



Edge Hill University

From projects to whole school/college-higher education institution partnerships: Identifying the critical success factors underpinning effective strategic partnerships

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From projects to whole school/college-higher education institution partnerships: Identifying the critical success factors under-pinning effective strategic partnerships

Executive summary

1. National context

This research has been funded as part of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) research grant programme relating to links between higher education institutions (HEIs), schools, colleges and academies, in response to the recommendations of the National Council for Educational Excellence.

2. Institutional context: Edge Hill University

Edge Hill University (EHU) has been delivering higher education (HE) for 125 years, and achieved degree awarding power in 2006, and research degree awarding power in 2008. EHU has 23,622 registered students and a wide portfolio, offering programmes in most subject and professional areas. EHU has a very strong commitment to widening participation, and is one of the largest providers of initial teacher training (ITT) and education-related Foundation Degrees (FDs) in the UK.

EHU has in the region of 2,500 links with schools and colleges, with a wide range of purposes, spanning student recruitment, widening participation, student placements for trainee teachers, professional development for education professionals, support for school development, collaborative provision, curriculum development and research.

3. Research focus

The aim of this research project was to explore links and partnerships between EHU and its staff with schools, colleges and academies. More specifically, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What links are there currently between EHU and schools and colleges?
2. How are links and partnerships developed initially and maintained/sustained over time?
3. What are the positive benefits or impact of these links for students, staff, schools/colleges, EHU and other stakeholders?
4. How can links move from projects to whole school/college-institution partnerships?
5. What factors contribute to the development of an effective strategic partnership?

4. Research methodology

This study adopts a case study approach, focusing on EHU and two partner schools and colleges, and using mixed methods to collect data. Data collection included:

- A survey of EHU staff about school/college links (39 valid responses for most questions).
- Interviews from a sample of 12 staff who had responded to the survey.
- Two contrasting partner case studies, involving interviews with key staff, a focus group and document analysis.
- A participatory seminar for staff from partner institutions and across EHU.

Survey responses provided quantitative and qualitative descriptive data about links and partnerships; the former was analysed to produce numbers and percentages in table and chart form. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed and coded up in relation to our research questions, using NVivo¹. The research process was guided by a steering group, who met twice during the lifetime of the project.

As part of this research project we have developed a partnership model and supporting tools to support our work, and that of others in the sector, in linking with schools and colleges. Our evaluation of the model and tools is formative and on-going. It is guided by the following criteria:

- a) accuracy (do they reflect experience?)
- b) relevance (are they applicable in different contexts?)
- c) usefulness (are they likely to inform current and/or future policy and/or practice?)
- d) completeness (are there criteria or dimensions missing?)

5. Case study partners

Holy Cross College (HCC) is a Catholic Sixth Form College situated close to the town centre of Bury. Bury is an old mill town whose centre is currently the subject of a major redevelopment that it is hoped will reinvigorate the local economy. HCC serves a local catchment area covering Bury Metropolitan Authority and neighbouring boroughs across north Manchester. Over the last ten years it has developed a University Centre in the College, making use of teaching space in the late afternoon and evening. Its university partners deliver a wide range of full and part-time HE programmes to 626 students. The courses are tailored to meet local needs, and many students are local and mature. EHU is one of several HE partners involved in the collaborative provision of HE programmes. Recruitment and student support is undertaken by the college, while teaching and quality assurance issues are undertaken by EHU staff.

¹ NVivo is a software package that supports the analysis of qualitative material, including interview transcripts, meeting notes and secondary documents.

Colne Primet is an 11–16 mixed community comprehensive school situated in the town of Colne, which is in the borough of Pendle, 6 miles north east of Burnley and 25 miles from Preston. It is a relatively small school, having a little over 600 students on roll, and all year groups are under-subscribed. The area is economically depressed, and there are issues relating to the integration of white and Asian heritage students. The school is in the process of becoming a science specialist school and has been selected as the lead school in the Burnley and Pendle area for the 14–19 diploma in science. The school has links with EHU in three broad areas: widening participation (through Aimhigher); student placements for those on initial teacher training programmes; and professional development and the enhancement of teacher skills in shortage/STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects.

6. Summary of current links and developments

EHU has a large number of links and partnerships with schools and colleges, predominantly in the northwest of England. There are partnerships which are clearly strategic, meeting the objectives of all partners involved, for example, collaborative provision and whole school workforce development, however many of these links are based on individual relationships, which were either the motivation for collaboration, or which have developed over time. Some links have a specific purpose or role, such as student placements, governor, outreach and recruitment, curriculum development or research. The majority of these relationships have lasted for a considerable amount of time, and have developed or evolved. Many of these links or partnerships may be described as effective – in that they achieve their objectives – but not as strategic – in that they are not planned to meet the strategic priorities of both the institutions involved and they do not impact on the whole school/college and EHU. This has a potential impact on the sustainability of links and partnerships, especially in a more challenging economic climate. We feel that there is potential to develop a more strategic approach to school/college links and partnerships, which are more closely aligned with multiple strategic priorities of collaborating institutions.

7. Benefits of links and partnerships

By analysing the institutional survey responses, EHU staff interviews, case studies and discussions at the participatory seminar, we identified benefits accruing to individuals, HEIs and schools and colleges.

- a) Personal gains
 - Interest and satisfaction
 - Contribution to the local community
 - Professional development and progression
 - Increased job satisfaction

- b) Higher education institutions
 - Understanding school and college sector

- Curriculum development
- Curriculum enrichment
- Promoting the institution
- Research, data collection and publication
- Widening participation
- Improved student success
- Future collaboration opportunities

c) Schools and colleges

- Curriculum enrichment
- Better understanding of HE
- Whole school development and improvement
- Recruitment of high quality staff
- Professional development of staff

These benefits have been grouped together into three outcome areas: widening participation and student success; student learning experience; and institutional development. These are illustrated with examples from the research study in Table E1 below:

Table E1: Outcome areas and examples identified in this study

Outcome area	Examples of benefits identified in this study
Widening participation and success in HE.	<p>Local, affordable collaborative provision offers new opportunities for HE study.</p> <p>Understanding of school/college/HE sectors – so staff better able to encourage, inform and prepare students.</p> <p>School students have on-going engagement with HE staff and students.</p> <p>HE feels more accessible and relevant.</p> <p>Transition support and more useful induction can be developed</p> <p>Curriculum enrichment and development.</p> <p>Better articulation between pre- and post-18 learning.</p> <p>Higher achievement and progression rates in school and HE.</p>
Student learning experience.	<p>Staff have better understanding of school/college/HE sectors.</p> <p>Contemporary knowledge, research and skills exchanged.</p> <p>Professional development of skills, knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>Staff are better informed and more satisfied.</p> <p>Recruitment of staff.</p> <p>Curriculum enrichment and development through contact with staff and student beyond the institution; visiting staff; learning outside of the classroom; and extra curricula activities.</p> <p>Transition support and more relevant induction can be developed</p> <p>Better articulation between pre- and post-18 learning.</p>
Institutional development.	<p>New courses, programmes and sites of provision.</p> <p>Professional development opportunities and learning from other sectors.</p> <p>Staff interest and satisfaction.</p> <p>More knowledgeable, skilled and fulfilled workforce.</p> <p>Enriched curriculum through visiting staff and students (including trainees), institutional visits, research and policy updates, interaction with colleagues, etc.</p> <p>External recognition via performance indicators, Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) etc.</p> <p>Engagement in research and knowledge transfer activities.</p> <p>Community engagement.</p> <p>Collaborative working in the future.</p>

8. Partnership continuum

Relations between HEIs and schools/colleges can be contacts, links, partnerships or strategic partnerships, all of which are underpinned by inter-personal relations. This can be conceptualised as a partnership continuum, and is presented as a model in Figure E1 below, and the characteristics of the different stages on the partnership continuum are summarised in Table E2.

Figure E1: Partnership continuum

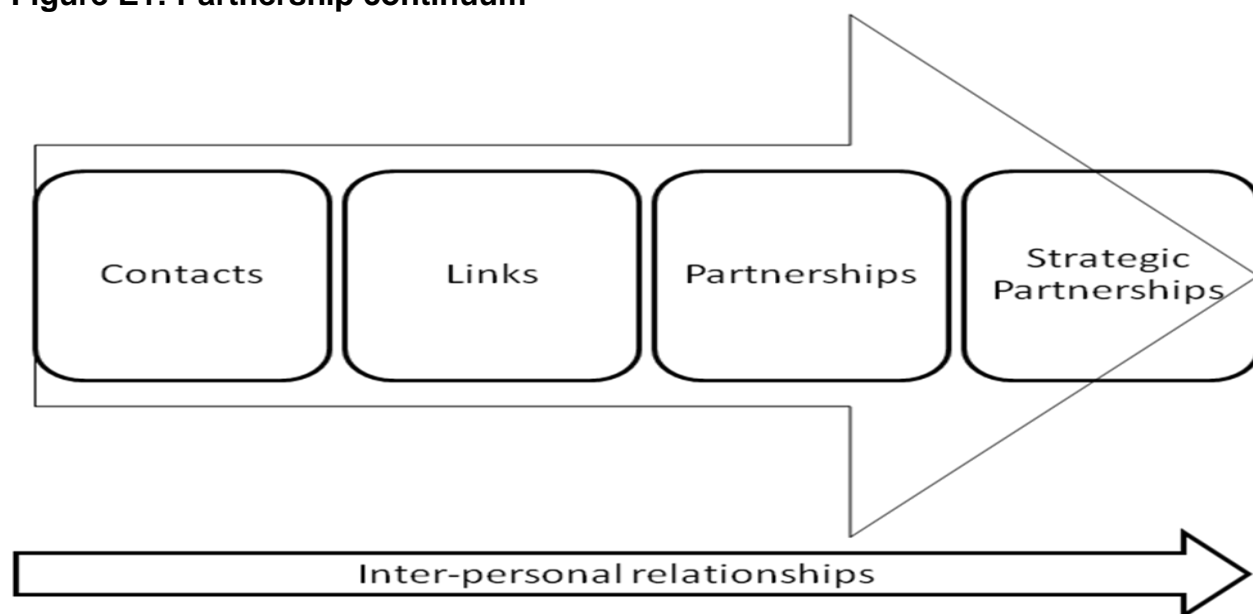


Table E2: Characteristics of the stages of the partnership continuum

Stages/ Characteristics	Contacts	Links	Partnerships	Strategic Partnerships
Level of inter-institutional engagement	Individuals	Individual or institutional unit	Institutional unit ²	Whole institution
Purpose	Non-specific, no purpose	Specific project or role	Single institutional priority and/or one or more unit priorities	Contributes to multiple strategic priorities of both institutions
Intra-institutional relations	Individual contacts	Limited, may not be widely known about	Different units involved, some institutional awareness.	Wide ranging and co-ordinated interactions
Intention	Unintentional	May be opportunistic or serendipitous	May be planned or opportunistic	Deliberate
Formality	None	Limited and defined by specific project or role	More formal	More formal, encompassing broad range of partnership activity
Examples	Former employee, parent, family contact	Research project, governor	Outreach in school, trainee placements	Collaborative provision, area for future development

² Unit is being used to mean a department, faculty, service, or centre in either an HEI or a school/college.

9. Defining an effective strategic partnership

An effective strategic partnership has a shared strategic vision which purposefully contributes to the strategic priorities of each institution. It engages and co-ordinates senior managers, staff and students from across institutions to work together. While it is based on inter-personal relationships within and across institutions, it is underpinned by appropriate processes and resources to support collaborative decision making, effective communication and professional implementation.

10. Essential characteristics of an effective strategic partnership

1. Shared strategic vision
2. Mutually and strategically beneficial
3. Effective decision making
4. Sufficient resources
5. Effective communication
6. Appropriate structural framework
7. Explicit understanding of implementation
8. Recognition of importance of people and relationships

These are further developed and desirable characteristics identified in the form of a reflective review tool to support the development of effective strategic partnerships.

11. Recommendations for schools, colleges and HEIs

- a) Understand that relations between institutions can develop along a partnership continuum, and that each contact, link, partnership and strategic partnership is valuable but may have the potential to evolve further.
- b) Consider ways in which contacts, links and partnerships can be identified, nurtured and developed, ultimately into strategic partnerships.
- c) Involve staff from across the institution in existing and new collaborative activity. Consider how staff can promote a wider range of partnership activities, how interactions with partners can be better co-ordinated to avoid duplication and how staff can be incentivised and/or rewarded.
- d) Consider adopting a more planned approach to developing collaborative relations, aiming to ensure that strategic partnerships contribute directly to multiple institutional priorities and are appropriately co-ordinated.
- e) Review links and partnerships regularly to ensure they are achieving their objectives, contributing to strategic priorities and working effectively from the perspective of all partners.
- f) The reflective review sets out in detail the recommendations for effective strategic partnerships. Schools, colleges and HEIs should use the reflective review to assess and develop specific links and partnerships.

12. Recommendations for further research and knowledge transfer

- a) Further evaluate, refine and disseminate the partnership continuum model, definition of effective strategic partnerships and reflective review tool developed as outcomes of this study.
- b) Systematically evaluate the impact of strategic partnerships on widening participation and student success, student learning experience and institutional development.
- c) Involve students in future partnership research, especially with regard to the benefits of (strategic) partnerships.
- d) Examine the role of school/college-HEI partnerships during a recession and how we can manage and change relationships to meet new purposes.

13. Suggested next steps for Edge Hill University

- a) Building on the contacts and enthusiasm generated by this study, form a working group to develop and review school/college partnerships. This should include internal colleagues, external partners and students.
- b) Review, refine and agree institutional priorities for strategic partnerships developed in this study (e.g. widening participation and student success, student learning experience and institutional development).
- c) Consider and implement further ways in which existing contacts with schools and colleges can be identified, including making greater use of existing data bases.
- d) Identify and explore ways in which staff can be encouraged and rewarded to develop contacts, links and partnerships into strategic partnerships, e.g. can this be built into annual review, performance appraisal, or linked to recognition and reward?
- e) Review existing partnerships using the reflective review tool to identify areas for further development.
- f) Pilot with a limited number of partnerships and links the process of moving from single to multi-purpose strategic partnerships.
- g) Evaluate the feasibility of converting existing links and partnerships into effective strategic partnerships and rolling this out across more of the institutions collaborative relations.

1. Background

1.1 National context

This research has been funded as part of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) research grant programme relating to links between higher education institutions (HEIs), schools, colleges and academies. The grant programme was initiated in response to the publication of the National Council for Educational Excellence: Recommendations (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008). This publication emphasised the need for more links between HEIs and schools and colleges to raise the attainment of learners, widen participation and promote learner progression to all types of higher education (HE) provision.

The aim of the research programme is to support up to ten institutions to research, develop and evaluate effective models of sustainable links between HEIs and schools/colleges. In turn, these models will be shared with the sector to facilitate institutions to select and apply appropriate models to their own work with schools and colleges. HEFCE recognises that developing effective and sustainable links is both a complex issue and will be influenced by the strategic priorities of HEIs. Shaw et al. (2007) suggest that institutional approaches to widening participation are influenced by institutional history and mission; self-identity; leadership; location and regionality; and market position. These factors are therefore likely to influence the links and partnerships that HEIs have with schools, colleges and academies.

1.2 Institutional context: Edge Hill University

Edge Hill University (EHU) has been delivering higher education for 125 years, initially as the first non-denominational provider of teacher education for women in England. It was awarded degree awarding power in 2006, and research degree awarding power in 2008. The university has a wide portfolio, offering programmes in most subject or professional areas with the exception of Medicine, Veterinary Science and Engineering, along with a growing portfolio of postgraduate and professional development programmes. The university currently has 23,622 registered students, of whom 7,748 are full-time, with the remaining 15,914 on a mix of part-time degree programmes and professional development programmes. The first year full-time degree population is 68% female, 98% UK, 89% northwest.

The university has a very strong commitment to widening participation. Widening participation is one of the six core aims in the University's Strategic Plan 2008–2013 (available at <http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/about/vision/strategicplan>): 'Edge Hill University will continue to enhance participation from under-represented groups in higher education.' The University has been at the forefront of widening participation leading the sector both at national and regional levels. For example it is the lead organisation for the Greater Merseyside and West

Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network (LLN); hosts the national Action on Access team and until recent changes in the national structure of Aimhigher it was the Lead Institution for Aimhigher North West. The University is currently fourth in the HEFCE's Key Performance Indicators for English universities for recruitment from low participation neighbourhoods and twelfth for recruitment from State Schools. 72.5% of Edge Hill University students fall into one or more of the following Widening Participation performance indicators: Indices of Multiple Deprivation; Low Participation Neighbourhoods; the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) Groups 4–7 or assessed family income of below £25,000 per annum.

EHU has been training teachers for more than 120 years, and the Faculty of Education provides a wide range of education programmes and awards. It offers Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Early Years, Primary, Key Stage 2/3, Secondary and Post-Compulsory education with the opportunity to specialise in a particular subject, plus Foundation Degrees in early years leadership, education and practice or teaching support, with progression routes to gaining Early Years Professional Status and Qualified Teacher Status. In summary EHU is one of the largest providers of Primary ITT in the UK; the largest provider of ITT for shortage subjects in the UK; the largest provider of Foundation Degrees for teaching assistants in the UK; lead contractor for the assessment of Higher Level Teaching Assistants in the North West, on behalf of the Training and Development Agency for Schools; and offers the widest range of subjects and delivery options for ITT programmes in the UK. Subsequently the Faculty of Education has partnerships and links with more than 2,000 schools, educational settings and colleges, Local Authorities (LAs) and Professional Associations.

EHU has in the region of 2,500 links with schools and colleges, with a wide range of purposes, spanning student recruitment, widening participation, student placements for trainee teachers, professional development for education professionals, support for school development, collaborative provision, curriculum development and research. As part of this study we undertook a staff survey to identify further links, both corporate and private, between EHU staff and schools and colleges. The findings from the survey are reported below; they demonstrate a very rich picture of individual relationships above and beyond high profile partnerships and those links more directly aligned to institutional priorities. More details of all these links are included in the EHU case study below. In addition, EHU has a large number of links and partnerships with schools and colleges, many of which have a specific purpose – which they achieve – but these might be considered more opportunistic than strategic. There is potential to develop a more strategic approach to developing effective school/college links and partnerships.

1.3 Research focus

As outlined above, EHU has links with a wide range of schools and colleges, covering a variety of purposes, and engaging staff, students, senior managers, departments and services across the University. We believe that

many are built on long-term, mutually beneficial relationships which have evolved from projects to strategic links including whole school/college-institution models. The aim of this research project was to explore these links and partnerships.

More specifically, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What links are there currently between EHU and schools and colleges?
2. How are links and partnerships developed initially and maintained/sustained over time?
3. What are the positive benefits or impact of these links for students, staff, schools/colleges, EHU and other stakeholders?
4. How can links move from projects to whole school/college-institution partnerships?
5. What factors contribute to the development of an effective strategic partnership?

To achieve this aim and answer these research questions the objectives of the study are to:

1. Audit and map existing school/college links across EHU.
2. Explore the development of long-term strategic links.
3. Explore the implications of partnerships for schools/colleges and EHU.
4. Illustrate how to move from projects to whole school/college-HEI partnerships.
5. Produce tools to support the development of effective partnerships.
6. Engage with stakeholders to promote mutual learning about school/college-HEI links.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach, focusing on EHU and two partners (one school and one college) and using mixed methods to collect data. Case studies, Cresswell (1998) states, involve the investigator exploring a bounded system, such as a setting or context, through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information. Yin (2003) identifies that a major strength of case studies is the opportunity to use different sources of evidence, as this allows the investigator the opportunity to address a broad range of issues and, furthermore, he asserts that any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be more convincing or accurate if it is based on several different sources. It was therefore deemed imperative to seize the advantage of using multiple methods of data collection in order to investigate the case.

The literature surrounding case studies identifies that researchers have the opportunity to conduct single or multiple case studies. In single case studies one case is looked at in depth. In multiple or collective case studies, several cases are considered and they are chosen because:

“...it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorising, about a still larger collection of cases.” (Stake, 2005: 446)

Yin (2003) identifies that a common example of multi-case studies is in the field of school innovations. In considering the number of cases to be studied, it was decided that a multi-case approach would be appropriate. The rationale for this being that, as Yin (2003: 53) states:

“...although all designs can lead to successful studies, when you have the choice (and resources), multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs. Even if you can only do a ‘two-case’ study, your chances of doing a good study will be better than using a single-case design. Single case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put ‘all your eggs in one basket.’ More important, the analytic benefits of having two (or more) cases may be substantial.”

Therefore, although it is acknowledged that, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state, in multi-case settings, less time can be spent in each, it was deemed appropriate to select more than one case, to minimise vulnerability and because multiple-case designs are often perceived as more compelling and therefore the overall study regarded as more robust (Yin, 2003).

From a practical perspective, although a decision was made to study more than one case, time was only available to study three cases. Therefore the study adopted a mixed-methodology approach to garner quantitative and qualitative data from EHU staff and from two schools/colleges in partnerships with EHU. Accordingly three strands to the research were developed and undertaken concurrently. Towards the end of the data

collection phase, a participatory seminar was held to share learning to date, collect new data from other partners and aid the process of data analysis. Thus, in summary, the research project uses a mixed methodology, combining a survey of school/college links across EHU and follow-up interviews, case studies of EHU and two schools/colleges that EHU has long-term partnerships with, and a participatory seminar.

During the planning phase of this study a conscious decision was made to choose methods that were both fit for purpose and sympathetic to the nature of the context (Cohen et al., 2007 and Wallimen and Buckler, 2008), therefore, the data collection methods were narrowed from a suitable variety in a 'divergent' approach for this style of research (Cohen et al., 2007:78) including; a survey, conducted via questionnaires, interviews and access to primary sources (Cohen et al., 2007, Denscombe, 2002 and Wallimen and Buckler, 2008).

