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# Scholarly activity building HE experience in an FE environment

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper considers the role that scholarly activity plays in the HE experience within an FE College environment and the impact that it has delivering Higher Education within the UK Further Education College environment (known as College Based Higher Education) has been a significant feature of the educational landscape within UK higher education over the last 30 years. Critics have pointed to the failure of staff within FE environments to undertake research and scholarly activity, which they determine is fundamental to Higher Education.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This research explores into the notion of scholarly activity and what that means within a CBHE environment, and how this can assist in the creation of a HE culture and thus a HE experience for both staff and students. The research adopts a qualitative approach using interviews with nine staff to gather thoughts on the HE-ness of the provision within the context of scholarship.

**Findings** – Responses from the interviewees demonstrated a high level of participation in scholarly activity, but which was not necessarily defined or described as such, and did not adopt as narrow a view as may occur within a University, where research prevails. It is evident that staff are keen to engage but significant barriers prevail, which inhibits, notably time, funds and teaching commitments. Crucially it is questioned whether CBHE should be looking to mirror a HE culture or whether a new CBHE culture is what is needed.

**Originality/value** – The paper addresses approaches to developing a HE experience within college-based higher education, also called HE in FE. While this article is UK focussed, it has relevance to a broader international dimension for institutions which are teaching focussed and open to a broader interpretation of scholarly activity.

**Keywords** Scholarly activity, Further education, College-based higher education, HE in FE, HE experience, HE ethos

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

For the majority of staff teaching on Higher Education courses within Further Education Colleges (College Based Higher Education or CBHE), the concept of scholarly activity as a feature of their role raises issues. Scholarly activity as a concept is open to interpretation, but is generally associated with teaching in higher education, and is often linked with research. Within FE however the concept may be considered far more teaching orientated than within a university. A plethora of literature (Creasy, 2013; Eaton, 2015; Jones, 2006b; King and Widdowson, 2010; King *et al.*, 2014) has been produced over the past 25 years which has outlined the differences between HE provision within Universities and Colleges, particularly highlighting and criticising College Based Higher Education (CBHE). As such, this perhaps creates the expectation that lecturers within this environment should engage with what may be considered HE activities such as scholarly activity (Gale *et al.*, 2011). A common critique of CBHE is the lack of scholarly activity (including research), being undertaken by those teaching on the HE programmes.

Further Education Colleges are often regarded as centers of vocational education and training (Turner *et al.*, 2009). Traditionally, these colleges have predominantly delivered provision aimed at 16–19 year old students studying on vocational and work-based courses, and what may be deemed adult returners studying on a part time basis for professional and higher level qualifications. Successive UK Governments have identified Colleges as areas for developing higher level technical skills often at a lower cost, than their more expensive university counterparts. Many of these institutions have become known as mixed economy (Senior and Barnes, 2023) or dual sector (Gale *et al.*, 2011; Saraswat, 2015) driven by government pressures, to raise of the national skills level, with Foundation Degrees being an attempt to provide a solution to this. Jones (2006a) notes, the foundation degree was designed to "deliver the specialist knowledge which employers require . . . also underpinned by rigorous and broad-based academic learning". The Foundation Degree, which may be considered a sub-degree covering the first two years of a standard UK undergraduate degree, may be considered a result of the friction between meeting the skills employers' need, while also being underpinned by academic rigour. Development of Foundation Degrees gave increased relevance and importance to HE delivered in college environments, and as such emphasised the importance of the HE-ness required (Schofield and Burton, 2015). Within this context HE-ness is considered as being university-like incorporating notions of research informed teaching, independent and self-directed study, and embedding of higher cognitive skills and behaviours. This friction underpins the importance of this research in considering scholarly activity.

Colleges (within CBHE) "do not set out to be research-intensive institutions – their purpose is to meet the immediate higher skills and needs of local employers and to widen participation in HE" (King and Widdowson, 2010). At the same time, it can be argued that the role of CBHE, and particularly the Foundation Degree is not focussed on generating research and developing that notion of originality, but instead it is about interpreting and modifying what already exists and putting it into the right contexts (Young, 2002). The focus of scholarship within HEIs tends to be about subject expertise and not pedagogical practices (in most cases). In contrast, staff within CBHE are more likely to engage in scholarship related to both their subject and teaching practice. Staff within the CBHE environment, would be on teaching-only contracts if considered within the HE environment, however this itself would not extend the notion far enough as generally staff within CBHE would spend almost two-thirds of the working week within the classroom environment and undertaking teaching duties.

