



A N N U A L   R E P O R T

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# SIGNALS FOR FE FUTURES

Further Education Trust for  
Leadership Annual Report

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## INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

**I am delighted to present the seventh Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) *Annual Report and Financial Statements* for the year to 31 July 2020.**

It is a report that we did not expect to write. FETL had originally planned to bring all of its activities to a close in July 2020. However, all that changed with the advent of COVID-19 and the cloud of uncertainty that descended with it over the further education and skills sector, as well as other parts of the education system, and society more widely. With the sector facing unprecedented challenges, and the task of leading in ways useful to staff and learners more complex than ever, we felt it would be irresponsible to wind up operations now.

When FETL was launched, more than seven years ago now, our aim was to give colleagues in the sector and system the time and space they desired to reflect forward with their experiences in the FE and skills sector and to contribute to the leadership of thinking they felt was required. We wanted to part the scene leaving behind the kind of independent, self-conscious and self-scrutinising sector that would no longer need an organisation such as FETL.

We have made great strides in this direction. I am proud of what FETL has achieved, and also of what colleagues have managed to do with our support. Nevertheless, it was always

part of the plan to set the sector up for the future, however, as FETL President Dame Ruth Silver has put it, 'the future is not what it used to be'. Faced with unprecedented challenges, the FETL trustees concluded that it was beholden on us to engage as fully as possible with these challenges, and to support the further education and skills sector in writing its own script for the future that will emerge from the current crisis.

To my thinking, two important tasks remain. First, we have to make sure we do full justice to the work of the present, to ensure that the reports, think pieces, occasional papers, provocations and webinar contributions we have commissioned and supported with our partners come to fruition in the best possible way. While it may not be possible to do everything we would wish to in terms of promotion and dissemination, we want to give each commissioned work the debut it deserves, using FETL's online reach and presence, as well as our networks of friends and partners, to compensate for the lack of face-to-face opportunities.

Second, we want to support colleagues in thinking about the future shape of the sector, in the context of not only the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impact but also the new policy thinking about further education. Further education is firmly under the microscope at the moment, with secretary of state Gavin Williamson acknowledging its contribution to fair economic growth and resolving to elevate its status in relation to other parts of the system, and Chancellor Rishi Sunak foregrounding FE's role in an inclusive

recovery ahead of a much-anticipated White Paper. But, of course, with renewed policy interest come new expectations and demands, and it is important that colleagues in the sector contribute actively to leading this new thinking.

After years of funding attrition, the promise of more resources and support at policy level is welcome indeed. We need to be ambitious but we also need to understand the challenges the sector faces, in terms of finances and capacity, but also leadership. The Ney review on college financial oversight, published in July 2020, reinforced the impression of a sector facing significant leadership challenges, with which it has only partly begun to get to grips. Many colleges and independent providers are also facing serious financial problems. Nevertheless, as the vision set out by the FETL-supported Independent Commission on the College of the Future demonstrates, it is still possible – and important – to think big, bold thoughts. Indeed, given the challenges we face just now, I wonder if we can afford not to. As big as the immediate challenges are, it is critically important that we continue to think beyond them, with learning at the centre, and in creative, student-centric and staff-focused ways. In the months ahead, FETL will continue to support this kind of leadership of thinking.

FETL's work over the past 12 months demonstrates how far we have come. We have built on the progress made during the first six years of our operations to develop, with our partners, important, innovative work on topics such as prison education, demographic change and further education leadership, adult community education,

lifelong learning, shame and shaming, skills and workforce development, regulation and oversight, governance, and the lessons to be learned from lockdown and the COVID-19 crisis. We have also continued to innovate in terms of how we communicate, producing films and hosting webinar, and amplifying these through social media and our own web platform. Our perspectives were regularly shared in the education press, both through news articles and in commissioned think pieces, and we organized a number of key events, including 2019 party conference fringe events and our very successful and inspiring Winter Symposium, 'Setting up the future: FE beyond 2020'.

The theme of the symposium is also very much the theme of FETL's final year of operation. As well as looking to secure the legacy of the body of work we have produced to date, we will bring a number of major projects to fruition, including work on the impact of the pandemic on further education, the future of the sector, 'leadership', 'unconditional' devolution, 'levelling up' for adult community education, the 'college of the future', careers provision, and the last of four occasional papers on the subject of shame. We will also continue our webinar series with *FE Week* and contribute our perspective through the education press and the FETL blog. We will remain, in all these activities, committed to funding and supporting our colleagues in developing their ideas, and to sharing them in as effective and useful 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 vision remains that 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. Our work, as ever, focuses on, and is shaped 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. And we continue to focus our attention on four key audiences: professionals in the FE and skills system, policymakers, partners and politicians. As always, our aim is not to tell these individuals and organisations what to think or how to do their jobs. FETL exists to create new spaces of possibility, in which people can encounter new and different ideas and shape and share their own. The launch pads for everything we do are the ideas and perspectives of our colleagues. One of the important lessons of the past seven years has been how very necessary and appreciated this function has been – and how well our colleagues can do it.

