



Our Plan for Further Education

Defined, Career and Skills Focused, Collaborative



The **Edge** Foundation

Contents

Foreword

Chapter 1 – Mapping the Further Education Sector

Breadth of FE provision and student population

The purpose(s) of colleges

The role of FE in promoting social mobility

Funding reforms

Challenges facing the FE sector in England

FE workforce recruitment and retention crisis

Increased class sizes and reduced learning hours

Low levels of student attainment

The marketisation of FE

Impact of college mergers

Chapter 2 – Views from researchers, FE providers, and policy makers

Perspectives from across the UK

Chapter 3 -- Case studies: promising practice within the FE sector

Chapter 4 – Recommendations and conclusions

What Next? A view from the Independent

Commission on the College of the Future

References

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Foreword

Our country has reached a pivotal point for the economy and society. Brexit means that, now more than ever, we must make the very most of developing our home-grown talent. Meanwhile the megatrends of demographics, the environment and the fourth industrial revolution will create seismic change over the coming decades. **Our further education and skills system must be a key driver in meeting those challenges.**



to allow businesses to compete and our economy to thrive. It is essential that the outputs from our FE and skills system are properly aligned to the needs of industry.

The research in this report shows a well-established correlation between the impact of the skills system and the level of economic growth achieved in local communities. However, the quality of the system is only as good as the quality of its workforce. Ingrained funding challenges

As a former further education (FE) college Principal, and before that CEO of a specialist STEM provider, I have seen first-hand how FE can be at the forefront of reducing inequality and addressing skills shortages. Yet, while our FE sector has many strengths, it has long been at the mercy of constant upheaval, political reform and a lack of clear and stable direction for its future. As a result, our FE institutions have been left to develop their own identity, or mixture of identities, often defined in contrast to schools and higher education rather than on their own merits. **We must support the FE sector to develop a clear and positive identity and plan of its own, placing it at the centre of addressing skills shortages, particularly at technician level.**

As we saw in the 2004 Leitch review, the impact of our skills system compares poorly to the progress made in expanding higher education. It's little wonder, since FE has traditionally been given an undistinguished role as the 'everything else' of the system, addressing gaps left by schools. More recently, the Augar Review made sound recommendations for the FE sector and that momentum must not be lost. **It is time for us to shine a spotlight on FE and give it the support it warrants - first and foremost by addressing the inadequacy and inequality of its funding. Hand in hand, with investment comes an expectation that FE will take the lead in providing the skills that are needed both now and, in the future,**

have left FE Principals strapped, unable to recruit the staff they need, particularly from growing industries where they simply cannot match pay in the sector. **We need a clear and ambitious workforce strategy to attract a new and inspiring generation of technical lecturers and offer the continuing development and connection to industry they need to remain at the forefront of their fields.**

If we take these steps, we will finally begin to **redefine public perception of professional and technical education, by reaffirming its value and purpose and giving FE the attention, investment and backing it deserves.** The £400 million of additional funding for FE pledged by the chancellor last year to support the introduction of T-levels and training for 500 FE lectures straight from industry are clear steps in the right direction.

Over the next decade, I want FE to play a central role in developing and shaping our economy and society. I want to see greater collaboration between providers and between the four nations of the UK. I want to see continued growth in investment and in the quality and opportunities available to the FE workforce. And **I want the Edge Foundation to be right beside the FE sector throughout,** championing its role, shining a spotlight on excellent practice and supporting positive change.

Neil Bates FCGI, Chair of the Edge Foundation

1. Mapping the Further Education sector



The further education (FE) sector is well known for its complexity. It is commonly labelled as the ‘everything else’ of the education sector due to the sheer breadth of provision it offers (Panchamia, 2012). FE comprises all post-compulsory education and training for 16 to 18-year-olds and adults. It does not fit neatly in the standard stages of primary, secondary, tertiary or post-tertiary education (including adult education).

This complex nature has made it very difficult for the sector to define itself and focus on a clear direction. Alongside a longstanding lack of funding, this has created a variety of challenges among the teaching workforce and student population. However, advances in the FE sector are being made and, in this report, we explore many examples of excellent practice, especially within professional and vocational education.

The Edge Foundation has adopted the term, ‘professional and vocational education’, to encompass the majority of provision within FE. This report is framed with an understanding that the FE sector is fragmented, complex and difficult to understand. We will limit our discussion to the following topics: the breadth of FE provision, the purpose of FE colleges, recent funding and policy reforms and the challenges facing the FE sector such as marketisation, mergers, attainment and the staff recruitment and retention crisis.

BREADTH OF FE PROVISION AND STUDENT POPULATION

Further education (FE) can be a confusing term in public debate. Originally, FE provided a wide breadth of options for apprentices and employed workers and related specialist skills training. However, after the Second World War, FE also became a major provider of adult education providing an established link between students and


their local labour market. FE providers include: further education colleges, sixth form colleges, tertiary colleges, and independent training providers (which include large private companies and smaller private and voluntary sector organisations). Figure 1 provides a map of the different providers, and qualifications delivered, across the FE sector.

In this report, we adopt the word ‘colleges’ to encompass all the publicly funded institutions that form the core of FE provision, and the term ‘FE lecturers’ to refer to all FE staff discussed in this report. Such institutions exist as specific types of legal entity. In England, for instance, the term covers those education providers incorporated as FE colleges under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Such colleges have historically grouped themselves formally around sector bodies, for example the Association of Colleges (AoC) in England (295 institutions), Colleges Scotland (26 institutions), Colleges Wales (14 institutions) and Colleges Northern Ireland (6 institutions). Figure 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of colleges across the UK.

Since the 1980s there have been 48 different Secretaries of State for Education and 28 major pieces of legislation covering the FE sector. Additionally, according to the Institute for Government’s ‘*All Change*’ report, responsibility for the FE sector has moved between six separate government departments (Norris and Adam, 2017). **This high level of churn in the policy circle has**

Mapping the Further Education sector

Figure 1: Description of further education providers and qualifications



	Description	Student profile	Courses	Qualifications
Colleges	The main FE providers, mostly comprised of General FE colleges. They provide technical and academic education, often including apprenticeships.	>16 - Adult (of all ages) 2.2 million	Vocational courses, academic courses like A Levels, Adult and Community Learning	A Levels, IB, BTEC, sometimes NVQ, HNC, HND
Local authority providers	Local authorities provide Adult and Community Learning and work based learning. Classes take place in a range of locations in the community, day and night classes and online	>16 - Adult (of all ages) 360,000	Part time ACL & WBL. Some courses include: English Language, languages, computer courses, skills-based courses for employment, yoga, counselling, beauty, customer care and children	BTEC, NVQ, HNC, HND, or specialised qualifications based on courses
Third sector providers	These are non-profit organisations that provide Adult and Community Learning and specialist courses	>16 - Adult (of all ages)	Adult and Community Learning, specialist courses and training to disadvantaged groups	Depends on the specialisation of the training provider. Mainly apprenticeship related qualifications: BTEC, NVQ, HNC, HND
Employer providers	Consists of employers who provide 'in-house' training to apprentices and employees	>16 - Adult (of all ages)	Work based learning	Depends on the specialisation of the training provider, but mainly apprenticeship related qualifications: BTEC, NVQ, HNC, HND
Independent training providers	Providers receive government funding to provide 'off-the-job training' to employees or apprentices on behalf of employers or colleges. Can be private or third sector	>16 - Adult (of all ages) 950,000	Work based learning Teaching theory, learning support, practical training. Often used to deliver training to apprentices on behalf of colleges or employers	Tend to be more flexible and varied, but have to comply with Ofsted standards

* Some providers enrol 14-16-year olds and receive funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). However, to do so they must have adequate capacity and resources to support these students in completing a full-time study programme that includes technical qualifications alongside general qualifications within the Key Stage 4 curriculum.

Figure 2: Breakdown of colleges

4. Specialist Designated Colleges:

Mostly offer specialist courses for those wishing to pursue a creative career. Also offer a range of courses at different levels including entry level courses, higher education courses and short courses.

3. Land-based Colleges:

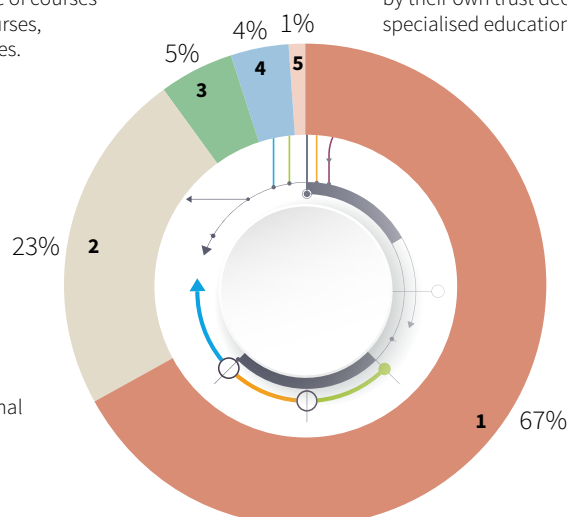
Mainly provide education and training with a focus on animals, plants, farming and the environment. They offer courses from entry to post-graduate level.

2. Sixth form Colleges:

Mostly cater to 16-19 year olds, with the majority of students studying full-time academic courses, yet some offer vocational courses too.

5. Other:

Independently founded charities regulated by their own trust deeds, focused on providing specialised education.



1. General FE Colleges:

Colleges offering a wide range of programmes for a variety of ages (16+) from IB and A-levels to apprenticeships, vocational courses, Adult and Community Learning classes and more.

Our plan for Further Education

led to the development of a multitude of ideas but few tangible outcomes as new policies are given little time to embed before changing again. This was further acknowledged in the Richard Review (2013), Sainsbury Review (2016) and Augar Review (2019).

In recent years we have seen a decrease in the total number of learners in FE in England, falling by 35% from 4.7 million to 3.1 million between 2003 and 2018.

As of 2018, 2.2 million students were attending colleges, of which 1.4 million were aged 19 or older. As of June 2019, 82.3% of 16-18 years olds were in full-time education, divided relatively evenly between colleges and schools, with 40.1% studying in colleges (30.4% in general FE colleges, 9.7% in sixth form colleges), 41.8% studying in schools (34.1% in state funded schools, 6.7% in independent schools and 1% in special schools) and just 0.5% in higher education (HE) institutions (DfE, 2019a). In Box 1, we attempt to draw out the features of a 'typical' FE college in the UK using information provided by AoC's college key facts in 2018/2019.

Colleges typically provide education to those aged 16 or older¹ (with the exception of a small and diminishing direct-entry provision at age 14), but beyond that basic unifying feature, the picture is one of diversity. **Colleges provide**

qualifications at a wide variety of levels and across a range of types, including: basic skills, A-Levels, vocational qualifications such as BTECs, foundation degrees, diplomas, apprenticeships, work-based training, higher degrees, unaccredited learning, personal and community learning and, as of September 2020, T levels. **This breadth of provision has contributed to the identity issue for FE colleges.** Sir Frank McLoughlin says this was not always the case, and today colleges have lost that definition, becoming the 'everything else' of the education system, defined by not being schools or universities rather than by what they *are*.

The Wolf Report (2011) explores the complexity in providers, funding and regulation. It highlights **the mis-match between qualifications and the requirements of the labour market**, noting that "there is a constant complaint that there are too many qualifications; and every reform leads in practice, to yet more" (Wolf, 2011, p. 140). However, in principle this variety is part of the strength of college provision, enabling a closer fit between the study pathway and a student's needs and interests, but it comes with challenges in communication and guidance. Colleges typically invest in a well-crafted prospectus and a filterable online search function, supported with advice pages and links, to help students find their course. Nevertheless, research suggests students continue to find these choices difficult to navigate and often default to what they already know rather than exploring relevant options.

The Behavioural Insights Team (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews, with 43 young people aged 11-18 and careers guidance professionals (CGPs) in eleven schools and colleges across England to explore how they approached key moments of choice in their educational pathway. They found that **young people's breadth of knowledge about career and subject options was generally low**, despite feeling they had access to the information they wanted.

When considering career pathways, young people generally drew on contextual factors such as: childhood experiences, careers depicted on TV and interactions with adults, rather than approaching choices in a formal sense; by identifying, exploring and evaluating options open to them. Post-16 college provision is considerably more varied in comparison

Box 1: The 'typical' college in England

While colleges vary widely in size and focus, a sense of typical scale can be seen in some simple ratios across the English college landscape.

The following features represent averages across England:

- learners per college: 8,500
- student age: 29
- distance from learners' home: 15 miles (vs 53 at HE)
- Free School Meals among 16-18-year olds: 16% (vs 8% in schools)
- income: £27m in 2016/17
- income from non-EU international activity: £700k in 2017/18
- Full-time equivalent staff: 450 (50% teaching)

Mapping the Further Education sector

to the school education most young people experience prior to 16. As such, influences through 'contextual factors' are unlikely to have much direct link with the new choices available in FE.

The new T level qualifications, of which the first three streams are to be introduced in 2020², aim to provide a world-class technical education. T levels will offer professional and vocational qualifications that are the equivalent to three A levels, in a bid to help address the current Level 4 and 5 technical skills shortage. **The distinctive difference between T levels and other FE courses, is the blend of classroom learning and practical experience, following a curriculum which has been developed alongside employers.** The T level courses will aim to create a bridge between high-level technical graduates and industry whilst further adding to the breadth of provision the FE sector provides. The government have pledged £20 million, to help support the introduction of T levels and a further £500 million annually once the programme has been rolled out³. There have been various issues identified by the first cohort of providers such as significant work needed to raise the awareness and understanding of T levels among students, parents/carers and employers (Straw et al., 2019).

THE PURPOSE(S) OF COLLEGES

Further education offers a unique environment for lifelong learning that is valued by many students. Many FE lecturers have a professional background in their field offering students the opportunity to learn from

Box 2: Five missions of FE

According to the Lingfield report on 'Teaching, leadership and governance' (2012) FE has the following missions:

1. Remedial: to help redress the shortcomings of schooling
2. Community: instil lifelong learning
3. Vocational FE: occupational skills
4. Academic courses to Level 3
5. HE studies: to provide 'practical learning which leads to the availability of a technically skilled workforce to power higher economic performance'

The report highlights that the **FE sector is a purposeful and autonomous sector and we should move away from using it to rectify the shortcomings of secondary education.**

industry experts who can prepare them for practical work. Additionally, FE colleges are the intermediary stage between student and adult life, allowing adult freedoms and forgoing secondary school rules whilst also accommodating mature and part-time students.

The Education and Training Foundations' (ETF) Further Education and Workforce Data report analyses the findings of the 2017-2018 Staff Individualised Record (SIR) from the FE workforce. A key finding was the **increased proportion of lecturers spending 30 hours or more on Continued Professional Development (CPD)** a year; CPD increased from 57% in 2015-2016 to 75% in 2017-2018 (ETF and



SIR FRANK McLOUGHLIN, DIRECTOR OF LEADERSHIP AT THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOUNDATION

Colleges across the UK are facing an identity crisis. If you stopped and asked ten people in the street what their local FE college does, you would get ten different answers and what's more all ten would be at least partly right. It was not always this way – there was a time when everyone knew what their local college did.

Some people say that colleges have such a broad remit that this isn't possible. I disagree. A university can cover everything from fine art to nuclear physics and yet the institution has a clear definition and position in its community. What we need is a similar level of clarity for colleges – we need to answer the question what should we put in the front of the shop window so that everyone in the community can articulate a clear and positive vision of what their local college does.

