

Appendix 1 MBS4060: Programme Plan cover sheet

Name	Helen Snider					
Title of final programme (insert individual title)	MProf Business					
Title of research project	The Future of Foundation Degrees					
Composition of proposed programme						
Module code	Module title	Credit	Credit level	Completion		Passed
				Year	Term	
MBS4100	Review of learning	30	7			
RAL at level 7	Professional Learning	30	7			
MBS4030	Planning a Practitioner Research Programme	30	7			
MBS4060	Planning a Practitioner Research Programme	60	7			
MBS4030	Project	30	7			
MBS4060	Project	60	7			
Total credit		180				

Note: If MBS4100 and/or RAL and/or MBS4030 are varied as part of a hybrid MProf programme, please insert all other assessed components, including their title, level and credit rating, and check that all combined credits add up to 180.

Now complete the Learning Agreement signatories sheet overleaf.

Learning Agreement...cont'd/

Learning Agreement	
Signatories	
University signature: <i>Chair of programme approval panel</i>	
Print name	
Stakeholder 1 signature	
Print name	Ann Cleary
Position/role with respect to candidate's programme	Head of School of Business Industries – line Manager for Helen Snider
Stakeholder 2 signature <i>Optional</i>	
Print name	
Position/role with respect to candidate's programme	
Stakeholder 3 signature <i>Optional</i>	
Print name	
Position/role with respect to candidate's programme	

Participant name:	Helen Snider
Programme:	MProf (please include the award subtitle: 'Business Practice', etc.)
Adviser name:	Julie Haddock-Millar
Date of submission:	July 2014
Project commencement date:	

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Executive Summary

Three hundred and seventy students are registered on Foundation Degree Programmes at Barnet and Southgate College, the largest general Further Education College in the north London. One hundred and third of these students are enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Business Programmes (Barnet and Southgate College, 2013).

This report has been written in the context of the changes in the Higher Educational landscape following the 2012 Educational reforms, which introduced maximum annual University fees of £9,000, enhanced the student fees for Foundation Degrees (BIS, 2012) and changed the existing relationships in the sector's partnerships.

This research aims to ascertain whether there is a future for the Foundation Degree qualification studied on an HE in FE basis and the changes that would need to be made to further enhance the qualification and extend the provision by:

- 📌 identifying how the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College is perceived by its main stakeholders
- 📌 making recommendations as to how the qualification can be enhanced to meet the needs and aspirations of the current and future stakeholders

It is envisaged that the findings and recommendations will be of most benefit to Barnet and Southgate College, and its stakeholders but will also be applicable to other Foundation Degrees hosted by FE Colleges.

The recommendations were made following the undertaking of quantitative and qualitative research. Primary research comprising a student perception questionnaire, interviews with key staff, employers and other stakeholders and focus groups with the student body were backed up by secondary research based around a literature review and the existing Barnet College student body data.

Analysing the enrolment data supplied by the Foundation Degree students, half of the students came from postcodes of disadvantage and that many of the students entered the course with non-traditional qualifications with UCAS point well below those required for entry on to a Bachelor's degree. Despite this, the majority of full-time students fulfilled their

ambition and progressed on to a top up degree and achieved at least a second class degree. The student body was appreciative of the support given to them while on the Foundation Degree that enabled them to achieve their qualifications. However, similar progression opportunities were not available for most part-time students.

The Foundation Degree also has the support of its key stakeholders and meets the ambitions for the re-skilling of the London workforce due to its practical vocational ethos.

It is thus recommended that:

- 🍷 Further Education Colleges should take control of the HE in FE agenda and if their current relationships with HEIs break down they should take steps to ensure the continuance of HE in FE. The most innovative way in doing this would be to seek self-validation of Foundation Degree Programmes that would allow the academic and theoretic disciplines necessary for this level of study to be interwoven with the students' vocational experience in a context that meets the demands of the local business context. For Barnet and Southgate College this would mean the designing of programmes to up-skill the London workforce to meet the needs of the Capital's businesses. The self-validation could also, in the longer term be extended to top-up degrees
- 🍷 Other scenarios could also be considered in the shorter term: the reintroduction of HNDs taking into account the less vocational and more static modules offered by this qualification
- 🍷 In the medium term there could be the establishment of new HEI partnerships, perhaps with those institutions not currently represented in the Capital who already have experience of Foundation Degrees, part-time students and their specific needs for top up degrees
- 🍷 There should be continuing support by the government for Foundation Degrees as a format to enable the non-traditional student to gain a level 5 qualification. Financial support should continue via the Student Loan Company
- 🍷 Special arrangements should be put in place to support part-time students with their quest for enhancing their qualifications while in the workplace by making appropriate funding and top up opportunities available to them so that they can also meet the employment challenges for London.

- ✿ The FE HE partnerships need to be reviewed so that they are fair and transparent to all stakeholders, allowing the continued studying of Foundation Degrees where these partnerships are in place.
- ✿ FE Colleges should enhance their own study facilities and financial arrangements to further extend support to their Foundation Degree students.

The Future of Foundation Degrees


1. Introduction


Barnet and Southgate College, the largest general Further Education College in the north London area, currently has in the region of 370 students registered on Foundation Degree and other Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE) Programmes. One hundred and thirty of these students are studying for a Foundation Degree in Business (Barnet and Southgate College, 2013).

This research and report has been written in the context of the changes in the Higher Educational landscape following the 2012 Educational reforms, as set out in the Education Funding Act of 2012, which introduced maximum annual University fees for undergraduate study of £9,000, which were adopted by more established universities (BIS, 2012). The reforms also greatly enhanced the fees of those studying HE in FE, and changed the relationships between existing partnerships within the sector. This research aims to ascertain whether there is a future for the Foundation Degree qualification studied on a HE in FE basis and also the changes that would need to be made to further enhance the qualification and extend the provision at Barnet and Southgate College.

The aim of this project is to review the future for Foundation Degrees in the current political and economic climate with a focus on the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College as a part of the Middlesex University consortium.

The research objectives are to:

-  Identify how the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College is perceived by its main stakeholders.

-  Make recommendations as to how the qualification can be enhanced to meet the needs and aspirations of the current and future stakeholders at Barnet and Southgate College.

The business case for undertaking a project, such as this, is that there has been a large investment by FE Colleges, including Barnet and Southgate College, in the delivery of Foundation Degrees (BIS, 2011). Since 2010, HE, including Foundation Degrees, has come

under the remit of the Department for Business Industry and Skills (BIS) whose focus is on Employer engagement in the form of Higher Apprenticeships rather than Foundation Degrees (BIS, 2014). The opening up of a market in HE has brought about a changed relationship between the HEI validators of the Foundation Degree qualifications taught in FE Colleges due to the introduction of competition into the sector: Universities and FE colleges are now in competition for students whereas previously they had their own distinct markets (BIS, 2011).

Thus, if there is no commitment to the future of the qualification by government or the Higher Educational Institution validators, there will need to be a shift in resources by the FE sector including Barnet and Southgate College. Different level 4 and 5 qualifications will need to be devised, additional partnerships between FE and HE institutions explored in order to enable FE Colleges to continue to be able to offer higher level qualifications to meet the needs of the local population, with an employability bias, for the non-traditional students who make up the majority of those studying for HE in FE qualifications.

It is envisaged that the findings and recommendations from the research project, will be of most benefit to Barnet and Southgate College, its staff, future students and their employers. However, it is also envisaged that many of the outcomes will also be applicable to other HE in FE Foundation Degrees hosted by FE Colleges. This being so, it is hoped that the results of this study will be published in the educational press and will form the basis of a discussion on the continuance of vocationally orientated HE qualifications in FE settings.

2. Literature Review

A literature review was conducted during March and April 2013 prior to the completion of the project proposal and this has been developed on an on-going basis throughout the undertaking of research for this report. A literature review was used to enable the researcher as it *“demonstrates some awareness of the current state of knowledge on the subject”* (Gill and Johnson, 2002, P21).

The initial literature review enabled the researcher to identify, and critically evaluate, the history and current thinking about Foundation Degree. This process has been extended for the final study to give breadth and currency to the final report.

Prior to 2009 a considerable amount of research was commissioned and published by the QUANGO, ‘Foundation Degrees Forward’ (FDF) set up by the then government to promote Foundation Degrees and now forms a part of the HEA archive. The change in government in 2010, brought about a change of climate. FDF was dissolved and BIS, the government Department in charge of the qualification, changed its focus to Higher Apprenticeships its own work-based level 4 and 5 qualifications. Although not actually removing its support from Foundation Degrees, BIS no longer finances their promotion although there is still government support, as noted later on, in Wales, from the Welsh Assembly, and in Northern Ireland. Due to this changed environment for Foundation Degrees, the researcher evaluated the FDF research and concluded that it no longer had relevance to the current HE in FE situation and so, along with much of the other pre-2010 research into the qualification, it has been excluded from the current review.

The exception to the above is the archive material detailing the establishment of the Foundation Degree qualification. This has been included to give a philosophical understanding of what was intended for the qualification and the basis of its vocational context. Documents that have been of particular importance to the researcher are the Dearing Report of 1997 which recommended the development of intermediate Higher Education vocational qualifications (National Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997) and the then government’s consultation paper, published in 2000, which established Foundation Degrees along the lines suggested by Dearing (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).

A search for post 2010 peer reviewed papers provided a pragmatic perspective of research into the qualification. Few specific post 2010 independent research papers on Foundation

Degrees have been published especially from the FE perspective. An interrogation of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) archive where the FDF papers are housed was undertaken. Many interesting research papers are included in this archive, including a 'Review of research literature focussed on Foundation Degrees' but its publication date of July 2009, and the retrospective nature of the document, made most of the information obsolete as far as the current study was concerned (Harvey, 2009).

Carmichael and Miller (2006) have gone some way to explain the reasons for the paucity of current research by suggesting that Educational research in FE is informed by the perspectives of the time. British government policy-making extends to statistical work a dominant position, which has had implications for the more quantitative approaches towards research which is favoured within FE.

Elliot (2005) continues in the same vein by discussing the differing roles of FE and HE lecturers. He notes that FE lecturers, even those delivering HE level qualifications focus upon their students' learning and achievement rather than upon academic research into the qualifications they offer. As the majority of Foundation Degrees are taught in FE Institutions, the researcher believes that this explanation goes some way to explain the lack of current research and why FE Institutions have not filled the research vacuum left by the demise of FDF.

