

# **A dynamic nucleus**

## **Colleges at the heart of local communities**

The Final Report of the Independent Commission  
on Colleges in their Communities

Baroness Sharp of Guildford

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## Introduction from the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry

This Commission was set up in January 2011 with the purpose of investigating the role that further education colleges can and do play within their communities, and the added public value that they can bring to those communities in their role as leaders of learning. Our remit required that the Inquiry was an independent one with its membership drawn from a wide range of stakeholders. In addition to the help and advice of colleagues on the Commission, I am grateful to the many people who responded to the calls for evidence, sent in case studies and invited me to visit their colleges. I would like in particular to thank Mark Ravenhall from NIACE who has guided me through this Inquiry and helped put this report together.

Further education colleges come from the twin traditions of working men's colleges and middle class philanthropy. Over the course of almost two centuries, individuals, employers, local communities and, more recently, central government have invested in, and benefited from, the delivery of this mix of liberal studies and family learning alongside vocational education and craft skills.

Today England's 347 colleges are present in almost every town and city, offering courses ranging from agriculture to the arts, helping some millions of young people and adults to gain and enhance their skills and education, providing pathways to better jobs and higher education. They are key players in the educational infrastructure of this country and, perhaps more importantly, a vital part of local employment and skills 'ecosystems'.

The communities they serve are diverse. They provide for young and old, public and private sector, employers and employees. The best colleges reach out to their communities and provide encouragement and leadership so that, in the words of the Prime Minister describing his Big Society vision, these communities are 'free and powerful enough to help themselves'.

Recent years have seen increasing government intervention in colleges. Almost twenty years of micro-management has led to a culture of following rather than taking the lead; of accepting, albeit grudgingly, instructions from above. The result is a funding and regulatory regime of immense complexity, which has consumed disproportionate top management time and resources. The aim of the Coalition government is to free up the system and give colleges greater discretion and flexibility to decide on their own priorities. Equally, budget restraints also require them to do so within a climate of 'more for less'. Our aim is to give some useful pointers as to how this might be achieved.

The report summarises the Commission's conclusions from the ten months of research, analysis and discussion and suggests a way forward. It is crucial we get this right. We believe colleges can not only help people into jobs through skills training, but, by being proactive in their work with local communities, can also harness the energy of those communities towards positive outcomes which in turn promote health, happiness and social cohesion. In doing so, the key is for colleges to work in partnership, whether with local business, charities, local authorities or public sector organisations. While colleges may be the catalyst for change – hence our term 'the dynamic nucleus' – we see the way forward as essentially 'a shared agenda'.



*Margaret Sharp, Baroness Sharp of Guildford*

## Executive summary

### Our vision

The Commission's vision is of colleges as a 'dynamic nucleus' at the heart of their communities, promoting a shared agenda of activities which both fulfil their central role of providing learning and skills training to young people and adults, but also reach out into their communities, catalysing a whole range of further activities. We see the college as the central player in a network of partnerships, dynamic in the sense of developing and engaging with other partners. This enables the network itself to become part of the dynamic, with colleges at its heart.

### The purpose of the inquiry

The Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities was set up in January 2011 to investigate the role that English further education colleges can and do play in their communities. Set within the context of a more flexible regulatory regime when colleges were once again asked to take responsibility for the shape and balance of educational offer to their locality. The Commission was tasked to report on the strategic role colleges can play and the added public value they can bring in leading learning and working within their communities.

### The method

The Inquiry gathered evidence from a variety of sources. These were:

- A systematic review of national and international literature on further education.
- Two calls for evidence, the second following the publication of our interim report.
- Visits to colleges and discussion with staff and learners.
- Notes from discussions and presentations at commissioners' meetings.
- Thematic seminars for invited specialists and stakeholders.

The full evidence, including all papers, contributions and analysis, can be found on the Commission website: <http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/colleges-in-their-communities-inquiry>.

### Context

The further education sector in England is large and diverse. It includes general further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, land-based colleges, art, design and performing arts colleges and specialist-designated colleges, and serves a range of learners of different ages. Apart from the UK home nations, no other country's further education system mirrors the English system in terms of its diversity and reach.

With diversity, however, comes the awkward issue of public perception and reputation. It has been argued that colleges have a weak brand. Despite being the major provider of education and training for adults and young people, colleges have no clearly defined place in the learning and skills landscape. They do, however, often have very strong local brands, and are, in many cases, already active shapers in their communities, fostering aspiration and providing opportunities for individuals to advance their social, economic and personal ambitions.

Although colleges uniformly argue that their value lies precisely in their complexity and local reach, political interest in the sector has coalesced around reforms and initiatives to simplify their purpose. The Labour Government's post-Foster<sup>2</sup> view of the sector as, primarily, an engine for economic growth led to the marginalisation of the wider role colleges play in their communities and created a system

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<sup>2</sup> Foster, A. (2005) *Realising the potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges*. Nottingham: DFES Publication.

of further education characterised by repeated top-down reform, ministerial target-setting and state micromanagement.

The current Coalition Government takes a wider view of the sector, and acknowledges its role in promoting inclusion and social mobility. It is seeking to introduce 'new freedoms and flexibilities' in the sector and to devolve greater responsibility for the system to local employers, learners and their communities. The proposed freedoms present challenges to funders and colleges to respond to the local skills agenda as well as to the demands of employers and individuals. However, funding is still constrained by rules and regulations as to what can be spent on which activity and, too often, college leaders spend more time managing 'upwards' to government than 'outwards' to their communities and beneficiaries.

Despite financial constraints and an overly complex funding system, many colleges are active in a wide range of partnerships, working closely with local authorities, the police and a wide range of agencies responsible for public health, social care, economic development and employment. More, however, needs to be done to help colleges play a leading role in local social and economic planning. In order to achieve long-lasting and effective social and economic impact on an area, there need to be collaborative approaches across the public sector.

## Findings

We learned that further education **colleges are, often, already embedded in their communities**. Their provision is exceptionally diverse, with informal and non-accredited learning sitting alongside vocational and academic study. As well as providing learning and skills, many colleges have developed a significant wider role in their communities, contributing to widening access to learning, community cohesion and the development of civil society and enterprise.

Although there has been some simplification, **colleges still have to negotiate an unduly complex funding regime**. Confronted by cuts and other uncertainties on top of this already complex funding regime, some colleges opt to retreat to the low-risk areas of 16–19 provision and apprenticeships. Other colleges, however, have managed to negotiate their way through and have developed innovative programmes reaching out to marginalised, 'hard-to-reach' groups. These achievements have often been developed through creative partnerships.

**Partnerships, while often rewarding, are expensive to negotiate**. Negotiating partnership agreements, sometimes three- or four-way, takes a good deal of top management time, requires considerable resource input and carries further risks. Nevertheless, where successful, they unlock new resources, spread risk and can bring new, innovative ideas into play.

One lesson from abroad is **the importance of local decision making**, where 'local' means close to the consumer and the needs of the locality. Systems which give considerable autonomy to the local unit have tended to be more successful, as have governance regimes which recognise local stakeholder involvement.

In terms of meeting the skills needs of the local area, **employer engagement is vital**, but the most successful is engagement that goes beyond just treating employers as customers and involves them as co-designers of the skills training offer. Likewise, in terms of meeting the learner needs, **the greater the involvement of learners in the design of the curriculum, the greater the buy-in, sense of ownership and achievement, the greater the success**.

Colleges do not just make an impact on the local economy and the labour force needs of local businesses. **In investing in colleges, we get social returns too**.

Reaching out to disadvantaged, hard-to-reach groups within their communities not only leads to a steady supply of learners for higher-level, qualification-based study, but supports colleges' wider role in promoting the well-being and cohesion of their communities. This, in turn, leads to significant benefits in other areas of public policy, including health, social care, support for families, volunteering and the Big Society.

### Conclusions

The best of our colleges are, in many respects, already fulfilling our vision of the college as a 'dynamic nucleus' at the heart of their communities. The aspiration is that all colleges should live up to the practice of the best. If this happens we feel it will help colleges to have a clearer role and develop a distinct brand, as their counterparts have in other countries.

**The key is the formation of partnerships**, which have the benefit both of spreading risks and of catalysing action. Through partnerships colleges can reach out to their communities and secure buy-in to their projects. Partnerships are essentially about establishing relationships of mutual trust which encourage all players to invest in the project, whether it is employers involved in a skills training initiative or a local authority in establishing a community hub in a deprived area.

Turning this vision into reality requires **a new generation of entrepreneurial college leaders**, and we recommend that the sector gives serious consideration to the establishment of a dedicated sector leadership centre which combines first-class training with guidance and peer support in building partnerships and taking and handling risk.

Colleges need to be working actively to **develop partnerships with local employers to upgrade skills and create jobs**. Many colleges already work closely with large employers in their area, but more needs to be done to **reach out to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)** using the new funding flexibilities.

Partnership with public-sector organisations is also essential to **making joined-up government work at a local level**. Colleges need to be proactive in seeking partnerships with local authorities, health providers, the police and youth offending teams, often in collaboration with charities and local community groups. Such partnerships yield substantial benefits, transforming the lives of individuals and the well-being of whole communities.

**Colleges need to ensure that their voices are heard on local economic and social planning partnerships**. Colleges are the main provider of skills training in many localities and they therefore need to be represented on Local Enterprise Partnerships, playing a prominent role in developing local skills strategies.

A new push into outreach activities requires **new thinking about the curriculum**. Providing routes and pathways to further learning is central but it needs also to be a highly flexible curriculum built to respond to local needs on an 'any time, any place' formula. Building confidence and self-esteem is important and so too is recognition of the motivational stimulus that people gain from group-based activities, whether in the college, the workplace or the community.

While the government has introduced new flexibilities, funding is still constrained by too many rules and regulations as to what is to be spent on which activity. If all colleges are to be innovative and entrepreneurial there needs to be **a more flexible funding system** giving colleges more discretion to be able to allocate resources as they see fit. An extension of the earned autonomy system might be appropriate. We also suggest that colleges, like universities, be subject to three-year rolling budgets.

Developing the community agenda for colleges requires **a new approach to governance and accountability**. The new Foundation Code of Governance for colleges sets out a new norm for community

engagement. This might be developed to include guidance on ways in which colleges might engage with and account to their various communities on their performance to include good practice guidelines, benchmarks and performance indicators – something akin to a community compact.

