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**THE SIXTH FORM BACCALAUREATE AWARD PILOT:
FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST YEAR**

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A. Introduction¹

The Sixth Form College Forum (SFCF), the national representative body of designated sixth form colleges across England, is developing and piloting an SFBac Award to be accorded to students who follow all-round programmes of learning including *subjects, skills, values and breadth* (see Figures 1 and 2).

The general aims of the SFBac Award are to:

- define and endorse the philosophy of the all-round education in sixth form colleges on the basis of *subjects, skills, values, and breadth*;
- recognise the diversity of student learning programmes to ensure that their educational experience isn't just about taking exams;
- help prepare students for continuing education, life, work and citizenship;
- add value to student applications into further and higher education by recognising the full range of courses, activities and experiences which a sixth form college curriculum provides;
- provide a flexible, non-prescriptive and inclusive certification framework – a 'high trust, low maintenance' award;
- be a kite-mark of curriculum quality rather than a qualification in its own right.

A total of 11 sixth form colleges opted into the initiative in 2009/10 (see Appendix 1) to work with the SFCF Curriculum Committee and Professors Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours from the Institute of Education, University of London (IoE), on the design of the award, the development of a sector-led validation process and plans for the introduction of the curriculum framework into their colleges.

This has involved:

- two meetings, chaired by SFCF, for all participating colleges and the Institute of Education 'critical friends' to discuss and develop the design of the SFBac and to explore how it might fit within college curricula;
- a one-day visit by the IOE critical friends to each of the participating colleges to interview the Senior Management Team (SMT), students and staff groups about their views on the SFBac and its development in their institution, culminating in feedback and a brief report to SMT;
- the production of a pack of materials for colleges to use in awareness-raising about and introducing the SFBac in their institutions;
- the setting up and piloting of a validation process, designed by members of the SFCF Curriculum Committee, and including all participating colleges, one of the IoE critical friends and SFCF representatives;
- a presentation by the critical friends to the SFCF Curriculum conference in Spring 2010 on the SFBac and interim findings from the pilot, followed by a meeting of the participating colleges;
- a second presentation by the IoE critical friends to the SFCF Summer Conference 2010 on the findings from the full year of the pilot;

¹ A detailed research-based, scoping paper outlining the history behind the development of Baccalaureates and Curriculum Frameworks in the UK, their key dimensions and how the SFBac fits within this can be seen at (http://www.ioe.ac.uk/Bacs_and_curriculum_frameworks_14-19.pdf)

- a range of developments in all participating colleges (discussed below).

Using material from the 11 one-day visits, involving group interviews with approximately 40 senior managers, 100 middle managers, teachers and support staff and 75 students, this report examines the reasons why the pilot colleges are considering introducing the SFBac, the different approaches each is taking to this initiative and responses from staff and students to the idea of the SFBac. The report concludes with a section on key messages from the first year of the pilot.

B. The SFBac Framework

Currently, the SFBac framework comprises a set of four fundamental elements – subjects, skills, values and breadth (see Figure 1), a set of recommended guided learning hours for the framework at the different levels (see Figure 2) and a suggested process of student recognition (see Figure 3).

Figure 1. The four elements of the SFBac

Element	Details
1. Subjects	The main examination courses that a student takes, which constitute the bulk of her/his learning programme and which will determine progression through to Level 2, Level 3, HE or employment
2. Skills: Learning and life skills	<p>a) <i>Learning skills</i> - programmes, courses and activities delivering study skills, key skills, thinking skills either free-standing or integrated into subjects</p> <p>b) <i>Life skills</i> - the kinds of learning in Tutorial and PSHE programmes or enrichment programmes which enhance student confidence, maturity and the ability to cope.</p>
3. Values: Citizenship and community learning	Courses and activities that demonstrate learning, involvement and commitment in relation to college, local and national communities.
	4. Breadth Breadth is defined by overall learning programmes which contain courses and activities in two or more domains out of four domains across the whole learning programme (see Appendix 2)

Figure 2: Time requirements for the SFBac at 4 levels

	Subjects	Skills and values	Total
Level 1 SFBac	450 hours minimum	150 hours minimum	600 hours
Level 2 SFBac	450 hours minimum	150 hours minimum	600 hours
Level 3 SFBac	900 hours minimum	300 hours minimum	1200 hours
Level 3 SFBac +	1200 hours minimum	300 hours minimum	1500 hours

Figure 3: The recognition process

1. A testimonial certificate awarded to all students who achieve the SFBac at a particular level, which will summarise the courses and activities that have contributed to the student learning programme in terms of subjects, skills, values and breadth.
2. A standardised SFBac statement that summarises the significance of the SFBac award in terms of the assurance that students have received an all round education on the basis of subjects, skills, values, breadth, and summarising the role of the SFCF in sponsoring the award.
3. A fuller individualised narrative devised by the College and approved by the SFCF and its validation panel describing in general terms the College curriculum at the relevant level and explaining how it fulfils the SFBac criteria.
4. An SFBac '*subjects, skills, values, breadth*' logo or kite-mark to be used by certified Colleges in their curriculum and promotional literature.

The SFBac has been conceived and designed as a curriculum framework quality assured by the SFCF rather than a qualification accredited by an awarding body. As part of the process of development, it is envisaged that any sixth form college that wishes to offer the SFBac and to receive the official kitemark will have to participate in validation meetings in which those offering the framework underpin quality by collective professional discussion and agreement.

This report is intended to act as a link between the initial framework already described and its manifestation in the 11 pilot colleges and the more detailed plans from the 11 pilot colleges that will emerge from the validation meeting. It aims to provide evidence upon which SFCF can make decisions on the future development of the SFBac. This paper should also be read in relation to the background scoping paper provided by the IoE

(http://www.ioe.ac.uk/Bacs_and_curriculum_frameworks_14-19.pdf) and the detailed Powerpoint presentation on the initial SFBac framework circulated on behalf of SFCF.

C. The 11 pilot colleges - reasons for involvement with the SFBac

While all the 11 pilot institutions embody the key features of a sixth form college – they have large numbers of full-time 16-19 year old students studying mostly at Level 3 and, within this, mostly A Levels - they also reflect their different local learning ecologies. Some are located in urban areas with high levels of deprivation, others enjoy a more affluent environment and the remainder serve more mixed social areas. Allied to their social settings, are different combinations of provision. Some colleges offer a significant number of BTEC National Diplomas and have sizable Level 2 cohorts and a small number of the pilot institutions promote their image locally as highly inclusive institutions. Furthermore, the pilot institutions experience different local environments of institutional competition and collaboration. Some play a leading or even dominant role in post-16 education in their local area, while others compete with schools and other colleges and have to carve out a niche. Several of the pilot colleges have extensive collaborative relationships with local schools and a number report that they are over-subscribed. Each college engaging the SFBac pilot, while strongly subscribing to the four SFBac themes (subjects, values, skills and breadth) is in the process of adapting these to their own circumstances. As a result, each will be developing models of delivery, which reflect its own history, areas of recent innovation and perceived needs.

The senior management teams (SMTs) in the pilot colleges offered a number of related reasons for their involvement in the SFBac. Across the 11 pilot institutions, seven major motives emerged. These related to the SFBac's role in promoting an education vision, representing a holistic curriculum framework, recognizing existing wider and enrichment activity, becoming a vehicle for curriculum development, an alternative to other frameworks on offer, a means of gaining funding, a mechanism for promoting the image of the institution and a basis for partnership. While the seven factors outlined below emerged from the visits as a whole, each college has its own particular combination of motives (see Appendix 3). It would appear that intentions to engage with the

SFBac are firmly grounded in the ethos, needs and context of each of the 11 pilot institutions and this provides a strong logic for its development and adaptation at the local level.

1. An educational vision and distinctive agenda – all the pilot colleges saw the SFBac Framework as a means of reflecting a vision of a rounded education, embodying ethos and values within a distinctive curriculum agenda. Furthermore, the Framework is commonly seen as a way of developing a coherent, holistic and inclusive ‘extended’ college curriculum, which is not tightly prescribed.

2. Recognising existing enrichment provision and incentivizing students – the SFBac is viewed as a way of recognising enrichment provision currently provided by the pilot colleges. Currently, in different ways, the pilot colleges all provide complementary or enrichment activities to supplement students’ qualifications (e.g. volunteering, mentoring, engagement college societies), but these activities are largely unaccredited. Pilot institutions thought that through the recognition of a wider curriculum offer, the SFBac could incentivize a broader range of students to engage more fully with these programmes.

3. Improving the student experience, developing wider skills and promoting progression – all the participating colleges understood the potential of the SFBac to improve the student experience of the sixth form college curriculum, to keep students busy and focused (although many are already very active) and to encourage them to take a less instrumental view of learning. Interviewees also linked the SFBac with the development of independent learning skills and adding value to student programmes to help them to cope with a recession and a more competitive application process for university.

4. Reinforcing existing provision and building a wider entitlement – the majority of the pilot institutions were not only interested in the ‘recognition’ role of the SFBac, but also saw it as a means of building on and improving existing provision and becoming a vehicle for significant curriculum development. Areas mentioned included the introduction or the further development of the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), the development of new areas of enrichment activity and re-focusing the tutorial system. Two colleges also reported that the SFBac would extend and replace already established institutional baccalaureate initiatives.

5. A flexible alternative to other frameworks or their absence – the SFBac is seen by some as a framework suited to the specific needs of sixth form colleges and as an alternative to the AQA Bac and the International Baccalaureate, that might be considered as too elitist. During some visits, colleges also referred to the absence of a government baccalaureate or overarching certificate agenda (summed up by the comment that *Curriculum 2000* had come and gone and Tomlinson had not been brought in) and colleges were searching for some sort of national framework.

6. Introducing curriculum redesign in a time of resource constraint – the adoption of the SFBac also had its pragmatic motivations. For example, one college viewed it as a framework to assist in the replacing of Key Skills with ‘thinking and reasoning skills’ in preparation for funded qualifications, such as the EPQ and Critical Thinking AS, in the second year of an A Level programme. Financial constraints were well understood and in some colleges there was a desire for the SFBac to be part of a strategy enabling them to secure funding for key activities and a way of prioritizing aspects of curriculum development at a time of resource reductions.

7. Supporting both institutional competition and collaboration – each of the colleges exists within a local institutional ecology in which the SFBac is seen as taking on its own particular purpose. Some colleges viewed it as a highly marketable product and a way of defining a specific agenda, which could set the institution apart from other providers and could be promoted in the locality to attract students. On the other hand, the SFBac was also seen as a vehicle for local collaboration and partnership development between the college and the surrounding 11-16 schools.

The motives listed above relate closely (although they are not identical) to the aims of the SFBac circulated by the SFCF Curriculum Committee. Throughout the discussions four related motives appeared to emerge most strongly - a strong educational vision; the improvement of the student experience and their capacities; and the development of the college curriculum under the control of

the institution. These point to the potential power of a bottom-up initiative which might grow and cohere into something of significance within the sector as a whole. Many recognized that the change process would employ a very different logic to that of top-down government policy.

D. Developing the SFBac – perspectives from the pilot colleges

During visits to the pilot colleges, in addition to exploring the reasons for involvement with the SFBac, IoE researchers asked SMT members about their approach to the pilot scheme and their priorities for development. The responses of college leaders reflected suggested that the SFBac would be developed from understanding of their local context, a baseline of curriculum developments and their students.

Focus and timescales

All pilot colleges are at an early stage of deliberation regarding the SFBac pilot programme. However, following the pilot visits, all felt that they would be able to make significant progress in the coming months. It is anticipated that all pilot colleges will participate in the SFCF validation meetings scheduled for late May 2010.

All participating institutions will be focusing the SFBac pilot on Level 3 and most intend for the SFBac to be offered at Level 2 at some point in the future. Only one college currently plans to pilot at Level 1. Those considering piloting at Level 3 and 2 have focused on how the SFBac can make a distinctive contribution at both levels. Ideas emerging include focusing Level 2 on progression skills so that learners can prepare for an effective transition to the higher level and then ensuring that Level 3 encourages a more outward facing approach to help students prepare for university and wider adult and working life.

The SFBac + programme is under serious consideration in only one college and this institution intends to use it in order to differentiate student engagement in a model in which it is anticipated that all students will be offered the the SFBac in the pilot phase.

With regards to timescales, all but one college intends to pilot the SFBac from September 2010 and one institution will start in September 2011. Several institutions are considering ways in which current Year 12 students might be able to be awarded the SFBac in Year 13 for activities already undertaken during 2009/10.

Baselines of provision and dimensions of development

Overall provision and the SFBac hours baseline - all the pilot colleges have strong baselines of provision on which to award the SFBac, although they differ in their nature. Documentation completed by the 11 institutions when considering involvement with the pilot showed that the threshold of 1200 hours for the SFBac Level 3 was attainable. In fact, several colleges were convinced that they had sufficient provision on offer to award the SFBac without having to undertake major curriculum developments or to expand hours of student study, although in discussions they saw the merit of the SFBac being associated with innovation rather than retrospective recognition.

Institutional curriculum emphasis – during discussions each institution had its own interpretation of what one college called the 'Wider Curriculum'. Some emphasized a broad engagement with enrichment activities such as sport, drama and music while others, particularly in urban settings, stressed civic participation and developing leadership skills. Several colleges had already developed models of a broader curriculum which they were seeking to enhance through the SFBac including a 'Core + 4', the use of COPE and an institutional-based baccalaureate. One institution is intending to focus the pilot in the first instance on the area of Level 3 science and during the discussions a broad multi-dimensional model emerged which could develop the deeper subject knowledge, research skills and broadening capacities of students seeking to specialize in this area. Several colleges, who are already successfully implementing the EPQ, see it playing an important

role in the delivery of the SFBac because of the ways in which it encourages independent learning and research skills.

Entitlement, recognition and voluntary participation – most colleges envisage that for the pilot phase at least participation in the SFBac will be voluntary, even though the framework could be considered an entitlement for all eligible students. A small minority of institutions are considering offering the SFBac as a universal award to be gained automatically because it reflects the required curriculum of the college. If this position is followed, there may be a role for an SFBac + to differentiate between those students who fulfil an institutional minimum and those who go beyond.

How far present individual student programmes meet the requirements - while a college may be offering an extensive programme of enrichment activities not all students engage with these and one of the functions of the SFBac will be to incentivise a greater proportion of students to do so. On the other hand, vocational programmes might meet many of the demands of the SFBac, but the area of 'values' and volunteering and community work would have to be addressed. Pilot colleges are presently considering how students from a range of courses might be able to meet the requirements of the SFBac framework. Some will easily do so and the issue here might be how to extend them even further. However, for most students achievement of the SFBac will mean extra effort to broaden their education. This is what everyone wishes the SFBac to achieve.

Developing tutorial systems and the awarding process – it was recognized that tutorial systems and committed tutors will play a critical role in the SFBac because of the need to encourage students to engage with the award at the beginning of their programme, to guide them through its requirements and then to undertake the process of recognition of achievements. Discussions also focused on the role that students could play in the recording process and the possible development of a 'claiming system' whereby students have to make a case for the SFBac to be conferred. This might also keep staff involvement in paperwork to a minimum.

Student involvement in SFBac development – students played an active part in the pilot visits and it quickly became clear that not only should students play a leading role in the recording process, they could also be involved in developing the model of delivery in the college and advising on its development and evaluation. As can be seen in the section on student perspectives, they very much support the SFBac framework and have clear ideas where it could provide greatest 'added value'.

Celebration of achievement – many colleges already hold events to celebrate student achievement. There was widespread acceptance during the visits that institutional recognition of the importance of award of the SFBac would be reinforced by a distinctive celebration of the achievements of those students who had volunteered to go beyond the norm.

Overall assessment of progress to date

The visits revealed that respective SMTs in all 11 pilot colleges are strongly committed to the SFBac and that commitment appears to grow with discussion and debate as its purposes and possibilities become clearer.

However, it is still early days and the general principles and design dimensions of the framework have yet to be translated into viable institutional models, together with clear strategies for piloting work with key student groups. Most colleges are considering starting small and then rolling out the SFBac in subsequent years to more students and other levels. It is anticipated that the upcoming validation meeting and the preparations for this event will help the participating colleges to turn this enthusiasm and goodwill into clear strategies.

