UPC Story

The development of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty; a national and internationally recognised network delivering high quality HE in FE opportunities and success for learners and the South West region.

An overview
The recognisable start of the University of Plymouth Colleges story began in the mid 1970s. During the late 1970s and early 1980s relationships started to develop between Plymouth Polytechnic and a small number of Further Education Colleges [FECs] in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. There was a trend for colleges to further develop and extend day-release programmes and at the same time to move into general vocational education, including: training schemes for the unemployed, vocational preparation programmes and academic education in the form of ‘A’ levels. Even with these modest developments, by the early 1980s, nationally around 20% of HE students were in FECs. The mid-70s also saw the first Access programmes, originally in the inner London area but they quickly grew to cover the country and involved links between Polytechnics and local FECs. This was accompanied by an increase in demand, particularly from mature students, women returners and people in employment for locally-available higher education [HE] opportunities. This was a significant development as further partnerships and franchises of higher education courses developed from such agreements. Since this time, UPC has grown from its modest start in 1989 when the newly named Polytechnic South West recognised that the opportunities for higher level study in the region’s scattered rural environment were limited. It entered into a partnership agreement with local colleges and, with an initial intake of just 450 students, what was to become the UPC network was born. By 2007, this had grown to 9,500 students studying on University of Plymouth programmes at 20+ locations stretching from Bristol to Penzance and from Barnstaple to the Channel Islands. Along the way there have been many important events and issues which have shaped the history, experiences and development of UPC. These events and developments have been researched through investigation of archival materials and interviews with key participants. This work was also undertaken to gain insights into UPC that would inform the further development of the HELP CETL operational strategy. While not every aspect of this journey can be covered, the timeline highlights key events and issues, whilst the following commentary expands upon these historic events.

Approach
While the events described below were taken forward by the dedication, hard work and vision of a whole range of individuals, groups and teams; this document does not refer to anyone by name and restricts itself to reporting, for the sake of brevity, just three kinds of contribution to the UPC Story:
1. Significant changes to policy, structures and systems
2. Characteristic approaches, actions and reactions
3. Highlighting when partners joined UPC on its journey

The pace of the development of UPC has not been steady and consistent growth; the commentary below highlights five points where there was a step change in the volume and variety of Plymouth co-ordinated regional HE in FE provision. Significant parallel developments in HE and FE collaborations in health are also highlighted [in italics]. The UPC Story commentary is supported by a time line poster which distils key moments into a graphical form that can be seen in parallel with the growth trend in UPC student numbers.
1976

Alston Kennerley’s history of the University comments on a short-lived collaboration with the College of St. Mark and St. John, on degrees in humanities and in social policy between 1976-80. It began to break down in 1977 due to different management approaches and differing aspirations. The college subsequently entered into an agreement with the University of Exeter, which became its validating body. While the potential for HE collaborations were becoming clearer, no region-wide structures or mechanisms existed.

1978

Plymouth Polytechnic realised a need to become engaged with the professional development of people across Devon and Cornwall and to become an established Polytechnic that was 'serving the peninsula'. The delivery of a limited range of post-experience/post-graduate Council for National Academic Awards [CNAA] validated programmes in collaboration with colleges was planned, in order to enable professionals to study locally. This was the start of the formation of collaborative degrees between Plymouth Polytechnic and Cornwall Colleges.

The decision was taken to develop two post-experience programmes; e.g. a diploma in management studies [DMS] offered in Plymouth, Camborne and Exeter. Relationships were then established with Exeter College and Cornwall College (Camborne) for the local delivery of the Plymouth Polytechnic Business School Diploma in Management Studies. At the same time, it was felt that there was a need to be able to train FE teachers and so a Certificate of Education [CertEd] was developed, which was offered in Plymouth, Camborne and at the Somerset College of Arts and Technology [SCAT] in Taunton. These decisions were approved by Devon County Council’s education committee, as the Polytechnic was under County Council control.

Another relatively short lived venture was also developed between Plymouth Polytechnic and Cornwall College; a degree in Scientific Illustration, with the science element delivered by Plymouth Polytechnic and the illustration delivered by Cornwall College, based in Camborne.

1981

Saw the creation of the regionally-based National Advisory Body [NAB] in 1981 to advise the government on the provision of HE courses and the allocation of Department for Education and Skills [DfES] funding. It was replaced in 1988 by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council [PCFC] and subsequently by the Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE].

1984

The Polytechnic appointed a new Deputy Director of Academic Affairs. The role developed into building partnerships with colleges across the peninsula, widening participation, expanding the local availability of courses, and securing progression routes to advanced levels of HE.

1986

Devon County Council Education Committee established the Devon Access Initiative aiming to improve arrangements for access to HE for mature students in every FEC in the county. This reflected national policy concerns, which were developing in the face of a significant demographic downturn in the number of traditional post ‘A’ level students. Concern was expressed that there would be unfilled university and college places. Consequently, it was decided to encourage women ‘returners’ and non-traditional students, particularly ‘mature’
students who had not progressed to higher education at 18+, and who did not wish to follow the Open University’s mode of study.

The Devon Education Committee’s decision crystallized in the establishment of the Access Initiative. The Polytechnic [which was at this time still under local authority control] decided it did not wish to run access courses itself, but would assist in planning, executing and evaluating the initiative and a small amount of money was allocated to undertake the work. The project increased Polytechnic /College contacts across the region and allowed the Polytechnic to engage in planning access provision and subject conversion courses relevant to the available degree courses. This, coupled with the award of full delegated validation powers from the CNAA, enabled the Polytechnic to unify planning, finance and validation with its partner colleges to provide the infrastructure for a pioneering HE in FE partnership. Step change in the volume and variety of Plymouth co-ordinated regional HE in FE provision.