## Recommendations

In our interim report we referred to what we saw as a ‘shared vision’ for a renewed and revitalised further education system with colleges at its heart. Since then we have received a great deal of support for a shared agenda of reform involving colleges, their support bodies, and local and central government. We recommend the work be taken forward as follows:

### Colleges to:

- Commence publication of college funding strategies that outline the levels of co-investment by state, employer, individual and other partners **(by September 2013)**.
- Define a clear offer from colleges to the communities they serve as specified within the proposed community compact **(by September 2012)**.
- Establish within colleges a clearly defined community curriculum that responds to local needs and associated educational outreach work **(by March 2013)**.
- Review HR strategies to reflect their community plans and introduce effective organisational support and development interventions and opportunities for all staff, leaders and governors **(by July 2012)**.
- Explore ways of helping local SMEs with apprenticeships and consultancy support **(by March 2013)**.

### Local partnerships and commissioning bodies to:

- Ensure colleges are properly represented as joint partners in local employment and skills planning processes, building on the effective partnerships colleges have already established with bodies such as the Local Government Association and the British Chambers of Commerce **(by September 2012)**.
- Share existing public sector intelligence and data systems to increase common understanding of community needs **(by March 2012)**.
- Make sure that colleges are properly linked into the new commissioning bodies being established within the NHS **(by March 2013)**.

### Central government agencies to:

- Establish an ‘innovation code’ to allow flexibility to fund responsive provision which meets locally assessed priority needs. This should total up to 25 per cent of the college’s adult skills budget per annum **(by September 2012)**, rising to 50 per cent **(by September 2014)**.
- Establish a model and funding methodologies for three-year funding **(by September 2013)**.
- Review the Qualifications and Credit Framework to enable the development of flexible and responsive community qualifications **(during 2011/12)**.
- Define the self-regulation framework envisaged for colleges **(by summer 2012)**.
- Harmonise Ofsted inspection criteria on meeting community needs with those set out in the Foundation Code of Governance **(by April 2012)**.

**Sector support bodies to:**

- Develop a community curriculum template with tools to help institutions to develop an overall curriculum strategy and linked assessment system **(by September 2012)**.
- Establish a professional programme to develop a new responsive community curriculum via the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and the Institute for Learning **(by September 2012)**.
- Develop, through sector collaboration, good practice guidance and performance measures for community engagement **(by July 2012)**.
- Develop, with the AoC Governors' Council, an annex to the Foundation Code of Governance that sets out norms for community engagement including supporting good practice guidance, benchmarks and performance indicators **(by July 2012)**.
- Identify funding to develop innovative and collaborative leadership programmes focused on the skills needed to address local issues and to create solutions **(by September 2012)**.
- Establish partnerships and programmes between the Institute for Learning and other professional networks to ensure synergy and effective professional development between staff and leaders **(by September 2012)**.
- Consider the formation of a dedicated college or sector leadership centre to ensure a strong focus on leadership and management for colleges **(by September 2012)**.



## Our process and timetable

The Commission was set up in January 2011 to investigate the role that English further education colleges can and do play in their communities. This was set within the context of a more flexible regulatory regime when colleges were once again asked to take responsibility for the shape and balance of educational offer to their locality. The Commission was tasked to report on the strategic role colleges can play and the added public value they can bring in leading learning and working within their communities.

The remit of the Commission was to:

- review literature, existing national and international policies and models of delivery, and carry out necessary research;
- identify a vision, strategic framework and potential models of delivery for enhancing the role of colleges in their communities;
- identify 'practice worth sharing' on colleges in their communities and a strategy for sharing good practice; and
- make realistic recommendations to government and to the further education sector on the implementation of the proposed strategy.

The timetable for the Inquiry's work is summarised below.

December 2010	Appointment of Chair
January 2011	Appointment of Commissioners and Observers
February 2011	First meeting of the Commission
March 2011	Evidence collection: issue of Call for Evidence Literature Review phase 1 Second meeting of the Commission
April 2011	Evidence collection: Thematic seminars Literature Reviews for seminars
May 2011	Evidence collection: Thematic seminars (continued) Literature Review for seminars Review of evidence received from Call for Evidence
June 2011	Third meeting of the Commission Emerging findings and conclusions presented to the Commission Interim Report drafted
July 2011	Fourth meeting of the Commission Interim Report approved Further research and investigation

August 2011	Literature Review concluded Analysis of research and evidence concluded
September 2011	Fifth meeting of the Commission Findings, conclusions and recommendations presented to the Commission
October 2011	Sixth meeting of the Commission Final Report drafted
November 2011	Launch of Inquiry Report at AoC Conference

## Our approach

The Inquiry gathered evidence from a variety of sources. These were:

- A systematic review of national and international literature on further education.
- Two calls for evidence, the second following the publication of our interim report.
- Visits to colleges and discussion with staff and learners.
- Notes from discussions and presentations at Commission meetings.
- Thematic seminars for invited specialists and stakeholders.

Colleges, stakeholders and other organisations with an interest in the Inquiry were invited to submit evidence to address the Inquiry's four research questions:

- What is the relationship between colleges and their communities?
- How do colleges contribute to local/community leadership?
- How do colleges develop, implement and refine national policies and plans?
- How do colleges define and arrive at a curriculum for their communities?

The Literature Review was carried out to identify, screen, categorise and analyse relevant published and unpublished literature. The process resulted in a detailed analysis of 289 documents, examining the nature of the relationship between colleges and their communities, and the ways in which the work of colleges impacts on learners, employers and their wider communities, along with issues of governance, leadership and accountability.

The expert seminar programme focused on six themes:

- Business and employer voice.
- Learner and citizen voice.
- Civil society and the wider community.
- Local social and economic planning.
- Curriculum and qualifications.
- Leadership and governance.

Each seminar was led by a Commissioner and had an invited audience drawn from colleges, learners, governors and stakeholder organisations. A total of 62 people participated, producing a rich source of evidence for the Inquiry. The interim report, published at the Inquiry's six-month mark, in July 2011, organised the findings under the six broad themes around which the six expert seminars had been convened.

A second call for evidence followed the publication of the interim report, adding to and further strengthening the case we set out there, and informing our final recommendations. We received over 100 responses to our two calls for evidence.

Details of the Inquiry's Commissioners and observers are given in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provides details of all other contributors to the Inquiry's evidence-gathering process.

Documents summarising the evidence and case studies produced during the Inquiry are available from the Commission website at <http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/colleges-in-their-communities-inquiry>

## Context: colleges in their communities

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Key strengths included extensive partnerships with local businesses, the local authority, schools and charities which create real projects that have high impact on both learners and the immediate community. These colleges are key players in the development of an effective community ethos. They develop strategies to engage hard-to-reach groups, and support them back into learning. Links with employers help them to become more competitive, enable them to secure their future workforce, and provide opportunities to local people. Students highly value work placements and have a very good choice of experiences through extensive links with employers, schools, nurseries, community organisations and universities.

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Evidence to the Commission from Ofsted on college inspection reports, 2011<sup>2</sup>

### What are further education colleges and what do they do?

The further education sector in England is large and diverse. It includes general further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, land-based colleges, art, design and performing arts colleges and specialist-designated colleges, and serves a range of learners of different ages. International comparisons suggest that, apart from the UK home nations, no other country's further education system mirrors the English system in terms of its diversity and reach. In 2009–10, English further education colleges educated and trained 3.4 million people. Eighty-six per cent of all students aged over 19 who received any sort of public funding in 2009–10 studied or trained at an FE college – 45 per cent (1.6 million) of the total further education student number. Ninety per cent of Skills for Life qualifications were achieved through FE institutions and more than 80 per cent of all ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners were in colleges. As well as their adult and outreach activities, colleges make a vital community impact through their provision for 14–19-year-olds. In 2009–10, 831,000 16–18-year-olds were studying in colleges, compared with 423,000 in maintained schools, academies and city technology colleges. Forty-four per cent of those achieving a Level 3 qualification (A-level equivalent) by the age of 19 do so at a college, while colleges are responsible for a quarter of all apprenticeships delivered in England.

Further education colleges are autonomous institutions incorporated under statute and covered by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. They deliver a wide range of publicly funded and non-publicly funded provision to young people and adults on a full- and part-time basis, in a variety of formal and informal settings. Their activities are, in the main, funded and regulated by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency. Those that deliver higher education provision also receive direct funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Further education colleges are led by a principal or chief executive with support from a senior management team and an independent board of governors. They develop their own strategic plans and associated objectives working within the regulatory framework set by the funding agencies on behalf of Government.

Further education colleges are primarily local institutions providing vocational, specialist and academic learning, as well as for community and personal development. Although they remain the most comprehensive component of the English education system, the range of learners studying in further education colleges has narrowed in recent years, with a pronounced shift towards younger learners. A slight majority of learners are currently under 19, but, until recently, as many as eight in ten were aged over 19.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, most adult learners still learn in or through colleges. There are colleges or college campuses in practically every city and town, and rural areas. They vary in size: some are small specialist-

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<sup>2</sup> Ofsted's full submission balanced key strengths with weaknesses. Not all colleges by any means lived up to these standards.

<sup>3</sup> NIACE (2005) *Eight in Ten: Adult Learners in Further Education*, Leicester: NIACE.

designated colleges for adults, or subject-specialist colleges, but the majority by far are large, multi-site general further education colleges, some of which are bigger than universities in terms of student numbers.

In contrast to universities, however, further education colleges offer a highly diverse range of learning programmes and qualifications. Thousands of vocational qualifications sit alongside academic qualifications and a wide range of accredited and non-accredited adult programmes. Although colleges are minor providers of higher education – with 12 per cent of the market share – almost all of this is employer-facing. Half of all Foundation Degree students are taught in colleges; while colleges deliver 78 per cent of Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and 59 per cent of Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). Two-thirds of large employers who train their staff do so through college. Colleges are also responsible for 14 per cent of informal adult and community learning. It is generally acknowledged, by the government amongst others, that access to informal learning will help people to engage effectively in civil society and contribute more fully to their local community as well as to the economy.<sup>4</sup>

### The weak perception of the college 'brand'

With diversity, however, comes the awkward issue of public perception and reputation. It has been argued that colleges have a weak brand (and that it is further weakened by the fact that any organisation can call itself a college). Despite being the major provider of education and training for adults and young people, colleges have no clearly defined place in the learning and skills landscape and are often overlooked in discussions of education policy. They have tended to be defined in terms of what they are not, that is, not a school or university, rather than in terms of their critical positive role in holding the system together and making it work.<sup>5</sup>

Colleges, however, often have a very strong *local* brand; 'local' in the sense of being known in their communities,<sup>6</sup> whether they be communities of place, interest or specialism. Many colleges are already engaged in the communities they serve, providing ongoing opportunities to individuals to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise and working with local employers to meet the specific needs of the local labour force. They have a critical role as a provider of learning for 60 per cent of our 16–19 year olds and 80 per cent of adults. In these ways colleges are already shapers in their communities, fostering aspiration and providing opportunities for individuals to advance their social, economic and personal ambitions.

