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Developing research-based learning in college based higher education (CBHE): UK and international perspectives (0040)

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The development of research-based learning in undergraduate education has received much attention internationally in the last decade (e.g. Jenkins *et al.* 2003; Brew 2006; Healey & Jenkins 2009) yet nearly all this work has focused on universities. The contribution of the college based higher education (CBHE) sector in the development of research-based learning has, with a few exceptions (e.g. Cedja & Hensel 2010; Houston 2008; Griffioen 2013), largely been ignored. Yet the number and proportion of students studying higher education in the college sector is growing and in the UK was above 10% even before the reforms of 2003 (DFES 2003), which instigated the growth of two-year foundation degrees, and 2011 (BIS 2011), which enabled further education colleges and other private providers to apply for their own degree awarding powers. This is also mirrored internationally in the steady growth of tertiary colleges in, for example, Australasia offering degree and sub-degree qualifications, and the award of two-year Associate degrees in North American community colleges.

There is also a lively debate about scholarship and research in CBHE (e.g. King & Widdowson 2009; Lea & Simmons 2012; Turner & Carpenter 2012; Williams *et al.* 2013), but the main focus of these discussions has been on the qualifications, experience and continuing professional development of staff. The experiences of students of research-based learning have been largely ignored in this debate, despite the call of Healey and Jenkins (2009, 3) that “All undergraduate students in all higher education institutions should experience learning through, and about, research and inquiry.” In a CBHE context this raises the question of whether a scholarly experience for students is best promoted by their teachers becoming more research-active, or whether this should prompt a reinvestigation of the research-teaching nexus for a college context, and the development of more context-tied notions of scholarship.

This paper draws on work in progress funded by the HE Academy in the UK (Authors). It explores the development of research-based curricula in the CBHE sector - often referred to in the UK as the HE in Further Education (FE) sector. The project involves reviewing the relevant literature on scholarship and research in CBHE and collecting short case studies (250-350 words) from staff and faculty in the sector on the different ways in which they engage undergraduate students in research and inquiry, for example:

- ◆ research-led: learning about current research in the discipline;
- ◆ research-oriented: developing research skills and techniques;
- ◆ research-based: undertaking research and inquiry; and
- ◆ research-tutored: engaging in research discussions (Healey 2005; Healey & Jenkins 2009).

Examples collected include student research and inquiry in CBHE courses from:

- ◆ Year one (level 4 in England, Wales and NI; levels 7/8 in Scotland);
- ◆ Upper level courses (levels 6-7 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; levels 9 & 10 in Scotland);
- ◆ Final year dissertation/capstone projects;
- ◆ Work-based and community-based projects;
- ◆ Departmental and institutional strategies.

We have collected mini-case studies from the United Kingdom and several other countries, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, and United States. However, the forms taken by CBHE vary widely internationally. They include, for example, Community Colleges in the US, Colleges and Institutes of Technical and Further Education (TAFEs) in Australia, Polytechnics in New Zealand, Institutes of Technology in Ireland, FE Colleges in UK, and Universities of Applied Science in the Netherlands. Some of these institutions teach almost entirely HE level courses, while in others these courses form a small proportion of their portfolio. Dual sector institutions which bridge HE and FE are increasingly common. Sub-degree qualifications (e.g. HND, Foundation Degrees, Associate Degrees) are commonly offered by CBHE institutions, though increasingly some offer bachelor and master's level qualifications as well, particularly in professional and vocational areas.

Early indications from the case studies collected are that there are many similarities in the variety of ways in which CBHE and universities engage their undergraduate students in research and inquiry, although there are subtle differences in the amount and level of involvement.

In the literature about scholarship and research in CBHE it is clear that institutions which bridge both HE and FE have developed what has been referred to as 'hybrid' learning, teaching and assessment regimes, suited to their own cultural contexts (Edward et al. 2007; Golding Lloyd & Griffiths 2008; Turner *et al.* 2009). This project provides an opportunity to explore this further and to look at whether, and how, this has impacted on students' scholarly activity in distinct ways.

Many colleges are also actively exploring how they might articulate their own unique understanding of scholarly activity – often with reference to the work of Boyer (1990). Here, the scholarships of application, integration, and teaching and learning are being elevated in ways which Boyer advocated for more traditional universities, where more emphasis has traditionally been placed on the scholarship of discovery.

The presentation will conclude by exploring some of the opportunities and threats created by this trend towards enhanced scholarship not just to the colleges in seeking to capture aspects of HEness or an HE ethos, but also to universities in prompting a reinvestigation of the different dimensions to the meaning of *higher* education. At this stage we are seeking feedback on some of the practical and policy implications of our work, and a discussion of possible fruitful avenues for future research in this area.

(875 words)

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