Association of Colleges

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**Further Education College Clerk
Development and Training Programme Resource Pack**

Module 7
Collaboration and Partnership

For suggestions on how to get the most out of these self-study materials, see the booklet on 'Using the Materials'.

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to Module 7, which reviews the types of partnership and collaboration that are developing in the further education (FE) sector, and aims to give you, as clerk, the information you need to advise your governing body.

Aims

By the end of this module you should be able to:

- explain the different ways a college can partner or collaborate with others;
- describe the benefits and risks of such partnerships and collaboration;
- outline your own college's partnership and collaboration activity;
- explain how your college's partnership and collaboration with other providers contribute towards economic prosperity, social inclusion and equality of opportunity;
- ask the questions about potential risks that should be considered when discussing new strategic partnerships/collaboration.

Contents

Mark the sections you want to study and tick them off as you complete them.

To do	Done		
		Section 1	Current policy and Government agendas
		Section 2	Definitions and types of partnership
		Section 3	In your college

Working on the self-study activities

These materials have been designed to be used flexibly (e.g. dip in and out for reference; complete in one sitting; work through alone or with others).

Where you need to make notes in response to activity questions, we suggest you do this in a notebook or on separate sheets of loose-leaf paper, and store the information you compile along with the module for future reference. References listed in the Further Reading section may also be helpful.

What you will need

To complete activities in this module you will need to obtain the following documents:

- any reports to the board about partnerships or collaborative activity produced by the senior management team; and
- information about partnerships and collaboration in your local area that affect the college.

Section 1. Current policy and Government agendas

The further education (FE) sector has a key role in meeting Government ambitions to achieve the highest quality skills to support an advanced and competitive economy and to support a trained workforce. In previous modules the FE policy environment has described how that vision for driving positive change in public services sits with the wider Government ambition of:

- consumer choice to force colleges and other providers to raise their game;
- competition to create pressure to raise standards;
- payment for results on the outcomes that society needs; and
- transparency about what is spent and what it achieved.

This is underpinned by a philosophy of local democratic accountability. To support this, the Government has reviewed the funding methodology and encourages the sector to look at innovative, cost-effective ways of delivering what the economy needs. This includes new models of delivery through partnerships, mergers, federations, and collaborative arrangements between different services, sectors and employers, and outsourcing to the private sector.

Since incorporation in 1992, colleges have been forming partnerships and collaborating with each other, local authorities, employers, schools, universities and other services, mostly for the purposes of widening participation and increasing the skills levels of the workforce. In more recent years, mergers and new infrastructure models have developed to meet local needs and increase value for money. Some colleges have merged to strengthen their financial position and provide a more coherent curriculum offer to the local community. These are described in Section 2. Recently, a new college has been established under the 1992 Act.

To achieve the Government's economic and skills ambitions requires more innovation and more collaboration in the FE sector, ensuring that the FE system can respond to the challenges ahead. This will include the development of new business models which reflect and respond to the new operating environment and are capable of making the most of the new opportunities open to schools, colleges and other learning and skills providers.

As with any business, colleges need to assess and reassess continually their position within the 'market' and the local circumstances in which they operate. Colleges respond to the changing needs and demands of students and employers; they respond to the needs of their communities; and they respond to Government priorities. The current Government is encouraging colleges to look at establishing or further developing collaborative working arrangements both within the FE college sector and with schools, universities other training providers and employers. This could include adopting different models for different groups of students.

The Education Act 2011, as well as freeing governing bodies to organise their governance to suit their local needs, opened up opportunities for FE colleges to partner with the school sector, through sponsoring academies, collaborative sixth form provision and other partnership arrangements.

Reforms to the higher education sector

The Government issued a White Paper in June 2011 called '[Students at the Heart of the System](#)' proposing a number of significant changes to higher education policy with the principal aim of opening up competition for student places. The implementation of these proposals has presented FE colleges with the opportunity of expanding their HE provision.