Our plan for Further Education

Frontier Economics, 2019). This is a marked increase in a workforce that has historically low hours of CPD.

Furthermore, colleges play a key role in their community, contributing significantly to the local economy. Strong local economies are built around anchor institutions, where FE colleges are often listed alongside universities, hospital trusts, housing organisations, military bases, sports teams and large employers with strong local ties (Henderson, Revell and Escobar, 2018). Anchor institutions are about more than the immediate service they deliver; in the case of further education this immediate service is improving the skills of local students and employees. This immediate service is highly significant, with government reports identifying substantial skills gains for individuals from FE, returning around £20 in net present value terms for every £1 invested (BIS, 2015).

However, this is only part of the picture – **colleges also employ a large number of people locally, invest in the local economy through local procurement, and participate as civic institutions, providing significant expertise through skilled staff volunteering and serving in governance roles throughout the local area.** Analysis by EMSI Labour Market Analytics, found that the £517 million the Hull College Group contributed to the region's economy, equated to £1 in every £20 spent in the region - the equivalent of 23,000 jobs on average wages (Slane, 2015).

Whilst the numbers are important, they do not reflect the significance of the convening and catalysing role of colleges. Baroness Sharp of Guildford's review on colleges and communities describes colleges as, a "dynamic nucleus" at the heart of the community, with the potential to form and foster partnerships between employers, education providers, community organisations and local government (Sharp Commission, 2011). This nucleus is born of the wide range of roles that colleges have and the cumulative impact of many individual actions, including community use of college premises, formal roles in local economic partnerships and skills initiatives, provision both to full-time young learners and full-time adults, both to those in-work and those out-of-

work, helping parents support their children and helping new communities learn English and participate locally.

Relationships between colleges and community groups are complex and nurturing. For instance, Baroness Sharp's review describes how Plumpton College, a land-based college to the north of Brighton, 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 the operation of the college in other ways.

The government-commissioned Augar Review of Post-18 provision, published in May 2019, states that of the young people who have not achieved a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19, almost none will ever do so and therefore risk missing out on the associated health and labour market benefits (Augar, 2019). As evidenced in Figure 3, students complete qualifications between Level 4 and Level 6 predominantly from the ages of 19 to 22 with a significant decrease after 23 years, which suggests that once students exit formal education few return (Espinoza and Speckesser, 2019). **The FE sector can provide on the job training to help address local community needs while also increasing the future prospects of its learners.**

THE ROLE OF FE IN PROMOTING SOCIAL MOBILITY

A research review commissioned by The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2015 provides evidence of **a positive direct effect of FE youth participation in education on employment, access to the professions, earnings and second chances** (Gloster et al., 2015). This positive effect is key to social mobility and widening participation, as colleges disproportionately reach disadvantaged learners. This is illustrated in an analysis by FFT DataLab in Figure 4 (Thomson, 2015). Figure 4 shows the Proportion of students on free school meals (FSM) in FE are far higher than those from independent schools. Groups 1 – 7 are split according to end of KS4 attainment grades, where group 1 is the

Mapping the Further Education sector

Figure 3: **Achievement age**

Highest level of education (%)

Age	L4V	L5V	L6A	Total
16-17	2.0	0.3	0.0	0.1
17-18	1.5	0.1	0.0	0.1
18-19	2.4	0.4	0.0	0.1
19-20	16.9	15.4	6.4	6.9
20-21	16.6	23.1	54.5	52.5
21-22	14.1	6.7	19.1	18.6
22-23	12.3	6.3	7.5	7.6
23-24	9.4	10.9	4.5	4.8
24-25	7.1	11.4	3.2	3.5
25-26	7.0	9.4	2.2	2.5
26-27	5.2	8.3	1.7	2.0
27-28	5.6	7.7	0.9	1.3
Total	100	100	100	100
Total	4,700	4,700	157,700	167,100

Note: Column headings: L4V (Level 4 vocational), L5V (Level 5 vocational), L6A (Level 6 academic)

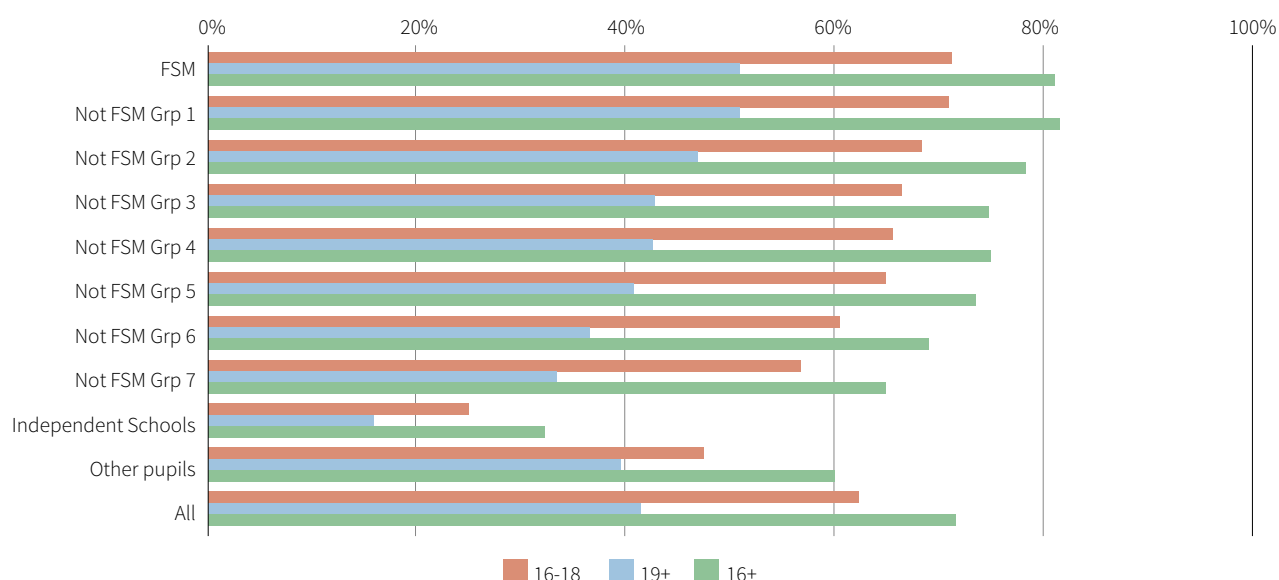
Source: Espinoza, H. and Speckesser, S., 2019. *A comparison of earnings related to higher level vocational/technical and academic education* (No. 502). National Institute of Economic and Social Research. (p.12).

lowest attaining group. The same line of analysis showed a proportional relationship between level of attainment and socio-economic group. For instance, **we see that over 70% of FSM students participate in FE aged 16-18, compared to less than 60% of non-FSM students with the highest levels of attainment** (defined as group 7 by FFT Education DataLab).

As evidenced in the Compare School Performance data (2019) produced by the Department for Education (DfE), **colleges tend to have narrower gaps in attainment between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students** (DfE, 2019c).

There is a lack of consistency within research on how we define ‘social mobility’ and its associated factors. For the purpose of this report we use The Sutton Trust definition to help frame social mobility. “Social mobility is about breaking the link between an individual’s parental background and their opportunities to reach their full potential in terms of income and occupation. It is about better opportunities for each generation and making access to these opportunities fairer, regardless of background” (Sutton Trust, 2017, p.17). **Ministers⁴ and sector representatives⁵ frequently emphasise the critical role FE colleges play in aiding upward social mobility, from providing adults with a second chance**

Figure 4: **Percentage participating in further education in 2012/13 by socio-economic group at (England)**



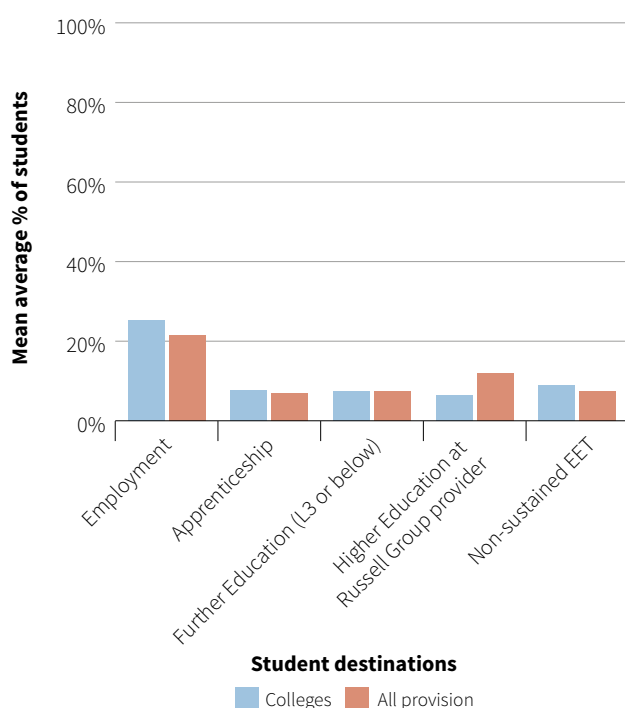
Source: Thomson, D., 2015. *Why aren't we talking about further education and social mobility?* FFT Education Lab.

Our plan for Further Education

at education and delivering skills-related training that is closely linked to the labour market, to creating engines of local economic activity.

Figure 5 and 6 illustrate the range of destinations of those in education, employment and training (EET) for colleges versus all provision using Compare School Performance data provided by the DfE (2019b). Figure 5 depicts the destinations of all students across England compared to those exclusively in colleges and Figure 6 depicts those considered disadvantaged students only (determined by those on FSM). This shows that **colleges in England support a different pattern of destinations to other 16-18 provision, focused more on employment and apprenticeship provision.**⁶

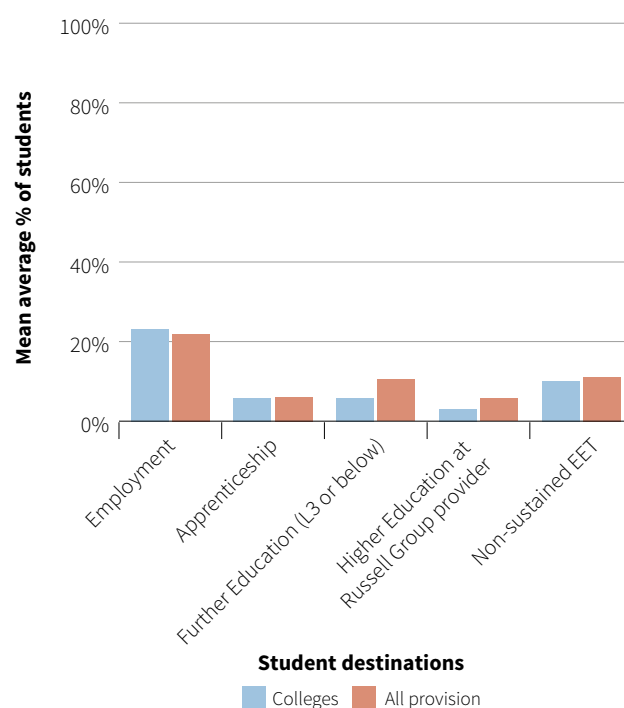
Figure 5: **Level 3 student destinations from 2015/16 cohort, colleges vs all population (England)**⁷



As seen in Figure 5, the greatest disparity between colleges and all provision is seen in *higher education at Russell Group providers*, where those from colleges are at 6.3%, just over half of the 12% from all provision. It is interesting to note that the total proportion of students in *sustained* EET after finishing L3 courses is 25.3% for college students, compared with 21.4% across all forms of 16-18 provision. Figure 6 isolates the results for those on free school meals (FSM) only.

According to Figure 6, colleges appear to have lower non-sustained EET for 16 to 18-year-old Level 3 disadvantaged pupils with a 10.2% non-sustained EET rate, lower than 11.2% non-sustained EET rate across all provision. The greatest disparity seen between colleges and all provision

Figure 6: **Level 3 student destinations from 2015/16 cohort, disadvantaged students only, colleges vs all population (England)**



THE SOCIAL MOBILITY COMMISSION (State of the Nation 2018-19: Social mobility in Great Britain)

We know that the greatest social mobility gains come from qualifications at degree level and above, but we also know that for some of our most disadvantaged students, further education is the stepping stone to gain a higher-level qualification. It is time to change the assumption that Britain can thrive economically with an education system that only focuses on the 40% of students that study A Levels [...] Twice the number of disadvantaged 16 to 18-year-olds are in further education than in school sixth forms.

Mapping the Further Education sector

is in FE, at 5.9% and 10.6% respectively. **The most prominent disparity between Figure 5 and 6 is in the percentage of destinations in higher education at a Russell Group provider, 3.1% from colleges and 5.7% from all provision, this is less than half of non-disadvantaged students.**

Colleges have a higher proportion of students in employment compared to *all other provision*, at 25.3% and 21.4% respectively. However, the mean average of *sustained* EET from colleges was lower for FSM students at 83.3% than non-FSM at 86.8%. Furthermore, the data shows there are 40% more students going into FE compared to HE and an overall lower proportion for FSM students going on to HE within this.⁸ Such data suggests that whilst FE is working to narrow the disparity in attainment and opportunities between social backgrounds, there is still a long way to go.

Post devolution, where the transfer of powers from national to local level took place across the four nations, established a shift in wider priorities and increased localism within the nations (Keep, 2016). In recent years, we have seen increasing policy divergence among the four nations of the UK. **Policy making in FE has shown significant change since the 1990s, with frequent shifts in qualifications, funding models and back and forth between central and devolved planning.**

Over the same period, the education systems of the four home countries have diverged, particularly between 2010 and 2017, although there may now be a trend towards less dramatic divergence, and a more ‘managed’ process of policy borrowing between nations (Hodgson et al., 2018).

England has increasingly experimented with competition between different education providers, including colleges. England has tended to increase autonomy for colleges, for instance over budget holding, whereas in Northern Ireland such autonomy has declined. Policy statements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all placed more emphasis on social inclusion than on developing skills for the economy, while recognising that both are key goals for FE in all of the nations.