Qualifications Assurance Agency (QAA)

The Qualifications Assurance Agency for Higher education (QAA) is the body currently responsible for the quality and inspection regime for HE qualifications including Foundation Degrees. It produced the Foundation Degree benchmarks, to which all validated Foundation degrees must adhere, used by the researcher in the report to define the qualification under discussion (QAA, 2010). In support of the new HE climate and the changing relationships between HE and FE partners the QAA has produced additional guidance to assist FE Colleges with achieving the self-validation of the Foundation Degree qualifications in 'The Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff' (QAA, 2013).

This document discusses the development of the concept of 'scholarly activity' within institutions teaching HE in FE and the requirement to embed scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness into Foundation Degree qualifications. This is an extension to the more traditional activity of FE lecturers and is an issue that forms a part of the discussion on the part of the researcher in connection with Barnet and Southgate College and used to inform

the report's main recommendations. The stance taken here is, that in the changing climate of HE in FE, Colleges should undertake future scenario planning to ensure that solutions can be put in place to maintain their delivery of Foundation Degrees. In these circumstances, the opportunities available to Colleges would be greatly enhanced if they had a lecturing staff ready and qualified to meet the challenges posed at the time.

This document states that, if a College is to achieve self-validation status, the QAA will require evidence of effective: governance, academic management, academic standards, quality assurance arrangements, scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of staff as well as an institutional environment which supports the delivery of HE qualifications. Emphasis is placed by the QAA on the College's ability to demonstrate that its academia encompasses a cohesive and self-critical academic community that guards the academic standards. Staff involved in HE in FE should have both relevant and current knowledge of their field of expertise as well as current research and advanced scholarship within their discipline. The aim being, for staff delivering HE in FE programmes having the ability to demonstrate an engagement with students as members of an academic community. A very different role from that required of lecturers delivering FE qualifications.

The QAA goes on to differentiate between scholarship in relation to Foundation Degrees, which is likely to have an employer-driven focus and tightly structured approach reflecting the vocational orientation of the qualification, and Bachelor's degrees where there is a greater expectation that teaching will be based upon the research/scholarship of the lecturing staff.

The inference here is that, FE Institutions applying to validate bachelor's degrees will need to demonstrate that their staff can implement the discipline of research and advanced scholarship.

This QAA paper is highly important and the advice relevant to the future routes available to FE colleges in the current market driven environment. It provides a focus for HE in FE lecturers who will need to move away from purely teaching their students to placing emphasis on their own scholarly activity in both academic and vocational formats.

Rowe and Baxter (2012) put the QAA guidance into context by discussing the processes Newcastle FE College pursued in order to achieve its own degree awarding powers. Although since writing this report it is alleged that the QAA has simplified the process, the guidance contained within this report has been used to form a part of the advice to Barnet

and Southgate College in the current report's recommendations. Joy Mercer, Director of Education Policy at the Association of Colleges, comments that the investment both in time and money to achieve self-validation was large: New College in Durham had one person working full-time on self-validation for three years before they achieved their goal. This will be evaluated in the current report's conclusions.

To balance the dearth of College based independent research it has been found that many of the current reports about Foundation Degrees are government sponsored, or generated, highlighting that this member of the Foundation Degree triptych, whether national or regional, is still a key player in Foundation Degrees. Political support, in the form of student loans and student numbers, is essential for the continuance of the qualification and its recognition by employers and higher educational institutions.

Higher Education Academy (HEA)

The Higher Education Academy (HEA), previously mentioned, sponsors and promotes research and training linked to the current HE Agenda. This includes support for those teaching on HE in FE programmes and issues affecting HE in FE practices. To promote teaching and support of learning, the HEA has sponsored 'The UK Professional Standards Framework' which HE lecturers (and those teaching HE in FE) are expected to adopt in order to gain Fellowship recognition. FE in HE practitioners will need to demonstrate: their familiarity with the core knowledge of their subject, that they are able to design and plan learning activities to teach students and support learning, and evidence to show they adhere to appropriate professional values. These are in addition to the teaching standards for the FE sector and the performance of lecturers as stipulated by Ofsted (2012). This paper has been used by the researcher to make recommendations for the training and standards for lecturers in the HE in FE field (HEA, 2011).

Other current reports issued by BIS, HEFCE, HESA and OFFA on higher education issues, due to the changing nature of HE in FE, are now relevant both to Foundation and Bachelor's degrees. Several key items have been included as a part of the Literature Review.

Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Research paper 69 in 2012 was the result of a commission by BIS from The University of Sheffield and the Institute of Education, into the current nature of HE in FE. This extensive report set out to provide BIS (when it took over the HE remit) with a full understanding of the sector by recording students', staff and managers' perceptions of studying HE in an FE as well as current numerical data. Many of the findings in this report cover questions discussed

by the student and staff focus groups in the current report and as such have been used to provide validation for the researcher's findings in the report as well as to formulate recommendations (BIS 2012a).

Research relevant to the other Foundation Degree stakeholders has also been undertaken.

Employers

Much of the literature on Foundation Degrees gives emphasis to the importance of the vocational nature of the qualification and employer involvement. Beynon et al., (2009) looked into the factors influencing the success of Foundation Degrees developed by a network of HE and FE providers in the Midlands - outside the London base of the current research. Despite this, one of the case studies is on the Metropolitan Police and their relationship with Foundation Degrees which provides relevance to the current research. The stance of the questions to Midlands employers have been used to form the basis of interviews to employers of Foundation Degree students at Barnet and Southgate College and despite the report being four years old was thus of relevance to the current study.

Literature from the Northern Irish government (2013) which comprises their own official, current and relevant advice to employers about Foundation Degrees has also been used by the researcher inform the employers' questioning for the current report. Despite the government's efforts, the Edge Foundation's, 2013 'Report on Vocational Qualifications', found that 60 percent of employers, from a variety of organisations surveyed, felt that the government did not give enough support to vocational education. The currency of this report has provided assistance to the researcher in the drafting of conclusions and recommendations in the current report.

Students

The final segment of the Foundation Degrees triptych is the students themselves. Arguments to support Colleges in their continued teaching of the qualification is provided by the Prospects careers service (2013) which notes that 60% of Foundation Degree graduates are in employment within six months of graduating and that 85% go on to top up degree. This advice has been used to validate the researcher's own findings and evaluated in the conclusions and recommendations of the report.

The students themselves are arguably the most important stakeholders for Foundation Degrees. Gibney's 2013 report is a dialogue on the findings from the 'Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey'. He notes that student opinion is reflecting the

changes in the HE sector and students are becoming more critical due to the commercialisation of the sector leading to the re-evaluation of the student experience by all HE institutions. Those appearing in the top ten, discuss how they have analysed student requirements and the student journey resulting in adjustments to their offer. Although Colleges teaching HE in FE are excluded from the survey, the issues raised have formed the basis of some of the lines of questioning of students in the students' focus groups. The future scenario here is that if FE College and HEI agreements are going to crumble, Colleges will need to look at other ways to offer HE in FE and self-validation is an option available to them. If this is the case, then Colleges will have to address the 'student experience' in order to attract new students and provide a high level of satisfaction. In a similar vein is the National Student Survey (2013) which includes data on some of the Foundation Degree courses offered by Barnet and Southgate College.

More specific to the learners' own experience of HE in FE is the whole debate about part-time students, who are already in the workplace, of which Barnet and Southgate College have a strong cohort. This HEA commissioned research by the University of Birmingham (2013) into the experiences of part-time students is thus relevant to the current study. Of particular interest is the discussion about the loan arrangements for part-time study where students were undertaking a significant amount of paid work. The report's findings about the detrimental way in which loan repayments impacted on working students, have led the government to make some concessions to these part-time students. Loans will now only become repayable once the student's course of study is completed. So despite the financial arguments contained in the report becoming obsolete, much of the information about part-time course models and students' perceptions is relevant to the current research and has been used by the researcher to validate her own findings (McLinden, 2013).

Regional Variations

Some regions of the United Kingdom are still promoting Foundation Degrees. Guidance to students by the Northern Irish government (2013) discusses the relevance of studying for a Foundation Degree to increase ones skills. However, much of the accompanying information, based upon opportunities in the Northern Irish employment market, is of little relevance to the current report. Similarly, the report by Parry (2012) on the experience of Foundation Degrees in Wales, which documents the progress made in Wales in introducing the qualification with the aid of European Social Fund finance. However, the argument in another the paper presented at the Glamorgan Conference, comparing Foundation Degrees to HNDs, has been followed through in the current research report (HEA, 2012).

London Experience

Of paramount importance to the current report is the extensive research undertaken by the Mayor's office and the Greater London Assembly into the educational requirements needed by Londoners to meet the employment vacancies and job growth opportunities in the capital (Mayor's Priorities, 2012). This theme has been continued in the reports GLA Economics 2013, OECD statistics and for Linking London (2013) as well as Ofsted's Annual Report 2012-13 for the sector (Ofsted, 2013). These sources have been used to promote the researcher's argument that FE Colleges should not only continue with their current Foundation Degrees in the future scenario of HEI links breaking down, but that they should also support the expansion of the qualification to meet the needs of London employers and provide those from postcodes of deprivation the ability to access and achieve the qualifications necessary to enable them to play a full part in the employment opportunities London has to offer.

Allied to the theme of providing opportunities to those from areas of deprivation are the recent reports funded by Million + and the University Alliance (2013) which focussed on widening participation linked to student funding. These have been used to give credence to the views made on the issues by focus groups of college students.

The Literature Review has been critically evaluated and used to support and provide substance to the arguments and themes put forward by the researcher when formulating her arguments leading to the final recommendations.

3. Research Methods

The research has been carried out by a practitioner-researcher or an 'insider-researcher', who is described by Brannick and Coghlan (2007) as a being researcher who undertakes research in their own organisation while also being a complete member of that organisation. This means that the researcher has a pre-understanding of the research topic and environment, has access to organisational data and will continue with their appointed role once the research is completed. Valid research needs to demonstrate intellectual rigour and objectivity. Where the researcher has an emotional stake in the research question and outcomes, it is argued that this cannot be maintained. However, this needs to be balanced against the researcher's organisational knowledge, access to data and relevant staff members and views and their own background knowledge of the issues being researched. The researcher has aimed to deliver a policy related research project which is both fit for purpose and which sets out to achieve the highest level of objectivity despite researching within her own department and organisation. The aim throughout has been for the researcher to balance any bias from the interviews and focus group with the empirical data from College student data archives.

