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**Abstract**

One of the distinctive features of the English encounter with mass higher education has been the uncertain and ambiguous role of further education colleges as providers of undergraduate education. Both before and during the major expansion that marked the shift to a mass scale of higher education in England, the higher education offered by colleges in the further education sector was commonly regarded as a residual or ancillary activity; its courses mostly at levels below the first degree and its growth in numbers among the slowest in higher education. In the period that followed, these same colleges were accorded a special mission in the delivery of short-cycle undergraduate education and, through their involvement in foundation degrees, were expected to lead a large part of the expansion in future years. The elevation of this provision, from a zone of 'low' or no policy to one of 'high' policy, has coincided with a radical reform of the planning, funding and quality arrangements for post-compulsory education. Under conditions less than favourable to the achievement of their higher education goals, colleges remain the responsibility of one administrative sector and higher education

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institutions the responsibility of another. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)