### Colleges as an engine for economic growth

Although colleges uniformly argue that their value lies precisely in their complexity and local reach, political interest in the sector has coalesced around reforms and initiatives to simplify their purpose. Sir Andrew Foster's 2005 report, *Realising the potential: The future role of further education colleges*, called on colleges to develop a 'recognised brand' based on a 'shared core purpose' focused on improving employability and the supply of economically valuable skills. This emphasis, reinforced by Lord Leitch's 2006 report on skills, prompted a narrowing of the adult learning offer and a dramatic reduction in the number of adult learning places in further education. By 2008 adult learning was at its lowest level since Labour came to power in 1997.<sup>7</sup> The Labour Government's post-Foster view of the sector as primarily an engine for economic growth, combined with its acceptance of Leitch's over-simplification of the links between productivity and the acquisition of qualifications, marginalised the wider role colleges play in the lives of their communities.<sup>8</sup> Colleges were driven by targets based on qualifications, and success in turn

<sup>4</sup> BIS (2010) *Skills for Sustainable Growth*, London: BIS.

<sup>5</sup> See Schuller, T. and Watson, D. (2009) *Learning Through Life*, Leicester: NIACE, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> We decided to use the term 'communities' rather than 'community' in this inquiry. This is an important distinction: the plural is a helpful reminder of the plurality of communities both in terms of groups of people ('community groups'), but also of *types* of community (of interest, and today, of course, also virtual ones).

<sup>7</sup> Aldridge, F. and Tuckett, A. (2009) *Narrowing Participation: The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning*, Leicester: NIACE

<sup>8</sup> Leitch, S. (2006) *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy—World Class Skills*. Norwich: HMSO

was measured by the achievement of qualifications. Professor Alison Wolf described it 'a bastion of Soviet style planning',<sup>9</sup> characterised by incessant top-down reform, ministerial target-setting and state micromanagement.

### Devolved responsibility and community ownership

The current Coalition Government takes a wider view of the further education system and acknowledges its role in promoting inclusion and social mobility. It is seeking to devolve greater responsibility for the system to its users – local employers, learners and their communities. In his ministerial foreword to the 2011 further education consultation, *New Challenges, New Chances*, John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, writes:

*Learning and its consequences feed purposeful pride. It helps people feel a new sense of purpose and pride in the present and hope for the future.*

*Opportunities for adults to gain new learning and skills throughout life are the portents of progress and the positive engagement of people with their communities. They are necessary for flexible, innovative and competitive businesses and the jobs they create. They are preconditions of personal growth and social mobility. They are guarantors of the values upon which our democracy is founded.*

*Working together, colleges, training providers, employers, voluntary organisations and community groups can make an enormous contribution to restoring this country.<sup>10</sup>*

The Coalition's vision for further education has emerged against a backdrop of rapid and uncharted public-sector reform, itself shaped by the global financial crisis and the need to reduce the national debt and stimulate growth. The dominant narrative of the Coalition's programme is localism: one of smaller government, a 'reinvigoration' of community leadership and action to support those areas where the state would have previously intervened. There is a strong belief across all areas of policy in putting 'power' and, (sometimes), resources into the hands of service-users to purchase the service they require and offering diversity of choice (i.e. competition between providers). At the same time, the Government has made a commitment to devolve trust to the professionals who deliver services, including school heads and the principals of colleges. The foreword to *Skills for Sustainable Growth*, the Coalition's skills strategy, states:

*Freedom does not just mean abolishing stifling bureaucracy and meaningless targets. It means trusting people to do their job. The adult education movement was not born of Government, but of the people. And its primary accountability today should be not to the Government, but to the people it serves.<sup>11</sup>*

### The Big Society agenda

The reforms are set within the context of the Coalition's Big Society agenda, which commits to 'give communities more powers' and to 'encourage people to take an active role in their communities'<sup>12</sup> to improve their own lives and the lives of those around them. These themes have implications both for the ways in which colleges respond as learning providers, and for the contribution that they make to their communities. This was recognised when colleges met with local government and the business community

<sup>9</sup> Wolf, A. (2009) *An Adult Approach to Further Education*, London: IEA.

<sup>10</sup> BIS (2010) *New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme*.

<sup>11</sup> BIS (2010) *Skills for Sustainable Growth*, London: BIS

<sup>12</sup> Cabinet Office (2010) *Building the Big Society*, pp. 1–2.

to share perspectives on how to promote local economic growth in a climate of severe funding constraint and to develop a common agenda.<sup>13</sup>

A paragraph from *Skills for Sustainable Growth*, under the heading 'Freedom', supports this:

*Control should be devolved from central government to citizens, employers and communities so they can play a greater role in shaping services to ensure that they meet their needs efficiently. We will increase competition between training providers to encourage greater diversity of provision, including, for instance, FE colleges offering more Higher Education courses. This together with empowering learners by providing better information on quality and tackling poor performance will drive up standards. We will free providers from excessively bureaucratic control and centrally determined targets and radically simplify the formulae which determine funding for adult education, so that providers can effectively respond to the needs of business and learners.<sup>14</sup>*

The Coalition's 'localism' and the Big Society ideas, with their emphasis on increased levels of community ownership and volunteering, have been well documented but not rigorously defined. In this regard they represent a huge opportunity for colleges and other providers to define what is meant by these terms locally and, therefore, how they are shaped and enacted. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the RSA, for example, have developed a new vision for further education 'that is fundamentally more collaborative, networked, and socially productive; where colleges are incubators of social value and hubs for service integration; where further education serves the needs of learners through being a creative partner in local growth and service reform agendas'.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that colleges should be shapers of reform as well as responding to it.

## Funding reform and constraints

This principle of funding reform is reiterated by BIS/Skills Funding Agency in the *Skills Investment Strategy*, published in parallel with the current skills strategy:

*This Skills Investment Strategy sets out how we will reduce bureaucracy; remove unnecessary interference from intermediary agencies whether local, regional or national; streamline the organisational skills landscape; remove unnecessary regulation; and, introduce new freedoms and flexibilities.*

*Collectively, these measures will ensure the sector is better able to meet the needs of individuals, businesses and local communities. ...*

*Our objective is to deliver a skills system driven from the bottom up, able to respond to the needs of individuals, communities and an increasingly dynamic economy.<sup>16</sup>*

The proposed freedoms present challenges to funders and colleges alike to respond to the local skills agenda as well as to the demands of employers and individuals. For colleges, this freedom, if enacted, will mean greater control over what is offered, and how that 'offer' is developed and priced.

The situation is complicated by the influence of 14–19 policy from the Department for Education, which has the potential to distort the whole further education curriculum.<sup>17</sup> Colleges, already major players in the expansion of post-16 learning, now increasingly cater for students from 14 upwards, and the detailed

<sup>13</sup> Local Government Association/157 Group/British Chambers of Commerce (2010) *Local Learning and Skills Conversations: New Responses to Local Needs*, London: LGA, November 2010.

<sup>14</sup> BIS (2010) *Skills for Sustainable Growth*, London: BIS.

<sup>15</sup> RSA/LSIS (2011) *The Further Education and Skills sector in 2020: A Social Productivity Approach*, London: RSA/LSIS, May 2011.

<sup>16</sup> SFA (2010) *FE: New Horizon: Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth*, November 2010.

<sup>17</sup> NIACE (2011) *Policy Briefing: The Wolf Report – its potential impact on adult learning*, Leicester: NIACE, April 2011.

implementation of the Wolf Report on vocational education, accepted in full by government, currently makes the 14–19 offer somewhat uncertain.

It ought also to be noted that, as the UK Commission for Employment and Skills has pointed out, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spending on employment and skills for unemployed adults represents almost half of the total spend on *adult skills*. Put together, the funding from the two departments now represents a significant resource in the system which could give colleges considerable leverage if there were really the discretion suggested by the skills strategies. However, this is far from the case, despite the recent successes with apprenticeships and the integration of employment and skills begun under the previous Labour Government.<sup>18</sup> Each department sticks to its own rules, sets its own targets and requires a separate set of accounts. This failure to develop joined-up government means a considerable fragmentation of effort.

### Partnership working

Despite financial constraints colleges are involved in a wide range of partnerships working closely with local authorities, the police, and various agencies responsible for public health, social care, economic development and employment. A potentially important player to have emerged during the first year of the Coalition Government is the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

LEPs are locally owned partnerships between local authorities and businesses, aimed at strengthening existing ways in which public funders, working with business and learning providers, can identify the employment and economic needs of their areas. They are seen by government as having ‘a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs’. They are also expected to be ‘a key vehicle in delivering government objectives for economic growth and decentralisation, whilst also providing a means for local authorities to work together with business in order to quicken the economic recovery’.<sup>19</sup>

Development has been slow, and the remit of LEPs is still beginning to emerge. Some LEPs are already pushing for a locally pooled skills budget.<sup>20</sup> However, it is still unclear how colleges will be involved and the lack of further education representation in the majority of LEPs is serious concern. There are also wider worries about how representative these bodies are (by May 2011 only two LEPs were chaired by women and seven boards had no female appointments at all); and, therefore, how well-placed they are to influence skills provision in a locality should their remit or ambition be extended. Colleges need to have a leading role here, helping local authorities to work with local employers, universities and other public and private sector institutions to develop a strategic overview of local skills needs and plans for how they might be met.

### Leadership, accountability and collaboration

Leadership in colleges cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider context within which colleges operate, politically and financially. Colleges do their best to take a holistic approach to the issue of leadership and planning for the multiple communities and age groups they serve. But the separation of policy guidance and funding streams is a serious impediment to this process. The separate funding of 16–19 and adult learning, for example, is, for many, an artificial division. Nevertheless the funding pressures, and the plethora of reforms and policy innovations they manage, mean that college leaders spend more time managing ‘upwards’ to government than ‘outwards’ to their communities and beneficiaries.

<sup>18</sup> UKCES (2011) *The Review of Employment and Skills*, London: UKCES, April 2011.

<sup>19</sup> DCLG (2010) *Local Growth: Realising Every Place's Potential*, London: DCLG, October 2010. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/local/localenterprisepartnerships/>

<sup>20</sup> Bolton (2011) *Sink or Swim? What Next For Local Enterprise Partnerships?*, London: Centre for Cities, May 2011.