Around 175,000 students study undergraduate and postgraduate courses at more than 280 colleges across England. In towns that do not have a university, the college provides a university-type service. Where towns and cities do have a university, the college often provides HE for local people. Colleges also provide HE for those who are unable to access university due to transport costs or family commitments. Some 70% of college HE students live within 25 miles of their campus, and more than 50% study part-time, mostly on specially designed courses.

The Government has relaxed its restriction on the number of students that universities and colleges can recruit. Recent policy changes have enabled unrestricted recruitment of high achieving students, but from 2015 there will be no restriction on the number of students a university or college can recruit.

Up to date information on college HE can be found on the [AoC website](#). Up to date information on student numbers and allocation can be found on the [HEFCE website](#).

Local Enterprise Partnerships

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are a key cornerstone of the Government's new local economic development policy. They are partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They decide what the priorities should be for investment in employment, skills and infrastructure in the area.

The Government's skills strategy elaborated on the relationship between LEPs and FE and HE institutions. It envisages colleges, universities and other providers working collaboratively with local partners to ensure that the skills demands of individual students and employers are met. They have control of the capital funding for further education and any future developments go through the LEP. Current information regarding LEPs can be found on the Government [LEP and enterprise zones policy](#) webpage.

Colleges in the community

In November 2011 the report of an independent commission on colleges in their communities – '[A Dynamic Nucleus](#)' – was published. It identifies the role that colleges currently play in their local communities and the strategic potential they have for adding value by leading learning and working. The potential lies in colleges' location and their instinct and ability to link with local organisations including local authorities, employers and the third sector. The report provides ways in which colleges can contribute through collaboration and partnership. A practice guide '[Thinking outside the college](#)' has been produced with active advice to governors on ways in which they can develop and demonstrate their public value contribution.

Activity

Find out more about how current Government policy influences your college's current strategic planning

Work through the questions below to find out more about these influences on your college's strategy. Make a note of your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Look through some recent principal's reports to governors. What partnership or collaboration issues do they raise? Make a note of them. In what way do they illustrate any of the current policy or Government agendas listed above?
2. Look at your college's mission statement and strategic objectives. How do these relate to the current Government policy objectives?
3. Look through your college's prospectus. How does the curriculum offer support the economic and social development of the local community?
4. Find out which LEP your college is located in. What are their priority areas and how does your college curriculum align to these? In what ways is your college involved in LEP activity?
5. Look at your local authority website. What are they saying about the policy on Raising the Participation Age and their role in implementing it?

Viewpoint

We hope this activity has given you an insight into how current policy and Government agendas are considered by your institution. You should have identified some partnerships or collaborative activity within your institution. You may feel that one or two aspects need to be considered more carefully.

When you can, check your thoughts out with the chair of governors or perhaps with the relevant senior post holder with responsibility for partnership working.

Section 2. Definitions and types of partnership

Collaboration

Collaboration has taken place in the sector for a long time and has enjoyed differing degrees of success. Moving forward, collaboration is likely to have a role to play in the sector with providers (both public and private) identifying ways of working together more effectively.

Collaboration offers organisations the opportunity to find efficiencies through specialisation; this may involve giving up elements of their provision to others who may offer better quality and/or more cost-effective delivery models.

In the past, meaningful collaboration has been difficult in FE as colleges have been encouraged, since incorporation, to work in competition, particularly in their local area. Collaborative working requires trust between all parties and the need to develop working relationships over time. The drivers for collaboration have since become more compelling with cuts in public spending and the need to meet the local economy's skills agenda, while showing value for money.

Collaborative delivery arrangements

Collaboration between FE providers can be facilitated via a range of mechanisms. There are opportunities for a wide range of collaborative activities which may be more or less formal. Collaborations or federations can involve many different types of provider and other organisations which may be linked geographically, through an industry specialism, or through a focus on a particular group of students. Collaborative models can rely on relatively informal arrangements or can use legally documented formal arrangements. In practice some models are more easily established than others, but effort put in to establishing a more formalised structure at the beginning may yield greater benefits to all partners.