2.1 Steering group

The research process was overseen and informed by a steering group, drawn mainly from EHU staff who have specific responsibility for working in partnership with schools and colleges. The Action on Access lead adviser for schools was also a member of the steering group, and provided a valuable external perspective. (Appendix 1 provides a full list of steering group members.) The steering group has met twice to guide and inform the research process; at each meeting a range of issues has been covered, but at the first meeting considerable time was devoted to the selection of case studies, and at the second, to planning the participatory seminar. Members of the steering group also attended the seminar and commented on a draft version of the final report and associated tools.

2.2 Survey of school/college links across EHU

The first research task involved a survey of EHU staff about their links with schools and colleges. The use of survey questionnaires in educational research is a popular method when aiming to contact large numbers of possible respondents and holds advantages to those parties that wish to contribute on an anonymous basis (Wallimen and Buckler 2008).

There are a number of advantages associated with the use of questionnaires. Munn and Drever (1996:2), for example, identify four such advantages.

- An efficient use of time
- Anonymity (for the respondent)
- The possibility of a high return rate
- Standardised questions

However, the use of questionnaires does have limitations, largely due to them often being descriptive rather than providing explanations and thus they are often superficial. Furthermore, they also require much planning

and drafting. For the purposes of this study, however, it was deemed appropriate to capitalise on the main advantages of questionnaire surveys, namely their ability to access a wide range of participants.

The aims of the survey were to:

- Identify links between EHU staff and schools and colleges, including descriptive data about purpose, capacity (personal or corporate) and duration.
- Indicate the impact of these links for both institutions and individuals.
- Review the development and evolution of these links.

An additional purpose of the survey was to identify a sample of EHU staff to interview about their school/college links (see below).

Although there is a temptation to go straight to the distribution stage, it is extremely important to give the questionnaires a trial run, ideally on a group similar to those who will be involved in the study, no matter how pressed for time, because, as Oppenheim (1966:vii), notes ‘the world is full of well meaning people who believe that anyone who can write plain English and has a modicum of common sense can produce a good questionnaire.’ He goes on to demonstrate that though common sense and the ability to write plain English will help, that in itself is insufficient. Care needs to be taken in selecting question type, in question-writing, and in ensuring that the design and distribution are appropriate. The questionnaire was therefore devised at the outset of the study to allow time for questions to be given much consideration and for the research team to evaluate them. The survey is shown in Appendix 3.

The research team also made a decision to administer the survey electronically to allow for rapid distribution and return; it was administered via Survey Monkey. This is software which enables people to complete the survey on-line. This is considered to be both convenient for respondents (especially in a university setting where colleagues have easy and frequent access to the internet), and expedient for the research team – being low cost and facilitating the analysis of the responses without the need for additional data inputting.

The survey was initially open for two weeks, which intersected the Easter vacation. During this time the majority of the responses were received, and these were initially reviewed at the steering group meeting in May. The survey identified a wide range of links with schools and colleges by staff from across the institution. Many of the links are personal rather than institutional, and thus revealed new information for EHU. It was agreed to keep the survey open throughout the summer term to maximise the opportunity for staff to respond. During the three months that the survey was available on-line 84 people accessed and began the survey, but for the majority of questions 39 or fewer valid returns were received. It is difficult to assess the response rate, as we do not know how many members of staff have links with schools and colleges, and it would be inappropriate for those

without links to respond to the survey. 74% of respondents were academic members of staff, 14% support staff, 9% service staff and 3% senior managers; from those who gave their details, we can see that respondents were from all three faculties and from central units.

The survey used a combination of multiple choice questions and open questions, both of which have advantages and disadvantages. Forced choice questions require people to select from pre-determined options which may not exactly reflect their perspective. However, each multiple choice question includes the response option of "other" and space to explain. This opportunity has been used effectively by respondents who did not feel our choices reflected their views/experiences. Multiple choice responses have been analysed to provide descriptive data about the types of links that EHU staff have with schools and colleges. This data has been used to create bar and pie charts where appropriate. It should be noted that some multiple choice questions, and all free text questions allowed people to provide more than one response. For example, respondents could have more than one type of link with a school or college, and they could identify a range of benefits.

Open question responses have been collated into a spreadsheet, and used to inform our analysis of the research questions this study is addressing. There is always a risk in interpreting and categorising free text responses, especially when you are not in a position to verify respondents' meaning. We have used these answers however to inform our semi-structured interviews with staff, and we believe this mixed method approach provides useful data which has been triangulated methodologically and by a range of respondents. In reporting this data we have combined our analysis of the survey data with explanatory data from interviews with EHU staff.

The survey elicited additional information, such as the existence of a schools links data base currently under development by the marketing department, and a list of respondents who have large numbers of school and college links. In some instances these individuals were then interviewed as part of the research.

2.3 Interviews with EHU staff

At the first steering group meeting it was agreed to interview 12 EHU staff about their links with schools and colleges. The aim of these short, individual interviews, was to gain greater understanding about the development, operation and impact of these links and partnerships.

Research interviews often fall into three distinct categories as outlined below (see for example, Cohen et al., 2007 and Wallimén and Buckler, 2008):

- **Structured:** where the researcher has a set of pre-prepared questions for the respondent and the researcher guides the interview.

- Unstructured: where the researcher develops a “conversation with a purpose” with the respondent (Wallimén and Buckler, 2008:173).
- Semi-structured: where the researcher has a few key questions that must be asked but the structure is less formal.

In seeking to determine the most appropriate form of interviewing, the research team concluded that a semi-structured approach would be the most appropriate, given that this allowed the team to devise themes in advance, but also facilitated the opportunity for the interviewers to occasionally ask some spontaneous questions if and where appropriate.

A sample of staff who had completed the survey and indicated they were willing to be interviewed was selected for interview to represent the different types of links (i.e. governors, trainee placements, partnership managers, research etc.) and all the faculties, service and research departments at EHU. We used a generic semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 4), which was adapted in response to each interviewee’s answers.

Most of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, while a few were conducted by telephone. It was decided that the interviews would be audio-taped, to allow the opportunity to re-listen to recordings in order to assist the analysis process, thus each interview was recorded and transcribed.

For all interviews (with EHU staff and school/college staff) we were concerned to inform participants about confidentiality issues. A key issue being that although we do not name individual participants, their schools and colleges are identified. Thus, it may be possible for individuals to be identified by default. Respondents could withdraw from the research at any point, or request that the tape recorder was turned off – and indeed this was done.

Analysis of these interviews was undertaken using NVivo (see discussion on analysis below).

2.4 Partner case studies

A significant part of the data collection phase involved two case studies of partner schools and colleges, where data was collected in relation to our key research questions using interviews and focus groups and document analysis. Given the large number of school/college links that EHU has it was a difficult to select appropriate institutions who would be able to accommodate our research needs. At the steering group meeting some useful discussion was entered into about location and whether we should select local schools for pragmatic reasons or select interesting cases which would contribute to EHU’s own learning about working in partnership; in the end we settled on the latter. Shortlisted schools were selected based on a range of criteria:

- Had they been signalled as strong partners in the databases and initial survey of EHU staff?

- Were they involved in a range of types of links i.e. recruitment, widening participation, curriculum development, initial teacher training and continuing professional development, collaborative provision, research?
- What type of school were they? It was decided that the schools/colleges should be 11–16 or 11–18, and that it would be useful to include one 11–16 school.
- How long had there been links between EHU and the school/college? It was determined that links should have been established for at least one year and preferably far longer.

It was agreed to select interesting and contrasting partnerships, covering a range of types of links, and not those focusing exclusively on recruitment or as a result of EHU's [Franchise] Collaborative Provision Strategy, but rather ones representing the broad range of partnership activities that EHU is engaged in. Hence an 11–16 school and an outreach centre attached to a sixth form college were chosen as the case studies.

The researchers were interested in understanding more about current links, including how they developed and how they benefit the stakeholders involved. A further area of interest was to explore what makes a good partnership and whether there have been deliberate attempts by either the schools/colleges or EHU to develop links or whether there was a more informal, fragmented and randomness to partnerships. A list of possible questions and prompts for interviews and focus groups was developed by the research team and grouped around four topics of interest:

- Details of current links (purpose/strengths/weaknesses)
- Views of the impact for schools, pupils, EHU and others involved i.e. LAs, relating to key areas that HEFCE have identified (governance, curriculum development etc.)
- Account of how the links developed and evolved and hopes regarding how they may change in future.
- Views on what makes an effective strategic partnership (people, roles and conditions).

The full interview schedule is in Appendix 4.

Having obtained agreement from two schools (described below), individual interviews were conducted with the head teacher or principal, a governor and several key members of staff who were involved in some form of link or partnership with an HEI (not necessarily EHU). Focus groups were also conducted with a broader range of school staff (such as teachers, support staff, trainees, teaching assistants, administrative staff). All of these individuals were nominated by the school.

2.5 Participatory seminar

A participatory seminar was organised after the initial data collection phase. Participative conferences and seminars provide an opportunity to share

initial findings and develop interpretations with a wide range of interested parties with different views on, or experiences of, the research area in question. Participative conferences and seminars employ dialogical modes of interaction, encouraging the audience to join in and inform the research debate, rather than seeing a conference as something that takes place once a piece of research has finished as a way of disseminating findings. Participative conferences and seminars allow the power relations and research frames to be questioned and reversed (Chambers, 1994), thus participants have the opportunity to influence the research process with the researchers (in some cases profoundly) and many claim to benefit from participation.

In this research study the aim of the participative seminar was to enable a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from the outputs of this research project. It had the following specific objectives:

- I. To share emerging research findings.
- II. To explore key ideas underpinning the research to further develop understanding of these issues.
- III. To contribute to the process of identifying necessary and desirable conditions for effective strategic partnerships.
- IV. To further develop understanding about the benefits of partnerships and to collect additional examples.
- V. To consider recommendations for further links/partnerships policy, practice and research.

The agenda for the seminar is provided in Appendix 5.

The seminar was attended by 19 participants, including staff from across EHU and from a range of schools and colleges that EHU has links with. Much of the day was based on small group work, and the discussions included members of the research team and were recorded in a range of ways including table cloths, flip charts, post it notes, postcards and through plenary sessions. Each of the resources created during the day were either taken away and typed up, or photographed and then turned into a visual resource that could be analysed. In addition, the discussion contributed to the development of the analytical framework (discussed below). The day provided an extremely useful way of developing the understandings of the research team, including testing out ideas, challenging our interpretation of findings and collecting new evidence about our key research questions. Some of these resources have been refined through the analytical process and are presented in the main body of the report.

2.6 Data handling and analysis

Yin (2003) identifies how, in case study research, analysis is one of the most difficult aspects of the study. Therefore, at the outset of the study, reference was made to the work of Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who state that the first step in the process of analysis is a careful reading of the data in order to become familiar with it. The purpose of this is to establish

whether any interesting patterns emerge and whether anything stands out, is surprising or puzzling. This was the starting point of this study and the team interacted with the data and, as Hammersley and Atkinson suggest, progressively focused on it throughout.

The stages of analysis were as follows:

- 'Immersion'. Wellington (2000) describes how this involves getting an 'overall sense' or 'feel' for the data.
- 'Reflecting'. Wellington describes how this stage of analysis involves 'standing back' from the data.
- 'Taking Apart/Analysing'. This stage, Wellington states, involves 'carving the data up' into manageable chunks and, in principle, this stage of analysis involved sorting the data into 'gross' themes (Atkins, 1984).
- 'Recombining/Synthesising'. Wellington outlines how this stage of analysis is the phase of looking for themes, paradoxes and irregularities. This aspect relates to Glaser and Strauss' notion of grounded theory (1967; in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe how the initial task in analysing qualitative data is to find some concepts that help us to make sense of what is going on, with the aim being to make the data intelligible in an analytical way. The participatory seminar contributed to the 'reflecting', taking apart' and 'recombining/synthesising' stages, both in terms of the discussions on the day, and by using the resources generated on the day to inform our analysis.

In order to interrogate the data, the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and 'immersion in' and 'reflection on' the data commenced. The research team reflected on the research questions and began to identify 'gross' themes. These were entered into NVIVO, coded and further analysis took place. The gross themes were structured into an initial model of themes for analysis (see Figure 1 below) and this was the central focus of discussion at the participatory seminar. The discussions allowed us to revise the model of themes for analysis (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Data analysis model: Effective strategic partnerships – before the participatory seminar

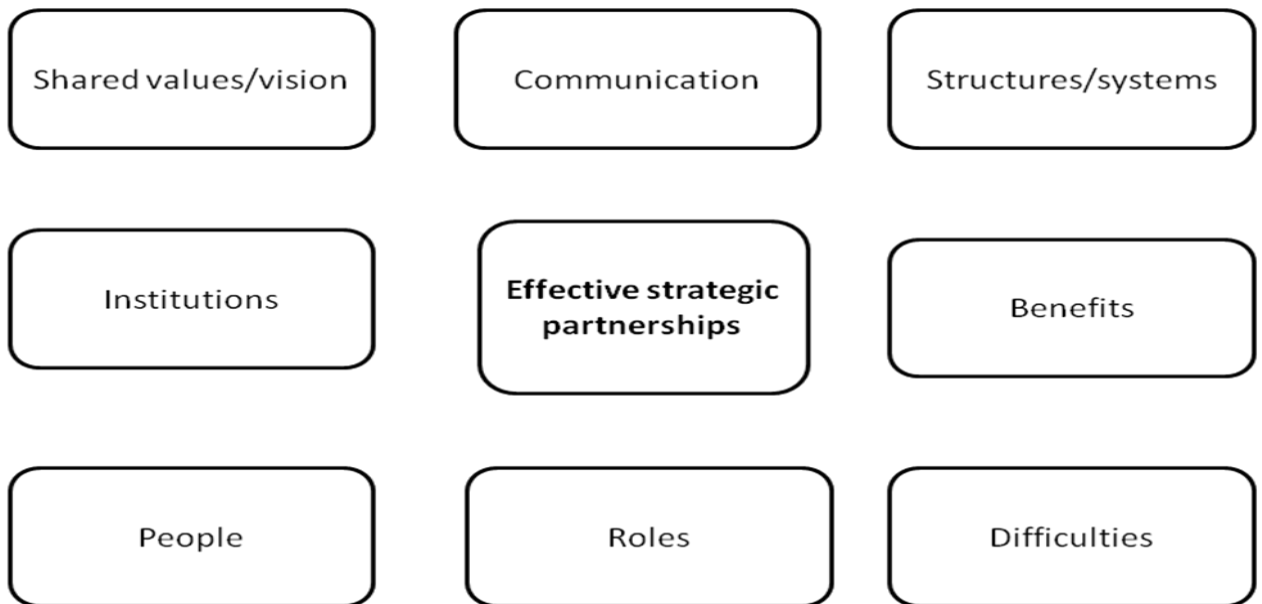
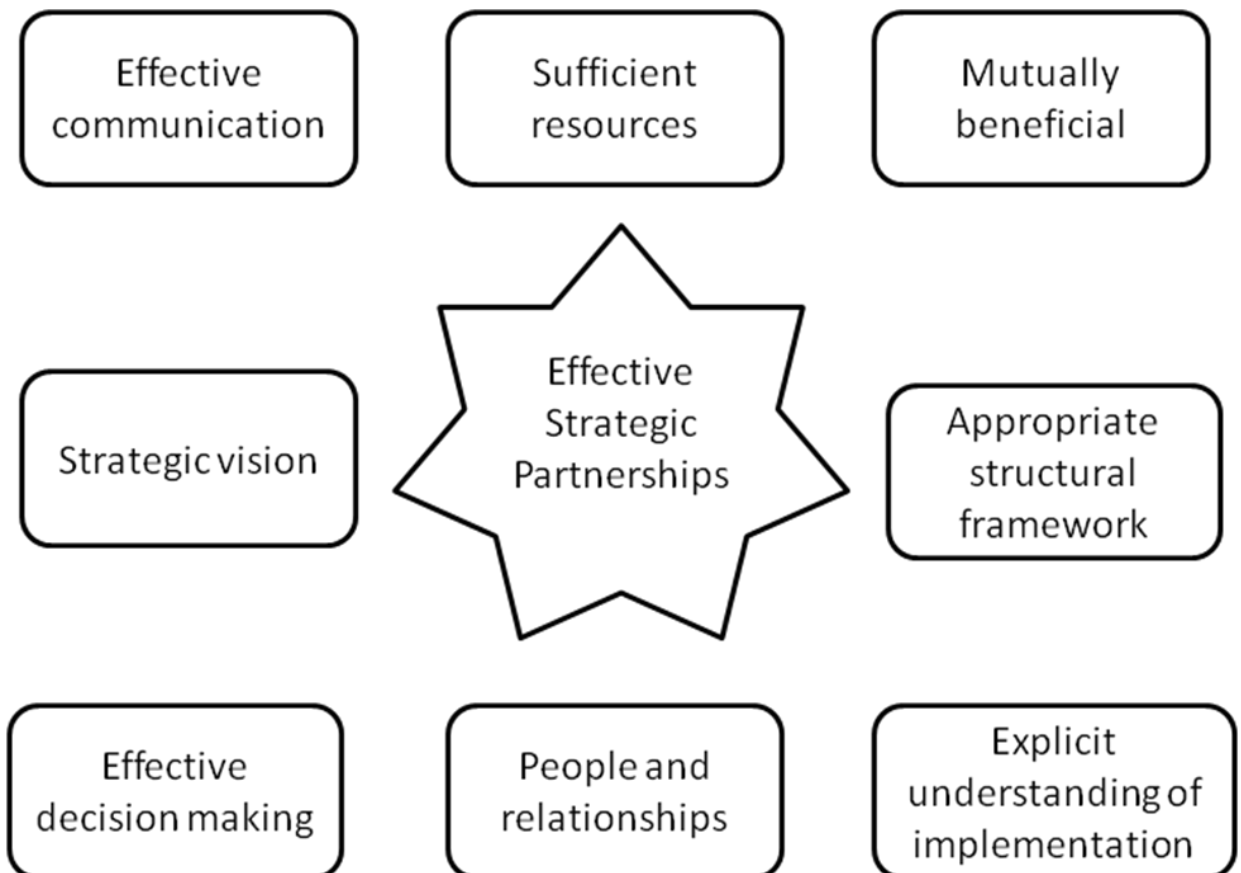


Figure 2. Data analysis model: Effective strategic partnerships – after the participatory seminar



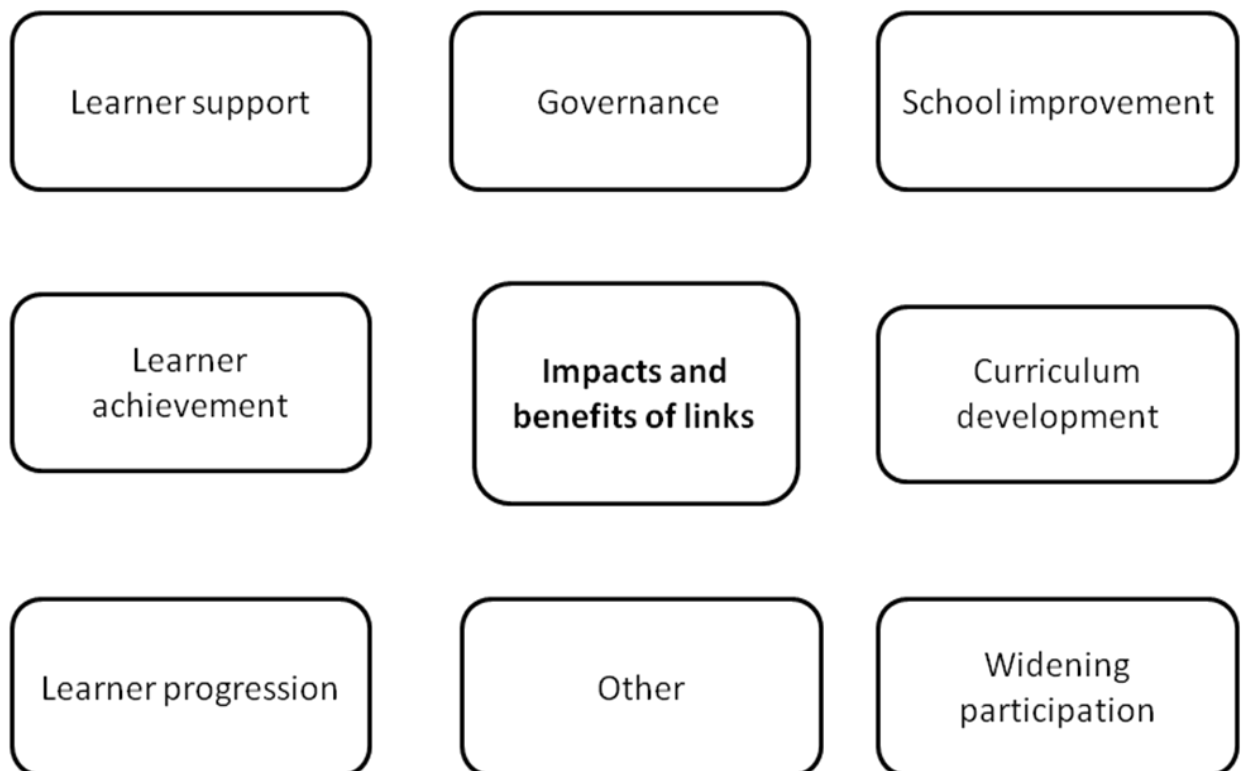
The second model used for analysis was based on the anticipated impacts of school and college links with HEIs as identified by HEFCE in the invitation

to tender (HEFCE, 2009). Here it is suggested that “effective models of school/college-HEI links” are characterised by:

- Shared governance and strategic planning arrangements: school improvement plans, HEI corporate plans.
- Curriculum development: joint working and exchange.
- Support for learners to progress to HE, especially Information, Advice and Guidance(IAG), and at key transition points.

The model developed is shown in Figure 3. This was also explored at the participatory seminar, and contributed to our understanding of the issues; a revised model (based on the participatory seminar and our analysis of the interview and survey data) is shown in Figure 4 in section 4.2 of this report.