Research Paradigm

The term 'paradigm' is used in the social sciences as a way of examining social phenomena so that an understanding can be gained and explanations attempted (Saunders et al., 2012). In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the research problem, as an insider researcher, the research was conducted around the paradigm of an insider researcher conducting fit for purpose, policy related research within a work environment.

Research Design

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used within the research design so as to enable the researcher to better understand the concept being tested or explored. Initially, the term triangulation was used to describe the bringing together of data from a mixture of methodologies to study one phenomenon. The suggestion was that any bias inherent in the data sources would be neutralised when used in conjunction with other data sources (Jick, 1979). However, more recent research suggests that, for reasons of development, the use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, where the first method is used sequentially to help inform the second method and to add scope and breadth to a study, enables the researcher to better understand the concept being tested or explored. Greene et al (1989) suggest five purposes for combining methods in a single study

and reinforce the acceptability of the dual paradigm approach in social research (Creswell, 2004).

Primary research

In order to illicit the views of the main stakeholder of the Foundation Degree in Business, the students, a two page questionnaire was sent to students completing the Foundation Degree in business (both full-time and part-time) on 1 August, 2013. A sample of 60 students (the cohort of 43 students who had completed the full-time Foundation Degree in Business qualification at the June 2013 Examination Board and the 17 part-time students) was surveyed by questionnaire. These students were selected due to their current knowledge of the Foundation Degree and the currency of the potential comments they may have to make about the qualification. The self-completed questionnaire focussed on the student's perceptions of the qualification and suggestions for improvement (see Appendix A). The self completed questionnaire was drawn up with a format using a variety open questions, which allowed the respondents to give full answers in their own words, and closed questions which would allow the responses to be analysed as quantitative data (Denscombe, 2007). Seale (2012) suggests that questionnaires of this type are particularly suited to instances where relatively few questions needed to be asked and that they are concepts that would be clear and simple in their meaning and replies.

Although response rates for questionnaires of this type are generally thought to be low (Oppenheim,1998), it was hoped that responses to this questionnaire would be in the league of 75 percent the minimum response rate for postal questionnaires thought acceptable to remove bias from respondents responses (Cook, Dickinson and Eccles, 2009). In order to attempt to achieve these levels of response, a sample of subjects with an interest in the research and motivated to complete the questionnaire was compiled: two of the main factors suggested by Seale (2012) to increase response rates. In addition, a copy of the questionnaire was posted to the student's home address, accompanied by: a personalised covering letter explaining the nature of the research, why it was being conducted and a guarantee of confidentiality of all comments made; details of a book token prize draw for those returning completed questionnaires and a reply-paid envelope addressed to the researcher at the college.

A follow up copy of the questionnaire was sent to the same cohort's personal e-mail accounts a week later to aid response rates. All said to be beneficial for boosting response rates (Oppenheim, 1998).

Unfortunately, responses were only received from six of the sixty students surveyed. Due to other commitments, the researcher was not able to follow up students' responses any further with telephone interviews. However, it has been suggested by Edwards, et al. 2009 that such a course of action has no overall impact upon response rates.

It was not felt acceptable to base the report on so few responses in so far as low response rates lead to bias in the reporting of findings. So, responses to the questionnaire were used to develop the format of questions to be put to student focus groups composed of current students studying across the Foundation Degree in Business Programme during the 2013-2014 academic year. This was thought an appropriate use of data and resources as, to get the best out of a survey, questions need to be pre-tested and the initial survey of students was used to this effect (Saunders, et al., 2012).

Focus Groups were conducted with students currently enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Business programme (both full and part-time) at Barnet and Southgate College. A focus group is essentially a group interview where the topic is clearly defined enabling interactive discussion between participants (Carson et al., 2001). To lead the direction of the focus groups, the 'future scenario' approach (Saunders, et al., 2012) was adopted in order to obtain students' preferences for the future of HE in FE and adaptations that they felt should be made to improve the Foundation Degree taught at the College.

In all, three focus groups, with between six and nine participants, were conducted with cohorts of Foundation Degree students from across the programme using a purposive sample, which is said by Denscombe (2007) to be most likely to produce valuable data: firstly with the student representatives across the Foundation Degree in Business (in December 2013) and then with cohorts of year 1 and year 2 and part-time students during the spring term of 2014. Questions from the original student survey were put to each of the focus groups along the lines of those asked in the original student survey and to illicit views to a variety of 'future scenarios' relevant to the Foundation Degree programme (see Appendix J).

An informal group discussion was held with the Foundation Degree Business Course Team was also held in December 2013 to discuss the current programme, the future scenario for Foundation Degrees and the way forward for delivering the qualification at Barnet and Southgate College.

The focus group participants were reminded prior to the meeting that the individual views expressed should remain confidential to the focus group and that no participants' names would be included in the final report, and this has been adhered to (see Appendix J).

The proceedings of the focus groups were transcribed by the researcher and the recurrent themes used to form the findings for the report. These were evaluated in the conclusions and brought forward, where appropriate, as the report's recommendations.

A series of one-to-one meetings was held with current contributors to the debate about the future of the Foundation Degree in Business. One to one interviews, described as a "purposeful discussion between two people", (Kahn and Cannell, 1957) were used to gather valid and reliable data relevant on the subject under discussion: the perception and future of Foundation Degrees by the interviewee, the appropriateness of the qualification and suggestions for improvement. A future scenarios perspective was followed by the researcher and the questions posed "what if..." was asked in order that the interviewees' outcomes were focussed upon how they perceived the future for the qualification. The future scenario is a tool for collecting, learning, reframing perceptions and preserving uncertainty when the latter is pervasive (Schoemaker, 1993) (see Appendix B for interview scenarios).

These were unstructured interviews where the researcher had no predetermined set of questions and the interviewee is given the opportunity to talk freely about events, behaviour and beliefs in relation to the topic area, and it is the interviewee who guides the conduct of the interview (Easterby-Smith, 2002) although there were a series of prompts used by the interviewer (see Appendix B). See below Figure 1 below for Interview List.

Figure 1 Interview List

Interviewee	Context	Date
External Examiner for the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College) and currently a senior lecturer in business at Northampton University with experiences of both externally examining and teaching Foundation Degree and HND level students	HE perspective of HE in FE and wide knowledge of level 4 and 5 Business programmes	June 2013
Angela Maguire formerly of Foundation Degrees Forward, an IQER panel member, and currently working for QAA, who has a wealth of knowledge on Foundation Degrees, current insights, FDF, other Institutions offering HE in FE.	A well-known spokesperson and writer on Foundation Degrees	April 2013
Four major employers local to Barnet and Southgate College, who also provide Internship placements to Foundation Degree in Business students:	Jewish Care Waitrose North Finchley Retail Trust Personal Care Bank	April 2013 May 2013 November 2013 May 2013
Head of Department at Barnet and Southgate College who line manages one the former Foundation Degree students	To achieve a flavour of the Importance placed by Barnet and Southgate College on up-skilling its staff	March 2013
An interview with a BIS Civil Servant	Spokesperson for Foundation Degrees	April 2013
A telephone interview with Sue Betts, Director of LLUK	A full discussion about the role of LLUK, the London context and the plight of part-time HE in FE students	April 2013
Head of HE at Barnet and Southgate College throughout the course of the research and finally in May 2014,	An ongoing series of interviews to discuss the developments in FE in HE	Throughout the research Final interview May 2014
Former curriculum manager with line management responsibilities for the Foundation Degree in Business and Foundation Degree Teaching Team	An ongoing series of interviews to discuss the developments in FE in HE	Throughout the research Final interview May 2014

Generalisability, Reliability and Validity

Generalisability is the extent to which the findings of a research study are applicable to other settings (Saunders et al 2012, p671). For the current study the student sample, focus groups and interviews all focus around the main stakeholders of the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College which, by definition, is not a representative sample of the stakeholders for all Foundation Degrees. This could thus be implied to lead to unrepresentative findings. However, Bryman (1998, p90) states that “within a case study a wide range of different people and activities are invariably examined so that the contrast with survey samples is not as acute as it appears at first glance”. Thus it is suggested that the findings for the current research would be applicable to other HE in FE Foundation Degree Programmes.

Reliability is the extent to which raw data techniques yield consistent findings and whether other researchers would draw similar conclusions (Saunders, et al. 2012). Although once again many of the findings from the focus groups and student questionnaire are specific to Barnet and Southgate College, some of the findings have been backed up by other quantitative research. The Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey (2014) shows that students value: employability embedded into to their degrees, major library refurbishments and creative of new study spaces and factors will increase a university’s placement in the rankings over time. These are facilities considered by the Barnet and Southgate College students as being important and in need of further development.

Validity is the extent to which data collection methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure (Saunders et al. 2012). Throughout the research project the researcher has endeavoured to use primary research methods and techniques that are valid and appropriate to obtain answers to her research questions and the aims and meet the objectives to the report as detailed above.

Secondary Research

In September 2013, a questionnaire (see Appendix C for questionnaire and analysis) was completed by all new Foundation Degree Business students starting the course (60 students in all). The data collected by this means was then analysed to ascertain the student profile for the foundation degree in Business in relation to: age, previous qualifications, nationality, ethnic background and address. This was compared with HEFCE's data for HE institutions as a whole (HEFCE).

From this data and that captured by the main student enrolment form for Barnet and Southgate College, entry qualifications, addresses and home postal code, were extrapolated. This data was then compared with that from Higher education Funding Council (HEFCE) and High Education (HESA) to provide information on the Barnet and Southgate College's level of entry qualifications and their perceived level of deprivation compared with the HEFCE and HESA norms. In addition to this, the Barnet and Southgate student responses to the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS) were reviewed. Alternative level 4 qualifications and top up degrees were researched using the NCC and Pearson's Edexcel websites.

In addition there was a Literature Reviews as discussed above.

4. Findings

Foundation Degrees were introduced into UK educational institutions following a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) Consultation Paper on Foundation Degrees published in February 2000. This aimed to implement the findings of the 1997 Dearing National Enquiry into Higher Education (HE) which recommended the development of intermediate Higher Education qualifications. The framework for this new qualification was summarised as having the key performance criteria of:

- A two year full-time course (with a part-time option)
- The development of work-based skills
- An articulation agreement so that on completion of the qualification there was a guaranteed progression to the third year of an Honours Degree
- Encouraging more people to extend their participation in formal education (Foundation Degree Task Force Report, 2004).