The focus of this research was to investigate how individuals teaching on CBHE appreciate and approach to Scholarship within their organisation. In particular the research seeks to find out how the use of Scholarly Activity creates a HE experience and how this helps to influence the CBHE culture.

*RQ1.* How do staff interpret and identify scholarly activity?

*RQ2.* How does the undertaking of scholarly activity build a HE experience within FE?

**Literature review**
Debate about scholarly activity within teaching focussed institutions within both the UK and USA has dominated the literature in the past five years or so (e.g. Bourne *et al.*, 2024; Chen *et al.*, 2021). While some similarity in context can be drawn with the CBHE sector, the factors affecting the institutions and the debates are very Higher Education (HE) focussed and as such do not draw the same similarities in the key issues as are drawn within the mixed economy nature of CBHE environments, which appear to have distinguishing characteristics.

*Identifying scholarly activity and scholarship*
There is divided opinion on the meaning of scholarly activity and what it consists of. Diamond (2002) suggests that initial perceptions of "scholarly" required an output that was original and

appeared in scholarly publications and most notably academic journals. Diamond however highlights a key turning point as the 1980 and 1990s as notable academics reassessed the concept a scholarship and scholarly activity with key works by Lynton, Elman and Smock in 1985, Rice in 1991 and Boyer in 1990, placed the concept within the context of the discipline. Arguing that to be considered scholarly, the activity needed to be [1] discipline related [2] conducted in a scholarly manner [3] be able to be disseminated [4] significant beyond an individual context [5] judged to have merit among peers. Bosold and Darnell (2012) considered this notion of scholarly activity within the context of nurse educators which straddled the vocational-academic divide. They recognised the contrast between traditional views of academia and the creation of knowledge while also identifying the importance of professionalism and practise as key facets. They point to the acknowledgement of scholarly activity as being specific and contextual. This broader view of scholarly activity aligns with Diamond (2002) but the concepts and breadth of definition proposed by Boyer's (1990) seminal work "Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate" opened the scope for an expanded HE environment which incorporated vocationalism, differentiation in qualifications and alternative approaches to experience.

Therefore within a CBHE context, scholarly activity within this paper is deemed to include the range of activities which form scholarship (Priest and Sturgess, 2005), and as such does not distinguish between elements such as research, consultancy or scholarly practice for teaching. There are different views within the University sector and CBHE providers. For many, Scholarly Activity is linked to research, while others suggest that there is a difference between scholarly activity and research. Jones (2006b) however, argues that while research is a component of scholarly activity, it is not the be all and end all of it, arguing that scholarly activity does not need to result in the production of new knowledge. This is supported by Widdowson (King and Widdowson, 2010) who distinguishes between scholarly activity and research. Widdowson argues that research is the domain of universities and is a key differentiator between the university sector and the CBHE sector. As such CBHE has no desire, no mandate, and particularly no focus on producing new knowledge. Eaton (2014) suggests that scholarship is an area of discussion for CBHE, and it is of interest to consider what the perception and manifestation of Scholarly Activity is, within the CBHE environment. This is crucial in attempting to identify, explain and evaluate the HE-ness of the CBHE environment, where Scholarly Activity is perceived and interpreted differently to the HE environment.

Jones (2006b) suggests that scholarly activity also refers to increasing knowledge and informing practice both in terms of teaching and vocational development. In clarifying the meaning of scholarly activity, Schofield and Burton (2015) point to Boyer's (1990) view of scholarly activity as consisting of four facets. Each facet had a different purpose and focus and which provided a broad overview of scholarly activity identifying different categories that it may fall into ... [1] Scholarship of discovery – undertaking research; [2] Scholarship of teaching – transmission of knowledge; [3] Scholarship of integration – synthesis of information [4] Scholarship of application – applying theory to real world settings. As such, this paper recognises all four facets within the broad base of scholarly activity, and that three of Boyer's facets (notably 2, 3 and 4) are prevalent within FE Colleges and therefore are embedded into CBHE culture and ethos.