1987

A Polytechnic Continuing Education Unit based within the Combined Honours Office at the Polytechnic was set up. It had two strands:

1. access and mature student matters,
2. CPD [which started the Polytechnic interfacing with local businesses and creating short-courses]

Following the start of access courses in FECs, work started to establish ways in which mature students could progress [via access courses] into the Polytechnic. The result was the establishment of a Mature Students Guidance Service. At that time, all students were interviewed for a place at the Polytechnic and all access courses had an external examiner appointed by the Polytechnic.

Discussions began with Cornwall College about the prospect of running the first year of a social science degree at Cornwall College. This potentially provided locally based higher education to follow on from the access courses. This enabled the colleges to extend access course provision and develop franchises of Polytechnic first year modules [initially just in the combined honours degrees] to see what could be done to provide students with a progression route from the access courses.

There was some intra Higher Education Institution [HEI] tension in that the University of Exeter was also interested in mature students, had an established extra-mural provision, primarily in humanities and saw a natural development into the provision of access courses to the region. With one exception, the subsequent validation of a small number of HND courses at the then new Truro College, the University of Exeter continued its outreach activity through locally-delivered extension courses. The Polytechnic’s activities at this pivotal point - in making higher education locally available, widening participation, and developing organisation - formed the foundation for the future UPC.

1988

The peninsula-wide organisation of access was achieved through the establishment of inter-institutional South West Access Monitoring Group enabling all access courses to be validated by an HEI, although funding remained with county councils. The Polytechnic expanded its franchise of first year HE provision to include Somerset College of Arts and Technology and later, North Devon College and South Devon College. With its explicit emphasis on opportunities for progression to the final two years of honours programmes, the Polytechnic’s approach contrasted at the time with that of the University of Exeter. Traditional University extension or extra-mural provision, often regarded as ‘leisure’ courses made little provision for structured progression to internal University programmes. Credits from these courses were not generally acceptable for progression to the later years of undergraduate programmes, although later a limited number of routes were developed.
By way of contrast, the Polytechnic was beginning to develop as an HEI with a distinct and explicit focus on the needs of the region and saw itself as the hub of a regional network of distributed higher education provision.

The Continuing Education Unit was successfully building a growing rapport with the colleges in Devon and Cornwall, with North Devon College interested in a social science franchise and South Devon College considering their future development and courses which they wanted to offer. The demand for access courses was increasing, both regionally and nationally and most colleges in the region wanted to boost their provision with access courses. In order to prepare people for progression into higher education, the college had to have a link with their local HEI. For example, the access courses at Somerset College could provide progression to Plymouth Polytechnic. This was the start of an important debate concerning Somerset College, as it was uncertain as to whether it was regarded as part of the rural South West or part of south Bristol.

In a complementary development, the national shortage of engineering graduates led the Polytechnic to establish a foundation [‘Level 0’] course through a government initiative, [‘Hi Tech’] to enable people without science A-Levels to move into engineering. Originally started in Plymouth, and funded through the ‘Switch Initiative’, it recruited successfully, and was subsequently offered at Somerset College. At the same time, a number of progression accords were concluded, allowing those who successfully completed HNCs or HNDs to ‘top-up’ to degree programmes.

Nationally, there was now a ‘binary system’ of higher education provision - with universities with their own degree awarding powers on one side, and polytechnics and colleges of higher education, with their courses validated by the CNAA on the other. Institutional governance was also changing. The polytechnics and major colleges of HE became independent of local authority control, answering instead to central government. The Education Reform Act established the PCFC as a parallel body to the University Grants Commission [UGC], so that the government could control the growing polytechnic sector. Although most ‘prescribed’ HE was funded by PCFC, ‘non-prescribed’ courses continued to be funded by Local Education Authorities [LEAs]. At this time there were 120,000 HE students nationally studying in FECs, the vast majority of which were sub-degree and part-time.

The government was aiming to significantly increase the provision and take up of HE; as the universities were only taking about 8% of the qualified population at this time. The policy-driver was that universities needed to increase the number of people getting a higher education qualification, and to do so as cheaply as possible. It was viewed as an important element in widening opportunities to provide for ‘Diversity and Complexity of provision at sub-degree level – in terms of funding, planning and responsibility’ [HMI Report, Department of Education and Science, 1989].

By effectively nationalising the polytechnics and creating a national funding body, the government with provided with an opportunity to shape the agenda strategically. The removal of local authority control also meant the end of the local authority dominated Regional Advisory Committees [RAC]. This change removed a block on development as previously every new course that a polytechnic had wanted to run had to receive RAC planning approval. The regional planning level now focussed on student numbers and funding under the aegis of the PCFC.

The net effect of these changes was to provide a significant opportunity for the Polytechnic to grow by forging strong links with Colleges and by embedding college programmes into strong progression networks with the Polytechnic. This effective strategic alliance between the Colleges and the Polytechnic developed rapidly and began to dominate HE in FE provision in the peninsula. The aim was to provide higher education opportunities for students across the peninsula, the promotional slogan of the time was, ‘Face to face, at a distance’.

In FECs still under local authority control, there was only a small amount of residual HE [mostly HNCs and HNDs]. The concern for the county councils was that they would no longer get the government money to fund HE. The concern for colleges was that they would not be eligible for PCFC funding and therefore be
excluded from participation in the growth of HE. The Polytechnic agreed with the three county councils to safeguard the existing higher education within this very small number of colleges, in the context of expanding college based provision of higher education to meet local needs. The Polytechnic began to bid for funding for college-based HE in the annual PCFC bidding round – the origins of the today’s HEFCE ‘indirect funding’ system for HE in FE. The Polytechnic was also franchising already-approved CNAA degree first years and carrying out BTEC HND approvals under a license agreement with the Business and Technician Education Council [BTEC]. The franchise approval and indirect funding systems allowed HNDs run at the colleges to be converted to Polytechnic approved and quality assured HNDs, run by colleges with operational funds channelled via the Polytechnic. In effect, HNCs and HNDs became Polytechnic courses and were generally integrated into the progression network.

