

## **PARALLEL LINES? HIGHER EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

*Jim Gallacher*

Further education colleges (FECs) are now major providers of higher education (HE) at undergraduate level in Scotland, through the provision of Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). The experience of students studying in FECs is in many respects different from the experience of students in higher education institutions (HEIs), and we now effectively have two parallel systems of HE in Scotland - one provided by the HEIs and the other provided by the FE colleges. However, this has been a largely unplanned development, and while there are many links between the two systems these have mainly developed through local agreements. It is increasingly important that we look more systematically at the role of these two systems, the opportunities they provide for students, and the issues which must be addressed if we are to have a HE system in which the different elements are complementary, and which meets the needs of students and of the wider society in the most effective way. These issues are also being considered in the current Inquiry into Lifelong Learning by the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, and in the Scottish Executive review of higher education. This is therefore an important opportunity to address these issues, and to take steps to establish a more satisfactory system for the future.

---

*Jim Gallacher is Professor of Lifelong Learning and Co-Director, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University. This is a revised version of a paper presented to the Seventh Scottish Forum on Lifelong Learning.*

## **HIGHER EDUCATION WITHIN THE FE COLLEGES**

During the last fifteen years the FE colleges have emerged as a much stronger and larger feature of the post-compulsory education system in Scotland. This can be seen from the figures presented in Table 1.

---

**Table 1**  
**Students enrolled in FE colleges by level and mode**

	1985-86	1990-91	1995-96	1999-2000
further education				
F/T	30,374	27,500	30,709	38,176
P/T	114,817	199,600	194,130	273,360
higher education				
F/T	6,996	9,431	25,328	29,841
P/T	23,029	23,722	35,390	42,166
Total	175,216	260,253	285,557	383,543

*Source: SOEID 1998 and SFEFC 2001 (note these figures exclude students registered on non-vocational courses)*

---

This growth has been associated with wider changes in the role and function of FE within the post-compulsory sector, resulting from changes in the economy and society, and in educational policy (Gallacher and Thompson, 1999). This has led to a rise in the status of the FE sector, and within the present political climate FE colleges are now clearly viewed as key institutions in widening access, promoting social inclusion and providing opportunities for lifelong learning. (Scottish Office, 1999)

It can also be seen from the figures in Table 1 that an area of particularly strong growth has been higher education. While the total number of students enrolled in FE colleges increased by 118% over the period 19885/6 to 1999/00, the numbers participating in higher education programmes increased by 140%. These are mainly provided through HNCs and HNDs, which have been developed within the frameworks provided by the Scottish

### *Scottish Affairs*

Qualifications Authority (SQA) and its predecessor bodies. This has enabled the FECs to develop a strong and distinctive tradition of higher education, independently of the HEIs. The FECs have a long and well established tradition of providing part-time HNCs, most of which had a strong vocational orientation, and provided qualifications for people in particular areas of employment. However, while these part-time programmes remain a strong feature of HN provision within the colleges, the more recent growth has seen a new focus on full-time HN courses, and the numbers enrolled on these courses increased by 327% over this period. As a result of these changes the majority of new undergraduate level entrants to HE in Scotland now begin their studies in FE colleges (Table 2).

---

**Table 2**  
**Undergraduate Entrants to Higher Education in Scotland, 1999/00, by Mode of Attendance and Sector**

	HEIs	FECs	Total
Full-time	37,491 (64%)	21,012 (36%)	58,503
Part-time	14,852 (29%)	36,173 (71%)	51,025
total	52,343 (48%)	57,185 (52%)	109,528

*Source: Scottish Executive 2001*

---

### **THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION OF FE COLLEGES TO HE**

While we now have two systems of HE in Scotland, there is also some evidence that the roles of the FECs and HEIs are in some respects distinctive and complementary.

Firstly, it can be seen from the above data that, while FECs are now important providers of full-time HE, with over one third of undergraduate level entrants enrolling in a college, they are clearly the major providers of part-time undergraduate level HE, with over 70% of the entrants to this mode of study enrolling in colleges.