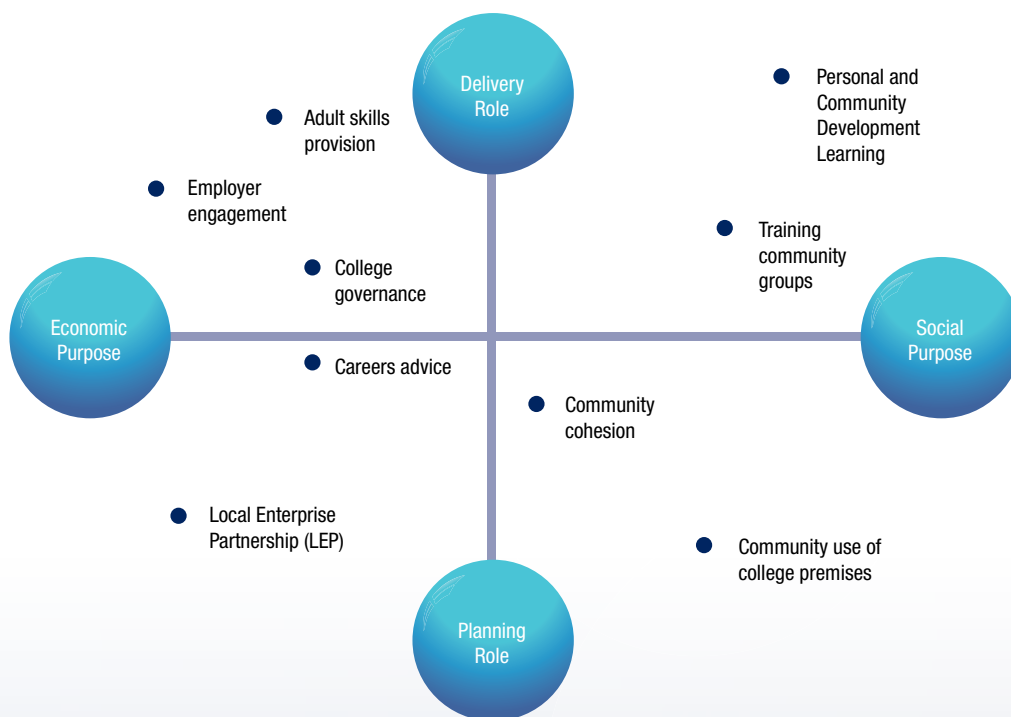


Colleges and communities often have different perceptions of accountability. For colleges accountability means audit procedures and representation on governing bodies as the main indicators of accountability; by contrast communities may be more concerned with the practical manifestation of what colleges actually do in terms of delivering learning to their communities. This might include the geographical location of learning centres, responsiveness to local issues, availability of transport, course fees or childcare facilities.

In order to achieve long-lasting and effective social and economic impact on an area, the need for collaborative approaches across the public sector seems so obvious. Pooling the local DWP employment spend, the Youth Offending Team expenditure on crime prevention and the college spend on skills training would avoid some duplication – there is a tendency for the same people to be recycled through the different programmes. This could provide extra resources, for example enabling those placed into jobs under DWP schemes to pursue further training and progression in employment. This, in turn, improves community incomes, reduces crime and generally adds to community health and well-being.

### Squaring the economic with the community role

Our analysis of the current context within which English colleges operate can be presented as four quadrants. These are formed by two continua: one ranging from a predominately economic to a predominately social *purpose* for the college's activity; the other exemplifying a range of activity from a predominately planning to a predominately delivery *role* of skills provision.



This diagram exemplifies the vast range of activities that colleges engage in populating all four quadrants; the balance of college activity will depend on the local situation, the character and strength of its local partnerships, its local responsiveness and the way in which the college in question perceives its purpose.

The last decade of skills policy has encouraged a preponderance of activity in the northwest quadrant: delivery of learning for an economic purpose (through the achievement of full qualifications). This is the 'market for skills' that is being opened up to greater competition – a competitive environment that colleges by and large thrive in.

But colleges have the potential to do so much more than just deliver skills training for economic benefit. Many of their activities are for other purposes: skills maintenance; helping parents better support their children; helping new and settled communities learn English; helping people fulfil their ambitions. Some of this provision – especially that which comes closer to informal adult learning – has been increasingly difficult to fund over recent years. But many colleges have stuck with it because they know it brings substantial social returns.

Providers which occupy only the northwest quadrant in the diagram are those colleges with what might be called a 'narrow economic offering': they see their role as education and skills training and little else. Occupying the two western quadrants leads us to think about the planning role that the best colleges have and their contribution to more effective local, sub-regional and national decision-making. A college might occupy the two northern quadrants – this is a college that concentrates on teaching and learning but spends little time in developing partnerships. A college occupying all four quadrants might be called a 'rounded college', one that combines the economic and social purposes and builds an inclusive institution.

Colleges' unique position in the local skills 'ecosystem' means they have potential to respond to a wider range of social and economic issues than they have been asked to over recent years.

## What we found

### Many colleges are already embedded in their communities

Further education colleges occupy a pivotal space in the learning and skills landscape. Their provision is exceptionally diverse, with informal and non-accredited learning sitting alongside vocational and academic study. Their primary role is the provision of high-quality learning and skills serving both their immediate communities and broader 'interest' communities throughout the UK and abroad. At the same time many colleges have developed a significant wider role in their communities, contributing to widening access to learning, community cohesion and the development of civil society and enterprise.

Colleges have traditionally engaged with working-class communities through their vocational and adult education provision, and work with specific disadvantaged groups of adults and young people, often through partnership with the voluntary sector. This is also true of a number of other systems internationally, particularly the United States. The US's community college model has a decentralised system of governance and finance, with a remit to widen participation and encourage learners of all backgrounds and abilities. One notable success of this model is in improving access to higher education, which has been a primary focus of community colleges. However, almost 50 per cent of learners leave without a qualification, whereas the record of English colleges is much better.

The notion of the Big Society is underpinned by a belief that increased participation in learning can benefit wider communities by increasing education and skill levels which, in turn, will raise self-esteem, encouraging social and community cohesion. As major social entrepreneurs in their own right, colleges have a significant contribution to make, both in terms of encouraging adults to develop entrepreneurial skills and in coaching and supporting people in starting up and establishing new businesses. These approaches will only be effective if they are located in a context that is relevant to the individuals and their communities. Partnership with voluntary and community groups, already a feature of the work of many colleges, is necessary to develop an appropriate curriculum.

Barriers to entry to learning need to be understood from the learner's perspective: are individuals 'hard to reach' or are institutions 'hard to enter'? Outreach and development work are required to support the engagement of the most disadvantaged learners. Many move from basic and often non-accredited courses to the development of practical skills which support advocacy and democratic engagement. Involvement in such activities enhances the credibility and reputation of colleges and encourages more to pursue the path of learning. However, current funding regimes requiring, for example, co-investment from the learner even on basic skills courses such as ESOL are limiting the degree to which colleges can keep open these pathways.

### But they still have to negotiate an unduly complex funding regime

Although in the last year there has been some simplification of the funding regime it still remains unduly prescriptive, with funding depending on such things as age, employment status and the level and aim of qualification sought. Confronted by cuts and other uncertainties on top of this already complex funding regime, some colleges opt to retreat to the low-risk areas of 16–19 provision and apprenticeships (even here, the funding regime discourages provision in communities where there is a risk of lower success

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“The more locally relevant provision is, the more empowered and resourced local populations are, and are hopefully more supportive of their citizens”

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*(Preston Learning Disabilities Forum)*

rates). Other colleges, however, have been able to develop innovative programmes reaching out to marginalised, 'hard-to-reach' groups despite some of these constraints.

The curriculum offered by colleges cannot be considered in isolation from external strategic factors that drive or limit their abilities to respond. Funding and regulatory regimes are limiting factors in curriculum development and delivery, and the methodology relating to qualifications and units still effectively micromanages the way in which the budget stream can be used. This inevitably inhibits the flexibility of colleges' response to local and individual needs. Thus, the potential of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to provide a flexible and accessible curriculum for adults is constrained by current funding methodologies. There is concern too that the perception of inspection and regulation systems can discourage innovation or work with non-traditional learners because of the potential impact on minimum performance levels, success rates and inspection grades. This may narrow rather than widen participation, particularly among the most disadvantaged adults. It may also discourage colleges from offering part or unit qualifications if success rates are still related to full qualifications.

Colleges which have succeeded in breaking free from the 'shackles' of the funding regime have often done so by developing a series of partnerships with other players, both public and private sector. Such partnerships have the advantage of both bringing in new resources and spreading risks amongst these players.

Colleges work in partnership with numerous different types of organisation to meet the skills needs of learners. Examples quoted in the Inquiry's Literature Review include: working with the Metropolitan Police to inform young people about the dangers of gang violence; working with local business, the local council and the DWP to provide unemployed people with specific skills; working with the local university and other further education colleges to develop a local higher education hub; and working with schools and nursery centres to encourage parents to get involved with their children's education. There are also numerous examples of colleges working in partnership with local employers to develop and deliver training.

### **But partnerships, while often rewarding, are expensive to negotiate**

Negotiating partnership agreements, sometimes involving multiple partners, takes a good deal of top management time, requires considerable resource input and carries further risks. Nevertheless, where successful, they unlock new resources, spread risk and can bring new, innovative ideas into play.

Recent research by NFER<sup>21</sup> which examined partnership work between colleges and local authorities highlighted a number of key lessons if collaboration was to be effective. These included: establishing relationships in which trust and openness were evident; having confidence that partners will deliver; sharing a vision and understanding of the project; regular and robust communication systems and the involvement of senior leadership. They also suggested that it was important to ensure that sufficient time and resources were dedicated to the partnership and that partners understood that other partners might operate in different ways and have competing priorities which would sometimes get in the way.

Nevertheless, partnership between different players at a local level can be immensely powerful and many colleges are playing a central role in creating such partnerships, despite financial constraint and the

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"I think that the major disappointment for people [is] they can't do a unit and get the funding for it, and that you actually have a prescribed way of doing the qualification ... it isn't as flexible as we had been led to believe"

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*(Large further education college, South East)*

<sup>21</sup> Reported in the Inquiry's Literature Review, page 31.

absence of a consistent approach to local skills planning. Already rooted in their communities in a variety of ways that add public value and contribute to social and economic well-being, colleges are centrally positioned between the educational community, on the one hand, and the employer community on the other. They work closely with local authorities and other local organisations, health organisations and the police. They also have links into community organisations such as youth groups and faith communities.