4.1 Enrolment Data

Analysing the enrolment data supplied by the Foundation Degree students in September 2011, 2012 and September 2013, it is noted that the numbers of full time students coming from postcodes pertaining to areas of deprivation (see Appendix D) has risen from a third to a half over the two year intake. This is in line with most other Colleges with HE in FE who pride themselves that they are meeting the needs of under-represented or disadvantaged students in their community or workplace by offering HE provision and attracting and retaining students on their programmes (AoC, 2013).

It is acknowledged by the government that such students have additional needs and additional funding is received by the College for the support of these students. OFSTED (although not the inspection regime for HE qualifications) are very keen for the college to track and support these students where past underperformance is recognised. Similarly for Higher Education, Student Opportunity Funding, the indirect public investment flowing through the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) agreements form an ecosystem which supports access to higher education (Million +, 2013). This fund is currently just 2 per cent of the £13bn HE budget, yet it is the only funding stream awarded to institutions based on the genuine added cost of recruiting and retaining these high cost students.(University Alliance, 2014). The implication here is that the College is expected to employ and utilise additional resources to enable these students, who are qualified by ability and attainment, to pursue, and succeed in, higher education.

Further analysis of the data recording the students' recorded qualifications on entry to the Foundation Degree in Business (see Appendix C for HESA questionnaire) shows many students have non-traditional qualifications (qualifications other than the traditional 3 'A' level entry requirement for university) see Figure 3 below. A similar range of qualifications was recorded for students studying on a part-time basis who were all currently employed and attend college on a one afternoon and evening per week basis to fit in with their work commitments. Thus the entry requirements for the Foundation Degree, currently 100 UCAS points and at least a GCSE grade D in Maths and English, are considerably below those for entry on to a Bachelor's Degree in the Business School at Middlesex University, advertised as being 260 UCAS points with at least a Grade C in English and Maths (Middlesex, 2014).

Figure 2 – 2013 Year 1 student cohort qualifications on entry data

Qualification	Student Numbers	Comment
BTec Certificate or Diploma	19	Young UK entrants to the programme
2 'A' levels	6	Academic 'A' levels at grades C and below
Overseas Level 3 qualification	8	One student with a Baccalaureate
Other UK level 3 qualifications: NVQ, GNVQ, Access	25	These were usually more mature students returning to study
Mature students with level 2 qualifications but extensive work experience	2	Students had been working in a variety of junior managerial office based jobs

There has been a change in the recruitment profile of students since 2011 (the year prior to the hike to £9,000 university fees) when 70 per cent of the full-time cohort had originally applied to Middlesex, or another University, to study on a Bachelor's degree. Due to fierce competition for places in 2011, many students who had failed to secure a University place, due to too few UCAS points were referred, by the University, to the Foundation Degree. Thus, initially these students came to Barnet and Southgate to study without the loyalty of students who had applied directly to the College but were also relieved that they could continue with their studies after leaving school. These students entered the Foundation Degree with a higher qualifications on entry profile than those in subsequent years (55 per cent had 150 plus UCAS points).

In subsequent years, the majority of students had applied directly to Barnet and Southgate College, either through UCAS or directly to the College as progressing current students or direct new applicants a process encouraged by HEFCE (AoC, 2013). There is no data as yet to relating to the progression of these students

An analysis of entry qualifications is almost meaningless unless the student outcomes are also analysed. Matching student entry qualifications with exit qualifications (in this case the students' profile on completion of the Foundation Degree in June 2013) it was found that 30 per cent of those with 100 – 150 UCAS points on entry achieved a Merit profile for their Foundation Degree. This equates to the student achieving at least 6 merits for the 8 modules studied in the second year of the Foundation Degree. This level of achievement currently enables students to progress to year three of a top up degree at the validating university – Middlesex University Business School. There is only anecdotal evidence for students final bachelor's degree profile: however, there are records of many students achieving first class or upper second class honours degrees and accolades being passed on to the lecturing team at Barnet and Southgate College "Without the preparation provided for me by the Foundation Degree, I doubt I would have been able to attain a First Class Honours Degree at Middlesex University" (Chris Francis, 2014, see Appendix I).

Figure 3 Destination Data for students completing Foundation Degree in Business (full-time completers 37 students)

Destination	Student Numbers	Comment
Top up Degree	34 (92%)	All students progressing to a top up programme
Top up Degree at Middlesex University	31 (84%)	All students who progress on to Middlesex University
Students progressing to Year 3 of a Top up Degree at Middlesex University	8 (21%)	This requires students to achieve a 6 Merits profile for Year 2 of their course
Students progressing to Year 2 of a Top up Degree at Middlesex University	23 (62%)	This number is rather over-represented as students wishing to progress to a finance course can only have Year 2 entry open to them

4.2 Focus Groups

The outcomes from the focus group recorded the students' delight to have been offered a place to study on an HE course (although they might not have secured their first choice of course at their favoured HE institution). They acknowledged the fact that they did not, in

most cases, have traditional University entry qualifications, and because of this they had limited options to extend their pre-entry qualifications. Despite this, students were, in general, appreciative of the opportunities offered to them to study on a HE course.

In support of the programme they were studying upon, the students were particularly appreciative of what they perceived to be, the excellent level of the teaching, the supportive lecturing team, the annually fixed timetable and the ability to progress on to a Bachelor's Degree on completion of the Foundation Degree.

When focus groups were led to discussion about their intentions for further study following the completion of the foundation degree, the overwhelming majority expressed an interest in completing a top up degree and achieving a Bachelor's degree qualification. Barnet and Southgate College currently hold an articulation arrangement with their validating university which allows students to progress on to the final year of a suitable Business School Degree on the achievement of the six merit grades in the final year of their course.

The younger students in the student cohort (19-21 year olds) very much wanted to move on from Barnet and Southgate College and progress to a University (Middlesex University in the majority of cases) to achieve their top up degree. The six merit requirement to enter year 3 of a programme was perceived to be motivational for the students to do well on their Foundation Degree. These students very much wanted to sample 'real university life' and perhaps join friends who were already studying at the institution. The £9,000pa cost of this route did not appear to be a deterrent for this course of action for this group of students.

The future scenario for these students was for the College to continue offering HE courses. These would need to have lower entry qualifications than those required by a university, to give students with fewer UCAS points the opportunity to study on level 4 and 5 programmes. The higher levels of lecturer contact, in a supportive learning environment, that assisted students to achieve their qualification and be able to progress on to a University top up course to complete a Bachelor's degree, was seen as particularly important.

The part-time students in employment and the more mature students with family responsibilities studying on full-time programmes, had similar sentiments about the need for them to be studying on a supportive programme. They also had aspirations for continuing with their studies and achieving a Bachelor's degree. However, the institution offering them their top up opportunities was of less importance to these students. They placed greater importance on more affordable fees, a supportive lecturing staff and a secure timetable for

the academic year. They saw that this would enable them to be able to plan their employment and home responsibilities around their commitments at college: of special mention was the fixed day time table so that students knew the days, and usually the times, that they would be in college at the beginning of the academic year. Students felt that the attitude voiced by some academic institutions that if they valued their future qualification they would fit their employment and other commitments around their course timetable (which might be for two or three hourly slots across three days a week) as being unhelpful and not acceptable to most employers.

Barnet and Southgate College has a set afternoon and evening for its part-time programme which can be communicated to employers at the beginning of the academic year and set days for its full-time programmes so that those with family and work responsibilities can book their child care accordingly (Barnet and Southgate College, 2013).

The £9,000 fee regime (charged by the University) for top up degrees was an issue for part-time students and those currently undertaking a considerable amount of paid work. These students are eligible for fee loans from the Student Finance Company but, due to household commitments, were worried about their ability to repay the loan following the completion of the course (despite the favourable interest rates charged). This means that some part-time students who take a cut in hours to enable them to attend classes (and reduced wages as a result) face a continued reduction in their take home pay due to repayments of their student loan in an economic climate of few wage rises (SFE, 2013). Such financial drains are untenable for some part-time students.

The future scenario that received overwhelming support from the part-time and more mature groups of students that was for Barnet and Southgate College not only to continue providing part-time HE courses for those currently at work but also to pursue additional progression routes to meet the employment and family commitments of these students. Of particular interest, were progression opportunities that would not involve these students moving to a new institution and away from the studying environment and supportive academic staff with whom they were familiar. Of almost equal importance was the requirement for a fixed timetable and a more affordable price for the top up degree.

The future scenario for Barnet and Southgate College to offer its own top up degrees is a reflection upon current limited progression opportunities for part-time students who are studying and working at the same time. Middlesex University does not currently have a part-time top-up degree or an evening programme tailored to the needs to students who

have full-time jobs, along the lines of that offered by Barnet and Southgate College. Students wishing to progress to a Bachelor's degree therefore have to fit into the full-time study programme. This means that in order for employed students to fulfil their work commitments, they can frequently only complete half the number of modules for a full top-up degree in one academic year. So, for students without the merit profile on their Foundation Degree, this means that they would have two more years of study to achieve a Bachelor's degree or four years part-time, meaning that they will have spent between six and a half years and seven years to achieve a degree level qualification. This is more than double that of full-time students starting full time at university, to complete a similar qualification. HEFCE (2014.a) has voiced its disquiet about the drop by almost 50 per cent since 2011 of students studying part-time and it is considered that much of the reduction is due to Universities finding full-time programmes easier to administer, the loan repayment regime for part-time students and the rise in part-time fees.

4.3 Higher National Diplomas

The current External Examiner for the Foundation Degree at Barnet and Southgate College is a lecturer in Business at Northampton University with particular experience of level 4 and 5 Foundation Degree and HND Business programmes. His annual External Examiner's Report (see Appendix E) following attendance at the Examination Board, sampling students' work and their achievements and meeting with both the Lecturing and student body, confirms that the Foundation Degree at Barnet and Southgate College is a well run programme and meets the needs and expectations of students. The student attainment is of a quality that is appropriate for qualifications of this nature elsewhere in the country.

He said that some universities had concerns about the quality of the HE in FE provision being offered by some FE Colleges. This had prompted universities, such as his own, to bring back the qualification into the university fold. To differentiate between what had been offered by the FE College, and their own qualification, the university had returned to offering the HND in Business. To improve the currency of this qualification, some modules had been rewritten to meet the current needs of the modern business student and the university's own top-up degrees. This is allowed by Edexcel/Pearson if institutions follow the 'Meeting Local Needs' agenda and get specific authority to make changes to optional units (HND, 2014).