The level of student demand was increasing, as was that for locally-available progression beyond the first year of undergraduate study. For some students, it was an attractive option to study the first year of a degree near their home and then finish the degree in Plymouth. For others who were totally tied to their locality, it was not so convenient. These people had been shown the opportunity and given their first taste of higher education with the Cert HE [first year of degree] and they then realised it was impossible for them to be able to travel into Plymouth on a regular basis to complete their degree.

Many new innovations were tested to try and make progression feasible for as many students as possible. This included prioritising the timetable so that potentially all tutorials were on the same day as lectures, creating core study periods and developing the Cornwall ‘Brain Train’ which encouraged students to travel from West Cornwall to the Polytechnic, studying as they travelled.

City College Plymouth joins the partnership.

Step change in the volume and variety of Plymouth co-ordinated regional HE in FE provision.

1989

Plymouth Polytechnic had now become a major regional institution through providing distributed higher education opportunities in an expanding range of subjects, in many parts of the peninsula. A further consequence of the Education Reform Act 1988 was the removal of local authority control along with the creation of the PCFC to make the position and governance of small ‘monotechnic’ colleges increasingly tenuous. Subsequently, amalgamations between Plymouth Polytechnic, Rolle College of Education, Exeter College of Art and Design and Seale Hayne Agricultural College, created Polytechnic South West. Despite considerable funding pressures emanating from central government, corporate status proved to be a significant benefit - and the links with colleges and other organisations that Exeter, Rolle, and Seale-Hayne had themselves developed, increased the range of partnership activity in the new Polytechnic. Organisationally, the Polytechnic’s HE in FE activity was now coordinated by a new Academic Partnerships office, linked to the Combined Honours administration. Crucially, a distinct set of HE in FE validation and quality assurance processes were formalised into a clear system by the Polytechnic to approve programmes franchised to and delivered in partner colleges and organisations.

Parallel developments were taking place in health with the merger of Cornwall and Plymouth schools of nursing, to form the Southwest College of Health Studies. Devonshire College was also created from the merger of Torbay and Exeter schools of nursing. A year later [1990], Devonshire College merged with the Somerset School of nursing to form Tor College and a year after that [1991] Tor and Southwest colleges merged. Discussions about moving these colleges provision into HE took place in 1990. The first courses to become degree courses concerned District Nursing and Health Visitors. By 1995 Tor and Southwest College and the University were offering Higher Award /BSc Hons for post registration courses in nursing and midwifery.
Bicton College and Plymouth College of Art and Design [PCAD] join the partnership. The link with PCAD was dissolved in 2003. The diversity of the partnerships was enhanced with the addition of collaborations with HMS Dryad, HMS Seahawk (RNAS Culdrose, HMS Collingwood and HMS Drake. Courses were subsequently combined in the Royal Naval Maritime Warfare Training School. Step change in the volume and variety of Plymouth co-ordinated regional HE in FE provision.

1990

The changes of 1988-9, coupled with steadily increasing student demand produced rapid growth in both courses and student numbers across the partnership. What had begun as a franchise and HNC/D arrangement with 5 colleges and 450 students, by now involved a developed relationship with every FE College in Devon and Cornwall. A social work course was running at the Polytechnic, East Devon College and Cornwall College. The Polytechnic was rolling out HNDs and the peninsula was starting to see new honours degrees in the Arts starting at Somerset College. The new Faculty of Arts and Education was in discussion with Somerset about converting their HND in Textiles into honours degree provision. The Seale Hayne Faculty was able to diversify through collaboration with partners to start to develop areas that the Polytechnic could not do alone. South Devon College was running a successful HND in Hotel and Catering Management and also had an emerging honours degree in Hospitality Management. In collaboration, this was effectively converted into an honours degree. At that time, East Devon College had established itself as a major Tourism Management centre for the southwest and wanted to run a HND, followed by South Devon College and Cornwall College both offering the HND in Tourism Management. Over the next three years, the development of Hospitality Management and Tourism Management as two completely new curriculum areas in the Polytechnic was largely created by a collaborative venture with the colleges concerned.

Polytechnic South West started accrediting the Britannia Royal Navy College Dartmouth academic programme: e.g. strategic studies, marine engineering, navigation and hydrology, naval architecture, modern languages etc. This developed into a Cert HE and Dartmouth entered into the partnership giving the college external civilian recognition.

Additionally, Polytechnic South West started working with the NHS in terms of validating diplomas in HE in nursing and midwifery. This was an important year with the development of new curriculum areas and provision of a wide range of courses that Polytechnic South West could not provide without college partnership, allowing conversion from HNDs in Colleges to BA degrees.

Prior to the merger, Somerset College had developed HNDs in Graphics and Textiles with Exeter Art School. The forming of the new partnership opened up great opportunities for the development of HE in Somerset, which is a county without its own university. The subsequent development of the Art and Design modular scheme was highly significant in increasing student numbers in colleges and the relationships established became a forerunner of the Art and Design Subject Forum over 10 years later in UPC.

In 1993 the first three year degree was offered in Textiles, and in 1995, additional pathways were developed in Fashion and Fashion & Textiles. By 1996 a top up degree in Packaging had been introduced as a progression route from the HND in Graphics. By 1997, five named awards were available in Fashion and Textiles, and other HNDs had been developed in other areas of the college, such as Engineering, Leisure and Tourism, Building Studies and Early Childhood Studies. These developments with Plymouth enabled the college to establish itself as a provider of high quality HE, and to develop the necessary staff, resources and the quality procedures.

All of these developments placed what was to become UPC firmly within the operational structure of the Polytechnic.