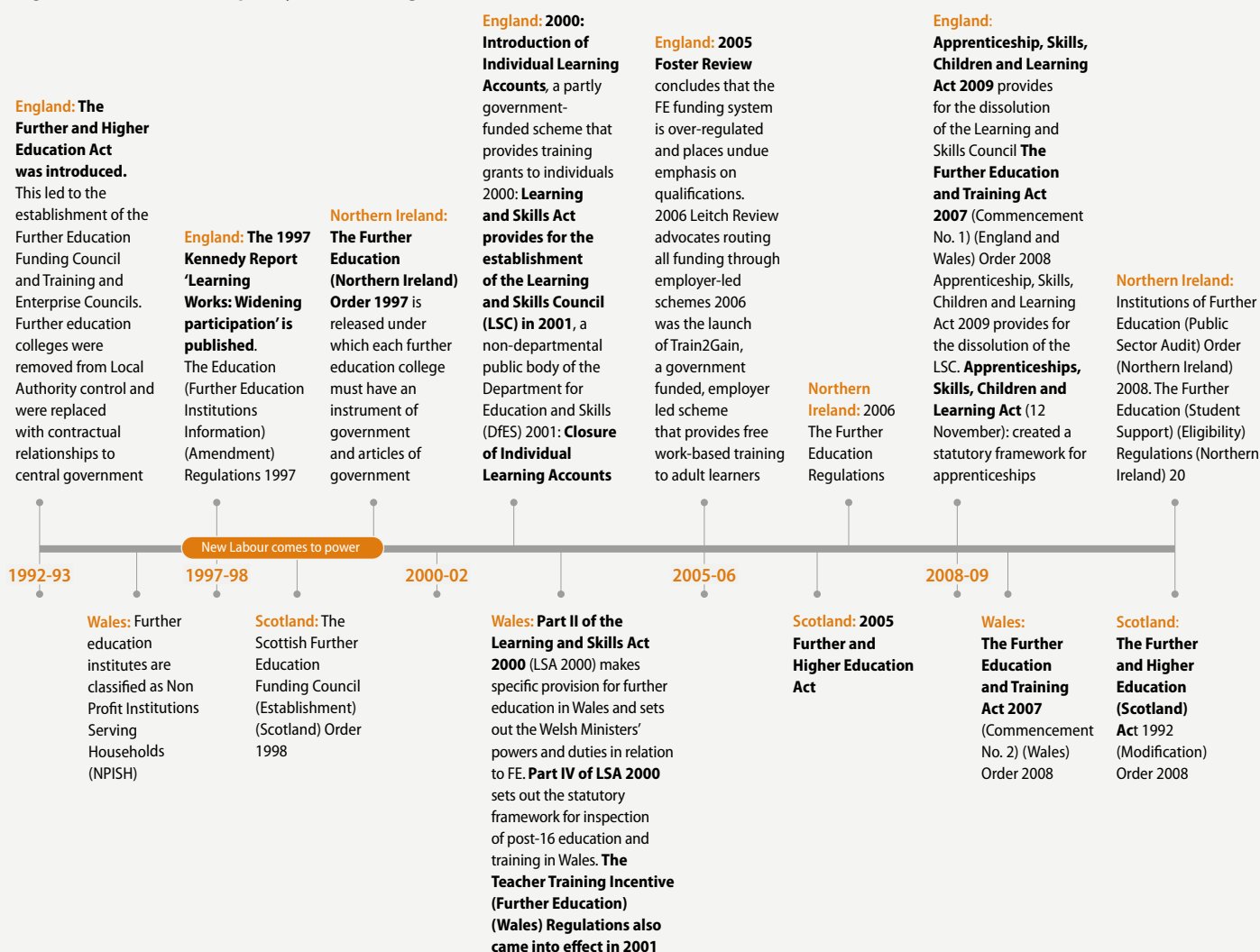
Norris and Adam (2017) argue that the FE sector in England has suffered from much less coherent change than other aspects of the English education system, noting that since 1980 there have been 28 major pieces of legislation with a bearing on FE, 48 secretaries of state with responsibility for the sector, and many other third-party agencies established and then dissolved. **Norris and Adam argue that ongoing policy change has worsened the standing of professional and vocational qualifications in England.** Additionally, given the number of already existing qualifications, it takes a long time for employers and the public to understand new and complex qualifications. By comparison, HE degrees and academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels appear very stable.

Edge recently commissioned a piece of research looking at FE and skills across the four countries of the UK and found that in Scotland the percentage of young people aged 24 or under in colleges has risen from 44% in 2005-06 to 58% in 2015-16. By contrast in England, this percentage has fallen (Hodgson et al., 2018). Scotland has developed a more centrally-managed and collaborative approach to education and training policy including planning, in contrast to the more marketised approach in England. Additionally, Scotland views FE under the umbrella of tertiary education grouping further and higher education together which in turn, limits the stigma associated with either pathway. In Wales, overall learner numbers in colleges have continued to decline but there has been an increase in the number of students taking up work-based learning.

In 2016/2017, Northern Ireland saw 130,000 enrolments in FE with 78% obtaining recognised qualifications. FE plays a key part in building social cohesion, in some cases bringing together students who have attended either predominantly Protestant or Catholic schools. In Northern Ireland, college may be the first setting in which students have studied alongside peers from a different background and this is something the Northern Ireland Assembly has frequently cited as positive. However, the Assembly’s recent state of disorder in 2017 has reflected the constant changing landscape of FE and the ramifications this is having on the sector. Looking at best practice within each nation can help establish a cohesive gold standard for FE across the UK (Hodgson et al., 2018).

Our plan for Further Education

Figure 7: Timeline of FE policy and funding reforms across the UK



In relation to challenges with governance in FE, the Scottish system is currently setting an example of how establishing an arms-length strategic body to oversee tertiary education and training may help manage, co-ordinate and define the FE sector. **Arm's Length Foundations (ALFs) are fully independent from colleges and are charitable organisations that must comply with the law.** They were set up in agreement between the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Colleges Scotland at the time when colleges were brought back into the public sector.

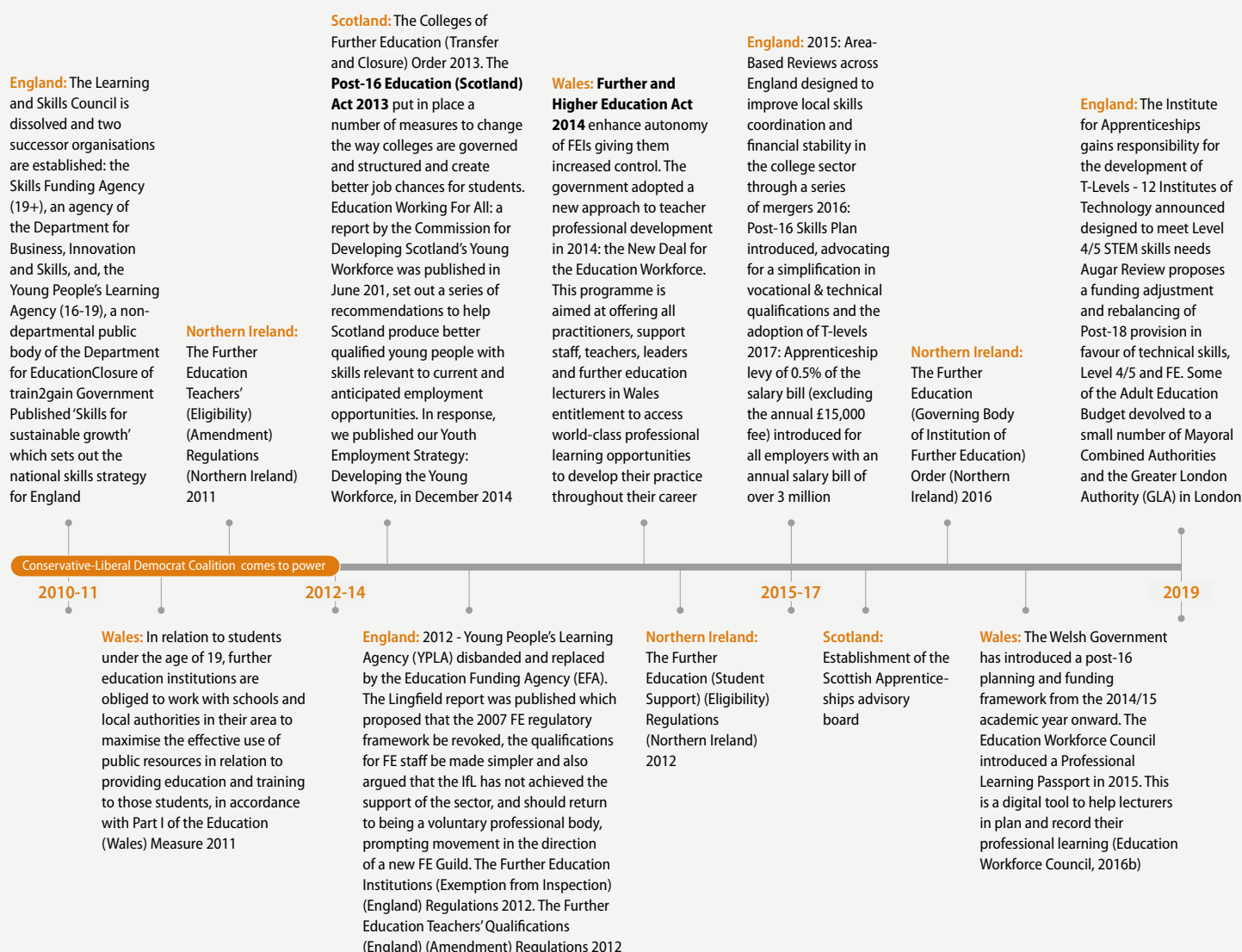
"Primarily, the ALFs exist to manage their funds in line with their charitable objectives. It is for individual colleges to put valid and robust business cases to their ALF when seeking money from them. ALFs seek to focus on strategic investment rather than operational issues. The money

in ALFs is not recurrent funding, nor sustainable and therefore should not be used for paying any ongoing operational costs" (Colleges Scotland, p.1). A similar model is currently being adopted in Wales, as explored further in Chapter 2. The following timeline presented in Figure 7 illustrates the marked reforms in policy and funding within the FE sector that have occurred across the four nations.

FUNDING REFORMS

The history of the last two decades in England has seen attempts to implement a variety of funding models, from the 1990s output model, which provided funding conditional to achieving specific milestones, through to performance-based framework from 2002 to 2006 and then employer-

Mapping the Further Education sector



based funding following the Leitch Review (2006)⁹. **Over the last decade the funding landscape, regardless of the funding model attempted, has been dominated by declining budgets, in both 16-18 and 19+ funding.**

16-18 funding has declined in all areas outside of apprenticeships. With respect to 16-18 provision, analysis of Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) research and government data by the Education Policy Institute in 2019 paints a picture of material decline over the last decade, undoing much of the longer-term progress in increasing funding since the early 2000s (Dominguez-Reig and Robinson, 2019). Since 2012/13 funding per full-time student in sixth form colleges fell by 15%, from £5,180 to £4,430, whilst funding in FE colleges fell by 9%, from £5,870 to £5,320 (see Figure 8).

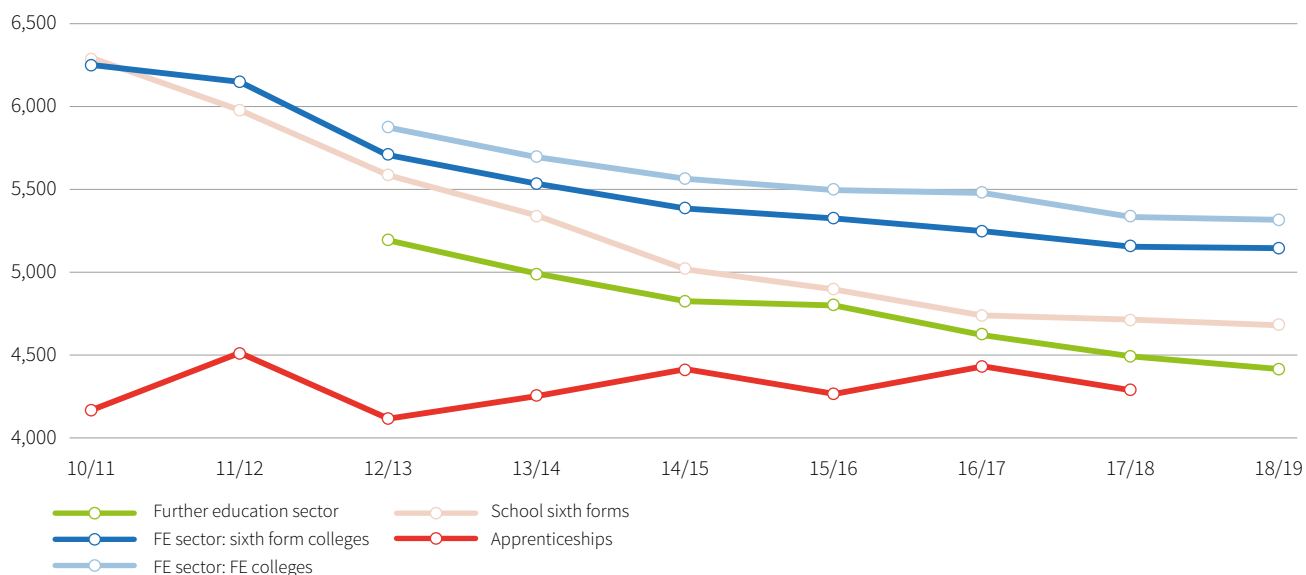
Post-18 funding, including HE and adult skills funding, has declined more sharply than 16-18 funding in the FE sector (see Figure 9). The Augar Review of post-18 provision makes policy recommendations that would begin to level out the differences in post-18 funding between HE and FE. **It recommends that low value HE courses are to be challenged and that there should be a higher base-rate of funding for high return FE courses, supported by an additional £1bn in capital investment and further investment in the workforce.**

The Augar review panel provided 11 recommendations for the further education sector, Box 3 identifies the recommendations most relevant to this report.

The recent real-terms decline in FE funding is revealed in Figure 10, illustrating how post-18 funding has declined

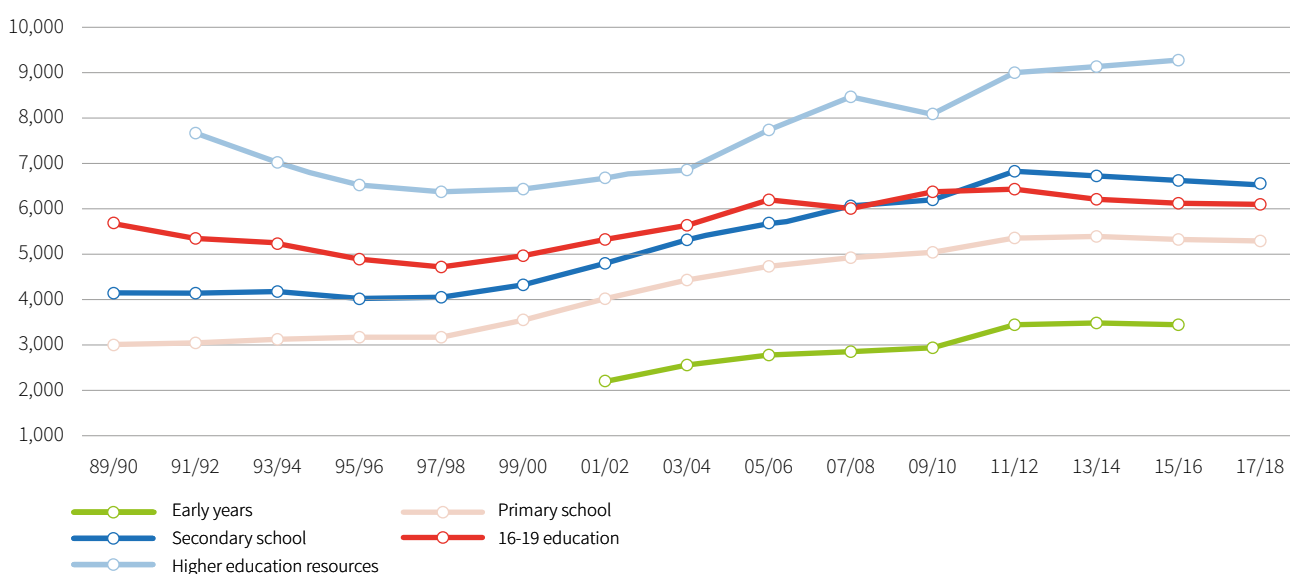
Our plan for Further Education

Figure 8: **16-19 funding per full-time student in real terms (exc. student support) by institution type, and apprenticeship funding per learner, 2010/11 to 2018/19 (£)**



Source: Dominguez-Reig, G. and Robinson, D., 2019. 16-19 education funding: trends and implications. May 2019. (p.22).

