

Higher Education in Further Education: *A bridge to widening participation?*

Addysg Uwch mewn Addysg Bellach: Pont i ehangu cyfranogiad?

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Nodau / Aims:

To offer an overview of research currently being conducted into HE in FE

I know from experience that HE in FE works. I also know there are many challenges. My research aims to explore and identify what works in terms of promoting success and building a bridge to widening participation in HE.

Y cyd-destun / The context

A pilot study was conducted to **encapsulate the views of staff involved** in delivering HE in an FE College.

Findings **aim to inform future research exploring the experiences of learners** and identifying what works.

The college is an experienced provider of HE in FE, offering HE provision for more than 70 years with the initial introduction of HNCs in 1948.

It currently offers 31 courses in 7 curriculum areas

Cefndir / Background

Bathmaker (2016) describes how **colleges reach out to non-traditional HE learners, delivering locally relevant, vocational higher-level skills.**

Young et al (2020) **advocated for the more personalised nature** where tutors have higher levels of contact time.

Rocks and Lavender (2018, p. 592) proposed that the opportunity to engage in HE through FE serves as a 'catalyst' for growth, not only intellectually but also socially and emotionally. Their research indicated that ***"all the research participants, to varying degrees, experienced some significant shift in attributes such as confidence, independence and willingness to try new things."***

Y dysgwr anhraddodiadol / The non-traditional learner



Y dysgwr anhraddodiadol / The non-traditional learner

- Crosling, Thomas and Heagney (2008) describe non-traditional learners as first generation students, mature students, disabled students, single parents, and those from low income and minority ethnic groups.
- Parry et al. (2012) suggest non-traditional learners are older, more likely to be studying part-time and to have come from areas of low engagement in higher education.

Cwestiynau ymchwil / Research questions

- What are the benefits and challenges of delivering HE in FE?
- What are the training and development needs of staff to be competent and confident in delivery of HE in FE?
- What are the needs of the HE in FE learner cohort?

Methodoleg / Methodology

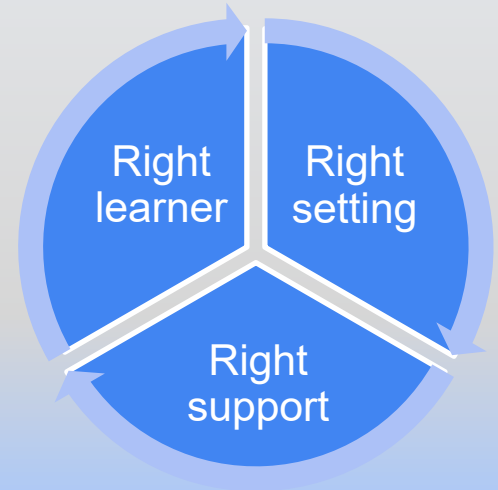
Ethical approval obtained from the Faculty Ethics Sub Group (FESG) at USW

Purposive sampling was used to facilitate **semi-structured interviews** with seven staff members

Interviews were recorded and transcribed

Data was collated using NVivo software

Key themes were identified





Dysgwr cywir / Right learner

- Lawson (2014) discusses how learners tend to be mature and lacking confidence in their identities as learners.
- Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) discussed how the unfamiliarity of the HE environment can impact more significantly on students from non-traditional backgrounds, potentially limiting learning.

“a lot of our students tend to be mature students so they’re people who haven’t necessarily gone through your traditional route through to HE, they might have worked for a few years and then decided they want to come back to education”

“[the] FE setting suits a lot of non-traditional learners, a lot more than your HE setting, so somebody who’s come through school, and they’ve gone to college rather than staying onto A levels then University. College is a very different setting and it’s a different environment, it suits some people more than the formal lectures.”

Lleoliad cywir / Right setting



Some key points highlighted included:

- Onsite facilities to support vocationally based courses serving to raise the skill set of the local communities
- Accessibility in terms of locality and flexibility of courses, appealing to non-traditional learners with additional commitments including employment and caring responsibilities

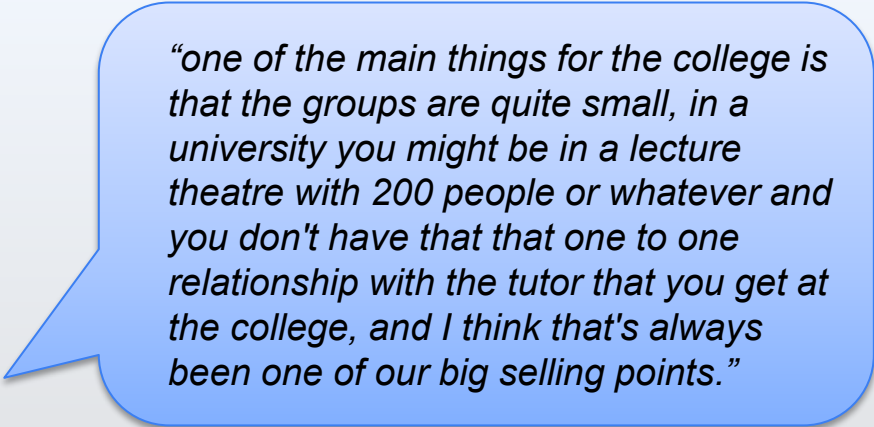
(referring to HND courses) [they] tend to be delivered in FE for that vocational context, the tutors who are delivering it tend to have more vocational experience than you would find in university lecturers and they tend to be more practical than academic, so from a delivery point of view FE colleges are broadly set up far better, we've got the resources"