E. Responses from staff

In addition to members of SMT, IoE researchers met with college staff most likely to be immediately involved with the pilot - heads of department or those with cross-college responsibilities. Awareness of the SFBac was variable. Most staff had some idea of the Framework from information circulated by SFCF, although on occasions it was necessary for additional explanations to be given and it was in this context that staff views were gathered.

Support

Overall, there was strong support for the concept of the SFBac, its principles and design. Responses provided by members of staff were broadly similar to those of college leaderships teams, but focused strongly on student needs, curriculum, teaching, learning and issues of achievement:

- There was enthusiastic support for the concept of a holistic education for 16-19 year olds.
- It was recognized that the Framework could acknowledge skills that students have learned and bring their work together in a holistic framework, encouraging them to see connections between different parts of their programme.
- The SFBac was seen as positive from a pastoral perspective because it would encourage more students to take wider activities more seriously and would provide a point of dialogue with tutors from the beginning of courses. It was viewed as helpful both for motivating the 'middle of the road' student and high achievers.
- It could also change student perceptions of what they are learning, particularly in the area of enrichment, and could provide a *raison d'être* for additional aspects of their programmes, such as 'Critical Thinking' and 'Science for Society'.
- Because the SFBac is available at different levels, it could encourage a range of skills - legitimating progression skills from Level 2; focusing on research skills at Level 3 and fostering employability skills for all.
- The 'values' dimension of the SFBac could also encourage the development of active citizenship, community involvement and leadership both within the college and beyond.
- The SFBac's emphasis on broader skills was seen as helpful in the university application process and for employment through its potential to improve students' UCAS statements and CVs.
- Staff also recognized benefits to the college and the sector as a whole – there was strong support for something that could make explicit what is currently implicit in terms of college aims; it would assist in revising and improving the college's curriculum and setting a future agenda for the institution; it is being developed across the sixth form college sector and that it would help with the development of local and regional networks.

Key concerns

At the same time, strong support for the SFBac was tempered by a number of concerns.

- Many members of staff required further explanation of an initiative that is more of a curriculum framework in which the college is kite-marked, rather than a formal qualification that is examined or externally validated. Many were aware that the SFBac has to be something tangible and that is easy to see and explain to students, parents and wider stakeholders. It was felt that this was not yet the case.

- Linked to this were initial anxieties about the potential currency and recognition of the framework (what we refer to as its 'exchange value'), although these were often allayed by discussions around the potential 'use-value' of the SFBac.
- While staff understood how the SFBac might function as a basic college entitlement, there was a desire to find a way in which the Framework might be personalized to meet individual student need without becoming too unwieldy, time-consuming and 'just another initiative'.
- More specifically, there were significant concerns about avoiding large amounts of paperwork arising from the achievement tracking process and having to constantly chase students.
- Staff understood the multi-level nature of the SFBac but its requirements, particularly at Level 3 were perceived as potentially elitist and some students could find it difficult to achieve, thus the SFBac might be 'only associated with the brightest kids'.
- While staff appreciated how the SFBac might help with the image of the college or the Sixth Form College Sector more broadly, there were hopes that the Framework could help to forge relationships across sectors rather than creating divisions with other institutions in the area.
- Staff wanted the SFBac to help in the revision and further development of college systems, but were keen that it should not disrupt established arrangements such as tutorial systems which, in some cases, were seen to be functioning effectively.
- Everyone recognized that while the SFBac was able to build on what colleges were already doing, its requirements for breadth and additionality do have funding implications and there were anxieties about the potential effects of future funding cuts.

The relationship between support and key concerns

While the 'concern factors' cited above had some weight with teachers and lecturers, they did not appear to seriously disturb the strong support for the SFBac, its broad aims and potential benefits. Interestingly, there were no significant objections to the SFBac model as such. The issue of 'breadth', which could have been seen as problematical, did not materialize as a serious issue because of the flexible interpretation of how breadth might be achieved across the curriculum and beyond the institution, with a widespread acceptance that breadth was more than just taking more subjects.

The relationship between support and concern factors may, however, point to particular paths of development for the SFBac and balances to be struck. Discussion of issues of recognition and exchange appear to point to the need to emphasise the 'use-value' of the SFBac for students, the college and the sector and, therefore, there is an issue as how this can be maximized. The potential problems of paperwork, bureaucracy and workload could be addressed by actively involving students in the award process (e.g. by them heading a process of claiming the award and emphasising the skills and self-awareness involved in such a process). Concerns about elitism can be addressed by college strategies to move beyond the pilot process to involve broader cohorts of students at different levels. Colleges will, however, have to wrestle with the dilemma of ensuring that the SFBac is something that is earned and valued and, at the same time, remains accessible. There will also be the challenge of balancing the benefits of a distinctive sector-wide initiative with a willingness to reach out to other sectors and to collaborate and share on a regional and local basis.

F. Responses from students

The IoE researchers met with groups of students (between 6 and 15) in 10 of the 11 pilot institutions. Student represented were in their first or second year and were mainly studying A

Level, although we did talk with a wide range of students on vocational courses, mostly at Level 3 but with some at Level 2.

Support

Supportive but differences of attitude based on social background - students were broadly positive, although there was a noticeable difference in the responses from middle-class students in relatively affluent areas and those from the inner city. The former were more inclined to exercise a degree of scepticism, questioning whether the SFBac would be able to offer added value over and above their current level of engagement and qualifications. Moreover, some were concerned that any initiative should be able to distinguish between more active and high achieving candidates and the rest, a process they saw as important for application to highly selective universities. Students in inner city colleges and more deprived backgrounds, on the other hand, were more inclined to see the immediate benefits of SFBac in terms of providing a broader education and something that would develop their capacities and ability to enter university and employment.

Strong support for the SFBac's educational aims and values - like members of SMTs and teachers, students voiced strong support for the educational values and purposes that lie behind the SFBac. One student stated forcefully '*College is not just about getting the qualifications*'. They felt that if the SFBac encouraged more students to get involved in activities like volunteering that would be a positive move. They also thought that it would be a valuable way of bringing together and making sense of all their qualifications, experiences and activities.

Developing skills and the capacity of the learner – many students, particularly from inner city colleges, were supportive of anything that would help them improve their UCAS personal statement and CV, that would recognize and build on their wider skills and provide them with opportunities to meet other people. The overwhelming view amongst this group was that '*it's worth it*'.

Bringing achievement together into a holistic framework – similar to their tutors, students recognized the value of bringing all their achievements together in one place and this could be motivational.

Progression to university – many thought that the SFBac would give them a '*better chance for university and employment*'. This hope, however, was linked to a concern about whether the Framework would be recognized by universities. Furthermore, some wanted to know where it was located in relation to other new awards, such as the Cambridge Pre-U and AQA Bac which also have the function of broadening student programmes of study.

Breadth and specialist study – while students were broadly supportive of breadth of study and achievement, some thought the SFBac should also encourage them to improve their specialist knowledge and skills. This might involve making connections between their A Level subjects, extending their learning in a specialist area and developing wider skills to take forward to university (e.g. more independent learning, researching for yourself and project management).

Key concerns

As with the tutor responses, student support was also tempered by a number of concerns, mainly surrounding the implications of a mandatory approach and the issue of recognition.

Will the award be recognized by universities? Several students were interested to know whether the SFBac had arisen because higher education institutions (HEIs) and employers had asked for it or whether it was something that had been developed by colleges themselves. In response, we explained that while the SFBac is a sixth form college sector initiative, it aims to develop capacities that will be welcomed by universities and that the SFCF would, in due course, be publicizing the

SFBac to the HEIs. We also explained that the SFBac could develop skills and experiences that would prove useful in the university application process.

Differentiation between students - some thought that if the SFBac was something that all students undertook, it might take away some of the differentiation between those students who had taken the initiative and really shown that they wanted to 'go the extra mile' with volunteering, for example, and those who were just going through the motions in order to get the award. They were worried that universities might not be able to distinguish between the two. They were only too aware of how competitive university admissions was becoming and that they wanted ways of selecting the best from a range of very good students. Students who were commenting on this did not want the SFBac to be part of this type of 'arms race' for qualifications.

Would everyone be able to find the time or the commitment to meet the requirements of the SFBac? – while the SFBac will be able to recognize a range of activities with which students already engage, there would be more to do and a number voiced concerns as to how some students could cope with the workloads. One commented: *'There's not much time to express yourself and have fun when the programme is so busy'*. Others remarked that if you are doing five subjects in the first year – it might just be too much to take on anything else. In other contexts, it was observed that the SFBac might prove problematical for those who could be seen by tutors as 'marginal Level 3 students' and who had to focus hard on successfully completing their subjects. These concerns suggest the need for highly personalized SFBac programmes that make sense to the individual student and her/his circumstances.

Do we really want you to try to recognize everything we do? As we have already seen, there was broad support for recognizing wider activities that are already being undertaken. However, some students also had significant reservations with regard to the recognition of existing activity in that it this may reduce its value. Moreover, some questioned how it would be possible to accredit many of the personal development and social skills that came from extra-curricular activities and indeed whether these were things that they wanted to divulge to the college. They could see that it might be an incentive for some students to do more, but they also thought that it could be 'a hassle'. In particular, they questioned this approach to adding value of the SFBac, with one student commenting:

'By the time you've got to a college age, you're already involved. I'm not sure what it adds – it sounds like a shiny wrapper around the dog's tail.'

Voluntary effort or spoon-feeding? – Linked to these concerns were more specific ones about spoon-feeding to do voluntary work. Would any attempt to make this kind of activity a requirement take away the independence and initiative associated with voluntary work? Universities might not be able to discriminate between candidates. There were a number of students who argued very passionately that not all aspects of learning or activities should be subject to accreditation and that some areas of the curriculum should be done because they are enjoyable and *'make you a better person'* (e.g. volunteering) not because you are going to gain a certificate for it. As one commented: *'You can motivate people without a qualification or award.'*

Relationship between support and key concerns

Through the process of discussion in which students voiced their support and concerns, as with staff, they suggested approaches to the SFBac which might help in the development of their skills and programmes of study.

A voluntary approach – students were inclined to support voluntary engagement with the SFBac on the grounds that some students might find it difficult to give it the time it deserved and that those who were willing to 'go beyond the norm' should be duly recognized, with one student stating, *'If you don't earn it you shouldn't really get it'*. They also thought it was important for colleges to offer the award, but that it should be something that students choose to do. One summed up the position by commenting: *'People will be more willing to do it, because you get something from it'*

and it's not compulsory.' On more than one occasion, students commented on the adult atmosphere in sixth form colleges and that it would be important to reflect the positive aspects of this ethos in the colleges' approach to the SFBac.

Claiming the SFBac – in discussions about how achievements in the SFBac might be recorded, students voiced strong support for a claiming process. While some felt that the idea of claiming the SFBac via a viva, for example, might be 'scary', it would fit with the voluntary approach they advocated. Furthermore, there was widespread support for the idea of a college SFBac Celebration Event.

Recognising and encouraging activities outside the college – many students were keen that activities and experiences that took place outside the college (e.g. part-time work, caring, voluntary work, sport) should also be counted and this would be a novel aspect of the Framework compared with other schemes or qualifications.

Developing additionality – students appreciated the argument as to how the SFBac could provide a context for the development of their courses. This was not only in relation to the EPQ, but also developing additional dimensions in vocational courses (e.g. that a modern foreign language might be built into the Travel and Tourism BTEC National Diploma). Some students also stated that they would like to be able to take additional non-examined subjects or classes to either broaden or deepen their studies. They very much liked the idea of teachers offering additional areas of study that they felt passionate about and that either extended subjects the students were already doing or provided a complement to them. The best learning, in their view, happened when they really enjoyed a subject and got into it in some depth and when the teacher was really passionate about it. It was recognized that the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) might provide this and that broadening studies were already being offered in Year 13.

G. Issues arising from the validation process

As part of the development of the SFBac, SFCF organised a two-day validation process to receive reports from each of the pilot institutions and via a panel comprising representatives from SFCF, the original steering group, researchers from the IoE and pilot colleges. Prior to the two-day event, a summary report of the visits to each of the 11 participating institutions, written by the IoE research team, was sent out to all involved and each college completed a proforma about how it intended to meet the criteria and main dimensions of the SFBac and how it planned to implement the pilot scheme in its institution. Each college sent one or more representatives to speak to its submission and they received questions and advice from the panel over a period of 60-90 minutes. In the event, a total of nine colleges participated and had their plans endorsed. Special arrangements will be made for the validation of the remaining two colleges.

Overall, the validation meeting was a great success and significantly strengthened the SFBac development process. Discussions were curriculum-focused, open, critical, friendly and supportive, very much reflecting the spirit of 'high trust/low maintenance' associated with the SFBac initiative.

During the validation process, a number of key issues/debates emerged, some of which had already been raised during individual college visits but others of which were new.

1. Clarifying the distinction between a college offering the SFBac Curriculum and students achieving and claiming it. This issue, which had arisen during individual college visits, became clearer during the validation discussions. All the submissions accepted that the SFBac should be an entitlement curriculum, but the substantive debate was how students would achieve the requirements of the Framework and how the curriculum would be developed further to meet the criteria.

2. The future of the SFBac+ - as we have noted earlier in the report, there was no great enthusiasm for the SFBac +, not least because it is primarily defined in terms of hours rather than

the quality of student achievement. During the validation meeting it was suggested that the SFBac + be replaced with the SFBac 'awarded with commendation'. This was received with enthusiasm because it can be flexibly applied by the institution, focuses on quality and exceptional activity by the student either inside or outside the college and has a less divisive feel.

3. *Breadth* – the issue of whether breadth should be represented by 'domains' continued to be debated. The resting point at the end of the validation meeting was that breadth is still defined by domains but can be achieved through subjects, skills and wider experiences.

4. *Varied implementation strategies within the Pilot Scheme*– it became clear that not only are there different types of sixth form colleges within the pilot but that there is also a variation of implementation strategies that reflect local circumstances and college priorities. Three colleges intend to undertake large-scale roll-outs of the Framework in 2010/11, while others will gradually extend the participating cohorts annually. Furthermore, some colleges will focus on vocational and Level 2 learners and programmes, while the majority will start with A Level students.

5. *Tracking, claiming and certification* – all those involved in the validation process agreed that a 'paper trail' has to be avoided. Several colleges are adapting existing electronic systems, together with reformed tutoring arrangements with an emphasis on maximising student involvement that culminates in a claiming process. All colleges are considering how they might develop systems, which can generate data for certification.

6. *Professional development* – it was clear from discussions that there are several important areas of staff development central to the successful implementation of the SFBac. These include sector wide discussions on research courses for 16-19 year olds, further development of the EPQ and refashioning tutorial systems.

H. Messages from the first year of the pilot

1. The outcomes of the 11 pilot visits suggest that the current SFBac principles and design have the potential to make an important contribution to the sixth form college curriculum and the development of student skills and wider capacities.
2. College plans for the SFBac are closely linked to their existing missions and direction of travel and all, in their different ways, intend to use the SFBac to help to develop aspects of their provision. The overall purposes articulated by colleges match quite closely the original aims for the SFBac.
3. The main focus of development is currently on Level 3, but the SFBac will be important for some colleges at Level 2, particularly to improve programmes of study for progression to higher levels. On the other hand, the SFBac + does not seem to be seen as necessary or desirable.
4. Colleges mainly wish to see the SFBac as a universal entitlement that is offered to a pilot group and then, ultimately, to all students. However, this appears to be combined with a recognition that students should exercise choice, volunteer their participation and opt in by claiming their award.
5. Through the discussions about university recognition, it became clear that the SFBac would be able to function most strongly as a curriculum framework with high 'use value' rather than as a qualification that has in-built 'exchange value'. At the same time, the SFBac embraces qualifications that in themselves have high exchange value.
6. In order that paperwork is minimized and maximum focus is placed on developing student skills and awareness, there was strong support for a process of 'claiming' whereby the student, with support from a tutor/mentor, compiles the evidence to make a claim for the

award of the SFBac, possibly through a viva. It was widely recognized that such a process would have implications for established tutorial systems.