St Austell College joins the partnership.
1992

Polytechnic South West became the University of Plymouth with full taught and research degree awarding powers under the Further and Higher Education Act. University status gave collaborative activities a much greater salience in the region, and a clearer identity in the perception of students, employers and the wider community. The number and range of partners and the University courses they offered continued to grow. An example of other developments was the validation of a Cert HE in Social Science at Highlands College Jersey as a collaborative venture with the combined social sciences programme within the University. This was supported by visiting lecturers, on island-tutorial support and early video conference tutorials which provided ‘face-to-face at a distance’ learning. Additionally, an ‘on island’ teaching certificate for primary school teachers and classroom assistants was created to cover a shortage in teachers. However, at this stage such initiatives did not halt the loss of younger students from the island, but did fulfil the needs of mature students who could not travel to the UK.

1993

The now mature partnership was commended in the Higher Education Quality Council [HEQC] Institutional Audit inter alia for ‘the energy and commitment of all its staff associated with the support of collaborative and partnership activities.’

Step change in the volume and variety of Plymouth co-ordinated regional HE in FE provision.

1994

The University received one of the first Queen’s Anniversary Prizes for Higher and Further Education in recognition of its successful HE in FE partner network. The citation noted that ‘an excellent model of collaborative working has been developed’ leading to ‘an exceptionally well-thought out and executed programme to improve educational opportunity in a scattered rural environment.’

At this time, the University took a policy decision to cease internal HND provision, and to concentrate on honours degree and postgraduate programmes. Over the following few years, HND and HNC activity was transferred to colleges within the network, starting with Business Studies and followed by niche HNDs such as the HND in Marine Telecommunications. At the same time the University wanted to strengthen the recruitment into the Honours degree in Marine and Electronic Telecommunications. It developed some long distance franchises with the then Brunel College in Bristol [now City of Bristol College] and South Tyneside College in South Shields, the successors of some of the oldest merchant marine training centres in the country. Student progression was to BSc [Hons] programmes in Plymouth. In the end, distance defeated the partnership with South Tyneside: numbers were small and progression impractical; the partnership was dissolved in 2000. The partnership in Bristol, however, did flourish, as an exemplar of joined-up planning. The college marketed the HND as a natural extension to its national diploma in Electronic Engineering, and the HND flourished on the basis that it was validated by the University, with a planned progression route in [from FE Level 3] and out [to honours degree]. This proved to be a very successful partnership and a model of good practice for planning and progression.

In order to secure the position of Cornwall College and the University in Cornwall, the University supported the development of the Cornwall College Business School [with a UniversityHonours Degree in Business Administration. Supporting and extending Cornwall College’s provision became a central part of the University’s strategy to meet the increasing demand for HE in Cornwall, in particular to contribute to the regeneration of Cornwall’s economy.
The University of Exeter unsuccessfully sought Millennium funding to develop its university level education provision in Cornwall. After this, Government Office South West took the view that HE should be developed in Cornwall and that it should be a collective venture between all of the region’s HE providers, not just the University of Exeter. The Combined Universities in Cornwall [CUC] was established as an over-arching structure with all HE providers in Cornwall coming together to provide a common benefit to all types of potential HE learners in the county, and subsequently became a major focus and conduit for EU Objective One funding. This year also saw the first Cornwall College degree ceremony.

Further parallel collaborative HE and FE developments in health included the merger of Cornwall School of Nursing and a School of Nursing in Torbay formed the Tor and South West School of Nursing. Within the South West Strategic Health Authority it was seen as important that the provider of HE services to the NHS would ensure that there was local delivery in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall with linkages with local hospitals, including CPD training. This gave the Polytechnic an opportunity to immediately provide this dispersed delivery with an academic infrastructure with nursing based in 4 centres; Plymouth, Exeter, Camborne and Somerset College.

Nearly 3000 students were studying University of Plymouth courses at the partner colleges, on a significant range of programmes. The HND Business developed into a peninsula-wide scheme. The provision at Highlands College, Jersey was extended to DipHE level, taught using the same combination of flying faculty and local support.

In a development that was to have major implications for the network, the University successfully bid for NHS training contracts in nursing and several professions allied to medicine. This incorporated the then Tor and South West College of Health into the University as the Institute of Health Studies. NHS policy was to concentrate small pockets of scattered and inefficient provision onto a smaller number of sites – and facilities were established on the University’s campuses in Plymouth and Exeter - and at Cornwall College in Camborne [later to move to Treliske] and at Somerset College in Taunton. In the latter cases, partner college staff provided substantial teaching inputs to these new University courses, and the development stimulated the growth of provision in health and social care in the two colleges. The development enhanced progression opportunities for the FE students at the colleges and the University invested money in the campuses to upgrade accommodation, including the science laboratories, and created learning centres. The facilities at Camborne subsequently formed the basis for the HE site development undertaken as part of the Objective One programme.

The recently established Truro College had a limited range of HND provision - e.g. in Law, Archaeology, and Computing - validated by the University of Exeter. By agreement between the two universities, Truro’s association with the University of Exeter was dissolved, the provision transferred to University of Plymouth validation, and Truro College became a full partner of the University of Plymouth. Coupled with the CUC development, the move was to enable a much more coordinated approach to the development of HE in FE in
2000

The strength of the University’s progression work was recognised through the award of the £275K HEFCE FDTL [3] SPAT [Student Progression and Transfer] project, which was operated in conjunction with the University of Ulster. SPAT built on the strength of partnership arrangements between the Seale-Hayne campus of the University with colleges and was to work over four years with 83 UK HEIs and Colleges. The practice developed formed the basis for progression and articulation arrangements, particularly in the development of Foundation degrees.

Undergraduate degrees in nursing followed incorporation with the mainstay of basic nurse training being at Dip HE level under the ‘Project 2000’ initiative. This led to more university programmes being delivered at multiple college sites.

Penwith College, Bridgwater College and Weymouth College all join the partnership this year.