Figure 3: Benefits of school/college-HEI links (based on HEFCE’s invitation to tender)



2.7 Evaluation of the project

As part of this research study we have developed a partnership model and supporting tools(see section 4) to further our work and that of others in the sector in linking with schools and colleges more effectively. These have, in part, been developed in collaboration with colleagues across EHU and from partner institutions. Furthermore, we will continue to test the model and associated tools in both applied and research contexts. In section 5.3 of this report we identify the next steps for EHU with regard to developing effective strategic partnerships. This process will involve actively engaging

with and refining our partnership model and tools. In addition, we will present our model and tools at research seminars and conferences for critical examination. For example, they will be presented as part of a keynote address at the 3rd National Enabling Educators Conference (Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, 25th–26th November 2009), where the focus will be on universities developing more proactive links with schools and communities.

Our evaluation of the tools and models is intended to be formative, in other words to assist others to develop their understanding of links and partnerships, and to provide feedback based on their experiences and knowledge to further develop our model and tools, as well as our partnership activity. The following criteria have guided our interactions with partners (primarily through the participative seminar) and will continue to be used to evaluate and refine our partnership model and tools:

- a) Accuracy (do they reflect experience?);
- b) Relevance (are they applicable in different contexts?);
- c) Usefulness (are they likely to inform current and/or future policy and/or practice?); and
- d) Completeness (are there criteria or dimensions missing?).

3. Case Studies

3.1 Edge Hill University

3.1.1 Contextual information

As described above, EHU is a modern university situated in the northwest of England with a longstanding, passionate and embedded commitment to widening participation. EHU's commitment includes collaborative provision (particularly working in partnership with colleges and employers to deliver Foundation Degrees) and supporting the retention, progression and achievement of students from all backgrounds and on all programmes, irrespective of their site of learning. These aims are reflected in the Strategic Plan and the Widening Participation Strategic Assessment. EHU is also committed to research and advanced scholarship. EHU's approach is summarised in its mission statement:

“Edge Hill University provides an innovative, high quality and inclusive learning experience underpinned by a commitment to the advancement, dissemination and application of knowledge. As a learning-led University, Edge Hill is dedicated to developing students as skilled autonomous learners in challenging and supportive environments.” (Mission statement, <http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/about/vision/missionStatement>).

Colleagues across EHU have links with schools and colleges for a wide range of purposes. Some of these links and partnerships are large scale and widely known about, while others are personal links between one member of staff and a particular school or college. We collated initial information from the steering group about the major links the university has with schools and colleges. A survey of staff links with schools and colleges was conducted during the 2009 summer term to enhance our knowledge and understanding of links. 84 members of staff completed the on-line survey. Most respondents were academics (74.3%), 14.3% identified themselves as support staff, 8.6% as service staff and 2.9% as senior managers. In addition 12 interviews were conducted with a sample of respondents from across the university with different types of links with schools and colleges. This included people responsible for large scale links as well as individuals with smaller scale and/or more personal links.

3.1.2 Description of current links

This section is sub-divided to include descriptive information about the large scale links that EHU has with schools and colleges, and results from the survey, which came from a wide range of staff across the institution who have a link (or links) with a school or college.

a) Large-scale links

- i. **Student Recruitment** works directly with 325 schools and colleges in the northwest of England and undertakes additional work in other parts of the UK and beyond. Whilst predominantly recruitment driven the work with these schools and colleges also involves a good deal of support and informs a number of developments; for example, mapping all recruitment activities against the new national standards for IAG and careers education and guidance (CEG); offering a coherent programme of masterclasses to support students studying A Level General Studies; and providing opportunities for individual school, college and advisory staff to update knowledge on HE or subject related matters.
- ii. Through **Aimhigher**, EHU works with 87 educational establishments. In Lancashire the university has worked with 62 schools including 7 primary schools and 2 referral units. For Merseyside the university has worked with 20 schools, and in Cheshire and Warrington with 3 schools. In addition a pilot for a pre-entry preparation for HE programme, called EVOLVE, for Years 12 and 13 is taking place in two further education (FE) colleges. The work of Aimhigher and the links with these educational institutions informs our work on transition from pre-HE to HE learning.
- iii. The **Faculty of Education** works with over 2,000 schools, colleges, other educational settings and local authorities. These are spread all over the country and range from pre-school to post-compulsory sectors. The links cover initial teacher training, professional development, large scale contracts such as Every Child Counts and Higher Level Teaching Assistants. In addition to the 'big picture' contracts and projects the Faculty responds to requests for support from individual schools and colleges and from these some of the more interesting developments arise. For example, a primary school in Leicester which went into Special Measures approached the Faculty for support. An interventionist strategy with both teachers and pupils was designed and the results were so successful that the DCSF and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) funded the Faculty to undertake further evaluation to inform a national strategy on how HEIs can support schools in Special Measures. The Faculty also co-ordinates requests and responses in respect of those organisations seeking Trust or Academy status and EHU is currently supporting one Academy, one Trust and one school that is applying for Trust status.
- iv. EHU is committed to providing HE in geographic locations that are accessible to those wishing to pursue programmes. The further education colleges (FECs) are crucial in developing appropriate provision aimed at local labour markets and communities and it is

from the FECs that many of the initial proposals emanate. **Collaborative Provision** in 2008/09 involved 10 partner organisations delivering 24 programmes to 601 learners and this is expected to rise to 15 partners delivering 45 programmes to over 700 learners in 2009/10. Through the LLN in 2008/09 we worked with 9 partner organisations, delivering 23 programmes making up 350 Additional Student Numbers (ASNs); this is expected to rise to 12 partners offering 25 programmes with an additional 260 ASNs.

- v. EHU is involved in the development of the **14–19 Curriculum**, in particular the new diplomas, through engagement with all six boroughs in Greater Merseyside and the seven Travel to Learn Areas (TTLAs) in Lancashire³. This engagement varies from membership or even chairing of strategic steering groups, to academic involvement with clusters of schools and colleges developing individual diploma lines, to input into the IAG or Transitions strand. The next phase of developments in support of 14–19 is to establish EHU's capacity to provide both additional specialist learning/projects and work related learning (in our capacity as an employer).

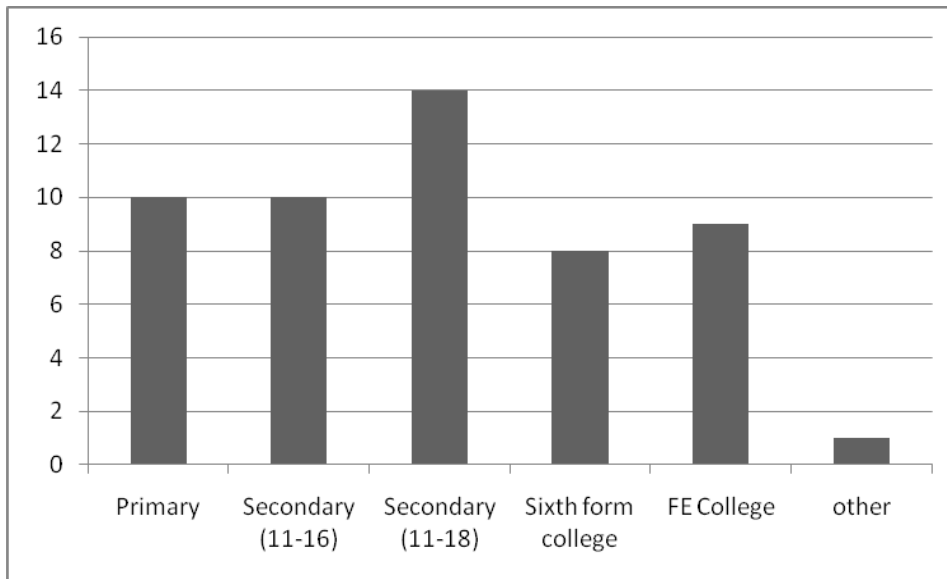
b) Results from the survey

As noted above, 84 people started the survey, but valid responses for the majority of questions were received from 39 or fewer people. However, respondents did not necessarily answer every question, and for many questions they could give more than one response. The links identified by survey respondents are relatively evenly split between primary schools (26.3%), 11–16 schools (26.3%), 11–18 schools (36.8%), sixth form colleges (21.1%) and FECs(23.7%). This is illustrated in chart 1 below (38 people responded to this question, and some indicated more than one link with schools and colleges). 86% of the responses indicated that links were with local schools and colleges; of the remainder the majority were in the northwest, with a few links in Yorkshire and one in Luton.

³ In serving a large shire county, and for logistical purposes, Lancashire County Council has created seven *Travel to Learn Areas* (TTLAs), each made up of one or more districts. The majority of learners within a TTLA are expected to travel to local providers to access learning.

Chart 1: Type of institution with which staff have links (based on responses from 38 respondents)

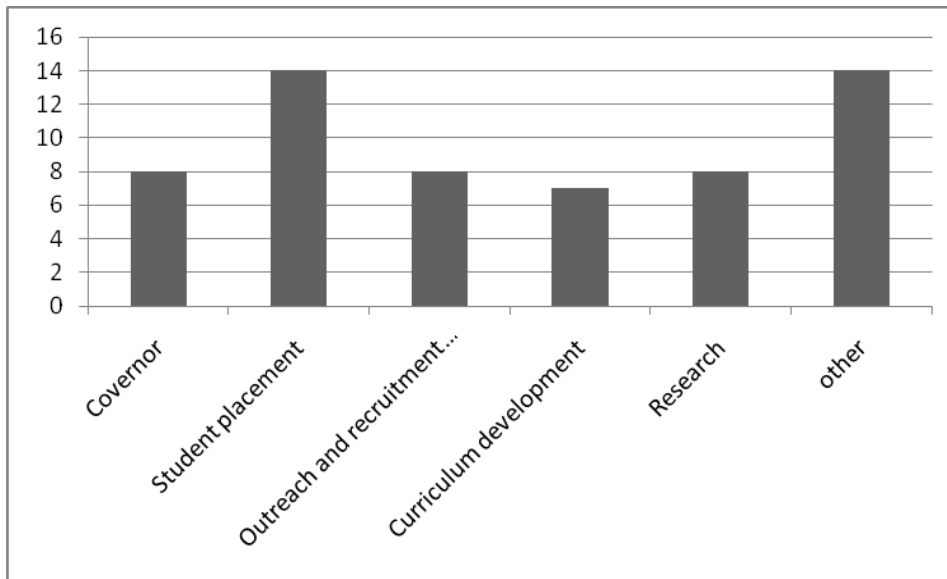
What type of institution is this?



Respondents were asked to indicate the purpose of links they have, and were offered the choices of: governor (20.5%); student placement (35.9%); outreach and recruitment activities (20.5%); curriculum development (17.9%); research (20.5%); and other (35.9%). This question was answered by 39 respondents. It is interesting again to note a fairly even split between these purposes (illustrated in chart 2 below), but it should be noted that some respondents indicated more than one purpose, which suggests that they have multiple links with a specific school or college. It is perhaps surprising in an institution such as EHU to see the same amount of activity in schools and colleges relating to outreach and recruitment activities, and research. It is also significant that 36% of respondents identified other purposes or types of links that they have. The full list is included in Appendix 6. The most significant activity identified and not captured in our list of options is staff development or continuing professional development (CPD) for school staff, which was identified by three of the 39 respondents to this question (7.7%). Thus the purpose or type of links identified by staff through the survey correspond to the mission and strategic aims of the institution, especially those relating to widening participation, collaboration, and learning, teaching and the student experience.

Chart 2: Purpose or type of link with school or college (based on responses from 39 respondents)

What type of link(s) do you have?



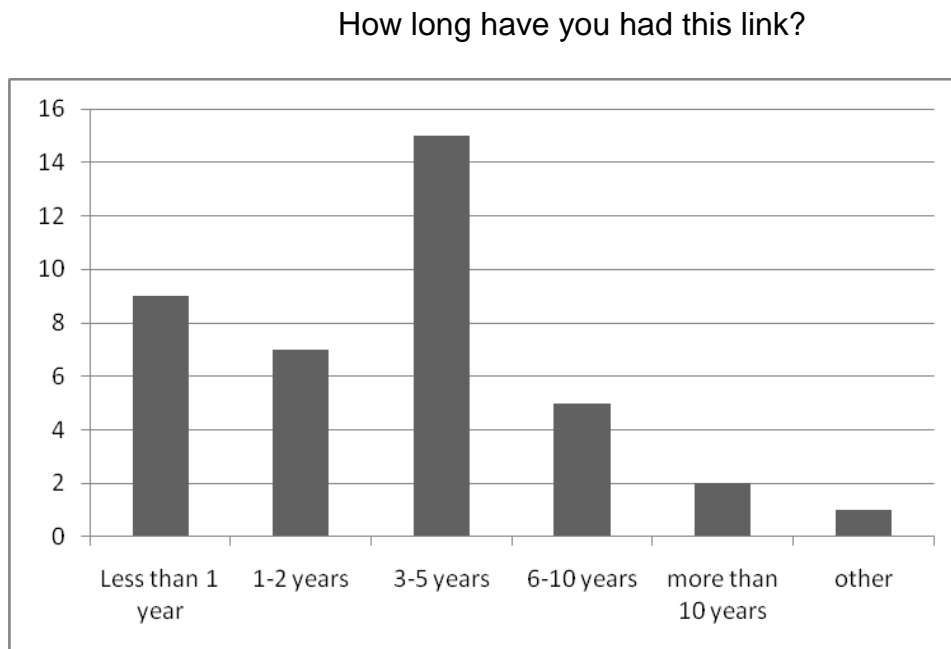
About two thirds of the 39 respondents (69.2%) said that they represented EHU through their link with a school or college; and about one third said it was undertaken in a private capacity (33.3%). There is a level of complexity here, as some of the comments in response to the question “Do you represent Edge Hill University or undertake this role in a private capacity?”, demonstrate:

“Both, technically all Governors are independent. I am a Local Authority appointed Governor but this was put into a previous Performance Review as an objective for me. Some activities I undertake with the school are in my capacity as an Edge Hill employee.” (Survey respondent)

“Privately – although they know I work for Edge Hill.” (Survey respondent)

Many of the links have been established for a significant amount of time according to the 39 people who answered this question. The most popular answer was 3-5 years (38.5%), with one fifth being substantially longer than this, and only 23.1% being less than one year. This is illustrated in Chart 3 below. It is interesting to note that of the respondents who answered the question, the majority only had a link with one school or college (71.4%).

Chart 3: Duration of staff-school/college links(based on responses from 39 respondents)



3.1.3 Development and maintenance of links

It appears that a number of the links have developed from personal engagement with the schools and colleges. Some of these have blossomed through professional inter-connections, while others are more personal, and could perhaps be utilised further. For example, currently or previously working at the institution, or being a parent of a student attending the institution, or friends or family members working at a particular school or college.

In response to the survey question: “What factors do you feel contribute to a positive link with a school or college?” a wide range of answers were received from 36 respondents, which have been grouped and categorised below. The answers are divided between the quality of the relationship, and the content/output of the link.

a) Personal relations

The most frequently cited attribute was the relationship between colleagues in different institutions. This was identified by one third of respondents; answers included: interpersonal relationship with staff; good working relationship; people skills; being engaging; having personal contact; and personalities. The importance of personal relations is reflected on in an interview with a member of EHU staff:

“I think from Edge Hill or any other individual’s point of view really a lot of it I have to say is based more on personalities than actual

systems. And that's a great pity. So an example being, I had an email this morning from somebody I know really well in an agency and I know that we get placements in that agency because I know this woman really well. I have cultivated the relationship with this agency, both from contact through my previous university and since I came to Edge Hill. She's leaving at the end of August and I know that I'll have to start all over again...there's quite a lot of personality involved...Having said that I don't think that it would last if I didn't deliver, then I think it would go. But in a sense it's who you know... but you still need to maintain that."

Other survey responses identified elements of inter-personal relationships which are deemed to be important: enthusiasm, commitment and wholehearted involvement; trust, honesty and respect; and confidentiality.

b) Good communication

Good communication between partners/individuals involved in the link was identified by 17% of survey respondents. Examples of good communication include having a named point of contact in each institution and having termly partnership updates.

c) Maintaining a relationship

Personal relations and good communication are clearly important, but time needs to be invested in maintaining the link/relationship over time (17%). Survey respondents suggested that this would be facilitated by regular interactions.

d) Mutually beneficial

The second most frequently cited response was that the link should be beneficial to both partners (22%). Survey respondents identified that the relationship needs to be mutually beneficial, and other factors identified included: clear agenda; relate to current priorities; add value; offer some thing they don't have or can't get elsewhere; sharing; and practically oriented. Related to this is the fact that partners need to be understanding and respect the context and priorities of other institutions (14%), for example recognising that in some schools: "Research is not so much bottom of the agenda as not on the agenda at all".

e) Professionalism

A number of survey respondents (19%) indicated the importance of "professionalism". This refers to having relevant experience and skills, acting efficiently and operating to high standards expected of educational professionals.

f) Other issues

Other factors that support good links and partnership working which were identified by survey respondents were clear procedures (e.g. “recognisable mode of access”), flexibility, and sharing action/responsibility for tasks.

3.1.4 Impact of links

A starting point for this research is that links with schools and colleges ought to be beneficial for schools, colleges and universities, and the individuals engaged in the links, particularly if the work is additional rather than central to their institutional role. This working hypothesis has been borne out by this study, which identified mutual benefit to be a factor contributing to an effective partnership (see discussion below). This view is summarised by an interviewee:

“Well again I guess you have to think: ‘Are we going to get anything out of it?’ You have to think: ‘Well who is, what’s the organisation, where are they... is it worth travelling the distance, is it worth my time?’ You could end up spending all your time just going into schools and I can’t do that because... my time is limited so...you have got to pick and choose who you are going to get into partnership with.... [The] time factor is something you have got to consider.”

In the following sections we use data from the survey and interviews with EHU staff to identify the benefits, or impact, of partnership working.

a) For EHU and its staff

Individuals responding to the survey were asked what they gained from their link with a school or a college, and subsequently they were asked about the benefits of the link for the institution. These were both free text questions, and 36 responses were received to the first question and 37 to the second. These responses have then been read and categorised. What is significant to note is that many respondents were not able to differentiate between the benefits of the links to themselves and for the institution, either citing the same benefits in response to each question, or mixing up personal and institutional benefits in each response. It should be recognised that there is often a significant overlap between individual and institutional benefits:

“I do not do this to benefit Edge Hill. However, my professional role does benefit from the different perspective of school priorities that I have as a Governor.”

A significant number of the respondents suggested that there is more than one benefit from engaging with schools and colleges. Thus, these

different types of gains are likely to intersect and reinforce each other, transcending the personal/professional/institutional divides.

“As a Governor, a great deal of personal satisfaction plus staff development in areas that I would not normally receive through my own role at Edge Hill, e.g. estates management, sub-contracting, etc.”

In the following section the benefits for individuals and EHU are discussed.

i. Understanding the school and college sector. The most often repeated benefit of working with a school or college was for the knowledge about schools and colleges that it afforded to individuals (36%) and to the institution as a whole (11%). Examples cited included knowledge about the primary, secondary or sixth form curriculum, the work place for new teachers, the FE sector, the issues facing young people etc. For example, an EHU member of staff serving as a governor articulates some of the benefits gained:

Researcher: “Do you think you have a better perspective of FE and does this impact on your role at EHU?”

Respondent: “Yes absolutely, I’d strongly say that that’s the case. Seeing how FE works from that side of the fence, and what the drivers are and the constraints and the policy environment....I have a greatly enhanced ability to understand that now, and it’s the intangibles such as how people think and what kind of language they use. All of that would be very difficult to get without having some kind of involvement along these lines.”

ii. Professional development. This gaining of knowledge is closely related to the concept of professional development for EHU staff, but it was differentiated by some respondents and some particular examples were given. Engaging with schools and colleges promotes professional development such as getting and trying out new curriculum ideas, promoting reflection on practice and providing a wider perspective on social work practice. The notion of professional development was identified by 10 respondents (28%) in relation to individual gains and 5 (14%) as an institutional benefit. Only a limited number of respondents however suggested that this knowledge was used to inform curriculum development (discussed below).

iii. Curriculum development. Some of the comments suggested that a better understanding of the school or college sector would have positive benefits, but this was not always explained in the survey as to how. A couple of examples of curriculum development were given, including developing Foundation Degrees and informing teacher education in the post-compulsory sector. In addition, it was recognised (14%) that having

placements for trainee teachers is essential to their learning experience, and an important institutional benefit.

iv. Research, data collection and publication. Six individuals identified research and data collection as a benefit to them as individuals, while four identified research and particularly publications as a benefit to EHU of the school/college link. For example, one person indicated that his link with a primary school in the northwest: “contributes to research development, knowledge transfer, Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) [sic]”.

v. Personal gains. In response to the question about how individuals benefit from the link, people identified personal satisfaction and interest as being important (17%); for example: “A huge amount of satisfaction at seeing the children develop their understanding”, or “It was flattering to be asked to get involved in another centre's plans and interesting to see what their plans were”. A couple of individuals identified a personal benefit of contributing to the local community.

vi. Promoting EHU. In response to both the individual (14%) and institutional (27%) benefits of school/college links survey respondents identified the value of promoting the university. Some of the responses were quite vague, but generally they implied institutional reputation and student recruitment:

“We work alongside the secondary schools and 6th form colleges which helps promote our service and Edge Hill.”

“Builds relationship within the local community. Possible prospect of students studying at EHU in the future.”

These sentiments were elaborated on in some of the interviews with EHU staff. For example:

“...the strength is getting Edge Hill's name in the school at an age where kids are just starting to think about what they are going to do after school... 12, 13 years old, some of them have got no idea about what they want to do, some have an idea of the kind of career they want, and again it's getting the name of Edge Hill in, it's getting my department's name in there, strengthening that sort of bond... that recognition with the kids. So I see the benefit is in getting the name in there.”

Some survey respondents were more specific about promoting the University to schools, colleges, students and the community, with a direct link to recruitment. This was especially evident in relation to institutional benefits (22%). The link between partnership working and recruitment was developed in an interview about LLNs, in particular the successful partnerships with FE colleges. These have resulted in 260

additional student numbers for next year and 225 for the following year, plus a commitment to continue the LLN.