Subsequently, Eaton (2014) points to Boyer's (1990) description and highlights that so much of scholarly activity should not focus on research. King and Widdowson (2010) later re-categorised scholarship into 3 activities which related to research and intellectual updating [1]; industrial updating linked to curriculum [2]; and improving learning and teaching [3]. In support, Gale et al. (2011) recognised the scholarship of teaching and learning allows for reflexivity and improved performance in practise. King et al. (2014) further suggest the prevalence of 2 and 3 within CBHE environments. Some, however, may suggest that Scholarly Activity has a greater overlap with CPD, within this context, than traditional Scholarly Activity, as defined by Boyer (1990). This is furthered by Harwood and Harwood's (2004)

whose research noted the acknowledgement of the importance of scholarly activity by CBHE staff, however the focus was primarily on updating subject knowledge to support teaching Noel *et al.* (2009), support this, noting that respondents in their study suggested activities within their institutions tended to concentrate on teaching and teaching skills often with little (if anything) relating to improving subject knowledge. The nature of CBHE suggests the need for a multiplicity of approaches (Eaton, 2014) to scholarship, with most CBHE adopting Boyer's (1990) description of Scholarly Activity. King and Widdowson (2010) suggest that scholarly activity within CBHE does not need to conform to the norm, identified as traditional notions as considered within HEIs. They note it as much broader concept which links both subject (academic and vocational) expertise along with teaching skills. Research by Saraswat (2015) highlights knowledge transfer as a key means of undertaking scholarly activity within the FE environment. As such we seek to define scholarly activity in the broad context as *"the range of activities undertaken by academic staff which seek to enhance their own knowledge and skillset and that of their students"*.

### Scholarly activity and HE culture

Jones (2006b) suggested that the interest of scholarly activity within the CBHE has been driven by need to develop a HE culture/ethos. A review of CBHE undertaken by The QAA (2006) suggested a greater need for both staff and students to be aware of the differences required at HE level and the need for it to be distinctive from FE study (often at the same college). If the organisation is to develop a HE ethos/culture then it is vital that this is embedded in both the staff and student bodies, and is not, and cannot be a top-down approach. Several colleges have rebranded themselves incorporating the term University Centre into their College title, while others have rebranded completely to create a separate identity away from the FE College brand. In the same way some colleges have incorporated and designated areas into their college footprint as HE, while others have used separate buildings sometimes on different sites as a key facilitator of this Feather (2016) recognised the importance of creating a HE ethos within FE, and noted this as a key driver.

Lawrence and Hall (2018) found a keenness for developing a HE-ness within CBHE by the academic staff but this countered by an inability to reduce time pressures due to the demand of the role and resistance of managers to invest in staff and time to allow greater HE ethos to develop. In general, there was commitment to scholarship but no practice. King *et al.* (2014) point to the culture of CBHE organisations as a reason for the issues related to the lack of scholarly activity. They notably point to research by Feather (2012) who criticises the high level of managerialism, and Creasy (2013) who criticises the need to serve two masters as reasons for this.

McKenzie *et al.* (2016) highlight the importance of developing CBHE lecturers to undertake scholarly activity, suggesting the need for investment to allow them to understand what it constitutes and how to go about it. Too much emphasis is placed on talking about it rather than doing it and understanding what it is and the impact it can have. As such Eaton (2015) attaches the concepts of HE-ness and scholarship as being symbiotic, and that scholarship is a critical part of academic life. He notes however the difficulty in identifying with scholarship and research when the primary focus for many is on the vocational and professional. This creates a divide that may be difficult to bridge. However, he suggests a term of "Professional Practice" which may be considered a solution to the mis-understanding that can flourish. Medcalf (2014) suggests that CBHE lecturers feel a commitment to scholarly activity but are limited by what they can do. Some of which are created by barriers, while much of it is related to not knowing what to do.

Several commentators (Harwood and Harwood, 2004; Scott, 2010) note the lack of a HE-ness within CBHE, notably focussing on the failure to support and encourage scholarly activity as one of the critical issues. Schofield and Burton (2015) note the importance of research as fundamental to student perceptions of HE, with expectations that teaching will be supported by

up-to-date knowledge. In particular, they note the need to create a research culture. This can be a result of the organisation's size or more specifically the size of the CBHE provision (Scott, 2010), as this will no doubt have a direct influence on the number of staff engaged, the number of students participating and the number of hours being delivered. No doubt the availability of finances will also dictate resource availability. Feather (2016) suggests that one barrier is managerialism which advocates allegiance to the college environment not the subject discipline. This is further enhanced by a focus on compliance and surveillance. Subsequently embedding scholarly activity is critical as a manifestation of the HE culture. Razik and Swanson (2010), link Mission, Values and Culture, as a fundamental management role suggesting it is they who create and push the goals and hence the behaviour of the organisation. They suggest that this is a major cause of the barriers to a HE Culture within CBHE as the overriding goals relate to the FE side of the organisation. Turner *et al.* (2009) in their research identify the provision of a financial reward being provided for undertaking aspects of scholarly activity within their case organisation, however note this is rare, in an attempt to encourage and facilitate activity.

