

0585

Duality: Theory and practice of duality in two English dual sector institutions

Arti Saraswat

Thames Valley University, London, United Kingdom

Background

The phenomenon of combining further and higher education in an institutional setting is referred to as duality in this paper. Dual sector institutions can evolve as a result of a merger between a university and an FE college; re-designation of an FE college to a HE college; mixed economy FE colleges (KPMG LLP, 2003), and as networked institutions. Institutions cannot be viewed in isolation from their contexts. Therefore, duality as experienced in a merged scenario is likely to differ from practices of duality in a HE college.

Research Questions

Dual sector institutions are a relatively novel institutional form in an English context, although they are more common in international settings, notably Australia. These institutions may be challenged with issues that may arise owing to the perceived differences in 'conventional' boundaries and cultures of further and higher education.

A number of complexities are associated with implementing mergers. This study aimed to identify issues of culture and identity in managing duality and compare whether there are any differences in managing duality in a merged institution and a re-designated college of higher education.

Methods

Two in-depth case studies have been conducted to illuminate experiences of duality in two institutions. One of the case studies explores duality in the Suburban University that had merged with an FE College and the other study focuses on experiences of duality in the City College which is formally a part of the HE sector. Multiple sources of evidence were gathered including interviews with institutional managers who held senior positions and had cross-sectoral roles.

Some of the distinctions between FE and HE work environments for teachers are reflected in bigger teaching loads in FE, different expertise required in FE and HE (Connolly et al, 2007); differences in employment contracts (Robson, 2006). Quality assessments in FE and HE are believed to differ on the grounds of mechanisms used by the quality agencies in FE and HE (Parry et al, 2006).

Frame

Shared practical facilities, libraries and being taught by common teachers for FE and HE, is believed to enhance opportunities for students to progress from FE to HE. Routes for internal progression from FE to HE may help meet goals of widening participation (Widdowson, 2005). Both the case study institutions attract learners from diverse backgrounds and assert to embrace widening participation agendas by offering progression routes to HE, particularly for those students who may otherwise not progress to HE.

Research findings

Macro issues

A comparative analysis of the two cases illustrates macro issues of duality that are influenced by the presence of external agencies of FE and HE. Separate funding and quality assessment bodies that

relate principally to either FE or HE, augment staff workloads owing to the necessity to meet the requirements of multiple agencies. In addition to these, the curriculum in FE is externally accredited while HE offers an ownership of the curriculum through university validation processes.

Micro issues

Micro issues are more specific to each institutional setting. Therefore, the nature of these micro issues can vary from one institution to another. The persistence of an elitist divide between FE and HE was found to be common to both institutions. HE is believed to be 'superior' to FE, and there is some evidence to suggest that HE teaching may serve as a route to career progression for those on FE contracts in dual sector settings.

Theory vs practice

Dual sector institutions have some potential to meet the vision of lifelong learning by spanning the divide between further and higher education (Garrod and Macfarlane, 2007) but in the process they are challenged with a number of issues of duality. In theory, the two case study institutions were 'committed' to enhancing opportunities for student progression, while the number of students making such transitions remained low. This is underpinned by a number of reasons including student choices to pursue HE at more prestigious institutions, and limited commitment to duality at an operational level. Even those who espouse such commitment prefer to identify themselves either with FE or HE work.

A merged dual sector institution can be challenged with a number of issues that may also relate to an 'us and them' divide which can inhibit sharing of a common vision for the organisation (Macfarlane et al, 2007). Although less prominent, boundaries between FE and HE can be noted in non-merged dual sector settings.

References

Connolly, M., Jones, C. & Jones, N. (2007) Managing collaboration across further and higher education: a case in practice *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 31(2) pp. 159-169.

Garrod, N. and Macfarlane, B. (2007) Scoping the duals: Structural challenges of combining further and higher education in post-secondary institutions, *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61(4), 578-596.

KPMG LLP July 2003, Research report 458, Models of HE/FE Mixed economy provision, jointly commissioned with the LSC and HEFCE,

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2003/rd12_03/ accessed on 12th June 2008.

Macfarlane, B. Filippakou, O., Halford, E. and Saraswat, A. (2007) Managing Duality: the role of manager-academics working in a dual sector institution, paper presented at Higher Education Academy Annual Conference, 3-5 July, 2007, Harrogate.

Parry, G., Thompson, A. & Blackie, P (2006) *Managing Higher Education in Colleges*, London, Continuum International.

Robson, J. (2006) *Teacher professionalism in further and higher education: challenges to culture and practice*, London, Routledge.

Widdowson, J. (2005) Implications for the mixed economy colleges, in Duke, C. and Layer, G. (eds) *Widening Participation. Which way forward for English higher education?*, Leicester, NIACE, 36-44.