One survey respondent identified more explicitly how links and partnerships assist widening participation and transition into higher education:

“A much wider and deeper understanding of the issues facing schools in terms of resources which is important when planning activities with all schools. An appreciation of teaching and learning styles which we are now starting to make use of in terms of planning pre-entry preparation for HE programmes and transition to HE. Opportunity to link in to wider networks – for example Maghull is in a network of 3 secondary schools and 14 primary schools who use our facilities for development days and into which we can reach for discussion and debate. Greater visibility in terms of recruitment through direct contact with teaching and advisory staff. Partner in Trust Status.”

vii. Partnership development. A number of respondents indicated that the institutional benefits of their links with schools/colleges would maintain, develop and promote further collaborative working with EHU (22%). For example:

“The staff know I work at Edge Hill. I would like to think that this might in some way encourage them to have a range of dealings with us – they take primary students on school-based experience; they provide staff for interviews; they take part in Edge Hill conferences and other events.” (Survey respondent)

“There is mutual respect and co operation so that the school will 'go the extra mile' as I do for them.” (Survey respondent)

b) School/college benefits

The key benefits for schools and colleges (as perceived by EHU staff) are curriculum enrichment, professional development for school staff, and improved progression opportunities for students. Other benefits identified include: supporting school/college development and facilitating the recruitment of new staff.

i. Curriculum enrichment. 36% of respondents identified ways in which the curriculum is enriched through engagement with EHU. Examples included access to research and expertise in specific areas; development of entrepreneurship skills amongst primary pupils; meeting overseas student teachers; work experience opportunities; and developing understanding about world of work.

“Edge Hill (Sporting Edge) is one of a number of local employers (Fire, Police, National Health Service (NHS), council, etc) that

attend and give the children an insight into what it is like to work in the 'outside world'." (Survey respondent)

"Using my skills as a Senior Lecturer to develop early entrepreneurial skills amongst the Junior group, to provide a programme over one term that teaches them some basic business principles and gets them working as teams developing products for sale at Christmas Fairs." (Survey respondent)

ii. Professional development for school/college staff. Another benefit identified frequently was professional development for school staff (19%). Examples included updating staff on national developments and research, developing specific areas of expertise, secondment and research opportunities, sharing expertise. In addition, one respondent noted that participating in research enabled staff to have a voice and contribute to the development of policy and practice.

iii. Better understanding of the HE sector and progression support for students. There are a number of examples identified of ways in which schools – both staff and students – gain a better understanding of the HE sector. This is either explicitly or implicitly related to improving opportunities for progression to HE. In some cases this is simply raising the profile of the institution.

"It maintains the link between the University and the school, and in particular reinforces the link to the sports facilities that many of the children have already used. It is good to put a face to the facility name." (Survey respondent)

Other links and partnerships directly provide information, advice, guidance and support to encourage progression to HE at EHU.

iv. School/college development and improvement

Links with universities may contribute to school and college development. For example, offering prestige, contributing to the development plan or assisting in other strategic developments. One link with a member of staff has resulted in Edge Hill being a partner in its bid for trust status. Other developmental benefits include enabling schools and colleges to deliver HE level programmes, and providing access to equipment and facilities that they would not usually have access to.

v. Recruitment of new staff. Many of the links that EHU has with schools and colleges are to provide student placements for trainee teachers. While this is clearly of benefit to EHU, it may be less obvious how the school benefits (beyond the financial recompense, which was identified by a number of respondents – 14%). Links with EHU can assist schools and colleges to recruit staff. There is evidence of more or less formal vacancy advertising opportunities, and more directly, the possibility of recruiting tried and tested staff who have been on placement in the school or college.

vi. Specific/personal benefits. Some staff responding to the survey identified specific personal benefits that they are able to offer to the schools and colleges that they work with, for example cover at short notice and marketing advice.

3.1.5 Future of links

Just over half of the survey respondents (54.1%) reported that their links had 'developed, deepened, changed or extended over time'. Some explained their answers by providing additional comments (see Appendix 7). These responses suggest that over time positive relations develop or are maintained, particularly with members of staff, and this can result in either a repeated or regular request for engagement, or a deepening of the engagement to include additional activities. For example, one respondent was involved in the appointment of a new head teacher.

EHU interviewees were asked to reflect on the future of their links with schools and colleges, in particular whether they anticipate having more and/or different links with schools and colleges in the future. Most respondents were optimistic, but answers covered a continuum of positions, from "not at the moment", to "always on the look out" to "new links developing". These are briefly illustrated below:

a) Not at the moment

Interviewer: "Because of the links you have now, have any subsequent links developed?"

Respondent: "No, but that doesn't mean that they won't. I think sometimes that it takes a while to get these things going and it takes a while to establish a network of people. I'm hoping that there's a kind of a critical mass moment or a critical movement moment where you've been plugging away for a while and then all of a sudden... at some point it takes on a momentum of its own, and... you can find that you have an established network. Whether that happens or not has yet to be seen."

b) Always on the look out

"...I'm always continuing to maintain and develop these links, in whichever way is seen fit. If the school is interested, and once they get involved I will quite happily go down and 'push it', and make time available for it."

c) New links developing

"... it is funny, tomorrow I am meeting the school again in a different capacity... because they are looking to build some of their own sports facilities at the school. I am meeting the Headmaster and their Business Development Manager along with [pro vice

chancellor], to talk about plans, possible partnerships... I don't really know until I have been in the meeting. I don't know whether this has come about because of my involvement...[or] whether it would have happened anyway. I don't know but maybe because I have been involved, that's helped."

Future links between EHU and schools and colleges could be developed with existing partners (e.g. responding to their needs and interests), which is what all of the respondents above are talking about. Alternatively, a more strategic approach might be to identify work that is to be undertaken in collaboration, and then look for suitable partners. This more strategic approach was exemplified by one of the interviewees:

"One of the ways in which social workers... progress through their career is something called PQ –post qualification – so we're looking at how we can be involved in those kind of training opportunities for social workers and we're looking at working with one particular local authority on delivery of that programme for newly qualified social workers. So we're looking for those kinds of opportunities...."

This approach can be contrasted with the alternative of looking for further ways of working with an existing partner:

"...I will probably get back in touch with them to see how they are doing and maybe arrange a visit to go back.... I got follow up feedback from them afterwards... thanking me for the interviews and a little bit of an update as to where they are up to... so it is probably worth going back to visit them again."

A more strategic approach might help ensure that links with schools and colleges are clearly beneficial to EHU by contributing to institutional priorities, as well as being beneficial to schools and colleges. Once collaborative priorities are identified, working with schools and colleges that EHU colleagues already have positive relationships with would give these partnerships a head start, as good foundations would already be in place.

3.2. Holy Cross College

Following initial contact by telephone, a letter of introduction was sent to the Director of the University Centre at Holy Cross College⁴ by way of setting up interviews and focus groups with staff at Holy Cross College (HCC). Members of the research team went into HCC on 24th and 25th June 2009 and conducted six interviews with the College Principal, the Director and Deputy Director of the University Centre, a Governor, a Senior Support Tutor and a Support Tutor link for EHU. A focus group was also conducted

⁴ Holy Cross College is a Sixth Form College, and it also operates a University Centre offering HE courses. The courses are validated by a range of higher education institutions, and run mostly in the evenings and often, although not exclusively, enrol local mature students. Further details about the provision are provided as part of the case study.

with administrative staff and HE Support Tutors. Additional background information was also supplied by HCC, some of which appears here.

3.2.1 Contextual information

HCC is situated close to the town centre of Bury which is an old mill town whose centre is currently the subject of a major redevelopment that it is hoped will reinvigorate the local economy. It serves a local catchment area covering Bury Metropolitan Authority and neighbouring boroughs across north Manchester. According to the ethos on their website, HCC is a Catholic Sixth Form College that strives to be:

“A place where people can learn, grow and develop while feeling at home and valued. The College aims to offer to all, especially the poor and marginalised, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation.”

Based on the A level scores of HCC’s students, it has been classified by *The Times* as one of the top ten colleges in the country for the past four years. In 2007/08 nearly 85% of their 16-18 year old students progressed into HEIs, and in 2009 six students have been offered places at Oxford or Cambridge, an achievement they are proud of. In addition, HCC has a University Centre (the Centre). This is housed in a separate building at HCC, and offers a range of HE courses tailored to meet local needs, and delivered both full and part time. Courses include: Foundation Degrees, degrees, Professional/Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCEs) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) equivalences. See Appendix 8 for a full list of courses and a timeline of their introduction. While the courses are developed and delivered by the partner HEIs, HCC is responsible for providing an infrastructure and pastoral support for students from enquiry and application through to graduation. The HEIs provide financial remuneration for the college and accredit students’ learning. There are currently 626 students studying HE courses at the Centre.

The Centre focuses on developing strong links in the local community, which it is hoped, will benefit from a wide variety of courses. Indeed, the Director of the Centre sees it as a ‘second chance’ for those who did not have the opportunities that are now offered to the 16-18 year old age group. He feels that central to HCC’s ethos is the desire to:

“Bring the University to where the people are because ‘it’s about local delivery to suit people’s lives’.”

3.2.2 The current links: developing partnerships

According to the Deputy Director of HCC the development of partnerships has moved up the agenda of HCC and particularly of the Centre because of the appointment of a new Principal.

However, he has a 'good base to start from' since HCC already works in partnership with four universities, including EHU, one other institution in the northwest and two institutions in different regions. The model they have developed is a partnership whereby the HEIs deliver the courses/pathways at the HCC site and HCC is responsible for providing an infrastructure and pastoral support for students. There are a few other types of links; in some cases professional development courses are provided by the HEIs for staff of HCC such as mentor training. These mentors then become a 'key link' between the universities and schools.

In relation to the specifics of the links between the case studies involved in this research project, the current partnership links between HCC and EHU were originally centred within the Faculty of Education, but have subsequently grown to include the Faculties of Arts & Sciences and Health plus widening participation. The Faculty of Education is always seeking to develop partnerships with schools and colleges in the Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester areas, but the relationship with HCC developed fortuitously. According to the Director of the Centre, their main partnership was initially established with one university because of the 'Catholic connection', because 'there was an actual affinity with [name of university] in terms of an ecumenical university'. The Director stated it was only when this university was unable to quickly respond to their desire to offer Foundation Degrees that another university was sought:

"We started to work with EHU because [name of university] couldn't meet our needs re Foundation Degrees, other universities weren't flexible enough and we wanted a quick response which EHU provided."

He also noted that often when new links were pursued, this was done through pre-established personal contacts, a view that was reiterated by the Principal:

"In the universities we have informal partnerships with, we know people such as admissions tutors well and that's extremely valuable: the better the relationship with a university, the better it is for students. On one level it's largely informal, but with staff expertise and staff contacts, there is a real sense of partnership."

The Director suggested that this is typical and that the HCC's relationships with the four universities were largely determined by HCC building on informal links and so was, in some ways, serendipitous. In particular, the development of links sometimes depended upon individuals at HCC having personal contacts with university staff:

"With [name of non-regional university] there again that was a link with someone who moved to there from [name of regional university] and he asked 'how are things going?' He was as

convinced on the model as were the Senior Managers, so that is how we linked in with [non-regional university].”

This view was reiterated by the Deputy Director who, when asked how relationships developed, stated that:

“I would look into our partner universities and who does what, then I would contact the Dean or someone that I know in that particular field and make an appointment to go along and discuss it [ideas for a course].”

In terms of universities strategically developing partnerships, the Governor who was interviewed felt it was important that decision-making should be made jointly between equals and that HCC should be free to choose whichever partners fit best with the aims and objectives of HCC in any particular set of circumstances. Of course, having made contacts, the universities already engaged are in a position to be offered any new opportunities that arise, although as the Director pointed out this is dependent upon whether the current relationships are ‘working well’. However, while HCC and EHU currently have strong links, it was HCC who made the initial approaches to EHU, and the benefits for EHU were not directly planned. However, it should be noted that EHU carefully reviews possible partnerships before progressing them, and is keen to ensure that they align with strategic priorities. The HCC partnership raises the profile of EHU amongst students of HCC and more widely in the East Lancashire area, and contributes to EHU’s widening participation and collaborative provision objectives.

3.2.3 What makes effective partnerships?

When asked about what makes a relationship work, everyone who was interviewed and those involved in the focus groups had very similar perceptions and felt that good personal relationships at all levels, shared values and similar goals were pivotal. The Director summed this up well and stated it is about:

“Consciously building a relationship which is one of mutual trust and understanding whether in admissions, registration, finance, or anywhere else....It’s about professional acceptance and a partnership of equals... it’s about joining in with the vision we have of delivering locally, having openness and transparency to develop this vision because it’s about more than delivering a degree course.”

One of the Senior Support Tutors at HCC echoed these comments and said that a good relationship is “all about communication... about being upfront and honest... getting on together and building good relationships.”

The Principal of HCC pointed out that although relationships began largely on an informal basis these developed over time so that eventually HCC became:

“A genuine partner with the University... where there’s a certain blurring of the distinction between us, and their interests become our interests.”

This high level of close collaboration was viewed as highly desirable by the Principal and it was his vision to continue in this vein as much as possible. Certainly a range of good relationships will enable HCC and EHU to seize on possible opportunities and co-develop ways of moving forward on them.

The views of what makes a good partnership were reiterated when staff at HCC reflected on the problems they have experienced in developing and strengthening links with their partner universities. The Governor noted that:

“Everybody needs to understand what they are trying to do because if your partner has one idea and you have a totally different idea that is not addressed right at the outset you run into problems.”

He also noted that sometimes this meant having to work together to create new models and to develop “creativity in our thinking about how we operate”.

Part of what is important according to the Director is to ensure that all the staff at the Centre at all levels “feel part of the programme” and have good communication links with their equivalent at each of the universities. The Senior Support Tutor reflected particularly on this last point and said it was important for the administrative teams at HCC and EHU to have strong links and for her to have strong links with the EHU tutors, but she noted that this involved a shared responsibility to “understand the different systems each had and adapt to them so that they work”. This level of sharing was particularly identified as a problem by a Link Tutor who felt that the universities “safeguard their own processes and procedure” which she felt made her job of supporting students more difficult since she couldn’t access, for example, the libraries of the universities or some of their software (e.g., blackboard).

One of the problems with the fact that relationships seemed to initially develop on an informal basis building on personal relationships, is that if that person leaves the relationship can suffer. As the Principal pointed out:

“The informal partnerships that are very ad hoc can be lost. If you lose a member of staff and if arrangements are not systematically built up, it can be a problem.”

In some cases difficulties in the partnership do not have to mean a disintegration of the links and can be managed to elicit a mutually agreed

outcome. For example, despite problems with the delivery of Foundation Degrees HCC still have substantial links with one of their partner universities and in the case of EHU a particular difficulty has led to a renewed understanding and a strengthening of the partnership. In this case, the Deputy Director of the Centre had been pursuing with EHU the possibility of a law degree, although EHU had not been able to agree the provision at the time, the Deputy Director was impressed with how the situation had been handled:

“We did feel that they [EHU] had looked into it very thoroughly and gave good reasons why it couldn’t be done, it was dealt with very professionally.”

One issue that was briefly touched on by some of the staff at HCC was the ‘affordability’ and financial implications of joint working. The Deputy Director pointed out that in the current financial climate they were working hard to secure good student numbers for courses, although she did feel demand was dependent on whether the courses offered were tailored to local demand. The Governor felt that it was important for courses to be financially viable and he didn’t see “any advantage in providing a service that isn’t going to pay for itself”. Having said that, he felt that using the college’s resources in the evening once the 16–18 year old cohort had left made financial sense and addressed the “wastefulness of the normal education system”. He was not the only one concerned with whether money would increasingly become an issue given the current climate, although the Principal and Director were adamant that this should not disadvantage students or threaten the links that had been developed.

3.2.4 The perceived impact of partnership working

Most of the staff working at HCC felt that the future plans for the Centre, decisions regarding the courses that would be introduced and governance issues were generally dealt with internally and that the HEIs’ involvement was to help develop ways in which their vision and goals could be put into practice. Such a view belies the importance of the strategic partnerships for HCC financially and otherwise since the partnerships have had a noticeable impact on the Centre’s work which has gained local and national recognition. For example, their work has been recognised as an example of good practice and in October 2005 representatives of HCC were invited to speak at a conference of the Director General for Higher Education in the countries of the European Union, and at the Association of Colleges (AOC) conference for HE in FE. The Centre is also a founder member of the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA), a member of the Greater Manchester Aimhigher Steering Group and of the Greater Manchester HE in FE Consortium. In addition there have been presentations at local forums and much interest has been shown in their innovative model of local provision of HE by other FE institutions. This view of the benefits for the HCC are cascaded down to the staff, as the Deputy Director pointed out:

“I’ve been heavily involved with EHU and from a personal view it’s developed my understanding, it’s developed my interest in my job, it’s widened my role and I feel pretty positive.”

This benefit was also commented on by the Principal who felt that the Centre’s involvement with the universities:

“Has had an impact on teaching and teaching standards because it has fired up staff in their subject specialisms again, and created a culture that affects how staff teach.”

The Principal also had a view on staff development and thought it could be extremely beneficial:

“Recently there have been a number of courses with one of our partners where there have been issues because of staffing problems. We have very little ability to help with that, and this has led me to think that more of a mixed economy would suit us and the universities better. Occasionally they have difficulties persuading their staff to come over here in the evenings and therefore I’m interested in developments which skill up our staff. If we encourage them to undertake their own research, gain doctorates where they don’t already have them, and develop their experience of HE lecturing and course planning, we might move to a situation of at least part franchising.”

Key to any course provision is the impact it has for learner support, achievement and progression and staff were proud of their achievements in these areas. In the decade that the Centre has been open student numbers have increased by over 800%, they have a retention rate of 91% for the BA/BSc routes and they claim that their positive achievement rates are at least equal to, if not higher than, those achieved by learners on the main campuses. In particular, the Director felt that the key factor in achieving these results was the high level of pastoral support provided by the Centre staff over and above that which they receive from the HEIs.

This more personal and intensive model that the Centre uses might be worth taking into consideration when thinking about how students, particularly those from widening participation target groups, are supported by universities when they are on main campuses. The results of the Centre highlight that universities can learn from their FE colleagues and that a strong partnership can be mutually beneficial not just in terms of finances and student recruitment, but also in terms of rethinking teaching and learning pedagogies and systems of student support.

Of course all the positive results achieved by HCC reflect well on EHU and the other partnership universities and encourage the strengthening of these relationships, but they can also increase HE accessibility for the Centre’s students if they choose to ‘top-up’ their degrees or progress onto post graduate courses.

The Director and the Senior Support Tutor were particularly proud of the results the College attained because the Centre at HCC delivers HE in what is known as a “cold-spot” in the North West of England, which is an area with a low level of progression to HE. To address this concern, the Centre was established in 1999 as a response to the Government’s widening participation drive with a vision to provide higher education opportunities for people who cannot or do not want to follow a traditional route to gaining a degree. This aim was quickly pursued by the Centre and in the 2002–2003 HEFCE Annual Report the provision at HCC was mentioned as an innovative approach to widening participation. Courses at the Centre have been developed to meet the specific needs of groups traditionally excluded from HE including those with no history or experience of HE; who do not have formal qualifications; who are socially or economically excluded from HE; who have disabilities that present obstacles to participation; or those who are culturally or ethnically excluded. Because of this remit the Director felt it was important to deliver all elements of the programme locally as it meant that people who cannot study at a main campus can still enrol and complete their degree.

“We are actively trying to encourage 6th formers, particularly those affected by the economic downturn, or by personal, or by cultural reasons that prevent them going away, to be interested....We, think this is a growth area, that 6th formers from Bury in the present climate or for other reasons are not going onto university, or are questioning it, or would rather go part time based here, could none-the-less go and get their degrees in this way.”

It would seem that the problems caused by the current financial downturn could actually enable partnerships that provide local and/or flexible modes of HE study to flourish. Indeed, the Deputy Director made this point and felt that the Centre’s role within HCC could become more important in the current financial climate because:

“A lot of the 6th formers aspire to go away, to live away and not study locally. However there’s an increasing amount, I think with the financial situation, who are choosing to stay at home, so we’re... tapping into that a little bit more than we have done in the past.”

HCC’s aim is that the responsibility for the quality assurance of the provision remains with the partner HEI to ensure that standards are maintained, and students get a comparable experience to those studying at the main campus. The Link Tutor agreed with this view and felt their work was important for widening participation because their students “tended to be people who are coming through the less traditional routes and women who want certain types of course”.

She also felt it was essential that HCC continued to provide a “seamless progression for some students who might not want to go away from home to study”.

This view was extended by the Principal who stated that some of their students “from less conventional backgrounds” are identified as part of Aimhigher and come to HCC because of a sense of familiarity.

Many of the people who enrol on the Centre’s courses have met with barriers to progression in their lives, and it was felt that the opportunity to study for a degree locally could remove the glass ceilings they might face in achieving their potential. As one Senior Support Tutor phrased it:

“It’s a real feel good factor that you have made a difference in somebody’s life.... I really didn’t anticipate that I would ever get a degree or even be in a teaching position because I never thought I had the ability, but with the encouragement of the staff in the University Centre they enabled me to do it, hence I now pass on my own experiences and make it work for other people.”

3.2.5 Future development of effective partnerships

The overarching view of the HCC staff seemed to be that effective partnerships may start serendipitously due to personal relationships, or factors such as geographical placement or staffing levels, and as such could not necessarily be strategically controlled by universities. However, once a link was in place, the key factors for strengthening a partnership were identified as:

- Having a shared vision
- Being honest and open about the possibilities and limitations involved in making the vision a reality
- Developing strong lines of communication
- Developing good personal relationships with relevant staff at the partner institution

While it may take time and effort for those in HEIs and their partner institutions to work on these factors, the experiences of the staff and learners at HCC suggests that the results achieved ‘are worth it’ (Senior Support Tutor). Also, the development of multiple layers of partnership links would seem to be an important step forward so that links are not lost if there are changes in staffing because the Deputy Director pointed out that:

“I think the only way I could see it ending was if they [the university] had a new Vice Chancellor, who didn’t want to engage in widening participation and outreach centres as much, like the VC did at [name of university] and various others who I know that has happened to, so that could be why it would end.”