Some possible federal structures are:

One provider leads the group
Such a provider could facilitate a group and often provides the legal entity for contracting. The provider may also provide specific expertise on behalf of a group. For example, they might lead on marketing, providing quality assurance systems, working with employers, or liaising with the funding agency and other funding bodies. The group will define its purpose and objectives and the range of provision or customer services to be considered.

Members of the group would be selected according to the objectives of the group and the provision or services to be influenced.

A representative structure
In this model there is a clearly defined and published structure allowing each member to be represented at the decision-making level, such as on a board or on a joint committee, possibly with the chair moving to each member in turn. Members of the group actively contribute resource to support a central secretariat, for example through subscription. The central secretariat coordinates activity but may also hold expertise that all members can call on, such as for legal or marketing advice, or project management. In this type of federation, task groups or thematic sub-groups are often established to take forward strands of work.

A statutory joint committee

This allows institutions to participate in joint committees with other institutions. The creation of a joint committee enables the provider's corporation (and the governing bodies of other committee members) to delegate a range of decision-making powers to that committee. In this way, institutions can work together to take forward projects for the benefit of students in their institutions.

An incorporated organisation/company
Institutions may consider establishing or acquiring a company in order to meet a specific need or to deliver specific services. For example, a specific trading company could be set up to focus on local employers, establish a different brand, or to focus on a specific industry sector. The providers need not be linked geographically but could be linked through an industry specialism such as land-based provision or nuclear decommissioning.

Working with the third sector
The third sector includes a very diverse range of organisations including: voluntary organisations; community groups; tenants' and residents' groups; faith groups; housing associations; most co-operatives and social enterprises (provided profits are retained for the benefit of the members or community served); most sports' organisations; grant-making trusts; and private clubs.

Organisations can take a variety of forms including one or more of the following:

- mutual
- community interest company
- industrial and provident society
- not-for-profit trade association
- charitable trust
- company limited by guarantee
- unincorporated group.

FE has long worked with the third sector in order to extend its reach into communities. Today, the third sector works in a variety of ways, e.g. through consortia and partnerships with other providers, to provide an holistic approach to meeting the needs of disadvantaged students.

Trusts
Trusts are a powerful way of enabling different types of providers to work together on specific, well-defined objectives. The purpose of the Trust is to use partnership working as a vehicle to drive up standards through long-term, formal relationships between the partner organisations and the school(s). Schools will draw on the skills and experience of Trust-appointed governors to strengthen the governing body and strategic leadership.

Academy sponsors
Collaboration with schools can bring many advantages to high performing post-16 educational providers. Academies are all-ability, state-funded schools, managed by independent sponsors. It is more important that strong educational establishments focus on what they are best at: delivering quality teaching, learning and assessment and positively shaping the ethos and culture of the academy. Academies have to ensure that the school will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other schools, colleges and the wider community. For more information on academies see the [Department for Education](#) webpage.

Drivers for collaboration

Colleges and other providers within FE have been involved in collaborative working for many years. It is recognised that collaborative working can be challenging and may have associated risks. There are many

reasons why colleges and other providers should consider working together, but key drivers include the following, though this is not an exhaustive list:

- building capacity within organisations and across federations to enable partners to thrive in a demand-led system;
- changing the way provision is delivered to better meet the needs of employers, adult learners and 14 to 19 year olds;
- meeting a specific need of the community;
- establishing coherence across 14 to 19 provision, and across other boundaries;
- deploying technology effectively to support a demand-led system;
- improving, moving or extending facilities; and
- sharing back-office services and systems.

Local planning to respond to identified gaps or poor quality

With the new localism agenda, more emphasis is placed on local area planning for delivery. Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver (DIUS, 2008) set out instances where the organisation of learning provision would change as a result of tackling gaps through competitions or by expanding high-quality provision delivered by a single provider.