7. While the ability of the SFBac to recognize students' wider activities, many of which are offered and already undertaken, was seen as a positive feature, support for the Framework appeared to grow when it became associated with curriculum development and enhancing provision.
8. More specifically, it became apparent that the EPQ has the potential to become a major vehicle for achieving the SFBac. Currently, the EPQ is being taken by a relatively small minority of students, but has proved very popular. The SFBac may provide a context in which the EPQ can be introduced to a wider cohort both at Level 3 and below.
9. Most of the pilot institutions intend the SFBac to be part of a multi-level offer. In developing the Framework beyond a pilot group, it will be important to make clear distinctions between the aims and purposes of the Level 2 and Level 3 awards so that students who progress internally see the difference and do not feel that they are repeating learning.
10. The pilot visits and validation process provided the pilot colleges with an opportunity to reflect on their motives for offering the SFBac, to articulate their basic approach, to understand the position of staff and students and to receive comments from all those involved in the development process. What will be important now is for each institution to develop its own model for delivery and for recognition.
11. It became increasingly clear throughout the visits that students, as well as staff, should be involved in the design, development and evaluation of the SFBac at college level and that this kind of participation could significantly improve the quality of decision-making and sense of ownership. This point was reiterated during the validation process.
12. A similar point applies to those colleges involved in the pilot. This is a bottom-up initiative and the active involvement of professionals at all stages of design, development and evaluation will be key to the success of the SFBac.
13. Finally, there is a clear role for SFCF in spearheading the SFBac quality assurance process, providing opportunities for pilot colleges to meet and share good practice and publicizing the benefits and values of the SFBac to higher education institutions, employers and relevant policy makers. In addition, it is recommended that the validation process is moved to a regional level as more institutions seek to participate.

Appendix 1. Sixth form colleges participating in the SFBac Initiative in 2009/10

Brooke House (BSix) Sixth Form College, Hackney, London
The College of Richard Collyer, Horsham, Sussex
Franklin, Grimsby Sixth Form College, Lincolnshire
Godalming Sixth Form College, Surrey
Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge
Huddersfield New College, Yorkshire
Longley Park Sixth Form College, Sheffield, Yorkshire
NewVIC Sixth Form College, Newham, London
Portsmouth Sixth Form College, Hampshire
Totton Sixth Form College, Southampton, Hampshire
Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I Sixth Form College, Leicester

Appendix 2.

SF Bac: 4 domain model for breadth

	1. Arts and culture	2. Business and Social Science	3. Humanities and Languages	4. Science, Maths and Technology
A-Levels, IB	Art, Ceramics, Dance, Design, Film Studies, Graphics, Media Studies, Music, Performing Arts, Photography, Sport & PE, Textiles, Theatre Studies, Visual Arts	Accounting, Business, Citizenship, Critical Thinking, Economics, Food Technology, Geography, Law, Politics, Psychology, Sociology, World Development	Communications, English Language, English Literature, French, German, Italian, Spanish, History, History of Art, Religious Studies, Philosophy, Theory of Knowledge	Biology, Chemistry, Computing, Electronics, Environmental Science, Geology, ICT, Maths, Physics
Applied, Diplomas, BTECs	Creative & Media, Hair & Beauty, Sport & Active Leisure, Manufacturing & Design	Society, Health and Development, Environment and Land-based, Business Admin & Finance, Hospitality, Retail, Travel & Tourism	Languages & International Communication	Engineering, IT, Construction & Built Environment, Science
Enrichment	All sports, Architecture, Ceramics, Children's Theatre, Choir etc	Skills for success, Young Enterprise, National Investment Programme etc	Ancient Greek World, Gender Studies, Religion and Society, Read for Pleasure etc	Medicine & Drugs, Medical Laboratory Sciences, Space Physics, etc

SFBac: subjects skills values breadth

9

Appendix 3. Reports on individual pilot college visits

BSix College, Hackney

22 March 2010

A. Background

1. BSix sees itself as an inclusive sixth form college of 1350 full-time students. Previously, the majority of its provision was below Level 3, but due to rising results in the College and an influx of better-qualified students, 60 per cent of provision is now advanced level. Moreover, in recent years BSix has moved from 23rd to 6th in the league table of sixth form colleges and general FE colleges in London in terms of A Level point scores. During 2010, the College is receiving three times the number of applications than previously. Prospective students often come to BSix having been rejected elsewhere, but increasing numbers are applying with high GCSE grades. Most, if not all, students are accepted because of the multi-level provision offered by the College.

B. Motives for piloting the SF Bac

1. The SFBac is seen as a way of advancing the 'extended college' agenda. This emphasizes the need for BSix students to achieve and to develop their skills and attitudes to learning beyond the classroom. If students take the extended college approach on board they will be involved in the SFBac.

2. In recent years BSix has sought to promote a baccalaureate-style framework and designed its own BSix Bac to promote wider learning and achievement. While this was accepted in principle by many staff, the initiative did not get very far because it was perceived as too unwieldy and the timescales for development were too short. The sector-based SFBac could be seen to take up where the BSix Bac left off, arguably with a simpler design and with more manageable timescales.

3. Presently the College offers a range of extra-curricular initiatives aimed at developing a volunteering approach amongst learners and to promote social cohesion and constructive behaviour. These include the 'learner advocacy programme' and various forms of mentoring.

4. There are, therefore, several related reasons why the College would like to pilot the SFBac. It will recognize what students are already doing, raise further the status of this kind of activity within the College and encourage others to engage more broadly. In other words, it will represent and recognise the success of the extended college programme.

5. It is envisaged that the SFBac will co-exist with a *BSix Progression Passport*, which is aimed at improving internal progression within the College. It is anticipated that over time all students at the various levels will have the opportunity to take an SFBac. In the first instance, however, the SFBac pilot will be aimed at the most active 30 students who will gain recognition at the end of 2011. In this sense, the SFBac could be seen as a mechanism for encouraging and broadening the base of 'learner activism' and rewarding students who are role models.

6. Currently, the College devotes one hour per week to a tutorial programme, which all staff participate in as tutors. Half this programme is taught and the other half is devoted to one-to-one support. This system is seen as a possible underpinning process behind the SFBac pilot.

C. Student Perspectives

1. We talked to a group of 11 students, eight of whom were on Level 3 programmes (A Level and BTEC), with the other three on Level 1 and 2. They had been chosen for interview because they were engaged in a range of activities within and outside the College alongside their qualifications. These included being involved in youth work and peer mentoring, being BSix student advocates for making improvements in the College, taking part in police cadets and, in one case, having a part-time job.

2. None of the students had heard of the SFBac. However, once they had been given an idea of what it involved, they were immediately enthusiastic about its potential for helping with their UCAS personal statement and CV, for recognizing and building on their other skills and providing them with opportunities to meet other people. The overwhelming view was that 'it was worth it'. One student suggested that the academic studies give an indication of what you can do, but that they do not 'tell you who you are' nor do they 'give an insight to your personality'. The extra activities undertaken and their recognition by the SFBac could do this. When the students were asked how they could fit everything in and whether the SFBac might detract from their qualifications, they said that the skills you could learn through it were essential for A Levels and other courses and that 'prioritising' was an important skill. The BTEC students also pointed out that many of the activities they experienced were useful for their coursework. Those on A Level programmes were interested to hear about the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and thought that it would be a good idea for the College.

3. The students felt that other students in the College would agree with them about the usefulness of the SFBac if it was presented clearly to them by the students themselves and if there was time allocated to supporting the recording process in the tutorial programme.

4. Those we talked with were all also highly complimentary about the College and what it was trying to do. They told us that 'student views are very important to the College', the students get a huge amount of support and that there are lots of activities to get involved with. One commented, 'If you want to do anything in this place you can do it.' Nevertheless, we were told that while the reputation of the College is rapidly improving, some people still think that it is 'quite rough'. These students thought that the SFBac would be a good selling point for the College and would make more people apply there.

5. When asked what more the College could be doing, the students found it hard to suggest anything. However, one felt that it would be good to have more competitive sport and competitions and activities with other SFCs. He said that the students really enjoy big events in the College and would like to see more of these.

6. Finally, when it was suggested to the students that they would be the group who would help to design the SFBac in their College, they were very enthusiastic about the idea.

D. Comments and conclusions

1. The College approach to the SFBac pilot, which puts the students in the driving seat, makes a great deal of sense. It also builds on existing initiatives aimed at promoting student 'community' activism and leadership. Clearly, the students we spoke to would support this approach, which could prove vital in motivating other students and staff.

2. We would also support the gradual introduction of the SFBac, focusing first on the most active cohort of students and using them as advocates to 'sell' the idea to incoming students at all levels

in September 2010. We suggest that while the SFBac is seen as an entitlement, that it remains voluntary for the time being.

3. At this stage, the most important step is to develop a 'model' of the SFBac for BSix and a simple recording system that dovetails with the tutorial programme. We recommend that in taking this step, staff from BSix talk directly to their counterparts in NewVIC who are at a similar stage of development, with a similar history and a desire to have a student-led approach.

4. With regards to BSix staff, it is suggested that a meeting be held in which leading students present the SFBac idea. One of us would be willing to attend this meeting if required and available.

5. We would thoroughly endorse the idea of a celebration event for the SFBac. This has proved to be very popular with students in similar initiatives, such as the Surrey Graduation Certificate.

6. Finally, given the increase in levels of attainment and student confidence at BSix, we would strongly recommend that the College looks seriously at introducing the EPQ at some later stage in the development of the SFBac. It appears that the EPQ will play an important role in other pilot colleges and there will be colleagues throughout the SFC sector who would be prepared to share their experience and expertise.

The College of Richard Collyer, Horsham

15 March 2010

A. Background

1. Collyer's Sixth Form College had previously been a boys' grammar school and a Mercer Company School. It has 1550 daytime and 500 evening students and is somewhat over-subscribed, although it has stretching recruitment targets for 2010/11. It receives 60 per cent of its intake from three high performing 11-16 partner schools and the rest from other institutions. There are no maintained 11-18 schools in Horsham, although there are several independent schools.
2. Presently, there are 100 students on Level 2 courses and the rest on Level 3, most of which are taking A Levels. Central Sussex College provides what can be termed 'heavy vocational' courses, although Collyer's does offer BTEC courses in sport, health and social care and business administration. Unusually, the College offers apprenticeships, derived from its COVE status
3. The College Advanced Level programme is presently 4 AS or equivalent + Level 3 Communications + tutorial programme (20 mins per day with specific days on health campaigns etc) + some AS in second year (e.g. critical thinking) + EPQ (about 100 doing it as a fifth + H&SC). In addition, the vast majority undertake at least one activity which is voluntary and not formally timetabled. Students also have their own societies.

B. Reasons for piloting the SFBac

1. Members of the senior management team offered four related reasons:
 - a. Belief in a coherent curriculum post-16, but not one that is tightly prescribed.
 - b. Keeping students engaged and busy, rather than broad as such.
 - c. Designing something that accredits all they do.
 - d. Gaining institutional ownership of curriculum design.

C. Perceived benefits of the SFBac

1. For students, it could:
 - provide a clearer focus on what they do and the way they think about education. The College would like to encourage them to take a less instrumental view of learning.
 - develop more independent learning skills in those coming from particular schools which, while high performing, might not always encourage a more inquiring student.
 - provide an incentive for students at the lower end of Level 3 who do not always engage in a range of activities. The SFBac would be voluntary, but with a heavy steer.
2. For staff and the College, the SFBac could deliver a number of benefits:
 - Developing EPQ and trying to find a place for it.
 - Curriculum redesign (e.g. the opportunity not to have key skills but not to lose the funding), with a particular focus on the first year in which Key Skills could be replaced by 'thinking and reasoning skills' in preparation for EPQ and Critical Thinking in the second year.
 - Taking part in the pilot will allow the College to collaborate with other colleges (inside the Pilot and more broadly)

However it is recognized that there are constraints, the most obvious being financial and having to develop the SFBac within existing staffing. Members of SMT have, therefore, decided on a cautious strategy so that the College does not damage a promising curriculum development.

3. For the Sixth Form College Sector, the SFBac is a way of defining/reinforcing a new identity in curriculum terms. It can provide currency for local initiatives and build that currency. Quality of development and delivery will, therefore, be very important.

D. Progress in planning and implementing the pilot

1. SMT have put ideas out there about the SFBac, but are not sure what staff think about the initiative. They will be interested in what is said today. They feel they are walking a tightrope between seeing the SFBac as a way of clarifying the curriculum while at the same time not something involving too much work for staff.

2. They hope that students will plan their SFBac through the ILP (My Progress) and that this will encourage student ownership of their learning.

3. They also hope to foster a curriculum-led approach rather than everything being seen as funding-driven – particularly in relation to unpopular qualifications (e.g. Key Skills).

E. Major issues in the pilot?

1. Members of the SMT are happy with the model (they were involved in its design), but recognize that the main debating point has been breadth. They feel comfortable with the idea of breadth as being more than just subjects.

2. They feel that funding for 2011 could be a major threat, but this would depend on whether there was any further capping of the size of student programmes. Enrichment might be particularly vulnerable if staffing were to be cut back.

3. All things remaining equal, it is envisaged that the SFBac at Level 2 will be awarded at the end of 2011 and Level 3 in 2012.

F. Staff perspectives

1. We interviewed a range of staff who were responsible for both curriculum areas and the tutorial programme. They articulated the following benefits of the SFBac:

- It could be seen as a kitemark for injecting quality into and accrediting students' programmes, particularly in terms of breadth;
- It could be positive from a pastoral point of view because it would allow students to value more highly what they are doing, including activities undertaken and capacities developed outside the college.
- It would recognize the type of enrichment activities that can enhance a cv.
- It is an important way of recognizing that a sixth form college education is more than just examination results.
- It sees student programmes in a more holistic way rather than 'separate bits and pieces'.
- If it is done in the right way it could inspire young people to become more active citizens – in this sense it could be the beginning of something big educationally.
- It would give a *raison d'être* for the additional aspects of the programme that students have to take (e.g. Key Skills, Critical Thinking/Science in Society)
- In working with students on the recording of activities for the SFBac it might help staff to get to know them better and this might help with teaching.

2. However, staff also raised a number of both practical and more philosophical questions/issues:

a. Practical questions

- How would the recording and accrediting of the SFBac happen – would it be done on an on-going basis or all at the end of the student's programme?
- Would this process be done through the tutorial programme and, if so, would extra time be given for it?
- The ILP was seen as a possible mechanism but not necessarily for all students - it would be important that all tutors used it in the same way so that there was a quality process for all students.
- They were concerned that the SFBac must not be about tutors chasing students – students should be able to take responsibility for their own learning and the SFBac should be about student motivation.
- On the other hand, not all students are able to do this – would some be disadvantaged?
- Were SMT expecting excellence in examination results as well as a holistic focus and might there be tensions here?
- There was a feeling that the SFBac might be just one more thing that staff had to focus on and that it might lead to overload.
- What resources (in terms of tutor time) are being put behind this initiative?

b. Three deeper concerns

- There was a concern that the SFBac might be seen as elitist and only for the best students. Staff would be concerned if it was 'only associated with the brightest kids'. If it is intended to be more inclusive than this, then this message needs to be made more clearly to staff.
- Will it be used as a marketing tool for attracting students to Collyer's and away from other competitor institutions? Staff would not be happy with this approach and need to be assured that this is not the case.
- Because the College is part of the pilot, the initiative will 'have to succeed' and this will lead to pressure on staff 'to pull students through'. SMT needs to assure staff that this will not be the case.

G. The student perspective

1. We interviewed nine students – four on the first year of their programme and five in the second year. There was a mix of those taking Level 2 and Level 3 awards – five were taking A Levels and four a mix of BTEC/GCSE programmes. None of the students had heard of the SFBac, so the interview began with a brief introduction to its main features. The students were then asked what they thought about the idea.

2. The majority was either ambivalent or suspicious of the idea. While they could see that it might have some benefits, these would only be realized if universities and employers recognized it. They questioned how it would be possible to accredit many of the personal development and social skills that came from extra-curricular activities and indeed whether these were things that they wanted to divulge to the College. They could see that it might be an incentive for some students to do more, but they also thought that it could be 'a hassle'. In particular they questioned the added value of the SFBac, with one commenting

'By the time you've got to a college age, you're already involved. I'm not sure what it adds – it sounds like a shiny wrapper around the dog's tail'.

