

## 4Cs Framework – Paving the way for a smooth transition from Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE)

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### Abstract

The objective of this empirical investigation is to develop a Framework which can be used to break-down identified barriers for learners in progressing from FE to HE and thereby drive equality of access to education. These barriers have been identified and documented in a previous journal article.<sup>1</sup> To develop the Framework, a mixed method research approach was used using quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). A survey was carried out with 450 students in an FE college with an uptake rate of 52%. The data collected in the surveys informed deeper investigation by way of focus groups (Kruegar & Casey, 2000). The preliminary findings identified inconsistencies and anomalies in the progression route for learners wishing to progress from FE to HE including: confusion as a result of the various application processes from FE to HE; lack of consistency in relation to advanced entry options; varying approaches to recognition of prior learning; lack of awareness of available academic and financial supports; and lack of awareness of opportunities for part-time programmes for students who need to work to fund college. In identifying a hierarchy of needs for learners progressing from FE to HE four C's have been identified: Communication, Collaboration, Consistency and Connectedness. The Framework incorporates these 4 Cs. Through Communication with learners it is possible to bridge the gap in knowledge about progression routes from FE to HE; through Collaboration between learners, educators, mentors and support staff, perceived barriers can be broken down; Consistency in the application and advanced entry application processes would simplify the transition for learners and; Connectedness between FE and HE providers through devising structures and initiatives to develop relationships between both sectors, adopting a formal approach, whereby staff are specifically allocated to this task. Through the implementation of this Framework it is hoped to establish transparent, coherent pathways from FE to HE nationally.

**Keywords:** barriers; collaboration; connectedness; equality; mentors