In terms of specific courses, the Deputy Director stated she was pursuing the possibility of further top-up courses for those with Foundation Degrees in the Faculties of Health and Education at EHU. She also thought it was particularly important that if the UK government introduced new policies (such as Early Years' Professional Status) HCC and the partner universities needed to respond quickly and effectively if there was a suitable and viable level of local demand.

The Link Tutor felt it might be beneficial to put careers staff from HCC and the HEIs in touch to provide students with the best information about what would be most suitable for them. However, the Deputy Director flagged an issue with current provision that perhaps needs attending to:

“There is an Edge Hill careers advisor who has occasionally come out to talk to students here. But my understanding is that the classification of our partnership agreement is changing and therefore access to this is going to be less straightforward.... I have spoken to the careers staff here about helping adult students in terms of careers advice and guidance and they have pointed out that 6th form careers advice and guidance is very, very different to adult careers and guidance, which I didn't know. So we haven't actually put Edge Hill's careers staff in touch with our careers staff, but... that's an interesting one. It makes me think... that there are contacts and links that we could make, between other departments here that aren't involved with the universities that we are partners with....”

In terms of future strategy, the Principal wanted a greater level of integration from the HEIs that his staff work with, and he hoped that there would be opportunities for continuing professional development via higher degrees so that his staff could “take advantage of relationships and develop academically as well as pedagogically and practically”.

This area of staff development could be extremely beneficial for two reasons. It could feed into the Teachers as Research Associates Programme (TRAP) run by the Faculty of Education at EHU, which supports those in school and college settings to develop a research profile and gain MA level accreditation. It could also enable staff at EHU to have access to pupils and practicing teachers since it is not always easy for EHU staff to develop and maintain 'grass roots' contacts that they can involve in their research.

Overall, those from HCC who took part in the interviews and focus groups were extremely positive about the strategic partnerships that had developed between the Centre and the four HEIs. As with any relationship, they commented on problems that developed from time to time but they also felt that working through problems together could strengthen the understanding

and commitment of those involved. As the Senior Support Tutor at HCC commented:

“Our links with the universities are now going from strength to strength, I can only see it going one way and I am proud to be part of it. It’s fantastic.”

3.2.6 EHU’s perspective

To provide a rounded view of the partnership between HCC and EHU, the university was invited to provide additional and background information about this link.

HCC responded to a letter from EHU to schools and colleges that send students to EHU seeking a meeting to discuss recruitment and pre-entry support opportunities. Consequently, the HCC Principal and the Director of their University Centre visited EHU and outlined their vision for their University Centre and wished to explore the potential of EHU offering degree programmes using HCC as an outreach centre.

At this time EHU was an Associated College of Lancaster University, which awarded EHU’s degrees. As a result franchise provision was not easily possible and therefore EHU did not [then] have a collaborative provision strategy. However, outreach provision with EHU staff delivering an academic programme was of interest and met with the EHU’s aspirations in respect of widening participation and offering HE provision in geographic areas where there is little or no local provision.

A number of exploratory visits were made to HCC by Pro-Vice Chancellors, Directors and Deans. EHU was impressed by the quality of provision at HCC and in particular their commitment to raising achievement, student support and their outstanding retention rates in the University Centre. Through these visits the relationship and mutual understanding of each other’s drivers, visions and values grew and it became clear that these were compatible and that a formal relationship would be mutually beneficial. The two partners then entered into the formal quality assurance processes for validating HCC as an outreach centre for EHU. There is now a Memoranda of Co-operation in place.

Developing the relationship with HCC has been very valuable to EHU as, since receiving degree awarding powers, the university has developed a Collaborative Provision Strategy. One of the key outcomes for EHU from the relationship with HCC that we have been able to take forward is that there is a strength in non-exclusive relationships (i.e., where more than one HE provider is associated with an FE partner) particularly in terms of offering a broader portfolio to the local community and in establishing the relationship as one of equal partners rather than one where a single HEI is seen to hold the balance of power.

HCC are very clear and business like about their plans for the future which makes it easy to work strategically with them. Local knowledge is invaluable and HCC are in a much better position to identify gaps or opportunities in provision to serve the local community and it is exactly this that EHU has tried to encourage other partners to do, so that all partners are able to bring 'ideas to the table'.

3.3 Colne Primet High School

Following an initial telephone conversation with the Head Teacher, a team of three researchers visited the school on 23rd June and conducted interviews with the Head, two science teachers, a governor, the careers teacher, the school co-ordinator for Aimhigher, a professional mentor (for ITT students) and a focus group of Year 9 pupils. A further visit took place on 15th July for a focus group discussion with a cross section of staff during the regular staff development afternoon.

3.3.1 Contextual information

Colne Primet is an 11–16 mixed community comprehensive school situated in the town of Colne, close to the end of the M65 motorway and adjacent to Colne Primet Primary School. It is a relatively small school, having a little over 600 students on roll. The school age population of the neighbourhood is falling and this is reflected in the fact that all year groups are under-subscribed. Colne itself is situated in the borough of Pendle, 6 miles north east of Burnley and 25 miles from Preston. The population is approximately 20,000, making it the second largest town in the Pendle district. The area is economically depressed, having suffered from the decline of traditional industries and is said by the Head Teacher to rank in the top 1% for deprivation, a claim that is reflected in the large number of pupils in receipt of free school meals. The ethnic composition is predominantly white working class and the number of non-white pupils is below the national average, though the number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) is above the national average. Approximately 15% of students are of Asian heritage and these students do not mix much with the majority white students, reflecting patterns in the local community whereby ethnic groups live largely separate lives. There is a significant British Nationalist Party (BNP) presence in the area and the school works hard to integrate students.

Lancashire is a large shire county characterised by rural districts and industrial conurbations in late transition from the former heavy industries, a process which goes some way in accounting for the economic depression of the Pendle district. Associated with this is a relative lack of mobility within the local population. The County Council has addressed the associated problems through the creation of seven Travel to Learn Areas (TTLAs), each made up of one or more districts. Burnley and Pendle is one of these. The majority of learners within a TTLA are expected to travel to local providers to access learning. Implementation of the Government's 14–19 curriculum reforms and the introduction from September 2008 onwards of

the new 14–19 diplomas is the responsibility in Lancashire of a Learner Entitlement Action and Delivery (LEAD) Group, a strategic area partnership group serving each TTLA. Colne Primet School is in the process of becoming a science specialist school and has been selected as the lead school in the Burnley and Pendle LEAD for the 14–19 diploma in science, which the DCSF plans to introduce in September 2011. The school is consequently devoting significant attention to the development of its science teaching.

The most recent OFSTED report (2008) for Colne Primet School records a trajectory of continuing improvement in all categories and the school is said to be good overall. OFSTED comment particularly favourably on the efforts made to develop pastoral care and support. However results at Key Stage (KS) 4 are said to need further improvement. The majority of students proceeding to post-16 study do so at nearby Nelson and Colne College, though Burnley College also competes to attract Colne Primet students. The school is very clearly focussed on its 11–16 role and does not much engage directly with HE. A further geographical dimension of the TTLA is the proposed *Pendle Promise* which will guarantee every primary school child a place in a Pendle secondary school and then at Nelson and Colne College in an effort to develop continuity of education. The TTLAs affect quite significantly the partnerships and allegiances that are likely to develop, though some students are beginning to look further afield. EHU is still perceived largely as a teacher training institute with the relative distance to travel being a significant disadvantage. It is 48 miles between EHU and the school, as opposed to 30 miles between the school and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), which is the lead HEI for Aimhigher in Lancashire. In spite of this, the school is strongly in favour of links that might support their curriculum development and currently favours the subject knowledge enhancement programmes for serving teachers offered by EHU for science and mathematics. These are clearly helpful too in its endeavours to meet the challenges of becoming the TTLA lead school for the 14–19 science diploma.

3.3.2 The current links: developing partnerships

The school has links with EHU in three broad areas:

- Widening participation (through Aimhigher).
- Student placements for those on initial teacher training programmes.
- Professional development and the enhancement of teacher skills in shortage/STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects.

a) Widening participation

Until 2007 it was the practice within Aimhigher Lancashire to link targeted schools individually to HEIs. Colne Primet was, until 2007, directly linked with EHU, with an Aimhigher project officer employed by EHU providing the main point of contact and delivering activities to pupils. However,

between 2007 and 2008 the [then] targeted approach of working with selected schools only, changed to include all schools (at the request of the County Council) with the level of support being calculated according to a formula based on traditional indicators of need such as free school meals (FSM) and Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Under these reforms, the former 1:1 school-HEI links were replaced by a “menu of activities” provided by all HEIs and available to all schools within the area. There is a strong feeling in the school (discussed below) that the old approach was better, and that the new relationship provides them with less of value and relevance to their school. For example:

“...a lot was done between me and [the Aimhigher project officer] organising events and that was terrific.... I preferred it when we were on our own with Edge Hill as opposed to going with Aimhigher.”

This was a matter of regret to the Head Teacher who referred frequently to the greater and more relevant range of activities that she felt had taken place under the old 1:1 link. This was not just the Head Teacher’s view. The assistant head also spoke highly of the way things had been organised in the past. EHU’s Director of Widening Participation similarly felt that the previous arrangements had worked well and was anxious to stress that the changes had not been made at EHU’s instigation.

It may, however, be the case that the new “menu of activity” arrangements have yet to be fully exploited. Several respondents cited the difficulties caused by geographical distance, but it is possible that these are exaggerated by an unwillingness to look beyond the TTLAs or to engage with newer forms of distance learning, including technology enhanced learning, that have been devised to overcome precisely such difficulties. EHU’s Director of Widening Participation referred in interview to the lack of a tradition of looking outwards, suggesting that even the melding of Burnley with Pendle operates as an uncomfortable attempt at the integration of two distinctly separate districts. There is thus a possible case for a greater and less exclusive mix of opportunities, not just for Colne Primet, but for all Burnley and Pendle schools who might look to UCLAN as well as EHU and other HEIs within a reasonable distance.

Colne Primet retains a formal partnership with EHU through the Aimhigher scheme and more specifically, the 14–19 curriculum reforms. EHU’s Director of Widening Participation currently chairs the steering group of the Burnley and Pendle LEAD. The school is the “banker school” for this; that is to say, it administers the budget for all LEAD activities in Burnley and Pendle. As a result of this, three members of staff working for the 14–19 LEAD Partnership are co-line managed by the school’s Head Teacher, EHU’s Director of Widening Participation and the County Council.

b) Student placements

Since the ending of the direct 1:1 link, formal links with EHU have centred upon the standard initial teacher training (ITT) partnership, based upon the placement of initial teacher training students. Initial teacher training partnerships are well established according to a national pattern and have to work. Students must attend their allocated placements even if there is some inconvenience in travelling. It is impossible to find secondary school placements for all students as near to their homes as they would like, and associated staff have to follow those students because it is an obvious part of their employment contract. EHU is the preferred provider within a quite competitive market. On the one hand, it is the case that universities have to work hard to find places for their students, and EHU had been less successful than an aggressive competitor, mainly due to timing of approach. On the other hand, it appeared that EHU had been more successful in providing good students of the kind that were wanted. This, over the years, had led to EHU's emergence as the provider the school turns to as a partner in teacher training. The professional mentor said:

“...we have been completely closed off to any other universities as long as you can guarantee that we will get the students that we request. That had been an issue where we requested students but didn't get them, so then we ended up with staff prepared and disappointed. This seems to have worked really, really well and I think it is good working with just one institution.”

It could be argued that schools should not have such freedom to pick and choose, that any teacher training partnership should bear a fair share of the weaker and stronger students. The issue goes right back, however, to the recruitment of good students in the first place and it is possible that EHU is relatively successful here. Schools and HEIs need to work together in a partnership to ensure that able and talented young people are attracted to teaching in the first place, particularly in the shortage/STEM subjects. Colne Primet School seemed to engage with this agenda:

“I know we've had students who actually just said, 'can we come in?' and the Head has been quite happy to have students come in and look at what the teaching is like before they have gone to a PGCE course; 'I'm so and so, I'm thinking of going on.... Can I come and look at a class?' We are quite amenable to that, which from your point of view is good because obviously quite a lot of them do carry on, maybe not in this institution but they end up somewhere.” (Professional Mentor)

Although there was a generally high level of satisfaction with the formal ITT partnership, several comments were fielded about the perennial issue of students' unpreparedness to control classes. The school's senior

professional mentor reflected the views of other staff in drawing attention to different priorities.

“...your goal is to get students up to speed with the curriculum, all the requirements and the logistics, whereas we would look at it more fundamentally...[putting] classroom control first because that’s the biggest issue.... All the theory in the world doesn’t prepare you for being in front of 30 boisterous Year 9s and how to control them, and at the end of the day that’s what a lot of students struggle with.”

This comment relates to a fundamental issue of the existing formal ITT partnership. It is not necessarily a criticism, although it might be seen as such by those who feel that EHU does not equip its students sufficiently well with behaviour management skills. Such a view, however, would presuppose that the task of EHU is to produce a classroom ready trainee teacher, which somewhat negates the notion of a partnership where the contribution of each partner is different, but of equal importance. Partnerships are more likely to develop when the school contributes something in the spirit of two way knowledge exchange rather than the uni-directional flow implied by knowledge transfer. It is only the school that can offer the actual environment of day to day live classes. A university is clearly unable to do this. The school might also offer the services of an advanced skills teacher or other staff member to contribute to university courses, particularly where there is a need for students to learn such things as how a currently practising teacher does control “30 boisterous Year 9s”.

c) Professional development of staff

The professional development of existing teachers is an important element of links between Colne Primet and EHU. This is strongly linked to the promotion of STEM subjects, and EHU is one of a number of providers to offer subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses. Two of Colne Primet’s science teachers are currently undertaking such courses with a view to increasing their subject knowledge of physics, which is a national priority. Participation in this programme is perceived to have been beneficial and contributed to curriculum development (see below).

There was some evidence that EHU were ‘going the extra mile’ with physics to make a really good job:

“Edge Hill put us in contact with the Institute of Physics, so they provided us with another contact, so that’s been really good because we’ve got a lot from that.”

The science teachers referred more than once to their lack of familiarity with some of the physics equipment in the school, but again EHU was able to provide a useful contact:

“They put us in contact with somebody who could come into school and show us how to use them.”

Colne Primet is a comprehensive high school in transition to science specialism status. Many comments made during the interviews suggest the school tries to serve its local community (a former industrial area) through particular attention to applied science and business. The drive to improve science teaching, particularly physics, reflects this and teachers seemed anxious to develop any kinds of link that made science or industry “real” for pupils. One science teacher explained:

“Two thirds of our pupils do applied science and within that they have to do a piece of coursework on aesthetic techniques, so they went into an actual lab, a biology lab and they had to do it professionally rather than just doing it in the classroom... it was very good actually.”

EHU is by no means the only provider of such links, which tend to be opportunistic. The science teachers presented as well motivated and keen to take what they could get when opportunities arose:

“I mean anything that develops us as teachers would benefit them...like having the connection with the Institute of Physics, like having a connection with [name of two other universities]... The ecliptic technique training that the kids did, we picked up on it and we can share it with the other 90 that didn't go on the trip.”

Questions arise, however, as to whether this kind of activity is truly a partnership. It is certainly not in the formal sense that ITT is. It has more the characteristic of a needs/provider relationship, the school and individual teachers within it being the “customers” who choose which local provider will satisfy their development needs. Although EHU is currently favoured, there is no reason it should necessarily continue to be so, unless it is built into a more strategic partnership arrangement.

d) Curriculum development and enrichment

A potential fourth area of collaboration was the chance enthusiasm or desire of largely individual teachers to enhance their curriculum area with real world experience, for the most part in the areas of business and applied science. Links, to achieve this aim, however appeared to develop from existing personal contacts. For example, contact with the food science department was made at the University of Reading because a teacher's brother was a lecturer there.

An unrealised aspiration appeared to be the Head Teacher's enthusiasm for what she called “curriculum support”, that is to say the development in some way of the curriculum by university experts in the relevant subject area. An example of this could be the music curriculum (see Appendix

9). EHU did not have to be only a provider of teacher training, though geographical distance was again raised as an obstacle:

“Curriculum development is an area in which EHU has expertise. This would be very useful to us, but we are a long way away. The physical distance, it’s an hour or more to Edge Hill, is a disincentive. How would it really work?”

3.3.3 What makes effective partnerships?

From the interviews the following factors contributing to an effective partnership can be identified:

- A named link and the importance of personal relationships
- Enthusiasts and appropriate systems
- Relevant to the school’s needs
- Convenient/practical
- Clear understanding of shared strategic objectives
- Involving other partners (e.g. FE colleges)

The chief lesson learned is that if these are to be sustainable they must not be overly dependent on one individual. Another very clear message to emerge from this case study is that the relevant FE institutions as well as HE should be involved wherever appropriate. It does not always make sense, least of all to pupils, to omit the 16–19 link.

a) A named link and the importance of personal relationships

With regards to the Aimhigher partnership work, the Head Teacher stressed the benefits of the personal contact with somebody who was clearly an effective advocate:

“A named institutional link would help greatly. Neil [Aimhigher Project Officer] was well thought of and effective. Who would be our contact now?” (Head Teacher)

Other members of staff affirmed the value of this personal relationship and what it appeared to achieve in making EHU a preferred partner in a region where there is a significant choice of universities within relatively easy reach. This teacher’s comment reflects the Head Teacher’s perception that the loss of this enthusiastic driving force is quite keenly felt:

“...it was very personal and we valued Edge Hill and there was a very good working relationship there.”

Although Neil, the Aimhigher Project Officer, is no longer at EHU, a replacement has been appointed and the 1:1 link could be readily reinstated, were the Aimhigher Lancashire partnership able to renegotiate with the County Council to revert to something more like its

former arrangements for the delivery of Aimhigher. The focus in the interviews however was consistently on the named individual with whom they had clearly had a relationship. There are thus good grounds to suggest that it is more appropriate to focus on the role itself rather than any particular named individual, though the obvious effectiveness of an enthusiastic individual advocate cannot be discounted.

b) Enthusiasts and appropriate systems

It has already been stated that a strong feeling existed that the Aimhigher initiative in the school had to a degree stalled since the change of arrangements from a 1:1 institutional link to an area based “menu of activities” approach. Researchers explored with the Head Teacher her views on whether an “enthusiast” as advocate or a more systematic approach would be effective in restoring the previous trust and high quality link:

“Individual enthusiasts give it momentum, but if it’s going to operate across all schools it needs a co-ordinator.”

c) Relevant to the school’s needs

There was a strong thread in the interviews that the new Aimhigher arrangements do not match as well with the school’s perceived needs as the old model. In part this is because the majority of the school’s students are from non-traditional backgrounds, and have little or no family knowledge or experience of HE, thus all of them need to be encouraged and supported to progress to HE. Furthermore, there is a small number of students who are likely to progress to the more selective institutions, but many for whom other HE opportunities would be appropriate. Part of the frustration with the current Aimhigher model stems from a belief that it does not really meet the needs of the school: The head teacher asserts:

“Elements of the current model of Aimhigher are very elitist, particularly where there is an emphasis on the G & T (gifted and talented) and getting them into Russell Group universities.”

It is possible that these difficulties arise from historic staffing associations with the G & T programme of the former Excellence in Cities/Excellence Challenge programmes which merged with Partnerships for Progression to become Aimhigher. The present management, however, is constrained in its ability to address these issues.

It is relevant to note here that, in part, the success of the trainee teacher placements is because it is perceived that EHU is supplying the trainee teachers the school wants, and thus the partnership is meeting the school’s needs, and so is perceived to be very effective.

d) Convenient/practical

In addition to being relevant, partnership activity must be convenient, or practical to fit into existing systems, without undermining other institutional priorities. When reflecting on the value of mentors, the Head Teacher said:

“Sometimes we’ve been over-run with mentors! If it’s done during school time it takes time out of lessons. One off after school might be worth developing, it might help with engaging parents, we really struggle with that. Some are frightened, some are working. It’s always nice for the young people to have them [mentors]. There probably are... [opportunities]...but we don’t engage.”

e) Clear understanding of shared strategic objectives

Respondents did not always seem to be clear about the strategic objectives of Aimhigher, for example feeling that it was just about recruiting more students to HE, irrespective of background, or alternatively that the focus was exclusively on gifted and talented students. For example, one teacher said about Aimhigher:

“We tie it to a couple of kids who we think might have the ability to go into higher education. I think that’s it.”

This lack of shared understanding and priorities may account for some of the perception that Aimhigher is not currently meeting the school’s strategic priorities or needs.

f) Involving other relevant partners

Colne Primet’s status as an 11–16 school often dominated discussions with staff. The transition to HE is clearly seen as relatively distant, and the priority for the school is 14–19 progression opportunities. Regular and active links are therefore mainly focused on sixth form and FE providers, rather than relationships with HEIs and progression to HE. Partnership with HEIs cannot take place in isolation, the input of the relevant FE partners, in particular Nelson and Colne College, is necessary. It is also worth noting that the proposed Pendle Promise does not extend beyond the 14–19 phase. If it were extended beyond this stage and involved HE partners, there would be scope to develop further partnerships.

3.3.4 The perceived impact of partnership working

a) Widening participation

A focus group with Year 9 students (three boys and three girls) demonstrates the need for more engagement with, and IAG about, the HE sector, as this summary of the discussion illustrates.

It was noticeable that the girls presented as significantly better informed than the boys about the progression from school through FE to HE as well as the relationship between social background and opportunity. All three girls desired (in the ideal world offered to them) to stay on at school until 16 and then progress to FE. One girl was articulate about her desire to become a marine biologist and had planned how she would progress to Nelson and Colne College in order to study chemistry and biology A levels in the hope of gaining a place in marine biology at university. A second girl had planned for herself vocational qualifications in beauty therapy at “college in Manchester”, to be followed by work experience in that field abroad. The third was clear that she wished to progress to Nelson and Colne College (“N’nC”) to study performing arts and dance at A level. Beyond that, she could not see, but significantly she was unaware that further progression to undergraduate courses in performing arts and/or dance was possible.