3. We also asked about their attitudes to some of the activities they currently undertake as part of the broadening and tutorial aspects of their programmes. Key skills were seen as a 'waste of time' by all students except one, who was very positive about everything that the College had to offer. 'My Progress' (the ILP) was simply seen as one-way communication from the college to the student not as something that the student contributed to. Critical Thinking and Science and Society were described as 'discussion subjects' and 'OK'. Nobody had done an EPQ.

4. When asked what the College might do to help students progress to the next stage of education or into employment, several students (including those aspiring to go into HE) said that they would appreciate help with work experience or a placement in a specific field associated with their area of study. They felt that it would be really useful if the College had a list of contacts of this type. They were clearly all concerned not just about what they were going to do next, but how they were eventually going to gain employment. The impact of the recession was clearly making itself felt with these students.

H. Comments and conclusions

1. Members of senior management are clear about why they wish to pilot the SFBac. We also witnessed strong support amongst a section of senior staff for its ideas and principles, although they have concerns, both educational and practical. The students we interviewed, on the other hand, were more ambivalent. They could see the merits but questioned its usefulness and added value.

2. We, therefore, conclude that the case has not yet been won for the SFBac in Collyer's College and more communication and discussion still needs to take place with both staff and students to inform and persuade and to arrive at a local model that delivers the maximum possible added value in its different forms.

3. The least convincing argument appears to be accrediting that which already exists – this can draw a cynical response from some students. Instead, the SFBac would appear to gain the most ground when it is associated with recognition, institutional improvements and some new key outcomes. These might include:

- focusing students from the beginning on their programme of study and wider experiences;
- a clearer educational consensus across departments within the College;
- improved dialogue with students about skills, values and breadth;
- improving the tutorial and ILP system;
- extending the role of EPQ and other core initiatives;
- focusing students and staff on those experiences beyond the institution that make students more attractive to employers and HE;
- improved UCAS statements with a wider range of skills and experiences for application to university and employment.

Franklin College

10 March 2010

A. Background

1. The College was formed in 1989 to respond to failing small school sixth forms, low participation rates and economic decline (55 per cent of students on EMA). Key members of the leadership team been here 20 years but there is a new Principal. The College has grown from 600 to 1500 over a period of two decades. The local environment is strongly competitive with some 11-18 schools, the Grimsby Institute (a general FE college) and new academies in NE Lincs.

2. Franklin College offers mainly A Levels (with about 90 students on Level 2). However, there is a perception that increasing numbers of students are coming on to A Level programmes with modest grade profiles and a greater level of indecision about what they want to do in the future.

3. In response, the College has offered a 'Core + 4' programme. This mostly comprises four AS Levels, but there is an increasing emphasis on offering vocational provision so that students can undertake more mixed programmes. Students have two hours with their tutor and all Level 3 students undertake a COPE programme. This aims to boost retention and skills. It also provides extra funding for the College, particularly in the second year. In addition, it offers 70 UCAS points which may be important for particular HE applications. General Studies has been phased out and EPQ has been running for three years. There is a take-up of 80 students and tutors support one class per week, together with some personal mentoring from subject specialists.

B. Reasons for interest in the SFBac pilot

Members of SMT offered seven related reasons for their interest in the Pilot:

1. The Government has not offered any definition of the 'glue' needed to cohere a SFC programme at Level 3. The College wants to badge this process, presently represented by its Core + 4 Programme.
2. Producing community leaders (e.g. Global Agendas) and building this into the curriculum.
3. Others are offering the AQA Bac (known in the sector as the Farnborough model) and the IB but these are, considered too elitist. The College needs another type of framework more suited to its needs.
4. Local competition and the issue of institutional image – Franklin needs a clearly defined agenda and external banner to promote success – a framework for 16-18 year olds that provides a transition between school and the next phase, with a flavour of the university during these two years.
5. The SFBac might even become a means of collaboration and franchising with other institutions pre-16. This could build on the 'Franklin Connection' in which staff have been deployed in local schools to save specialist provision, promote performance and student confidence at KS4, including an EPQ at Level 2.
6. The College is looking to a national framework, which will bring its initiatives together and provide them with external credibility.
7. It could be a way of recognizing an important sector.

C. Staff perspectives

1. The curriculum directors and managers we met had been introduced to the SFBac, with some having more knowledge than others. It is broadly seen as an overarching framework which allows students to choose which subjects they want to study but which also gives students credit for the core aspects of their programme (e.g. COPE and/or EPQ).

2. The SFBac is seen as positive because it:

- has the potential to tie all aspects of student learning together into a holistic framework;
- may help students to understand why they need to go beyond the subjects they are taking;
- could legitimate some of the progression skills that student coming from Grimsby schools may need to develop to allow them to be successful in their Level 3 programmes;
- represents what SFCs are all about and would provide a distinctive 'brand' for the College;
- may well lead to other SFCs in the local network coming on board and this would be supportive in developing the framework;
- is a national kitemark that will have more legitimacy than a Franklin-college approach;
- could support students at the end of their two years in the college in reflecting on what they have done and how they have developed;
- would be supported by staff who are used to change and willing to do anything that will benefit the students;
- will motivate middle of the road student to go to HE.

3. However, staff are also anxious that it might lead to more paperwork and that this should be strongly resisted. They did not feel that it would necessarily lead to more development – much is already happening in terms of extending the subject areas and offering opportunities for extension activities, such as volunteering. Rather it would provide a template that would make sense of all the curriculum development that has taken/is taking place.

4. Views on the current core

The staff we spoke to recognized both strengths and weaknesses in the use of COPE as the central vehicle for the tutorial programme. They feel it does help to develop the skills that students need, particularly in terms of the next steps they need to make and in organizing their study programmes. The reporting system has been changed to fit within the reflection and target-setting concept that lies behind COPE and it is tied into a strong tutorial programme. However, the paperwork is seen as repetitive and tedious and they will report this to ASDAN. They think that it works best in the more vocational areas because it is integrated with students' main subjects – this is not so much the case with students on A Level programmes. They feel that tutors have to be positive about COPE (and not all are) and should try to integrate it with specialist subjects. Those we talked to admitted that students have varied views about the usefulness of COPE. However, they are convinced that most students have benefited from the process and would say so, but don't like the accreditation side of the award. The EPQ and AQA Bac are viewed as useful initiatives.

D. Student perspectives

1. We interviewed three groups of students – one involved in EPQ, the other involved in COPE and the third (a mix of A Level and Diploma students).

2. With regards to the EPQ experience, seven students we talked to had carried out investigations in the fields of medicine, architecture, ICT applications and media. All were very enthusiastic about the skills they have developed and experiences they have had or were about to have. These skills include independent learning and research capabilities, choosing a topic, researching in the locality, producing plans and products, using new practical skills (e.g. filming), extending skills in areas not used by their main subjects and talking with experts outside the College. They all remarked that it had been hard work, but were happy to do this because they had chosen the subject and enjoyed pushing themselves. They were proud of what they had produced and wanted to share it with others. It was often something they had done in their own time, but none of them felt that it had detracted from their main studies. In many cases, it was related to what they wanted to do in later life. They also said that it should be voluntary, but that they should be given

the full information about it so they could make an informed choice. Students who had undertaken the EPQ would be the best advocates for this.

3. COPE – students were highly ambivalent or even dismissive of this award. They remarked that it was not necessary, that they had not learned a lot, that it was not challenging because you only had to do the minimum to gain the accreditation, you tended not to use COPE to do new things and that the paperwork was really tedious. When pressed, they did see a point in some of the activities, particularly where this had involved outside contacts or experiences. They also felt that it had helped with university application, but did not like writing this up for the award. The UCAS points given for COPE were not seen as very valuable because many HE institutions do not use this tariff. Their views reflected the fact that COPE was new in the College, with some students suggesting ‘Nobody really knows what they are doing’. They also said that COPE needed to be sold more from the outset. Finally, one student commented that COPE was to do with funding.

4. Before talking to students about the SFBac, we asked them to tell us what was distinctive about coming to a sixth form college like Franklin. They commented on the fact that it was one of the top colleges in the area, focused on academic study, gave you a wide choice of subjects, treated you like an adult, but was also there to support you in your studies. We would suggest that these features need to be part of the narrative around the SFBac.

5. After explaining what the SFBac was, we asked the students what they thought about the idea. They liked the concept of a Core (like the IB) and a choice of subjects (A Levels or Diplomas). They accepted that in a SFC students would be asked to do things beyond their subjects. They felt that it would be useful to have a framework that recognized everything they did, including part-time work and activities outside the College. However, it was important that Franklin was very clear with them about what would be required from the start, could ensure that the SFBac would be achievable, flexible (a menu approach), recognized outside the College and supported what was being done in the main study areas.

E. Commentary and recommendations

1. There is a rationale for the College to use the SFBac as a curriculum framework because it encapsulates in a more overt way the idea of Core + 4. However, it is clear from students that the narrative behind the SFBac will need to be carefully crafted and clearly presented if it is to be understood and valued. The case for the SFBac could be multi-layered because it offers benefits to:

- Students in terms of skills and progression
- Staff and their professionalism
- The College in its local environment
- The future of the Sixth Form Sector

2. The Framework needs to be applied flexibly (e.g. with a menu for the Core) and there is not convincing evidence at present that COPE on its own provides an effective and accepted vehicle for the Core. The EPQ is already highly regarded by students and should, undoubtedly, form one of the major elements on a Core menu. However, students were clear that it should remain voluntary, but that it should be much more clearly marketed by successful EPQ graduates.

3. In order to satisfy the ‘values, skills and breadth’ requirements of the SFBac, it will be important to recognize activities undertaken both outside and inside the College.

4. One area where the SFBac might stimulate further curriculum development is in relation to Level 2 programmes which are currently under-developed in comparison with Level 3. An SFBac at Level 2 could be firmly linked to progression to Level 3 study and the workplace.

5. Members of staff we talked to were very positive about the SFBac idea and keen to explore its potential at Franklin and more widely within SFCs within the area. Due to the groundswell of support for the SFBac Framework, we see considerable merit in directly involving a broad range of staff and students in its design and marketing.

6. Given that the SFBac is currently at the proposal stage only in the College, it will be important to decide upon a development programme for the Pilot, which will consider issues such as:

- rationale and narrative
- the model and how it builds of Core + 4
- which groups of students will be involved in the first year of the Pilot and at what level
- how the existing strong tutorial programme will support the SFBac
- how to record and recognize achievement without too much paperwork.

GODALMING COLLEGE

22 April 2010

A. Background

1. Godalming is a college of 1700 students, of which the vast majority undertake Level 3 study and A Levels in particular. There has been recent expansion of BTEC National Diplomas (200 students) in Sport, Media, Business and IT and First Diploma (Art, Media, Sport and Leisure), with about 50 students. Out of these, about 35/40 progress to Level 3. 14-19 Diplomas do not currently form part of the offer.

2. The College has Beacon Status and is heavily over-subscribed, with about 400 more applicants than places. While it could easily focus exclusively on Level 3, it continues with a limited Level 2 offer in order to fulfil a commitment to the local partnership of four 11-16 schools. The College maintains that it is not particularly driven by the desire to seek institutional prestige through initiatives such as the SFBac and characterizes the local environment as not particularly competitive.

B. Motives for piloting the Sfbac – discussions with SMT

1. In the first instance, the College has seen the SFBac as a way of offering recognition for its enrichment activities and what the students achieve beyond formal qualifications. It has an extensive enrichment programme, which includes additional studies in the second year, including the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

2. There is a large EPQ cohort, which started two years ago, gained good results last year and will have 280 completers this year. There are three college prizes for EPQ projects, but there was an admission that more (e.g. an exhibition of student work) might be done to promote EPQ outcomes and the SFBac could assist with this. With regards to student preparation for the EPQ, this has been limited to date. It is possible that the SFBac could promote EPQ research preparation as well as focusing on working life and HE.

3. While students at the College appear highly motivated, the SFBac is seen as a way of encouraging more of them to broaden their approach to learning and wider engagement. In this respect, the SFBac might be both a lever to increase participation in enrichment, particularly citizenship/community volunteering and skill development.

4. In addition, the SFBac is seen as a helpful with the HE admissions process. Presently, 85 per cent of students apply to university, with up to 20 graduating to Oxbridge.

5. Viewed educationally, the SFBac is seen as representing a coherent and holistic curriculum and an ethos and values agenda.

C. Development and progress of the pilot

1. The Student Council and members of staff have been introduced to the SFBac model and design.

2. Currently, it is envisaged that all students will be entered for the SFBac. In this context, the College is also considering introducing the Sfbac+ for some students, with the focus on additional breadth, volunteering and the EPQ, rather than the distinction being made by completing 1500 hours.

3. It is anticipated that the new Level 2 and 3 student cohorts will participate in the SFBac pilot in September 2010. There is still discussion as to whether to provide existing A2 students with the opportunity to opt in during their final year.

4. Several important areas are yet to be decided on (e.g. how to approach the issue of breadth and domains; how far to facilitate breadth through depth of study and how the tutorial system might develop further).

D. Views of teachers and tutors

1. When the teachers/tutors (in this case mainly heads of department) were asked about their understanding of the SFBac, they talked about it being:

- an umbrella to recognize the total and coherent student experience;
- a platform for students to be involved in wider activities because they regard some them as half-hearted about additional studies and needing encouragement to get involved;
- good for higher achievers because it is more challenging than the current curriculum, particularly if it means a greater focus on research skills (e.g. prior to the EPQ).

2. They recognized that universities are looking for ways to further differentiate between applicants and asked about how the SFBac might be viewed by higher education.

3. With regards to major issues, they thought the SFBac was a good idea, but wondered whether it would make a difference in practical terms.

4. They were also concerned that a tick-box, paper-based approach should be avoided and thought it better to employ a DoE model of self-recording which has the additional benefit of promoting greater student self-awareness.

5. They were concerned about the role of the tutor in relation to the SFBac and were not keen to see further changes in this area.

E. Student perspectives

1. We saw a total of 16 Year 12 students, several of whom were members of the students' union in the College. All but one were taking 4 AS Levels, with the additional one taking a BTEC Diploma and 2 AS Levels. The students had been introduced by the Principal to the idea of the SF Bac prior to our visit. They described it as 'something additional to the subjects taken'.

2. Initially they raised a number of fundamental questions, which largely revolved around whether the SFBac would be providing them with anything that added value to their current programme or qualifications profile, for example: 'What is the necessity of this?' 'What is the point?'

3. They were also interested whether the SFBac had arisen because higher education institutions (HEIs) and employers had asked for it or whether it was something that had been developed by colleges themselves. Clearly initially they were prepared to be more positive about it if the former was the case.

4. Another major concern was whether the SFBac, if it was something that all students did, might take away some of the differentiation between those students who had taken the initiative and really shown that they wanted to 'go the extra mile' with volunteering, for example, and those who were just going through the motions in order to get the award. They were worried that universities might not be able to distinguish between the two. They were only too aware of how competitive university admissions was becoming and that they wanted ways of selecting the best from a range

of very good students. The students did not want the SFBac to be part of this type of 'arms race' for qualifications.

5. There were also concerns about what was meant by 'breadth' in the SFBac. Students support the idea of choice of subjects in the English system and, apart from one, all wanted to ensure that the SFBac did not interfere with this. They were well aware that universities were looking for subject specialism and depth rather than breadth in terms of subjects.

6. There was quite a heated debate about whether the award should be compulsory or not. The consensus was that while it should be possible for all learners to participate in the activities that are embraced within the SFBac framework, learners should not be forced to take it and there should be scope for people to gain the SFBac via different activities. This suggests that the SFBac should be seen as an entitlement that students have to claim rather than something that is compulsory for all.

7. Interestingly, there were a number of students who argued very passionately that not all aspects of learning or activities should be subject to accreditation and that some areas of the curriculum should be done because they are enjoyable and 'make you a better person' (e.g. volunteering) not because you are going to gain a certificate for it. As one commented: 'You can motivate people without a qualification or award.' At this point several students said that they would like to be able to take additional non-examined subjects or classes to either broaden or deepen their studies. They very much liked the idea of teachers offering additional areas of study that they felt passionate about and that either extended subjects the students were already doing or provided a complement to them. The best learning, in their view, happened when they really enjoyed a subject and got into it in some depth and when the teacher was really passionate about it. It was recognized that the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) might provide this and that broadening studies were already being offered in Year 13.