A key issue which is at the centre of the scholarly activity debate is time. Staff teach a large number of hours which will significantly impact on a lecturer's ability to undertake scholarly activity. This is highlighted by the failed attempt to launch the British Journal of Higher Education in Further Education (BJHEinFE) in 2008. The BJHEinFE was aimed at being a multi-disciplinary journal to celebrate the diversity of research within CBHE. The Journal failed to launch and this was directly attributed to the view that staff did not have the time to write journal articles. The organising body put out a statement that "Despite an extensive call for papers . . . poor response due to staff workload in FE". This mirrored the assertion by Harwood and Harwood (2004), who had previously suggested workload as a barrier to scholarly activity within CBHE, which included time and funding but also linked to opportunity.

*Barriers to scholarly activity*
Research undertaken by Noel *et al.* (2009) into CBHE lecturers' lack of engagement with scholarly activity and HE processes, included workload (teaching and administration) and lack of remission (related to teaching). They also suggested that staff within CBHE lacked confidence. However, fundamental to the engagement was the lack of funding and support from Managers. Many considered that a big cause of this was the lack of awareness of Managers regarding the delivery of HE. Subsequently, King *et al.* (2014) highlighted key barriers to scholarly activity as time; capability (not academics); lack of involvement of HEI partner; low volume of HE provision meaning no resource; the management of HE provision and the recording of activity. Feather (2016, p. 99) suggests the development of "underground working" as colleges do not see it as part of the day job. He also questions whether FE lecturers have the skills to undertake research. Johnston and Johnston (2024) consider some of these broader issues in their paper on professional, while also noting managerialist practices driving efficiency processes rather than development and quality processes.

This is further supported by, Burston (2017, p. 516) who notes "Time availability and time management are critical to the organisation of work, study and leisure", and further concludes that as a resource time is limited. This is supported by Schofield and Burton (2015). They note a lack of support and time from managers to undertake research, but acknowledge the activities undertaken particularly related to teaching based scholarship and pedagogic research. While Noel *et al.* (2009) took a different approach to Harwood and Harwood (2004) there are obvious connections. It would seem, both suggest that the nature of FE creates a barrier due to the mixed economy delivery model which is common. Even aspects such as job title, tutor rather than lecturer and curriculum rather than academic signify differences in the set up. Similarly, Lawrence and Hall (2018) acknowledge the difference in terminology between the HE sector and the CBHE sector. They suggest that while there has been much debate about the types of

contracts used in HEIs and that even those on "teaching-only" contracts imply engagement with scholarly activity, CBHE are on "teaching-only" contracts which are explicit to teaching and which do not really consider scholarly activity.

In concluding the literature review, there is evidence to suggest that there is a lack of clarity within the CBHE sector about what Scholarly Activity is, and what Scholarly Activity is within the CBHE context. This is driven by the nature and ethos of the institutions, the nature of contracts and the requirements of staff to teach across varying levels of courses. This has led to many questioning the HE-ness of CBHE, and in some cases whether CBHE can deliver a HE experience. Furthermore, should it be expected to deliver a HE experience and should a CBHE experience be accepted as different. The ensuing research seeks to respond to this gap by considering what staff perceptions of Scholarly Activity are, how they see this within their role and how they make use of it to create more of a HE feel to their students.

### Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivist stance following an inductive approach (Bell, 2001). The research has taken a Case Study (Yin, 2014) approach using a single organisation. The Case Organisation is a large dual sector institution within the north of England. The institution has a relatively small HE population (<200 students) and is validated mainly by a University, within the city which they are both based in. The College offers a range of HE provision, including Higher Nationals, Foundation Degrees and Top Up Degrees, and also offers 3 year degrees in some areas. Provision is mainly part time with some full time provision. Three departments were chosen adopting a convenience sampling approach. In each area three members of staff were chosen through a purposive sampling strategy. Each area shared a context of "services to people" in their focus. All three also shared the same structure of Foundation Degree – Top Up (see Table 1).

