



A N N U A L R E P O R T

SETTING UP THE FUTURE

Further Education Trust for
Leadership Annual Report

Y E A R E N D E D 3 1 J U L Y 2 0 1 9

CONTENTS

- 3 | Introduction from the chair
- 7 | Trustees' report for the year ended 31 July 2019
 - 7 | Structure, governance and management
 - 8 | Objectives and activities
- 10 | Review of the year
- 26 | Setting up the future

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

I am delighted to present the sixth Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) *Annual Report and Financial Statements* for the year to 31 July 2019.

This report is an opportunity both to celebrate the achievements of the past 12 months and to reflect thoughtfully on what we would like to achieve in the year ahead, as FETL prepares to cease operations in 2020 and makes plans to secure its legacy – setting up the future by ensuring the work continues and the thought-filled voice of the sector continues to be heard.

FETL was always planned as what television producers describe as a 'limited series'. We are confident that we have made a significant impact on further education and skills over the past six years, fully living up to our brief to create spaces for leadership of thinking in the sector by funding and publishing the work of colleagues who have either approached FETL or been approached by us. And, while there remain a number of major plans, programmes, events and publications in the pipeline, we are also looking beyond them to consider how the work we have done can continue to ripple out, creating new ideas and starting new conversations, long into the future. This has been an important part of the Board's thinking – and FETL's mission – from the beginning. We want everything we publish, in whatever format, to have a life off the screen or beyond the page.

This report comes at an extraordinarily busy and productive moment for FETL, when a number of major projects are either reaching fruition or being disseminated. These represent the culmination of much effort and engagement with partner organisations in and around the further education sector. We have been true to our promise to look 'everywhere and elsewhere' for new ideas, and have challenged ourselves to find new ways of working and to share our work in different ways, making use of online and digital platforms to maximise our impact. This has been a major feature of our work in the past year, as we restructured our website, updated its contents, and used it as a platform for webinars, video resources, live conference streams, lectures and blog posts. We remain, in all our activities, committed to funding and supporting our colleagues to develop their ideas, and to sharing them in as effective a way as possible. This, essentially, is how we deploy our independence as an organisation: by mobilising and amplifying the voice and views of our colleagues.

Our activities are, as ever, guided by our vision of a further education sector that is valued and recognised for its commitment to continual innovation, its long-term thinking and its generous sharing of good practice and fresh ideas. We believe that the work we publish will be of general interest to the system and of particular value to the further education and skills sector. Our work concerns, and is guided by, two domains: *the leader in the system*, in other words, the place of leaders and leadership in the wider educational ecology; and *the system in the leader*, by which we mean how that

system is internalised in the life and values of leaders and how it relates to their culture, beliefs, ideas, character and disposition. It is important to keep in mind that while leadership in the sector is subject to external pressures, in the form of policy reform, accountability and funding restrictions, leaders also have their own internal drivers, their own frailties and strengths, as well as their distinct values and moral outlook. An important theme of our work has been the importance of the ethical dimension in thinking and doing things differently.

In the past year, FETL has acted as commissioner, partner, organiser, contributor, funder and publisher on a range of different projects. Highlights of the work included high-level policy symposia; thought leadership, through articles in the education press, speeches and presentations, and contributions to major policy initiatives, such as the Liberal Democrats' Commission on Lifelong Learning; and a number of major books and reports, including two new publications series – our *Occasional Papers* and our *Provocations* – intended to stimulate fresh thinking within and about further education and skills. In most cases, the outcomes of our work have been accompanied by strong press coverage, backed by webinars and video conversations involving some of the most thoughtful and inspirational voices in the sector.

Our growing influence on the leadership of thinking in the further education and skills sector is reflected in the enthusiasm of colleagues in taking up our ideas and contributing to our work, the willingness

of organisations and individuals to enter into collaboration with us, and the interest of the press in our ideas and projects. It is gratifying indeed to see how our work has stimulated the interest and imagination of colleagues, and how far we have come in establishing ourselves as a key player in the life and thought of the sector.

In all this activity we focus our attention on four key audiences: professionals in the FE and skills system, policymakers, partners and politicians. We do not aim to instruct these individuals and organisations in how to fulfil their responsibilities, or to offer the final word on any issue or policy on which they might be engaged. Our intention, rather, is to stimulate their engagement with new and different ideas, to engender conversations and to create spaces in which perspectives can be shared and new thinking fostered. The starting point for all our work is the new thinking and ideas of our colleagues.

The need for such new thinking is made more acute by the challenges faced by the further education and skills sector, and by the increasingly uncertain environment in which we operate. The past year has been notable, first, for the interminable stalemate over Brexit, which continues to hold the wheels of our economy and society crucial inches off the ground; and, second, by numerous commissions and inquiries, including those on lifelong learning and the Augar review of tertiary education. In amongst all this activity, it was possible to identify a number of important themes: a demand for a more holistic approach to post-18 education, with a growing emphasis on place and devolved

responsibility; an increased recognition of the role of further education providers and of the need to reverse decades of under-funding; and increased policy attention on lifelong learning and how to ensure adults have access to education and training throughout their lives. It has been pleasing to see how heavily involved FETL has been in the shaping of all these themes.