8. There was also considerable discussion about the educational values and purposes that lie behind the SFBac. These were seen to be beneficial. One student stated forcefully "College is not just about getting the qualifications.' They felt that if the SFBac encouraged more students to get involved in activities like volunteering that was positive. They also thought that it would be a valuable way of bringing together and making sense of all their qualifications, experiences and activities.

9. When asked to vote on whether the SFBac was potentially a good idea, 12 out of the 16 put their hands up, although they stressed the word 'potentially'.

10. Finally, the students were very keen to be involved in the development of the SFBac because they thought it should be designed to meet the particular needs of the colleges involved.

F. Conclusions

1. Taking note of both student and staff comments, it is important that the SFBac is not simply seen as legitimating the current curriculum approach. It is crucial that it is seen as a tool for improvement of the curriculum, student experience and skill development.

2. The local nature of the SFBac offers opportunities for both education professionals and students to be involved in its design and development. We were convinced through our discussion with the students, in particular, that they would be most willing to be involved and could be a valuable resource in promoting the initiative.

3. Reflecting on the discussions overall, it would appear that the College could implement the pilot, either by stressing the features on the left or on the right in the columns below:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Use value | Exchange value |
| • Development/enhancement | Recognition of current activities |
| • Voluntary participation | Compulsory participation |
| • Curriculum approach | Qualification approach |

We suggest that the features on the left would be more likely to lead to a productive outcome than those on the right.

4. If the students are expected to take major responsibility for claiming they have fulfilled all the requirements of the SFBac (and this is what a voluntary scheme would suggest), then the College will need to consider the type of tutorial support it puts in place to facilitate this process.

5. Given the success of the EPQ in the College and its ability to meet many of the criteria for the SFBac, we endorse a strategy, which places it in a leading role in the SFBac Pilot, although we do not suggest that it becomes compulsory for all students.

Hills Road College, Cambridge

26 April 2010

A. Background

1. Hills Road Sixth Form College primarily offers an academic Level 3 curriculum, but with Mathematics and English (Level 2) for those who have not achieved a Grade C at GCSE. Alongside A Levels, students are expected to take an enrichment option, an Academic Research Course and Citizenship Activities in Year 12. This is followed by an AS extended project or Critical Thinking/World Development/Science in Society in Year 13. At this point, students are encouraged to continue with enrichment/citizenship activities, but these are optional. Presently, all students undertake a fourth component of some sort (beyond their three A Levels in second year), but about 40 per cent do four full A Levels and this exempts them from the Wider Curriculum option in the second year.
2. The Academic Research Course (ARC) culminates in a Level 2/3 project. It is taken by all students in Year 12 and is considered a replacement for Key Skills. A total of 90 students upgraded to the Level 3 EPQ in the first year and 100 take EPQ in the second year. Those who take EPQ in the first year choose another fourth component in the second year.
3. College management considers the Wider Curriculum, as outlined above, to be a very important part of the curriculum offer, both in its own right and because of the benefits it can offer in an increasingly competitive university application process.
4. The current Wider Curriculum Programme at Hills Road will easily satisfy the basic requirements of the SFBac.

B. Reasons for involvement in the Pilot

1. Members of the senior team recognize that many very able young people study at the College and the institution should push further for the Wider Curriculum Programme.
2. In particular, they wish to see the development of citizenship /community activity and would like to see it incorporated into the SFBac. This is seen as a different type of activity, which fosters more independent learning and which could also diversify approaches to ARC/EPQ, making it a more practical activity.
3. The SFBac is seen as bringing coherence to the College offer and could be used as a descriptor of the whole package, signaling what a Hills Road student should have achieved on graduation. It could also be viewed as a sixth form college response to the Government's unwillingness to implement the Tomlinson unified system proposals.
4. Members of SMT predicted that given that the College is already offering an SFBac-type curriculum, there will be questions about its added value. Will it simply be seen as a sixth form college sector perspective on the curriculum or can it be something that students actually value? On the one hand, the College can offer the SFBac to all students based on its Wider Curriculum. However, to incentivise some more able or active students, it may be possible to offer the SFBac+, although there are problems of basing this on a high number of hours that could exceed the funding cap. On reflection, members of SMT stated that the SFBac+ was less important to them than leveraging some students into a citizenship agenda.

5. They were also conscious of potential problems of onerous monitoring and the need to alleviate staff concerns on this matter. Connected to this, is the issue of the tutorial system, with a case for greater student ownership in which they are recording their own activity.

6. Currently, ideas about the SFBac have been discussed amongst certain staff teams but not in any detail. Students have yet to consider the initiative. With regards to implementation, there are plans to start the SFBac with the 2010/11 Year 12 students.

C. Perspectives from HODs and tutors

1. Staff, while recognizing the potential usefulness of the SFBac, posed questions suggesting that some of them currently see it more as a qualification than as a curriculum framework. Others, however, appeared to understand the SFBac as a badge to overlay the existing College curriculum and to encourage students to increase the value ascribed to enrichment.

2. Both interpretations led to the following questions related to its identity, its recognition, its use-value, relationships between institutions and its implications for college systems:

- What is the SFBac? Is it a qualification or a quality kitemark?
- What are its benefits and will students value it?
- Will the SFBac be recognized by universities?
- How does it compare with AQA Bac and IB? Calling it a Bac might be associated with lots of work.
- The College is placing a disparate set of educational experiences into the wrapper. Will this provide the push for more students to engage with the Wider Curriculum Programme?
- How do you personalize the SFBac without creating a time-consuming bureaucracy for staff and students? Will the recording of students' claims to the SFBac become a bureaucratic exercise?
- Is it an initiative of the Sixth Form College Sector only? If so, this could be a mistake because it has to be a full national project to give it credibility. Furthermore, a sector-based approach could cause inequities with other providers.
- What will the SFBac mean for the tutor system, currently based on 'super-tutors'? Currently, the guidance system and the curriculum could be seen as moving apart and the SFBac might help close this gap.

3. On the other hand, from a marketing perspective, the SFBac was regarded as important since the College has a package to show that it is investing in its students; that it is offering a good experience and a high degree of choice to students and that there is external support for its approach through SFCF.

D. Student views

1. Five first-year students, taking a mix of four or five AS Levels, volunteered to talk to us about their views on the SFBac. We began the interview by asking them their views about the Academic Research Course (ARC), the Extended Project at Levels 2 and 3 and the Enrichment programme that they were expected to follow alongside their A Levels because of the important role that these elements will play within the SFBac framework.

2. The ARC programme was seen as beneficial, but there was less enthusiasm for the research methods and taught elements (one student described it as 'tedious') than for the work on the Project itself. Students felt that they had often covered the research skills at GCSE via projects and coursework (e.g. in Geography) and that the programme was thus repetitive. For the students taking five AS Levels, the ARC programme, together with the demands of the Enrichment programme, were seen as making the first year experience 'very intensive', particularly if a

demanding area (e.g. drama) had been taken for the Enrichment programme. This suggests a need for more guidance for students around the nature of their extended curriculum as well as around the subjects that they are taking.

3. It was seen as positive that the Project could be taken at either Level 2 (Higher) or Level 3 (EPQ) and that there was a free choice of subject. Experiences of the support for the Project varied, however, and there was a perception that the major tutor emphasis was on supporting the Higher Project in Year 12, so that those taking an EPQ at Level 3 were left with too little help. One student described how she felt 'abandoned'. One criticism of the Higher Project was the focus on the process, with a tick-box approach to assessment, rather than on the quality of the outcome. Finally, students were concerned that universities did not appear to be interested in it.

4. While the Enrichment Programme was broadly supported and students claimed they had enjoyed and learnt a great deal from the choices they had made, there were concerns about the amount of time that some of the activities demanded. Here there was a desire for a more tailored approach and for staff to take into account the kind of activities that students undertook outside the college. This, they felt, would be very important in relation to the SFBac.

5. The students had not been introduced to the idea of the SFBac prior to this meeting. When its main features had been explained, students' immediate response was broadly positive. They thought that it sounded like 'quite a useful idea for recognising what you do' or, as one put it, 'making the breadth we do official'. They also immediately saw that it was intended to give greater coherence to their programmes of study. This led to a debate around what might change as a result of the introduction of the SFBac. As one commented, 'What would change? We do it anyway.'

6. The major discussion that ensued revolved around whether the SFBac was something that was for the institution or for the individual student - in the words of one of the students, 'Is (the SFBac) giving the badge to the school rather than the individual?' Interestingly his point was that if only Sixth Form Colleges were allowed to offer the SFBac, this might create inequalities between students in this college and those in other institutions. There was support for the SFBac being part of an improvement strategy and for students having to 'claim' their right to gain the award - 'If you don't earn it you shouldn't really get it'. They also felt that it was important to be able to use outside-college activities as part of the claim.

E. Conclusions and suggestions for further development

1. Hills Road already offers a curriculum that meets the criteria for the SFBac. However, from discussions with staff it is clear that there is still a need for clarification of what the SFBac is and what its main purposes are. A discussion of the following inter-related features of qualifications/curriculum frameworks might help in the clarification process. In our view, the features on the left hand side are more appropriate for the SFBac than those on the right:

Use value	Exchange value
Leading to development/enhancement	Recognition of current activities
Voluntary participation by students	Compulsory participation
Curriculum framework	Qualification

2. If the introduction of the SFBac is to be more than simply a 'kite marking' of what Hills Road already does, then what is the curriculum enhancement process that it will bring in? Two areas arose in discussion with staff – a more overt focus on providing opportunities for volunteering and community involvement and a mechanism for bring the 'super tutors' and curriculum staff together more closely. Both are consistent with the aims and purposes of the SFBac.
3. Much of the discussion centred on the importance of the SFBac being a curriculum entitlement for all students and expressing the philosophy of the Hills Road approach to the curriculum, but also the need for 'personalisation' and for students actively to 'claim' their SFBac. The question for the College is how this 'claiming' process is built into the current tutorial programme. Our recommendation is that since the SFBac is seen as the overarching award for the total student experience at Hills Road, the process of 'claiming' by the individual student should be an on-going reflection process that takes place throughout the two years of the course rather than being left to the end of Year 13. This may require a rethinking of the tutorial programme and the role of tutors.
4. The College is intending to begin the SFBac with Year 12 students in September 2010, with the first awards being made in July 2012. However, there may be some mileage in considering whether some of this year's Year 12 students might wish to claim the award in July 2011 as part of the pilot process.
5. Discussions at this College raised issues for how validation of the SFBac will assess the quality of the system that underpins the student 'claiming' process in Colleges that wish to be awarded the kite mark.
6. Finally, given the responses of students at this College and elsewhere, we recommend that they are actively involved in the SFBac piloting and development process.

NEW COLLEGE HUDDERSFIELD

13 May 2010

A. Background

1. New College Huddersfield considers itself to be an 'inclusive college', with 2300 full-time students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (23% BME) and 50 per cent receiving an EMA.
2. With regards to provision, the College has 90 per cent of its offer at Level 3, of which two-thirds is A Level. The remaining courses are largely BTEC and OCR awards. There are about 200 Level 2 students and a small number at Level 1. It has an agreement with Kirklees College to limit the amount of Level 2 provision within the College. In terms of student intake scores, the College finds itself in the bottom 10 per cent of SFCs.
3. The College is over-subscribed and students come from a wide catchment area (e.g. 650 come from outside the Kirklees LA including 300 from Calderdale and 100 from Bradford). There is cross-party support for a new site of the College in the North Kirklees area to meet 16+ educational needs. South Kirklees has another SFC - Greenhead College - which is regarded as more selective but, in their different ways, both jointly meet the needs of the area. There are relatively few school sixth forms in the locality.

B. Reasons for piloting the SFBac

1. Members of SMT have had interest in an award/framework like this going back to Tomlinson and plans for an English Bac. The College is committed to providing more breadth for students and to encouraging their aspirations, self-confidence and self-promotion. A signifier of this would be the improved quality of UCAS statements. Members of SMT see the SFBac as a vehicle for students to *'thrive, to do more and to become more attractive to HEIs'* (presently 80 per cent apply to university).
2. The College already offers a great deal of additionality. There is an extensive enrichment programme (e.g. Academies in Sport; Performing Arts; Debating Society; Criminology, work experience; HE week and a Student Union). They have recently appointed an enrichment co-ordinator and enhancement manager and there are over 150 EPQ participants at Level 2 and 3. However, student participation in enrichment is variable and requires encouragement.
3. The College has an established tutorial system and a positive experience of introducing the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) with over 100 students now participating. The EPQ has been particularly successful within vocational programmes where tutors are driving the process.
4. Members of SMT see the SFBac as providing a framework to make this provision more coherent, to help drive good practice, to incentivise students to participate in wider activities, to foster more independent learning skills and to project an image of excellence as a college.

C. Staff perspectives

1. We met with six staff representing a range of large vocational areas (e.g. Sport and Leisure, IT) and the enrichment programme. All staff had had basic information about the SFBac, but were keen to hear more about it in the meeting and to discuss its implications for the College.
2. Having been provided with more detail on the broad aims of the SFBac and its key design features, staff were also informed by the person responsible for the initiative about his thoughts on how it might be taken forward as a pilot. It is initially envisaged that the SFBac will be piloted at

Level 3 in 2010/11 with some BTEC areas and with A Level 'extension' students (the College's version of a gifted and talented programme). The BTEC areas have been chosen because they are already offering quite large programmes, including the opportunity for an EPQ in some cases, and have a tight tutoring system, which would lend itself to the SFBac.

3. During the discussion that followed, only one major issue was raised in relation to the SFBac. Staff were concerned about the amount of paperwork that it would generate in terms of evidence for the award.

4. The majority of the discussion was highly positive, with staff suggesting that the SFBac would support or even legitimate developments that they were already wanting to introduce, as well as recognizing the rich programmes already on offer to students and the extra activities in which many students are already participating. New developments included raising the profile of enrichment and getting more students involved, extending the uptake of the EPQ and changes to the tutorial system. They felt that it would also enhance the dialogue between tutor and student and make it more of a coaching/supervisory role.

5. Staff were keen that all students should be offered an entitlement to the SFBac, but that it would be for the students themselves to claim that they had fulfilled the criteria for the award via a viva system. While tutors would be there to support students in claiming the award and would engage in regular monitoring of progress towards its completion, the onus would be on the students to gather light-touch evidence for the SFBac claiming process. The College already has interviews for students moving from the first to the second year of the BTEC National in some vocational areas so this could be seen as an extension to this existing development.

6. A number of other interesting suggestions arose during the course of the meeting:

- a. using Year 13 EPQ students to act as ambassadors for the EPQ among Year 12 students and getting recognition for this via the SFBac;
- b. the idea of vivas for students claiming their SFBac with panels comprising representatives from other colleges, HE institutions and employers;
- c. working closely with other colleges in the area around the development of the SFBac and its quality assurance systems;
- d. having a broad set of College criteria for the SFBac, but allowing these to be tailored to specific developments in different curriculum areas (e.g. community service in the BTEC IT);
- e. the need to develop the tutoring system to underpin the SFBac, while still ensuring that it met the purposes of different programme areas.
- f. linking the SFBac to College targets for engagement and enrichment;
- g. reinvigorating Level 2 programmes to include work placements, work skills and sporting activities and seeing them more as a progression package to Level 3. It was suggested that a meeting with Longley Park might well be fruitful in this area.
- h. Considering retrospective accreditation for the Year 13s in 2010/11.

D. Student perspectives

1. We met with five BTEC National Travel and Tourism Year 12 students and one Year 13. The students did not know anything about the SFBac so the discussion began with an explanation of the award and what it would mean for students.

2. The students were very positive. They thought young people would want to do it because it would give them '*a better chance for university or employment*'. However, a couple of them wanted to know exactly what it would involve them in doing because they felt that they were already working very hard with all their coursework and could not envisage when they would have

the time to do extra. One commented, *'There's not much time to express yourself and have fun when the programme is so busy'*.

3. For this reason, students were keen that activities and experiences that took place outside the college (e.g. part-time work, caring, voluntary work, sport) should also be counted. They thought it was important for the College to offer the award, but that it should be voluntary. One student supported this point: *'People will be more willing to do it, because you get something from it and it's not compulsory.'* They felt that the idea of claiming the SFBac via a viva, while *'scary'*, would be more motivating than everyone being given the award because they were in an SFBac college. There was unanimous support for the idea of an SFBac Celebration Evening.