Specialisation

Institutions may choose to collaborate as a result of specialisation. Some institutions have sought a distinctive mission by specialising in training for particular industry sectors; some are considering whether to narrow their client group in other ways, often in the context of shifts in provision and demand that are emerging within their areas. This could be combined with moves to attract larger number of students from outside their immediate area, or indeed internationally.

Ensuring choice and quality

Collaborative working arrangements can provide the means to expand the range of opportunities available to students, spread excellence in teaching, learning and assessment, and make it easier for the best providers to spread their influence across the system and lead change. All collaborative models can involve any number of organisations with potentially very different organisational objectives. However, there are some common factors which can deliver successful outcomes for students and employers as well as the partners involved.

It is important that the group does not get too unwieldy, that it is able to influence provision directly and speedily, and that it avoids having unreasonable expectations of what partners can contribute in terms of finance or time. Common characteristics demonstrated by successful collaborative partnerships are:

- a sense of shared identity/common purpose;
- clarity of vision and purpose and partner roles;
- strong, cohesive leadership and a strong management infrastructure;
- commitment; and
- trust.

Activity

Get to know your institution's partners and collaborators

In this activity you will be finding out more about the partnerships your institution has with other providers. You may already have some of this information from working through the activities in Module 1: Overview of the Further Education System, and Module 6: Strategy and Educational Character. If not, or if there are gaps in your information, you should look at your principal's report to governors and/or your college's annual report.

1. Identify the formal and informal partnerships your institution has with other providers, both public and private.
2. Now consider how these contribute to your institution's mission and vision.
3. What are the risks associated with these partnerships and how are these monitored?
4. What kinds of partnerships would you like to see your college engaging in and why?

Viewpoint

You should be getting a better understanding of the institution's attitude and culture towards partnerships and how they contribute to the institution playing a full role in the community it serves.

College mergers

"I am not saying that mergers should never happen, but there needs to be a wide variety of approaches if we are to achieve a revitalised and dynamic system. We want to work with you to refine our approach so that change is catalysed, not by failure, but by innovation."
John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, speech 15 June, 2011

There has been a significant reduction in the number of colleges merging, as the new freedoms and flexibilities have enabled new business models to be considered. However this is still the option for failing or struggling colleges, particularly small institutions, both FECs and private training providers. The reasons for merger may be categorised under two headings:

- **rescue**: in which a struggling college is 'rescued' by, and usually amalgamated into, a more viable college;
- **strategic**: in which two colleges that are already fairly successful merge because they believe they will be even more viable if combine.

Types of merger

There are currently two types of merger.

- **Model A**: a new corporation is established, then the existing corporations dissolve and their property, rights and liabilities are transferred to the new corporation.
- **Model B**: one corporation dissolves and its property, rights and liabilities are transferred to an existing corporation.

The practical differences between the two are:

- Model A: a new corporation must be established, which will comprise an entirely new board of governors. A new staffing structure must be established, with all staff having to be appointed to posts in that new structure;
- Model B: one of the corporations will continue. The governing body of that corporation will not have to change, although it has been common for the board to invite members of the other corporation to join, either by filling vacancies or by increasing the size of the board.

The Education Act 2011 removed the right of the Secretary of State to dissolve an English FE corporation, or the local authority to dissolve a sixth form college. The power to dissolve firmly rests with the governing body.

The Secretary of State has reserved powers to intervene, through the FE Commissioner. The role of the FE Commissioner is to review the position of those FE colleges which are judged to be 'inadequate' by Ofsted, fail to meet national minimum standards of performance, or have an inadequate assessment for financial health and/or financial control by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The FE commissioner then advises the Secretary of State on the course of action necessary to secure improvement. This may include a merger or takeover of the college.

The procedures to be adopted when dissolving a corporation are set out in Statutory Instrument 2012 no.1167. Any corporation considering merger will be expected to complete a Structure and Prospects Appraisal.