The boys, by contrast, had either little idea or less carefully thought through plans. Only one boy would stay on at school until 16 if he did not have to. Of the other two, one would leave at 14, the other at 15. One boy had no idea what he would do. He was “open to offers”. Another thought he would become a chef “because my mum’s always watching Ramsey’s kitchen nightmares”. When asked how he would become a chef, he did not know. One of the other boys helpfully suggested that “you start from the ground up”. The group discussed this route and the possible pay associated with it. The boy thought that low pay did not really matter, “as long as it’s not too little”. The third boy was clear that he wanted to join the navy and had recently joined the local army cadets in order to further this ambition. His older cousin had sent him a DVD about the navy “ages ago” and he had held this ambition for some time. Entry qualifications, progression routes and the various possibilities ranging from the learning of skilled trades through artificer apprenticeships to cadetships at Dartmouth were discussed. Significantly, none of the boys had any awareness of the associated social class issues or the implications for study and aiming higher. The girls showed greater awareness and tried to explain to the boys the significance of commissioned and non-commissioned rank in the services.

Frustration with the current Aimhigher arrangements however obscured any perceptions of impact. In addition, the Head felt that existing teacher training students had no impact on her pupils, other than the degree to which they were effective or not as a substitute teacher. This suggests that there is not currently a strong intra-institutional link between ITT student placements and widening participation. More co-ordination between different school/college links, particularly in a single institution, is

a potential area for development to achieve more effective strategic partnerships between EHU and schools and colleges.

The suggested solution however by the school Head Teacher was for contact with other students, (i.e. those not studying to be teachers) to help raise aspirations and make the future more 'real' for school students, as they would be closer to the age of HE students than staff. The Head felt that, for example, a mock GCSE results day the school had held could have been enhanced in effectiveness by the presence of students who would give the results meaning for the students. This was really "blue skies" thinking.

b) Information, advice and guidance

With reference to the Year 9 boys interviewed, the Governor was asked how improving results, higher aspirations and young people's need for individual encouragement could be reconciled, given that the school's full time staff were already working as hard as they could.

"To achieve the Aimhigher ideal then in schools you need some sort of adjunct to the careers officer. There will be a teacher here who is nominated as careers, but in my experience careers tends to be a bit of an add-on if you will. Really there could be a partnership where an outside body could supplement the careers staff bringing out the things that will enable children to understand what they need to do, to 'Aimhigher' in order to achieve their aspirations. Otherwise if they have no knowledge of it... they don't even get to first base do they?"

c) Curriculum development

The head and the two science teachers were very pleased with the impact of physics SKE course on curriculum development and learner support in the school.

"...when we went on that physics course... we had to write schemes of work we were going to teach, so we've been pinching all those from the training we have just had. So in terms of the physics, it has really helped us a lot."

d) Improving institutional performance

Improving institutional performance is measured by such things as better academic results and better OFSTED inspections. The Governor felt that EHU could help here, with things such as expert input into the curriculum.

3.3.5 Future development of effective partnerships

Three areas that potentially affect the future emerged through this case study:

- a) The strength of the current partnership that is based upon initial teacher training placements and, to a lesser extent, the professional development of serving teachers. This element of the partnership is based, not upon the Aimhigher initiative, but the requirements of the TDA and reflects EHU's Faculty of Education's success in a competitive market.
- b) The tensions between an exclusive 1:1 partnership and a wider "menu of activities" available across the TTLA but co-ordinated formally by Aimhigher. Here, external constraints are operative which compel wider dialogue than is possible simply between EHU and Colne Primet School.
- c) The opportunities of less formal links that may exist through chance contacts or the enthusiasms of individuals.

Concerning the first, it can be stated that the partnership is already strong and effective. However, it is not a partnership based upon widening participation or Aimhigher. In the future, it may become more so as, hopefully, Colne Primet looks to EHU for support in developing its status as a science specialist college and the lead school in the Burnley and Pendle TTLA for the 14–19 science diploma. Arrangements for teacher subject knowledge enhancement are already well in hand and the data reported above show clearly that there are openings for curriculum enhancement through further input of advanced subject knowledge in science by university staff. Enhancement of the pupil experience through contact with "real laboratories" would also be a significant way forwards and the specific nature of the 14–19 science diploma, a mix of developing science knowledge and skills, with an emphasis on learning by doing is something that EHU is well placed to support.

The second of the three areas is the most difficult of the three. As has already been described, the ability to manage this situation is constrained by historic issues of staffing and changes in the nature of the Aimhigher Lancashire Project. This report has shown clearly that neither of the two parties is happy with the existing arrangement. Both would prefer a closer 1:1 link facilitated by a specific project officer, but this is not a possibility in the immediately foreseeable future. Whilst the alternative "menu of activities" approach could probably be developed and made to work better, there is a significant conceptual barrier in terms of the understanding that is held of widening participation for all pupils as opposed to provision for the gifted and talented. What is needed is clear staff development in this area and whilst the ability and willingness to undertake this exists within both parties, neither is really in a position to undertake such a move independently of the current Aimhigher arrangements.

The third of the three areas refers to those incidental personal relationships that develop by chance, as described elsewhere in this report. These are not insignificant. It is clear that individual enthusiasms or serendipitous

opportunities can lead to effective initiatives which, though not necessarily sustainable or strategic in terms of the greater vision, are nevertheless of considerable value. What is significant here is that a number of such ways forward have presented themselves through the process of undertaking this research and it would seem entirely appropriate to build on these opportunities where genuinely practicable. Further details of possible future collaborations are provided in Appendix 9.

3.3.6 EHU's perspective

To provide a rounded view of the links between Colne Primet and EHU, the university was invited to provide additional information.

EHU has had a relationship with Colne Primet High School spanning many years and covering the placement of trainee teachers, CPD for staff plus aspiration and achievement raising activities through the Aimhigher Lancashire project.

An excellent relationship was developed between EHU's Aimhigher Project Officer and Colne Primet staff after Aimhigher Lancashire allocated Colne Primet as one of EHU's targeted schools. The Project Officer was able to work with cohorts of pupils on a consistent and progressive basis developing their understanding of, and aspiration to, HE as well as improving academic and interpersonal skills. There was very much a sense of 'learner progression' in the programme of interconnecting activities that took place, with the Project Officer taking a direct interest in, and responsibility for, the development of those pupils within the curriculum boundaries set as part of Aimhigher.

Changes in the overall operation of Aimhigher Lancashire occurred in 2007 and moved the project away from the 1:1 relationships between an individual school and a HEI and replaced this with a 'menu of activities' offered by all four HEIs in Lancashire. Schools or groups of schools can opt in to the menu either directly or through their local Aimhigher Co-ordinator. From both the EHU and Colne Primet perspectives this was a backward step and the opportunity to work directly, consistently and developmentally with the same pupils is sorely missed.

However, at the time of the changes the Director of Widening Participation at Edge Hill was nominated as the HE representative on the Burnley and Pendle 14–19 LEAD Group, which meant regular meetings with the Head Teacher of Colne Primet (along with other heads and principals in the two districts). Because of the excellent working relationship between the two partners to date the two individuals continued to work together to try to ameliorate the impact of the changes in Aimhigher and also to support each other in terms of understanding 14–19 Curriculum Reform and the national Aimhigher and HE agendas. EHU has chosen to invest considerably in supporting the 14–19 Curriculum Reforms for two key reasons: the ability to keep fully abreast of developments and respond accordingly and for the direct access it provides to school and college leaders.

The Burnley and Pendle LEAD involves all schools and colleges in the Burnley and Pendle districts and requires them to work as one partnership. However the two districts continue to see themselves as distinct which at times has slowed the rate of progress. In recognising this, the LEAD Group asked the EHU Director of Widening Participation to act as an 'Independent Chair' to steer the area through the reforms. As Colne Primet is the 'banker' school for the LEAD, the Head Teacher, the EHU Director of Widening Participation and a member of staff from Lancashire County Council are jointly responsible for the line management of staff employed through the partnership and for management and accountability of funding. The reforms will impact on schools and colleges at all levels including changes in governance, curriculum, staffing, funding regimes etc. and EHU is pleased to be able to support and guide these reforms through the involvement and time of one of its senior managers and, possibly, as the partnership develops to offer CPD to support the reforms.

4. Discussion

In this section of the report we reflect on and develop our learning from this study, and this is guided by our research questions.

1. What links are there currently between EHU and schools and colleges?
2. How are links and partnerships developed initially and maintained/sustained over time?
3. What are the positive benefits or impact of these links for students, staff, schools/colleges, EHU and other stakeholders?
4. How can links move from projects to whole school/college-institution partnerships?
5. What factors contribute to the development of an effective strategic partnership?

4.1 What is the current situation? (Research questions 1 and 2)

EHU has a large number of links and partnerships with schools and colleges, predominantly, but not exclusively in the northwest of England. There are partnerships which are clearly strategic, meeting the objectives of all partners involved, for example, collaborative provision and whole school workforce development; however many any of these links are based on individual relationships, which were either the motivation for collaboration, or which have developed over time. Many links have a specific purpose or role, such as student placements, governor, outreach and recruitment, curriculum development or research. Our institutional survey suggests that many of these relationships have lasted for a considerable amount of time, and have often developed or evolved during this period. However, such developments seem to be 'bottom-up', and not planned specifically to achieve the strategic priorities of EHU and/or the school/college, although these links and partnerships may well contribute to institutional priorities (and in the case of formal partnerships this would be a necessity). Many of these links or partnerships may be described as effective – in that they achieve their objectives – but not as strategic – in that they are not planned to meet the strategic priorities of both the institutions involved and they do not impact on the whole school/college and EHU. This has a potential impact on the sustainability of links and partnerships, especially in a more challenging economic climate. We feel that there is potential to develop a more strategic approach to school/college links and partnerships, which are more closely aligned with multiple strategic priorities of collaborating institutions.

From the Colne Primet study two interesting outcomes have been identified and these will be the subject of further consideration by EHU over the coming months.

The first of these is the different emphasis that each partner placed on the current partnership arrangements. EHU views the 14–19 Curriculum Reform and working in partnership with all Burnley and Pendle schools and colleges (including Colne Primet) as strategically important and a real sign of partnership yet this didn't warrant a mention in the interviews with the

school. Given the timeframe for this particular project it was not possible to have an iterative process and so investigation of the reasons for this will take place after this project has completed. However it may be that this school (and others in such partnerships) hasn't yet moved on in its thinking about wider partnership working and therefore concentrated on the purely 1:1 relationships it has with EHU.

The second outcome of interest was the list of possible future interactions and activities with EHU that the school identified with the researchers, particularly as these had not been identified in the normal round of interactions and business that occurs between the school and EHU. In reflecting on this EHU has recognised that it may wish to replicate the 'account manager' system it has with post-16 providers targeted for student recruitment activity where the regular 'account manager' meetings build in the opportunity for discussion of 'any other business'.

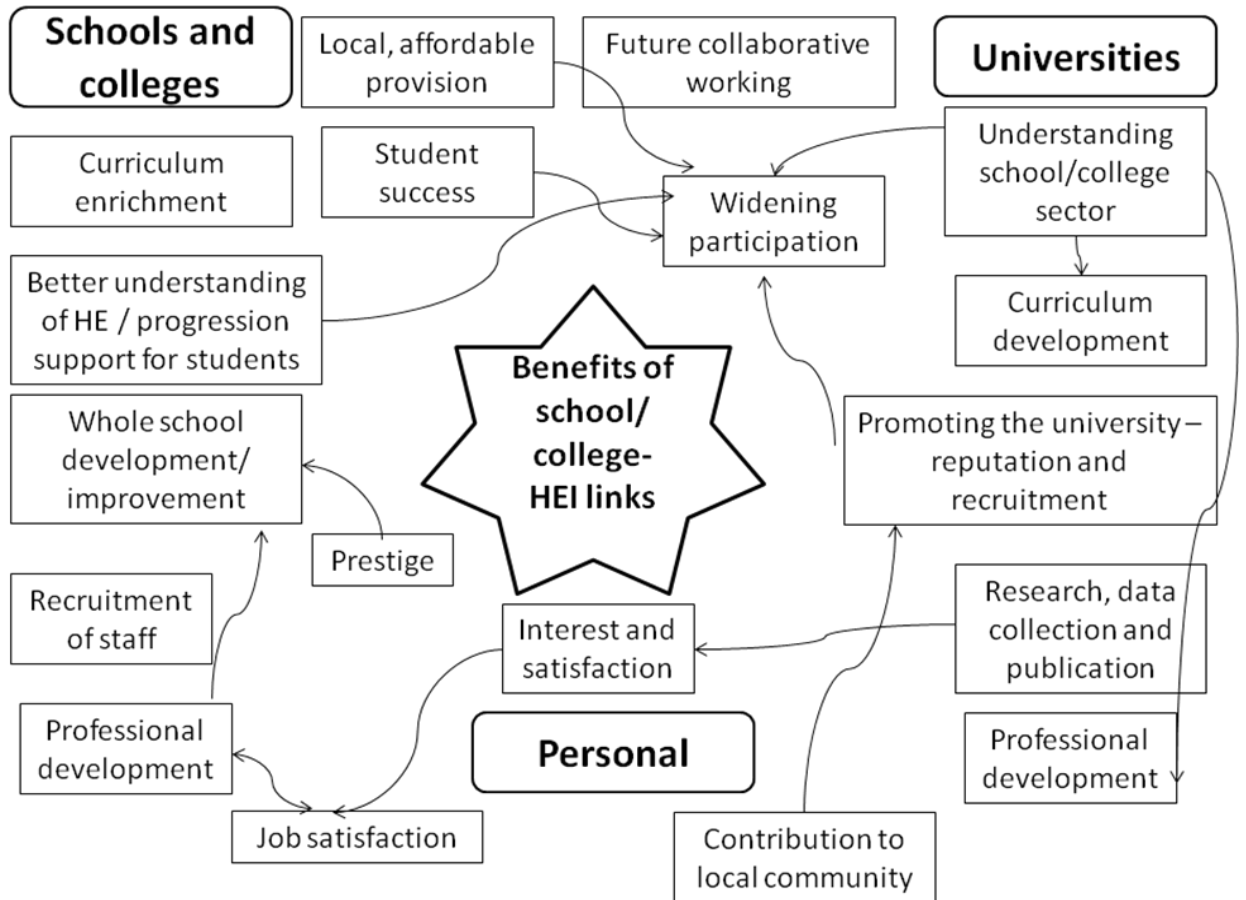
4.2 Benefits and impacts (Research question 3)

The initial model of impacts (see Figure 3 above) identified the following types of benefits:

- Learner support
- Learner achievement
- Learner progression
- School improvement
- Curriculum development
- Widening participation
- Governance

In the first instance we have categorised the benefits of links and partnerships into three groups: personal, HEIs, and schools and colleges. We have then considered how these benefits interact and contribute to broader outcomes such as those listed above. Figure 4 attempts to show the benefits in relation to individuals, schools/colleges and HEIs, and this is developed in the text below.

Figure 4: Benefits of school/college-HEI links



4.2.1 Personal gains

In summary, in this study we have identified the following personal gains resulting from working with schools, colleges or HEIs.

- i. Interest and satisfaction, particularly from working with students, colleagues and institutions in a different sector and seeing the impact of your work.
- ii. Contribution to the local community in terms of sharing knowledge and skills on a voluntary basis (e.g. as a governor or other voluntary role).
- iii. Professional development and progression, including understanding a different sector; learning new skills by working with colleagues or taking on a new role; participating in formal development opportunities; undertaking research. These in turn can result in further opportunities to progress within one's career.
- iv. Increased job satisfaction may come from the additional interest of an expanded role, interaction beyond one's own institution, utilisation of new skills and knowledge, etc.

Many of these personal gains will also have a positive benefit for the institutions too.

4.2.2 Higher education institutions

In summary, our analysis has identified the following ways in which EHU has benefited from collaborative links with schools and colleges. These may well apply to other HEIs:

- i. Understanding school and college sector, including having a better understanding of the learning experience and curriculum of students prior to entry to HE.
- ii. Curriculum development. Increased understanding and knowledge about the school and college sector is used to improve transition and induction to learning in HE, the first year curriculum for all subjects and the curriculum for professional programmes such as education and social work.
- iii. Curriculum enrichment. The experience of student teachers going into the classroom is an external requirement, but the value of links to facilitate this should not be ignored. It is in the school/college that students learn how to manage a classroom, both by doing it, and with guidance and examples from more experienced colleagues.
- iv. Promoting EHU, in terms of contributing to a positive reputation both with schools and colleges, and beyond (students, families and communities), and in turn this may result in the recruitment of new students, e.g. from schools and communities with little contact with HE, or with little knowledge of EHU specifically.
- v. School and college research, data collection and publication are key areas from EHU staff with a professional interest in education. Links provide the opportunity to pursue the collection of data for masters dissertations and research degrees, and a wide range of other research projects.
- vi. Links with schools and colleges are central to the role of widening participation. They provide opportunities for engaging with both staff and students in schools and colleges.
- vii. Improved student success is facilitated by a better knowledge and understanding of students' previous learning in a school and college. This knowledge can be used to inform transition interventions, induction, first year curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment, etc.
- viii. Positive links with schools and colleges provide the opportunity for future collaborative working for a wide range of ends.

4.2.3 Schools and Colleges

- i. Curriculum enrichment, including inputs from HE staff and students, research updates, use of HEI facilities and equipment and through professional development for staff.
- ii. Better understanding of HE, which is used in particular to provide better progression IAG and encouragement and support for students.
- iii. Whole school development and improvement, including developing professionalism, skills and knowledge of staff; improving quality of provision and OFSTED inspection outcomes; leadership, management and governance; contribution to work to become Trust Schools or

Academies, prestige and status through the process of collaborating with a university.

- iv. Recruitment of high quality staff by being able to recruit trainee teachers that have been on placement and/or advertising their vacancies to newly qualified staff.
- v. Development of staff through participation in research, academic and professional programmes.

4.2.4 Outcomes

When considering these impacts or benefits of links and partnerships it is important to note the extent to which they interact and are mutually reinforcing. We have therefore found it useful to group the benefits together into three key types of outcomes:

- Widening participation and student success
- Student learning experience
- Institutional development

Figures 5, 6 and 7 below demonstrate how the various benefits of school/college-HEI links contribute to these three outcome areas.

Figure 5: Benefits of school/college-HEI links contributing to the widening participation and success outcome

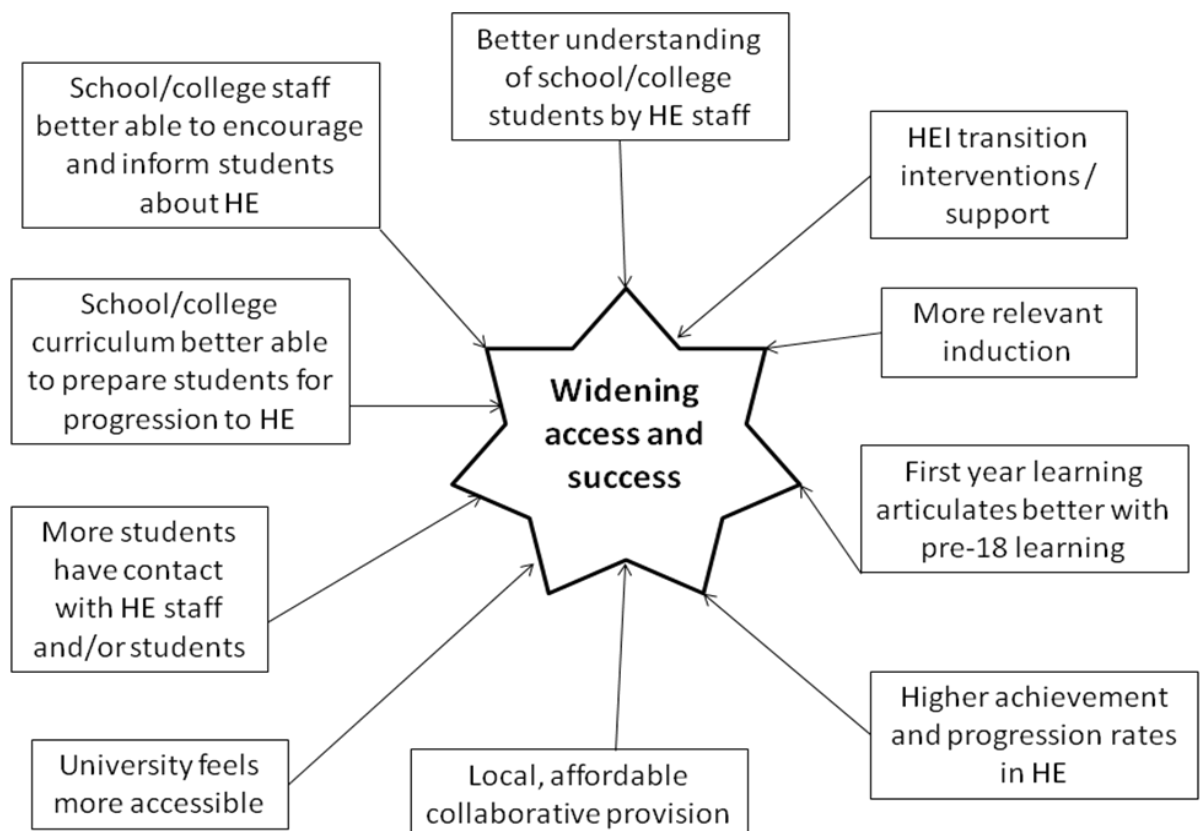


Figure 6: Benefits of school/college-HEI links contributing to the student learning experience outcome