Figure 9: **Funding per student in real terms by education phase, 1989/90 to 2017/18, 2018/19 prices**



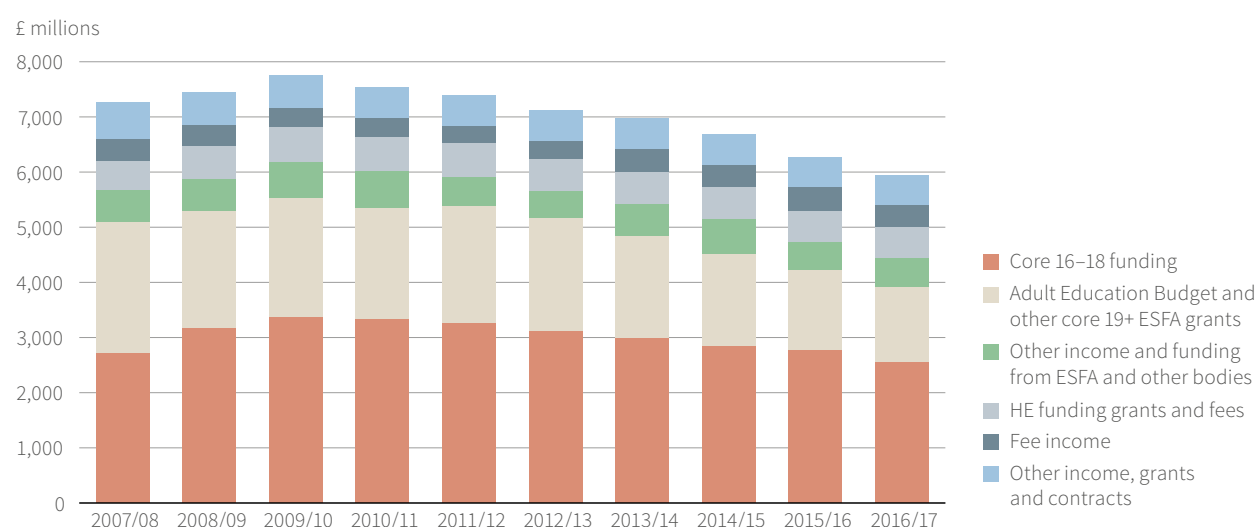
Source: Dominguez-Reig, G. and Robinson, D., 2019. 16-19 education funding: trends and implications. May 2019. (p.24).

more sharply than 16-18 funding. Funding complexity in FE has also been described by the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee as a factor limiting innovation and responsiveness to local labour market demand, exacerbating the difficulties caused by low absolute levels of funding (House of Lords, 2018). **IFS analysis has regularly demonstrated the funding discrepancies between types of learners within FE**, which can be seen in Figure 11 (Sibieta and Belfield, 2018).

When looking closer at the differences within FE in Figure 11, the data shows that for non-apprenticeship programmes the average income per learner is greater than for 'apprenticeship learners' and 'all learners'. For those on a 19+ non-apprenticeship course, a college receives on average £2,511 per learner compared to £313 for apprentices. This further highlights the disparity in pay between schools and colleges.

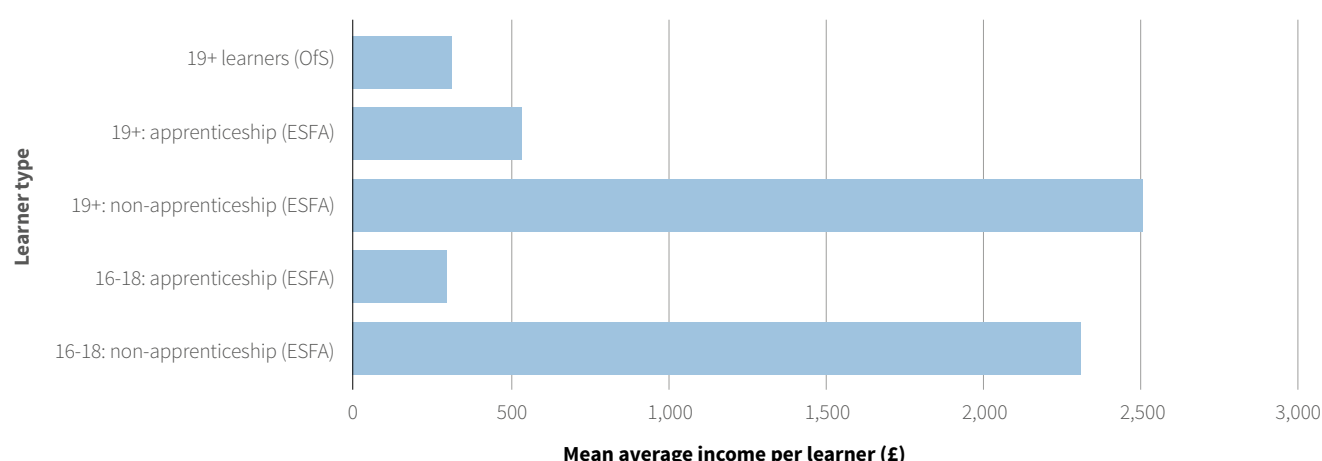
Mapping the Further Education sector

Figure 10: **FE college sector total income 2007/8 to 2016/17 (2016/17 prices)**



Source: Augar, P., 2019. Independent panel report to the review of post-18 education and funding. *Post-18 Education and Funding Review Panel*. (p.120).

Figure 11: **Average income per learner by learner type between 2016-2018¹⁰**



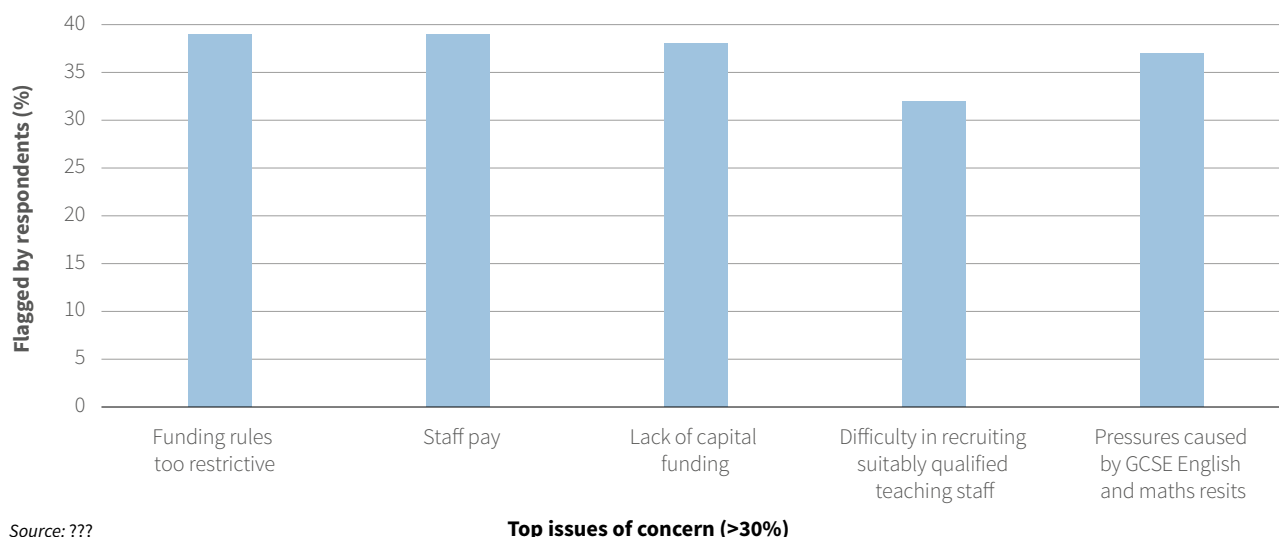
Source: ???

Box 3: Snapshot of the Augar Review Recommendations (Augar, 2019, pp. 131-138)

1. The reduction in the core funding rate for 18-year-olds should be reversed.
2. ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) funding rules should be simplified, allowing colleges to respond more flexibly and immediately to the needs of their local labour market.
3. In addition to funding for T levels, government should provide FE colleges with a dedicated capital investment of at least £1 billion over the next Spending Review period in line with Industrial Strategy priorities.
4. The structure of the FE college network, particularly in large cities, should be further modified to minimise duplication in a close vicinity.
5. Investment in the FE workforce should be a priority, focusing on improvements in recruitment and retention, drawing in more expertise from industry, and strengthening professional development.
6. The FE sector should have a protected title similar to that conferred on universities to clearly distinguish itself from other training providers.
7. The government should improve data collection, collation, analysis and publication across the whole further education sector (including independent training providers).

Our plan for Further Education

Figure 12: AoC survey, June 2018: Issues of most concern to your college (if of concern to more than 30% of respondents) (n=90)¹¹



CHALLENGES FACING THE FE SECTOR IN ENGLAND

The Association of Colleges in England (AoC) regularly surveys its members about the top three issues of most concern to their college (see Figure 12). The results from June 2018 reveal that the top issues of concern are funding and issues directly linked to funding, with the exception of resits in GCSE English and maths.

Results suggest that issues of most concern surround difficulties with financing such as staff pay and the resultant difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified lecturers. Unlike funding issues, especially in relation to staff pay, there is little research looking into pressure caused by GCSE maths and English resits and the negative implications of stereotyping associated with FE students. Within this survey, it was reported that 19% of lecturers were concerned about rising levels of mental health difficulties amongst young people within colleges, which is another key concern that needs to be addressed (Thornton et al., 2018).

FE WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

Analysis of the government's Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data from England for 2017-2018 highlights the knock-on effects of funding on the FE workforce. In the

current landscape, lecturers make up 50% of the average total workforce of an FE college and their **average pay is £31,600 compared to an average of £37,400 for school teachers** (ETF and Frontier Economics, 2019). Figure 13 shows the minimal changes in average staff pay evidenced across the previous six Staff Individualised Records.

Reduced funding translates directly into staff numbers and salaries, with about **68% of all college spending on staff costs, resulting in a recruitment and retention crisis across colleges** (AoC, 2019). Recruitment of high-quality lecturers and leaders is made challenging by direct competition from schools, higher education institutions and businesses, all of which typically offer more 'attractive rates of pay for comparable roles' (Augar, 2019).

The Augar Review (2019) reports an average national vacancy rate of 1.1% in secondary schools, compared to estimates of 3% in FE colleges, or 5% in subjects like engineering and manufacturing, construction, and legal, finance and accounting. Staff turnover is also higher in FE colleges than schools (Figure 14). Principals' surveys reveal significant difficulties with recruitment, with **staff surveys indicating high numbers are planning to leave the sector: 42% of lecturers and 33% of leaders indicated they were likely to leave the sector over the next 12 months** (Augar, 2019).

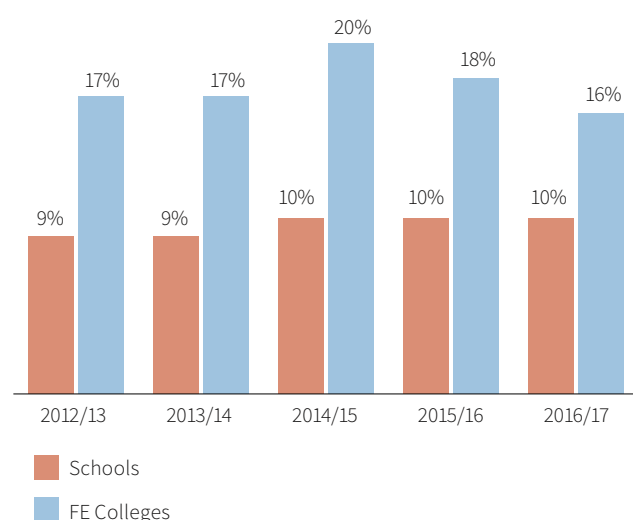
Rather than addressing the funding and pay issue, the government's policy response to this staffing matter has been to revoke regulations relating to FE lecturers' qualifications.¹³ **Since 2012/13, there have been no prescribed levels of educational or professional status required to teach in further education.** The most common subject-specific qualification is Level 6 (Bachelor's Degree or equivalent), and the most common general teaching qualification is Level 7 such as PGCE or equivalent (ETF and Frontier Economics, 2019). While the reform hoped to facilitate recruiting industry professionals with relevant teaching skills but without specific qualifications, in actuality the result is a lack of clarity over what skills lecturers should have and how these might be demonstrated.

Figure 13: Average pay, change overtime (teachers only)¹²

Year	Mean pay	Median pay
SIR 21	£32,000	£32,500
SIR 22	£31,900	£32,500
SIR 23	£32,000	£32,500
SIR 24	£31,400	£32,000
SIR 25	£31,400	£31,800
SIR 26	£31,400	£31,600

Source: Education and Training Foundation and Frontier Economics. 2019. *Further Education Workforce Data for England: Analysis of the 2017-2018 Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data.* (p.45).

Figure 14: Teacher turnover in FE colleges and schools



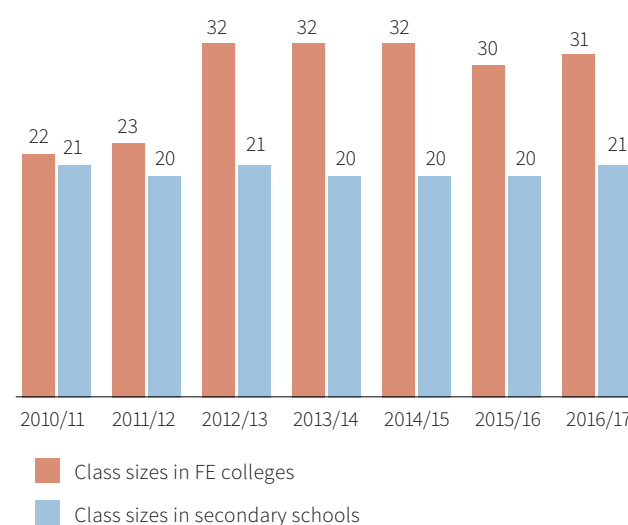
Source: Department for Education (DfE). 2019d. *State of the nation 2018-19: Social mobility in Great Britain Statistics.* (p.67).

INCREASED CLASS SIZES AND REDUCED LEARNING HOURS

Sector representatives relate the decline in funding directly to a reduction in learning hours for students (Education Policy Institute, 2019). Kevin Courtney, joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, said that reduced funding has caused **the number of teaching hours students receive to fall by an average of 65 hours per year over just four years**, particularly in science and maths subjects.

Data analysed by the Social Mobility Commission's, *State of the Nation 2018-19 Social Mobility in Great Britain* report, reveals **class sizes in the FE sector have increased from the low 20s in 2010-12 to the low 30s**, significantly larger than class sizes in secondary schools (see Figure 15). This supports another common frustration amongst lecturers; the increased workload (Thornton et al., 2018). Trends support smaller class sizes in providing the time to support and accommodate technical and specialised training; larger classes make individualised learning more challenging.

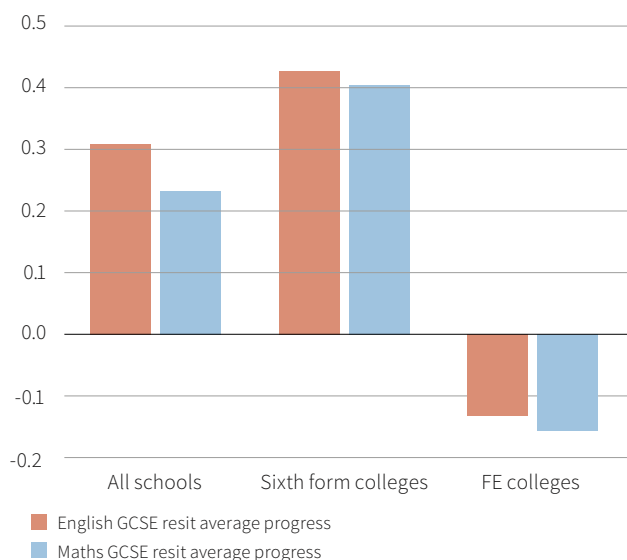
Figure 15: Student-teacher ratio in FE colleges and secondary schools per full-time teacher



Source: Department for Education (DfE). 2019d. *State of the nation 2018-19: Social mobility in Great Britain Statistics.* (p.68).