For some research and comment on mergers in the sector see:

- 'Mergers: the answer to an increasingly competitive FE marketplace?' (January 2013) An article in FE News;
- 'Delivering Value for Money through Infrastructural Change' (2010). Research commissioned by the Learning & Skills Council (LSC).

Dissolution process for further education corporations

Decision to consult dissolution proposal: Following assessment of options, the corporation decides to consult upon a proposal to dissolve.

Publication of the dissolution proposal: At least four months before the proposed date of dissolution, the corporation publishes the dissolution proposal for consultation and sends a copy to list of prescribed persons.

Consultation on the proposals: Proposals should be consulted on for a period of at least one month from the date of publication.

Consideration of responses and publication of outcomes: At the end of the consultation, the corporation considers the consultation responses, and publishes a summary of the consultation and its outcome within two months of the end of the consultation period.

Decision to dissolve and draft resolution: The corporation agrees to dissolve and publishes a draft resolution (including the proposed date of dissolution) at least one month before dissolution.

Resolution by college corporation: The corporation resolves to dissolve.

Note: Where a dissolution proposal involves establishing a new corporation, which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State, the corporation(s) must submit the draft proposal to the Secretary of State for comment before going out to consultation and must submit any final proposal for Secretary of State agreement to establish the new corporation, before publishing the outcomes of the consultation.

Colleges are reminded that they must act as trustees in accordance with [guidance on managing financial difficulties](#) issued by the Charity Commissioner. While the assets of a college could be transferred to a private company, it should be noted that they can only be used thereafter for charitable purposes. In the situation where the FE Commissioner has decided to intervene in the affairs of a college, s/he may remove all or any of the members of the governing body, appoint new members of that body if there are vacancies and/or give a direction requiring the governors to collaborate with another organisation or make a resolution to dissolve. Prior to intervention it is probable that an external team of consultants will be attached to the college.

Dissolution of a college is most likely to occur where a merger is intended. However it could also be applied where a college wishes to operate as a company limited by guarantee rather than a corporation.

The new process for dissolution is intended to be less cumbersome than previously. While guidance on dissolution of a corporation is provided by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) for FE colleges and by the Department for Education (DfE) for sixth form colleges this is not a substitute for appropriate expert legal advice, which is to be recommended. An example of a merger process under the old regulations is included here for illustration of the kinds of procedures expected.

Example

The merger of two south west colleges
All mergers require a public consultation to enable the communities they serve to have a say in the merger proposals. Most colleges produce a document or prospectus that sets out the rationale for merger and the benefits it will bring the community. Recently a public consultation began between two colleges in the south west region that are considering a merger. They intend to discuss their plans with local people over a period of five weeks, as they hope to safeguard their future and create a new, unified college.

The colleges believe a combined institution will provide "major benefits" and ensure a "sound future", particularly in response to expected funding cuts over the next few years. Both governing bodies feel this merger constitutes a shared vision for learning in their communities and will maintain access to learning for rural communities.

The two colleges are very similar in terms of curriculum and performance, and the merger is aimed at ensuring the rural towns between the two campuses are well served by good vocational colleges. This is a merger from a position of strength and the new college is expected to maintain and improve performance, while also reducing costs and increasing participation.

Both college governing bodies considered public feedback and submitted their complete merger plan to the Minister of State for Further Education. The proposals were approved by the Minister and the college opened under a new name in February 2012.

For a detailed investigation into mergers in the FE sector see '[The evidence base on college size and mergers in the FE sector](#)', DIUS, 2008.

Alternatives to merger

The focus on individual accountability is a major contributory factor to the lack of trust between colleges, their willingness to share data and delegate strategic decisions to others. It particularly inhibits

the development of federative activity which could be a useful alternative to merger and a basis for the development of shared services. Often merger is the only option available to failing colleges. There are shared services collaborations developing across institutions, particularly in finance, HR and management information systems.