Data has been collected via qualitative research through email interviews with staff members. This has enabled the research to collect rich data which will provide key thoughts from staff delivering on HE provision. Questions were designed to allow the respondents to provide open and detailed responses to allow them scope for adding detail as they felt relevant. The key questions were:

(1) What do you understand by the term scholarship/scholarly activity?

(2) How do you distinguish scholarship from research or consultancy?

**Table 1.** Background information

| Respondent | Programme area | Age | Experience (HE teaching) | % Age HE:FE | Gender | Highest qualification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Business | 40–49 | 5 years | 50% | Male | MSc |
| 2 | Business | 60+ | 12 years | 100% | Female | MA |
| 3 | Business | 50–59 | 8 years | 50% | Male | MBA |
| 4 | Childcare | 50–59 | 2 years | 30% | Female | BA* |
| 5 | Childcare | 50–59 | 5 years | 30% | Female | BA |
| 6 | Childcare | 40–49 | 1 year | 30% | Female | BA* |
| 7 | Health and Social Care | 30–39 | 2 years | 30% | Female | MSc |
| 8 | Health and Social Care | 30–39 | 2 years | 25% | Female | BSc |
| 9 | Health and Social Care | 40–49 | 5 years | 50% | Female | MA |

**Note(s):** *Currently working towards a PG qualification
**Source(s):** Authors' own work

(3) How do you use scholarship to support your teaching?

(4) What do you do different in your HE teaching, from your FE teaching?

(5) How does scholarship affect this?

Interviewees comprised nine members of staff with teaching experience on Foundation Degree Programmes across three departments, within the host organisation. Alongside the interviews participants also completed a short questionnaire which was used to gather additional background data and information. This allowed the use of some basic information regarding the participants' qualifications, experience and demographics etc. The interviews were analysed via open manual coding followed by the development of themes, using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2017). Through the thematic analysis two key themes were drawn out and resonated across the interviewees. The two key themes were how did staff view the concept of scholarly activity in general and within a CBHE environment, and how did staff make use of scholarly activity within their teaching and what impact that had on student experience in their view. The use of thematic analysis provided a valuable process to enable a systematic and structured approach to analysing the data. Key ideas have been interpreted and were used to identify key factors with the potential to look for relationships and the development of a model and theoretical significance. This rich data was supported by the analysis of the questionnaire. It was noticeable from the that the majority of staff teaching on HE were over 40 years of age and most had a master's degree, while two were studying for a masters.

In conducting the research, it was fundamental to ensure the outcomes were trustworthy and credible (Sparkes and Smith, 2009). As such, three strategies were adopted. Firstly an audit trail was used to maintain accurate records of information and events; secondly the use of reflexivity was adopted to ensure impact on the research has been considered throughout the process; thirdly the use of thick description to ensure that detail was provided for analysis and interpretation. To ensure accuracy respondents were provided with the key themes from the thematic and how their responses fitted and were asked to clarify and confirm responses where necessary and interpretations were discussed were appropriate. In doing this, effort was made to ensure transparency (as discussed by Levitt *et al.*, 2018) and consideration was given to the notion of saturation as acknowledged by Anderson (2017). Critically in all aspects of research it is necessary to be both academically rigorous and practically relevant (Johnston, 2014; Anderson, 2017).

### Findings

*Concept of scholarly activity*

There was general understanding regarding the concept of scholarly activity (or scholarship) as all staff were able to respond in terms of providing some understanding, although most of the staff had a very narrow perception of it, relating it to just preparing for teaching. Of the nine respondents, six (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8) of them initially responded with a comment "*preparing for teaching*". Further questioning of these six led them to include comments around "*reading around the subject*", "*developing teaching and learning materials*" and "*developing more knowledge*". R4 gave a broader response suggesting "*It can be a mix of things. Mainly it is about reading so that you can prepare for your teaching, not just so you can prepare slides but also so that you can apply the ideas when explaining it in class*". Asked if this was important, she responded "*Yes, all the students are practitioners, so it is important to put the theory and ideas into practice to help them understand. They get bored if you don't*". R7 suggested that Scholarly Activity was about "*Knowing about the theories in your subject. It is important to keep up to date because ideas change. Also if you are trying to get students to read articles you need to find relevant ones to give them. This helps because it makes the students feel the course is hard because we don't ask them to read them at level 3*".