HND qualifications are validated by Edexcel/Pearson and Institutions are granted the right to teach the qualification, made up of usually 16 pre-written modules, to be taught over two years. They do not have to go through the lengthy validation procedures with a University or

in their own right (in the case of Colleges with self-validation rights) unlike most Foundation Degrees. The annual quality check is made by Edexcel/Pearson in the form of a visit by an external examiner, similar to that described above for the Foundation Degree. Many College managements have seen HND qualifications as being a way of continuing to offer HE in FE qualifications if relationships with partner universities soured following the 2012 changes (HND, 2014).

Other advantages of the HND qualification are that students completing their studies after one year can achieve a HNC certificate (if they have completed the correct modules) whereas with Foundation Degrees, certification is after two years (or longer if the qualification is being studied on a part-time basis) (DfEE, 2000).

There has been a resurgence of interest in HND qualifications across London, particularly in the Engineering field (Andrew Jones, Linking London 9 April 2013) and also in privately funded colleges (Guardian, 19 November 2013) despite the fact that students are only entitled to fee loans of £6,000 if studying at these institutions – it being expected that the student themselves will need to make up, from their own resources, the rest of the fees charged.

Employment and education are integrally linked in the discussion on the future of Foundation Degrees and the original performance criteria for the qualification was increased work-based skills and alliance with the HND qualification could sever this close link for students. At Barnet and Southgate College, Foundation Degree in Business students currently undertake a two week work shadowing placement in year one of the course so that they can observe the work of a manager, how a business operates and how staff are recruited. During their second year, students undertake an Internship where they work in a company, acting as a 'consultant' in order to research the causes of a business problem and present to the employer, possible ways of solving it. The outcome of this activity is a 5,000 word management report for their employer which is also formally presented in a 20 minute presentation to the employer and college. This challenging part of the Foundation Degree (worth two modules and an eighth of the programme) could be lost if HNDs replaced the qualification as the research project component does not have the internship requirement demanded by the Foundation Degree (HND, 2014).

4.4 Student Fees and Numbers

The cohort of students entering HE in September 2012 were subjected to, in many cases, a three fold rise in tuition fees. The majority of universities, particularly those in the London

region, increased their fees to the government imposed £9,000 ceiling. All HEIs currently hold access agreements allowing them to charge the maximum fees (OFFA, 2014). The ultimate aim was to create a market in HE: traditional universities tended to charge the maximum fee (while FE institutions and the private colleges offering Foundation Degrees and HND qualifications charging competitively lower fees (usually between £5,000 and £6,000)). Thus a price differential between institutions and courses was opened up by BIS as a part of its quest to open up competition in the sector (AoC, 2013). Private providers gained 'designated status' which meant that their students became eligible for government backed student fee loans, for students studying for HND qualifications (SFE,13.a) putting them on a par with Further Education Colleges who were also eligible for government funding.

In February 2014, HEFCE issued a grant letter from BIS (HEFCE, 2014) showing that the government had reviewed its policy on student numbers for the 2014-2015 academic year and increased HE numbers by up to 30,000 using a bidding process to reallocate extra places..

However, from the 2015-2016 academic year, number controls will be removed entirely from all HE Institutions (in both the public and private sectors) (HEFCE, 2014). This is in the light of BIS's own financial projections that estimate a lower percentage of graduates will actually repay their student loans, due to the size of the loans being recorded, and the reduction in graduate salaries. There is now considerable concern about the viability of the student loan policy. David Willets (the then Minister for Universities and Science) revealed that the rates of non-repayment of student loans were near the point at which experts believe tripling tuition fees will add nothing to the Treasury coffers and that new official forecasts suggest write-off costs have reached 45 per cent of the £10bn in student loans made each year (Guardian, 21 March 2014).

To maintain the market in higher education, BIS has a current policy that 'Better information will enable students to make informed choices about where to study'. It is recognised that there is a need for a variety of institutions whose functions differ, to provide appropriate educational opportunities and to supply national needs for educated workers. The scrapping of student numbers might bring about more of a true market in HE as popular higher education courses, at popular institutions (the Russell Group Universities), would be able to expand and allow new providers, including those who offer different models of HE, to enter the market. There is an expectation that a number of predominantly for profit, private providers (owned by hedge funds and global media corporations) will enter the HE market

and break the Universities' cartel in HE. In 2011-2012, BIS estimate that 160,000 HE learners (of whom 50 per cent were UK domiciled) were studying in 674 privately funded HE institutions; one third of whom were specialist business, management, accountancy, law and IT providers (BIS, 2013). This group will expand in number with the entry of the large players to the scene.

For Further Education colleges, the loss of HE student numbers would have considerable financial implications. There is the obvious loss of the student income and prestige brought in by HE students which comes at a time when the government is also reducing support to FE Colleges for their 16-18 year old students and adult learners.

4.5 London perspective

Barnet and Southgate College is situated in the Boroughs of Barnet and Enfield in the most northerly point of the Greater London area. It is thus in a pivotal position to prepare students for the employment opportunities available across the London conurbation but its courses must fit the employment requirements and needs of London. This has been stressed in the 2012-2013 Ofsted Annual Report for the sector (Ofsted, 2013). Similar themes are have been emphasised by Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, in his priorities for his second term of office. "Education is one of the most important elements for the future of success of London and to a strong education system is vital to developing jobs and growth which is the main propriety of the mayor's second term" (Mayor of London's Response, 2012, p2)

The Mayor's priorities for the city note that London is one of the best places in the world in which to do business and that the GLA are doing all they can to ensure it stays that way by promoting London as a prime location to visit, learn and invest in. The GLA works to champion the City at home and abroad, support the capital's entrepreneurs, nurture business large and small and help Londoners find and access crucial jobs and training opportunities (GLA, 2013)

There is also a commitment to ensure that "Londoners make the most of their innate talent and flair so that they make London's economy even more productive and successful and we want all Londoners to have the opportunity to find fulfilling jobs that also mean ensuring the conditional are right for the businesses that employ them and flourish", Mayor of London (Spatial Development Plan for London, 2009).

Figure 4 – London Employment Profile

Profile	Number or Percentage of Londoners	Comment
London employees with a degree level qualification (GLA Economics, 2013)	45%	Financial and Business sectors account for most of employees with this level of qualification
UK nationals as a proportion of workers with a degree level qualification (GLA Economics, 2013)	80%	The remaining 20 per cent come largely from Australia, Nigeria, South Africa and US
Workers (2008) with level 4 qualifications were employed in real estate, marketing and business activity (GLA Economics, 2013)	400,000 UK nationals	This is 85 per cent of this sector's London workforce
Workers (2008), with level 4 qualifications were employed in financial sector (GLA Economics, 2013)	200,000 UK nationals	This is 87 per cent of this sector's London workforce
Percentage of UK 15-19 year olds in education (OECD 2012)	71%	Compared with EU average of 82%
Percentage of UK 20-29 year olds in education (OECD 2012)	17%	Compared with EU average of 25%

Looking at the OECD data, if this situation persists, it is likely that the London economy will become even more reliant on highly skilled migrants (OECD, 2012).

The above supported by Angela Maguire, writing as the then London Region Co-ordinator of Foundation Degree Forward (issue 24 June 2011 pp69-70) suggesting that London is a City of contrasts and complexities, ranging from the wealth of the City to the deprivation of Tower Hamlets. FDF worked with a network of stakeholders with a view to encouraging the sharing of good practice and developing innovative curriculum that meets the workforce development needs of the capital. London now has the largest student base in the UK and the highest proportion of graduates. However, it also has problems with unemployment and lack of skills. London has significant income polarisation – 28 percent of workers in the highest quintile and 25 per cent in the lowest quintile due to the loss of middle income jobs during 1990s. This trend was more pronounced in London than elsewhere where 36 per cent of children grow up in low income families (London Child Poverty Alliance, 2014).

High levels of skills and qualifications become increasingly important to succeed in the London jobs market and low income children significantly underperform compared with their peers (40 per cent in low income families).

London's employers, if they are unable to find skills amongst London's population, look to migrants to fill jobs. However, employers would clearly benefit from being able to employ suitably qualified local residents. As such to raise the educational attainment amongst London's young people, particularly those from low income background is clearly important. It would both help London's economy and help alleviate some of the social problems that exist in London's deprived neighbourhoods.

It is projected that 50 per cent of employees in London will have a degree by 2020. Currently fifty five percent of 25-29 year olds working in London have a degree level qualification – 45% across all age ranges. More importantly 88 per cent of those with degree level qualifications are in work compared with only 42% of those with no qualifications (ONS, 2013).

There is a mismatch between the demands from employers for employees with high level qualifications and the significant numbers of Londoners who have relatively low level or no qualifications all – Londoners living in private sector housing have 80 per cent employment rates compared to those in public sector housing who have employment rates of only 50 per cent. Thirty one per cent of Children from inner London backgrounds live in non-working households compared with 19 per cent from outer London Households and 16% from the UK as a whole.

Any policies that can successfully raise educational standards of children from disadvantaged backgrounds would appear to have potential benefits for London – a better trained work force for London employers and address social problems (ONS, 2012).

Currently a higher proportion of London's children go on to Further and Higher Education (and GCSE grades are better than elsewhere in the country), but 10 per cent of full-time employees earn less than the living wage of £7.66 per hour (London Skills and Employment Board, 2013).

The QUANGO, Linking London, has, as its main objective, the increasing of progression opportunities for learners across London. Over the past five years it has helped to ensure that those in London can access the qualifications they need by increasing the numbers of

potential progression routes for students. In the last five years £700,000 has been committed to develop new Foundation Degrees and short courses (Linking London, 2013). Its current focus is on the movement of London students from non-traditional level 3 courses (Btecs) into level 4 qualifications (of which Foundation Degrees could be one option). It works with its HE partner's to promote these.

4.6. Part-time Study

Despite the need for a more skilled workforce, particularly in the London region, between 2010 and 2012 overall participation in higher education by part-time students fell by over 40 per cent when annual fees were hiked to a maximum of £9,000 (HEFCE, 2012). The number of HE in FE part-time students fell by 20 per cent over the same period. HEFCE sees that this drop in student numbers needs "immediate attention" and announced plans to set up an "observatory" to monitor issues such as these. It is of note that disadvantaged students are more than twice as likely to study part-time as the most advantaged students. Part-time students are also more reluctant to take on student loans.

