee at the maximum of £9,000 per annum, and most college fees are significantly below that, there is emerging evidence of an upward trend. There is also a rise in student expectations about the nature of their college HE experience. The academic standards required will be the same as those demanded by universities, but students choose to study at a college knowing that their experience will be different. Many prefer to be able to study whilst living at home, driven by family circumstances, financial constraints or the wish to retain social contacts or a part-time job. Their local college may offer the best opportunity to do this. Such students are less interested in or motivated by the much-publicised accompaniments to other types of full-time study such as halls of residence, sports halls and social facilities. They prefer to remain in their home communities, studying to improve their career prospects in that community.

Students who are in employment and studying on a part-time basis usually have a clear motivation for studying, which is to progress in their career either with their current employer or in a better job elsewhere. They are less concerned (if they are concerned at all) with anything which does not contribute directly to their studies and chances of success.

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1 John is Chair of The Mixed Economy Group of Colleges (MEG) and Principal of New College Durham. Madeleine is MEG Co-ordinator and has a long and extensive career in further education research and practice.
2 HEFCE, 2013
3 MEG research, 2010
4 MEG, research published in Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning, 2014
The big issue

The needs of part-time students should not be ignored. Although the introduction of the new fees regime may well have worked for full-time students, enrolment on part-time courses has reduced by nearly fifty per cent in the same period. As noted by Universities UK in 2013, if such a decline had applied to full-time students there would have been a national outcry. Whilst increased fees explain only part of this fall, alongside volatility in the economy, they are a significant factor. Crucially, when combined with course structures which are often based on full-time equivalents, rather than tailored to the needs of work-based students, there are some serious questions to be asked of institutions and employers.

There are also new developments in the HE landscape. Alongside a desire to introduce new alternative providers there are also new forms of qualification and course structure. Principal amongst these is the development of Higher Apprenticeships and, most recently, Degree Apprenticeships. These are intended to present a work-based route to higher qualifications for those completing Apprenticeship at Level 3 as well as offering a new alternative to school leavers who do not wish to study on a traditional full-time course but instead prefer to ‘earn while they learn’. One implication of this new approach to HE is the need to respond much more directly to the needs of employers. The expectations and aspirations of learners are also key components: these students have a very clear view of what they want their higher-level qualification to do for them.

Conclusions

Against this background, can colleges claim to be the new polytechnics? Clearly they can, but rather than simply replicate what has gone before colleges are uniquely placed to offer more.

As institutions firmly rooted in their local communities, they are well placed to address the needs of employers of all sizes, from the smallest company to large regional or national organisations. This ‘localness’ can also help in those geographical areas where participation in HE is still stubbornly low, particularly where there is no community tradition of continuing on to higher study. With their extensive curriculum offer at Level 3 and below colleges are ideally placed to encourage progression across all vocational areas. Part of this strategy involves encouraging employers to appreciate and value what having employees with higher-level qualifications can do for their businesses.

Colleges can also ensure that students who choose a work-based route on leaving school do not immediately rule out (or make more difficult) higher-level study as and when the time is right for them. Teaching staff in colleges are often ‘dual professionals’, having worked and qualified in their parent industry or profession before becoming tutors. They can thus pass on important practical skills that are impossible to learn solely in an academic context, as well as impart the knowledge, attitudes and approaches employers need.

To make this happen on the scale that is required, several things must change.

Firstly, colleges need to be given greater autonomy to design and accredit higher qualifications, preferably under a system which recognises the particular demands of higher vocational study. However, this must not be used to create a two-tier approach where vocational study takes second place to traditional academic models. Rather than embark on a wholly separate accreditation route, a more pragmatic and more cost-effective option would simply be to remove the constraints currently placed on colleges which prevent them working together in validation partnerships. These would be subject to the same QAA quality criteria as other degree awarding bodies. There would thus be no question as to the status or value of their awards. The current HEFCE review of Quality Assurance presents a good opportunity to achieve this.

Secondly, colleges should be freed from the need to work in partnership with universities where they have demonstrated a track record of achievement at higher level. This will enable colleges to respond flexibly to the requirements of employers.

Thirdly, colleges should be empowered to engage more meaningfully with those employers, involving them in setting and assessing standards as set out in the new ‘Trailblazer’ Higher Apprenticeships.

Finally, there must be a realisation that high quality vocational and technical education has a valid place in the HE landscape. Students undertake higher-level study for a wide range of motives, none of which are mutually exclusive. One size should not be made to fit all.