### *Higher Education in Scotland's Colleges and Higher Education Institutions*

Secondly FECs seem to be particularly important in providing a route back into HE for many older students. In 1999-2000, 54% of HE students in FECs were aged 25 or older, while only 32% of these students were under 21 (SFEFC, 2001). By contrast only 17% of students on first degrees, who were almost all in HEIs, were over 25, while 53% were under 21 (Scottish Executive, 2001). These differences in the age profiles between the two sectors are partly associated with the processes through which many adults return to study. Research undertaken in the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) has shown that the opportunity to study in a college which is local and convenient is important for many adult returners, both at the stage of initial entry to FE (Gallacher et al, 2000), and as they continue their study into HN programmes (Gallacher et al, 1997).

Thirdly the work of Gillian Raab and her colleagues at Napier University has shown that the FE colleges are successful in attracting, into HE courses, a much higher percentage of students from disadvantaged areas than is to be found in the university sector (Raab, 1998). This study involved establishing Standardised Participation Ratios (SPRs) for the areas in which people lived. Areas were identified on the basis of an Education Advantage Score. This is a Census-based score based on two Census indicators: the proportion of heads of households in social classes 1 and 2; and the proportion of adults with post-school qualifications. Postcode sectors were ranked on this score and divided into seven equal categories, where 7 represents the most educationally advantaged (Raab, 1998, p.38). SPRs are based on a calculation where 'a ratio of 100 represents the national average. This means that the number of people participating in HE from a locality is equal to the number we would expect, averaged for the whole of Scotland, taking into account the age structure of the population in that locality' (Raab, 1998, p.6). A figure of over 100 means a higher than average SPR. A figure of less than 100 means a lower than average SPR.

While it can be seen from Table 3 that there is a clear overall gradient between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, it can also be seen that this is even more pronounced among participants in HEIs, while participation in FECs is much closer to what might be expected as a national average. This evidence of differential participation rates between sectors can also be observed in UK national data (see for example UCAS, 1999). It would appear then that there is some evidence of FECs successfully recruiting

*Scottish Affairs*

students from socially disadvantaged areas, and enabling them to progress to HE level study.

---

**Table 3**  
**Standardised participation ratios by educational advantage score category for Scottish domiciled students (not post graduate) 1996-97**

Advantage Score category	All	In HEIs		In FECs		Distance learning
		Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
1 = low	55	42	41	85	76	44
2	79	66	67	100	104	72
3	89	82	73	105	100	94
4	99	98	88	108	95	112
5	116	117	112	108	118	125
6	130	143	131	109	110	132
7 = high	164	203	238	86	104	149

*Source: Raab/SHEFC, 1998*

---

This evidence shows that FE colleges are making what is in many respects a distinctive contribution to HE provision in Scotland. However it is also clear that many students who begin their studies in FECs wish to transfer to HEIs, and we must now consider the opportunities for transfer, and the issues and problems to which this gives rise.

### **THE TRANSITION FROM FE COLLEGES TO HEIS**

There have been no national studies of progression from HN programmes to HEIs in Scotland. However, data published by the Scottish Executive indicates that 54% of students who obtained a 'sub degree' qualification in 2000 progressed to further full-time study (Scottish Executive, 2001). Unfortunately we have no direct evidence regarding the number of these students who were undertaking degree level study. Data published by SFEFC

*Higher Education in Scotland's Colleges and Higher Education Institutions*

indicates considerable variations, by subject group, in the percentages of students who gain HN Group Awards and progress to degree level study. Thus in 1999-2000 these data show that 34% of social science students progressed to degrees, 30% of science and maths students, and 23% of business and management students. However, in a strongly vocational subject area such as social work only 8% of students went on to degree study. It should also be noted that these data are limited, in that there was no information on destination for 36% of students who completed HN awards (SFEFC, 2001). More detailed information about the progression of HN students into degree programmes is provided in the study by Gallacher et al, which is based on students from 13 HN programmes in 6 FE colleges throughout Scotland (Gallacher et al, 1997). In this study 65% of the HN students, whom the researchers were able to track, proceeded to degree study. However more detailed investigation would be required to establish accurate national figures regarding progression from HN to degree programmes. It is, nevertheless, clear that many students who begin their studies in FECs wish to carry on to complete degree level study in universities. However it is also clear that the opportunities for progression of this kind are often limited, and are unevenly spread between different institutions.