"they've got families, they might have jobs, they've got things that tie them to this area which is why they don't want to look at that extra travel"

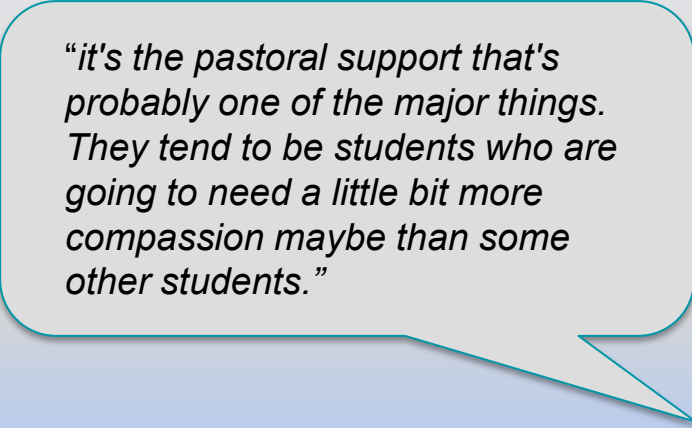
"...it is the element of flexibility I think, of giving students who wouldn't be able to access University but be able to access FE because of flexibility of timings and the way that the college use learning as something that is an ongoing fostering for future learning"

Cymorth cywir / Right support

- Lea and Simmons (2012) discuss the distinctiveness of HE in FE in offering supportive pedagogic relationships.
- This was supported in the research with all participants referring to the benefits of having smaller group sizes and opportunity to provide pastoral support.



“one of the main things for the college is that the groups are quite small, in a university you might be in a lecture theatre with 200 people or whatever and you don't have that that one to one relationship with the tutor that you get at the college, and I think that's always been one of our big selling points.”



“it's the pastoral support that's probably one of the major things. They tend to be students who are going to need a little bit more compassion maybe than some other students.”

Heriau / Challenges

Avis and Orr (2016) refer to the working conditions of HE in FE teachers, highlighting issues of limited time and space for scholarship and research, with publication rarely being a priority.

Feather (2016) highlighted some common themes as barriers including the lack of resources, including time, and accessibility of journals and other materials that would allow opportunity to undertake scholarly activity.



“HE [staff] given more time to mark and they can take holidays when they want for example, whereas we’re governed by the FE timetable. I spend the beginning and the end of my summer attending course boards when I’m actually on leave from my job, so yeah there are some challenges I think delivering it from a lecturer’s point of view.”

“we just don’t have the opportunities as HE staff to engage in research and fellowship”

Nodyn terfynol / End note

“it’s very heart-warming for want of better words, to see them progress and to watch them develop from like a level two or a level three course all the way through.....I love teaching the range of levels and seeing the students progressing”

Nodyn terfynol / End note



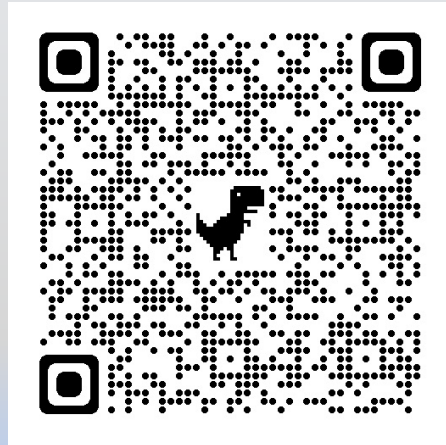
I struggled at school and left at 16 to attend Bridgend College. I successfully completed Level 3 in Health and Social Care and was encouraged to further my education to degree level. I considered applying to a university but was fortunate that Bridgend College offered the same course. I have ASD and change can be overwhelming, the option to remain at Bridgend College suited my needs. I have now completed my foundation degree and I believe that I made the right choice. The transition from FE to HE was seamless and the support available to me from the lecturers` was amazing. The lecturers` are always available, whether by email or in person. The lectures are smaller and there are fewer students than a typical university campus and this enabled me to form relationships that I know will stay with me forever. My decision to study HE at Bridgend College is the best that I have made. My confidence has grown, and I am now ready for the next chapter in my life. I have enrolled at a university to complete my degree and I am prepared for the challenge. I have Bridgend College to thank and would recommend studying HE there.

Argymhellion / Recommendations

Over to you!

*Can you describe how you would
improve the delivery of HE in FE?*

- <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Bgt6oA0vC7CivACd7zCh0lt23ikk-VrBYXy5jEipg14/edit#settings>



Cyfeirnodau / References

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