2001

Further franchise provision and college-designed HNDs were introduced and the creation of Pathfinder colleges by the Learning and Skills Council [LSC] - the national FE planning and funding body. Additionally, in 2001, the Quality Assurance Agency’s [QAA] Institutional Review report on the University specifically noted that: ‘The University has been successful in developing a sense of shared purpose, even in colleges at a considerable distance from its campuses. Staff from partner institutions were clear about the positive effects of liaison with the University and visits by University staff appeared frequent and valued on both sides…’ The report concluded by commending ‘the integration, within its quality strategy, of the University’s collaborative activity with partner institutions.’

2001 also saw the launch of the initial Foundation Degrees in Art & Design and Tourism at three colleges; South Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. This development was backed by HEFCE Foundation Degree pilot funding for a collaborative project involving the Universities of Plymouth and Bournemouth to design, introduce and evaluate the operation of these new qualifications. Participants in this work also went on to be involved in the national evaluation for HEFCE of initial Foundation Degrees. Significantly, the experience led to a close cooperation between the two universities’ partnership operations, leading to later cooperation in the development of Foundation degrees in public services and in the South West Lifelong Learning Network [SWLLN]. Subsequently most UPC HND provision has been converted into Foundation Degrees.

In a parallel development, the Cornwall College group was formed through the merger of Cornwall College (Camborne), Duchy College, Falmouth Marine School, Newquay College, Saltash College and St Austell College. The Cornwall College corporation would eventually incorporate a further five colleges.

Treviglas Community College joins the partnership.

2002

The new Vice-Chancellor instituted a review and reform of the academic structure of the University. Within this review it was recognised that the close relationship between University and the partner colleges was an enormous asset to the University and the region, and that the partnership system was at the forefront of national developments. Updated academic cooperation agreements were concluded with each partner college and organisation. The Head of Academic Partnerships led the review, and consulted widely across the Univer-
sity and with partner colleges, as well as examining the structure and operation of partnerships in both the UK and the United States.

**Mous Training**, a University spin out company, starts delivering programmes approved thorough the University.

**Step change in the volume and variety of Plymouth co-ordinated regional HE in FE provision.**

2003

The review [as described above] analysed the strengths and weaknesses and produced a rationale and proposed structure for a new and unique faculty structure for the University’s HE in FE partnerships. The main points of the analysis were:

**Strengths:** Plymouth had one of the largest, longest established, good quality [according to QAA reviews and institutional audit] and best-developed partner college networks in the country which others were seeking to emulate. The partnership meet local community needs, provided a major vehicle for widening participation and provided essential feeder routes to university degree provision.

**Weaknesses:** The Plymouth partnership suffered from an insufficiently strong brand; over-burdensome quality assurance requirements on faculties; and a failure to make more of colleges’ shared management responsibilities. Planning and deliberative mechanisms were poorly integrated into the university’s central processes, and colleges felt they had insufficient recognition for the significant contribution they made to meet both the university mission and regional development goals. Subject-based academic support between University and Colleges was also variable in range and approach.

**Needs:** The partnership needed a greater profile within the University’s structures and recognition of its contribution of two-year vocational education as being an integral part of the University mission. Systems needed to be made uniform, with greater engagement of college management and there needs to be a greater emphasis on the creation of an academic community comparable with some of the best practice in N. America. The model of the University of Wisconsin Colleges was influential in shaping the model for what became UPC.

**External drivers for change:** The White Paper on the future of Higher Education saw the bulk of future student growth through Foundation degrees, delivered primarily by partnerships between HE and FE. Progression to honours degrees delivered by HEIs would be seen as an integral part of the student expectation. Part time and work-based provision will be strongly encouraged and top-up fees would inevitably drive some students to seek local provision to study. A central campus in Plymouth would not alone be able to serve these students needs.

New QAA review arrangements focused on audits of evidence that institutional processes were consistently applied, and that best practice is uniformly extended to all provision irrespective of its point of delivery. This focus upon quality enhancement; ownership of quality at the point of delivery, and upon the existence of uniform and easily accessible quality assurance [QA] records also focused the universities approach. The previous devolution of QA oversight to faculties had generated a number of anomalies in the style of approach and there were a number of QA practices, which needed to be reviewed.

**Internal drivers for change:** Internally, the university had a major challenge in developing its research and consultancy capacity. Faculty priorities inevitably focused upon this work; it was therefore incumbent upon Academic Partnerships to ensure that academic staff time was not diverted unnecessarily. This is particularly the case in relation to some of the essentially administrative QA tasks that some faculty academic staff undertook in support of partner colleges.
The review was completed in early 2003, and culminated in a report to the University’s Academic Board. It recommended the organisation of partnerships as a Faculty, and drew significantly on the successful model of the University of Wisconsin Colleges system in the USA. Accepting the report, Academic Board and the Board of Governors approved the establishment of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty [UPC] as a full Faculty of the University. This was an important signal of both the strength and extent of the partnership – and of its centrality to the University’s mission.

The University had developed a strong commitment to the region and to widening participation. The Board of Governors recognised that Partner Colleges represented the key vehicle for widening participation and meeting community needs, leaving internal faculties to concentrate on undergraduate programmes, research and higher level taught courses. In this dual track mission, it was important that partner college work was accorded equal status within the university, and enabled planning to be effectively incorporated within mainstream university structures and timescales.

A key additional feature of the new faculty would be to focus academic liaison on the creation of dispersed academic communities, with the emphasis on quality enhancement, curriculum development and student progression issues. Eight Subject Forums were created comprising college based and university staff involved in the delivery and support of HE in FE programmes and their associated progression arrangements. The forums broadly mapped onto the university faculty structure.

By 2003, prior to the launch of UPC, nearly 5000 students were studying University of Plymouth courses at partner colleges. The University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty was launched in Autumn 2003. The launch also highlighted the aim of creating a regional academic community, raising the profile of UPC and HE within the colleges, and widely publicising the increasing range of progression opportunities for students. UPC started with strategic priorities involving the curriculum, market niches, economic development, the dispersed university, staff development, infrastructure and investment and a specific summary of the strategy for college based Level 3 and Honours Degree Developments.