Partnership and collaboration are key elements in the implementation of our vision, with colleges acting as catalysts at the centre, forming partnerships with local employers, helping and supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and working closely with schools and universities, local authorities, voluntary and community groups, and other public services.

### The importance of local autonomy

Although international examples are of limited value in terms of direct transferability, one lesson from abroad is the importance of local decision making, where 'local' means close to the consumer and the needs of the locality. Systems which give considerable autonomy to the local unit have tended to be more successful, as have governance regimes which recognise local stakeholder involvement. Autonomy tends to encourage innovation and the development of new ideas. It can, however, lead to uneven standards unless there are also strong quality control and performance management systems.

The balance between the different communities served by a college is best achieved through local decision-making rather than by central direction. Local governance and accountability arrangements should inform these strategic planning decisions. The tensions between central policy direction and local accountability need to be addressed within the context of the public value that colleges bring to their communities. Colleges can demonstrate local leadership and responsiveness that illustrates the principles of localism in a practical way and yet sometimes be at variance with central policy direction.

### Employer and learner engagement

Encouraged by successive governments, colleges have engaged with employers, small and large, either directly or indirectly, for some time, and take a wide range of approaches to the work. Some see their local business community as *customers* for learning products, others as *co-designers* of provision to meet specific business needs. The notion of a continuum ranging from selling to engagement through to co-design is a useful way of reflecting on colleges' relationship with employers and mirrors a similar continuum in relation to engagement and involvement of learners. All the evidence suggests that the more employers are engaged in the design and management of the learning process, the more satisfied they are.

Alignment between vocational education, the local labour market and the wider needs of the economy, has been a major theme of policy in most industrialised countries. A few systems – notably in Australia and Germany – include collaboration between government, industry and education providers in determining qualifications and curricula. Strong systems of apprenticeships are frequently a critical mechanism when it comes to ensuring employer engagement and investment, a particular issue in England where too few employers regard investment in training as a priority. In this regard it is important to engage employers more closely with Sector Skills Councils, whose responsibility it is to determine appropriate frameworks for different employment sectors.

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“[There should be an] enhanced role of teaching and learning practitioners  
in strategic position of college”

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(Institute for Learning)

The contribution colleges make to local skills delivery and their key place in the local economy means that they have a critical and under-exploited role in contributing to the development of local skills strategies. Their role should be better aligned with local social and economic planning, and in particular, with the emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Colleges are often closer to local businesses than universities precisely because of their role as major skills providers in their areas. Working collaboratively with local business and local authorities on developing the local skills strategy can be a fruitful exercise for all involved.

There are particular problems in relation to SMEs. Their needs may be more diverse and less clearly articulated than those of larger businesses and finding time and people to develop links always poses a problem. They are a prime example of where outreach work may pay off, partly because they are likely to relate more readily to the college than to other organisations. It is often the learner in such cases who acts as the point of contact and mediates between the skills provider and employer – this happens frequently in apprenticeships. The Canadian example, where colleges offer consultancy and engineering services as well as skills training, suggests that the relationship could profitably be further developed.

There are considerable benefits to involving learners in the development of their own education. Research, reported in more detail in the Inquiry's Literature Review, has shown that taking account of learner voices can have positive outcomes for maintaining quality standards, improving the student learning experience<sup>22</sup> and the learner motivation and engagement.<sup>23</sup> There is a wealth of good practice already undertaken by colleges in England and throughout the UK. There is also wide appreciation that a differentiated approach is required in capturing and responding to learner voices, with adult learners requiring a different approach to that employed for younger learners. Most colleges work along a continuum, with feedback from learners at one end and involvement in curriculum development at the other.

Providers that have gone furthest in embedding the learner voice into their practice have: instituted meetings between student representatives and the senior leadership team; introduced 'Principal's Question Time'; involved students in policy and strategy review; and implemented projects for students to rate their classrooms.<sup>24</sup> These mechanisms help to engage learners in the development of the curriculum and ensure that the learner voice is reflected in other aspects of organisation. They can be used to place learner voice at the heart of the learning experience while, at the same time, raising learners' expectations and encouraging learners to take more responsibility for their learning. The Inquiry found plenty of examples of colleges doing this and of the positive effect it can have on learners. The use of new digital technologies (for example SMS text messaging and online surveys to catch real-time feedback) has been found to be very effective with younger students.

The success of such initiatives depends on a number of factors, including the creation of trusting relationships between learners and educators, which, in turn, reflects the level of organisational buy-in to the concept of the learner voice.<sup>25</sup> In order to be effective the learner voice must be representative of all of the college's communities, both geographic and communities of interest. A strategic, whole-college approach is required to engage, understand and work with learner communities. College corporations need to develop a good understanding of what is relevant to learners from these different communities. Research suggests that although many of the more common practices are very effective at reaching full-time students, levels of engagement with those who are studying part-time or at a distance are poor. Colleges therefore need to put particular effort in to reaching into these communities.

<sup>22</sup> Collinson, D. 'Editorial Introduction', in Collinson, D. (2007) *Leadership and the Learner Voice*.

<sup>23</sup> Forrest, C., Lawton, J., Adams, A., Louth, T. and Swain, I., 'The Learner Voice and Quality Improvement – The Impact of Learner Voice on Quality Improvement', in Collinson, D. (2007) *Leadership and the Learner Voice*.

<sup>24</sup> LSIS (2009) *Leading the Learner Voice 2009: Dissemination of Effective Practice*.

<sup>25</sup> Shuttle, J. (2007) 'The Learner Voice and Quality Improvement – Learner Involvement in Decision Making' in Collinson, D. (2007) *Leadership and the Learner Voice*.

## **In investing in colleges, we get social returns too**

First and foremost, colleges are institutions of further education, established to deliver high-quality learning and skills to young people and adults. They have developed a range of methods of delivery in addition to their primarily campus-based, full-time offer designed to meet the wide-ranging learning needs of students and to widen participation. Colleges have implemented community-based initiatives to facilitate better access to those groups typically marginalised within a local area and have been successful in engaging disadvantaged and hard-to-reach learners, learners with low levels of literacy or numeracy skills, and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. They also attract a culturally and ethnically diverse student body, with a higher representation of minority ethnic learners than the communities they serve.<sup>26</sup>

Reaching out to disadvantaged, hard-to-reach groups within their communities not only leads to a steady supply of learners for higher-level, qualification-based study, but supports colleges' wider role in promoting the well-being and cohesion of their communities. This, in turn, leads to significant benefits in other areas of public policy, including health, crime reduction, social care, support for families and volunteering.

Colleges are key strategic partners and their contribution and impact on society is often understated in relation to their economic role. This is not to deny that colleges are a significant part of their local economy. They are not only providers of learning but also major employers, and the owners and generators of community assets. But they are also major contributors to social welfare not least by the creation of learning communities and safe, tolerant spaces in which people can come together to learn. This wider role of colleges is little understood but it can be crucial in, for example, metropolitan areas where gang culture exists. The college, as a neutral environment, provides a stress-free, safe haven for many young men and women.

The strategic contribution of colleges also should be recognised in the context of a shift to greater commissioning of public services where colleges could be involved in shaping and planning services relating to the areas they serve. A greater understanding of commissioning processes and commissioning cycles in the public sector, particularly in local authorities, would be beneficial. Experience from other public services, such as health, provides models where providers can both contribute to planning and engage in delivery without conflict of interest.

<sup>26</sup> Frumkin, L., Koutsoubou, M. and Voraasm, J. (2008) *Minority Ethnic Groups: Success Rates in Further Education – A Literature Review*, QIA (LSIS), cited in Howard, U. (2009) *FE Colleges in a New Culture of Adult and Lifelong learning: IFLL Sector Paper 7*, NIACE.

## What we would like to see

Our vision is of colleges as a 'dynamic nucleus' at the heart of their communities, creating links and forging networks of partnerships – down into the education community, into the secondary and primary schools, the early years and Sure Start centres; and upwards towards small and large employers, local authorities, universities, hospitals, police, youth offending teams, youth services, community groups and housing associations.

We want to see colleges become prime players within their communities, promoting a shared agenda of activities which not only fulfils their central role of providing high-quality learning and skills training to young people and adults, but also reaches out into their communities, catalysing a whole range of further activities. These activities, in turn, bring more (potentially many more) people into the learning experience (and therefore, often, also into the college) and, in doing so, ignite an interest in participating and setting the agenda, whether in terms of the college itself or, more broadly, of their local communities.

There is nothing new in this: the best of our further education colleges are, in many respects, already fulfilling this vision, as active shapers within their communities, supporting social cohesion, creating aspiration and providing individuals with the wherewithal to advance their social, economic and personal ambitions. Our aspiration is that all colleges should live up to the practice of the best. If this happens we feel it will help colleges to have a clearer role and develop a distinct 'brand', as their counterparts have in other countries.

The key is the formation of partnerships. Partnerships bring with them the benefit both of spreading risk and of catalysing action. Through partnerships, colleges can reach out to their communities and secure wider buy-in to their projects. Partnerships are essentially about establishing relationships of mutual trust which encourage all players in the partnership to invest in the project, whether it is employers involved in a skills training initiative or a local authority involved in establishing a community hub in a deprived area.