4. However, when asked whether the College should focus on offering the SFBac to the incoming Year 12s in September 2010 or should also allow the Year 13s to claim it retrospectively, they unanimously stated that they thought it should be focused on the 2010 Year 12s. The Year 13 student was particularly vociferous on this point because of the amount of coursework that had to be done in the final year.

5. Two other useful points arose from discussions with these students. First, they thought that a modern foreign language should be built into the Travel and Tourism BTEC National Diploma. This could be a positive focus of development under the banner of the SFBac. Second, they were very happy at the College. What they particularly liked was its adult atmosphere – the fact that it was different from school – and that it was relaxed but purposeful in relation to study. It was contrasted favourably with another local college, which was seen as more *'schooly'* and overly obsessed with examination grades. It will be important to reflect the positive aspects of this ethos in the College's approach to the SFBac.

E. Conclusions and suggestions for development

1. The College is attracted to a curriculum and student learning focus for the SFBac because it sees it as helping to formalize and recognize the wider curriculum on offer and to stimulate student engagement with this curriculum and wider skill development. There is also support for the idea of the SFBac providing a framework for a number of key developments in particular programme areas and to extend new initiatives such as the EPQ.

2. There appears to be strong support from staff and students for the pilot approach described above because of a shared vision of fostering more rounded learners and improving student capacities to progress more effectively to higher education and adult and working life.

3. The College has a strong base on which to launch the SFBac pilot because of recent curriculum developments in a number of vocational areas, the implementation of EPQ and a strong tutorial system.

4. Throughout discussions college staff and students strongly supported the idea of the SFBac being an entitlement but that students have the opportunity to achieve it, via a process of claiming. This projects the award as something that is voluntary and earned and that focuses on dialogue and justification rather than paperwork and ticking boxes.

5. Discussions confirmed the current staged approach to the pilot with implementation being focused on Year 12 groups in both vocational and general areas at Level 3 in 2010/11 and the inclusion of Level 2 in 2011/12. We suggest, however, that careful consideration is given to the retrospective award of the SFBac for current Year 12 students. While supporting the concept of

the SFBac some current Year 12s may be reluctant to become involved at this stage because of the prospects of high workloads in Year 13.

6. We would like to support the areas of good practice and development suggested by tutors and college managers (see C6 a-h).

7. We think that a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the SFBac will involve making clear distinctions between the aims of the Level 2 and Level 3 awards and the way they are presented – the first focusing primarily on progression and developing the habits for success at the next level or in the workplace; the second emphasizing breadth, the ability to work independently and to make a contribution to the wider community.

8. Finally, we would suggest as we have done in all our visits actively involving students in the development of the SFBac design, the promotion of the award and its further development. They will be your strongest ambassadors.

Longley Park Sixth Form College, Sheffield

10 May 2010

A. Background

1. Longley Park Sixth Form College is very focused on widening participation, having a total of 1350 students at various levels (L1 – 58, L2 – 240, L3 -1000) and of these about 200 do not have Maths/English at Level 2. Many students are considered to be on the borders of Level 3 and over 500 students are taking Level 2 Maths/English as part of their Level 3 study programme. At advanced level, college provision is split roughly 50/50 between A Level and BTEC National Diploma, with the direction of development being with the latter. However, a total of 40 subjects are still on offer at A Level. There is a small amount of Diploma collaboration, although none of the partner schools are engaged with the Diplomas. There is a shared perception that Diplomas serve the upper end of the student cohort at Level 2.

2. The College serves several deprived estates and has a mixed ethnic intake, including many recent arrivals to the UK. Longley Park was established six years ago to serve seven partner schools (five of them currently National Challenge schools) and operates a relatively open access policy with regards to entry grades. Surrounding post-16 providers, on the other hand, and including Sheffield City College, have higher entry requirements in terms of the number and grades of GCSEs required. They are also inclined not to accept the tariff equivalent of Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. treating a BTEC First as one GCSE as opposed to four).

B. Motives for considering the SFBac (SMT)

Members of SMT articulated a number of reasons for engaging with the SFBac pilot, all of which are closely related to the college context, its mission and its students.

1. *Level 2 progression* - they stressed the importance of piloting the SFBac at Level 2. It is envisaged that students would opt in, with about 10 per cent of the cohorts at Level 2 and 3 engaging initially (25 at Level 2 and 60 at Level 3) in 2011/12.

2. The application of the SFBac Framework at Level 2 would mean the College offering in addition to their main qualification, other awards such as Wider Key Skills and programmes such as student ambassadors, peer mentoring and local enterprise activities.

3. The SFBac at Level 2 would aim to:

- Encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own learning.
- Promote progression-related skills such as independent learning and good study habits that are associated with Merit and Distinction grades in vocational Level 2 awards.
- Enrich the range of activities currently on offer and push this agenda for a wider range of students.
- Keep students focused and busy - many stay in the College for long periods because it provides a safe and sociable environment.
- Recognize the extra activity students undertake in relation to outside life (family caring, enterprise, community volunteering etc).
- Encourage achievement beyond a pass grade (the minimum required for progression) and in doing so promote the learning that underpins successful progression to higher courses or to employment.
- Providing further focus for the current tutorial programme (there are about 20 students to a progress tutor group and the programme comprises group tutorials and regular one-to-one

meetings). The SFBac could provide the basis for a coaching model and a tutorial system that supports the process of working towards the Framework.

2. *Broadening horizons at Level 3* – the SFBac could also be used to overcome the student reticence about wider activities. Many students at Level 3 either lack the confidence for wider engagement or are occupied with literacy/numeracy programmes to strengthen their basic skills.
3. *Badging the ethos and values of the College* – Longley Park does not have a tradition of compulsory enrichment in the same way as other colleges. Instead, it takes a more civic and social justice perspective emphasizing community leadership and commitment. The College has its own award ceremonies and a student council and sees the SFBac as providing a more explicit value statement of activities that are currently recognised by the institution.
4. *More rounded, confident and outward-going learners* – in broad terms, the College is seeking to promote a more rounded, confident and outward-going learner who not only succeeds in her/his studies, but also makes a wider contribution to her/his community and society at large.
5. *The next stage of development for the College* – the SFBac builds on and extends the existing institutional mission - diversity, one-to-one support and stretch.

C. College managers' views

1. We met with six members of staff with curriculum management responsibilities. All had been given a briefing about the SFBac, but they had different degrees of awareness about it. The meeting thus provided an opportunity for staff to ask questions about the initiative, as well as for us to gather information about the College's approach.
2. The main issue that arose was around the currency and recognition of the SFBac; whether it was eventually intended to be accredited by an awarding body, whether it would gain UCAS points and how many colleges would take part in the initiative. It was suggested that unless it had this kind of currency and gained some kind of national recognition, it might be difficult to sell its significance to students.
3. Having discussed at some length the advantages and disadvantages of both curriculum frameworks and qualifications and indicating that the SFBac would remain the former rather than the latter, staff could see many of the benefits of the curriculum framework approach. They liked the idea that the SFBac could provide a broad template to recognize all aspects of a learner's programme without the necessary restrictions that would be imposed by a qualification. In particular, they were keen to ensure that the SFBac was used to serve the specific needs of the College and that it would not involve large amounts of paperwork and accountability. At the same time, they stressed the importance of a rigorous validation process, the imprimatur of the SFCF and the need for this organization to make universities and employers aware of the SFBac initiative.
4. Staff could see that the SFBac at Level 2 could be used to support their efforts to encourage students to develop the skills for progression and that the Level 3 award could be used to promote both the HE-related skills within the EPQ and to reward students who are taking a more outward-looking approach to their studies and wider life. In this sense, the award at both levels fits well with the ethos of the College. Moreover, they felt that the SFBac had the potential to promote the skills, qualifications, independent learners and well-rounded individuals that employers and universities claim they want.
5. All staff felt that it would be important to use students actively in the development of the SFBac. They also agreed that if it were to have value with students, it would need to be something that

was seen as for those who made the extra effort. While the College would make it possible for all students to have opportunities to meet the requirements of the SFBac at Levels 2 and 3, it would be for students to claim they had met the criteria for the award.

6. It was suggested that it might be a good idea for student representatives from the pilot colleges, as well as staff, to meet together to discuss the initiative, their experiences and the further development of the SFBac. This could be done virtually or face-to-face and might best be organized on a regional basis, although it was recognized that there are considerable differences between the student intakes to the 11 colleges so selecting appropriate partners to work with might not always be possible on a regional basis.

D. Steps towards the SFBac

1. The College anticipates piloting the SFBac in September 2011. During 2010/11 it will be starting the Level 3 EPQ with a focus on application to universities that will provide valuable experience in what might be an important future vehicle for the SFBac.

2. The College recognizes the importance of having a distinctive approach to Level 2 and Level 3, with the former being more internally focused and with an emphasis on gaining greater learning independence and the Level 3 being more outward focused.

3. An important next step will be discussions with the wider staff to clarify the College's own interpretation of SFBac, who will be involved in its development, which students will be eligible, how it will be awarded or claimed and the implementation timescales.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

1. The College has a clear rationale for introducing the SFBac, staff appear keen to make it work, the tutoring system provides a useful underpinning and there is a clear plan for its introduction and development.

2. A common theme that has arisen throughout the pilot visits is the relationship between 'exchange value' and 'use value' in the SFBac. Following lengthy discussions, there has been a general recognition that the most fruitful immediate path of development for the SFBac will be to emphasise and develop its 'use value' – the way in which it can be used to broaden student horizons and develop skills and habits for progression. The way in which Longley Park is envisages developing the SFBac appears to support this interpretation.

3. We suggest that the College might consider the following actions, all of which have arisen in one form or another from discussions during the visit:

a. Promoting the SFBac as a way of demonstrating and celebrating the College's concern with progression, raising aspirations and supporting higher achievement.

b. Involving students in the development of the SFBac design, the promotion of the award and its further development.

c. Disseminating information about the award to governors and other local stakeholders (e.g. HEIs and employers) to ensure that they are aware of the SFBac and its potential use value and using events such as EPQ exhibitions or SFBac award ceremonies to demonstrate its scope and potential.

- d. Making a clear distinction between the way that the Level 2 and Level 3 awards are presented – the first focusing primarily on progression and developing the habits for success at the next level or in the workplace (e.g. by suggesting that to gain an award students would need 95% attendance and a Merit or Distinction grade at Level 2); the second emphasizing breadth, the ability to work independently and to make a contribution to the wider community.
- e. Linking the development of the SFBac at Level 3 to the introduction and promotion of the EPQ and considering retrospective awarding of the SFBac to those students taking an EPQ next year or to those undertaking exceptional community- or college-related voluntary activities.
- f. Using the tutoring system as a way of coaching learners through the SFBac award and as a process for setting initial goals, monitoring the development of progression skills and wider engagement and preparing the case for claiming the award.

NEWHAM SIXTH FORM COLLEGE (NEWVIC)

3 March 2010

A. Background

1. Newham Sixth Form College (NewVIC) is a large, diverse inner city college with over 2,600 full-time students studying A-level, advanced vocational, intermediate and foundation programmes. The college has the highest measure of deprivation of any sixth form college in England with 98% of students from high widening participation postcodes and 76% receiving Educational Maintenance Awards. Most of the students come from secondary schools in Newham where GCSE achievement in Year 11, although improving, is still below the national average. 93% come from ethnic minority backgrounds, 76% speak a language other than English at home.
2. NEWVIC has already offered a college diploma at different levels - bronze, silver and gold – which recognizes both achievement and enrichment activities, but it is not running this year in anticipation of the introduction of the SFBac. It also has a number of external sponsors for its student achievement awards.
3. The College welcomes the SFBac initiative because it believes that it will be simpler to operate, easier to achieve and has an extra focus on skills. It is envisaged that current NEWVIC Achievement awards and commendations will run alongside the SFBac (e.g. the award of the SFBac with commendations).
4. The SFBac pilot programme will be launched with the current Level 3s and awards will be made in the summer of 2011. The Level 2 cohort will start in September 2010. More discussion has to take place regarding the Level 1 cohort, because their curriculum has recently been revised.

B. Reasons for engaging with the SFBac pilot

Members of the senior management team talked about several reasons for participating in the Pilot:

1. NEWVIC wants to offer the SFBac because it fits in with its core values and builds on existing systems of rewarding its students for extra activity. Moreover, the College has a new global citizens agenda and has formed a new team responsible for enrichment and complementary programmes (e.g. creative arts, sports, volunteering programmes, student union). The programme is voluntary but heavily recommended.
2. The college has a particular demographic with a particular focus on academic achievement in order to enter the professions. Staff feel there is a need to broaden student horizons and to develop their wider capacities. Furthermore, there is a perception that adding value to student programmes will help them to cope with a recessionary environment and a more competitive application process for university.
3. With regards to staff, the SFBac could help them motivate students to take greater responsibility, to develop themselves personally and to take part in college life. Staff might also feel that they are part of something wider than the homegrown college diploma.
4. The College itself will benefit because the SFBac is very marketable, with an ability to attract new students and to help with further partnership development in the locality.
5. In terms of the Sector, the award also builds on a range of activities already being undertaken by sixth form colleges through a funded entitlement. However, institutions can see the SFBac as a framework that hangs it altogether. Furthermore, the SFBac should give status to the Sector and help it build a distinctive image with its partners.

C. Strengths and weaknesses of the current design

1. NEWVIC does not see significant weakness in the components of the Framework. However, the breadth element remains a little hazy and what might fit into skills or values remains somewhat unclear.

2. Materials currently look rather 'wordy', but the College will develop its own materials to promote the SFBac. It may add an attendance requirement that they had in the College Diploma.
3. One concern is that the SFBac may not be particularly aspirational for high achievers, hence the complementary role of College achievement awards and commendations.

D. Major issues facing the pilot

1. Tracking and recording will be an important issue. Until the new VLE comes in with its scanning system, the first cohort will have to be tracked through a paper-based system. In addition, because NEWVIC want to offer the first Bacs in 2011, there will be an issue of how existing students will be able to achieve all its requirements. In response, the College will be distributing booklets to students over the next two months and a major tracking/recording and tutoring exercise will take place in June/July to review student activity in the first year. The SFBac will be promoted through next year's tutorial programmes and students will be encouraged to take up extra enrichment activities.

Discussions with a selection of staff suggested the following issues:

2. There could be some confusion moving from the College Diploma to the SFBac. Moreover, staff reported some negative attitudes towards the College Diploma and there is an argument that the SFBac has to be different. In particular, it has to be recognised that NEWVIC is part of a bigger national sector scheme.
3. How can the SFBac be marketed to Level 2 students on vocational programmes and those who may be struggling with their work? Presently, there is a great deal of emphasis on Level 3 students and applying to university. With regards to Level 2, ideas included a focus on work experience and placements and providing them with interesting and different types of activities other than classroom work.
4. The College needs to talk more about the ethos of the Bac, how it can enhance learning and not just about recognizing existing activities through a tracking and recording process.

E. Students' views and ideas

1. We met with 7 students (3 BTEC National and 4 AS) two of whom were hoping to go on to study medicine. The students had been given a short briefing about the SFBac before they came to talk with us.

2. Their understanding of the SFBac was that it recognises extra-curricular activities and that they would be given points at the end of the year to help them get into HE/work. They thought that it was a very good idea to do more activities and to have them recognized in this way. They saw it as possibly providing an incentive ('bribing') to go the extra distance. There was here almost a hint that they also thought there should be some kind of financial reward (the power of the EMA and its affects on attendance was mentioned for example), although this was not explicitly said. They felt that some people were already doing these things anyway and that this would be a way of recognizing their effort. In addition, for those who were not it might prove a way of getting them to start doing things. Finally, they saw it as a way for 'people to develop their personalities'.

3. However, they also had a number of concerns. They felt that it was important to make the demands of the SFBac realistic because some students can have 'family issues'. They also mentioned a couple of practical problems they perceived from the information they had had – the award may be too hard for some (they had not realized that it would be available at different levels) and that it would be 'difficult to control who is doing the biz' and how student achievements would be tracked (they were not aware of the systems for this). They were concerned that the SFBac had been introduced at this point in the year – they thought it should have been started earlier to motivate more people to take part in wider activities – and that they might not get credit for what they had already done (again they were reassured on this point). They were worried that some people might feel left out. In addition they wondered whether universities recognized the SFBac, although they were quite persuaded by the idea that it would help with their CVs and UCAS forms.