In the context of the challenges we face as a society, FETL's work has become increasingly important, and is increasingly seen as such. This is gratifying and encouraging, but perhaps not surprising given the level of change and uncertainty we face. Sector leaders need to be supported in developing the new thinking, learning and capacities they will need while also remaining true to their values and to the core mission of the sector: teaching and learning. FETL is all about helping them develop scripts for the future – a future in which innovation, creativity and collaboration will be to the fore.

As we move into FETL's final full year of operation our focus, as ever, is on the future. We want to do full justice to our current projects, but also to ensure that these and the other projects in which we have been involved have a lasting legacy. We know that we will only get better as a sector and as a country through better ideas and better thinking, through a willingness to learn and to talk. Some of the spaces FETL has created for this purpose will endure, as will the debates we have started and the ideas we have put into circulation, but we will pass the baton to others when it comes to the active promotion of leadership of thinking in further

education and skills. The current level of engagement in FETL's work – and the positive way in which it has been received within the sector – encourages me to think that scripts for the future are being written through which the sector can fulfil its rich potential.

FETL's work across this extraordinarily busy and successful year would not have happened without the help of our President and trustees, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge their work and to thank them for it.

Ricky McMenemy FRSA is Chair of the Further Education Trust for Leadership

TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2019

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

1. Who we are

Our vision and mission

The Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) is an independent think tank which works to strengthen and develop the leadership of thinking from, in and about further education and skills. Our vision is of a further education sector that is valued and respected for:

- innovating constantly to meet the needs of learners, communities and employers;
- preparing for the long term as well as delivering in the short term; and
- sharing fresh ideas generously and informing practice with knowledge.

We support this vision by creating opportunities for colleagues in and around the sector to develop the evidence needed to change policy and influence practice. We do this through our programme of commissioned work for the exploration of future possibilities, the events we offer and the resources we produce and disseminate. While the initial impetus of our work comes from the ideas and thinking of colleagues, we take care in ensuring their work is shared and understood as widely as possible, in the hope of engendering further ideas and fresh innovation.

Core activities

FETL takes the view that, for far too long, further education has been under-researched, under-conceptualised, under-theorised and, hence, under-understood. We aim to change this by supporting colleagues to undertake research and development activities in areas that are of interest to them and that are relevant to the leadership of thinking, in pursuit of intelligent sector development. Their thinking in turn informs the creation of new collaborative spaces of possibility, encouraging generative engagement with relevant partners and, we hope, fostering the next stage of knowledge-enriched leadership, characterised by autonomy foresight, creativity and independence.

FETL does this, in the main, through a programme of commissioned work and grant-funded projects, and through our written and digital communications. Our project grants are aimed at organisations with a track record of developing thinking in FE, skills and related fields. They can be independent training providers, third sector organisations, adult and community learning providers, colleges (further education, land-based and sixth form) or policy and leadership organisations. Projects should add depth and value to the current knowledge base, by developing new knowledge on leading thinking in the FE and skills sector and system.

Our project support and the fellowship programme we offered to FE and skills leaders and connected others to pursue a research interest that benefits thinking in the sector, with academic support from the Institute of Education, University College

London, have shaped the programme of commissioned activities through which FETL strives to further develop the evidence, thinking and options the sector will need as it leads and adapts to its role in a fast-changing world. These activities begin with the ideas and offers of colleagues and go on to be commissioned by the FETL Board. The aim is to create new spaces for further learning and to open up new areas of exploration and collaboration, often across disciplinary boundaries. They take various forms, from a University Chair in Further Education Leadership to ongoing collaboration with the likes of the Social Market Foundation, IPPR and the RSA. We see the different strands of our work as linked and mutually supportive.

Our aim is to help create a sector in which leadership is enriched by learning and characterised by creativity, trust, enterprise and agency, where leaders are supported both in understanding the wider ecology in which they operate and how to change it, and in cultivating the skills, capacities and values they need to lead ethical organisations.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

2. Charitable objective

The objects of the Trust are to advance education and training for the public benefit.

3. Measuring impact and public benefit

As a grant-making Trust, providing public benefit is at the heart of FETL's activity.

In exercising their powers and duties, the trustees confirm that they have referred to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit, when reviewing the Trust's aims and objectives, and in planning future activities and setting its grant-making policy.

Trustees aim to create impact by improving the leadership of thinking in FE and skills. Working in partnership with others, they support research and provide fellowships for individuals and grants for organisations. Trustees are committed to maintaining and updating the framework to measure and regularly review the Trust's impact.

4. Grant-making priorities

The Trust's focus is on funding research projects proposed by colleagues which develop the leadership of thinking in the FE and skills sector.