Estover Community College joins the partnership and brings a further diversity to it with their collaboration with Deep Blue Sound, a professional recording studio providing nationally recognised sound engineering, music technology and music production courses.

2001

Full establishment of University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty [UPC]. At a time when other faculties began to converge on the Plymouth campus [through the closure of outlying campuses], UPC redefined the meaning of the term ‘dispersed university’. Spread across the whole of the South West, it incorporated thirteen general and specialist colleges, offering Higher Education through University of Plymouth accredited programmes along with other institutions such as Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth. Like any other faculty; it now had a Faculty Board [including senior managers from each college] with responsibility for the strategic planning and quality assurance of all its HND and Foundation Degree programmes. The Faculty was constructed on the basis that ownership and responsibility for programmes, quality assurance and enhancement should be exercised collaboratively as close to the point of delivery as possible, and that structures would allow the university centrally to have a clear line of sight to that point of delivery.

In the past a ‘typical’ UPC student might have been a mature student returning to study and restricted to a particular location. Increasing numbers of younger students were now attracted to the exciting new vocational degrees on offer [e.g. such as the Aquaculture Foundation Degree at Cornwall College, Newquay with the national lobster hatcheries] or chose the smaller institutional environment and the relationship with staff that the colleges offer e.g. locally available HE has allowed many more students to realise their full potential through the two years at College, and sometimes out-perform traditional University students on arrival at Plymouth.
The faculty was launched with well established robust operating systems. A clear brand and high quality promotional materials [e.g. 'A Degree on your doorstep'], helped to gain an excellent national profile, received excellent national and regional press coverage, and were recognised by HEFCE, the LSC, and the then DfES as exemplars for the rest of the country. Nationally, UPC senior staff contributed to the set-up and launch of Foundation Degree Forward [FdF], and the drafting of the new QAA Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark [FDQB].

**Strode College** joins UPC.

UPC bid successfully, in partnership, for a Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning [CETL] The Higher Education Learning Partnerships [HELP] CETL became the only CETL awarded for the development of HE in FE. HELP CETL was part of a national network of 74 CETLs which were funded by HEFCE to reward excellence in learning and teaching and to promote educational research. The HELP CETL was funded £4.5M over five years [2005-2010] to support HE in FE development. The HELP CETL built on the existing excellence of the University of Plymouth Colleges [UPC] partnership within the South West region.

It simultaneously implemented a programme of development/intervention while researching and evaluating these work packages. The research built upon existing work within the field, and provided outcomes that served to guide and inform other stakeholders in the HE in FE context.

In addition the HELP CETL worked to enhance the experience of students within UPC and the wider HE in FE community. Work to achieve this was undertaken in the following five work packages with both individuals and groups:

1. Established recognition and reward strategies for staff working within UPC to further their personal and professional development. This was partly achieved through the creation of an Award Holder Scheme.
2. Established coherent and functioning physical and virtual Communities of Practice [CoPs] that operate over the dispersed area of UPC and incorporating participants from beyond the region.
3. Investigated the viability of virtually supporting individuals with video conferencing and Knowledge Management tools.
4. Take forward the strategic priorities of UPC through a range of Development Activities. These provided:
   a. Individual and group research and scholarly activity opportunities.
   b. Opportunities for groups of staff to come together from different disciplines and locations to facilitate the formation and/or development of CoPs.
5. Identified, and in some cases provided, the infrastructure facilities necessary to support the delivery of HE in FE. This included the purchase of capital equipment, e.g. video conferencing, or provide financial support toward the building/refurbishment of facilities.

These research and development areas were all inter-related e.g. the knowledge management system was developed through the infrastructure/facilities capital programme but was also integral to the development of CoPs in UPC, of which the Award Holders were a significant CoP. The role of the HELP CETL in furthering UPC’s strategic plan and in building HE capacity within colleges through devices such as the Award Holder Scheme has been crucial.

Other significant development included the launch of UPC’s capacity-building staff development programme for college staff and the annual External Examiners’ Conference.
2006

Following an exhaustive review and visits to a number of partners, a highly successful QAA Collaborative Provision Audit of the University identified the following features of good practice:

• the structures, processes, procedures and initiatives that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the ‘hub and rim’ model in delivering higher education in further education colleges within the region. These are exemplified by the establishment and operation of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty [UPC], the joint boards of study, the refinement of standard quality assurance documentation to accommodate the requirements of partner institutions and associated guidance, including the document ‘preparing a foundation degree programme for approval by UPC’;

• The deliberate construction of an academic culture supporting ‘communities of practice and scholarship’ across the collaborative partners, as demonstrated by subject fora and the HELP CETL, University fellowship schemes; the operation of the Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching; the funding of scholarly activity and research in some partners; and other targeted investment of resources;

• The guidance and support provided to external examiners via the University website, the UPC annual conference, and the formalisation of mentoring arrangements for external examiners working with UPC;

• The collegiate approach to staff development that provides extensive opportunities to all staff involved in the delivery and support of University programmes across partner institutions;

• The partnership between the University and the University of Plymouth Students’ Union to improve student representation in its collaborative provision.

In 2006, the QAA review on the future of HE in FE is finalised. This included UPC and College representatives being consulted by QAA on the design of the new Integrated Quality Enhancement Review [IQER] system for HE provision in FECs.

2007

A new Vice-Chancellor joined the university this year and continued support for HE in FE partnerships. The influential leader of Plymouth HE in FE partnerships and first Dean of UPC left to take up the Chief Executive role with Combined Universities Cornwall [CUC] after almost twenty years developing the Plymouth approach to partnerships. UPC Faculty student numbers reached 9,500, mostly students undertaking Foundation Degree level study or working on University programmes delivered at college sites. UPC was by then, by some considerable distance, the largest Faculty of the University of Plymouth in terms of student numbers. UPC continues to promote consolidation and renewal of original Foundation degree provision, seeks to exploit flexibility of the model, and promotes new ‘second-generation’ work-based Foundation degrees and CPD modules for those in employment. Successful extension of ‘chunks’ and ‘bitesize’ CPD opportunities in Cornwall, North Devon, South Devon and Somerset is undertaken on basis of 2006 pilots.