Recent reports by the OECD and UKCES (e.g. Skills Beyond School review of England, OECD 2013) have shown that the UK is lagging behind other developed nations in its use and appreciation of higher vocational education and training. There has never been a better time for colleges to rise to the challenge and provide opportunities in this field which surpass even the best of what the former polytechnics achieved.

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How can we stimulate technical and professional education in England?

“We need to trust FE institutions more. In overseas vocational systems, colleges have the power, like UK universities, to devise their own programmes and award their own qualifications. We need colleges with the power to decide what to teach and how.”

In the light of a well-known Vince Cable speech, Nick Davy presents the case of the Association of Colleges for the UK: only an autonomous, streamlined and employer-led local FE model will solve the pressing skills gap and improve access to higher education qualifications.

Breaking the mould, facing the challenge
In Breaking the Mould, AoC argued that universities’ virtual monopoly of validating and awarding HE qualifications and a funding system that incentivises institutions to develop three- or four-year full-time academic honours degree programmes has led to a growth in this type of provision at the expense of less costly, and potentially more appropriate, technical and professional qualification alternatives.

Labour market challenges over the next twenty years demand that the tertiary education system produces more technically-qualified diplomats and up-skill those presently in employment. This adjustment is required to replace ageing workers in level four and five occupations, meet the demands of the growth in higher skilled occupations and an ageing population and sustain the growth ambitions of successful sectors such as the creative industries and pharmaceuticals. Many of these replacement and new job roles require technical and professional knowledge and skills at levels three to five, that do not necessitate a full honours degree – or the student experience and boarding school model associated with English higher education.

UKCES describes trends in the UK labour market as the decline of the ‘traditional middle’: a decrease in clerical, secretarial and skilled and semi-skilled blue collar jobs; and increases in management, professional, higher technician and jobs in care and leisure, including sales. There is also increasing evidence that many routine jobs carried out by lawyers and engineers are being out-sourced to lower waged economies or being replaced by technology.

Additionally, in many areas the English economy is still stuck in “the low skills equilibrium” highlighted in the 1980s, and in many locations where there is strong college HE provision. And the economy is not producing enough well paid and secure jobs, leading to insecurity, anxiety and considerable wage inequality; and mounting evidence of a mismatch between the skills people have and the skills employers want.

What needs to be done
These statistics indicate that England will need some significant changes to its higher education system if it is to meet these challenges and educate and train a workforce that will meet the skills and productivity demands of the mid-21st century. In our view these include:

- An increase in the supply of higher skills in identified growth sectors and those occupations with a significant replacement need;
- Greater employer involvement in curriculum, assessment and programme design to ensure technical and professional HE qualifications are fit for purpose;
- More short-cycle HE qualifications of six months to two years’ duration;
- Improved technical learning and teaching techniques, including a clear line of sight to work as argued by the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL);
- Quicker validation and award processes more attuned to the needs of fast-moving industries;
- A different external quality assurance system for technical and professional education, with more – or a different – involvement from employers and professional associations;
- Technical reforms of higher apprenticeships such as a unified loan scheme to make access easier and a mechanism to convert standards to appropriate qualifications;
- A fairer tertiary learner support system that includes education accounts for all adult learners.

It is the time to address the present iniquity that favours university education over other forms of tertiary education and create a coherent and accessible lifelong learning culture for all and not the minority.

Evidence
There is a now a considerable research and evidence base that England has a weak technical and professional education system in comparison to many OECD countries and that the present young HE participation rate needs to increase and more employees be re-skilled if the country is to create a more highly skilled workforce and move away from the low skills equilibrium that blights many communities and towns. Evidence from OECD, the history of HE and funding incentives in England confirms that in general most universities are unsuited or uninterested in developing short-cycle technical and professional education at levels and durations below honours degree. There is recent evidence that many universities are now exiting the short cycle – foundation degree – market. However, the present technical and professional education ‘system’ is under...

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1 Speech by Rt. Hon. Vince Cable, MP Cambridge Public Policy lecture 24 April 2014, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
developed, leading to a multiplicity of agencies involved in its leadership, governance, funding and external quality assurance, and, until recently, weak employer involvement. Too many agencies exist in the space between providers and employers and providers are over-regulated with limited autonomy to develop new awards in comparison to universities. Recent analysis indicates a serious decline in enrolments on level five three courses at colleges and a continuing decline in part-time level five courses across universities and colleges.