Those awarded funding undertake research projects which develop the leadership of thinking in FE and skills. Funding is available to individuals (through sponsoring organisations), institutions, sector membership bodies and other organisations through fellowship and grant funding. The University Chair at the University College London, Institute of Education, is funded via a grant which commenced in 2016.

Notwithstanding the Trust's overall charitable objectives for the public benefit, the trustees regularly review their policies, objectives and guidelines for grant-making.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

The public benefit of Trust funding is measured by the achievements of activities funded by the Trust, and the impact of events and its publications. Grant-funding recipients are required to provide progress reports at regular intervals and their activities are monitored by the FETL team.



REVIEW OF THE YEAR

6. Key achievements

FETL organised and hosted three high-level policy symposia during the year.


The FETL **Winter Symposium**, which took lifelong learning as its theme, took place in December 2018 in Parliament. Former skills minister Sir John Hayes gave the keynote lecture, with a forward-looking discussion led by Professor Tom Schuller, co-author, with Sir David Watson, of one of the most seminal recent contributions to debate on the theme, *Learning through Life* (NIACE, 2009). The event was hosted by Baroness Sue Garden of Frognal and featured contributions from panellists Fiona Aldridge, Director of Policy and Research, Learning and Work Institute, Paul Feldman, Chief Executive of Jisc, and FETL President Dame Ruth Silver. Other participants included Sir Alan Tuckett, Professor of Education at the University of Wolverhampton, Ruth Spellman, Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Workers' Educational Association, Gordon Marsden MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Skills, and Sue Pember, Director of Hoxley and former Director for FE at the Department for Education. Participants reaffirmed their determination to reverse successive governments' neglect of lifelong learning and to ensure that its 'wider benefits' – for health and wellbeing, civic engagement and social cohesion, as well as for the economy – are recognised.



FETL's **Spring Symposium** was called 'Connecting the dots: The role of further education in local priorities and national challenges' and took place in Bristol in March 2019. It considered the extent to which institutional, local system, and national priorities align, and asked what policy or cultural changes may be required in order to allow the FE sector to contribute fully to the needs of the country and local communities. It came at a moment when combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships were being asked to devise local industrial strategies, and sought to bring together stakeholders from across the system and local government to explore how FE can play a more prominent role in addressing policy challenges such as raising productivity, the impact of the 4th industrial revolution, and supporting local infrastructure projects. The high-profile contributors included Karin Smyth, MP for Bristol South, Emma Jarnman, Vice Principal, City of Bristol College, Councillor Mark Hawthorne, Leader of Gloucestershire County Council, Smita Jamdar, Partner at Shakespeare Martineau, and Professor Ewart Keep, Director of the Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE), Oxford University.

Key achievements

THE FETL SUMMER SYMPOSIUM



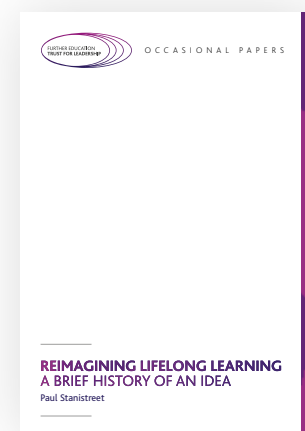
Our **Summer Symposium** was another substantial success. Focusing on 'New horizons in FE: How technology will change learning', the event was chaired by Lord Holmes, Chair of the EdTech Leadership Group and APPG for Assistive Technology, and featured contributions from the following panellists: Deborah Millar, Group Director of Digital Learning Technology, Grimsby Institute; Paul Feldman, Chief Executive of Jisc; Dick Palmer, former Chief Executive, TEN Group, and adviser on FELTAG; and Maren Deepwell, Chief Executive of the Association for Learning Technology. The panellists set the scene for a fascinating discussion which ranged over issues such as the inclusivity of technology, how it is already changing teaching and learning, and the challenges it creates for providers, teachers and students. FETL's President Dame Ruth Silver posed the critical question of how technology could be strategically organised to ensure it sits within a coordinated FE system.



There were a number of important centenaries in 2019, including 100 years of the Representation of the People Act, which extended the franchise in parliamentary elections to women over 30, and the anniversary of the publication of the *1919 Report*, the seminal final report of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee. FETL published works marking both. ***Marvellous Regiment: 100 years of Women in Further Education and Skills*** highlighted the achievements of 14 of the most prominent female shapers and influencers of the past century. It was based on a series of FETL blog posts, published between January and December 2018, on such significant figures as Jennie Lee, Margaret Thatcher, Ellen Wilkinson, Margaret Sharp and Helena Kennedy, as well as FETL's own Ruth Silver. Julia Belgutay, writing in the *TES*, said:

[The women's] stories and personalities are as varied as the student cohort in any modern FE college, and while their tales will appeal to some learners more than others, I challenge anyone to not be inspired by how they have challenged norms and smashed through barriers. I have to confess that I knew about less than a handful of these women ... What the FETL series of blogs also reminds us, though, is that the wheel of history never stops turning. There will be women just like the 14 inspirational role models in our schools and colleges today, next week and next year. Regardless of the chaotic times we find ourselves in, this is their shot at success. And it's always worth remembering that it may be the only one they ever get.