HELP CETL Capital Programme draws to a conclusion with over £1.8 in capital investment redelivered to improve the student experience at UPC college sites. Investments ranged from large scale redevelopments of existing infrastructure at Somerset College, to small scale projects where students helped set the priorities. Investment was also made to assist colleges in transition, for example the whole site move of South Devon College. Details of the programme of investment can be found in the report, ‘Evaluation of the HELP CETL Capital Programme: buildings and equipment’ [http://hdl.handle.net/10293/133].

The HELP CETL work programme was significantly enhanced by further funding from additional teaching and learning projects; for example UsPaCe [www.uspace.org.uk/]. This JISC funded project worked to support the needs of WBL learners and mentors via the creation and sharing of resources and by providing online student
support for learners in the work-place to be accessed via desktop or mobile devices. It also supported tutors, mentors, learners and employers to interact, communicate and share ideas experiences and knowledge. This initiative brought together contributions from UPC, Cornwall College, Falmouth Marine School, the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies and City College Plymouth.

2008

UPC secured HEFCE and Regional Development Agency [RDA] funding for the construction of new higher education and innovation centres at North Devon College and South Devon College. The project was praised as an exemplar by ministers for the new ‘University Challenge’ programme - and as a pilot for joint working between HEFCE and RDAs focussing on widening participation, employer and enterprise led CPD, and local regeneration. The first UPC member of staff is nominated for a National Teaching Fellowship. Other significant developments included the launch of UPC’s Blended Learning Strategy. By the half way stage of the HELP CETL additional funding through HEFCE, HEA and JISC funding exceeded £625,000.

Nationally, the Government’s clear strategy for HE in FE, involved initiatives to provide for ‘cold spots’ where access is poor, for growing Foundation Degree provision to new targets, and for increasing employer involvement in HE in FE.

HELP CETL investment has led to the establishment of a network of 17 high quality UPC video conferencing centres. This has led to time and carbon savings through reduced travel and opened up further collaboration opportunities within UPC and with external partners.

North Devon College and East Devon College merger (later Petroc 2009).

Truro College and Penwith College merge to form Truro and Penwith College.

2009

The national HE in FE culture and experience a partnership perspective conference was held at Warwick. While being led by UPC and the HELP CETL, this event was a national celebration of the development of HE in FE in the UK. It brought together contributions from seven HE in FE partnerships and national bodies supporting HE in FE to addresses future policy and strategy. The conference proceedings can be found at [http://hdl.handle.net/10293/127].

In the academic year 2008-09, there were more than 10,000 students undertaking University programmes at UPC Colleges.

The UPC regional repository goes live [http://uplace.org.uk:8080/dspace/]. This development was the outcome of a JISC funded project that is integrated with and supports the work of UPC and the HELP CETL. It provides a home for the outputs from the CETL, the South West Life Long Learning Network and other projects including C-Change, a Geography Earth & Environmental Sciences [GEES] HEA Subject Centre initiative concerning climate change. In time the repository will also become a key tool in the management and dissemination of UPC resources. This work was informed by the JISC funded Web2Rights [www.web2rights.org.uk] project that guides institutions and individuals through the complexities of developing, publishing, sharing and storing online resources. Members of the HELP CETL team took a leading role in this project.

Work starts on the Higher Level Skills building at South Devon College, stage two of a building programme that enhances the HE offer in more flexible ways that are targeted at supporting the local and regional economy.

UPC’s work was recognised on a national stage where at the annual QAA HE in FE conference, five out of nine workshops at the national event were delivered by UPC; one from a member of HELP CETL staff and the rest by CETL Award Holders. Other national recognition has come from invitations to undertake HE in FE...
work for the HEA and to participate in a HEFCE Leadership Governance and Management project supporting college governors in delivering HE in FE [www.sheffield.ac.uk/heinfestratprog/index.html]. CETL staff have also joined the HEA HE in FE reference group and other UPC and HELP staff are increasingly invited to speak at national events or provide staff development input to national programmes such as the Learning and Skills Research Network [LSRN].

The 2009 revised and updated HEFCE HE in FE good practice guide was launched with significant amounts of good practice featured from UPC and the HELP CETL. [www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2009/09_05/]

‘Putting the I into identity’ published [http://escalate.ac.uk/6105]. This joint HELP CETL & ESCalate [HEA Education Subject Centre] publication provides powerful testimony to the developmental journey undertaken by college based HE staff undertaking research and scholarly activity within a supportive community of practice.

A great example of how over the period of the HELP CETL it’s work has become ever more embedded within the operation and culture of UPC is the wide range of good practice identified in a highly successful round of QAA Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) reports – for example nine areas of good practice highlighted from Bridgewater College.

A £300K JISC funded Pineapple project started in 2009 which aims to bring greater clarity and structure to current Accredited Prior Learning (APL) work, policies and practice carried out in UPC. Guidance and advice will be improved for UPC staff and those working through the APL process. The resulting tools, resources and processes will be relevant, beneficial and transferable to other HE and FE settings.

2010

UPC celebrates 20 years as a significant and continually growing part of the University at an event where speakers from the regional and national HE community outline how the UPC journey has evolved and how this experience and expertise is shaping the future development of UPC and HE in FE more widely.

What’s next?

Following on from the 2009 national HE in FE culture and experience a partnership perspective conference, UPC is working to further develop and strengthen collaboration between HE in FE partnerships to support the development of strategy, staff and professional practice and the student experience. The aim being a more effective partnership of partnerships in the provision of HE in FE.