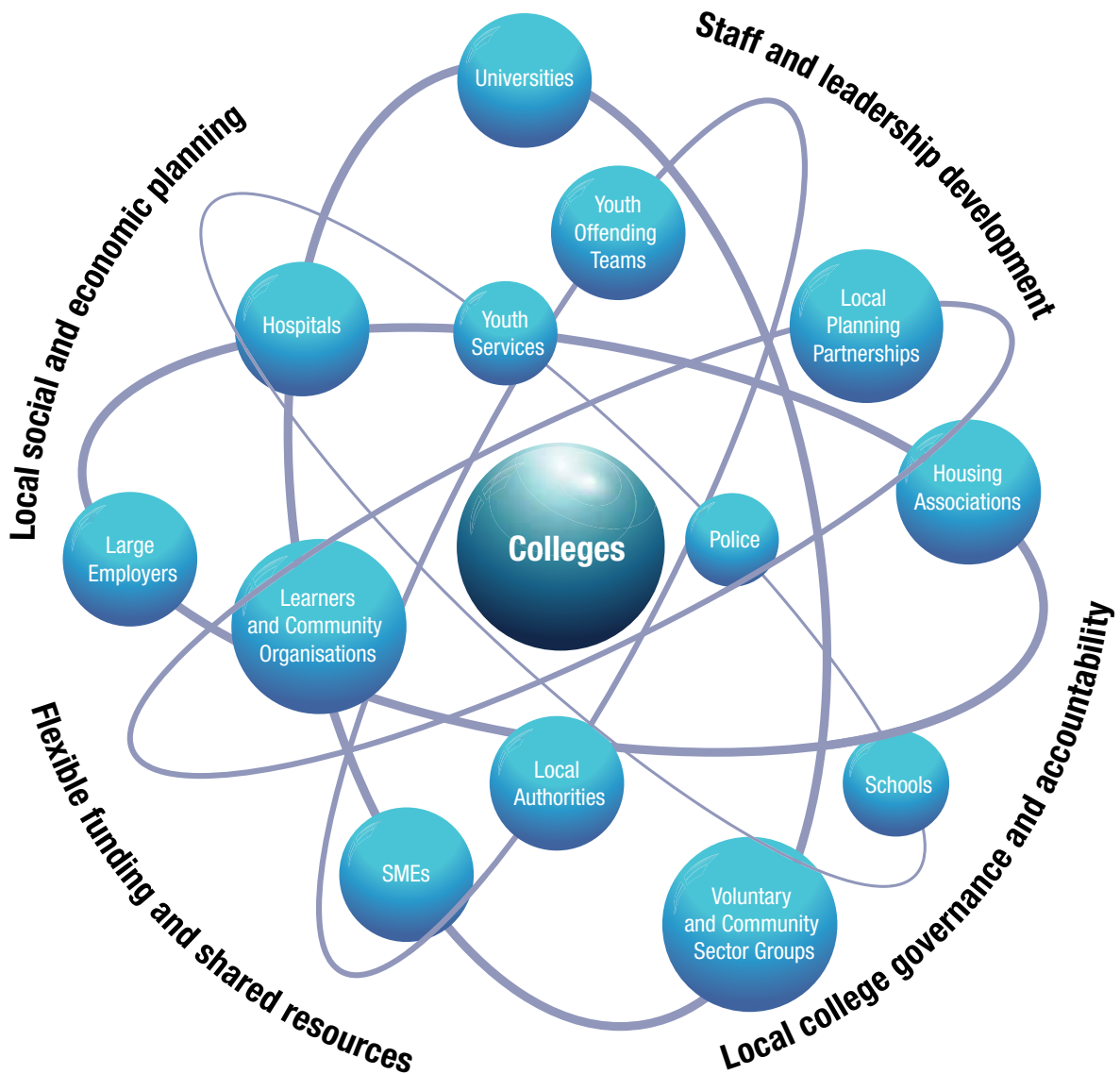
We need to think about partnerships in new ways. They must mean more than simply 'more meetings'. Partnerships unlock social energy – people are often more willing to undertake activities, particularly where there are uncertainties, jointly rather than by themselves. For example, one college we encountered runs a community hub jointly with the local authority. This hub channels the energy of its young people into a boxing club and a cycling club, both of which now raise substantial sums for charity from sponsored activities. In other words, social energy channelled to positive ends increases both economic and social productivity. Improved levels of education and skills mean higher economic productivity. But the knock-on effects of self-confidence and self-esteem mean higher social productivity in terms of a lower incidence of crime, better health, happiness and community cohesion.

The college is seen, therefore, as the central player in a network of partnerships, dynamic in the sense of developing and engaging with other partners. This enables the network itself to become part of the dynamic, with the college at its heart.

Achieving our vision will not be easy. The right building blocks must be in place. In particular, in line with the ambitions of the Coalition Government's skills strategy, colleges must be given *greater funding freedoms and flexibilities*. In return, they will be expected to:

- Achieve higher levels of co-investment with employers, other public sector institutions and individuals.
- Play a greater role in local social and economic planning.
- Engage the local communities they serve in developing effective responses to community needs.
- Make greater use of their premises and other resources for wider community activities.





In order to achieve this, colleges will need to work with government on a *shared agenda* to:

- Revise governance and accountability mechanisms.
- Maximise cross-departmental co-operation and procedures.
- Clarify the college's role in serving local communities.
- Remodel the college–community curriculum offer.
- Support staff, managers and leaders across all colleges to deliver this.

This is an ambitious agenda but we believe it is achievable because:

- There is the will and commitment from both government and colleges.
- All colleges are doing some aspects of this work already.
- There are many exemplars of good practices from the UK and overseas.
- Because of the success of these exemplars, there will be increasing pressure on *all* colleges to move in this direction.

Our recommendations set out in detail how we think we can achieve the vision. They are all, we believe, essential elements in creating a further education system that will give colleges the freedoms they need to innovate and experiment and respond flexibly to the needs of their communities, and balance this freedom with systems of governance which bring proper accountability but which, at the same time, reflect the wider public benefit to be gained from such activities.

## How we think this can be achieved

Each of the following points represents an essential step in achieving the Commission's vision of colleges as a dynamic nucleus within their communities. We see each as a critical building block in creating a viable route for colleges to follow and envisage them being taken forward as part of a shared agenda of reform with colleges, sector support bodies, and local and central government.

### A new generation of entrepreneurial college leaders

The most important factor required to turn this vision into reality is to support and train a new generation of college leaders who are both leaders and entrepreneurs. In order for colleges and government to meet each aspect of this shared agenda, the staff charged with responsibility for implementation and accountability, for ensuring their college is fully responsive to their communities, and for the outcomes articulated in this report, need appropriate, planned development and support.

College staff need to be skilled in securing routes of engagement with a wide range of local communities and in the co-creation of services, working across traditional organisational boundaries. They also need to possess the so-called 'softer' skills of empathy, emotional intelligence, working beyond formal authority and being able to take initiative and generate innovation, in real time, on the front line.

This requires a stronger focus on distributed leadership, professional autonomy and peer support and review. As well as developing and supporting the skills of teachers as specialists *and* educators *and* facilitators of new forms of learning opportunities. There is also a key role for support staff to ensure appropriate front-line customer services and back-office support. A new community-led pedagogy is also needed and we believe the key to making this happen is through fostering high-quality leadership with a clear and passionate focus on teaching and learning.

The Commission believes that a renewed and passionate focus by all staff and leaders on the importance of good-quality teaching and learning, and improved relationships with and responses to their local communities, are pivotal to success.

Approaches to staff and leadership development need also to acknowledge the changed and tighter fiscal context in which public services operate. The environment is one in which more is required with the same or fewer inputs. At the same time greater flexibility offers opportunities which can bring pay-offs but require taking risks. This is why we look to college leaders who are prepared to be entrepreneurs as well as leaders. It is also the reason training of college leaders should include risk-taking and risk-management.

**The Working Men's College employs Bangladeshi community outreach workers who successfully engage hard-to-reach ethnic minorities, particularly women reluctant to leave their homes, in learning English with other students. As a result of the work, students then engage in their local community and with their local schools.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

Much leadership is innate but it is vital to have a clear focus on leadership and the need for a balance and mix of college-led and sector-wide supported, designed and initiated interventions. Learning from ourselves, but also from others, outside colleges, was also highlighted. We recommend therefore that the sector should give serious consideration to the establishment of a dedicated college or sector leadership centre which combines first-class training with guidance and peer support in building partnerships and taking and handling risk.

## Working with local employers to upgrade skills and create jobs

High on the agenda in the present circumstances is the need to alleviate unemployment and create jobs. In this regard, colleges need to be working actively to develop partnerships with local employers, helping to fill skills gaps and working with them to tailor training to local needs. We believe colleges are more effective in meeting the needs of local business if they approach employer responsiveness as a shared agenda with a clear process of co-creating relevant services and programmes – rather than viewing employer involvement solely from a customer–provider or commissioner–subcontractor perspective. Colleges have engaged with employers for a long time but too frequently they treat employers as customers – buyers of their learning products – not as co-designers.

There is evidence of confusion regarding the role of business and disillusionment among some employers who feel their views are not being listened to or acted upon. Furthermore, despite the focus given to the creation of an employer-led system in policymaking, the evidence suggests that current mechanisms for engagement are focused on involving employers rather than on enlisting their support in the design of provision. As Ofsted told us, 'partnerships with employers are mostly good for vocational provision but opportunities for employers to support more generally are limited'. Too often, employers encounter a lack of clarity as to what is available locally and how this links to the labour market. They do not find it easy to find out who is responsible for local labour market planning, identifying skills gaps or taking action to address them.

**Leicester College has worked closely with Hammerson plc and the John Lewis Partnership to train unemployed people for jobs within Leicester's redeveloped city centre. The Retail Routeway to Work offered unemployed people the opportunity to take part in a two-week pre-employment training programme called 'Retail Works'. Progression opportunities were built into the Routeway, allowing individuals and their employers to access funding to continue their learning and development once in employment.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

Better governance and greater accountability are important here, as are leadership and management. It is critical that the key staff members responsible for meeting this new, shared agenda are responsive to the local business community, understand what is required in the new environment, and get the guidance and support they need. Colleges, employers and the wider community may have different perceptions of accountability, and new measures of accountability and approaches to governance may need to be developed to reflect local priorities and responsiveness.

This is only one part of the solution. It is clear that colleges have a critically important role in supporting local employers in upgrading skills and creating jobs, as well in promoting and developing the entrepreneurial skills required to build the local economy. There are many examples of innovative business and community partnership work, from which we are keen to learn, and which deserve to be more widely shared, but good practice is frequently too dispersed with the lessons not being learned from one area to another.

**South Thames College has pioneered an apprenticeship scheme that not only helps redress a major industry skills gap, but also offers long-term potential for a professional career in civil engineering. The programme was set up with a consortium of six of the UK's largest engineering consultancies to establish an advanced technician apprenticeship in civil engineering in order to deliver a formal qualification for what was a skills gap in the industry.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

## Reaching out to smaller firms

Many colleges already work closely with large employers in their area, but more needs to be done by colleges to reach out to SMEs, using the new funding flexibilities. Colleges which engage with their local employers and SMEs often have a better understanding of local skills needs that wither local authorities or universities. There is considerable potential for colleges to work more closely with SMEs both in relation to apprenticeships but also through small-scale activities to support their business, with considerable benefits for both sides.

Here there are lessons to be learned from the Canadian model, where colleges work closely with SMEs not only to advise on skills requirements but to provide a range of hands-on advice and help services. A key strength of the Canadian system, in which community colleges are established by individual provinces, is the flexibility it affords colleges to respond to local need. Many colleges provide services or activities for the wider community, including supporting economic development; advising small businesses about industry practices; facilitating industry networks and collaboration; identifying business development opportunities for local employers; and targeting provision at specific industry needs to attract new business to an area. There is much we could learn from this hands-on approach to engaging business through facilitation activities.