4. Interestingly, they raised the same issue that had also been exercising staff - what to do about those students who don't want to take on the additional activities that might form part of their SFBac. We asked them for their suggested solutions to this and they gave a range of really fascinating and useful ideas:

- It is vital to ensure students have the full information about the award and that this is explained to them clearly;
- There could be a questionnaire for students which could be used to raise awareness, but also to ask for ideas about how the SFBac might be implemented and what activities students might value;
- There could be student 'seminars' (their word) to discuss important issues and to involve more students;
- There could be student focus groups, which could discuss the SFBac and feed back to staff;
- Doing more and different activities might actually help with family issues;
- The College should put on more activities that students are interested in and be aware that some people have P/T jobs;
- Could the College run seminars to advise on improving certain skills?;
- Could the College ensure that there are activities that are part of the course and add to it but are also fun;
- Could there be more student-suggested and student-run club sessions? – these are more likely to attract students;
- Making the SFBac more relevant for those going into work not just for those going into HE;
- It is important for those who are doing all sciences for medicine to have arts and humanities activities (non accredited) that they can take part in – currently this is not possible and that has been disappointing.

F. Conclusions and suggestions

1. It will be important the NEWVIC engages in a dialogue with other pilot colleges through the project. It has a great deal of practical experience and advice to offer and wants to be part of a high profile national initiative.

2. Tutors are a vital force because they help knit the programme together and it will be important to have CPD activities around the SFBac to exchange ideas and good practice.

3. Although EPQ does not form an explicit part of the SFBac Framework, it is increasingly recognized as a vital strategy for carrying important dimensions of the Framework. The SFBac could also provide an additional impetus for EPQ.

4. The student discussion suggested the following key points:

- a. It is vital that the student voice is harnessed in introducing, developing and promoting the SFBac – tutors would learn a lot from listening to their messages and support for the idea and the messages about the SFBac would come best from students to students;
- b. The SFBac should be seen as a focus for stimulating more activities (many of them student-run) in the college – the message to students could be 'what can you do as part of the SFBac?'
- c. What is important about the SFBac is not just its content and the certification but the quality of the process that goes into achieving it.

5. Although the SFBac could be seen to be a follow-on from the College Diploma, it is important that its image is different and one way of doing this would be to ensure that the publicity and recording materials have a sufficiently different feel.

6. It became clear from this visit the importance of SFCF playing a strong role in promoting the SFBac to higher education, employers and other agencies national, regional and local in order to support the pilot colleges.

PORTSMOUTH COLLEGE

1 February 2010

A. BACKGROUND

- 950 FT students – building up numbers in recent years and in a competitive environment with middle class parents tending to look to out-of-city institutions.
- Tertiary relationship with surrounding 11-16 schools.
- Beacon award for partnership working with the schools, but also good working relationship with Highbury GFE college. Division of labour – H. does vocational work and P. more general education.
- Improving examination results and strong on VA.
- 5 A*-C admissions requirement for L3, but all of student applicants do not have 5 A*-C grades. Strong focus on Level 2 with some work at Level 1 and Entry.
- Small, urban inclusive and ethnically diverse
- Aim to put college at the heart of the city (geographically remote – complex) and to build partnership work. LSC funding crisis denied new build plans but there are plans to have a number of community facilities on site. New physical developments – GOALS and horticulture will help with enrichment activities
- Competition– Havant Sixth Form College (white middle class) and South Downs College (top college)
- Principal chairs schools trust and family of six colleges
- Undertakes collaborative work with Coastal 6.
- City – lack of aspiration in the City because of labour market history (e.g. docks).
- Sarah McCarthy Fry been a good MP and friend to the College.

B. Why have you decided to pilot the SF Bac?

SMT

- Interested in SFBac from an inclusive perspective.
- Some local institutions have IB route and we want our version.
- Driver for curriculum change and encourages students into broader programmes – we hope it will also motivate them to achieve more.
- Give recognition to programmes above the norm
- Bac could have marketing potential

C. What do you know about the SF Bac pilot (Curriculum Directors)?

(Had been given one session on the SF Bac about a week before our visit and at the same time as they had been warned about financial stringency in the future).

- A bit – understand it's about breadth and to make sense for students doing new things.
- However, it is work for us in terms of evidence gathering because we will have to record breadth. Concerned how the evidence will be collated.
- On vocational courses, students are achieving all of this - issue, therefore, of duplication. All students do tailored courses and concern as to whether Bac will involve greater pressure on these students.

D. What benefits do you think the pilot will deliver to:

a. Students

- To incentivise additionality.

- Grade inflation in HE and showing the extra - talked to local universities already and they are on board. Need to help students to be able to cope with different types of HE. Students in the mid-range will come under pressure on HE recruitment.
- Employers emphasizing skills and not just getting the grades – employability skills very important in longer term.
- Important that it's a kitemark rather than a qualification – so recognizing what we do rather than students doing an entirely new qualification
- Universities will be looking at wider achievements.
- Employability skills.
- Contribution to local community – recognized by Ofsted.
- In theory has potential to give credit for what they do and to give it more kudos to this.
- This might add a bit for universities and employers.
- Give students more life skills and will be helpful for employment.
- Breadth is good, particularly for those who are not decided.
- College needs to emphasise these extra things more (DoE), work experience, EPQ and to promote these activities and put in the structures to support them.

b. Staff

- Help with staff CVs because it will go beyond the pilot.
- CPD and interesting work with other partnerships.
- Need good VLE to develop across those working on the pilot and locally.
- Morally behind it, better to develop students as a whole.
- If students are motivated then all will benefit.

c. The college

- Good framework for colleges and schools across the City - even under Tory rule – dynamic group institutions delivering a better curriculum.
- Collaborative competition with other schools – keeping kids on the island.
- Collaboration in relation to enrichment, sports and world challenge, which would enhance the curriculum of all partners.
- Pan college statement and development.
- Financial pressures will make collaboration happen more quickly.
- Reputation and kudos.
- Quality kitemark that will attract future applicants, possibly more high achievers.

d. The Sixth Form College Sector

- Further encourage collaboration, federation thinking across the piece.
- SFCs perceived not to be interested in employability and community.
- responsiveness and this initiative would help to reverse this view.
- Rewarding institutions for work they are already doing on motivating students.
- Enhances reputation of sixth form colleges.
- Bring sixth form colleges closer together.

4. What do you consider to be the main strengths and weaknesses of the current design?

- IB is restrictive, elitist and unaffordable. This is a flexible template and involving professionals in the design and delivery – something they have not had for some time.
- Strengths – giving enrichment the recognition it needs.
- Picks up enrichment activities outside college.
- Links with the community – getting students to engage and valuing this.
- Overlaps into current subjects and brings them together.

- Encourage breadth and value to everything the students are doing.
- All depends on how onerous it becomes.
- Some students will find different parts difficult to achieve.
- Quite a big commitment – often student enthusiasm wanes – the importance of keeping it fresh.
- Concern about the need to focus on HE grades because of possible reduction in places and greater competition – will this detract?
- Need for university recognition.

5. What is your curriculum approach to the pilot?

- Will pilot across the three Levels in Sep 2010 but will choose pragmatically which courses and which students – likely to be voluntary for students.
- Long-term vision is to make it an entitlement for all students and to have it as a curriculum framework across 2/3 colleges as well as a university.

6. How far have you progressed in planning and implementing the pilot?

- Meeting with all staff and Curriculum Directors.
- Not disseminated to students as yet – too late for prospectus for next year – will have to focus on it in admissions and induction processes.
- Staff - Just heard about it on Tues last week so can't really comment

7. What kind of change will you need to make in your area to support the introduction of the SF Bac? (*Curriculum Deputies only*)

- Would encourage students to engage with important areas.
- Difficult to respond at this stage.
- Some areas will have to manufacture links with community.
- Need something that naturally evolves out of A Levels.
- Sports and some vocational areas will find it easier because of the practical requirements and current practices – but logistical challenges - will not have to change much (e.g. DoE) and the SFBac will bring it all together.
- Concerns about evidencing and how it all fits together - existing practice in DoE is the use of mentors.
- Portfolio building can be rewarding but it does need time and investment.
- Recording is an important issue.
- Designated time is built into some areas for this kind of work and this would have to be provided for the implementation of the SFBac.
- Tutors could play an important role, but there is an issue of time demands.

8. What are the major issues you are facing in the pilot?

- New initiative fatigue for the Curriculum Deputies – thinking about transactions cost, portfolios and extra work.
- Concern that people will ask - what difference will this make?
- SLT has not done selling job as yet.
- It's still early days.
- Time.
- It will be easier to introduce in some curriculum areas than other.
- Concern about what the added value would be for some areas – e.g. Diplomas and vocational qualifications.

- Logistics and how it will be managed.
- There appears to be a big focus on the community but this is not in our control – the skills aspect of it feels more familiar.
- College does not have work placement/community learning co-ordinator – the EBP works particularly with schools but does not give us so much help.
- The importance of being flexible about how enrichment takes place (e.g. bringing in artists in residence not necessarily having to go out into the community).
- At a time of financial cuts will the resources be there. ‘We have a negative pot’.
- Issue of how students will view it – will there be employer and HE support?
- Would like to see a real model in order to be able to explain it to the students very concretely.
- Monitoring and tracking student achievement (remembering key skills!) and emphasis on evidence – will this lead to a lot of bureaucracy?
- University attitude is crucial – will the focus on this let students grades slip.
- It’s a great philosophy – kitemark that rewards and giving credibility to external activities.

Student perspectives

- If you are doing five subjects in the first year – it might just be too much to take on anything else.
- How much time would it take.
- Breadth subtracts from depth – it could distract.
- Concern about pushing people into things they don’t want to do (e.g. voluntary work).
- People might not take it too seriously – it might be those who take their studies seriously and people who want a higher qualification who go for this but others who really need to would not. Quite a few might not want to do it.
- It will have to be a choice thing – at least in the beginning.
- Some people who like practical work and don’t show up well in their qualifications might go for this.
- Is it about spoon-feeding to do voluntary work? –could take away the independence and initiative associated with voluntary work and universities might not be able to discriminate between candidates.
- Support from one student for a very open and flexible model of the SF Bac and from the other two for major vehicles for achieving it (e.g. DoE, work experience, EPQ).

9. What are your next steps (SMT only)?

- More work to be done with Curriculum Deputies.
- Look at the applications to the college and the client group we are getting to see which groups might be best to target for the pilot.
- Roll-out model internally in college, then other post-16 providers and with 14-19 across the City more generally.

10. What support do you need?

Students

- Might need more support within your A Levels and more one-to-one to piece the SFBac together and to ensure that you’re coping. You will need more customized support with a different kind of one-to-one. You’d need specific teachers for citizenship and this kind of tutor/mentor work – it does not suit everyone.

11. Discussion and commentary

1. All those interviewed could see a positive role for the SFBac as a way of broadening the curriculum and accrediting wider learning activities which would be valued by employers and HE providers.

2. However, there were different perspectives on the initiative from those viewing it from different levels.

- The Principal and SMT took a strategic view, seeing the SFBac as a way of both improving the curriculum offer in the college and engaging with a range of local and regional partners around a broad and potentially valuable curriculum framework.
- Curriculum Deputies, while positive about the idea of valuing breadth, were more aware of the constraints of their programme areas. Some questioned what the value added of the SFBac would be (mainly vocational programmes) while others were concerned that the SFBac might detract from gaining high grades in A Levels in an increasingly competitive HE market. All were very aware of practical issues around evidencing and recording. The idea of taking this on as another initiative in a time of financial constraint was something that worried them. Currently they do not see this as something that brings together other initiatives they are involved in, although it could be seen in this way.
- The students we talked to were positive about the SFBac in principle, but had concerns about how much time it would take up, whether it would detract from their studies and whether it would be valued by end users.

3. The approach that Portsmouth College is taking to the SFBac pilot is very much an inclusive one – it wants to introduce it at Levels 1, 2 and 3 and to go with programmes that are willing but envisages it as an entitlement in the longer run. The SFBac + does not appear to be relevant to this college at this point.

4. Three inter-related issues appeared to stand out:

a. Where does the SFBac lie on the continuum between a qualification and a loose curriculum framework?

The looser the framework, the more acceptable the SFBac might be to a range of institutions that have different curriculum approaches. It also makes it potentially possible to be more innovative at the grassroots level because its final shape can be determined by teachers and curriculum designers within the college. However, in this form, the downside is that there is a lack of clarity about what the SFBac is, how it adds value and how it will be seen by outsiders. The nearer it is to a qualification the more clarification there is about its parameters and value, but the more restrictive and inflexible it becomes as a curriculum framework.

To what extent should the SFBac rely on 'strong vehicles' (e.g. Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Work Experience) and to what extent should it be a record of the curriculum experiences that the student has within and outside the college?

There seemed to be quite a bit of support for the former position because having strong vehicles gives a clearer sense of character of the SFBac and how it might be delivered. Students saw the open model as 'more appealing' but quickly understood the solidity of the strong vehicles model

and how it might bring about improved performance. EPQ has been given a broadly positive welcome and it also brings in funding. Furthermore, the 'strong vehicles' approach, particularly using EPQ and any attendant research/skills based courses, could have both 'use' and 'exchange value' with a positive effect on students' main subjects.

b. These were accompanied by practical issues related to the implementation of the pilot and the amount of support to be given to staff and students.

Ways will have to be found to minimize recording bureaucracy and to find time and resources for implementation. Again, the type of model to be implemented might affect this. The ability to gain strong support for the SFBac pilot will also be linked to how far its introduction positively affects different dimensions of the curriculum (e.g. tutoring and mentoring), delivering support to areas such as work experience and making sense of a set of related experiences and initiatives. The SFBac would thus be associated with making new and additional demands **and** delivering higher levels of support for students.

c. A college pilot will, nevertheless, have to recognize diversity and be inclusive

If the pilot is to operate at different levels with different groups of students, it will have to be built around their needs. The discussion above is very much rooted in Level 3 and will need to be 'translated' for Levels 1 and 2. However, it is undoubtedly the case that the SFBac pilot will ultimately be judged at Level 3.

Totton College

2 February 2010

A. Background

Having meetings with minister – Ian Wright – looking to trim the size of student programmes 16-18. Colleges who have programmes beyond the average will have a cut. Want to have a proper discussion about what you want rather than let accountants and finances determine the curriculum. Talked about the SFBac at the DCSF – 14-19 Programme Board (PM delivery unit, awarding bodies, AoC, SFCF, DCSF officials). Risk assessment of the reform programme. Concern about the new A2 – particularly A* and new types of questions. SF saw decline in 2009 AS results so a real concern about A2. Commissioned a study of all results which came out in November. Newness that caught many of the SFCs out – teachers are the key to getting students through. The more inclusive you are the more likely you are to get lower results. Concerns about how HEIs will use the A*. LSIS support programme was not taken up in this area.

Designated SFC but the least like 93 SFCs – two brands – SFC and Skills brand. Also a lot of adult work (20% hit this year). (Portsmouth in the same position). 65% 16-18s. This will change the balance and will become more SFC brand. At incorporation the smallest SFC but have grown and diversified. 40% L3 – very inclusive. 1350 FTEs and turnover of £14m. Twice as big as at incorporation. Academic pathway, Applied (BTECs) vocational (NVQs) and Foundation Pathway (substantial) including E2E and COVE for SEN. Don't currently deliver any Dips. Have the go-ahead to deliver the SHED and will have the possibility of others but schools delivering for the first time this year in Year 10. Considerable resistance from schools. Tertiary system in Hampshire so like a Tertiary College – not big competition from SFs – political consensus about that. Successful competitor – Brockenhurst Tertiary College. Draw most of students – West Soton, Totton, Waterside, Forest and increasingly Wiltshire – no SF colleges in Wiltshire.

Strong emphasis on SF environment – SFC contracts, national pay bargaining, no industrial action since incorporation, strong emphasis on teacher manager (not managers). Collegiate ethos – try to blur issues about managers and the rest. Strong bond between support staff and teaching staff. Inclusion as the 'golden thread' – keep entry barriers down. Not like selective SFCs. Great emphasis on pastoral care including for strongly vocational programmes.

