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# **Exploring Research Culture in English Further Education Colleges**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the lived experience of research culture in English Further Education (FE) colleges using a practitioner network as the recruitment and knowledge-exchange vehicle.

Despite growing appetite for research-based practice within the FE sector, there remain persistent barriers which constrain colleges' research activity, with recent impact and sector reports (ETF, 2025; & EEF 2025) identify common obstacles which arrest longer-term research development. Although academic research exists, with research culture in FE being explored since the turn of the century (Cunningham & Doncaster, 2002, for example), there is a paucity of scholarly activity and what is available, primarily explores 'standalone' practitioner research and good practice (Scattergood & Jones, 2024).

Through semi-structured online interviews with a purposive sample of college leaders, we will identify where and to what extent research cultures exist; barriers and enablers to practitioner research; and the role of networks and partnerships (with HEIs and employers) in sustaining research activity. Data will be analysed using thematic methods to produce pragmatic recommendations and potentially a toolkit tailored for educational developers. Findings could have policy and practice relevance: they would help funders and sector bodies target capacity-building, help colleges design realistic research strategies and plans, and inform government thinking about how to sustain FE research infrastructure.

The project is currently in the data collection phase, therefore there is no draft paper for submission. It is anticipated that the full paper will be completed by early June.

**Keywords:** Further Education; Research Culture; Practitioner Network