Other students may not be eligible for support by subsidised loans if they are studying for a degree at the same level as one they already hold – although the subject content might be very different. David Hughes, Director of NIACE, (2013) explained that HE institutions were retreating from providing part-time courses in favour of easier to administer full-time programmes: lack of availability contributed to the impression of a lack of demand. He said that the government needs to make part-time courses a priority to preserve access to learning. The government needs to say this is really important so that universities and colleges take it seriously as part of their core mission. Overall HE in FE increased by 6 per cent with student numbers rising to 50,000. (TES, 22 March 2013 pp24-25)

Paul Stanistreet, NIACE's policy lead on higher education, added that, "The dramatic slump in part-time figures is of particular concern to NIACE as the vast majority of part-time students are mature, with disproportionately high numbers from less advantaged and non-traditional backgrounds." He added that the overall decline in adult recruitment "was bad news for social mobility, for the economy and for the health and diversity of our democracy." It made no sense in a society with an ageing population and a need to provide opportunities for all of its population to retrain, reskill and rethink at critical moments throughout their lives. The government needs to look carefully at the impact the rise in part-time fees has had on recruitment of part-time mature students, despite the extension of tuition fee (NIACE, 2013).

4.7 Employer Engagement

A report by the Edge Foundation for City and Guilds found that 60 percent of the 1,005 employers from a variety of organisations surveyed on-line in September and October 2013 did not feel that the government gave enough support to vocational education. Figure 5 below indicates the employers' responses (Edge Foundation, 2013).

Figure 5 Edge Foundation Responses

Percentage response Agreed or strongly agreed	Question responded to
39 per cent strongly agreed	that young people needed to be made more aware of options available to them to progress to their chosen career
38 per cent agreed	that young people should be given more exposure to the work of work
35 per cent agreed	that there needed to be a better alternative to 'A' levels for young people who favour practical learning
29 per cent strongly agreed	that there needed to be an increase in the number and range of vocational qualifications and
23 per cent, agreed	vocational qualifications were essential for improving the skills of young people (Foundation Degrees, although not mentioned as an example, would fit this criteria)

These findings are similar to those expressed at the meetings with employers linked to the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College. There was a general consensus that, although the internship programme put pressure on the employer (who had to make available appropriate support for the student), and the student themselves (who had to, in many cases, juggle the commitment to the employer and the research for the internship project, with the rigors of academic study and home and work commitments), young people benefited from being subjected to the workplace for a part of their course. There was a general appreciation of the benefits that with their linkage to the workplace, Foundation Degrees offered; a factor that was absent from most other HE qualifications.

With the part-time Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College, the workplace link is even stronger as these students are working and studying at the same time. Many aspects of their assessed work uses their own workplace as a case study upon which to apply and relate theory. Their final consultancy project is based on their own workplace, where they have ongoing employment, rather than on an internship. Although statistical data is not available, anecdotal evidence suggests that part-time students completing a Foundation Degree find workplace promotion, not previously on offer, is

available to them. This is also true of the College's own staff members studying on the programme: one of whom is now Course Leader of an HNC in Beauty following completion of the course.

4.8 Links with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

The bringing about of a market in HE following the changes in funding in 2012, has encouraged changed relationships between in the FE Colleges and their University validators. Instead of working together to recruit and progress students, these two institutions, are competing for students to fill their allocated student numbers. In the climate of falling student applications, as the junior partner in this relationship, FE colleges are vulnerable to their senior partners' reviews of their provision and power to force changes. These are particularly prevalent in instances where the HEI wishes to change its own public perception (HEFCE, 2014).

Discussions are taking place within universities validating Foundation Degree programmes as to whether it would be more profitable for them to recruit the HE in FE students directly on to their own programmes rather than to continue the relationship with FE Colleges, as has been expressed by the Foundation Degree's own External Examiner at his institution. As HE institutions change their market position, some have severed their links with FE Colleges while others are looking for successful HE in FE Foundation Degree programmes to which they can align themselves in order to enhance the profile of their own institution and establish a presence in other parts of the UK.

Greg Wade, Policy Advisor at Universities UK, suggested universities "universities are still committed to their partnerships" (Matthews, 2011). But due to the pressure on student numbers and changes at HE institutions these original hopes may not be the current reality.

4.9 Validation of Programmes

Some FE Colleges have taken the route of gaining the rights to be able to award Foundation Degrees in their own right, Joy Mercer, Director of Education Policy at the Association of Colleges, and spokesperson from New College Durham, in supporting this action said that this would give FE colleges a sense of control as they would not longer have to rely on external course validation (Matthews, 2011). This was supported by BIS, when interviewed, with the suggestion that applying for self-validation of Foundation Degrees could be the way forward for FE institutions who were struggling with their changing relationships with their HE partners.

Mercer, acknowledges that there were downsides to self-validation by FE colleges, in so far that it had taken New College Durham over three years and a dedicated full-time staff member to achieve this status. Many FE colleges do not have the resources for this sort of commitment to achieve self-validation status, so it is hoped that the new QAA guidance, will streamline and reduce the cost of the procedures.

However, it is noted from the interviews with the Head of HE at Barnet and Southgate, that self-validation of Foundation Degrees would allow Further Education Colleges to seize the momentum in HE in FE and validate their own exciting new Foundation Degree programmes. These could encompass a three dimensional qualification embedding the academic and theoretical learning, with the students' own vocational experiences, to meet the needs of local employers (in the Case of Barnet and Southgate College with needs of London's businesses and aligning itself with the Mayor's Agenda for London). Self-validation would remove the threats placed by external forces, validating HEIs and Edexcel, upon College based Foundation Degrees, enhance the independence of FE Colleges and improve the relevance of qualifications.

4.10 Scholarship and Teaching

To enable FE colleges to become further embedded in delivering and validating their own Level 4 and above qualifications, the QAA has issued guidance on, 'Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding power and for taught degree-awarding powers' (QAA, 2013) which should be read in conjunction with the 'Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmarks' (QAA, 2010). The Foundation Degree in Business lecturing team, as discussed in their Focus Group, are proud of their record of achieving Masters and research degrees qualifications in excess of those required to teach on the level 4 and 5 Foundation Degree Programmes currently offered by the College. Of the 12 lecturers and managers currently teaching on the programme, two thirds have a full Masters qualification and one other, who has a level 7 diploma is current completing a full qualification. Three further lecturers have both a degree and professional qualifications in their subject specialism. One lecturer currently holds a PhD and another is currently registered on a doctorate programme. All members have current teaching observation grades (a procedure that the College undertakes to meet its Ofsted quality obligations) of either Grade 1 (outstanding) or Grade 2 (good) (Ofsted, 2012) (see Appendix F for teaching grade profile).

The lecturing team see their research activity, both vocationally based and more scholarly, as a way of enhancing the currency of their teaching and preparing students for the more

scholarly experience of university. This bodes well for meeting the QAA's requirements for institutions to evidence the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of their staff if wishing to validate their own Foundation Degree qualifications. The Lecturing Team feels that it has gone some considerable way to fulfilling the academic requirements for self-validation.

The above shows that there is verifiable evidence to meet the students' assertions that the teaching on the Foundation Degree is of an excellent quality (see Appendix F). The above also shows that the lecturing team has an appropriate mixture of both vocational qualifications and skills and current research interests to support the research and scholarship components of Foundation Degree and Bachelor's qualifications. Similarly, the course team has attended training days run by the Higher Education Academy on 'Teaching on HE in FE Courses' which have enabled staff to become acquainted with the sector norms, meet with other lecturers from other institutions offering similar programmes and team build (HEA, 2013).

4.11 Teaching and Learning Facilities

In the focus groups, students expressed concern about the College's Library facilities which were felt not always to meet the needs of HE students. Although book stocks were regularly updated to meet the module specifications, students would welcome a continual supply of additional resources including access to e-books and on-line data bases. There is minuted frustration (see Appendix G, Board of Study Minutes) that, due to the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by the College and University, students at Barnet and Southgate College do not have borrowing rights for books at the University Library or access to the University's on-line resources. They can, however, have access to the Library and use the books while there but sometimes even getting access to the premises required perseverance.

An on-going discussion with HE students in the college about the layout of the Library or the Learning Resource Centre as it is known, is also underway. Currently, students wishing to undertake quiet, private study have to compete with other, probably younger, students, undertaking noisy group work. These inadequacies have also come to light in the National Student Survey (NSS, 2013) although the overall satisfaction across all lines of enquiry was good.

Unlike University Libraries, the one at Barnet and Southgate College closes at 7.30pm at the latest. Some days this is considerably earlier to meet staffing issues. In order to overcome

this issue and the lack of access to campus computing facilities, the College has provided all full-time HE students with their own lap top computer. Unfortunately, the current year's specification is poor and students are returning their machines within days of receiving them as they do not work. These machines should have facilitated an opportunity for students to improve their research and cooperative learning skills: instead, they have been a source of grief.

Much is made in the in HEFCE Grant letter of 2014 (HEFCE, 2014) of the government's commitment to improving access to higher education and 'the responsibility placed on institutions to fund access and retention access facilities, including supporting students in cases of hardship'. College systems do not allow for delays in fee payments by the Student Loan Company. Although it is acknowledged by students that course fees must be paid, there is considerable anxiety felt by students on HE programmes when letters threatening action by the debt collectors are received during the academic year due to delays in fee assessment by the funding agency who are frequently tardy in completing the assessment of the non-traditional students with a more complicated residency and validation process. There are similar issues with students suffering hardship when loan payments and grants are delayed. Those living away from home have no means of support other than that of family and friends. Policies to overcome these issues are included in the HEFCE guidance (AoC, 2013).

4.12 Competition

In September 2013 Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) were launched in the UK using the Futurelearn platform which delivers University level courses, from 35 UK institutions, online enabling UK institutions to compete with courses offered by overseas providers. Currently MOOCs are not full three year university courses but modules of study that can eventually form the basis of such a qualification. In the US this form of blended teaching has had an enormous impact, with University fees there at a similar level to those in the UK (\$21, 857pa on average in 2010), there has been a move away from students connecting with campus to connecting by social media (Mallison, 2013). Foundation Degrees are not as yet a part of this initiative, but could be so in the future and this would benefit potential students already in the workplace.