Mergers are particularly successful where it is recognised that an entirely new situation is being created and where exhaustive advance planning and modelling takes place to look at the potential benefits and costs.

Hard federations and soft federations

Many institutions are considering federations, either hard or soft.

A **hard federation** generally is where there is one governing body that oversees several institutions, and is accountable for the federation. However, hard federations are developing with more dynamic models of governance. Each institution will still have its own budget, but the governing body will make strategic budgetary decisions on behalf of the federation. There may be one executive position with overall accountability for the federation, but each institution may still have its own chief executive officer.

A **soft federation** is where each institution maintains its own governing body and management structure, but a governance committee is established that has delegated powers to make certain decisions on behalf of the federation, usually with shared membership from each institution in the federation. Protocols are agreed for what can and cannot be decided by the committee and when it is required that a recommendation has to be approved at the institution's governing body.

Joint venture partnership model

There is an option for providers to collaborate and be run as a Joint Venture Board. A JVB is a non-exempt charity (unlike colleges, which are exempt charities); one provider, either public or private sector, is the accountable body for funding and other related purposes. The partnership can reflect:

- a wish on the part of one partner to share curriculum and services benefits;
- a wish to improve career development pathways and develop internal talent;
- a desire to utilise each other's expertise, particularly with regard to support services but also in terms of their curriculum development and quality improvement experience; or
- one partner's willingness to contribute working capital to the venture.

This not-for-profit partnership model is an alternative option to merger. The original idea of the not-for-profit model came out of meetings and discussions with the then Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, who was concerned about the loss of local involvement and control of smaller FE colleges in financial difficulty. There were two fears: large colleges swallowing up smaller ones; and the danger that successful colleges would be reluctant in future to take on smaller colleges, which may then disappear. This model allows for private organisations to partner with colleges for the good of the community.

HE/FE partnerships

There are already a great many further and higher education partnerships, some at a regional level. For example, Regional University Network Leeds Metropolitan University, where 24 FE colleges work in a network to enhance the HE regional offer to students. Another example is the Combined Universities of Cornwall (CUC).

Example

Combined Universities of Cornwall (CUC)
CUC secures funding for and coordinates the growth of university-level education in Cornwall. It ensures that Cornwall's unique university partnership is more than the sum of its parts and is developed in a way that benefits the region's people and businesses. Students are recruited and taught by CUC's partner universities and colleges, each of which brings its own strengths and specialisms to the partnership and to the county.

In the past, one of Cornwall's most serious challenges has been the annual exodus of young people leaving the area because it was not possible for them to study their favoured subjects close to home. Very few of these people returned to live and work in Cornwall, dividing families and making it hard for local businesses to recruit skilled, creative young people. It also hampered new enterprise and innovation. At the time of CUC being set up, Cornwall had 2,500 funded HE places for an approximate population of 450,000. It was the county with the poorest economic performance in England at the time.

The partnership was set up eleven years ago. It came out of a strong vision for the county shared by the social and community partners as well as the education institutions in Cornwall. Key leaders in the universities at the time, the Government Office of the South West and Cornwall County Council, had a clear sense of what Cornwall needed to develop its economic strategy. Previously, Cornwall had had aspirations for a university to stem the outpouring of 17 to 18 year olds who returned (if at all) in their thirties and forties, creating a huge demographic dip with consequences for economic development and enterprise in the county. The opportunity to do something about this came through the European Regional Development Funding Programme.

The partners asked: What are the really major things we could do with this money that would transform Cornwall, as opposed to lots of little local projects that would produce more of the same? They realised Cornwall needed transformational change, at the heart of which were increasing opportunities and access to HE in Cornwall. The funding provided the opportunity to create the Combined Universities of Cornwall Partnership. It was the lever that enabled Cornwall to make significant progress.