In July 2018, FETL marked 100 years of the *1919 Report* with the publication of an 'Occasional Paper' called ***Reimagining Lifelong Learning: A Brief History of an Idea***, written by Paul Stanistreet. The paper, which was offered as a written contribution to the Liberal Democrats' Independent Commission on Lifelong Learning, chaired by Sir Vince Cable, in which Dame Ruth Silver participated as commissioner. It also informed discussion at FETL's Winter Symposium on lifelong learning. The paper gave an overview of the use of the term 'lifelong learning', how it emerged as an idea and how it has since been re-understood and reimagined by



policy-makers, planners and educationalists, viewed through the lens of key developments in thinking and influential policy documents and statements. It described the main trends and ideas that led to the concept's adoption, globally and at national level, as an important educational paradigm, and to its subsequent 'revisions and reimaginings'. Jill Westerman, Principal of Northern College, described the paper as 'the clearest account of policy over the last 100 years that I've read'.

The Occasional Papers were one of two new publication series launched by FETL during 2018-19. The second was its series of 'FETL provocations', intended as short stimulus papers published with a view to eliciting thoughtful, open-minded responses. The first of these, published in February 2019 and written by Dame Ruth Silver, considered the case for further education '**elders**', an 'independent, worldly wise stewarding body/oversight organisation made up of senior figures that represent the collective memory, knowledge and experience of a sector or tradition'. The paper proposed 'the creation of a new body of experienced, expert and knowledgeable figures from the broader world of further education' with the authority 'to provide informed, independent commentary on policy, to work on solutions to wicked problems and to vouchsafe the core values of the sector' and the independence 'to assert the sector's professional and social values and call out policies and practices that do not live up to them'. The paper was picked up in the education press (it was reprinted in full in the *TES*) and prompted wide debate within the sector. Senior colleagues have since met a number of times to discuss how to take the idea forward.

The second 'provocation', also written by Dame Ruth and published in April 2019, was on the difficult subject of **shame and repair**. Entitled *Shame, Learning and Repair: Fostering Compassion in Organisation Life*, the paper reflected on the 'harsh and intemperate' criticism sometimes levelled at leaders in the sector, the impact of the accountability system on the lives of leaders and their organisations, and

the highly personal, sometimes abusive, discourse around further education. Taking up themes raised in the 2018 FETL Lecture, by Professor Mark Stein on whistleblowing and the 'good self' of organisations, it called for the creation of organisational cultures in which people 'feel able not only to highlight misconduct but also to admit when they are struggling against expectations and ask for support'. We all have a responsibility to protect the 'good self' of our organisations, the paper argued. It drew on another FETL project, led by organisational consultants John Balzalette and Susan Harrison, on how issues of organisational shame are being experienced in the further education sector. It was also, in part, a reaction to the death of former college principal Garry Phillips, which prompted Dame Ruth to write an article

for the *TES*, calling for a re-examination of how leaders in the sector are judged and supported. A third 'provocation' in the series was published in July 2019, reproducing an important article by *TES* FE Editor Stephen Exley on **evidence-based policymaking**. The paper highlights the need for leaders to use their judgement in interpreting and implementing evidence, taking into account a range of other factors, including values, context and public appetite.



FETL by numbers:

IN SIX YEARS...

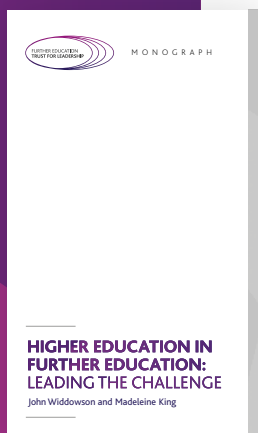
... FETL HAS WORKED WITH **36 ORGANISATIONS** ...

... ON **29 DIFFERENT TOPICS** ...

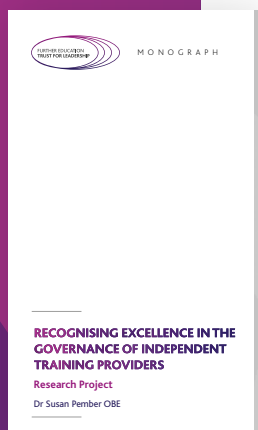
... IN PURSUIT OF ITS **ONE MISSION** ...

... ACROSS THE **TWO CORE DOMAINS** OF ITS FOCUS ...

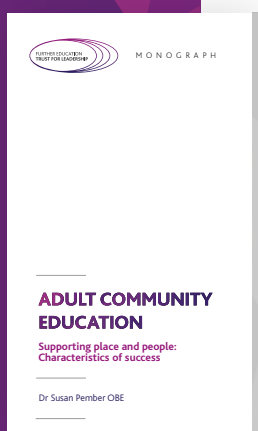
... AND WITH **FOUR KEY AUDIENCES** IN MIND.