R9 gave the most complete (and reflective) response by also including research within the concept. She suggested "*Scholarly Activity has a number of facets really it is about reading up and developing your knowledge. This can help with teaching as it allows you to expand your knowledge and then use it in the classroom, rather than just relying on a single book or a couple. It also involves research. I was involved in a consultancy project a few years ago with a couple of colleagues that I was working with. This involved doing some research related to dementia and how this hospice was using music to tackle the problem. We got it published in a journal and then got asked to write a chapter for a book on the back of it*". Asked about how this had come about, the respondent confirmed that one of her colleagues was a lecturer at a university and did "*most of the hard work*". R9 was asked if she wanted to do more research and asked "*It was great to do, but in this job, I don't really get the time. It amazed me how long it took to get it published. The journal kept sending it back to be changed*". The other respondents were asked about doing research. Only 5 (1, 2, 3, 4, 8) responded with the only positive response being from R4 who stated "*I need to do a piece of research for my MA. If that goes well then maybe, yes I would consider trying to write something*".

Asked about differences between scholarly activity, research and consultancy, R6 suggested that "*they are all the same really, just different approaches and how you use them. I suppose Scholarly Activity is mainly to do with the reading up and applying it for teaching, whereas Research is about new stuff, i.e. finding out from data, and Consultancy is about using your knowledge to help organisations. I suppose they can all overlap*". R3 suggested that "*Scholarly Activity and Research are the same but Consultancy is different. Consultancy is about working with businesses to help them to improve*". R4 suggested "*I think there are probably differences but I am not sure on the finer details. I know consultancy is about working with organisations – so some staff have worked with nurseries and as I said previously about scholarly activity. Research could be something in between or a combination of the two*".

*Scholarly activity in teaching*

All respondents suggested that they spent more time preparing the teaching for their Foundation Degree classes with R5 commenting "*I spend a lot more time preparing my slides for the FD class as I do a lot more reading and finding materials but I suppose for the Level 2 and 3 classes I spend a lot more time making activities to keep them engaged. If I actually counted the time it would probably be even, I guess, but it doesn't feel like it. Doing the FD means I have to concentrate whereas the Level 2 is more practical. To prepare my FD lesson, so had to get the books out and prepare a load of slides. I then had to find a video on YouTube to make it a bit more interesting and a couple of articles for them to read after and before next week. Fortunately the session I was doing meant we could do a lot of discussion and so that can save time*". Alongside this R3 commented "*It takes more time but is normally worth it. The HE students take part and contribute so you feel it is worth it. I use a lot of case studies and finding suitable ones can often take up a lot of time. I am lucky because all the stuff I taught last year is what I am teaching this year so it is as much about updating and improving than writing new stuff*".

Asked about how their teaching was different on the HE courses compared to the FE course, all respondents talked about increased use of theory, trying to be more academically rigorous and greater use of reading and research. Several respondents commented on library or research activity, getting the students to conduct their own research and present it back to the group for all to learn from, rather than teaching about something and then getting the students to present as a follow up activity. R8 wrote "*A common activity is giving the students a concept or theory and asking them to research it and present it back. Each group has a different theory and they produce a handout. That way they do the teaching and feel engaged*". Several respondents felt that the same principles for teaching existed regardless of the level. For them, it was more about the depth and the use of activities that really dictated the approach they took. Five of the respondents made reference to reading and the

use of journal articles. R1 stated "*It is about getting them to read, and to read widely. Too often students just use the Internet at Level 3 and if not the Internet they all use the same book, so on my Level 4 module I get them using magazines such as Management Today. I know these are not particularly academic but they are a good starting point. Then when we get them into Level 5 we can make use of Journal Articles. I do introduce these into Level 4 but not too often. It does get students reading and not just the Internet. In teaching I can then get them to read an article in advance of the next class. There is more chance of reading a two or three page magazine article than an eight page journal article. It is about building it up*". Other respondents also made reference to getting the students to read People Management (2) and Nursery World (4 and 5) and Nursing Times (7, 8, and 9). Asked about the use of these magazines a common response was "*practical*" and "*journals are too academic and written in a language the students don't understand*".