Different options were explored and the preferred model was to build on the different strengths of all the HEIs with an existing interest in Cornwall: the Universities of Exeter and Plymouth, University College Falmouth, the Open University, College of St Mark and St John, and the FE colleges in the county. This was seen as the best way of harnessing complementary strengths, in particular of the institutions not based in the county.

University Technical Colleges (UTCs)

"The next great poverty-busting structural change we need – the expansion of University Technical Schools – offering first-class technical skills to those turned off by purely academic study."
David Cameron, Prime Minister

University Technical Colleges are a new concept in education. They allow 14 to19 year olds to take a highly-regarded technical course of study, at a specialist school equipped to the highest standards. UTCs are sponsored by a university or college of further education, with clear progression routes into higher education or further learning in work. They offer full-time courses that combine practical and academic studies. Employers are involved from the start in shaping the curriculum.

University Technical Colleges are free-standing institutions offering just two specialisms, for example engineering and advanced manufacturing. UTCs are academies but schools or colleges cannot become a

UTC by simply converting to academy status. All applications for UTCs must be submitted to and approved by the Department for Education.

Example

Black Country UTC
Based in Walsall, the UTC is being supported by lead sponsor Walsall College, and co-sponsored by the University of Wolverhampton and Walsall Council, with strong partnerships with local employers. It is intended that the new training academy will reinvigorate the Black Country's engineering heritage. The Black Country UTC officially opened in September 2011 to its first cohort of year 10s and year 12s (sixth form). Its specialisms are engineering and science.

The Black Country UTC aims to create the next generation of engineers and scientists, who will work on exciting and challenging projects, developing innovative new products and processes that could change the way we live in the future. It will provide forward-thinking year 10 and year 12 pupils with an opportunity to get a head start in developing the skills required for a career in the engineering industry.

In the process of setting up the UTC, Walsall College rationalised some of its provision, handing over curriculum for 16 to 18 year olds in engineering and design to the UTC, in return for progressing them onto the higher level foundation degrees and technical qualifications offered at the college.

Cross-sector partnerships – health/social/education

Many institutions are starting to partner more with other public sector services, such as the health service, community youth groups and social services, to support each other in achieving their goals.

Example

Northamptonshire County Council
Northamptonshire Adult Learning Service has articulated a distinct role for adult learning in the county that sits alongside and is separate from the Government's drive for vocational skills. It has a vision for well-being and social community development, both of which may lead to an increase in skills and economic activity, though this is not the intended core purpose for delivering adult learning.

The authority sees its role more as a part of the community development, social networking, health and well-being of citizens. The Service Manager describes adult learning as having a role in: "*supporting the extended family in a community*", as families increasingly live apart and people become isolated from family support. Those individuals and families need support so that their complex needs are not escalated to requiring high-cost specialist social services.

This reflects the three core purposes of the council:

- to help people help themselves;
- to help those who cannot help themselves; and
- to be a trusted advocate.

These core purposes are encapsulated in the adult learning service's mission:
"Through learning, to empower people in Northamptonshire to live more independent lives as active citizens, helping to deliver safer communities and promoting a dynamic and prosperous economy."

The service is working in partnership with the Northampton NHS to provide a series of community-based adult learning courses for people with mild to moderate depression and anxiety. The courses currently offered by Northamptonshire Adult Learning are structured around the themes of:

- well-being, including stress management and confidence building; and
- creative expression, including creative writing, painting, drawing and card making.

Over 300 learners have attended these courses. People can self-refer by contacting 'Changing Minds' (NTPCT) or are referred by their GPs.

The Mental Health Foundation independently evaluated this programme over three years. The 'Learning for Life' report published the results of this study in 2011, showing that community-based adult learning programmes provide a simple, low-cost way of helping to reduce the symptoms of mild to moderate mental stress.

Section 3. In your college

As you discovered in the previous activity, your institution has many partnerships and collaborations in various forms. Some will be at a strategic level and therefore of interest to governors, whereas others may be operational and managed wholly through the leadership team.