4.13 Foundation Degree Expansion

With the change in Government in 2010, research, promotion and expansion of the Foundation Degree qualifications ceased. In the preceding ten years since their inception, student numbers on Foundation Degrees had increased to 100,000 (HEFCE, 2012). Although the Government, through BIS, acknowledges that Foundation Degrees have a role to play and students are supported by loans from the Student Finance Company, there is currently little expansion of the programme. The exception is in Wales where newly validated programmes in business studies and computing are seen as a catalyst to skill the Welsh working population in the light of considerable changes to the employment landscape in the Country (Parry, 2012).

5. Conclusions

Foundation Degrees have a clear ethos of vocational orientated teaching which must be supported by regular interaction with employers in order to facilitate currency of knowledge and local issues. To make them a viable qualification, they need to have a high level of acceptance across the board from all their stakeholders: the student body, their host institution, their validators, local employers, the politicians (both local and national).

The Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College enjoys this level of support and meets the targets for successful programmes: high levels of achievement by its students, good levels of retention, appreciation of the teaching team and their teaching and support of the student body, the local employers and the institutions teaching and validating the programme. The focus on supporting non-traditional students to gain HE qualifications meets the widening participation agendas (HEFCE, 2012).

The student profile is largely non-traditional and many are from areas of deprivation within London having previously studied Btec qualifications. Such students are the targets for Linking London who is anxious to promote progression routes as well as being one of the Mayor of London priorities for the City's workforce. This, added to the support from the students, institutions and employers, gives legitimacy to the qualification and should give Foundation Degrees a continuing future.

The Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College includes an articulation agreement that allows progression on to the third year of a top up degree at Middlesex University. This arrangement is not only a part of the original targets for the qualification but also a good recruitment pointer for younger students whose level 3 qualifications have attracted too few UCAS points to enter year one of a full University Bachelor's degree. Such students are interested in progressing to a top-up qualification at a university to enjoy the university experience and to study with their friends who joined the institution in year one of a degree. Fees of £9,000 for undertaking a top up degree are accepted by the younger students so continuing with an articulation agreement to a university is an important factor for many of the younger students.

The part-time and mature students have other progression requirements. For them, the institution where they will be studying their top up degree is of less importance. Their main concerns are about the cost of the course (as many of them, who are currently working, will have to start repaying their loans as soon as they complete their qualification), timetabling of

lectures (one afternoon evening block to fit around work commitments) and a supportive lecturing team.

As far as part-time students are concerned, their employer, and the local economy, needs the skills that this group of up-skilled students can bring to the London economy. At a time when opportunities for part-time study in HE are diminishing, as institutions transfer resources to the more lucrative full-time programmes, students value the ability to be able to study HE in FE at pre-determined times when their course can be fitted around employment and family commitments. The FE Colleges, with their long history of offering part-time vocational courses, should be able to capitalise on this market and up-skill the London workforce.

Thus it is important that the future plans for the Foundation Degree in Business at Barnet and Southgate College take into account the particular progression needs for both working and mature students as well as the younger age group: those who want to experience studying at University and those already working who want an acceptable top-up arrangement that meets employment and family commitments.

Part-time students are treated adversely by the current funding regime. Although it now looks as if the penalty of having to repay the loan while studying, if the student is earning over £25,000 has been removed, they will start repaying their loan immediately their course ends. Student loans are not available to those who already hold a Bachelor's degree (although the previous degree might be in a completely different subject). If the student is unable to self-fund, grants for fees or loans are difficult to acquire. Thus, for the working student who is trying to be flexible and achieve a qualification that would enable them to change careers, no state funding is available. So it is important that any top up degrees have a more reasonable fee structure than the £9,000pa regularly charged by Universities and that the access to loans is further reviewed.

If the relationship between FE Institutions and their University partners break down due to issues of competition and change of focus, there are various options available to the College. The most exciting of these would be self-validation of Foundation Degrees. To meet the criteria set out by the QAA for self-validation, would mean that additional resources have to be ploughed into ensuring all the parameters for the process are met but also that there is an extension of the level of scholarship amongst their staff. The lecturers' own teaching, research interests and published papers, would be given precedence over employer engagement (QAA, 2013).

The need for this course of action will largely depend on how the relationship develops between the FE Institution and the University validating its Foundation Degree Programme. Three quarters of HE in FE courses for the 2012-2013 academic year charged fees of less than £6,000, for Foundation Degrees including that in Business at Barnet and Southgate College for which a fee of £5,200 set was for the 2013-2014 academic year. The differing fees and the competitive relationships which develop between College and University for student numbers leave the Colleges open to being charged additional fees for running validated programmes. These additional charges can radically reduce the financial viability of HE in FE. Situations such as this are untenable and could lead to colleges looking for alternative solutions to maintaining their provision at a time when there is little opportunity to increase student numbers (HEFCE, 2014).

Colleges of Further Education see HE in FE as a growth area at a time when their funding for running their 16-19 provision is being reduced by the government. Expanding the HE provision will not only give more opportunities for the non-traditional students to be able to expand their qualifications but also maintain the infrastructure of the colleges and their specialist staff members. With the removal of the student numbers capping in September 2015 (HEFCE, 2014), there will be considerable scope for the expansion of successful Foundation Degrees in FE Colleges, if there is a validating university, a local pool of potential non-traditional students and a College-based academic infrastructure.

In London, there is an obvious need for non-traditional students to be able to gain the higher level qualifications required by London's employers. In the light of only 71% of the Capital's 15-19 age children being in education (OECD, 2012), provision needs to be put in place if these young people are to achieve their potential and not form part of the inner London underclass where almost a third of the population are not in work. There must be a strategic decision to enable these people to gain qualifications. Once a level three qualification has been gained (usually a Btec), or the student can demonstrate considerable basic skills and a good body of work experience, a well-developed Foundation Degree could meet these needs.

Studying for a Foundation Degree in an FE setting would allow such non-traditional students to have the support they need in order to achieve qualifications at HE level. Such qualifications developed in an exciting and novel way could enhance job prospects in the City (80% of those in London with degree level qualifications work compared to 45% of those with no qualifications). There would also be benefits for London as a whole. Housing and transport are finite, so if Londoners could gain the qualifications required by employers (it is

estimated that 50% of jobs by 2020 will need a degree level qualification) there would be less necessity for employers to look outside the EU for staff of the correct calibre and there would be a corresponding reduction in pressure on London's infrastructure.

The promotion to employers of a method to up-skill their own workforce qualified to the level required by the business, would not only been good for the Londoners, by allowing them to achieve the higher paid jobs that the capital has to offer, but it would also ensure a stable workforce for London. It is thus important to make employers aware of the study opportunities for their potential employees and for Colleges to make available training opportunities so that these qualifications can be studied at times to meet the students' work commitments. FE Colleges have a long traditional of evening provision that allows students to work and study at the same time.

Other delivery options for Foundation Degrees could be considered too, following the launch of MOOCs. The modularised arrangement of MOOCs could be adapted around Foundation Degree Modules so that learners, when completing sufficient units could achieve a Foundation Degree. There are, of course, financial implications with becoming involved in this programme, as studying in this format is free and it is difficult to see how cash-strapped FE Colleges would be able to recoup their development costs. However, the development of other more lucrative forms of blended learning could be developed by colleges to improve the access to part-time study, particularly for those in employment. It could also assist more mature students achieve Bachelor's degrees, if level 6 modules were offered and brought into the qualifications framework.

FE Colleges should therefore seize the agenda and plan for expanding their provision of HE in FE taking advantage of the relaxation in HE numbers from September 2015. There are a variety of ways that this could be done. If the traditional relationship with an HE partner is working well, this could be maintained or expanded, but, as demonstrated above, there are also considerable opportunities for self-validating new and relevant Foundation Degrees. (HEFCE, 2014).

Continuing to focus on less-costly methods of continuing to offer HE in FE, Colleges could revert to offering HND qualifications validated by Pearson. Most FE colleges already have approval to offer the Btec suite of qualifications suitable for 16-19 year old study which are also a part of the Pearson suit of qualifications. It should, therefore, be a relatively easy process for Colleges to achieve awarding powers for HND and the costs of achieving this would not be exorbitant. Unfortunately, although well know, the HND qualifications are seen

as being somewhat outdated, and if MLN modules are not developed, a qualification launched in 2010 would be delivered. As there is less of an emphasis upon employability, HND qualifications may not be as acceptable to employers or meet the needs for a more qualified London workforce.

Another option would be for FE institutions to seek new partnerships. Several of the former Institutions of Higher Education outside the London area, offering Bachelor's degrees at below the £9,000 maximum fee, are reputed to be trying to establish a presence in the capital working with FE Colleges. Approaches could be made to such universities with a view to establishing more advantageous arrangements for the validation or franchising of Foundation Degrees and the progression of students to top-up degrees. The possibility of the FE institution offering a franchised top-up degree programme could also be explored. Such arrangements would be advantageous for both the FE College, in that they would be able to continue with their current HE in FE programmes (and expand further when HE numbers are no longer capped), and also for the university who would achieve a presence in the capital (and perhaps the overseas student market).

A realignment of partnerships with Universities could facilitate Colleges, such as Barnet and Southgate, to upgrade their academic facilities for HE students: access to costly on-line data bases, book stocks and enhanced library and study facilities could also be a part of the new contracts. There would also be scope for changes in the administration of student finance within colleges, further improving student satisfaction.

Probably most exciting of all would be for FE Colleges to seek their own self-validation rights for Foundation Degrees. This would remove a College's reliance of the whims of other institutions and develop and run their own exciting Foundation Degree Programmes with top-up options which could be designed to meet the needs of Business in the Capital. The students' own work experiences could be linked to the academic and business scene to provide a relevant platform from which to launch new graduates into the London workforce to meet the requirements and the skill shortage of the capital's employers.

This would ensure that Foundation Degrees, and their linked top-up degrees, were viewed by all stakeholders as the way of choice to meet the needs for the capital's workforce for non-traditional students at a reasonable cost: the student body, the FE College, the local employers, LLUK and the Mayor's Office, BIS, HEFCE, OFFA.