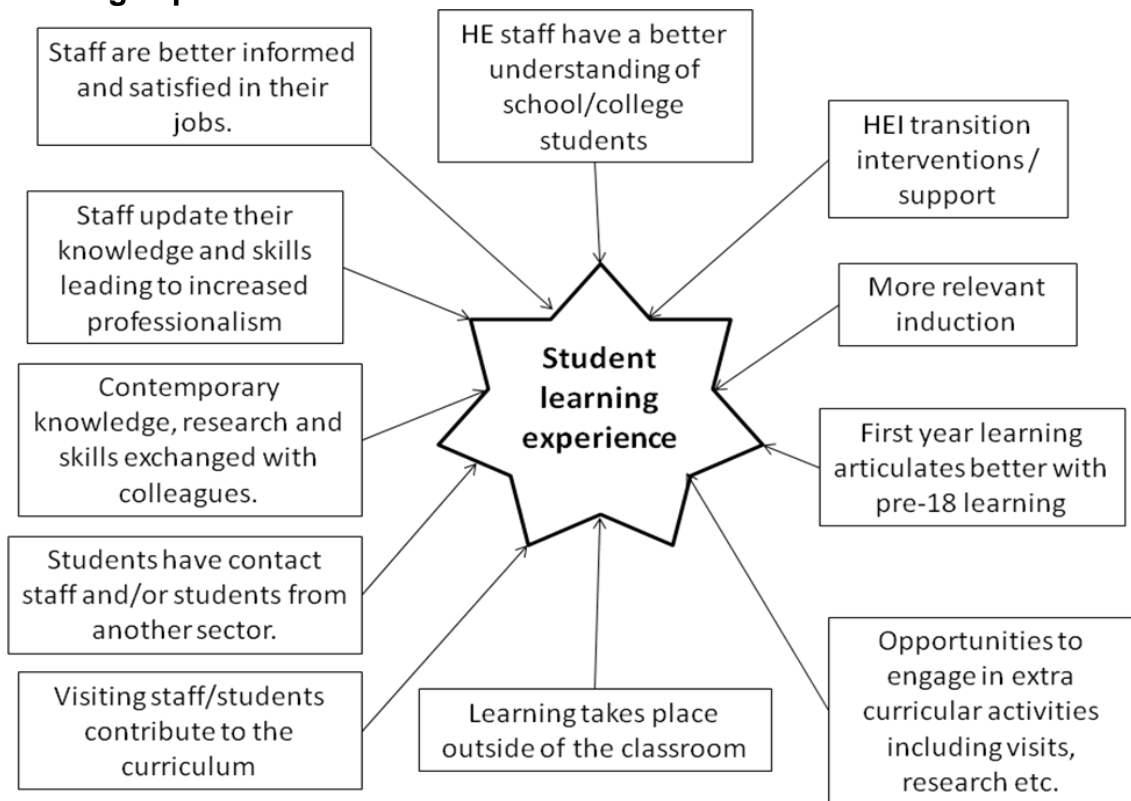
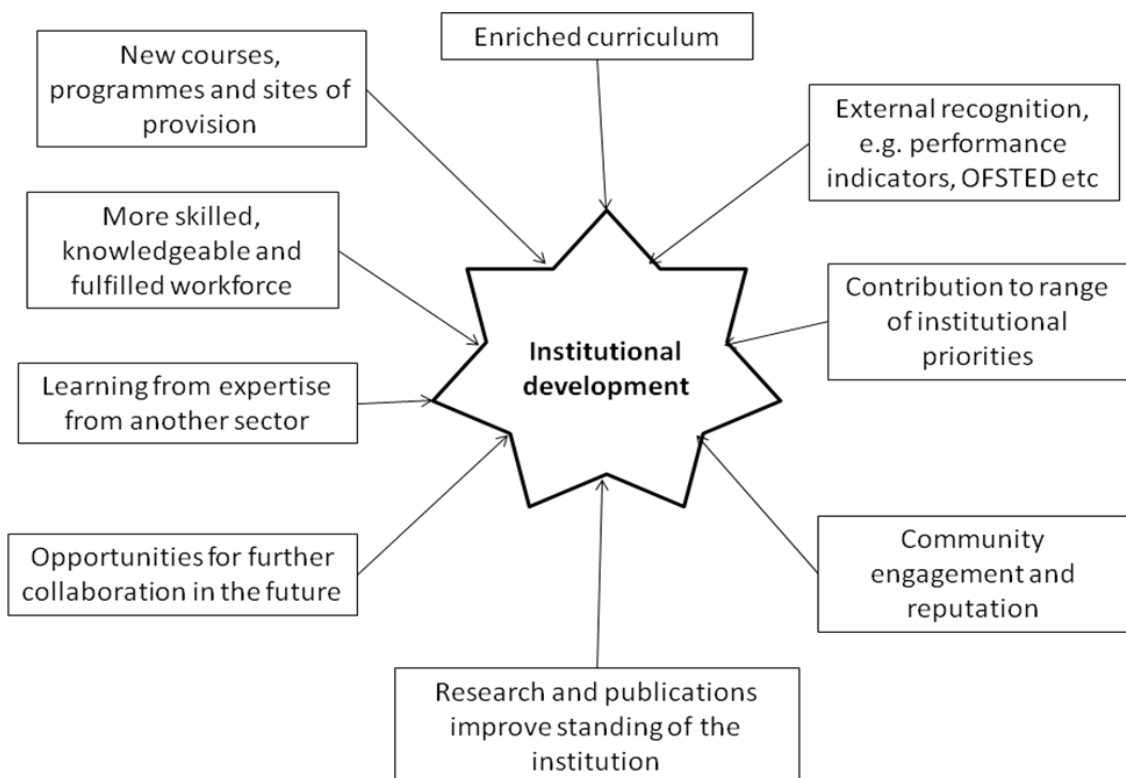


Figure 7: Benefits of school/college-HEI links contributing to institutional development (in school/college and HEIs)



The outcome areas we have identified can be mapped against the impacts identified by HEFCE (and listed above), and the benefits identified by respondents in this research study. This is demonstrated in Table 1.

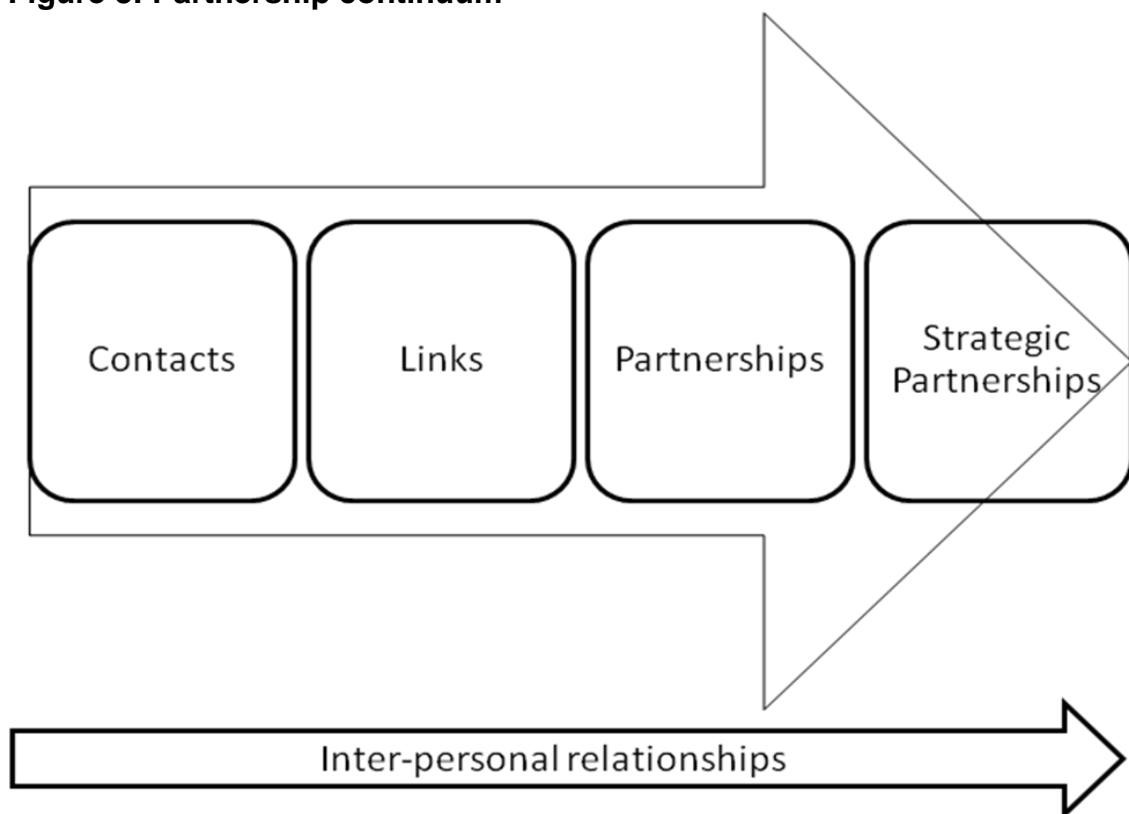
Table 1: Outcome areas and specific examples identified in this study, related to impacts suggested by HEFCE

Outcome area	Examples of benefits identified in this study	HEFCE impacts
Widening participation and success in HE.	Local, affordable collaborative provision offers new opportunities for HE study. Understanding of school/college/HE sectors – so staff better able to encourage, inform and prepare students. School students have on-going engagement with HE staff and students. HE feels more accessible and relevant. Transition support and more useful induction can be developed Curriculum enrichment and development Better articulation between pre- and post-18 learning. Higher achievement and progression rates in school and HE.	Learner support, learner achievement, learner progression, widening participation.
Student learning experience.	Staff have better understanding of school/college/HE sectors. Contemporary knowledge, research and skills exchanged. Professional development of skills, knowledge and expertise. Staff are better informed and more satisfied. Recruitment of staff. Curriculum enrichment and development through contact with staff and students beyond the institution; visiting staff; learning outside of the classroom; and extra curricula activities. Transition support and more relevant induction can be developed Better articulation between pre- and post-18 learning.	Learner support, learner achievement, learner progression, curriculum development.
Institutional development.	New courses, programmes and sites of provision. Professional development opportunities and learning from other sectors. Staff interest and satisfaction. More knowledgeable, skilled and fulfilled workforce. Enriched curriculum through visiting staff and students (including trainees), institutional visits, research and policy updates, interaction with colleagues, etc. External recognition via performance indicators, OFSTED etc. Engagement in research and knowledge transfer activities. Community engagement. Collaborative working in the future.	Learner achievement, school improvement, curriculum development, widening participation, governance.

4.3 Contacts, links, partnerships and strategic partnerships (Research question 4)

The research demonstrates the centrality of personal relationships to all links between HEIs and schools/colleges. However, relationships can be limited to inter-personal engagement, or evolve to enable and support institution-to-institution partnerships. In an attempt to make sense of the complexity of school/college-institution links we have devised a working model or *partnership continuum* to start conceptualising these different types of relationship. Models such as this, consisting of 'ideal types', should be viewed as a way of simplifying reality to assist with understanding complexity. They should not be viewed as forms that every link or partnership must be compared to or shoe-horned into. (Kalberg, 1994; Robinson et al., 2000). Our emerging thinking is set out in Figure 8 and Table 2 below. Reality will be more messy than this model implies.

Figure 8: Partnership continuum



4.3.1 Contacts

The EHU staff survey and interviews and the school and college case studies illustrate that many links begin with personal relations. For example, staff being former employees of a particular school or college, or parents of students studying there. Many members of staff will have a network of contacts outside of EHU, and often this will include some engagement with schools and colleges. These do not exist for a particular purpose, and in many cases may not be utilised for any specific purpose.

4.3.2 Links

Contacts however develop into links when they are used. This may be for a specific purpose, such as collecting data for a research project, or a specific role, such as a member of the governing board. Links such as this tend to be opportunistic or serendipitous, rather than partner institutions being carefully selected, or collaborative activity deliberately planned. These links still tend to be quite personal, or involving a specific part of the school/college and/or institution. For example, for a larger research project the link might be between the academic department or faculty and one or more members of staff at the school/college, rather than being restricted to a 1:1 relationship. However, the link will probably be brokered on a 1:1 basis. In the case of a governor, the link is with the whole school/college but with a specific purpose, and it does not represent a link with the HEI as a whole.

4.3.3 Partnerships

Over time links can develop into partnerships, which can be understood to be a more formal relationship between the two organisations designed to meet one or more specific purpose(s) over time. The partnership may be between the two institutions, or specific parts/units of the one or both of the institutions. These partnerships are likely to be very important to the units involved, and may well contribute to a specific strategic priority of the institution. For example, the widening participation department at EHU has a number of partnerships with schools and colleges to raise aspiration, achievement, progression and preparation for HE. The Faculty of Education has many partnerships with departments in schools to deliver student placements for trainee teachers. The HCC University Centre has a number of partnerships with EHU faculties to deliver HE courses in the Centre. (These partnerships clearly are strategic, but are not classified as *strategic partnerships* according to the *partnership continuum model* developed here.

4.3.4 Strategic partnerships

While all the links and partnerships we have learnt about during the course of this study are of great value to individuals and institutions involved, we wonder if there is potential to develop a more strategic approach to school/college partnerships, which are more closely aligned with strategic priorities of collaborating institutions. In particular could links and partnerships be developed to contribute directly to multiple strategic priorities of both institutions? These partnerships would still be built on personal relations, but they would involve more people from across each institution, and they would contribute to a range of strategic priorities, and thus they would be more likely to represent good value for money and be sustainable in the longer term, and for example, would not be lost when one member of staff moves institution. This would also promote a more 'joined-up approach' to working with partner schools and colleges and avoid the confusion and frustration for schools/colleges and embarrassment for HEI

staff of discovering other colleagues have recently been engaging in partnership activity.

Table 2: Characteristics of the stages of the partnership continuum

Stages/ Characteristics	Contacts	Links	Partnerships	Strategic Partnerships
Level of inter-institutional engagement	Individuals	Individual or institutional unit	Institutional unit ⁵	Whole institution
Purpose	Non-specific, no purpose	Specific project or role	Single institutional strategic priority and/or one or more unit priorities	Contributes to multiple strategic priorities of both institutions
Intra-institutional relations	Individual contacts	Limited, may not be widely known about	Different units involved, some institutional awareness	Wide ranging and co-ordinated interactions
Intention	Unintentional	May be opportunistic or serendipitous	May be planned or opportunistic	Deliberate
Formality	None	Limited and defined by specific project or role	More formal	More formal, encompassing broad range of partnership activity
Examples	Former employee, parent, family contact	Research project, governor	Outreach in school, trainee placements	Collaborative provision, area for future development

Of the case studies analysed here, we would hesitate to identify either of them as a strategic partnership (as defined in the discussion above), although the HCC relationship comes the closest, as is outlined below.

a) Whole institution engagement

The whole of the HCC University Centre is engaged in the partnership with EHU, and there are links between individuals in relevant roles and at different levels throughout the HCC University Centre and within EHU. At the moment however, partnership working does not extend into the Sixth Form College as much as either party would wish. For example, although EHU is currently visited by sixth form students as part of their support about progression to HE, relatively small numbers of their students progress to either the University Centre or to EHU. Both partners would like to look at promoting this route to HE more.

⁵ Unit is being used to mean a department, faculty, service, or centre in either an HEI or a school/college.

b) Multiple strategic priorities

The collaborative provision at HCC contributes primarily to EHU's strategic priorities of collaborative provision and widening participation (to mature learners), wider school workforce development and student recruitment. This study of the partnership may suggest ways in which the relationship could be developed further, and this could be initiated by EHU to contribute additional strategic priorities, such as Learning and Teaching.

c) Deliberate partnership

Although the initial approach was not initiated by EHU, that in itself is not an issue as one or other partner must, by definition, make the first move. The relationship did however align with EHU's priorities regarding the development of collaborative/outreach provision. There are however other examples of existing partnerships where each institution identified the potential for collaborative working, and thus both were developing contacts and links in order to further develop their relationship.

d) Formal agreement

HCC have a Memorandum of Co-operation with EHU and under the Collaborative Partnership Arrangements HCC are classed as a Category C provider (Outreach Supported Learning). This Memorandum lists the programmes they are able to deliver as an Annex. The Annex is updated as new programmes come on line or the portfolio changes. There is a process for each new programme to be approved. This is a good example of a formal agreement, with sufficient flexibility for development in response to changing needs of learners and so forth.

4.4 What is an effective strategic partnership? (Research question 5)

At the end of the participatory seminar participants were asked to work in groups to develop a definition of an effective strategic partnership. The definitions presented by the four groups are given below:

“An effective strategic partnership is mutually supportive, beneficial and has shared goals. It involves the following stakeholders: governors, senior managers, academic practitioners, guidance and support teams in both institutions. Systems should be co-owned and agreed to support all parties through the student lifecycle. It is expected to benefit institutions through recruitment, retention, achievement, learner development and meeting strategic goals.”

“An effective strategic partnership involves successful delivery of shared objectives. It requires clear communication and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. It can be expected to benefit institutions mutually by enhancing staff, student and community experiences.”

“An effective strategic partnership involves senior managers of both institutions and enthusiasts, champions and advocates (in an appropriate balance). It includes administrators, support staff and academic staff resulting from a needs/provider relationship, and (perhaps) a broker of the needs/provider relationship – people in the organisations who know what’s possible, what’s valid etc. Systems include guidelines and agreements (e.g. Memorandum of Understanding), built-in review points and quality assurance systems, and shared staff events e.g. relating to assessment). The partnership should meet locally identified needs, promote curriculum development, involve people not traditionally engaged in HE and make effective use of resources, buildings and equipment.”

“An effective strategic partnership is a mutually beneficial sustainable enterprise. It is characterised by the following features:

- A shared vision, ownership and focus
- An explicit set of objectives, structures & roles
- Well-defined working systems and practices which are flexible
- Is multi-faceted, having extended & diverse interactions between people & organisational functions
- Involves effective communication between staff, often at several levels within both organisations
- The organisations encourage and enable advocates/enthusiasts to sustain the relationships through resources and time
- Results in benefits which may be financial, developmental, support learner achievement & progression and assist in external scrutiny.”

Drawing on these inputs and other research and analysis undertaken as part of this study, we have identified the key characteristics of an effective strategic partnership:

1. Shared strategic vision
2. Mutually and strategically beneficial
3. Effective decision making
4. Sufficient resources
5. Effective communication
6. Appropriate structural framework
7. Explicit understanding of implementation
8. Recognition of importance of people and relationships

Our working definition of an effective strategic partnership is:

An effective strategic partnership has a shared strategic vision which purposefully contributes to the strategic priorities of each institution. It engages and co-ordinates senior managers, staff and students from across institutions to work together. While it is based on inter-personal relationships within and across institutions, it is underpinned by appropriate processes and resources to support collaborative decision making, effective communication and professional implementation.

4.5 Reflective review: school/college-HEI strategic partnerships

This reflective review has been developed as a tool to support the development of more strategic partnerships between schools/colleges and HEIs. The aim of the reflective review is to provide a list of questions to:

- Promote reflection on your current situation
- Assess progress towards effective *strategic* partnerships
- Identify key areas where development is needed
- Indicate changes that might be introduced

The reflective review could be undertaken individually, or with colleagues. You may have any of the following outcomes in relation to the questions asked:

- **Affirmation.** Content with your findings. Confirm that your institution has effective strategic partnerships between schools/colleges and HEIs. This should increase your confidence in the progress being made.
- **Raises issues.** Findings may raise awareness of certain issues that need a level of consideration by either yourself or other stakeholders in the institution.
- **Requires action.** Findings may prompt you to identify actions that need to be taken to make a required change to develop more effective strategic partnerships.

1. Strategic vision

- i. Does the partnership contribute to the strategic vision/goals/mission/priorities of both institutions?
- ii. Is there a strategic vision for the partnerships that has been jointly developed and is jointly owned?
- iii. Is the partnership (and its strategic vision) underpinned by shared values/philosophy (e.g. about the student experience etc)? If not, what are the potential implications of this?
- iv. Does the partnership have realistic expectations of each partner?
- v. Is there sufficient recognition of the risks involved in partnership working?
- vi. Is this an on-going or time-bounded relationship? What are the implications of this to the vision?

2. Mutually beneficial

- i. Does the partnership contribute to the strategic priorities of both institutions in the areas of widening participation and student success, student learning experience and institutional development?
- ii. Do the staff engaged in partnership activity gain both professionally and personally?
- iii. Is the partnership beneficial for learners, particularly those from targeted groups?

3. Effective decision making

- i. Do partners have a genuinely equal stake in managing the partnership?
- ii. Do partners have clearly defined roles that are widely acknowledged, understood and accepted?
- iii. Is the decision making process transparent?
- iv. Is the partnership autonomous, or do decisions have to be approved by institutional processes?
- v. Is there an effective relationship between strategic decision making and day-to-day implementation?

4. Sufficient resources

- i. Do staff have sufficient time to undertake partnership activities?
- ii. Are partnership activities adequately funded?
- iii. How are staff at all levels supported to undertake partnership activity?
- iv. Are suitable staff development opportunities offered for staff throughout the partner organisations?
- v. Is there sufficient recognition of workload and priorities of others involved in the partnership?

5. Effective communication

- i. Are there communication points throughout the organisations, at different levels, and related to different roles/functions?
- ii. Is there a “partnership fixer” in each institution? This is someone to go to at times of need, e.g. someone is absent, a new type of communication is needed, a new member of staff needs to understand the other institution.
- iii. Is a sufficient range of methods used to enhance communication (including electronic solutions)?
- iv. Do individuals involved know each other or are they encouraged to develop a relationship?
- v. Is the impact of distance on communication adequately thought through?

6. Appropriate structural framework

- i. Is there a formal agreement that underpins the work of the partnership?
- ii. Are there sufficient and suitable systems in place for routine processes?

- iii. Is there shared access to institutional systems when they are to be used by partners?
- iv. Are systems and processes sufficiently flexible to respond to changing needs?
- v. Are there agreed quality assurance processes in place to ensure that all partners are satisfied with the quality of service being delivered by one partner on behalf of others?
- vi. Are there processes in place to monitor and review the partnership regularly?