So what is the role of governance in partnership and collaboration?

Governors will be particularly interested in any partnership or collaboration that changes the educational character, accountability or business model of the institution. As with any business decision, the risks need to be managed, and it is the responsibility of the governing body to identify and manage the risks through a risk-based approach to partnerships and collaborations. Every institution will have different drivers and motives for working with other institutions.

Below is a series of reflective questions to help you think about the governors' role in collaboration and partnership.

Strategic questions

- How is partnership and collaboration articulated within our current vision, mission and values?
- How could new partnerships and collaborations help us better meet our vision and mission?
- Which institutions or services in our community, if we worked together, could help us provide better access to education and training and improve the quality of our service?
- What impact would such collaborative arrangements make on the governance of the institution?
- What impact would such collaborative arrangements have on the management of the institution(s)?
- In what ways does this partnership add value to the students in our community? What are the key benefits of the partnership?
- What are the key risks?
- What are the critical success factors (CSFs) for success with this partnership? (CSFs refer to a limited number - maybe between three and eight - of characteristics, conditions or variables that have a direct impact on the effectiveness or viability of a given activity.)

It is helpful to test scenarios, with "what if?" questions, for example: what if the relationship breaks down? This helps to identify all the known and potential risks and plan to manage them.

If your institution is considering a strategic partnership or collaboration, the student should be the central focus for any decision, and how the plans support improvement in teaching, learning and assessment. Public consultation and listening to the voice of the community, along with a clear stakeholder communication strategy is critical for success in any partnership or collaboration.

The new freedoms and flexibilities enable colleges to consider any business model that will best provide for their partnership or collaboration arrangements. Some have started to investigate social enterprises and mutual business models. Keep an eye on the case studies in the AoC governance library as new models will be captured as case studies. Any model needs to start from the institution's mission and vision, providing the right 'fit for purpose' business model and strategy to deliver the mission and vision.

Module review

This module has reviewed the types of partnership and collaboration that are developing in the further education (FE) sector, and sought to give you the information you need to advise your governing body. If you have worked through this module, you should be able to:

- explain the different ways a college can partner or collaborate with others;
- describe the benefits and risks of such partnerships and collaboration;
- outline your own college's partnership and collaboration activity;
- explain how your college's partnership and collaboration with other providers contribute towards economic prosperity, social inclusion and equality of opportunity;
- ask the questions about potential risks that should be considered when discussing new strategic partnerships/collaboration.

Summary of key learning points

In this module you have looked at the policy landscape, and the current and emerging opportunities for partnership and collaboration. You have also started to identify the strategic partnerships your institution currently has, and think about the potential partnerships and collaboration that could add value to the service you provide to your community.

It is important that any partnership or collaboration keeps students, and how this adds value to the community, at the heart of any strategic decisions. Taking a risk-based approach will ensure a thorough exploration of the options available and will enable the best strategic decisions to be made.

Where next?

You have now completed work on Module 7: Collaboration and Partnership. Take a look at the Further Reading section. Note down what further information, support or guidance you would like.

Putting it into action

We hope that working through this module has raised useful questions, increased your awareness of issues and given you ideas for practical action that you would like to follow up. The 'Action Planner' in 'Using the Materials' contains a section where you can note down any questions or action points that you want to follow up within your own college.

Further Reading

[Emerging models of delivery across the FE and skills sector](#) (2012). A research report on the emerging delivery models developing in the wake of New Challenges, New Chances.

[Decision makers' support package](#) (2012). A toolkit published by LSIS to help you think through the process of collaborating or partnering.

[Case studies](#) - Case studies relating to the research report 'Emerging models of delivery across the FE and skills sector'. Also The AoC governance library will be continually adding new case studies as colleges change their governance.

'[The further education and skills sector in 2020: a social productivity approach](#)' (2011). A think piece produced by the RSA Public Services Hub about what FE would look like in 2020 and the implications for leadership.

Acknowledgements

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