

Research and Scholarship in College Higher Education: Reaping what you sow, or turning a blind eye? - Eve Rapley

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Much has been written about the challenges of teaching and working as a college higher education (CHE) teacher (Creasy, 2013; Fenge, 2011; Golding Lloyd and Griffiths 2008; Turner et al., 2009a). Teaching hours and lack of remission for HE teaching, switching between academic levels and serving two policy and quality assurance masters has long been a feature of this literature (Kumari, 2017; Springbett, 2017; Turner et al., 2009b).

This Think Piece is formed of opinions that are my own and relate to a specific sector of CHE (landbased education which includes animal, equine, agriculture, horticulture, countryside management studies), but it is likely to resonate (to a greater or lesser extent) with all CHE sectors. My main concern is the relationship between validating universities and colleges delivering their qualifications, particularly with regard to research and scholarship capabilities.

Despite the increase in colleges gaining foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP), the usual model for colleges is to work in partnership with a university. Predominantly through a validation model (though occasionally as a franchise) the university 'rubber stamps' the college (Rapley, 2014). The college delivers the HE programmes, whilst the university oversees QA and awards students the HE qualification in their name.

My own experience of this includes universities approving colleges to deliver HE, yet arguably not necessarily doing enough to support HE teachers or the college with regards to research and scholarship. As stated by the QAA (2012) Quality Code (B3), "Scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education" (p.13). Whilst notions of research and scholarship are likely to manifest themselves differently at a college when compared to a research-intensive university, the underlying premise that *all* HE should be underpinned and informed by scholarship and research is clear. The QAA (2013) further state how:

...all teaching staff engaged in the delivery of higher education programmes have relevant knowledge and understanding of current research and advanced

scholarship in their discipline area and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching (p.2).

It is unlikely that anyone would dispute this, yet my own experience reveals how colleges can be approved to deliver HE with teaching teams who lack post-graduate qualifications and/or experience of engaging in research or scholarship, or of support for these teachers to gain these essential attributes.

What strikes me is the lack of awareness and understanding that some validating universities can have for the particularity and complexity of the CHE context, and the challenges CHE teachers face when they are having to work in FE and in HE spaces. Husband and Jeffrey (2016) suggests by recognising “cultural and practical differences between FE and HE, it is possible and reasonable to accept that creating ‘HEness’ in FE is problematic” (p.68). I agree and contend this is something that has not been given enough consideration when universities are approving HE partnerships with further education colleges (FECs).

On a number of occasions I have been an external on an HE validation panel at an FE college where I suspect I have made myself a little unpopular when I have pressed senior college and university staff on how two or three HE teachers (often without, or who are working towards a post-graduate qualifications and/or a teaching qualification as well), who are teaching 24 hours a week (with well over half being HE) are going to shoulder the lions share of the teaching a foundation degree between them? Or what provision colleges have to support PG education and scholarly development for their HE teachers, and what remission these teachers have to ensure they can engage in scholarship.

Responses have varied from borderline hostility at my temerity to ask, to more benign and ‘fudgey’ ones about CHE being *different*, thus not perhaps needing those with PG academic qualifications, because the HE teachers have vocational/professional qualifications and experience. When I have asked about the comparability of teaching loads for university teachers versus those for CHE teacher counterparts I have yet to receive a satisfactory answer. Would teachers in the validating university be expected to teach 25 hours a week? Would they be expected to engage in research without sufficient background and training? I suspect not; in fact I know not, yet it is viewed as being acceptable for HE teachers who are teaching the same level programmes in their name.

In order for CHE teachers to be able to participate in a scholarly community, to develop themselves and their HE learners, FECs need to endorse and support it, and HE teachers need to be provided with development and time to enhance their skills in order for them to effectively undertake scholarly activity/research (QAA, 2015). This should be a right and an expectation; teachers should not have to fight for it or have to self fund it to enable them to develop these skills. Indicator 4 in the 2012 Quality Code clearly compels “Higher education providers [to] assure

themselves that everyone involved in teaching or supporting student learning is appropriately qualified, supported and developed” (QAA, 2012, p.23). As the validating partner, universities have a clear responsibility to ensure those providing and teaching HE in their name do have conditions and resources that enable them to do this in accordance with sector expectations and those afforded to their own teaching staff who are performing comparable HE teaching roles. It is disingenuous to CHE teachers to merely pay lip service to these expectations. Side stepping them because CHE is in someway *different* and does not need the research and scholarship (or only in a minimal way) is a cop out.

Crucially, If CHE learners do not experience a true research and scholarship culture, what kind of HE might they get? CHE is often characterised as being “the local, low-cost alternative for those disadvantaged and underserved students who do not have the resources to participate in more prestigious and more expensive alternatives” (Bathmaker, 2016, p.28). If CHE teaching teams are not developed and supported to become active within research and scholarship communities, this potentially serves only to perpetuate this characterisation of CHE and could serve only to sustain and reproduce social inequalities for CHE learners, rather than overcoming them (Bathmaker, 2016; Avis and Orr, 2016).

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