Asked about making it feel HE, four of the respondents commented that it was difficult really because we are a college with (R3) stating "*We are a college and only really play at it*", while R4 noted "*We have the new HE area but that will take a while to settle in. I suppose HE is the way we teach and the way we try to introduce more theory*". R9 commented "*I don't think we can really. I take {colleagues name} at her university and the resources they have. They have loads of space, labs and equipment and lots of IT and technical support. We cannot compare*". Asked about what they could do further or what they would need to create more of a HE feel, the common threads were resources and time. There was a feeling that they did not want to be HE but that they wanted the courses to be of a higher level. Comments included "*I came into FE to teach. The level of course is not what it is about, but we do too much teaching*" (R1), "*I love teaching on the FD but I wouldn't want to teach in a University, it wouldn't be for me. I am more practical than academic so the FD is great*" (R5) and "*The obsession with HE really annoys me as we are what we are and we do a good service for the students we get. More resources and more time or rather less admin would make life easier*" (R6).

## Discussion
### Interpretation and identification of scholarly activity
Fundamentally, it can be deemed from the findings that there is limited understanding and acknowledgement of the notion of scholarly activity among staff and students within the CBHE sector. That is not to say that it is not happening but merely that it is more likely to be something that staff do rather than think about. As such they are just doing what they need to do, to do the job to the best of their ability, and for the benefit of their students. It is not necessarily something that is about self-promotion or about self-achievement. Commonly the purpose of scholarly activity relates to teaching, fitting with three of Boyer's (1990) facets. In particular the respondents relate scholarly activity to ensuring that they have the knowledge (and the ability to apply that knowledge) to be effective in the classroom. In a similar way it also fits with Widdowson's (2003, cited in King and Widdowson (2010) later classification in his identification with scholarly activity being about reading around the subject area to support teaching.

Although several of the commentators including Jones (2006b), King and Widdowson (2010) and King *et al.* (2014) all seem to highlight a broader spectrum of scholarly activity than that which may be considered "academic" it is this approach that seems to sit prominently with the staff. So industrial updating, for example, is not necessarily just done for the HE element of teaching. Similarly the development of teaching or teaching approaches may also not be distinguished. This would suggest whole college approaches to development activities which staff within colleges would not necessarily identify as specifically orientated towards the CBHE element of the college or their role and as such this lack of specificity may diminish or even detract from that notion of scholarly activity or even the linkage being made to CBHE, resulting in the lack of association between the two,

aligning with the suggest adopting by Medcalf (2014), while also acknowledging the symbiotic relationship proposed by Eaton (2015).

The findings seemed to concur with the literature in terms of the barriers to staff undertaking the type of scholarly activity that is most related to HE. None of the staff seemed to refer to problems related to preparing for teaching, which they most associated with the concept however they did recognise the lack of time available to them to conduct other activities which they would associate with the concept. Importantly in terms of research which some consider an aspect of scholarly activity (Boyes, 1990) there was general reluctance to commit with a couple of the staff not being certain what to do. This was despite holding masters degrees. This is perhaps due to lack of experience or lack confidence. The one member of staff who had had experience of research had done so with "help" from a colleague who worked at a university and perhaps there is a role for university partners to work with staff who deliver on CBHE to mentor and support the generation of research. Perhaps there is scope for an attempt to reintroduce the notion of a Journal aimed at research going on in the CBHE sector. That said however there is scope for publishing in the "trade" journals that most use or even the Journal of Further and Higher Education. It is not however unrealistic to publish in more mainstream journals.

*The impact of scholarly activity on HE experience*
Responses would suggest that there is a difference between the FE and HE side of Colleges without really an emphasis of there being a HE ethos or culture, instead the HE approach is somewhat under the radar and exists differently. That is that there is a more academic approach to the teaching through the use of theory and academic approaches to writing. At the same time students are more serious about their studies and more motivated. They work harder and undertake the tasks, this means that the teaching and learning activities become more interactive and there is better engagement, which both sides believe contribute to the HE-ness of the courses. This suggests a failing to create an appropriate environment in which a HE culture or ethos can become prevalent, and within which the FE ethos has prevalence (Scott, 2010).