**Niagara College, in Ontario, Canada, utilises existing staff and students to conduct research with and on behalf of local industry. The college works in partnership with local businesses, small and large, in areas of importance to the economic health of the region. Each semester 600 students are involved in course-based projects with more than 50 industry partners.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

Colleges in the UK do, of course, already make significant contributions to the training and development of SMEs, which are often the main businesses in the localities served by colleges. They are, therefore, well placed to be a catalyst for the development of the small businesses sector through enterprise hubs that can train, encourage and support the growth of micro and small businesses.

**Unionlearn has worked with a number of colleges in brokering protocols to promote learning and skills in the workplace. One example is Stephenson College in Leicestershire. Here, unions and local employers are working with the college to support the development of workplace learning and apprenticeships, as well as helping young people to enter the world of work.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

Colleges are not just skills providers and planners; they are also a major part of the local economic infrastructure. They are large employers, and purchasers of goods and services. Their experience of working across the public-private sector interface means they are well-placed to advise other businesses on how to operate more efficiently and innovatively. We would like to see this role enhanced as colleges develop their community plans. In particular colleges need to explore new ways of helping local SMEs with apprenticeships and consultancy support.

## Making joined-up government work at a local level

Partnership with public-sector organisations is also essential. Joined-up government may prove difficult at the national level, but it can be highly effective when put into practice at a local level. There are many good examples. We encountered numerous instances of colleges linking up with other public service providers, in areas such as youth justice, health and social care, parenting and family support, youth services and the police, to drive forward new partnerships aimed at promoting community well-being in one form or another.

**As part of Hull College's wider community engagement, students from the college's construction department have been taking part in the Void Project, a joint venture involving Hull Council, Probe, a not-for-profit community development organisation and the Preston Road Development Trust, to transform four empty properties into decent homes. More houses are shortly to undergo the same refurbishment.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

Colleges, it should be remembered, do not just make an impact on the local economy and the labour force needs of local businesses; they make a major contribution to the health, well-being, culture, cohesion and reputation of a locality. This wider impact does not always get the attention given to colleges' economic role, but it is an area in which colleges make a real difference. Critically, the wider work colleges do in promoting the well-being and cohesion of their communities can lead to significant benefits in other areas of public policy, including health, social care, support for families, volunteering and the Big Society.

Ofsted told us weaker colleges have 'insufficient links with community partners and organisations to improve learning opportunities'. We know that such partnerships can yield substantial benefits, transforming the lives of individuals, the well-being of whole communities, as well as the quality of learning for existing college students. Colleges and their public-sector partners need to be bold, collaborative and entrepreneurial in making them happen.

### **Making the college voice heard on local planning partnerships**

Colleges, as the major providers of skills training in many localities, have a key contribution to make to employment and skills planning as well as to delivery, and need to ensure that their voices are heard on local economic and social planning partnerships. They should have a prominent role in developing local skills strategies.

The Commission found that the competitive environment in which colleges and other providers operate sometimes hinders effective collaboration. Permissive approaches to partnership creation and loose alliances have led to a lack of consistency and role-clarity, and partnerships based on self-interest. Despite many years of heavy public investment, colleges are at risk of being under-utilised as a knowledge and physical resource in the communities they serve, though there are notable exceptions.

**Plumpton College, a land-based college to the north of Brighton, has taken an active role in hosting and supporting community activities. It provides serviced accommodation and administrative support to a number of voluntary groups and rural charities, including the regional Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the Sussex Young Farmers' Club and Farming and Countryside Education. Instead of rent, some of the bodies offer the college a portion of their staff time in support of college teaching or support operations.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

The economic impact of colleges is not only through the outcomes of skills delivery but also through their place in the local economy and their contribution to local decision-making. This deserves greater exploitation and alignment with new arrangements, such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and, in particular, with local government's role in the economic growth agenda. This can lead to colleges working alongside employers, local authorities and other public services as strategic partners – often a fruitful relationship.

**Northern College, in South Yorkshire, is an active member of the Kirklees Adult Learning Partnership. The partnership, which is led by Kirklees Council, brings together local partners with an interest in adult learning to identify local needs and priorities for adult learning and to jointly plan provision. Working in partnership with Kirklees Council's Adult Learning Service, the college has provided training for community organisations to develop their capacity to deliver learning and offered courses designed to encourage active citizenship and contribute to community cohesion.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

A vibrant learning and skills system is not concerned only with qualifications; it is about education in the wider sense. Further education colleges have an important role in the delivery of informal adult and community learning, working alongside local authorities, specialist-designated colleges and the voluntary sector to reach out to disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups within the community. This work supports colleges' wider role in promoting the well-being and cohesion of their communities, leading also to substantial savings in, for example, health and welfare bills.

### **Developing a new curriculum**

New initiatives towards outreach activities require new thinking about the curriculum. Providing routes and pathways to further learning is central, but it needs also to be a highly flexible curriculum built to respond to local needs on an 'any time, any place' formula and, for young people in particular, making full use of the internet and new social media. Building confidence and self-esteem is important and so too is recognition of the motivational stimulus that people gain from group-based activities, whether in the college, the workplace or the community. Hence, the need to blend online and distance learning with campus-based or even residential sessions.

Over the past decade the development and delivery of colleges' community curriculum offer has been limited by external strategic factors such as funding methodology restrictions and regulatory regimes which can discourage innovative accessible curriculum development aimed at non-traditional learners. Other limiting factors are qualification frameworks and awarding bodies programmes; and teacher training courses concentrating on the delivery and management of teaching at the expense of the philosophy behind curriculum design and development.

**Oxford and Cherwell Valley College developed a project in partnership with Oxford Brookes University to deliver a 'Resident Research and Leadership' programme in deprived areas. The programme was aimed at enabling residents to research learning needs and other issues and to empower them to respond.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

In spite of these constraints, the Coalition Government's reforms promise to enable a more flexible response to delivering services, learning opportunities and curriculum programmes. Increased investment in fees by individuals and employers, while challenging in a number of respects, also opens new doors and offers the potential for engaging a wider range of people.

**Bishop Auckland College worked with a range of partners to devise a quality framework to ensure adult learners have definite aims, structure and quality assurance and has developed curriculum and provision to meet the needs of adults and communities while addressing national priorities for the area. Partnership has been a key way of overcoming funding challenges.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

A new 'community curriculum' would reflect the commitment to providing local responsiveness. The key features of curriculum design would be to:

- *Communicate with a college's communities in a manner which they understand and with which they can engage.*
- *Develop aspects of learning in a way, and at a time and place, which will involve the majority of the targeted group.* A curriculum needs to include an assessment methodology both formative and summative which moves learning forward and does not merely judge what has been learned. It must add to the process of learning, building upon existing skills and capabilities and further developing an individual.
- *Reflect the distinction between younger people's learning and the often more episodic way in which adults learn.* It should recognise the different starting points and learning experiences of younger learners whose brain functions are different from those of older, more analogue adult learners who will not have experienced the same level of technology or the national curriculum.

The design of a community curriculum should:

- Reflect the different learning experiences of adults and develop confidence and self-esteem.
- Be delivered locally and responsively, comprising a series of short or part-time learning experiences rather than merely longer-term linear courses.
- Provide different routes and pathways to learning in a flexible way.
- Ensure that the process of learning and appropriateness of assessment and feedback methods are critical and of equal importance to the content.
- Offer highly flexible, any-time, any-place provision, and support episodic learning.
- Build upon the wide range of experiences and skills adults bring to learning.
- Encourage enterprise and the development of business start-up skills within vocational areas of learning.
- Encourage adults to get involved in the life of the college through mentoring and coaching, employment opportunities and the learning voice.
- Be supported by professional development to enable the assessment of community needs, the development of curriculum philosophy and design and the implementation of curriculum and assessment methodology.

### **A more flexible funding system**

The world-class further and higher education system we enjoy today is the result of years of investment from the public purse. Whatever the future status of colleges in the public, private or third sectors, they are assets in which we have all invested and from which communities have a right to benefit. Their common denominator is that they are currently not-for-profit bodies where any surplus is ploughed back into the business. In challenging economic times it is important to allow these social businesses as much space as possible to flourish and play a full part in their local economies.

**Norwich City College has taken a number of innovative approaches to the funding guidance received from the Skills Funding Agency. These have included modelling the impacts of the policy on students and courses; making changes to the college curriculum to make learning more affordable and to allow students to approach learning in smaller chunks; and linking with its communities to ensure target groups are engaged and given opportunities to progress.** A case study detailing the college's engagement with its community is published on the Inquiry website.

While the Coalition Government deserves credit for introducing considerably more flexibilities than under the previous system, funding is still constrained by too many rules and regulations as to what is to be spent on which activity. If all colleges are to be innovative and entrepreneurial they need more discretion to be able to allocate resources as they see fit.

There are two main causes of concern expressed by colleges:

- An insecure funding base that hinders innovation and development.
- Micromanagement of funding detail by government agencies that discourages cross-subsidy and direct college response/discretion to local and individual needs.

The achievement of the vision of this report hinges on the ability of colleges to respond flexibly and responsively to their very different local economies and communities.

In our interim report we argued for a number of immediate and longer-term changes to the funding regime. In particular, we asked government to allow colleges to:

- Use up to 25 per cent of their adult skills budget to meet locally assessed priority needs.
- Pilot the funding of outcomes as opposed to student numbers or qualification outputs.
- Pilot three-year funding for outstanding colleges.
- Review and amend the funding guidance and audit regime, stripping out the detailed bureaucratic controls.

These ideas have received broad support and the Coalition Government's reform programme has continued to take a direction of travel that moves the sector towards the shared agenda we outlined in July 2011.

### **A new approach to governance and accountability**

The shift in public policy from centrally planned systems towards greater local discretion and responsibility means greater autonomy for colleges, and a continuing streamlining of top-down regulation and direction, particularly for those colleges demonstrating good results and sound finances. It also means placing a greater emphasis on accountability to the people colleges serve, rather than to government or its agencies. Developing the community agenda for colleges requires new thinking about governance and accountability.

A college's accountability to its communities is different in nature from its traditional accountability to central regulators and funders. Community bodies will not have regulatory oversight of what a college delivers, nor will they have commissioning powers (except where they are co-funding provision). A college's duty is to engage with its communities in order to develop a common view on priority skills needs and how



they can best be met; and to explain and discuss its performance in meeting them. We see responsibility for balancing the competing priorities of different users as lying with the college.