Our plan for Further Education

Figure 16: **Average progress for all students in English and maths qualifications resits by institution in 2017/18**



Source: Department for Education (DfE). 2019d. *State of the nation 2018-19: Social mobility in Great Britain Statistics*. (p.63).

LOW LEVELS OF STUDENT ATTAINMENT

The Social Mobility Commission has also drawn attention to concerns about progress in English and maths in the FE sector. “At Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16), the percentage of free school meal eligible pupils achieving a grade 4/C or above in GCSE English and maths is 40% compared with 68% of all other pupils” (DfE, 2019d, p.38). This trend in disparity is just as prevalent across all qualifications and throughout schooling. Looking further to KS5 attainment, in 2018 those from independent schools scored over 13 points higher than disadvantaged students and over seven points higher than for all schools and FE colleges (DfE, 2019d). **Working with a larger number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds on reduced funding, colleges tend to be outperformed by schools in academic measures.** Across disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students those who improve the least on resits are in FE (see Figure 16).

THE MARKETISATION OF FE

David Hughes, the Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges in England has flagged concern at growing marketisation of FE in England (Hughes, 2018). The Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) commissioned

Professor Ewart Keep of Oxford University to assess the evidence around marketisation and the strategic scenarios that might emerge in the coming years (Keep, 2018). Such marketisation exists along a spectrum, attracts ambivalence across policymakers and stakeholders, and varies across FE activities (16-19, adult skills, apprenticeships all having different ‘buyers’) but there is a general direction of travel towards increased marketisation.

This marketisation of further education is perhaps contributing to the gradual decrease in FE student population and to a reduction in collaboration as a consequence of increasing competition between institutions. Further effects of marketisation are illustrated in Box 4. According to a 2018 report by AoC on college finances, there is falling income from 16-18-year olds due to a decreasing proportion in the population participating in FE and a decreasing retention rate among those that do, resulting in a 2.1% drop in government funding (AoC, 2018).

IMPACT OF COLLEGE MERGERS

Since the 2015 general election, and prompted by the process of Area Reviews in England, **the FE sector has witnessed an increase in college mergers as a way to ease financial burden and safeguard against anticipated future funding cuts given recent policy priorities.** England has already seen 171 mergers since 1993, 39 of those happening between 2017 and 2018

Box 4: Effects of marketisation of FE

- Around 260 new school sixth forms entered the 16-18 market between 2011/12 and 2014/15
- Number of approved apprenticeship providers rose from 1,043 in 2011/12 to 2,543 in April 2018
- HE has expanded its sector to match the diversity of students by offering a wider range of courses traditionally offered by FE colleges
- Large scale independent training providers have reduced their operations
- FE colleges are being encouraged to merge as opposed to close unilaterally

Mapping the Further Education sector

(Popov and Cattoretti, 2019). However, in the face of uncertain cuts to funding and increasing competition amongst colleges it is hoped that centralising resources and joining up back offices will enhance financial stability in colleges and help sustain efforts to develop and diversify the curriculum.

The DfE commissioned research in 2019 exploring the impact that mergers have had on colleges, by comparing the outcomes and performance across a range of measures pre and post-merger. Findings from the research sample of 40 colleges between 2005-2015, prior to the Area Reviews in England, suggested that **there was no strong statistical evidence that mergers led to any improvement of college performance.** However, performance of merging colleges varies with the effects being positive for some colleges and negative for others. “On average, colleges experience decreases in profit margins as a percentage of their income in the period after

a merger as compared to the period before. Furthermore, interest and debt as a percentage of income are, on average, higher post-merger than pre-merger period” (Popov and Cattoretti, 2019, p. 31).

Additionally, when comparing merged colleges with non-merged colleges, their profit margins are actually -0.4% and 1.4% respectively. This suggests that if mergers are to support profitability, more time and work may be required before this ambition is fulfilled. Increasing profitability may help larger colleges refinance debt and, as a result, deliver better quality learning. Mergers are one response to the challenges faced by the FE sector over the years. However, there are many other initiatives different providers have adopted to attempt to resolve a variety of issues and improve performance. The next two chapters will discuss research into these initiatives further and introduce case studies of providers that have showcased good practice in the FE sector.

Chapter Summary

- With a lack of stability in both policy and funding, the FE sector has struggled to dictate the direction of its own future.
- The FE sector offers breadth and diversity of provision. It is trying to meet a range of different aims, but that can make its role unclear for students and career advisors.
- Further education provides a unique educational setting through:
 - Promoting positive/upward social mobility through supporting large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
 - Playing an anchor role in local communities, contributing significantly to the local economy (particularly larger colleges);
 - Engaging strongly with employers across all forms of provision.
- There have been diverging policy and funding reforms across the four nations of the UK.
- England has seen attempts to implement different funding models, from the output model of the 1990s through to performance-based from 2002 to 2006 before moving to employer-based funding.
- A continuous decline in funding both 16-18 and post-18 has caused significant challenges for the FE sector:
 - Colleges are facing a staff recruitment and retention crisis reinforced by the increased marketisation of the sector;
 - There are no prescribed levels of education qualification or professional status required to teach in further education in England creating uncertainty about appropriate and sufficient staff requirements;
 - The breadth of provision offered alongside a stretched workforce often means FE providers take on more than they have the capacity to handle;
 - Class sizes have increased and learning hours per student decreased to compensate for cuts in funding.
- Mergers have attempted to respond to funding and governance challenges across the sector, but the emerging evidence to date suggests this had limited success.



2. Views from researchers, FE providers, and policy makers

Chapter 1 set out the latest evidence from statistics and research about the size and characteristics of the FE sector and the challenges it faces. In this chapter, we introduce perspectives from some of the leading academics and organisations working with the Edge Foundation across the UK, adding further insight to the issues presented in Chapter 1.



Marketisation in English FE

PROFESSOR EWART KEEP

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD: Professor and Director of SKOPE
(Centre for Skills Knowledge & Organisational Performance)

One of the central developments in English skills policy over the last three decades has been the growing emphasis upon contestability, competition and the marketisation of schools, colleges and higher education provision. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of the UK, where the devolved nations have maintained and developed policies on funding and governance that stress the importance of a more systems-based approach.

What have been the results of a governmental enthusiasm for markets in English further education? The first has

been that institutions generally compete rather than cooperate with other providers in their locality as funding follows student or parental choice. Thus, in the 16-19 marketplace, FE colleges face competition from other colleges, school sixth forms, UTCs, Studio Schools, and private providers. This often leads to duplication and, set against a backdrop where funding levels are very tight, to provision that ultimately proves to be non-viable. Where colleges are competing for chunks of government funding, the rules of the competitive process are complex and the outcomes of these contest extremely uncertain.

Views from researchers, FE providers, and policy makers

As they operate on narrow financial margins, the result is that significant number of colleges have suffered serious financial problems, and some have gone bankrupt. FE provision has, as a result, become quite unstable.

A second consequence is that if funding follows student choice, colleges tend to frame 'demand' for learning as that which is generated by potential learners, rather than by reference to what employers and the labour market may want. This leads to tensions between competing conceptions of demand and accusations that colleges are not responsive to the needs of employers.

A third feature of the FE landscape has been the adoption of a regulatory approach to governance. The FE market is policed by regulatory bodies (Ofsted, Education and Skills Funding Agency, the FE Commissioners) that generate a remarkably high stakes environment for college leaders. A bad Ofsted inspection often means the sacking of the

senior management team. One consequence of this is that innovation becomes a very risky proposition, and colleges have a strong incentive to stick with tried and tested approaches rather than try out new ideas.

The government's enthusiasm for markets has generally not been shared by the Combined Authorities, who are seeking to deploy their devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) to help create local systems where different providers cooperate to deliver the locality's strategic priorities. In some Combined Authorities colleges are trying to develop ways to cooperate rather than compete and to construct a collective offer to the Combined Authority. In some instances, elements of college specialisation may result. There are also some early signs that central government's belief in the efficacy of the 'invisible hand' of the market to sculpt provision and drive efficiency and improved quality in FE may have already peaked.



The role of FE colleges in inclusive economic, social and educational growth

PAUL GRAINGER

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, UCL: Co-Director of the Centre for Post-14 Education and Work, and Head of Enterprise and Innovation for the Department of Education, Practice and Society (EPS)

When in 2015 Vince Cable launched his consultation, *a Dual Mandate for Adult Vocational Education*, rather than just tidying up loose ends, he was recognising a purpose that FE colleges have been developing over many years. Calling for one institution to provide both the high-level skills necessary for economic success and the basic skills for community cohesion may seem convenient, but it also reflects the fundamental principle of FE colleges; that they are immersed in their communities and promote community aspirations.

Central to the nature of FE has been its close links with both local companies and the civic community. Sometimes sharing equipment and, crucially, often

recruiting from the same pool of staff, colleges are able to engage with employers to assess local skill requirements. At the same time, embedded within communities, colleges have generally achieved a welcoming reputation, attracting those who have had negative previous experience of education. The dual mandate has an important function within a developing inclusive local economy. An economy based purely on high skills can be fundamentally unstable causing an inflationary spiral that drives out local residents. Balanced development requires some form of social inclusion and this is a major contribution that colleges make to the cohesion of a local population (Spours et al., 2019).

Our plan for Further Education

A feature of further education recently has been a spate of mergers. This has happened contemporaneously with, but largely independent of, Area Based reviews and represents a broader realignment of colleges with their regional base (Granger and Little, 2019). One consequence of this process has been that many colleges have become very large institutions. Where many colleges may once have competed to characterise regional identity, the newly emerging colleges represent the whole region. They have become ‘civic anchor institutions’, steadying the local skills system and encouraging participation from all members of society.

Few would deny that an effective technical education system requires lecturers with appropriate knowledge and skills. Consequently, the chronic difficulty that many further education colleges in England are currently having in recruiting and keeping expert lecturers in subjects like science and construction may threaten the successful implementation of the government’s ambitious Skills Plan. That plan was based on the *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education* (usually referred to as the Sainsbury Report) which explicitly (2016, p. 66) states that “recruiting technical education lecturers with well-developed pedagogical skills, mastery of their field, and up-to-date industry experience can be a significant challenge in the competitive labour market.”

Research carried out at the University of Huddersfield for the Education and Training Foundation to better understand the recruitment of engineering staff revealed just how significant that challenge is. Between April and June 2017, a total of 31 telephone interviews or email surveys with senior staff from Human Resources and Engineering departments representing 24 of the largest 50 colleges in England measured by financial turnover. Although these colleges were diverse in their location, size and curriculum, virtually all of them agreed that recruiting engineering staff was difficult. The explanation most frequently given for this difficulty was the inferior pay engineering lecturers receive in colleges compared to what they might earn in industry. Some colleges had attempted to attract engineering lecturers by offering higher salaries, organising teaching taster sessions to attract people in from industry and colleges were offering

teacher apprenticeships so they could develop their own staff. More positively, many of the colleges reported low staff turnover in engineering, with a perception that those who found the job unsuitable would quickly leave while most remain.

The comprehensive reform of technical education that is envisaged in the government’s plan will require careful review of the curriculum, the introduction of suitable assessment methods and the use of appropriate pedagogy. Unfortunately, all of those may be second order concerns for college managers if there are not sufficient lecturers for the new courses. Successful reform of technical education in England has to involve consideration of teaching in FE colleges and, above all, how that crucial occupation might be made more attractive to potential recruits from industry.



EDGE’S VIEW

Ewart and Paul have strongly reflected the key challenges around funding and recruitment discussed in Chapter 1. The competitive process that colleges must engage in to secure funding has inevitably led to consequences for the sector, which raises a risk of provision that becomes too narrow and does not reflect the needs of the labour market. There is an emphasis on the role that FE can play in local communities and **we believe that it is essential for colleges to play an increasing role in their local communities as anchor institutions.**



Perspectives from across the UK

View from Wales

RACHEL BOWEN

COLLEGES WALES: Director of Policy and Public Affairs

Since devolution, education, including further education, has been the domain of the Welsh Government. Important but often overlooked changes in FE and HE have already taken place. However, after twenty years, the biggest shake-up affecting FE in Wales is the proposed establishment of a new arms-length strategic body to oversee tertiary education and training. This would bring together all areas of Further, Higher, Adult and Work-Based Learning.

The proposal for the new body emerged via a 2016 Welsh Government-commissioned review by Professor Ellen Hazelkorn - Towards 2030: A framework for building a world-class post-compulsory education system for Wales. It proposed a reform to governance, to ensure more effective co-ordination amongst public institutions; enhancing educational and career opportunities and quality, across the whole post-compulsory spectrum and underpinning regional social, cultural and economic development through boosting institutional and national global competitiveness.

Remembering that compulsory education ends at 16 in Wales, the specific recommendation of developing a single regulatory, oversight and coordinating authority for the post-compulsory sector has been pursued by the Welsh Government within its time-constrained legislative programme. Subject to primary legislation, the new body will be established as an independent Sponsored Body by 2023 to ensure that the post-16 sector is relevant and responsive to the needs of learners.

Indicative of the complexity of such a proposal, consultation has been in-depth and detailed, long before the draft bill has been seen. The initial government response to the Hazelkorn report, 'Public Good and a Prosperous Wales: Building a reformed PCET system' arrived in June 2017 with further consultation in April 2018: 'Public Good and a Prosperous Wales – the next steps'. Even the name of the new body has gone through several iterations – originally, 'the Tertiary Education Authority' (TEA), it then became

The Tertiary Education & Research Commission for Wales' (TERCW) and more recently the 'Commission for Tertiary Education and Research' (CTER). In reality it's still known in common parlance as 'The Hazelkorn Body'!

What's proposed is largely welcome. A 'made in Wales' approach to post-compulsory education and training which takes full account of what FE offers and makes it genuinely easier for people to learn and acquire skills, is something we can all endorse. As always, the devil will be in the detail.

Colegau Cymru has long called for a strategy to address post-compulsory education in Wales. This was supported by the recommendation from Towards 2030 that the Welsh Government should develop its vision for the PCET system, with stronger links between providers and social and economic goals. Through collaboration, FE institutions in Wales are achieving great things, from work-based learning to higher-level apprenticeships; from getting more students to be active through sport and wellbeing, to vocational work placements in catering, engineering and even seal sanctuaries via the Erasmus+ scheme. This is in addition to delivering academic routes and improving basic skills and opening up vocational pathways. Its increasing HE provision demonstrates the need to better integrate post-compulsory education in Wales.

Support to learning through the medium of Welsh and developing Welsh language skills is also vital if we are to reach the Welsh Government target of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050, and meet employer demands for Welsh language skills. Much good work already takes place in FE but the challenge is always to do and deliver more.

Legislation to achieve the ambitions of Towards 2030 will be complex and contested. Colegau Cymru looks forward to continuing to support this transformational change in the interests of learners, staff and the economy and society more broadly.