A number of studies have looked at the nature and extent of links between FECs and HEIs in Scotland. The most systematic of these studies is that undertaken by Alexander et al (1995), and while the data on which this is based is now more than five years old, more recent studies would confirm the patterns established in that study (eg MacLennan et al, 2000; Osborne et al, 2000). These data were based on a survey of all FE colleges to which 31 of the 45 colleges contacted responded, a response rate of 69%.

Table 4 shows the links between FE and HE which were identified. It is clear from this table that articulation links are the most common ones in Scotland. However, there is no generally agreed definition of the term articulation, and the types of articulation relationships which have been established between HEIs and FECs vary considerably. They can be seen to include any arrangement whereby an HEI undertakes to offer entry to one of its degrees as a consequence of a student successfully completing the learning outcomes of an HNC or HND offered by a particular FEC. Some of these relationships are formally established, while others are fairly informal agreements. Some will enable students to gain credit, and enter the degree programme with

*Scottish Affairs*

advanced standing, while others will not, or will award only a lower level of credit.

Franchising was defined as link 'where an HEI approves an FEC to deliver all or part of one of its courses' (Alexander et al, 1995, p.34). It can be seen that the number of these franchise arrangements is small. This reflects the way in which the Scottish HN framework has enabled the FECs to develop their own HE level provision. This contrasts sharply with developments in England. A validated programme is one 'where a FEC has developed and submitted a course/programme to a university to be validated for delivery by the FEC' (Alexander et al, 1995, p.36). It can also be seen that the number of links of this kind is limited for similar reasons.

This study also shows that the majority of these links have been established between the FE colleges and the post 1992 universities (Table 5).

---

**Table 4**  
**Types of FE/HE links which exist**

	Number of colleges	Number of programme links
articulation arrangements	27	281
franchising arrangements	13	16
validated programmes	3	6
other types of link	2	4

*Source: Alexander et al, 1995*

---

**Table 5**  
**Number of articulation programme links to different types of HEI.**

	Number of articulation links	% of all articulation links
new universities	164	58
old universities	82	29

*Source: Alexander et al, 1995*

---

Osborne et al have also noted that articulation agreements, and other links, are more likely to occur with 'non elite universities' (Osborne et al, 2000, p.244). Maclennan et al (2000) suggest that this reflects the differing institutional missions and priorities of these universities. They refer to the distinction between 'selecting' and 'recruiting' universities. 'Selecting' universities, which are more likely to be pre-92 universities, are less likely to provide articulated routes with credit transfer, whereas 'recruiting' universities are more likely to adopt a promotion-based approach, and to actively establish links with FE colleges. These distinctions in institutional approach lead to differences in access policies, including FE/HE links, and often reflect a complex set of factors. These are, in turn, associated with differences in recruitment policies which are designed to ensure institutional survival within an increasingly competitive higher education market. The outcome is that, while it has been noted above that FECs have had considerable success in widening access, the progression routes available to students after study in FECs are still limited. The introduction of the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (SCOTCATS) does not really seem to have had a major impact in changing this pattern, and although much emphasis is now placed on the role of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) in facilitating transfer with credit between sectors, it is not clear that the establishment of this framework will in itself address the underlying issues.

The difficulties in developing these links are further complicated by differences between HNC/D programmes and degrees.

The first set of differences is what Maclennan et al (2000) refer to as 'curricular issues'. These differences partly reflect differences in the original purposes of HN and degree programmes. HN programmes were designed as vocational awards, under the auspices of the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) and its predecessor bodies. However, many of these programmes now serve a dual purpose, both to prepare students for entry to employment, and to prepare them for progression to the more academically oriented degree programmes. There are now considerable differences between the various HN programmes in the extent to which their main

### *Scottish Affairs*

purpose is to prepare students for employment, or for further study. It has been indicated above that the proportion of these students who proceed to degree programmes is in some measure related to the extent to which these programmes still have a strong vocational orientation. Nevertheless what has emerged, in the dual system of higher education which we now have, is two rather different types of higher education programme. As a result there are differences in both structure and content between HN and degree programmes, and these differences can contribute to the difficulties in the matching of these programmes. In this context a number of HE admissions tutors argue that students lack the necessary under-pinning knowledge to successfully enter a degree programme with credit which will give advanced standing. However a number of staff within FECs have suggested that in some cases there is too much emphasis on the particular knowledge, and not enough on the underlying capacity to learn which has been acquired (Maclennan et al, 2000, p.20).