In March 2018, we launched our series of FETL Monographs with *Higher education in further education: Leading the challenges*, written by John Widdowson and Madeline King of the Mixed Economy Group of colleges. The monographs are intended as short, forward-looking treatments of subjects key to the leadership of thinking in further education and skills. Written at the invitation of FETL's Board, they aim to influence leadership within and outwith the sector, taking its present needs and concerns as their starting point and looking deeply into the experiences of colleagues in order to devise 'scripts for the future'. A second monograph was launched in July 2018, written by Ewart Keep on behalf of the Association of Colleges (AoC) on the theme of 'exploring potential strategic leadership responses to the marketisation of English FE and vocational provision'. It focused on how providers might choose to conceive of, make sense of, react to and seek to navigate their way through and influence such markets.



A third monograph followed in September 2018, on *Recognising Excellence in the Governance of Independent Training Providers*. Written by Sue Pember on behalf of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), the book highlighted examples of excellence in governance and asked how it could be replicated throughout the independent training provider (ITP) sector. The study formed the basis for the development of a new code of **governance** for ITPs launched in June 2018 by AELP. This was a welcome development for FETL for, as Dame Ruth Silver put it in her foreword to the monograph, 'governance is perhaps the least understood and, in some ways, least transparent aspect of our public life'.

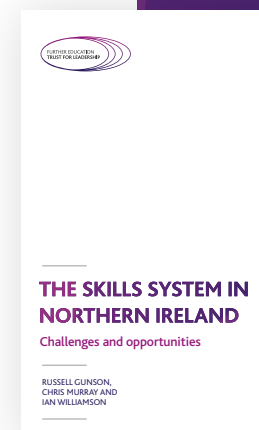


A fourth FETL Monograph was published in June 2019, on **adult community education**. Written by Sue Pember for Hoxley, the lead professional body for adult community education and learning, the book considered an often overlooked, but wholly essential, part of post-16 education. It demonstrated the success of adult community education services in raising standards and sustaining high performance

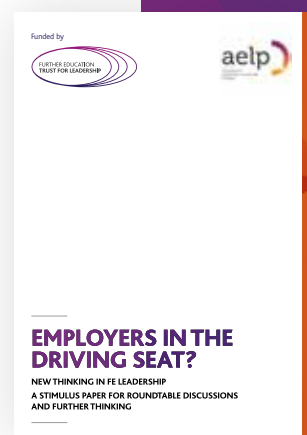
in their local neighbourhoods, often in contrast to other parts of the sector, and considered the key characteristics of the most successful services, emphasising 'place-making and supporting residents'. In her foreword, Dame Ruth Silver said:

Adult community education is one of the most resilient and creative parts of the education system. It has survived swingeing cuts to its public support, yet it continues to make its vital contribution to the social, civic and economic wellbeing of our communities, retaining its values and mission in spite of changing policy agendas and the hollowing out of local authority funding over the past decade.

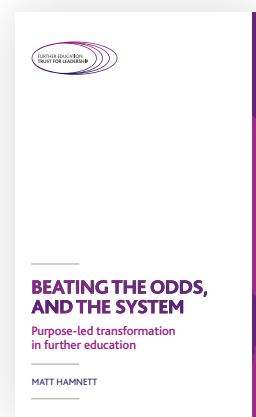
FETL's collaboration with IPPR Scotland on **cross-country comparisons** between the skills systems of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continued, building on work already undertaken with FETL on the future challenges facing Scotland's skills system. *The skills system in Northern Ireland: Challenges and opportunities* was published in August 2018. Surveying the distinctive economic and skills challenges facing Northern Ireland, the report described how the skills system could support employers and learners in realizing their potential, driving inclusive growth and helping ensure Northern Ireland's future economic prosperity. In November 2018, FETL published a third report with IPPR, *The future is coming: ready or not? Delivering a successful 21st century skills system for Northern Ireland and Scotland*, this time offering a series of recommendations for what needs to change and what needs to stay the same in Northern Ireland and Scotland in order to prepare for the future we face. Further collaboration between FETL and IPPR Scotland resulted in the publication of two reports on the skills system in Wales, the first surveying the country's skills challenges, the second proposing recommendations fitted to its future needs.



FETL also funded an AELP project on *Employers in the driving seat? New thinking in FE leadership*. Its first output, published in March 2018, was a stimulus paper for sector leaders on **the role of employers in FE and skills**. This considered the current dynamic between employers, state and providers and offered thoughtful provocations to leaders, encouraging careful, open-minded reflection about challenging questions. The final report, published by FETL in April 2019, asked whether recent policy interventions, for example the Richard review, had increased employer engagement in education. The answer, Dame Ruth Silver wrote in her foreword, 'would appear to be "no", or at best "not enough"'. AELP Chief Executive Mark Dawe, in his introduction, agreed, observing that there has been no real improvement, with only large employers engaging and the state refusing to cede control of the system. The answer, Dawe argued, was for the sector to blow its own trumpet more and to be more assertive as to what its role should be.