Creating a comprehensive validation structure

Present validation and award structures and processes for technical and professional education below honours degree are spread across several 'sectors' – academic higher education, including higher national qualifications, adult and higher vocational skills, including higher apprenticeships, and the professional certificates and diplomas market. There is no coherent validation and award system for this type of provision leading to constant policy tinkering, disjointed structures and ultimately confusion for employers and applicants. In consequence, professional and technical education has always been the poor relation in England’s tertiary education system – often poorly funded and with less status than academic higher education.

There is a need for a new organisation that can reorganise validation processes and promote this form of education. Present validation and award processes work and have credibility with major stakeholders. These need to be adapted and adopted to create the infrastructure in which professional and technical education can flourish. The experience of England’s world-leading university sector with autonomous institutions and robust awarding powers indicates the way forward.

In response to these challenges, we believe there is a case for some structural changes in present HE validation and awarding arrangements:

- The creation of a Technical Education Accreditation Council to authorise colleges and others who want to award technical and professional qualifications at Levels 3, 4 and 5.
- The inclusion of employer-endorsed higher apprenticeship qualifications, based on the trailblazer standards, within the remit of such a Council.

A new employer-led model

We believe the creation of a new validation and accreditation model is crucial if we are to meet the 'technical education challenge', increase HE participation, especially amongst young men, and better meet the skills needs of the future labour market. We need to move away from an exclusive ‘academic model’ of validation and accreditation based on the three-year full-time degree and seek different methods and processes. The Lingfield Report reached similar conclusions within the context of colleges achieving charter status: ‘(the) ability for the sector to offer its own distinctive awards acting collectively’.

Technical education providers would be accredited by a new Technical Education Accreditation Council to make their own awards in partnership with employers. A system of regulated and differentiated price caps – a step further than the present HE market – would avoid the risks associated with cream-skimming and careful institutional financial monitoring would address the issue of moral hazard. And the whole underpinned by a fairer tertiary learner support system that included education accounts for all adult learners.

BIS could still set the overall policy direction, UKCES and LEPs can provide advice, QAA or an equivalent externally assure, the SLC, SFA or HEFCE can continue to fund and SSCs and UKCES endorse and own occupational standards. Such an organisation – a Technical Education Accreditation Council – would be employer-led, build on the principles established in the Richard and Whitehead reviews and take best practice from present validation, award and external quality assurance processes. It would also make sense to include advanced and higher apprenticeship awards in the Council’s remit.

High level local technical education - leading the way

The only organisations with the focus on local employers and communities are colleges, locally-facing universities and training providers. These are the only organisations that provide the infrastructure and possess the mission to make a new technical education system work at local level.

This would mean the proposed growth in tertiary education over the next twenty years would concentrate on this type of provision and develop a credible and high quality technical and professional education sector that would help meet the aspiration of 50% of school leavers experiencing some form of higher education.

There is now a clear consensus amongst the social partners and educationalists, backed up by evidence, for the need to develop England’s technical and professional education provision. AoC urges the next government to respond to this challenge.

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6 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2012) Professionalism in Further Education P 29 London BIS
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HEA Enhancement events series
THE HEA is running a series of strategic enhancement events to provide opportunities to network and share best practice. Forthcoming events include Developing disciplinary communities in STEM, Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences and Health & Social Care. Location: Leeds. 21st May 2015. These events will focus on developing pedagogy in the cluster disciplines. Delegates will join colleagues from within their disciplines to hear about examples of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment. They will also address issues of strategic importance to their discipline cluster – including employability – in workshops and discussions led by HEA consultants and pedagogic project leaders. Details of all HEA events can be accessed at www.heacademy.ac.uk/events-conferences

Professional Recognition
Sixty thousand learning and teaching professionals in higher education are now Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. HEA Fellowship is designed around the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) which supports the initial and continuing professional development of staff engaged in teaching and supporting learning in higher education (HE). It provides a means to comprehensively benchmark, develop, and recognise and reward teaching and learning support roles within HE. Further details available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition/hea-fellowships/become-fellow-hea

Practitioner Perceptions of Student Transitions from College to University in Scotland
The HEA will conduct an extensive research survey of college and university learning and teaching-focused staff members in Scotland. This survey will explore their perceptions and experiences so that those students who choose to begin studies within a college but complete them within a university (‘college-to-university students’) can be best supported from a learning perspective. A report of the findings will act as a companion piece to the HEA/NUS Scotland ‘Learning Journeys’ report. (2013) You can participate in the survey at http://response.questback.com/thehighereducationacademy/scotland_transitions
The survey will be open until 10 May 2015.