The governing body of a college is key to this process. It sets strategic priorities in the light of both the policies of government and funding agencies, and the training needs identified by communities. However, governing bodies sometimes experience tension between their engagement with communities and their statutory responsibilities in relation to quality and financial performance. In both these areas, colleges are subject to prescriptive top-down supervision and regulation by Ofsted and the Skills Funding Agency respectively. Many feel that upward accountability to regulators has stunted the development of processes for answering to the communities they serve.

**York College has restructured its governing body to facilitate a better understanding of the skills and training needs of employers. As a result, an employer and skills committee has been established. Members include key local employers, who now have an opportunity to directly impact on the college's strategic direction.** The full case study is published on the Inquiry website.

We have considered a number of approaches to dealing with these tensions, and ensuring that governing bodies deepen their engagement with communities to get a better understanding of local needs and priorities, and to explain performance and future plans in helping to meet them. To be durable, the approach needs to go with the grain of the Coalition Government's plans to reduce prescriptive external regulation and move towards greater self-regulation. The government plans to give colleges freedom to streamline their Instruments and Articles of Governance, while retaining some core duties on governing bodies. We welcome this, but believe that the duties should be extended in two ways. First, in preparing their business plans corporations should have regard to the skills needs of the communities they serve. This would help embed a community focus more universally across the college sector, and require governors to balance the needs of their communities against their other duties in respect of quality and financial performance. Second, corporations should be given a new statutory duty in their Articles to account, probably annually, to their various communities on their performance in meeting local needs. This is required in order to provide the basis for regular open dialogue.

Along with this new autonomy, it is important for colleges to become a good deal more transparent about their performance and future plans for meeting their communities' skills needs. The new Foundation Code of Governance for colleges, due to come into force next year, already sets out a new norm for community engagement. This might be developed to include guidance on ways in which colleges might engage with and account to their various communities on their performance to include good practice guidelines, benchmarks and performance indicators. One possibility is to extend this section of the Code into an fully fledged 'compact' negotiated with the local community and setting out explicitly and with greater transparency the college's community offer and expected outcomes against which progress might be measured.

## A shared agenda

In our interim report we argued that if government would respond to our suggestion for a loosening of the over-rigorous funding regime and a lessening of bureaucracy then colleges would, for their part, deliver in terms of community leadership, closer engagement with employers and learners and acceptance of greater local accountability.

Since then we have received a great deal of support for this shared agenda of reform with colleges, their support bodies, and local and central government all being prepared to play their part. The planning and implementation of the precise details of how this will be taken forward will be a product of collaboration between these agencies – we are delighted that work has already started in this regard.

### Colleges to:

- Commence publication of college funding strategies that outline the levels of co-investment by state, employer, individual and other partners **(by September 2013)**.
- Define a clear offer from colleges to the communities they serve as specified within the proposed community compact **(by September 2012)**.
- Establish within colleges a clearly defined community curriculum that responds to local needs and associated educational outreach work **(by March 2013)**.
- Review HR strategies to reflect their community plans and introduce effective organisational support and development interventions and opportunities for all staff, leaders and governors **(by July 2012)**.
- Explore ways of helping local SMEs with apprenticeships and consultancy support **(by March 2013)**.

### Local partnerships and commissioning bodies to:

- Ensure colleges are properly represented as joint partners in local employment and skills planning processes, building on the effective partnerships colleges have already established with bodies such as the Local Government Association and the British Chambers of Commerce **(by September 2012)**.
- Share existing public sector intelligence and data systems to increase common understanding of community needs **(by March 2012)**.
- Make sure that colleges are properly linked into the new commissioning bodies being established within the NHS **(by March 2013)**.

### Central government agencies to:

- Establish an 'innovation code' to allow flexibility to fund responsive provision which meets locally assessed priority needs. This should total up to 25 per cent of the college's adult skills budget per annum **(by September 2012)**, rising to 50 per cent **(by September 2014)**.
- Establish a model and funding methodologies for three-year funding **(by September 2013)**.
- Review the Qualifications and Credit Framework to enable the development of flexible and responsive community qualifications **(during 2011/12)**.
- Define the self-regulation framework envisaged for colleges **(by summer 2012)**.

- Harmonise Ofsted inspection criteria on meeting community needs with those set out in the Foundation Code of Governance **(by April 2012)**.

### **Sector support bodies to:**

- Develop a community curriculum template with tools to help institutions to develop an overall curriculum strategy and linked assessment system **(by September 2012)**.
- Establish a professional programme to develop a new responsive community curriculum via the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and the Institute for Learning **(by September 2012)**.
- Develop, through sector collaboration, good practice guidance and performance measures for community engagement **(by July 2012)**.
- Develop, with the AoC Governors' Council, an annex to the Foundation Code of Governance that sets out norms for community engagement including supporting good practice guidance, benchmarks and performance indicators **(by July 2012)**.
- Identify funding to develop innovative and collaborative leadership programmes focused on the skills needed to address local issues and to create solutions **(by September 2012)**.
- Establish partnerships and programmes between the Institute for Learning and other professional networks to ensure synergy and effective professional development between staff and leaders **(by September 2012)**.
- Consider the formation of a dedicated college or sector leadership centre to ensure a strong focus on leadership and management for colleges **(by September 2012)**.

# Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities

## Appendix 1

### Commissioners

Margaret Sharp, Baroness Sharp of Guildford – Chair of the Inquiry  
Mike Atkinson – Governor, Plumpton College  
Denise Brown-Sackey – Principal, Newham College (from May 2011)  
Michelle Dawson – Community Manager, Hammerson PLC  
Sally Dicketts – Principal, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College  
Beverley Evans – Chair, Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults (LEAFEA)  
Maggie Galliers CBE – Principal, Leicester College  
Satnam Gill OBE – Principal, Working Men's College, Camden  
Geoff Hall – Principal, New College Nottingham (until May 2011)  
Stella Mbubaegbu CBE – Principal and Chief Executive, Highbury College  
Elaine McMahon CBE – Chief Executive and Principal, Hull College  
David McNulty – Chief Executive, Surrey County Council  
Chris Morecroft – President, Association of Colleges (AoC)  
Lynne Sedgmore CBE – Executive Director, 157 Group  
John Widdowson CBE – Principal and Chief Executive, New College Durham  
Tom Wilson – Director, unionlearn

### Observers

Verity Bullough – Executive Director, Capacity and Infrastructure, Skills Funding Agency (from June 2011)  
Lorna Fitzjohn – Divisional Manager, Learning and Skills, Ofsted  
David Hughes – National Director of College and Learning Provider Services, Skills Funding Agency (until May 2011; from September 2011 as Chief Executive, NIACE)  
Bobbie McClelland – Deputy Director for Post-19 Landscape, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)  
Alison Morris – Senior Manager, UK Commission for Employment and Skills  
Alan Tuckett OBE – Chief Executive, NIACE (until August 2011)  
Rob Wye – Chief Executive, Learning and Skills Improvement Service

### Project Team

Mark Ravenhall – Director of Policy and Impact, NIACE  
Joy Mercer – Director of Policy (Education), AoC  
Ian Yarroll – Programme Manager, NIACE  
Dr Fiona Aldridge – Research Manager, NIACE (until June 2011)  
Lindsey Bowes – Senior Research Manager, CFE  
Amy Goodall – Project Administrator, NIACE  
Emily Jones, Research Assistant, NIACE  
Sarah Neat – Senior Research Executive, CFE  
Dr Helen Plant – Research Manager, NIACE (from June 2011)  
Dr Paul Stanistreet – Editor, *Adults Learning*

## Appendix 2

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Liz Armstrong, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College

Mike Bell, Skills Funding Agency

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Joanna Cain, UNISON

Bert Clough, TUC unionlearn

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Karen Ingram, BIS

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Tracey Kinsley, Leicester College

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Peter Lavender, NIACE

Liz Leek, New College Nottingham

Janice Logie, Essex County Council

Holly Manley, Apprentice of the Year 2010

Chris Minter, Leicester City Council

Judith Mobbs, Suffolk County Council

Frank Offer, Surrey County Council

Alice Pethic, Warwickshire College

David Pine, Sussex Coast College

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Hilary Rimmer, Birmingham Metropolitan College

Steven Roberts, Cornwall College

Mark Robertson, South Staffordshire College

Irina Stanera, Working Men's College

Steve Stanley, Ofsted

David Steadman, Falmouth Marine School

Richard Stevens, Hull City Council

Helen Stevenson, Derby College

Selina Stewart, Joseph Chamberlain College

Dan Taubman, UCU

Cathy Taylor, Sirius Academy

Ann Walker, WEA

Gary Warke, Hull College

Andy Wilson, Westminster Kingsway College

Tony Woodward, Strode's College

### Staff, students and stakeholders at the following colleges visited by the chair:

Barnsley College

Bolton Community College

Bradford College

City Literary Institute, Holborn

Hull College

Leicester College

Newham College of Further Education

North Warwickshire and Hinckley College

Northern College

Oldham Sixth Form College Science Centre

South Thames College

Working Men's College, Camden

### Further submissions of evidence

Denis Allison, Trustee of Horden Youth and Community Centre

Ruth Auton

Tony Bartley, Sandbach School

Bassingbourn Village College  
David Bell, Asset Skills  
Shane Chowen, Institute for Learning  
Teresa Cole, Head of Community College, Highbury College  
Professor David Collinson, Lancaster University  
June Davison, Northumbria University  
Derby City Council Adult Learning Service  
Devon Community Learning Partnership  
Colin Farmery, St Vincent College  
Sandie Foster, Royal National College for the Blind  
Julie Hinchliffe, Bradford College  
Jeremy Holloway  
Azara Issifu, BIMATA Associates  
Professor David James, Bristol Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning and Education  
Gemma Knott, 157 Group  
The Lancashire Colleges  
Lancaster and Morecambe College  
Macclesfield College  
Manchester City Council  
The Manchester College  
Manchester Third Sector Learning, Skills and Employment Network  
Iain McKinnon

Andrew Morris  
David Nelson  
Tra My Nguyen, Ofsted  
North West Local Education Authority Forum for the Education of Adults  
Judith Pelham, learner  
Jayne Quantrill, Forward Communities  
Sue Somerville, Bolton Council  
South Devon College  
Sussex Coast College Hastings  
Jill Taylor, KTS Training

**Case studies provided by:**

Bishop Auckland College  
Hull College  
Leicester College/Hammersons plc  
Northern College  
Norwich City College  
Oxford and Cherwell Valley College  
Plumpton College  
South Thames College  
unionlearn/Stephenson College  
Working Men's College, Camden  
York College



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