7. Explicit understanding of implementation

- i. Do you have a collaborative implementation plan that shares responsibility between institutions?
- ii. Is there clarity about roles, actions and tasks?
- iii. Are there sufficient joint staff development opportunities to ensure shared understandings and ways of operating between and across institutions?
- iv. How do you take account of the fact that institutions work differently and have different policies, cultures and practices?
- v. Do you have an agreed and shared approach to the quality assurance of student/staff experiences?
- vi. How have you responded to the challenges of working with colleagues at a distance?

8. Recognition of importance of people and relationships

- i. Are staff at all levels and across the institution involved in the partnership?
- ii. Do you build on enthusiasms and interests of staff?
- iii. Is time invested in relationship building, especially at the beginning of partnerships or changes of personnel?
- iv. What shared activities are organised to encourage staff to get to know each other (e.g. joint staff development)?
- v. Do you include at least some face-to-face opportunities for staff to get to know each other and develop their working relationships?

5. Recommendations

5.1 For schools, colleges and HEIs

- a) Understand that relations between institutions can develop along a *partnership continuum*, and that each contact, link, partnership and strategic partnership is valuable, but may have the potential to evolve further.
- b) Consider ways in which contacts, links and partnerships can be identified, nurtured and developed, ultimately into strategic partnerships.
- c) Involve staff from across the institution in existing and new collaborative activity. Consider how staff can promote a wider range of partnership activities, how interactions with partners can be better co-ordinated to avoid duplication and how staff can be incentivised and/or rewarded.
- d) Consider adopting a more planned approach to developing collaborative relations, aiming to ensure that strategic partnerships contribute directly to multiple institutional priorities and are appropriately co-ordinated.
- e) Review links and partnerships regularly to ensure they are achieving their objectives, contributing to strategic priorities and working effectively from the perspective of all partners.
- f) The reflective review sets out in detail the recommendations for effective strategic partnerships. Schools, colleges and HEIs should use the reflective review to assess and develop specific links and partnerships.

5.2 For further research and knowledge transfer

- a) Further evaluate, refine and disseminate the partnership continuum model, definition of effective strategic partnerships and reflective review tool developed as outcomes of this study.
- b) Systematically evaluate the impact of strategic partnerships on widening participation and student success, student learning experience and institutional development.
- c) Involve students in future partnership research, especially with regard to the benefits of (strategic) partnerships.
- d) Examine the role of school/college-HEI partnerships during a recession and how we can manage and change relationships to meet new purposes.

5.3 Suggested next steps for Edge Hill University

- a) Building on the contacts and enthusiasm generated by this study, form a working group to develop and review school/college partnerships. This should include internal colleagues, external partners and students.
- b) Review, refine and agree institutional priorities for strategic partnerships developed in this study (e.g. widening participation and student success, student learning experience and institutional development).
- c) Consider and implement further ways in which existing contacts with schools and colleges can be identified, including making greater use of existing data bases.
- d) Identify and explore ways in which staff can be encouraged and rewarded to develop contacts, links and partnerships into strategic partnerships, e.g. can this be built into annual review, performance appraisal, or linked to recognition and reward?
- e) Review existing strategic partnerships using the reflective review tool to identify areas for further development.
- f) Pilot with a limited number of partnerships and links the process of moving from single to multi-purpose strategic partnerships.
- g) Evaluate the feasibility of converting existing links and partnerships into effective strategic partnerships and rolling this out across more of the institution's collaborative relations.

6. Appendices

1. Steering group
2. Research team
3. Edge Hill University staff survey
4. Interview schedule
5. Participatory seminar agenda
6. Other links identified by Edge Hill University survey respondents
7. Comments by survey respondents about the development of links with schools and colleges
8. Timeline of partnership and curriculum developments, higher education programme, Holy Cross College
9. Areas identified for future collaboration between Colne Primet High School and Edge Hill University

Steering Group

Phil Harley, Lead adviser for schools, Action on Access
Dr David Law, Pro Vice-chancellor (Students and External), (Chair)
Anne Richards, Director of Widening Participation
Robert Smedley, Dean, Faculty of Education

Research Team

Professor Martin Ashley, Head of Research, Faculty of Education
Professor John Diamond, Research and Development Co-ordinator, Centre for
Local Policy Studies
Nicola Farrelly, Research Assistant, Faculty of Education
Kate Grime, Research Officer, Department of Research and Knowledge
Transfer
Tony Liversidge, Research and Development Co-ordinator, Faculty of
Education
Lisa Murtagh, Primary undergraduate part-time programme leader, Faculty of
Education
Professor Liz Thomas, Director, Widening Participation Research Centre
Clare Woolhouse, Research Assistant, Faculty of Education

Edge Hill University Staff Survey

Staff survey to identify and map school/college links across the University

Section 1

The University has won a competitive research grant from HEFCE to explore links between the University and schools and colleges. We understand that some departments or Faculties (Education in particular) will have regular links based on, for example, student placements. However, we need to capture the full range of other formal and informal links with schools and colleges of any kind, anywhere in the country.

The links do not have to have a particular focus, and at this early stage of the study we are interested to discover the breadth of links that staff and departments have. We will use the information you supply to create a wider understanding of the extent of the links EHU staff have with schools and colleges and to inform subsequent phases of the research.

If you have any links with schools or colleges other than those related to normal training placements, please answer the following questions. Please detail all links you have with one school/college in the same entry, but please complete a separate entry for links that you have with different institutions.

Kate Grime (Research Officer) Edge Hill University
01695 584184

All data collected in this survey will be held anonymously and securely. Individual results are strictly confidential.

Demographic data collected at the end of the survey will only be used for the purposes of this survey and cannot be used to identify any individuals.

Section 2

1. I agree to this information being held electronically and used by the university to inform this research project and associated dissemination

Yes - Continue with the survey

No - Please log out

2. I agree to this information being held electronically and used by the university to inform further work about school-college links.

Yes - Continue with the survey

No - Please log out

3. Are you willing for your link with external Schools/ Colleges to be made public knowledge.

- Yes - Continue with the survey
- No - Please log out

Section 3

1. What is the name of the School/ College you have links with?

2. If the School/ College is not local, please give the address below.

3. What type of institution is this?

- Primary
 - Secondary (11-16)
 - Secondary (11-18)
 - Sixth form college
 - FE College
 - Other
- Other (please specify)

4. What type of link(s) do you have?

- Curriculum development
 - Governor
 - Other
 - Outreach and recruitment activities
 - Research
 - Student Placement
- Other (please specify)

5. Please briefly describe what this involves.

6. Do you represent Edge Hill University or undertake this role in a private capacity?

- EHU
- Private
- Other

Other (please specify)

7. How long have you had this link?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years
- Other

Other (please specify)

8. Have you had any other links with this institution in the past?

- Yes
- No

If Yes (please specify)

9. Has your involvement with the institution developed, deepened, changed or extended over time?

- Yes
- No

If Yes (please specify)

10. What do you gain from this link?

11. How does the School/College benefit from this link?

12. How does Edge Hill University benefit from this link?

13. What factors do you feel contribute to a positive link with a school or college?

14. Do you have links with other schools or colleges?

- Yes - Please complete another form for the other institution
- No

Section 4

We are asking for your details in order to produce an Institutional Directory of School and College links if you do not want your details to be on the Directory, please do not fill in the fields below.

1. Please give you name below

2. What is your job title?

3. Which Faculty/Department are you in?

4. Are you an academic, support or service member of staff?

- Academic
- Support

- Service
- Other

Other (please specify)

Section 5

1. Are you willing to be further involved in this research?

- I am willing to provide further information about my school/college link(s)
- I would like to be invited to the participatory seminar about School/College links
- I would like to receive further details of the research findings
- None of the above

2. If you have stated your willingness for further involvement can you please supply your e-mail address and contact phone number below.

3. If you have any other comments please submit them here.

Thank you for completing this survey.

If you would like to complete another survey to inform us of another link please click 'Done'

If you would like to exit please just close your web page.

If you have questions following this please feel free to contact the research team.

Kate Grime can be reached on 4184 or grimek@edgehill.ac.uk

Interview schedule

Introduction to participants:

Edge Hill University (EHU) has strategic links with a wide range of schools and colleges, covering a variety of purposes, and engaging staff, students, senior managers, departments and services across the University. Many are built on long-term, mutually beneficial relationships which have evolved from projects to strategic links including whole school/college-institution models.

This project is funded by HEFCE to investigate what makes a good partnership. We are interested in exploring whether there have been deliberate attempts by either the schools/colleges or EH to develop relationships or whether there was a more informal, fragmented and randomness to partnerships.

Confidentiality statement

All interviews and focus group discussions will be tape recorded. Participants can request that the recorder is turned off at any point. Recordings will be transcribed and used to inform the analysis of the case studies. This may include the use of verbatim quotes from participants. Individual participants will not be named, but the school/college will be. It may therefore be possible for individuals to be identified by default. The draft of the report will be available to participants (via the named contact) prior to publication to enable factual errors to be corrected.

Aims of project

1. Audit and map existing school/college links across EHU.
2. Explore the process of developing long-term strategic links and evaluate the implications for schools/colleges and EHU.
3. Demonstrate how to move from projects to whole school/college-institution partnerships.
4. Produce and evaluate tools to support the development of whole school/college-institution partnerships
5. Engage with stakeholders in partner schools, colleges, EHU and beyond to disseminate our findings and tools.

Schools/colleges involved are welcome to have a copy of the findings and will be invited to a day of seminars on **15th July** to discuss our initial findings.

Focus Group/Interview Schedule

The key questions are in bold with further prompt questions below. The questions are taken from the generic list that was circulated, and each group of questions is broad so that they can be selected from to suit the particulars of the person/group you are working with.

1. What is your view of the current situation?

What types of links do you have now?

Who is involved? (Staff at different levels of across the institution, students, alumni, governors)

What is the purpose of this partnership?

What level do they operate at (strategic, operational, project etc)

What are the strengths and weaknesses?

How would you improve this partnership?

What other schools/college/universities (as appropriate) do you have links with?

How do these differ? Purpose, practice, usefulness etc

2. What is your view regarding the impact for schools, pupils, EH and others involved i.e. LAs, relating to key areas that HEFCE have identified?

- **Governance**
- **School improvement (inc staff development)**
- **Curriculum development**
- **Learner support**
- **Learner achievement**
- **Learner progression**
- **Widening Participation**

How widely known about is your partnership? (e.g. range of staff, students, visual representations, etc)

What are the implications/impacts of links for schools/colleges?

What are the impacts of the partnership?

What evidence do you have to support this?

What are the implications/impacts of links for EHU?

- Outreach and widening participation
- Marketing and recruitment
 - Promote strategic and vulnerable subjects (languages, science, technology, engineering, maths)
 - Curriculum development – e.g. transition, articulation etc
 - Learning opportunities – e.g. student placements, volunteering, mentoring
 - Staff development
 - Improved preparation, transition and learning resulting in improved student retention and success
- Strategic planning
- Do you have a careers advisor linked to EHU?
- Do you have links with any career agencies such as connexions?

What are the main costs of engaging in this partnership?

How do they compare to the benefits?

In a constrained economic climate will you continue with all your existing partnerships, look for more partnerships and/or reduce your partnerships?

3. Can you explain how the links developed and evolved and what are your hopes regarding how they may change in future?

How did your links begin?

First example of working together

Which factors encouraged or supported this link?

What factors promoting positive working together?

What subsequent links have developed?

Why do you think one link has evolved into more long lasting relationships?

How do think this partnership will develop over the next few years?

4. What are your views on what makes an effective strategic partnership (people, roles and conditions)?

What makes for good partnerships?

What are the essential ingredients for a successful partnership?

What conditions do you need to support a successful partnership?

What is the role of structure and processes?

What is the role of individuals?

What factors do you take into consideration before creating a new partnership?

Shared values / Complementary goals / Proximity / Personal knowledge / Relationships / Existing links / Opportunities as they arise / pragmatic Strategic identification of suitable partners / Sustainability

Will this partnership be maintained over the next few years?

What factors will contribute to continuation / ending this partnership?

Would you like to add anything else?

Participatory seminar Agenda

Edge Hill University, 10am – 3pm, 15th July 2009

Aims

The aim of this participative seminar is to enable a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from the outputs of this research project.

Objectives

- I. To share emerging research findings.
- II. To explore key ideas underpinning the research to further develop understanding of these issues.
- III. To contribute to the process of identifying necessary and desirable conditions for effective strategic partnerships.
- IV. To further develop understanding about the benefits of partnerships and to collect additional examples.
- V. To consider recommendations for further links/partnerships policy, practice and research.

Agenda

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 9.45 | Arrival and refreshments. |
| 10.00 | Welcome and introduction to the research. |
| 10.30 | Activity: Developing effective strategic links and partnerships. |
| 11.30 | Plenary: Sharing ideas and moving towards consensus about necessary and desirable conditions, considering accuracy, relevance, usefulness and completeness. |
| 12.15 | Lunch |
| 12.45 | Activity: What are the benefits of partnerships for schools/colleges and universities? |
| 2.00 | Activity: Defining effective strategic partnerships. |
| 2.40 | Recommendations for future partnership policy, practice and research. |
| 3.00 | Next steps and close. |

Other links identified by Edge Hill University survey respondents

1. personal - friends and partner teach there;
2. Consultant on Sports centre operations
3. Representative as a local employer
4. Trustee of Maghull High School Productions
5. Visiting professors from US carry out observations at the school.
6. I have delivered INSET to staff and I have also done various workshop type activities with pupils
7. Chemistry practical work supporting GCSE Environmental Science
8. vacancy advertising
9. Professional development of staff
10. 'Champion' of Edge Hill Training Centre Partnership with the School
11. Staff Development
12. dyslexia support tutor
13. Run a Year 5/6 Business Club as an After-School Club
14. School mentors who work with us during trainee interviews
15. part time evening class teaching

Comments by survey respondents about the development of links with schools and colleges

1.	Yes, more aware of the development of sixth form issues;
2.	See above - re Information, Advice and Guidance, entering Trust status and also approaching them as potential external adviser to our literacy programmes
3.	I have met with staff regarding recruitment to programme and delivered a lecture to potential candidates
4.	Maintained an excellent continuous relationship even though students are not placed at Rainford every semester.
5.	Significant partner for ITT and PD
6.	branch secretary for last 10 years, on national committee (Teacher Education Working Group)
7.	Extended to include points under 5 above
8.	They automatically contact me each year to do the presentations and I have developed a good relationship with several tutors over the four years I have been doing it
9.	Developed and deepened due to ongoing work
10.	More involved. Links more often made.
11.	Developed
12.	Now involved in actual classroom practice with Art Week
13.	Deepened and trust developed. I was involved in the appointment of the new Head Teacher.
14.	Deepend
15.	With some schools we work with many times, with some there is only a single instance

Timeline of partnership and curriculum developments, Higher Education programme, Holy Cross College

(Programmes delivered by EHU are identified).

April 1999	PGCE Primary (Distance Learning)
September 1999	Part-time BA/BSc Combined Honours Programme – 3 subject areas
September 2000	Part-time BA/BSc Programme expanded to 5 subject areas
September 2001	Full-time and Part-time BA/BSc Programme available – 7 subject areas
May 2002	Foundation Degree ‘Children & Young People Learning’ introduced
September 2002	Full-time and Part-time BA/BSc Programme available – 9 subject areas
September 2003	Foundation Degree ‘Children & Young People Learning’ introduced
September 2004	Sociology added to BA/BSc subjects Foundation Degree ‘Supporting Learning & Teaching’ introduced Full-time Foundation Degree ‘Pastoral Leadership’ introduced Higher Learning and Teaching Assistants(HLTA) pilot project introduced
September 2005	BA Inclusive Education (top-up pathway) MA in Catholic School Leadership
April 2006	Foundation Degree ‘Supporting Teaching & Learning’ (EHU)
April 2007	Foundation Degree ‘Young Children’s Learning and Development’
April 2008	Foundation Degree ‘Professional Development’ (EHU)
September 2008	BA/BSc Combined Honours replaced with Single Honours BA Education and Inclusion BA Religious Studies and Theology Foundation Degree ‘Disability Studies’ BSc Multimedia Foundation Degree ‘Integrated Practice’ (EHU) GCSE Equivalency Programme (EHU)
September 2009	BA English (EHU) BA Health & Social Wellbeing (EHU) BA Teaching, Learning & Mentoring – Top-up for Foundation Degree’ (EHU) Foundation Degree ‘Professional Development for staff working with pupils with additional needs’ (EHU)

Areas identified for future collaboration between Colne Primet High School and Edge Hill University

Numerous possibilities have presented themselves as a result of the contact made for this project and the potential for future development of a diversity of links between Colne Primet and Edge Hill University is strong. Some of the more exciting possibilities are described below.

a) Joint pedagogical day: School/FE/HE

One of the original motivations for this project, from EHU's point of view, was to address better the pedagogical transition from school to HE with an aim amongst others of improving retention. Concern continues to be expressed, not only at EHU, but at many HE institutions about a perceived decline in the study skills and capacity for independent, self-directed learning shown by first year undergraduates. There is also a sector wide difficulty that is manifest annually in the National Student Survey in which student satisfaction with assessment and feedback is consistently lower than across most other measures. It is possible that this is related to different pedagogical approaches in the sectors with, in consequence, poorly managed expectations. Most particularly, students are not well prepared for the four week turn round on assignment feedback that is common in HE. Whilst it is common to complain about this, it is less common to find HE staff undertaking observation and research in school sixth forms to understand better the conditions under which schools operate and thereby improve the transition for students.

The present project offered the opportunity to begin to engage with this process. It was most interesting to discover that the head teacher had strong views which mirror many of the complaints made by HE lecturers:

"The prescribed nature of the National Curriculum and its associated pedagogy is a real obstacle. The three part lessons with their starter activities. The kids hate the starter activities. They'd be the first thing to go in room 101! We are churning out kids now who cannot be independent learners. The strategies have created Mickey Mouse courses. You have learning objectives, a starter, a three point lesson, a plenary. Then you wonder why they can't cope with HE! Now we have AfL⁶ and yet more formulaic impositions. We're all sick to death of tool kits based on the same old approach."

"Well, it's interesting that you raise all that, because we have the perception that too many kids can't cope as independent

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learners in HE. Most of my colleagues complain constantly that first year students are much less capable or well prepared than in the past. We wonder what's going on in schools that's causing this. Do you think some kind of joint pedagogical day might be helpful, where teachers and lecturers could get together to understand each other's pedagogy better?"

The Head Teacher was very enthusiastic about the prospect of a joint pedagogical day and it is therefore very much to be hoped that this will develop as an outcome of this partnership project. Clearly, teaching staff from the relevant FE institutions must also be invited and if the proposed day goes ahead, it may contribute usefully to better understanding of how students can be enabled to progress as independent, creative learners in the context of widening participation, new learning technologies and the new knowledge economy.

b) The Avatar Island

Closely associated with the management of student expectations during identity transition from school to HE is an existing proposal within the Faculty of Education for a full time funded PhD student to develop a virtual educational island using technology such as Second Life or Sim City. If the bursary does go ahead, the Burnley and Pendle TTLA might be considered as a suitable case study.

c) Subject knowledge enhancement, mathematics

There is evidence of a successful link through SKE for science with an immediate prospect for similar work in mathematics.

d) Boys Keep Singing

Though not a STEM subject, boys' participation in singing is currently a high profile issue as a result of the £40m government funded National Singing Programme. A key issue is progression from Y6 to Y7 and the sustaining of momentum developed in KS2 during KS3, a particularly difficult time for boys' singing. During the forthcoming academic year, the Faculty of Education will be launching its Arts and Humanities Research Council funded multi-media resource designed to address all these issues and will be looking for partner schools willing to trial, evaluate and provide developmental feedback. This is a significant project for EHU, being the largest research council funding award the university has yet achieved. It is potentially of significant health and wellbeing benefit to the Colne community with its agenda of positively engaging boys through music.

As a result of the visits made, links have now been established whereby the school is keen to be involved in using the materials as a lead partner in the process of user feedback, hopefully also with the outcome of a musical event in the Colne community. This is a potentially a good

example of knowledge transfer/exchange very much along the lines of curriculum support that has been identified above in this case study report.

e) Mentoring research with pupils

Various suggestions, often speculative, have been made in this report about pupil mentoring. There is a possible research/knowledge exchange project to examine the use of community based mentoring schemes focussed on helping pupils set challenging but realistic expectations for themselves. Such work could readily be linked to the Year 9 project below or the proposed Avatar project above. A key point to be appreciated is that the school has not hitherto fully realised the usefulness of the role it can play as a gatekeeper of access to pupils and their families for research.

f) Pupil choices at Year 9

Another ongoing doctoral project within the Faculty of Education is looking at very similar issues to those at Colne Primet with regard to pupil choices of subject and future career toward the end of Year 9. This project has significant data sets from another school and a partnership with Colne might result in the creation of new, parallel data sets of significant benefit to both parties, and ultimately to the wider stakeholder community in education. The issue once again is that of the school appreciating better what it is able to contribute through its role as “gatekeeper” of access to pupils and their families.

g) The Teacher Research Associates Programme (TRAP)

This is a recently established scheme funded by the Faculty of Education which has just recruited its second cohort of teacher researchers. This case study report has identified a number of potentially successful and useful projects for a supported teacher-researcher at Colne Primet. Funding for 30 days’ cover for the selected teacher as well as the support of a dedicated tutor/mentor is available through this scheme.

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GLOSSARY

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AOC	Association of Colleges
ASN	Additional Student Number
BNP	British National Party
CEG	Careers education and guidance
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools & Families
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EHU	Edge Hill University
FD	Foundation Degree
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
FSM	Free School Meals
G & T	Gifted & Talented
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
GMSA	Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance
HCC	Holy Cross College
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAG	Information, Advice & Guidance
IMD	Indices or Index of Multiple Deprivation
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
LEAD	Learner Entitlement Action & Delivery Group
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
NHS	National Health Service
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services & Skills
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
PGCE	Professional or Post Graduate Certificate in Education
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise

SKE	Subject Knowledge Enhancement
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
TDA	Training & Development Agency for Schools
TRAP	Teachers in Research Associates Programme
TTLA	Travel To Learn Area
UCLAN	University of Central Lancashire