Central to using scholarly activity as a basis for developing greater HE-ness comes coupled with the lack of recognition of what they are actually doing to make the sessions more HE. A key element of this is the preparation that goes into the lessons, the change of style and the depth of approach which comes about from the preparation of materials and activities (scholarship of teaching). At the same time staff bring in their own knowledge of experience done from previous jobs or consultancy activity (scholarship of application) and where they can they undertake small activity research (scholarly activity). In doing this staff do so, to both improve themselves and also improve the experience of the students.

In a similar vein, staff need to consider their output of scholarly activity in a way of disseminating their activity and also projecting it to the student community and the college itself. Some of this may be through the display of activities, which may include the use of noticeboards but may also include the publishing of materials (internal of external) and then using these materials or products in the teaching and learning spaces. Output events such as CPD (HE orientated) seminars to present and discuss activity which can be developed to showcase activities. All this will help to create more of a HE feel to the environment.

**Conclusion**
Scholarly activity exists in the context teaching and learning, and the majority of staff focus their efforts and as such this is where the concept manifests. Scholarly activity is evident in a broad context and fits with common explanations of scholarship (Boyer, 1990; King *et al.*, 2014). It does not fit, with the narrow perception, and the link to research, that is commonly placed on the concept. Research, "as research", is not fundamental to individuals within CBHE environments, in the same way it is to university staff.

It may be concluded however both through the literature and the findings that scholarly activity is fundamentally an "institutional" problem potentially created by the mixed economy focus with a single economy bias, which often means that the CBHE side is often considered the "poor relation" in terms of support and resources. CBHE providers are mostly acknowledged as Further Education Colleges and the significant majority of their income is related to their 16–19 year old provision, with only a small proportion of income generated from their HE provision, and subsequently under-resourced. It could therefore be deemed appropriate for Colleges (Senior Leaders) to consider their role in the culture creation of the environment and think how a CBHE ethos/culture can be created by putting scholarly activity at its heart. There is a need to embed this notion of scholarly activity at its foundation by freeing staff through the removal of barriers, which would allow them to become advocates and lead to students mirroring behaviours and attitudes.

As such, it is recommended to leaders within the CBHE context of the need to ensure key areas are developed if CBHE is to develop a level of comparability with that of the University sector. Firstly, leaders need to consider how to provide support through targeted staff development activities to broaden staff awareness of scholarly activity opportunities, and this may include providing mentoring (perhaps with the support of university partners) to develop capacity and opportunity. In doing this, staff could then be empowered to undertake scholarly activity through the performance review process. In doing this, leaders could review teaching and learning commitments and contractual arrangements to provide time and resources to support scholarly activity, while also providing internal vehicles (conferences, publications etc) for the output of scholarly activity by staff. This could also be coupled with encouraging attendance at University partner conferences and events, and where possible the promotion (and funding) of external conference attendance.

*Limitations of the research*
As with all research, limitations are inevitable. As a small-scale study there is a limit to the reliability and generalisability of the findings. However, the key issue relates to the lack of statistical data which means that it is difficult to draw findings and conclusions which are generalisable, whereas the findings from this research may be considered theoretical and generalisable to similar environments. It remains a small-scale study, as it only used a limited number of respondents across three programmes, in one FE College. As such it may not be a true reflection on other programmes in the college or similar programmes in other colleges. Furthermore, the data was collected at a single point of time, a cross-sectional (Bell, 2001) rather than through a longitudinal period. As such data collected at a single point is limited by the single collection point.

*Contribution to practice*
The research outlines key issues within the CBHE environment that potentially prevents the development of a HE experience. Research suggests that the lack of scholarly activity among programme teams has a detrimental effect on the HE experience of students. There remains the question, however of whether CBHE can provide a HE experience, and more importantly whether it should. Therefore, in conducting this study, the findings and discussion identify some areas for development (recommendations) for institutions to consider. In considering these areas and acting upon them, institutions will provide added worth and confidence to staff (to stand on a par with universities) and drive improvements in the student experience.

**Further research**
While this paper seeks to discuss the current position regarding the approach to scholarly activity in CBHE within the UK, it does not gather enough data to be truly generalisable across the sector, nor does it necessarily draw comparison with similar environments on a global

scale. As such, this paper provides a grounding, and the re-opening of the debate about the expectations of scholarly activity within higher education institutions and environments, as institutions become more routine in managerialist approaches and we see the ever increasing use of precarious contracts in all sectors. This paper can be considered a starting point for greater debate and further research across a broad sector with a global scale.

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