UPC Summer conference and HELP CETL Celebration event [June 2010]. This event marks the formal end of the HELP CETL as one of HEFCE’s network of national Centres for Excellence, but more importantly showcases the aspects of the HELP CETL that are now embedded in UPC, the University and the wider HE in FE community. The event will also provide an opportunity to outline the successful practice and learning from the CETL and illustrate how this is being used to inform the future direction of UPC.
# Acronyms used in this publication:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CertEd</td>
<td>Certificate in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNAA</td>
<td>Council for Academic Awards</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
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<td>CUC</td>
<td>Combined Universities Cornwall</td>
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<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills</td>
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<td>DMS</td>
<td>Diploma in Management Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>FdF</td>
<td>Foundation Degree Forward</td>
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<td>FDQB</td>
<td>Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark</td>
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<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
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<td>FEC</td>
<td>Further Education College</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HE in FE</td>
<td>Higher Education in Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>HELP CETL</td>
<td>Higher Education Learning Partnerships; Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning</td>
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<td>HEQC</td>
<td>Higher Education Quality Committee</td>
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<td>HNC</td>
<td>Higher National Certificate</td>
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<td>HND</td>
<td>Higher National Diploma</td>
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<td>IQER</td>
<td>Integrated Quality Enhancement Review</td>
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<td>JISC</td>
<td>Joint Information Systems Committee</td>
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<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Authority</td>
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<td>NAB</td>
<td>National Advisory Body</td>
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<td>PCFC</td>
<td>Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council</td>
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<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>QAA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Agency</td>
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<td>RAC</td>
<td>Regional Advisory Committees</td>
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<td>RDA</td>
<td>Regional Development Agency</td>
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<td>SWLLN</td>
<td>South West Lifelong Learning Network</td>
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<td>UGC</td>
<td>University Grants Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPC</td>
<td>University of Plymouth Colleges</td>
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Bibliography:

- QAA [1994] Institutional Audit, University of Plymouth, Report
  This report identified key problems with the university’s existing HE in FE support and development structures and was the starting point for thinking and developments that would end with the UPC launch model.
- University of Plymouth [2003] Strategic Plan.
- University of Plymouth [2003] Learning and Teaching Strategy [2003-06].
- University of Plymouth Colleges [2003] Faculty Board.
- University of Plymouth Colleges [2004] Faculty Board.
- University of Plymouth Colleges [2004] UPC Strategic Plan.
- University of Plymouth Colleges [2007] UPC Strategic Plan.
Many of the key milestones in the development of UPC and the decision making that underpinned them are held within University, Faculty and College documentation. However, these sources provide far less than the whole story. The connections, the implications and the impact of individual and consequential events are held by those key participants who lived through and piloted the developments that led to UPC. When the HELP CETL was established, it became clear that it was important to put in place a methodology to extract and capture the UPC story, as this provided the current context and historical influence for much of the work to be undertaken. A series of interviews were undertaken by the CETL team with members of the core UPC team. The data gathered from these interviews, along with the documentary trawl was analysed using a Framework Analysis approach to produce a key milestone UPC timeline. The volume of data precluded including many developments and incidents. However, critical incidents and big shifts in policy, procedure and approach that signified the direction of travel and the major influences upon this were investigated.

From this point a modified Dephi approach was followed. This allowed the story to emerge from participant input, with subsequent synthesis and analysis [of the documentary and interview input]. Results were then presented back to contributors for recognition, clarity checking and additional reflection. At this point, further checking and cross referencing was extended to a small number of senior figures within colleges who had also been participants in and witnesses to the development of UPC.

It has been a difficult task to get the balance right between comprehensively detailing a sequence of events and their significance or providing a level of detail that covers most of the key milestones and illustrates the rationale for and impact of the journey undertaken. It is likely that there will be later versions of this story that include both future events and revisions or additions to the back story of UPC.

Research aims:
1. To establish the history and development of the UPC model; including if possible, the lessons learned/what worked and what did not
2. Supplementary to the first aim, was to establish the operational approach and style of UPC, how this developed and current issues within the partnership that would inform the HELP CETL approach and work plan.

Outline Interview Structure: Semi structured questions were led by one HELP CETL interviewer. They intervened minimally with follow up questions relevant to the aims of the interview; the interviewer role was to prime and listen.

1. UPC time line: what are the key events/moments/incidents in the development of UPC?
   Before the interview please identify around eight key milestones and identify the date of occurrence and whether there is any written material/evidence of these from that time.
2. What are the key influences/drivers in your approach to developing the UPC Faculty?
   For each key incident:
   • Why was this event so important?
   • What were the positive and negative impacts/effects from this event?
   • What did you learn from this event and how did you take this forward as a result?

In undertaking the questioning the interviewer sort to:
• Understand the drivers: e.g. what were the institutional and policy drivers in the development of the UPC and the partnership?
• Capture the highlights: e.g. what were the major achievements and milestones?
• Explore walls and bridges: e.g. what were the major blockages to development and how were these overcome?
• Explore rocks in the stream: e.g. what where the immovable obstacles that needed going around?
• Understand who were the good guys and bad guys: e.g. what helped the development of the partnership and who got in the way; what were the perceived reasons or motivations for their behaviour, attitudes or actions?
• Understand how the UPC philosophy and culture developed and how this would influence future HELP
CETL operational strategy; key issues included exploring:
• issues in developing an HE in FE culture/ethos including scholarship and research
• working collaboratively across multiple institutions
• ways to overcome the perception of 'top down' or 'being done to' that comes from the quality enforcing aspect of HE FE relationships
• experiences of UPC in identifying and sharing good practice
• Potential future research questions:
• In the light of the experience of undertaking this work, future research could investigate:
• can aspects of organisational change or change management theory inform our understanding of the development of UPC
• what evaluative tools could the partnership use to periodically test effectiveness of its operational mode
The UPC Story

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