Unusual aspects of the offer – unlike traditional SFC. Playing our part in the NEETs strategy via our E2E programme and come into FE. In a sense we see this programme as a preparation for FE. Important as part of **RPA**. – not all are ready for FE programmes. Finding more pathways to ensure more seamless and personalized progression into FE. Also deliver education to young people in criminal justice system – West London (15) and W. Hampshire (20) purpose built centre – funding comes via NHS Trusts to LSC. Skills brand – Apprenticeship contract for young people and adults. T2G and adult programmes too and small HE offer in HND and HNC – direct contract with HEFCE. Deliver FDs for University of Southampton.

Challenge of cuts in provision, particularly in adults (25%) reductions and using the Bac model to defend and promote good practice.

B. Why have you decided to pilot the SF Bac?

Very interested in this Project. Want to support the Forum's initiative. Important to have a good spread of institutions in the Project. Curious as to how it will work. C2000 has come and gone and Tomlinson not brought in. Thus need for a curriculum experience that is more than a sum of

courses. We need to be pragmatic but we can work with the model and still work within the funding package.

All students should be entitled to the best that our education system can offer them. The range and quality of the experience should be full and coherent. Struggled for some time to deliver that in a meaningful way. Currently, we have no overall articulation of this curriculum approach and the SF Bac offers that. Simply a course driven offer is inadequate. Understand the games we have to play but keep going back to what we would really like for young people and what we experienced of education. Want to give students this.

There is an opportunity to focus on L3 students, more difficult with L2 because of the diversity but Foundation Learning is trying to do this. We have decided, therefore, to focus on the STEM agenda and to target science at L3 and to take the opportunity to pilot the entitlement model with this group.

Always had the idea of entitlement to curriculum offer but this can become a bit disparate or dislocated. We presently use an 'Academies' approach in three curriculum areas (sports, psychology, performing arts). These areas bid to the college to deliver additionality (for example, psychology academy – links with OU, psychology days). Academies last for 3 years and the incentives include more students, resources and staffing.

The Psychology Academy was extremely successful in encouraging learners to learn, big commitment for learners as well as teachers and more popular but not necessarily increasing results. Part of a strategy for getting more young people into HE. Better prepared for university. Other subjects do this kind of activity but not in the same way.

Science is not yet an Academy and it is a real challenge as a curriculum area.

Therefore we have decided to pilot in one area and one level, but we are eventually committed to an all-embracing framework for all full-time 16-18s at all levels – Academic, Applied and Foundation Learning. SFBac could eventually replace the Academies. Important in terms of ensuring that young people are not overly instrumental – the student could see this as something they aspire to.

C. Different perspectives on the pilot

We want something that is tangible and defined and is easy to see. We are going with something that is difficult for us to achieve. If we can secure the SFBac at L3 and Science then move on to the rest of L3.

Head of Science is expected to lead, but have not necessarily a student-led demand for this. We would like them to articulate a passion for science but we have to provide them with a basis for this.

There has been significant growth in A Level science offer. We have qualified young people but they haven't always made successful transition to advanced level science. Generally poor results in science, particularly in AS and in 2009, both AS and A2 were poor. There have been several initiatives - bridging courses and T & L initiatives. Teaching looks broadly OK and there is a perception that the science department is quite strong. Some of the teachers just want to focus on improving the AS results. However, we think the opposite and want to make the whole area more of a science experience.

Need to look at the science offer, including enrichment and enhancement, to engage with learners about what it means to study science at Totton College. Problem of C.2000 approach, focusing on the specifications and possibly making it dull. Issue of who is doing sciences and who consider themselves as future scientists and to develop their aspirations.

We are not sure whether we should focus on all those taking science or just those taking two sciences or more.

Head of Science

Broad spectrum of courses for a small department – GCSE, BTECs, A Levels. The bread and butter is 16-19 A Level work. We need to create a more coherent programme for science students and to encourage people to do more than one science. We have 150 students doing AS science, more than half doing biology (96 doing AS in one year with 40 doing two or more).

Would like to produce a programme which has science as a focus of which the individual subjects are a part, rather than students treating them as separate subjects. This would give the possibility of transfer of skills and knowledge between the science subjects and increase progression to university. We think it is desirable to focus the SFBac pilot on students taking two or more science subjects at Level 3, and then spread it from there. Eventually, it would be good to think about a more faculty approach to subject groups (e.g. bringing science, maths and psychology together) as part of the Bac strategy.

He talked about the success of the *Institute of Engineering scheme (IoES)* which might form one of the elements of the SFBac pilot. The IoES creates links between the college, university and companies on live projects that come up with practical solutions (e.g. measuring heat emissions). Students (4/5 people per team), who were specially selected for the scheme via a rigorous interview process, have been at University of Southampton on the project and generated an industrial standard final report which is interrogated by senior engineers. The report can be used as a focus for HE interviews.

Students participating in the Institute of Engineering Scheme

We talked to three students who were participating in the project and spoke to us about their experience.

- You have a lot of planning as a group. (Team work and project management)
- Have to go to university and work with staff there (Progression to HE)
- Have to design and build particular instruments rather than just theory (application of theory)
- You are given a project, you cannot select it (it's like a real work context)
- Get trips to companies who make this equipment and get to know how they use it. (Careers Guidance)
- It helps with time management - we had this on a Wed afternoon so it was not taking up lesson time. Some students prioritized A Level work first and felt that the time management skills would help with their study in order to fit everything in.

However, these students had not had the opportunity to hear about the SFBac. After a brief explanation, we discussed the possible role of the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). In response, the students talked about the problem of learning bits of knowledge inside individual A Levels which they were not convinced they were ever going to use. They thought that a project that encouraged them to think about connections between their A Level subject would be a better preparation for university study. They felt the EPQ would allow them to develop skills to take

forward to university (e.g. more independent learning, researching for yourself and project management). However, they were concerned whether the award would be recognized by universities.

Work experience co-ordinator

The college offers an extensive placement programme for students in both science and the NHS and it is possible to tailor placements to student interest. We discussed the kind of support programme for the SFBac science route, with a particular focus on tutoring/mentoring.

Presently, all students have a personal tutor who also teaches them. This is allocated one hour per week and includes both group and individual support, together with an effective on-line monitoring and reporting system.

We discussed the importance of having holistic support to pull all the elements of the SFBac together, as well as helping students to remain on course and to raise aspirations.

In terms of the community aspects of the Bac, which had not arisen in discussion up until this point, it was suggested that while a number of individual students undertake a range of activities (e.g. links to foundation department and working with students with learning difficulties), this is an area which would need development as part of the SFBac programme.

D. Discussion and commentary

There seems to be a strong rationale for the focus on a Science Bac with Level 3 learners as starting point because this is an area that the College feels it needs to focus on; the Head of Department is keen to follow the Academy example but in a different way and sees the SFBac as a possible route.

SFBac Programme

Such a programme could comprise six areas, each with its distinct function and with the overall aim of creating a coherent science identity, improved learning programmes and improved outcomes.

1. *Qualification courses* with the aim of encouraging students to take more science subjects and to see subjects as part of an overall package.
2. *Maths skills enhancement* (e.g. Maths for Chemistry) and looking at Maths for Engineering.
3. *External schemes* such as the Institute of Engineering Scheme which involve HE and work experience
4. *Community engagement* (e.g. undertaking workshops in foundation department, Year 11 mentoring, primary schools and possible international work) and using the SFBac in order to make it easier to volunteer
5. *EPQ* to exercise personal choice in an area of research, develop project management skills and to undertake inter-disciplinary study
6. *Specialised tutoring support programme* to ensure that all parts of the programme fit together (e.g. specialist tutoring, organizing a whole programme, supervising the different elements including the EPQ, encouraging volunteering, recording and certificating the Bac and promoting progression).

Curriculum modeling

Towards the end of our discussions it was suggested that the SFBac pilot should offer a distinctive experience for the students early on in the programme to get it off to a good start. There is also the issue of how to use time throughout the year in different ways (e.g. June/July after the AS exams)

Professional development

There are also benefits for staff to work as a development team, to experiment with different pedagogical strategies (e.g. the Plus One experience where every two weeks one lesson is devoted to learning beyond the specification)

Next steps

The key issue now is how to take the proposal forward in relation to the team and to decide on a five-year strategy for moving beyond the pilot stage.

Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College

9 March 2010

A. Background

The College is successful and considered a first choice post-16 institution within the City having 1900 applications for 1100 places. There was a 20 per cent increase in applications last year.

WQE1 provides mostly A Level provision and entry requirements are 5 A*-C grades but, in reality, students have to be predicted to get better than this to gain entry. Average entry profiles are typical of SFCs. However, the College does favour City schools because of the Excellence in Cities Programme and students enter with lower grade profiles than those from outside the City.

There is a great deal of staff stability and many lecturers have been at the College for a long time. They are good at what they do and change is generally viewed with a fair degree of scepticism. However, provision has changed over time:

- There is an extensive enrichment programme and this is one of the reasons why students come to WQE1. Each person does an average of 1.8 courses and some undertake as many as six activities.
- The IB was introduced in 2006 and has a cohort of 55. However, the College has found it difficult to recruit to it and some students drift away back to A Levels. The future of the IB within the College is not assured in a period of funding cuts.
- About 100 students are taking the EPQ and the work produced appears impressive. The new award is popular amongst students taking it.

Diploma provision post-16 is very patchy across the City and is not being run at the College because of low numbers of applications – therefore this has not deflected attention to applied awards.

B. Motives for involvement in the pilot

The College originally became involved because of the role of the Principal in the SFCF Curriculum Committee, with a feeling of obligation to try it out. However, WQE1 runs the IB and is committed to a broad and enriched curriculum. Moreover, there is a feeling of the need to boost the cultural capital of students from Leicester and to build on the past role of General Studies, now Critical Studies and EPQ.

The SFBac very much fits with the philosophy of the College, but members of SMT are not absolutely sure what it will do for students. It could assist in recognizing their enrichment experience and reinforce thinking about the need for a broader programme of study.

With regards to staff, the SFBac framework could help to develop internal collaboration amongst staff and to assist in seeing the College experience as a 'whole'. The College has 16 departments and there is a constant need to help forge connections, to focus on learning and teaching and to promote educational matters that will embrace all students. In particular, there is a need to help teachers and students to look beyond the A Level specification.

The SFBac could have major benefits for the Sector. Despite their successes, the three SFCs in Leicester feel somewhat vulnerable, finding themselves between schools, FE colleges and now academies and possibly a Muslim sixth form in the city. Now that the Sector has become more distinct, it is important that SFCs stand up to say what they believe in educationally and strive to 'strengthen the SFC brand'

C. Issues facing the Pilot

The Principal and Vice Principal Curriculum identified a number of issues:

- Because the College already offers much of what the SFBac seeks to promote, it has to establish a clearer rationale to the Pilot if it is to be seen as useful.
- It also has to become clearer about those aspects of its provision it wishes to improve through the Framework (e.g. developments of the tutorial programme)
- Keeping recording and paperwork to a minimum – if the College is not clear about what it is doing, this aspect of the Framework will be resisted.
- It wants to continue developing the EPQ within a more restrictive funding environment and this will be important to the SFBac.

D. Student perspectives

The eight students we met were all members of the Student Executive at the College. It was clear that they already get involved in many activities and might not be typical of the student body as a whole. They did not know anything about the SF Bac so we began our discussion with them by explaining what it was. They were interested in the idea and thought it was 'good in theory' because it might 'bring in those students who are less prepared for higher education entry'. They suggested that it might be appropriate for other colleges, which might need to develop a broader student offer. It was felt that WQEI already did all of the things contained within the SFBac, although they admitted that not all students took advantage of everything that was on offer. They also liked the idea that the SFBac would accredit some of the things they were already doing, but for which they did not gain any credit.

However, they were not sure what added value the SFBac would give them above and beyond the current curriculum offer. They wanted to know where it was located in relation to other new awards, such as the Cambridge Pre-U and AQA Bac; if it would be recognized by universities; and whether it would be voluntary. In addition, one student suggested that it ought to include opportunities to encourage students to extend within subjects as well as to think of breadth in terms of doing more and different activities.

E. Staff perspectives

All the staff we met had some knowledge of what the SFBac was from reading college documentation, although they had different levels of understanding about what it was and its purposes.

The majority of those we spoke to was very positive about the initiative. The SFBac was seen as:

- acknowledging some of the skills that the students have learnt, but which they do not necessarily realize they have learnt and giving them space to reflect on these in a more formal way;
- making explicit what is currently implicit in terms of the aims, philosophy and practices of the College;
- changing student perceptions of what they are learning – at the moment they see things in terms of 'pick and mix' rather than as a whole – the SFBac will help to make things more joined up both in practice and in perception.
- being a little like an 'A Level IB' and possibly getting students to develop areas they find challenging;
- supporting the concept of a more holistic education, which is what the College is trying to inculcate in students;
- strong because it was a curriculum framework rather than a qualification;

- something that was being developed across the SFC sector via a community of practice that believed in the importance of a rounded 16-19 education;
- helping students to appreciate the wider aspects of the curriculum – accreditation is important to students;
- providing a more direct and explicit link between the enrichment and academic programmes – this was seen as good for both staff and students;
- setting a future agenda for the college and getting more cross-college programmes going;
- doing some of the things that were promised but not delivered by C2000;
- helping to identify students who are not doing as much as they could and encouraging them to take on more;
- letting the general public know how hard-working and successful SFCs are.
- providing students with the cultural capital many of them need to be successful in applying for and studying at university;
- making institutional expectations more explicit and providing space for ‘the development of personalities’ (among the students);
- supporting the perception that education is more than its individual parts and good departments – it would make the college more collegiate and encourage more cross-fertilisation.
- Helping to market the college (but it should not be used in a competitive way).

They also made the following comments/raised the following issues:

- There will need to be a way of differentiating between students;
- One of the weaknesses of the ‘loose’ SFBac model is that it has the potential to ‘lose its way’, although if it is endorsed by the SFCF that should not happen;
- Should it be an ‘opt in’ for students?
- It will be important to win staff round culturally to the SFBac and to implement it carefully. Staff are rather set in their ways and need to consider different ways of working;
- The best way might be to ‘get a few people on board and then get the rest’.
- It will be important to look at how it relates to the tutorial programme;
- Will it just be more work for staff and just a piece of paper for students?
- Quite a lot of the students have to cope with other things outside College. Some are doing a large amount of paid work. Some have a lot of family duties and are from split homes. College is only a part of their lives. It may sound as if everyone can get involved, but it may not be possible for some.
- Important not to detract from students’ main aim of getting A Levels – the SFBac needs to enhance not distract;
- If the students are for it, the ‘staff will tag along’.
- It is important that the SFBac is not seen as something that is imposed on the students by the college – it needs to be seen as something that is clearly of benefit to them.

F. Commentary and recommendations

1. It has to be recognized that WQE1 already offers many of the components of the SFBac, although the issue of the skills element may need to be addressed more explicitly for students who are not on the IB or doing an EPQ. The main issue is what value the SFBac will add to the College.
2. Our discussions suggest that the SFBac could be a valuable framework for making explicit the culture, philosophy and practices at the College. At the moment these are relatively implicit. It will be important to develop a shared narrative among staff and students about the benefits of a more holistic approach to the curriculum and the advantages that the qualities which the College is trying to foster will have in the HE application process. This is particularly relevant in an era of increased competition for university places in which students have to demonstrate a broader range of capacities to gain places on selective courses and in selective institutions.

3. It will be important to build on the good practice that already exists in the College in the EPQ and enrichment programme and to make more overt the links between these 'additional' activities and the rest of students' learning programmes.
4. The SFBac Framework would provide a common focus for staff to build on their evident departmental strengths. but to work towards a more College-wide educational goal and in conjunction with other SFC colleagues.
5. With regards to the next step, there is clearly a need for more extensive discussions with all staff, harnessing the experience and enthusiasm of those who actively support the development of the SFBac Framework at this point.
6. More work will need to be done on the approach of the College to the Framework if it is not simply to become a template for existing activities. This would be likely to lead to cynicism among staff and students. Instead, could the SFBac be seen as developing the IB philosophy for those students on A Level programmes?
7. It might be best to consider a gradual rolling out of the scheme in which a proportion of the Level 3 students are involved in the first instance, possibly using the EPQ cohort as the starting point.