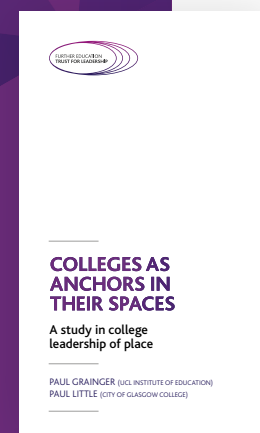


The perspective it takes is a personal, albeit a recognisable, one. However, the lessons are transferable, and leaders in the sector are engaged with and think hard about the issues this experience raises. There is, of course, no one way to run a college and there are no ready-made solutions when it comes to changing the culture and performance of an organisation. That would be the wrong way to read this paper. Rather, it gives leaders different options and ways of thinking about problems and challenges that may or may not be relevant to them, and, I very much hope, the confidence to try something different. New ideas and fresh thinking are the lifeblood of good educational leadership, but they must be tempered by a shrewd and carefully cultivated understanding of purpose, people, place and possibility.



In January 2019, FETL published *Beating the odds, and the system: Purpose-led transformation in further education*, by Matt Hamnett, a very personal and vividly written account of one further education principal's experience of **college transformation**. The book detailed the pressures and frustrations that often beset leaders of change, reflecting thoughtfully on how failing institutions can most effectively be transformed into vibrant, progressive and effective creators of social and economic value for the students, businesses and communities they serve. Dame Ruth Silver wrote in her foreword to the book:

Achieving swift, noticeable culture change in an organisation is one of the toughest challenges a leader can take on. It is a particular challenge in the further education sector, characterised, as it is, by significant budgetary constraint, a demanding accountability regime and a culture of high expectations combined with regular and often ill-considered top-down policy reform. This publication explores this issue, sharing one leader's perceptions of effective culture change at his own struggling college.



The challenge of **leading place** was the theme of a FETL project led by Paul Grainger, of the Institute of Education, University College London, and Paul Little, of City of Glasgow College. Their final report, *Colleges as anchors in their spaces: A study in college leadership of place*, published in June 2019, examined college leadership through the lens of the changing role of colleges as leaders of place. Six prominent sector leaders were interviewed as part of the project. Their insights were used to identify varying and developing demands on the role of college leadership and radical changes in the nature of their work in recent years, as they respond to a new landscape in the provision of technical education in the UK. Place was also an important theme of *Crossing Boundaries 2*, Paul Grainger's second survey of FETL's published output, the first volume having been published in 2017.



FETL's long-term collaboration with the Social Market Foundation (SMF) continued to bear important fruit. Two papers, under the banner of '**Leading Skills**', were produced, both exploring policies for strong leadership in further education colleges. The second of the two reports was published in July 2019. The authors argued that a shift in mindset was needed to promote and strengthen leadership in further education colleges. Reforms to the system are necessary as well as cultural change in the sector and beyond.

FETL shares the hope of the SMF that the project will lead to 'a bigger, deeper discussion about leadership in which sector bodies, colleges, the Department for Education, politicians, learners, and those who do the training and development can participate'.

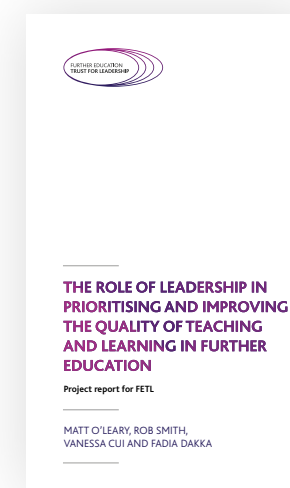
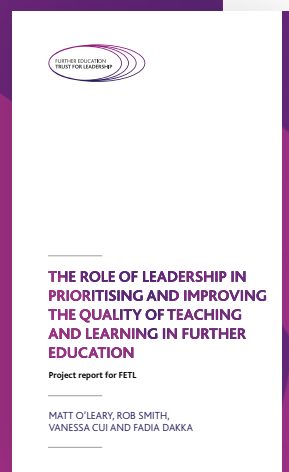
In 2018, FETL funded a team from Birmingham City University, led by Matt O'Leary, to explore the relationship between leadership and the improvement of **the quality of teaching and learning** in further education. The project reported in *The role of leadership in prioritising and improving the quality of teaching and learning in further education*, published in May 2019. The report captured the views and experiences of further education staff working at all levels, from senior leaders to hourly paid tutors and learning support staff. It found that the culture of high-stakes inspection that dominates our approach to accountability can have a distorting and disruptive impact on improving teaching and learning, as can instability in policy and funding arrangements. Teaching staff are best placed to improve teaching and learning by identifying and targeting their own professional needs, the authors found. Senior leaders and managers have an important role to play in establishing the conditions in which this can take place. Leadership approaches to improving teaching and learning need to involve those that teach, drawing on their expertise and experience. In short, the authors argued, improving teaching and learning is about creating an environment in which collegial interaction can flourish.