A second but related set of issues is associated with the culture and ethos of the different institutions, approaches to teaching and learning and associated study skills, and methods of assessment (Gallacher et al, 1997; Maclennan et al, 2000). There are considerable differences between the experience of students on HN programmes in FECs and students on degree programmes in HEIs. These are associated with: the scale of the institutions, the size of teaching groups (groups in FECs tend to be relatively small), teaching methods and assessment methods (Sharp and Gallacher, 1996; Maclennan et al, 2000). These differences can create difficulties for students when making the transition from FECs to HEIs. These have been documented by Gallacher et al (1997) in their study (Table 6).

A total of 64% of these students experienced one or more problems after starting their degree programme. These difficulties have also contributed to a situation in which some staff in HEIs feel that students from FECs are not adequately prepared for entry into degree programmes. This can confirm their uncertainties about the value of establishing agreements with colleges which enable students to enter degrees with advanced standing (Maclennan et al, 2000)

**Table 6**  
**Problems experienced after starting the degree programme**  
**(Degree students, N=126)**

	%
Assessment procedures	27
Teaching methods	27
Availability of staff	25
Other problems	17

*Source: Gallacher et al, 1997*

---

A further set of differences are ones associated with quality assurance. At present HN provision in colleges is assured through SQA procedures and the Inspectorate, while the higher education institutions operate under the auspices of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). In a situation where there are major differences in structure, curriculum, teaching methods and assessment, it is difficult to be certain that quality standards are similar in each sector. In line with the comments about complementarity of provision made above, there is some evidence of strengths in each sector, but at present there is a lack of systematic information about these relative strengths.

The actual impact of these differences between the two systems on the progression, retention, and completion rates for students who transfer from HN to degree programmes has not been systematically studied at a national level, although the study by Gallacher et al (1997) did indicate relatively high completion rates. It would appear, then, on the basis of the limited evidence available, that while there are difficulties associated with the relationships between the two systems of HE, and the transition from one to the other, many of the students who make this transition are successful in their degree level studies.

It is clear that the links between the FE college sector and the HEIs which enable students to transfer from one sector to the other are patchy, and that there is a range of factors which are creating barriers to developing and strengthening these links. This partly reflects the very different history of HN provision in the two sectors, and the types of programmes which now exist as

### *Scottish Affairs*

a result of that history. These links are nevertheless important for a large number of students who wish to progress from HN to degree level study, and it would appear that many of the students who progress in this way are successful in their degree studies. It seems important, in the interest of maximising opportunities for students, and providing a more effective HE system in Scotland, that the issues which have been identified are addressed, and ways are found to resolve them. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), which the Lifelong Learning Inquiry Interim Report emphasises as a key element in future developments, seeks to strengthen the opportunities for transfers of this kind. However it will only be effective if some of the key underlying issues are addressed. These questions will be discussed further below.

### **FUNDING IN FE COLLEGES AND HEIS**

The final set of issues which must be considered in examining these parallel systems of HE is the one associated with funding. Funding problems exist, both at the level of the institutions and of the students.

At the institutional level there are presently two systems of funding. The FE colleges are funded through the funding mechanisms operated by the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC), while the HEIs are funded through the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC). While it is difficult to directly compare funding for HE level work within the two systems, written evidence submitted by the Scottish Executive to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, at its meeting on 8 May 2001, allows one to calculate that the average level of funding per full-time student equivalent provided by SFEFC is about £2,900, while the average figure provided by SHEFC is about £3,900. These differentials contribute to the widespread view within the FE sector that the level of funding they are receiving for HE level work is much lower than that provided to the HEIs, and this makes it difficult to provide a similar quality of educational experience for their students. Within the HEI sector there appear to be differing responses to issues associated with funding (Maclennan et al, 2000). As indicated above, many of the post-92 universities see direct entry FE students as an important student group, and an important source of income for the institution, while for many of the pre-92 universities these students are much more marginal, and a potential cost to the institution if special arrangements need to be made to ensure that their transition is smooth and

### *Higher Education in Scotland's Colleges and Higher Education Institutions*

successful. This raises issues about the potential need for special funding arrangements to support the development of this work. Overall then there is evidence of concerns about existing funding arrangements from the point of view of both FECs and HEIs, and the need for measures to address these issues.