View from Scotland

JIM GALLAGHER

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY: Professor of Lifelong Learning

A 'managed' approach to colleges education and training policy has emerged in Scotland, with a strong emphasis on Government policy and planning (Gallacher and Reeve, 2019), in contrast to the more marketised approach which has emerged in England which emphasises competition between providers (Keep, 2017). Key features of this managed system are a Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC) responsible for funding and policy direction for both further education and higher education, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) which is responsible for the apprenticeship programmes and careers guidance, an economic development agency Scottish Enterprise (SE) working alongside the region specific Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and South of Scotland Enterprise which is being established. An Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board was established in 2018 to oversee the work of all of these national agencies and promote 'alignment' and a common agenda. Scotland can also be seen to be further along a continuum of a steadily evolving managed system than either Wales or Northern Ireland.

The structure of the college sector in Scotland has been reshaped through a major programme of regionalisation for colleges. This policy was designed to end unnecessary duplication and create a college structure which would more effectively meet the needs of learners and employers within the regions. As a result of a merger process the number of colleges has been reduced from 43 to 26 in 13 regions. Most are now single college regions, but there are three multi-college regions (Glasgow, Lanarkshire, and the 10 colleges within the University of the Highlands and Islands region). All regions now are required to agree a Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) which specifies how they will contribute to twin goals of skills development and social inclusion within their regions. Funding is then provided on this basis. These ROAs provide the SFC with additional opportunities to 'manage' the system on behalf of the Scottish Government.

There are around 240,000 students in Scotland's colleges, down from 349,000 in 2005-06, and around 31% are now full-time, up from 17% in 2005-06 (Scottish Funding Council, 2019). This reflects reductions in funding (Audit Scotland, 2015, noted that between 2010 and 2014 funding for the colleges sector was reduced by 18%) and Scottish Government policy which has encouraged colleges to focus on full-time courses which lead to formal qualifications at the expense of shorter part-time courses. There is a relatively high number of higher education level students (20%) when compared with England. These students are mainly on Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma (HNC or HND) programmes rather than the Foundation Degrees which are an important feature of HE level provision in English colleges. While many of the HNC/D programmes were traditionally a means to obtain vocational qualifications through part-time study for those in work, these programmes are now mainly full-time and many students use these qualifications to progress to bachelor degree programmes in universities, rather than as terminal vocational qualifications (Gallacher, 2017), a development which has been actively encouraged by the SFC through its articulation policies which have been designed to strengthen links between colleges and universities (Scottish Funding Council, 2007).

Given the strength of the colleges in attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds these students make an important contribution to widening access to higher education in Scotland. Hunter Blackburn et al. have reported that that 'ninety per cent of the overall growth in the HEIPR (Higher Education Participation Rate) for the most disadvantaged in Scotland since 2006 has been due to increased entry into college level higher education' (Blackburn et al., 2016, p55).



View from Northern Ireland

MARIE-THÉRÈSE MCGIVERN

Principal and Chief Executive at BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

Background of FE Colleges in Northern Ireland

FE colleges play a critical role in the future of Northern Ireland. There are now 6 colleges in Northern Ireland after a programme of rationalisation took place in 2007, when colleges went from 16 to 6. The colleges enrol around 80,000 students per year undertaking qualifications from Level 0 to Level 7. The colleges employ 3,500 FTE staff and have an annual budget of £190m. Retention and achievement rates have risen steadily to almost 90%. Nearly 20% of students embarking on a higher education course in NI commences their programme of study at an FE college. The sector is the main provider of technical and vocational education in NI including apprenticeships. Colleges have been designated Non-Departmental Public Bodies since 2014 which has had positive and negative outcomes.

The colleges are at arm's length from their parent Department for the Economy. This underlines the clear role the colleges are seen to have in relation to economic success and growth and colleges are expected to be closely aligned with local business and its needs. The sector on average partners with over 10,000 businesses in any year providing not just training assistance but also business development and innovation processes assisting increased productivity. The colleges are also expected to operate a dual mandate and to work strongly on the widening participation and social inclusion agendas with nearly 45% of enrolments by students coming from the most deprived quintiles.

Key Issues

The last three years have been difficult for everyone in the public sector in Northern Ireland as the absence of an Assembly and the process towards Brexit created uncertainty and squeezed resources. The Assembly is now back in place and the FE sector now has an active Minister. During the last period a number of policy areas remained static and there is now a requirement to deal with the backlog and to take potentially hard decisions about

the future. Overarchingly the Assembly is working on a new Programme for Government, reviving an out of date Industrial Strategy and sorting out a financial strategy. One important development for the FE sector is the creation of a new Skills Strategy for NI.

A new Skills Strategy for NI will allow the FE Sector to further emphasise and underline its role and function in relation to economic and social success in Northern Ireland. Over the last decade, the explicit requirement for colleges to critically undertake a dual mandate and to align more strongly with business need combined with their definition as NDPBs has created stronger clarity and understanding of the importance of their role and function. While still lacking the status of schools or universities, the crucial role of skills to economic success is increasingly understood and the colleges are seen as the key institutions to deliver in their area.

The process to develop a new skills strategy has relied greatly on strong advice from the OECD who have identified 4 key processes for a successful region– creating a culture of lifelong learning; reducing skills imbalances; effectively using skills in the workplace; strengthening the governance of skills policies. Colleges are in a pivotal position to play a central role in the first three and will benefit greatly from the realisation of the fourth. Colleges are working hard with the new Assembly to ensure their role is understood and that the requirement for resources to create sustainability to deliver is on the agenda.

The Independent Commission for the Future College is focusing on a key triangle of people, prosperity and places as the core element of a relevant and impacting college. In Northern Ireland the 6 colleges are striving to translate this into reality.



Further education colleges on small islands: the challenges of providing higher education opportunities

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Given the difficulties involved in capturing a single representative picture of FE provision across the larger islands of the UK, the task is even more complex when focusing on small islands in and around the UK. Colleges in these contexts are responsive to UK education policy, but also have distinct localised governance that operates in a variety of ways. For some islands, such as the Isle of Wight (a county of England) and the Scottish islands (part of the Scottish highlands), the policy relationship is one of adapting to education policy developments determined by the devolved UK nation to which they belong. Other islands such as the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are self-governing crown dependencies whose domestic policy is not dictated by the UK government; these islands in the latter category each therefore have their own particular systems of school and post-secondary education, and are each at individual stages in adapting and reforming these systems.

These diverse legislative characteristics mean that our Society for Research into Higher Education funded project, which has explored higher education experiences in island colleges in and around the UK, is near-impossible to neatly sum up. Nevertheless, there are some key concerns emerging from the project that demonstrate both the specificity of the islands as educational contexts in their own right and the challenges facing FE colleges across the devolved nations. The first of these is a problem of visibility. Very little is known about island colleges on the UK mainland; these colleges are overlooked within an already under-represented and under-valued FE sector. The second concern for island FE colleges offering higher education is that of degree awarding arrangements. For the twelve colleges that make up the University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland, the administrative challenges in managing such a geographically dispersed

network are balanced against the rewards of having the autonomy of university status. For the FE colleges on other islands, offering degree courses requires partnerships with universities on the UK mainland. These partnership relationships are subject to changes far beyond the control of the college, and rarely with the interests of the college in mind.

Underlying these issues is a larger question that could be asked of any post-compulsory education provision but that is especially pertinent to a small college on a small island. Our research project found that staff and students at these colleges were passionate about providing higher



Perspectives from across the UK

EDGE'S VIEW:

These perspectives from across the UK illustrate how devolution has played a role in shaping and governing the FE sector. There are lessons in each of the devolved administrations that others can learn from, such as the more managed approach in Scotland, colleges being at arm's length from their parent Department in Northern Ireland proving, the key role colleges play in relation to economic success and growth. Similarly, Wales will be introducing a new Arm's Length strategic body to oversee tertiary education and training. Meanwhile the smaller islands reinforce the opportunities for colleges to play an anchor role and show what can be achieved where they are given more freedom to do so.

We believe that we must continue to use the whole of the British Isles as an active policy learning laboratory in order to learn and share important lessons for further education and beyond.

education opportunities on the islands, where these had historically been absent. These opportunities meant that for the first time, students did not have to choose between staying on the island and studying for a degree; they could do both. For a whole host of reasons that include commitment to the island and the community, as well as lack of financial means to study on the UK mainland (often paying international student fees to do so), leaving the island is not what everyone wants to do. These FE colleges make it possible to stay and to study. At the same time, however, on-island policy-making requires that the colleges offer courses that are consistent with island labour market shortages, thereby responding to policy objectives addressing loss from the island of youth labour and skills. While not mutually exclusive, these are two very different ways of seeing the purpose of providing higher education in local areas. The student who stays has fewer choices, and their reasons for staying often bear little relation to the rationale for the curriculum offer at their local college. There is more to be researched and understood about the ways that place and policy intersect to determine student futures in FE.





3. Case studies: promising practice within the FE sector

In Chapter 2, some of the leading academics and practitioners working with The Edge Foundation reinforced the key messages that came out of the statistics and analysis in Chapter 1. Colleges have a very broad range of provision, with no clearly understood definition. They are suffering from significant funding challenges and in England particularly from the impact of marketisation, while policies diverge increasingly across the four nations of the UK. Despite these challenges, however, there are examples of promising practice from right across the UK. This chapter draws out a range of these examples.

CASE STUDY – CHANGING THE SHAPE OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AT SUNDERLAND COLLEGE

Sunderland College merged with Hartlepool Sixth Form in 2017 and Northumberland College in March 2019. In April 2019 a new regional college group was formed, Education Partnership North East (EPNE). Statutorily all colleges are part of City of Sunderland College, however the brands of Hartlepool Sixth Form and Northumberland College have been retained in order to support a strong agenda of localism. After doing so, Hartlepool Sixth Form College experienced a shift from declining attainment levels to a 3-year increase in achievement rates amongst students. Shaping and developing a 'careers focused curriculum' is at the forefront of the Senior Leadership Team's (SLT) strategic goal at Sunderland College. They place great focus on working alongside industry experts, hiring lecturers with professional experience and remaining aware of and involved in how the workforce is changing in order to create high quality and valuable learning experiences for the students.

Additionally, Sunderland College is certainly playing a role in challenging the stigma associated with vocational based learning, with industry standard facilities spanning across public services, games development, construction, health and life sciences and the arts. Classrooms that are reflective of the industry itself also help ease the transition between FE and the world of work.

This blended approach, between academic and practical based learning, has been very successful at the college with an overall A-level pass rate of 99.1% and students progressing on to top universities in subjects such as games design and law and prestigious apprenticeship programmes such as professional catering at the Hilton or progressing to Engineering Apprenticeships with Liebherr, full-time Paint Technician roles at Calsonic Kansei and Construction Apprenticeships at Persimmon Homes. Placing curriculum



Our plan for Further Education

at the heart of the college's work also allows for students to take a mix of A-levels and vocational courses giving them the unique opportunity to tailor their learning towards their interests and development needs. Relatedly, there is intentional overlap between classes and courses to ensure that students are receiving the breadth of skills necessary despite progressing down a specific route. For example, the SLT encourage the inclusion of the creative arts within all subjects as a tool for developing softer skills. Students on a public services course will regularly participate in role play scenario sets as a paramedic or police officer.

Sunderland College has an involved and strategic approach to teacher recruitment and retention – an increasing problem within FE. When hiring it is a priority that lecturers are specialists in their field and are able to focus on teaching one subject as opposed to multiple. In order to overcome the challenges associated with hiring lecturers from industry, such as salary reduction, the SLT at Sunderland College have invested resources into teacher training, gradually transitioning lecturers into their role with a reduced timetable, making time for development and providing them with the freedom and autonomy to develop their own teaching style and tailor the curriculum, with a focus on training the next generation of professionals.

Further to this, by implementing the Aspire Leadership Program, which provides opportunities for leadership

capacity building they have attracted professionals actively looking for opportunities to develop their career in another sector. The programme not only seeks to ensure there is a path to leadership and senior leadership but also allows for lecturers and aspiring leaders to be involved in decisions about curriculum changes and investment in priority areas and be prepared for progression opportunities in or outside the college. Upon recruitment, the retention rate at Sunderland College has been high and can be attributed in part to the investment placed on professional development and the teaching supported by progress monitoring given to each student.

Alongside continuous professional development within the college, there is an integrated culture of sharing best practice, both internal, external and specifically with Hartlepool Sixth Form College. Each year the college holds a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference, allocating two days to support areas of cross-college focus such as health and wellbeing, industrial updating plus two additional dates for bespoke faculty curriculum developments. In addition, the college has designated quality teacher learning assessment managers (QTLA) which are deployed to the faculties to help with staff training and 1to1 coaching where necessary and when staff request the support. There is no lesson observation grading system in place therefore staff are able to develop their individual needs with no intimidation.

Sunderland College is part of the North East Colleges Teaching and Assessment Network (NECTAR), which allow for colleges to spread best practice within the area. NECTAR also helps support 'communities in practice', which allows colleges to pilot new initiatives or changes in a small area within their college before discussing with practitioners across the sector and expanding throughout other colleges. Such groups are an integral part of the successful operating within financial and staff resource constraints.

Sunderland College is a progressive example of the future of further education, the move towards a careers focused education that addresses the skills shortages, and provides an example of the pleasure and purpose of teaching in further education. They are set to be providers of T levels in 2021 and are optimistic about preparing for the future changes to further education and how it can benefit their students.



CASE STUDY – COMPUTING AND CREATIVE MEDIA AT DUNDEE AND ANGUS COLLEGE

The Computing and Creative Media Team at Dundee & Angus (D&A) College have been working in hyper-drive for the last few years to expand opportunities and provide the best possible learning for students whilst also creating a clear talent pipe-line for regional businesses.

In June 2018 the team launched their 'Digital Mile' as a visual representation of the links with both local and global employers. As a part of this creative development, learning spaces have been re-developed from traditional classrooms (with all the desks facing the front) to learning spaces that replicate real working creative industries environments. The desks are clustered, allowing teams to work on real life projects, share ideas, support each other and meet deadlines, just as they would when they enter the workplace.

A number of the learning spaces in college are now industry equipped hubs - which have Microsoft, Cisco

and Oracle classrooms. Each has specialised software and hardware to support experimental learning and enable students to become familiar with the programmes, features and usage of industry requirements. Everything from creating physical to virtual networks, which they can build and manage as well tablets, servers and more to disassemble and maintain.

The college also has a designated Women in STEM classroom which provides a safe and supportive space for the smaller number of female students on computing courses. In some cases there is only one female student on each course with perhaps more than twenty male students. The Women in STEM classroom allows these students to meet out of class to share their experiences and help each other as needed. Female lecturers often stop in to offer advice and help the girls with their projects. It is hoped that soon this space won't be needed, but for now the support is there and networks are being formed.



Our plan for Further Education

What makes the Digital Mile a real stand-out is the regular input from industry. Two learning spaces have been supported by local digital businesses, both of whom are experts in their field with an international as well as local presence.

Ninja Kiwi are the colleges' partners for their HNC/D Computer Games Development courses and the yearly **GamesJam**. They work with the students to advise on industry developments and speak to students about the standards they (and the industry) expect from employees as well as ways they can bring their coursework up to full industry standards.

MTC Media provide a similar input for Interactive Media and Development courses (from Level 5 to HND). Their input to the colleges' brand new **Webathon** illustrated exactly what they need in an employee and how to get it. They set real life projects for the students, to give them tangible experience of the working world, whilst developing their abilities and providing feedback and strategies for moving forward.