FETL continued to support the RSA's work on cities of learning, widely recognised as an important new approach to activating a grassroots, city-based, mass-engagement movement around learning and skills. It also worked with the RSA on a project entitled *Adopting global skills innovation for the UK*. The final report, published in May 2019, was the culmination of a seven-month research project led by the RSA in partnership with WorldSkills UK and supported by FETL. It investigated inspiring examples of global innovation in TVET and skills, with the aim of drawing out lessons for UK policymakers and practitioners, including the FE sector, as they work to

confront the major skills, productivity and social inclusion challenges facing Britain. Working with WorldSkills UK has allowed the RSA to examine a relatively under-explored but highly promising platform for skills innovation: skills competitions. Dame Ruth Silver wrote of the report: 'What I like about this report is that it does not suggest there is nothing to build on in the UK — some of the 'success factors' it identifies are already present, in some form or another, here — or suppose that it is possible simply to import another country's skills system wholesale into the UK national context. As the authors write, the review of global practice is about learning rather than borrowing, building on our own strengths rather than trying to mimic others'. As a result, the report is able to offer proposals for development and innovation that are far from alien and, from the point of view of implementation, decidedly doable'.

Learning at Life Transitions: Supporting learners returning to work or preparing to retire was the title of a report supported by FETL, commissioned by the Workers' Educational Association and prepared by the Learning and Work Institute. The research found that these life transitions can prompt a reappraisal of the decisions and actions that shape an adult's life course, particularly as priorities shift and change, and new things become important. Engagement in learning can become more of a priority, especially when seen to play a pivotal role in helping people achieve their ambitions and aspirations. At the same time, these transitions also affect some of the practical factors that are involved in an individual's decision about whether to participate in learning, particularly in relation to time, cost and availability of childcare. There is rarely one attitudinal or practical factor that influences the decision to take up learning, the authors found,

rather, a range of intersecting enabling and hindering factors are simultaneously at play. Learning is most accessible when it both becomes a priority/something that is valued more than other activities, and physical/practical factors enable it.



THE FETL CHAIR IN FURTHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

FETL WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE
**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE LONDON, ...**

... TO CREATE
THE UK'S **FIRST-
EVER UNIVERSITY
CHAIR** IN FURTHER
EDUCATION
LEADERSHIP, ...

... WITH THE AIM
OF ADVANCING THE
**STRATEGIC
DEVELOPMENT
OF THOUGHT
LEADERSHIP IN FE ...**

... AND SKILLS AND
FOSTERING RESEARCH
THAT **CHALLENGES
POLICY AND
PRACTICE** WITH
A VIEW TO
IMPROVING IT.

MARTIN DOEL,
WHO HAD
SERVED AS **CHIEF
EXECUTIVE
OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES** SINCE
2008, BECAUSE
THE FIRST
HOLDER OF THE
PROFESSORSHIP
IN APRIL 2016.

Since then, Professor Doel has brought his significant experience and policy knowledge to bear in the generation of fresh, new thinking about the sector. His two main areas of focus have been the problem of defining the distinctive contribution of further education to society and the economy; and 'the prospect of redressing the imbalance in our education systems between academic study and the development of technical and professional skills'. The first of these was the subject of his first public lecture in February 2018.

Professor Doel convened a series of roundtables for leaders in FE and skills to 'introduce wider perspectives and concepts from academic fields outside the sector that can be the inspiration for fresh thinking within it'. The three roundtables, focused on collaboration versus competition, place, and defining technical education, took place between September 2018 and March 2019. They gathered some of the key figures and most influential thinkers about further education in the UK. For each roundtable, Professor Doel prepared a short paper to stimulate debate. These were published by FETL in July 2019 as *Rethinking Place and Purpose: Provocations on the Future of FE*. FETL President Dame Ruth Silver wrote in her foreword to the book:

Like the professorship itself, the roundtables represented a serious attempt to bridge the divide between academic thought about the sector and the practice of those engaged in the day-to-day business of leading learning in further education. ... It is important both that research is informed by the real experiences and issues facing the sector, and that further education, as a sector, learns from and contributes to scholarship, in order to better influence and shape its own future. The issues Martin presented at the roundtables have become increasingly relevant, and are at the heart of much of the best and most promising current thinking about further education.

Professor Doel has also given a number of high-profile keynote speeches, written articles in the education press, delivered lectures and seminars, and contributed to wider research, while in post.