For students making the transition from FECs to HEIs, problems associated with the length of time required to complete a degree, travel costs and childcare have been reported (Maclennan et al 2000). It has been noted above that many of these students are considerably older than the average undergraduate in HEIs. Many have additional financial demands associated with domestic responsibilities and childcare, and have less flexibility with regard to part-time employment. In this respect the financial burdens which result if students do not receive credit for their HNC or HND, and have to 'go back' a year to gain entry to a degree programme, can be a disincentive to further study. This can compound the problems which many students, especially mature students, already experience under the current student funding arrangements (Osborne et al, 2001). The additional costs of travel associated with attending an institution which is considerably further from home can also be significant for these students. Research has shown that convenience of travel is an important factor for these students, both in making their initial choice of FE college and in their choice of HEI (Gallacher et al, 1997). There is therefore clearly a need to recognise and address these student level funding issues.

### **OPTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE**

It has been argued above that we now have two parallel, but in some ways complementary, systems of HE in Scotland. We will now consider a number of possible responses to the problems which have been outlined above.

One possible solution, advocated in some of the evidence provided to the Scottish Parliament's Inquiry (eg by NUS Scotland), is the merging of the FE and HE sectors to create a new unified tertiary education sector. However, while this may be a valuable long term goal, it can be argued that in the short term it could have a de-stabilising effect on Scottish tertiary education. As indicated above, the FE colleges have been emerging as a strong and distinctive element in providing lifelong learning opportunities for a wide range of Scottish society in recent years. In particular they are providing

### *Scottish Affairs*

opportunities for adult returners, and are widening access to FE and HE. It is important that they are given an opportunity to consolidate this role before a major reorganisation takes place. Merging them with large powerful HEIs, many of which have agendas which are driven by research excellence, and other issues associated with their place in the national and international world of HE, could easily weaken the distinctive contribution of FECs at this point. It must also be noted that there are significant differences between HEIs. We have referred above to differences between the pre-92 and post-92 universities in the extent of their links with the FE colleges. These are part of a wider pattern of differentiation which can be observed in the HE system within the UK. It would appear therefore that the creation of a unified tertiary education system could be part of a long term strategy, but not something that could be moved towards as a short term objective.

In the short to medium term it seems important that measures should be taken which will ensure much more effective forms of collaboration between HEIs and FECs to ensure that their complementary roles can be strengthened, and enhanced opportunities for students can be created. A number of models of collaboration have already emerged, such as developments associated with the Crichton Campus in Dumfries, and the The University of the Highlands and Islands Millenium Project. These need to be carefully evaluated to establish what lessons can be learned to inform future developments, including the changes in national policy which may be required to support effective collaboration.

There is also a need for much stronger and more effective bodies to co-ordinate the work of the FECs and HEIs, and encourage collaboration. In this context we need to look more closely at development in other parts of the world, eg Community Colleges in the USA, to consider what can be learned from these experiences, and how they can inform our thinking. The need to improve articulation policies between community colleges and universities has been recognised if the needs of 'transfer' students are to be met more effectively. This has led to a number of state-wide initiatives to facilitate the transfer of students from community college to university degree programmes. One of the most interesting recent developments of this kind has been the Illinois Articulation Initiative, within which a core curriculum has been developed to facilitate transfer (Rifkin, 1998). A number of states also have community college transfer centres to provide information and support for students which will facilitate their transfer to university.