MTC Media also offer the students work experience and paid placement opportunities – commonplace for university students, but a newer departure for college learners.

All of this work is creating the employment pipeline that gives the students something to work towards and means that they are far more employable than students who have simply studied the theory.

MTC Media and Ninja Kiwi have also worked with the lecturers to ensure that their knowledge is up-to-date and are helping to build and develop future focused course content. By advising on the curriculum MTC and Ninja Kiwi are making an investment into their own companies' future, they are developing a talent pipeline to deliver on future skills needs while ensuring that potential employees have a solid understanding of the world of work and the skills and experiences which are relevant for their industry. Students are getting the best possible education which will make them more employable, with the additional bonus of invaluable input from senior industry experts.

Over the last year MTC have provided:

- workshops and talks on preparing a CV for the creative industry;
- one-to-one meetings and discussion with web development students;
- two paid internships; and
- curriculum sponsorship to purchase specialist equipment.

They have now come joined the college as official Curriculum Partners and the college now have a branded MTC media studio space which is used to deliver specialist workshops from their staff including real client-based work projects – all embedded within their SQA provision. This learning space also allows students to see that the Interactive Media and Web Development courses are supported and recognised by the largest growing web company in Scotland.

The benefits of this partnership are threefold. MTC get to know, meet and interact with prospective employees whilst ensuring that students are leaving D&A College with relevant industry skills and experience. The Computing and Creative Media Team are able to deliver an up-to-date, employable, relevant & exciting curriculum, and the students are receiving excellent skills and opportunities.

Dundee and Angus College provide an example of how valuable effective educational partnerships can be and the symbiotic benefits it can have on students and employees alike. They also provide an example of how quickly the world of technology is developing and how colleges have a responsibility to reflect this. The Edge Foundation will be releasing a report on EdTech in FE colleges later this year exploring the future of EdTech and its current climate within the FE sector.

CASE STUDY – A HYBRID APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AT DA VINCI COLLEGE, THE NETHERLANDS

On Edge's study visit to the Netherlands many examples of good practice were observed across the Dutch Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. A key highlight was illustrated at Da Vinci College, a regional training centre offering VET provision in the fields of engineering, ICT, construction, infrastructural engineering and media & design. The Duurzaamheidsfabriek or the 'sustainable factory' model at the college promoted a hybrid approach where companies and education work together to meet the demands of the labour market. The Sustainable Factory specialises in smart industry, general and maritime technology, energy transitions and control engineering.

A key feature of the sustainable factory is the installation of a culture of "learning in a professional context". Specifically, the MBO students (secondary vocational education) on the Middle Management Engineering programme work

alongside the HBO students, (tertiary level vocational education) on associate degrees from Rotterdam Academy.

Within this programme assignments have been set by industrial partners and students are tasked to fix and respond to the problem posed by companies.

For example:

- An agricultural business tasked students to develop a sustainable watering system;
- An aerospace engineering company tasked students with developing an automated 'arm' to assist employees fixing the wing parts on their airplanes;
- The local government tasked students with creating a contactless coin 'stamper' for tourists.



Our plan for Further Education

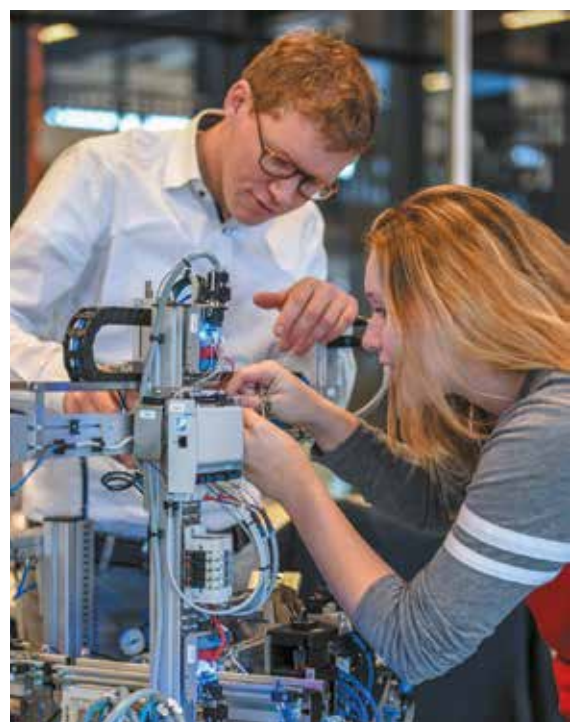
Throughout this programme students work in small teams over 10 weeks to develop their projects. The teams consist of levels 5 students (HBO students from Rotterdam Academy) and Level 4 students from Da Vinci College. Teams would produce prototypes of their products, write a detailed report and present their end product to the company and course lecturers. Students would have continuous communication with companies. Each group is given a budget of €500 to buy materials for their projects. This helps students develop their budgeting and planning skills as they would need to in real world scenarios.

The mixture of students from different levels aimed to promote learning and an exchange of knowledge and skills. Level 5 students would bring a more theoretical approach to the team whereas the Level 4 students on a vocational stream would bring a more practical hands-on approach. As part of the programme students learn soft skills through 'professional identity' training, project management and group work. Students must define their competencies and skills, and where they feel they need to develop. Lecturers would be on-hand to support students' development of these.

Another highlight at the college was the *Inspire Week* initiative; an expanded form of tutor training that



encourages lecturers' to keep their expert knowledge to stay up to date. A key challenge posed by the college was recruiting lecturers that had the skills to integrate the changing dynamics of the profession into their curriculum. The Inspire Week initiative allows lecturers to maintain professional industry-level practice by leaving the college for a week to take up a placement in either companies, government agencies or schools. Upon returning to the college lecturers would report back on their newly acquired inspiration with ideas and suggestions for improvement within their practises.



CASE STUDY – PROJECT BASED LEARNING, ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT SOUTH EAST REGIONAL COLLEGE, NORTHERN IRELAND

At South Eastern Regional College (SERC) there has been a significant shift in how education is received and perceived. The introduction of project-based learning (PBL) across the college has been a major catalyst for change. SERC created a PBL model based on Stanford's CDIO (Conceive Design Implement Operate) initiative and the challenge-based learning used by the Basque VET colleges. This PBL model provides a context for learners to work on multidisciplinary, collaborative, industry facing projects, helping them build the skills, habits and knowledge to succeed in the workplace. SERC wanted to develop an environment which supported creativity and critical thinking. This meant implementing change at scale whilst ensuring high-quality outcomes.



Changing pedagogy – changing culture

The economy needs creative thinkers, those with the potential to become tomorrow's innovators. Engaging

learners in real-world challenges, applicable to the industry they want to enter and the community they are part of, means they can see the immediate relevance



Our plan for Further Education

of their studies whilst developing the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to succeed. In SERC, learners are encouraged to develop the aptitude and confidence to tackle real-world challenges—a crucial skill for any employee. PBL has provided an environment where students can work collaboratively, resolve disputes and persevere to find solutions to challenges.

The college's PBL approach, inspires students to take measured risks, to achieve innovative solutions, while ensuring these challenges are mapped to the curriculum and assessed in a way that harnesses naturally occurring evidence and develops their wider skills. This redesign of the curriculum has seen a cultural and mindset shift amongst staff and students. It is a team effort; policymakers, educators, entrepreneurs and awarding organisations all have a part to play in supporting an innovative education system. Transformative change in education may be an ambitious goal, but in SERC this goal is being realised. There has been a significant investment in staff development with time devoted to collaborative planning by curriculum teams year on year. Buy-in by senior management has been crucial in both the short and longer term. SERC's management team are committed to the development of PBL and have seen significant return on their investment.

Enterprising students

PBL principles are embedded in all courses from the outset of the academic year. Students participate in Enterprise Fortnight, during the first two weeks of term, working collaboratively in groups, on real world challenges. In September 2019, 4,517 students completed Enterprise Fortnight. Thinking critically, students come up with a range of solutions and present their final proposal at the SERC Student Expo, receiving feedback not only from their peers but also from internal and external judges. External judges include policymakers, entrepreneurs and local community representatives. The winners of Enterprise Fortnight in 2017-2018 developed an idea to create a mobile food truck to cater at external events.

To support this SERC invested in a trailer and challenged engineering students to create a food truck. This was a PBL activity which required collaboration between motor

vehicle, engineering and catering students. "The College Kitchen" was launched. Students can transform the food truck depending on the event, for example: a traditional burger van, Mexican food truck and even a breakfast bar. The commercial success of 'The College Kitchen' has provided a range of real-world experiences for this multi-disciplinary team.

This year's environment winners were a group of health and social care students, who had an idea for a social activity centre for isolated adults. They pitched their idea to various stakeholders and secured funding and support from a range of community organisations. Golden Memories is running successfully as a social enterprise initiative. The Award for Innovation and Entrepreneurship this year was won by a team of applied science students who created a green tea infused with cinnamon and mint, specifically designed for those living with diabetes to help manage blood glucose levels.

Following Enterprise Fortnight, students are encouraged to implement their project ideas by setting up a business. In 2018–2019, 32 student companies were created. In 2019-2020 (to date), 78 companies have been set up, 42 of these as a direct result of Enterprise Fortnight. Each of the SERC 'Enterprises', 'Start-ups' and 'Innovation Projects' receive bespoke mentoring in the Entrepreneurs' Club to facilitate the swift progression from original idea / concept to 'market'. Supported by mentors, teams are encouraged to showcase their product/service to industry specialists and at local and regional competitions. Competitions also raise the profile of the business idea and can attract the interest of angel funders. Regular pop-up events give students the opportunity to prepare their marketing strategies while increasing their awareness of financial operations. Students can trade goods and services at specific seasonal events, monthly internal fairs, local craft markets and online. Within the Entrepreneurs' Club some students offer their time to support current companies to develop their ideas. This approach benefits both the student company and the individuals volunteering their time.

CASE STUDY – IMPROVING BRISTOL POST 16: A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

A tale of two cities

Bristol is the largest city in the West of England's devolved combined authority area. It has a thriving economy, and notably so in key sectors such as engineering and aero, creative, media and digital, fintech and the visitor economy. With some 54,000 students attending the city's 2 large universities, there is no shortage of innovation and enterprise in the city, which hosts a significant number of successful start-ups, SMEs and its very own "unicorn" company.

Alongside this tale of success lies another story for some of Bristol's residents. A City of Sanctuary with high numbers of 16-18 and adult refugees, Bristol is home to three of the lowest five performing wards in the country when it comes to progression to Higher Education. Bristol also hosts some the greatest education and employment equalities gaps of all of England's core cities. Particular areas of concern are the high proportion of young people with an Educational Health

Care Plan (EHCP), children in care and care leavers, and those attending an Alternative Learning Provider (ALPs) who become NEET, exceeding national rates.

Bristol is proud to be a UNESCO Learning City and its Learning City Partnership has a strong ambition to enable all young people to achieve their full potential in learning, life and work. In an effort to reduce the amount of young people disengaging early in education and improve the provision of best fit pathways to employment, leading post 16 providers have come together to carry out research and develop a collaborative strategy with clear priority actions. Convened by Bristol City Council and chaired by the Principal and CEO of City of Bristol College, partners in the Post 16 Strategy Task Group include schools and academies, universities, ALPs, private training providers, third sector organisations and other local FE and sixth-form colleges.



Our plan for Further Education



Scripting a brighter future

Focusing on transition from secondary to post 16 education, careers advice and provision mapping, the partnership has developed a 2019-24 Post 16 Strategy for the city, following a one year period of case study and statistical research and consultation with partners and young people. The strategy identifies the following priorities:

1. Improve the Bristol Post 16 Curriculum and Pathways
2. Improve earlier career insights
3. Engage, inform and listen to young people
4. Engage, inform and listen to parents and carers
5. Improve staff training and support
6. Support providers to work together and thrive

Case studies and the voices of young people have been key to identifying the priorities for action resulting from the strategy. Young people have consistently said that post 16 options are presented to them too late with very little time to make informed decisions. They also highlight that parents can sometimes encourage young people to take the wrong pathway as they aren't aware of other options. Transition at 16 is cited as an incredibly stressful period that

can cause mental health issues, and these can spiral for some. Some young people who struggle academically and have learning difficulties have been left feeling that they can't do anything meaningful with their lives: young people want to see all pupils given an equal chance to succeed.

This second year of the partnership has rightly focused on putting actions to ideas. Of particular value has been the informal conversations and networking resulting from the research. The partnership now meets quarterly to implement priority areas, including actions to improve access to a good range of provision in all parts of the city, engagement in careers and raising aspirations activities, and working with a range of networks to understand and improve transition and progression pathways for our most at risk young people.

The partnership recognises the importance of employer engagement in increasing access to high quality work experience opportunities and apprenticeship pathways. A reciprocal approach to aligning the Strategy with the skills and training priorities identified by WECA in their Employment and Skills Plan has been an essential tenet of the work and success of this plan will depend on ensuring continued alignment across city partner and regional priorities.

CASE STUDY – COLEG CAMBRIA: OPERATING, AND THRIVING, AS A CROSS-BORDER COLLEGE

Coleg Cambria is an impressively large, prize-winning institution established as a result of Deeside College merger with the Welsh college of horticulture, then with LLysfasi College, before merging with Yale College in 2013. It offers a huge range of full-time and part-time courses including A Levels, GCSEs, BTECs, Welsh for Adults and Higher Education to over 27,000 students of all ages over 16. It serves three local authority areas: Flintshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire. As an FE college, there is a strong focus on employer links, working in partnership with over 1500 employers at any time, ranging from SMEs to larger companies such as Airbus and Kelloggs.

Physically as well as operationally large, the college is composed of seven sites located across the Cheshire/ North Wales border, drawing students from within North Wales, Shropshire, Wirral, Merseyside and Cheshire. As such, it is in some ways a uniquely cross-border college, with 25% of staff coming across from England and strong engagement with industries across the border. Sometimes this creates various logistical challenges (their Chamber of Commerce, for instance, is Chester, Cheshire West and North Wales); sometimes these challenges are more significant: *“One of the challenges of delivery in Wales is that qualification changes in England can have unintended consequences as Wales is a much smaller market so it’s not*

always financially viable for awarding bodies to continue offering qualifications even if we still value them in Wales” (Sue Price, College Principal). They also face a challenge with being found by students across the border, even those only ten minutes away, because of not being listed on the Skills Funding Agency website. However, their role as a college is to *“hide the wiring for employers and learners and ensuring the offer meets local needs.”*

Despite navigating the trickiness of sitting across two separate countries, the college *very much identifies* as Welsh. As the principal puts it: *“We’re very proud to be a Welsh college, Coleg Cambria is one of the highest performing colleges in Wales, rated Excellent by Estyn,”* though she adds that they *“support many English students and English employers as we can meet their needs.”* Indeed, despite its size and only recent formation, the college has an extremely strong sense of community; what staff describe as “the Cambria approach”. As one member of staff put it: *“I wouldn’t know which staff now started off in which institution, we’re all one college.”* This is partly fostered through technology (the campus is Google-enabled), and partly through the large investment in CPD—investing millions of pounds into CPD programmes and equipment and staff are actively encouraged to keep developing their skills and see the connectivity between their different areas of work.



Our plan for Further Education

A particular strength to the college is its ability to offer multiple routes to students (vocational or academic) for the same career aspiration; this is further enabled by a 'right choice review' check at the end of the first week of the course, allowing students to not only change career but also the type of course, if they find it is not working for them with further review throughout the year. The college's provision for more unconventional learners is also particularly strong, with a roll-on-roll-off Welsh-government funded traineeship offered to students who are NEET, involving bespoke programmes created with local industries who have a skills shortage, whereby the college delivers the programme necessary and the industry gets to 'try out' the students.