Two **FETL fellows** published the results of their research during the year. Dragana Ramsden, of Morley College, London, researched the development of a new vision of collaborative partnership between adult community learning and mental health primary care. In her final report, *Collaboration and leadership for improving mental health and wellbeing*, she concluded that while adult learning has a positive impact on mental health and well-being, as well as on other aspects of adults' lives, this impact tends to be most effective when organisations, national and local, work collaboratively in ways that involve local communities. Carol Thompson, of the University of Bedfordshire, explored the impact of the leadership of thinking on innovation in FE. In *Finding the glass slipper: The impact of leadership on innovation in further education*, she argued that empowering further education teachers is a complex matter, bound by context and perception, and that change was a collective concern, which demanded a whole-organisation approach. Both fellows were supported in their research by UCL-LoE. FETL ensured that their work was widely disseminated and discussed within the sector. This included thematic webinars in which the fellows were able to explore their findings and answer questions about their projects.

Webinars, videos and lectures are an increasingly important part of our work and our approach to dissemination. Across the year, we produced a range of **digital resources**. In addition to the webinars involving our two fellows, FETL organized and hosted webinars on potential strategic leadership responses to the marketisation of English FE and vocational provision, with Ewart Keep, and recognising excellence in the governance of independent training providers, with Sue Pember. All four webinars were well-trailed and publicised events, and generated a good deal of interest on social media. The webinars are broadcast live but were available afterwards as a recording on the FETL website. FETL also produced a series of videos called 'In Conversation', in which leading figures from the sector explored issues of topical concern. Participants included Sir Geoff Hall, former principal of New College Nottingham and General Secretary of the Principals' Professional Council, Russell Gunson,



Director of IPPR Scotland, FETL Chair in Further Education Leadership Martin Doel, Jill Westerman, Principal of Northern College, and Mark Malcolmson, Principal of City Lit. All the video content produced by FETL is linked to a FETL YouTube channel.

FETL also posted 15 new **blog posts** across the reporting period, including contributions to our '100 Years of Women in FE' series, and articles on the role of leadership in improving teaching and learning (Matt O'Leary), collaboration and leadership in improving mental health and wellbeing (Dragana Ramsden), and on the impact of decentralisation on further education (Ewart Keep).

FETL also maintained a strong presence in the **education press**. Dame Ruth Silver's *TES* article reflecting on the challenges of leadership in a culture of blame and direct accountability and the need for adequate support systems for FE leaders was described by Stephen Exley as 'an absolute must-read' and was widely discussed on social media. Dame Ruth also published articles on the FE 'elders', the mark made by women on the FE sector, the Augar review of post-16 education (*TES*), and the need for FE to see its complexity as a strength rather than a weakness (*FE Week*). She also took part in the *TES* FE podcast where she discussed the challenges of college leadership with presenter Sarah Simons. FETL's work was widely cited and our comment frequently sought by sector journalists.

The **FETL website** continues to be the key mechanism through which we seek to disseminate the body of knowledge we are

creating. Increasingly, it is regarded as an important reference point and resource for leaders in the sector. This year, we continued to strengthen it, uploading more video content and hosting further FETL webinars, while improving and restructuring the written content. FETL actively shares this content through social media, including through Twitter and LinkedIn.

A new innovation, launched in June 2019, is **Listening Posts**. This project gives colleagues in the FE sector the opportunity to take part in a series of confidential discussions, called 'Listening Posts', sponsored by FETL. Listening Post is a form of social enquiry, like a focus group. It takes a 'temperature check' of the sector's collective wellbeing by exploring the preoccupations and interests of the people within it through a series of confidential conversations. Everyone who attends a Listening Post does so as an anonymous 'citizen of FE'; with all views taken as being expressed on behalf of the whole sector rather than in an individual capacity.

7. Setting up the future

This annual report demonstrates the range, strength, depth and variety of FETL's work in the past year. FETL's mission remains to strengthen and support the leadership of thinking in further education and skills. We will continue to do this by funding a range of opportunities for those working within further education and skills to develop their ideas and reflect purposefully on the future of the sector. In the coming year, we will support the completion of our existing projects, while continuing to disseminate the findings of completed projects. We will also continue to engage with our partners, colleagues and collaborators, both in supporting the creation of new ideas and the leadership of thinking, and in securing the legacy of FETL's work.

A particularly important strand of this work in the coming year will be the three commissions that FETL is funding and supporting, namely Colleges of the Future, with the Association of Colleges; the Future FE Ecosystem, with Policy Connect; and Reimagining Lifelong Learning, with Nottingham University. We are delighted to be involved in these important commissions. They are all extremely timely and much needed, and point, in their distinctive ways, to different possible destinations ahead for the sector.

FETL's trustees are committed to continuing to develop a body of knowledge to inform the leadership of thinking in the sector through this variety of strategic work platforms. Its work plan for the next period includes continuing support to grant-funded programmes and commissioned work. It will also continue to develop a body of knowledge to support the leadership of thinking in FE and skills and work to ensure that body of knowledge has a life beyond FETL's own. As we have always understood, the real legacy of FETL lies in the new ideas and the real and virtual spaces it has created, and in the voices it has allowed to be heard. The trustees are committed to a spend-out strategy and have no plans to fundraise or continue beyond the seven-year term agreed at the formation of FETL.

FETL

SETTING UP THE FUTURE





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