### *Higher Education in Scotland's Colleges and Higher Education Institutions*

At present SHEFC/SFEFC have established regional fora, but their role is limited with respect to these issues. It would be useful to consider how the role of these fora could be enhanced to ensure that they were more effective in ensuring co-operation from all the institutions involved to address the issues outlined above. This would require establishing regional bodies with a very clear remit and powers which would ensure that effective collaboration occurred. These bodies could then consider the extent of existing links between FECs and HEIs, and what measures can be taken to enhance and extend these links. This would include addressing issues associated with the differences in the curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment, which have been referred to above. It would also include establishing more effective measures to deal with issues associated with transition from FECs to HEIs. In this respect the experience of developmental education in the USA could be of value. In undertaking this work it would be important to recognise the strengths within the FE and HE sectors, and the extent to which they are already complementary, as has been indicated above. The Funding Councils could make it clear that funding to institutions would be conditional on effective collaboration in these regional bodies, and on implementing decisions which they reached. It may also be necessary to consider incentive grants to encourage HEIs to become fully involved in this area of work. One possible model would be that HEIs would receive a premium for each student recruited from a FEC with an HN qualification. A similar model already operates with respect to students from designated post codes to encourage widening access policies. The details of such a policy would require careful planning to ensure that it was effective, but a scheme of this kind could be useful, at least as an interim measure. The outcome of developments of this kind might be the establishment of strong regional federations of FECs and HEIs, which might lead to further mergers in the longer term.

There will also be a need to address some of the issues outlined above at a national level. It has been argued that we now have two parallel systems with quite distinct histories. If the HN system, which has emerged out of a more vocational tradition, is also to have a major role in preparing people for progression to degree courses there is a need for more careful consideration of the implications of this for these programmes. It must of course be recognised that many HN programmes will continue to have vocational preparation as their primary function. It will therefore be necessary to consider more explicitly how these differing functions can be accommodated and reconciled in the future development of HN provision. The HEIs must

### *Scottish Affairs*

also be encouraged to look more critically at their programmes, and consider how greater flexibility can be introduced, and how students can have greater confidence that their study at HN level will be recognised for credit within the full range of HEIs. This may require an initiative at a national level involving SQA, SFEFC and SHEFC to create a framework within which these issues can be addressed, although this will be complemented by work within the regional fora to establish the details of collaborative arrangements. The establishment of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) creates an important context within which these issues can be addressed. This Framework is designed to establish equivalences between qualifications, which will facilitate credit transfer for qualifications obtained in different sectors. Within this framework an HNC is regarded as carrying equivalent credit points to the first level of an undergraduate degree, and an HND is equivalent to level 2. However in many cases universities do not provide entry to level 2 for students transferring with an HNC, or entry to level 3 for students with HNDs. There is a variety of reasons for this, some associated with the structure of the programme, some associated with the perceptions of staff regarding the preparedness of students for entry to degree level study. These have been referred to above. It is however important that these issues are now addressed, if the SCQF is to have the impact which it is hoped it will have. In this context it may also be useful to consider the issue of quality. As has been indicated above there are different quality assurance systems operating within the two sectors. It would seem useful if the QAA could be involved in discussions with SQA, SFEFC and the HMIs to consider how a more unified system of quality assurance for all of HE provision could be established. This could help ensure that the quality of students' experiences in HN and degree level study is comparable.

The issue of funding must also be addressed. The differentials in funding systems for HE have been outlined above. There is growing recognition of the need to address these issues. Proposals for a merging of the two funding councils have been made, and it seems quite possible that this will emerge as a longer term solution. However arguments have been presented against it in the short term. These partly focus on the issue that the SFEFC has only been established relatively recently, and it has an important job of working with the FE sector to strengthen this sector, and establish its distinctive role in providing lifelong learning opportunities. There is also another set of arguments which suggest that what is required is a wider re-examination of all funding for post compulsory education, and in this respect a major re-

### *Higher Education in Scotland's Colleges and Higher Education Institutions*

organisation which focussed only on FE/HE would be too limited as a long term solution. As an interim measure, the Lifelong Learning Inquiry Interim Report has suggested a joint funding system up to Level 8 of the SCQF (Level 2 within the higher education system), but the details of this proposal have not been developed. It is clear that the role of HEIs, which includes a major commitment to research, is in many respects different from that of the FECs, and that funding systems should reflect these differences. On the other hand it is also clear that the students in both sectors should have access to a similar quality of learning experience. This requires a careful analysis of what is needed to increase the resource base in FECs to ensure that the needs of students are adequately met. It is important that measures taken here are designed to raise quality, and it is clear that the HE sector will resist strongly any further erosion of its unit of resource. This would therefore seem to imply that additional resources must be found to fund a development of this kind. However it is also possible that the development of collaborative arrangements between FECs and HEIs could help address these issues; for example it may be possible to provide FEC students with access to library facilities in HEIs.