Another important aspect of the college to highlight is their emphasis on the students. As one staff member from the Foundation Learning and Employability Skills Directorate

put it: *"we're all here for the learners"*—students are at the heart of the system, and this is clear from the college's focus on pastoral care. Beyond introducing "pastoral coaches", all staff members see their roles as encompassing a great deal more than lecture delivery. As one lecturer explains: *"The days of teachers coming in and delivering a session, those days are long gone. It's all about supporting learners."* Indeed, one of the greater challenges facing the college is the mental health of students, many of whom have come from deprived areas and are struggling with a range of difficulties, such as anxiety and Asperger's; all staff emphasised the need to teach resilience to their students (in fact, beyond digital literacy, this was the key skill emphasised by everyone interviewed). From the students themselves, as well, it was clear that they felt cared for and supported by their tutors. As one student put it, *"they're always there to help you, and it's nice to have that reassurance."*

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter we have shared examples of colleges across the UK and abroad that illustrate:

- There are many pockets of innovative practice occurring across the nations.
- **An increasing steer towards professional and vocational based learning for staff and students alike.** Coleg Cambria are championing a flexible and supportive learning environment, where students' choices and career aspirations are at the heart of the system. By harnessing the use of modern technology, they have been able to create a post-merger community that address the labour market needs on both sides of the border.
- **Colleges need to collaborate to share and learn from one another.** Sunderland College are a fantastic example of how a college merger has facilitated tangible improvements in attainment amongst students, by having the capability to offer a wider range of provision and share best practise among institutions with vested interest.
- It is key for colleges to work closely with industry to develop provision that matches industry needs, such as 'the Digital Mile' at Dundee and Angus College and 'the Sustainable Factory Model' at Da Vinci College in the Netherlands. Both of these colleges work on establishing links with local employers to work to meet the demands of the labour market and ensure FE curriculum remains reflective of real world problems and changes.
- **Working with industry and embedding projects develops more real-world learning for students and make learning more relevant and engaging.** The investment in project-based learning by South East Regional College embodies this principle through championing the importance of creative thinking in a professional space, using enterprise fortnight as a tool to do so.
- **Lecturers' continuous professional development is crucial in delivering up-to-date knowledge and improving staff satisfaction and retention,** as highlighted in the strategy development for City of Bristol College. The City of Bristol College provides voices of lecturers and young people to identify key priority areas that include; informing and listening to parents and carers, improving staff training and support and improving career pathways for both students and lecturers.



4. Recommendations and conclusions

The evidence set out in Chapter 1, research perspectives in Chapter 2 and examples of good practice in Chapter 3 have led Edge to formulate clear recommendations for the FE sector and policymakers to consider. These are presented in this chapter and will feed into the work of the Independent Commission on the College of the Future, which is discussed in more detail at the end.

The Edge Foundation encourages the further education sector to become more:

- 1. Defined** – in setting a clear purpose and direction for its own future.
- 2. Career and skills focused** – by continuing developing close links with local industry to ensure colleges address the skill shortages in the labour market.
- 3. Collaborative** – by taking on anchor roles within the heart of their local community, and sharing practice with the wider FE community across the UK.

DEFINED: setting a clear direction for the sector

In this report, Edge has attempted to acknowledge the variety of provision the FE sector offers. The continuous changes the sector has endured, alongside a high level of policy churn has led to less clarity on the way forward for the FE sector. **The lack of a clear definition for FE has been a result of the top-down influence of constant policy reform.** This has been a contributing factor to the 35% decrease in the overall number of learners in FE between 2003 and 2018 in England. It is time for greater consistency from education departments across the four nations on the future of FE policy.

Our plan for Further Education

It is apparent that the lack of a clear definition for FE has had consequences for stakeholders, including both policymakers and students, *“as some commentators have quipped of post-compulsory education and training; if you are not confused by it, then you haven’t understood it”* (Norris, 2017, p. 7). **To secure a strong future, Edge encourages the FE sector to articulate a clearly defined vision for FE set by the sector itself.**

It is understandable that FE will continue to have a number of specific goals within its future vision. However, as Frank McCoughlin makes clear in Chapter 1, this should not stop the sector from developing a clear overall brand and public understanding of colleges, just as universities have today. To achieve this, it will be essential for the sector to agree what is ‘at the front of the shop window’ when people think about the sector. This may be Level 4 and 5 qualifications, where colleges have a key role in addressing the technician skills gap, which is a huge challenge for the economy. As part of their ongoing discussions, **Government should consider whether it would be advantageous to give colleges a protected role in this area through awarding powers just as recognised Higher Education Institutions have degree-awarding powers.**

If T levels are delivered at a high standard, they may be a response that helps support FE’s future direction. Their key feature of a mixture of classroom learning and practical experience developed alongside employers could help address the level 4 and level 5 skills shortage. However, many first-round providers have voiced concerns, including the potential lack of understanding among students, parents and the wider population on what T levels are, and the challenge of securing sufficient work placements. **The Edge Foundation will seek to bring partners together to monitor and share research findings and feedback from the T level providers to help understand the development and rollout of these new qualifications.**

KEY RECOMMENDATION: Edge encourages the FE sector to establish a clear definition for itself, with a focus on *what it is* as opposed to *what it is not*. This could provide greater clarity across the system. Edge recommends individual FE providers continue to define their own identity and missions within this to ensure that their local offer is equally clear.

CAREER AND SKILLS FOCUSED: preparing the workforce of the future

FE has a strong history of addressing local skills needs and it is more important now than ever to continue addressing the skill shortages in the UK workforce. Edge’s series of Skills Shortage Bulletins has shown that in sectors across the economy, leading businesses are struggling to find the skilled workforce they need, with the Employer Skills Survey revealing 226,000 skills shortage vacancies in 2017. **Edge will continue to support colleges with their efforts on working with local businesses to become the skills and business development partner of choice for their area.**

To be effective at addressing the shortages in the UK workforce, it is essential colleges have skilled staff who feel valued. Colleges look to their communities to employ industry-trained professionals. However, as evidenced throughout this report, staff recruitment and retention within the FE sector has been difficult. Principals have been trapped, by the wider system, in a position where they are unable to pay anything near what an individual would earn in many growth industries. It is perhaps not surprising that 42% of tutors and 33% of leaders are planning on leaving the sector within the next 12 months (Augar, 2019). For this to be remedied, **Governments must agree a new deal with the FE sector across the four nations based on their renewed vision and purpose, which includes sufficient funding to address the recruitment and retention crisis.**

Pay is only one part of the story in ensuring that the college workforce feel valued, are able to keep their practice current and continue to foster links with local businesses. For further support, **Governments should fund a systematic programme of industry exchange**

Recommendations and conclusions

to encourage lecturers to continue making links with local employers, keep their industry knowledge up-to-date and develop a consistently updated curriculum that links directly to local businesses and is reflective of industry demands. For example, this could be achieved through ‘teacher externships’, a model that Edge has piloted in the North East of England, where FE lecturers spend time immersed with a local employer to observe and discuss career pathways relevant to their subject, before developing this experience into an interactive project for their students.

Additionally, the DfE should increase investment in FE teaching - by increasing pay (see box below), investing in flexible working, the development of early career lecturers, and creating a more supportive culture and reduced workload. A positive illustration of this was showcased in Chapter 3 where Sunderland College targeted greater investment and resources into training to transition lecturers into their role providing them with time, flexibility, autonomy and development opportunities. One possible starting point could be a ‘national institute for teaching’ to recruit, support and develop the next generation of technical lecturers supported by regional knowledge centres where pedagogical and subject-specific skills can be informed and updated. Neil Bates discusses this further in his FETL publication (FETL, 2019).

KEY RECOMMENDATION: To develop a skilled UK workforce, the FE sector needs to attract, develop and recognise its own teaching staff. Edge supports the formation of an independent panel for FE pay, which would help establish transparency, fairness and impartiality. The panel would consider pay and conditions in other sectors from which FE staff may be drawn to ensure parity and fairness across the country.

COLLABORATION: becoming anchor institutions

colleges remain one of the few key civic institutions that exist across the country and open their doors to the whole community. It is essential that colleges are widely acknowledged in this role and **FE principals see**

themselves, and are recognised as, civic leaders in their communities. This could be reflected further in the training and support that FE staff receive to prepare them for their roles and as part of their ongoing CPD.

Furthermore, Edge advises FE providers to work together to develop solutions to the challenges faced by the FE sector by sharing best practice. Education departments across the four nations should help facilitate this further. This can also be achieved through forming collaborative college groupings, where colleges are positioned at the forefront of their local communities. For example, City of Bristol College exemplified successful community partnership through leading the local development of a UNESCO Learning City, strengthening its link with Learning City Partnership to help reduce the number of disengaged young people in education. **Edge encourages the FE sector to become more collaborative wherever possible – both within itself and with other institutions, fighting back against the negative impacts of marketisation.** The agreement of a new deal between the Government and the FE sector based on an increased amount of funding will help reduce the pressure of competition.

This report has illustrated examples of colleges Edge has worked with across the UK that showcase exceptional practices. For example, Chapter 3 exemplified the promotion of digital technologies at Dundee and Angus College to expand opportunities available for students and create a talent pipe-line for local business. Greater investment and prioritisation of CPD was illustrated at Sunderland College and Coleg Cambria to address the recruitment and retention crisis, and facilitate future changes in line with the changing direction of FE. **Edge will continue to promote and illustrate links among FE providers to share best practice.**

KEY RECOMMENDATION: Colleges and education departments across the four nations are encouraged to focus on forming collaborative groupings, bringing together schools, independent training providers and higher education institutions. With support from organisations like Edge, sharing best practice can be facilitated right across the UK.

What Next? A view from the Independent Commission on the College of the Future

LEWIS COOPER, DIRECTOR

The Independent Commission on the College of the Future is asking two simple but fundamental questions. Firstly, what do we want and need from colleges in 10 years' time? And secondly, what changes are needed in order to achieve this? These are important questions. Seismic shifts are happening across the UK - from the climate emergency, to ongoing technological revolution and to major demographic shifts. It is clear that colleges can and must be at the heart of meeting these challenges.

In the hundreds of conversations we have had across the four nations of the UK since our launch in March 2019, there has been notable consensus across our two questions. Building on the critical role colleges already play, there is a real appetite for a confident, ambitious vision for the ever-more central role that they can play for people, productivity and places.

For people, we hear a need for a much more personalised, seven-day-a-week service that many more of us engage

with throughout our lives to improve life chances. For productivity, there is a sense that colleges working together within regional networks can offer a much more explicit service for employers of all sizes – including supporting them with implementing new innovations and anticipating future workforce needs. Alongside this, colleges have a critical role to play as place-making institutions – as community hubs, working alongside other local partners to boost health, wellbeing and the aspirations of their community.

For colleges to play this important role for people, productivity and places a systemic change in approach is required. An emphasis on competition and growth as a means to survival must be reoriented instead towards working well together. Whilst the scale of changes required are naturally different across the four nations, there is a growing consensus across the UK that we need to develop and deepen a far more collaborative approach – colleges working within regional networks, agreeing specialisms, delivering a consistent careers information, advice and guidance offer and coordinating a strategic approach to regional employer engagement.

We have heard a great deal about the associated cultural changes that are required in order to embed this more collaborative, outward-facing and confident sector. This means serious investment in CPD, secondments and new networks for staff and leaders – and a new systems approach, which is supported by sufficient and sustainable funding, will also enable and reinforce this.

Our final report will set out our collective vision for the college of the future, alongside specific recommendations as to how we can take this forward within the particular contexts of the four nations of the UK. We look forward to continuing to work with a broad range of people from across and outside the sector as we co-develop our ideas, and take them forward. Colleges across the four nations

SIR IAN DIAMOND, CHAIR OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON THE COLLEGE OF THE FUTURE

Now is the time for us to ensure that colleges can continue to transform lives in every community across the four nations of the UK. With so many critical challenges facing us, from changes in technology, jobs, inequalities, and the climate, colleges must take an even more central place in public policy. We are consistently hearing that collaboration is key and that this must be the basis of the college system of the future. We will be putting forward clear recommendations to further develop this approach so that colleges can ensure that no person is left behind, productivity is boosted right across the UK, and our places are strengthened.

already play a vital role in transforming lives – but we need to ensure that this is the case in every community.

You can find out more about the Independent Commission on the College of the Future and feed in your thoughts, at www.collegecommission.co.uk. The Independent Commission on the College of the Future is supported by the Association of Colleges, City and Guilds, ColegauCymru, Colleges Scotland, FETL, Jisc, NCFE, NOCN and Pearson.



RESEARCH IN FE

Throughout compiling this report, the Edge team have been struck by how little research is occurring across the FE sector compared to other areas of education. Where it is occurring, it can sometimes be quite disconnected and overlapping. To realise the future vision for FE, we must do so on the basis of a much more structured and thorough evidence base. **Edge promotes and supports the Social Mobility Commission's call for a What Works Centre for FE which recommends that government should invest £20 million over five years to help establish the evidence and research led centre.**

Please contact the Edge Research and Policy team if you wish to collaborate efforts to build the research profile within the FE sector by emailing: enquiry@edge.co.uk

NOTES

1. A small number of students are under 16, equivalent to ~0.8% of the college student population (England, 2016/17).
2. The first three T level streams to be offered are in: 1. Education, 2. Design, surveying and planning, 3. Digital production, design and development
3. T level action plan 2019, page 7 – Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-action-plan>
4. e.g. Anne Milton: <https://www.fenews.co.uk/press-releases/30038-fe-is-a-driver-of-social-mobility-and-at-the-heart-of-creating-an-education-system-that-works-for-everybody>; Damian Hinds: <https://www.fenews.co.uk/fevoices/18424-speech-education-secretary-sets-vision-for-boosting-social-mobility>
5. e.g. NUS FE VP: <https://fewee.co.uk/2017/12/10/social-mobility-means-nothing-without-financial-support-for-fe/>
6. 2019 Compare School Performance data for previous cohorts, provided by the Department for Education and analysed for this report.
7. Figures 5 and 6 has been adapted from 2019 Compare School Performance data for previous cohorts, provided by the Department for Education and analysed for this report.
8. 2019 Compare School Performance data for previous cohorts, provided by the Department for Education and analysed for this report.
9. HMT. “Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy–world class skills.” Final report (2006).
10. 2019 College Financial Benchmarking tool, data submitted by colleges in 2016/17 and 2017/18 provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and analysed for this report.
11. The 90 respondents cover 69 FE Colleges (38% of all those in England), 10 Sixth Form Colleges (16%), and 8 specialist colleges (31%), as well as three sixth form college conversions. All nine regions of England are represented in the respondents, ranging from 16% coverage of London (n=6) to 42% coverage of the South West (n=10).
12. SIR 21 (2012-2013 data), SIR 22 (2013-2014 data), SIR 23 (2014-2015 data), SIR 24 (2015-2016 data), SIR 25 (2016-17 data), SIR 26 (2017-2018 data)
13. e.g. Further Education Teachers’ Continuing Professional Development and Registration (England) Regulations (2007); partial revocation of Further Education Teachers’ Qualifications (England) Regulations (2007).
14. <http://www.cdio.org/>
15. <https://www.serc.ac.uk/about/student-companies/companies>

Our plan for Further Education

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