6. Recommendations

The research shows that there is a continuing need for level 4 and 5 qualifications aimed at non-traditional students to be offered by Further Education Colleges. For these courses to be successful there needs to be a balance between being an academic qualification, having a vocational bias and being offered in a supportive environment. Foundation Degree qualifications that fulfil these parameters have the full support of all the main stakeholders for the qualification: the students, the FE Colleges offering the HE in FE qualifications, the validating HEI, the employers, and, for those in the London area, LLUK and the Mayor's Office. There is an ongoing economic requirement by employers for employees with at least level 5 academic qualifications with a vocational bias. This being so, it is recommended that following points are actioned to ensure the continuance of Foundation Degrees:

1. Barnet and Southgate College should expand its Foundation Degree provision, once student numbers are abolished by HEFCE in September 2015. This would mean that more suitably qualified Londoners would be given the chance to achieve higher level qualifications and fulfil their career aims and go some way to meet the Mayor aspirations for the London workforce. It is suggested that course numbers to be expanded should be those currently attracting the largest number of students, although, using the future scenario concept, new provision could be developed to meet future students' and employers' needs.

2. It is recommended that in order to maintain HE in FE, Colleges need to undertake some future scenario planning to ensure that they have plans in place to continue with the provision even if their University partnership fails. In the short term, this might involve Colleges seeking approval to offer HND courses from Edexcel, hopefully using the provision for updating the module specifications under the Meeting Local Needs provision, to ensure that there was a continuity of HE in FE provision.

In the medium term they should seek to establish partnerships with new validators: other universities, more sympathetic to HE in FE and with experience of part-time HE study for those already in work.

Finally, in the long term, to pursue self-validation of their programmes. This would allow FE Colleges to seize the initiative and design their own unique programmes, mixing academic and vocational skills as the local market requires. To make these self-validated Foundation Degrees truly exciting and unique, but rigorous, the College could develop and offer

provision whereby the academic and vocational rigours over-lap with the Capital's business needs to give a truly three dimensional view of reality to students. This will ensure that there is on-going exciting, but relevant, provision available for the non-traditional student to study and upgrade their skills.

3. It is recommended that suitable progression formats should be sought for mature and part-time students so that there are appropriate progression opportunities for all students so that a fair balance between their studies, working and family lives can be maintained. This is one of the four performance criteria for Foundation Degrees. Colleges need to ensure that this factor is a part of their future scenario planning for Foundation Degrees and that these elements are in-built into their own self-validated programmes as well as any future partnerships with universities.

4. To enable the above to take place, it is recommended that there should be continuing support by the government for Foundation Degrees as a format to enable the non-traditional student to gain a level 5 qualification and to be able to progress on to a full Bachelor's degree. Furthermore systems should be put into place to facilitate Further Education Colleges to be the provider of choice for these qualifications due to their ability to provide a high class teaching and learning environment that is able to support and progress non-traditional students who need such an environment to fully achieve their potential.

5. Also in support of recommendation 1, it is recommended that student loans via the Student Loan Company should remain a part of the government's support for Foundation Degrees. Loans make it possible for most students to be able to study, but especially the non-traditional students from disadvantages post codes, who are predominantly, found studying on Foundation Degree programmes.

It is also recommended that the discriminatory way in which loans, or the lack of them, impact on part-time students should be further reviewed by the government. One way to improve the skills of the workforce, particularly that in London, is to up-skill those already in employment. Therefore it is recommended that a more sympathetic funding regime needs to be found for those already in employment and studying part-time for a Foundation Degree, (a vocational qualification that will move them towards a career). The penalty of having to repay a loan while studying, which is a fact of life for most part-time students in London, has, hopefully, now been removed and students will be able to repay their loans at the end of their courses.

It is also recommended, that there should be a review of the policy of not allowing, even part-time students who already have a degree, to have a loan (event though they may well not have had a loan for that original study). A skills mix to match the London jobs scene cannot be improved if penalties such as these remain in place. A lifetime loan allocation to support re-training and re-skilling in line with international best practice, which would be income contingent and repaid following graduation, offering protection to those receiving low pay, should be considered to meet the specific needs of part-time working students.

6. It is recommended that the specific features of HE in FE should be formally recognised and appropriate financial funding made available to support the HE in FE model that enables the non-traditional students to flourish in small class groups with high levels of tutor support which nurtures the students, enables them to develop and achieve their qualifications and be of benefit to the local economy. It is recommended that the Student Opportunity fund should be maintained or even increased to support the non-traditional students studying for Foundation Degrees.

7. It is recommended that the competitive HE model introduced by BIS, who have set out to establish a market in HE, should not be used by universities to maintain their cartel and remove HE in FE from the scene. There should be a transparent fee structure for Colleges offering validated or franchised FE in HE programmes and these should recognise the differing fee structures for university courses (maximum £9,000) and HE in FE (£6,000). Additional, prohibitive charges by universities on FE Colleges offering validated or franchised courses should not be allowed. If these charges were no longer imposed it would enable FE providers to spend more on their facilities and improve their amenities for HE students. Less would need to be handed over to the University validators to cover the now minimal costs of hosting the programme.

8. Students studying HE in FE perceive the need for improved study facilities within colleges. Learning Resource Centres are frequently small and have to be shared with noisier, younger student. Space for quiet study is limited as is access to an extensive range of books, and on-line data-bases and electronic books. Quiet HE Common Rooms for HE students to meet and study together are also frequently lacking. It is recommended that Colleges seeking to self-validate their own programmes or seek new partners should review the students' access to library facilities and that this would ensure that access arrangements to on-line data-bases and books that the students perceive to be important to the HE studies are fully available. Similarly HE Common Room facilities for HE students to meet, discuss and undertake group work should also be provided, perhaps using some of the Student

Opportunities Funding secured by the FE College. This would ensure that HE in FE students are not disadvantaged in their access to study resources when compared to students studying at the main university and that they have twenty first century resources available to them as they study their exciting new Foundation Degree Programmes.

Figure 6 Recommendation Action Plan

Recommendation	Action	By whom	Timescale
Maintain HE in FE, Colleges In the short term by revalidating/updating HND programmes	Undertake some future scenario planning to ensure that they have plans in place to continue with the provision even if their University partnership fails.	College Management Team	On-going from summer 2014
In the long term, to pursue self-validation of their programmes.	This would allow FE Colleges to seize the initiative and design their own unique programmes, mixing academic, vocational skills as the local market requires.	College Management Team in consultant with Lecturing Team	
Secure suitable progression formats for mature and part-time students	Put in place appropriate progression opportunities for all students so that a fair balance between their studies, working and family lives can be maintained.	College Management Team	On-going from summer 2014
Lobby government to ensure that there is continuing support for Foundation Degrees as a format for non-traditional student to gain a level 5 qualification and progression to a full Bachelor's degree.	Put in place systems to facilitate Further Education Colleges to be the provider of choice for these qualifications due to their ability to provide a high class teaching and learning environment that is able to support and progress non-traditional students who need such an environment to achieve	College Management Team Via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014
Lobby government to ensure that Student Loans via the Student Loan Company should remain a part of the support for Foundation Degrees.	Loans make it possible for non-traditional students to be able to study	College Management Team via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014
The government should review the discriminatory way in which loans, impact on part-time students	A more sympathetic funding regime is required to fund the upskilling of those already in employment.	College Management Team via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014
The government should formally recognise the specific features of HE in FE	The would mean that funding should be made available to fully support non-traditional students to flourish in small class groups with high levels of tutor support to achieve qualification to benefit the local economy	College Management Team via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014

The government should maintain the Student Opportunity fund	Tis fund supports non-traditional students studying for Foundation Degrees.	College Management Team via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014
Review of the competitive HE model introduced by BIS	The newly established market in HE should not be used by universities to maintain their cartel and remove HE in FE from the scene. There should be a transparent fee structure for Colleges offering validated or franchised FE in HE programmes and these should recognise the differing fee structures for university courses (maximum £9,000) and HE in FE (£6,000).	College Management Team via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014
Government to make available funding to improve the student facilities for those studying HE in	To score highly in student surveys the study, support and social facilities need to be improved. In a student-led environment it is essential that this money is spent if students are to be attracted to FE institutes to undertake their studies	College Management Team via Association of Colleges	On-going from summer 2014

End Piece – Critical reflection on my own Practice

This twelve thousand word report is the final stage of a project that I started in the autumn of 2011 to achieve an MProf qualification. It had long been my desire to achieve a full Masters level qualification and also to find out more about the key stakeholders' perceptions of the qualification for which I had been a Course Leader for a decade. The current marketing led educational environment means that decisions are often taken on the basis of insubstantial data so being given the opportunity to research in depth a topic of this nature has, I hope, produced an interesting and relevant study, of use to all the major stakeholders as well as allowing me to fulfil my research objectives.

In a previous career I had been a 'researcher' and had always enjoyed the reading and research necessary to prior to preparing reports for my sponsors. Undertaking the current academic project this enjoyment of researching has returned. However, prior to undertaking this piece of work, I had not fully understood the tight formal procedures I would need to follow when preparing my report. This has been a learning curve for me and I am now more appreciative of the rigours of academic research. It is a skill that I will be able to instil into, and pass on to, my own tutees.

Secondary sources had always been used as a basis for my previous research reports – discussed as a part of the methodology and written up as a part of the findings. Undertaking a more formal and separate literature review was a new skill for me to master. The importance of this type of critical review, a major feature of the academic infrastructure, was brought home to me in the preparation and presentation of the research proposal.

An item reviewed for the summative report was the QAA 'Guidance on Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff'. This review brought home to me the different skill levels and qualifications of those studying Foundation Degrees whose lecturers have an employer-driven focus reflecting the vocational nature of the qualification. With lecturers on bachelor degree programmes there is an expectation that the teaching will be based upon the research/scholarship of the lecturing staff. This is extended further to those studying for masters qualifications that are expected to critically evaluate the work and research of others. This is a skill I have been honing throughout the study for the MProf qualification and one which I hope I am now able to fully demonstrate.

Throughout the MProf qualification I have learnt much. Although I had been involved with Foundation Degrees, and their stakeholders, my understanding of the political environment was much more tenuous. I now feel that I have a full grasp of this aspect of academic life and that this is knowledge that will enable me to become a full participant in the future decision making surrounding the qualification at College level.

Julie Haddock-Millar, my University Supervisor has guided and encouraged me throughout my trials and tribulations to complete this research project and the MProf qualification. I hope I have now met her standards as a critically aware researcher. I would like to thank her for her continued encouragement and support and am fully aware that without this, the final report would not have been written.

Helen Snider

July 2014

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