With regard to student funding, the issue of type and level of support has been widely recognised as a key issue particularly for adult students (Osborne et al, 2001), and some improvements have been introduced following the Cubie Report on student finance. However an issue which gives continuing cause for concern is the complexity of the existing systems, and the relationship between student support and the Benefits system. Both of these issues are recognised in the Lifelong Learning Inquiry Interim Report. It is recommended there that a single agency should be established to provide information and guidance to learners on their entitlements to support. This would appear to be a useful and helpful suggestion.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

HE provision within the FE college sector is now a major element within the Scottish HE system. It is providing valuable opportunities for many students, particularly adult returners, and it is contributing to widening access to HE. However the growth in this sector has contributed to a situation where we now have two parallel systems of HE in Scotland. The links between these systems have not been developed in a planned and systematic way. This is now limiting the opportunities available to students, and prevents our HE

### *Scottish Affairs*

system making its full and most effective contribution to Scottish society. There is now a pressing need to address these issues, and take steps which will ensure a more effective integration of these systems, whilst recognising their distinctive traditions and contributions.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Alexander, H., Gallacher, J., Leahy, J. & Yule, W. (1995) Changing patterns of higher education in Scotland: a study of links between further education colleges and higher education institutions. **Scottish Journal of Adult and Continuing Education**, 2, 25-54.
- Gallacher, J., Leahy, J & MacFarlane, K (1997) **The FE/HE Route: New Pathways into Higher Education. Research Report for SOEID**, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Gallacher J and Thomson C (1999) Further Education: overlapping or overstepping? **Scottish Journal of Adult and Continuing Education**, Vol 5. No 1, pp9-24
- Gallacher J, Crossan B, Leahy J, Merrill B & Field J (2000) **Education for all? FE, social inclusion and widening access, Final Report for Scottish Executive**. GCU, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University
- MacLennan A, Musselbrook K & Dundas M (2000) **Credit Transfer at the FE/HE Interface**, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council/Scottish Further Education Funding Council
- Murphy M, Morgan-Klein B, Osborne M & Gallacher J (2001) **Widening Access to Higher education: Report to the Scottish Executive**, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, University of Stirling
- Osborne M, Cloonan M, Morgan-Klein B, & Loots C (2000) Mix and match? Further and higher education links in Scotland. **International Journal of lifelong education**, 19, 3.
- Osborne, M., Brink, B., Cloonan, M., Davies, P. Marks, A., Turner, E. and Williams, J. (2001): **For me or not for me in Scotland? A report of mature student participation in higher education, Report prepared for the Scottish Executive**, Stirling: Institute of Education, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning
- Raab, G & Davidson K (1999) **Distribution of FE Provision in Scotland**, SOEID.
- Raab G (1998) **Participation in Higher Education in Scotland**, Edinburgh, SHEFC
- Rifkin T (1998) **Improving articulation policy to increase transfer**, Policy Paper, Education Commission of the States, Denver

*Higher Education in Scotland's Colleges and Higher Education Institutions*

Scottish Executive (2001) **Standard Tables on Higher and Further Education in Scotland**

Scottish Further Education Funding Council (2001) **Further Education Statistics**

Scottish Office (1999) **Opportunity for Everyone: A Strategic Framework for FE**, Edinburgh, HMSO

Sharp, N & Gallacher, J. (1996) Working together: Aspects of FE/HE links in Scotland, in Abrahamson, M., Bird, J. and Stennet, A. (eds), **Further and Higher Education Partnerships: the future for collaboration**, London, Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and Open University Press.

SOEID (1998) **Further Education Statistics 1996-97**

UCAS (1999) **Statistical bulletin on widening participation**. Cheltenham, UCAS

*April 2002*