# THE SCHOLARSHIP FRAMEWORK

# Supporting university and college higher education scholarly partnerships

## Introduction

The term partnership is used in many different contexts with a range of different, usually implicit, meanings. There can be an emphasis on partnership as an outcome or partnership as a process. The term partnership encompasses a wide range of practices and relationships across a wide range of fields, so some caution is required when generalising about such matters (Dhillon, 2005; 211).

Government policy on college higher education (HE) partnerships has not been consistent over the years which has meant that such partnerships have not operated in a stable environment (Parry, 2009; Stanton, 2009).

Partnerships between universities and further education colleges vary in terms of validation and accreditation arrangements, financial arrangements and devolution of the operation of quality assurance systems and procedures.

Partnership consists of layers of collaboration between institutions (Dhillon, 2005; 214). This is particularly true of the library which is an often neglected aspect (Collins, 2011). In order for a partnership to work effectively all these layers need to function congruently (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992). However, it needs to be recognised that each institution in a partnership will have different motivations for engaging in collaboration and that there will be differing motivations within each institution at each layer (Dhillon, 2005; 214). It is these layers and the shared values and trust which sustain partnerships and this includes "a commitment to collaborative working and recognition that this way of working can lead to benefits that could not otherwise be achieved." (Dhillon, 2005; 215). Partnership is a complex process and its continuity and effectiveness relies on the social

relationships between people whatever formal agreements and policy incentives it is based on (Dhillon, 2005; 217-8).

It is argued that the following factors underpin effective college HE partnerships and cross-sector collaboration include:

i.   Commitment from all staff (Blackie, 1998; 22–23; Connolly, 2007; 165)
ii.  Organisations having similar value systems (Trim, 2001)
iii. Trust between partners (Green, 1998; 27; Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Milbourne et al, 2003; Foskett, 2006;, 363)
iv.  Some argue that there should be equality in the partnership (Blackie, 1998; 23; Green, 1998; 27)
v.   Clear articulation of and convergence of aims towards a common purpose (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Foskett, 2006; 357/8); however, there are usually unstated or emergent aims which will need to be worked with but which can confound the original aims (Foskett, 2006; 359)

It is interesting to note that a list of problems that can arise in making a partnership work is the exact opposite of those items listed above:

i.    differences in aims
ii.   language
iii.  procedures
iv.   culture and perceived power
v.    the tension between autonomy and accountability
vi.   the lack of authority structure
vii.  the time needed to manage the logistics (Huxham, 1996)

It is also worth considering the nature of the contestation and collaboration both between the fields of HE and FE as well as between institutions within each of those fields. The relative status of these fields and institutions influences the nature and the potential of partnerships. For example, high status institutions in each field (e.g. sixth form colleges and Russell Group universities) are likely to have a greater affinity while FE colleges and post-1992 universities may struggle for distinction (Colley et al, 2014; 116-117). It would be worth adding a third field, that of disciplines, to this cultural analysis as there is also a status distinction between old and new disciplines which can intersect with the fields of higher and further education.

## Research Base

The original research question on which this guidance note is based concerned the support for scholarly activity that universities gave college higher education.

The recommendations are not intended to imply that colleges can only learn from universities. The recommendations also do not reflect the collaborative work that goes on between colleges independently of universities.

Colleges will be in different stages of development regarding their partner universities' support for scholarly activity. Each recommendation offers an opportunity for colleges at any stage of development to review their current position and plan accordingly.

# Recommendations

## For Colleges

- Understand the values position of a university partner in relation to your organisation's values, the way partnership functions are distributed within a university in relation to your partnership roles, the business case for partnership in particular subjects and the background and motivation of key staff in considering the scope and volume of support for scholarly activity that is likely to be available
- Clarify the rationale for your own and the partnership university's involvement in partnership
- Examine the university's internal structures and processes which support partnership activities in relation to your own structures and processes and monitor changes to structures and personnel
- Support the permeation of the values, practices and procedures of partnership working across all functions at all levels of the organisation with a bearing on partnership
- Identify departments and individuals which have a values-based commitment to partnership and cultivate such relationships
- Make use of seemingly functional procedures as opportunities for supporting scholarly activity
- Develop opportunities for partnership staff at all levels to meet regularly both formally and informally for multiple purposes both functional and developmental at both the university and the college
- Find ways of supporting FE staff to attend university staff development and continuing professional development events either through formal cover arrangements or through better use of streaming technologies or through alternative activities at the university for students or through better coordinated timing of such events

- Extend invitations to university staff to attend relevant events at the college
- Vary the types of meetings and venues for staff development and continuing professional development opportunities with the university partner
- Continue to support college staff gaining HEA Fellowships and encourage the university partner to continue to offer support for Fellowship applications
- Take full advantage of partner university discounts for Masters programmes and extend such offers where possible
- Prioritise working with a partner university to find ways of increasing staff attendance at university staff development and continuing professional development events
- Support staff, and students where appropriate, to attend and present at partnership conferences and support spin-offs as they arise
- Develop a set of incremental steps from local investigative projects to publication in relevant journals for staff to progress along at their own pace and with appropriate support
- Provide significant resources and support for staff to undertake research projects
- Provide opportunities and support for staff to collaborate with partner university colleagues on research projects

## For Universities

- Review the institutional rationale for partnership working and place value on supporting scholarly activity in college HE as an investment rather than a cost
- Ensure that the values, practices and procedures of partnership working permeate all functions at all levels of the organisation bearing on partnership
- Resource partnership roles adequately within the business model and make the internal transfer of funds transparent
- Develop opportunities for partnership staff at all levels to meet regularly both formally and informally for multiple purposes both functional and developmental
- Create opportunities for functional procedures to have developmental activities
- Clarify with college HE partners the definition, scope and range of scholarly activity which might be supported

- Provide colleges with a timetable, and ideally an annual plan, of staff development and continuing professional development events as early in the planning cycle as possible
- Vary the types of meetings for staff development and continuing professional development
- Continue to develop support for HEA Fellowships
- Continue to offer discounts for Master's programmes for partner colleges and extend such offers where possible
- Continue with conferences, varying the type and timing, expect and support spin-offs as they arise
- Examine ways in which FE staff can be involved in research
- Value the development of an HE ethos because it encourages and is encouraged by scholarly activity
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