While circumstances remain challenging, and the future profoundly uncertain, thoughtful research and reflection on what has passed in the past year remains a vital endeavour. This report is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the past 12 months and to reflect thoughtfully on what we would like to achieve in the months ahead, as FETL seeks to secure its legacy ahead of ceasing operations in 2021. I am certain that our

work and the thought-filled space it has created have never been more needed. I want to express my appreciation of the work our partners, our president and our trustees have done in support of our objectives thus far, including the Institute of Education, University College London, for kindly offering to archive FETTL's resources once we have completed our tour of service. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge their contribution, while also looking forward to the final year of our operations and setting up pathways to the future along the tracks we have, together, made.

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

# TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2020

## 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 and creative ideas 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. The impetus of our work comes from the ideas and thinking of colleagues, and we take care to ensure 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 has done this, in the main, through our programme of commissioned work and grant-funded projects, and through our written and digital communications. We have offered project grants to organisations with a track record of developing thinking in FE, skills and related fields. They have been independent training providers, third sector organisations, adult and community learning providers, colleges (further education, land-based and sixth form) or policy and leadership organisations. These projects have added depth and value to the current knowledge base, 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 colleagues such as the Social Market Foundation, IPPR and the RSA. We see the different strands of our work as linked, mutually supportive and strengthening. It is to be noted that the final written outputs of ongoing projects will be submitted to FETL by the end of 2020.

Our aim remains to help create a more thinking sector in which leadership is enriched by learning and ensures the ideas which develop are taken to the world of their colleagues and characterised by creativity, trust, enterprise and agency, where leaders are supported both in understanding the ecology in which they operate and how to change it, and in cultivating the skills, capacities and values needed 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

The FETL **Winter Symposium** focused on 'Setting up the future: FE beyond 2020', and took place in December 2020 in the House of Commons. The event brought together sector leaders, academics and practitioners to discuss how to set out an ambitious, long-term vision for the future of further education beyond 2020. The panel was made up of Baroness Alison Wolf of Dulwich, who was part of the Augar Review into Post-18 Education and Funding; James Kirkup, the Director of the Social Market Foundation; Lesley Davies OBE, principal and CEO of the Trafford College Group; and Kirstie Donnelly MBE, Group Managing Director at the City & Guilds Group. The event was chaired by Stephen Exley, at the time Further Education Editor at TES. The discussion focused on: the profile of further education; 'higher education versus further education'; FE funding, and stability for the FE sector. Participants noted the increased profile enjoyed by FE within all main political parties, though they acknowledged that FE remained very much a 'poor relation' compared to HE, which continued to dominate the media's coverage of tertiary education. Some of the panellists, notably Lesley Davies OBE and Kirstie Donnelly MBE, argued strongly for greater stability of funding for FE, highlighting the importance of greater trust between government and the sector and the need to create an environment in which sector colleagues felt able to be both ambitious and hopeful about the future.

Key achievements

### THE FETL WINTER SYMPOSIUM



FETL partnered with the Social Market Foundation to co-host two parallel **fringe events** at the Conservative and Labour party conferences in 2019. The events, both of which were chaired by James Kirkup, Director, Social Market Foundation focused on 'Delivering the promise of further education'. Gordon Marsden MP, then Shadow Minister for Higher & Further Education and Skills, Lord Bassam of Brighton, Shadow Spokesperson for Further and Higher Education, Caireen Mitchell, Principal and CEO, Croydon College, and Priya Minhas, Research Manager, Opinium, took part in the event at the Labour conference. They discussed what a thriving FE sector could look like, and how government, business and providers could work together to better support FE its learners and its leaders. Baroness Wolf of Dulwich, Panel Member of the Augar Review, David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, and Adam Drummond, Associate Director and Partner, Opinium, spoke in the Conservative event, examining why successive governments have neglected further education in favour of higher education.

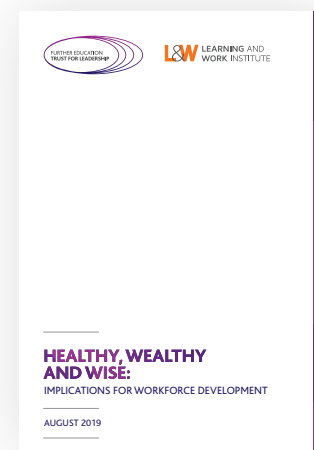




## Key achievements

### MARTIN DOEL'S SECOND PUBLIC LECTURE

Another important event in FETL's year, in February 2020, was Martin Doel's second **public lecture** as FETL University Chair in Further Education Leadership at the Institute of Education, University College London. Professor Doel built on his first lecture, which examined how further education is defined and its lack of a clear sense of identity, by asking what is next for the sector. He considered different possibilities for the future of FE through the lens of a series of dilemmas: competitive or collaborative; local or national; generalist or specialist; second chance or first choice; simple or complicated. He argued that these apparent dilemmas are in fact inevitable and necessary dualisms within an exceptionally diverse sector. In each case, following a dialectic process, the future will lie in achieving a synthesis between absolutes according to prevailing political, economic and social circumstances.



FETL produced a number of high-profile publications during the reporting period. ***Healthy, wealthy and wise: Implication for workforce development***, the outcome of FETL's collaboration with the **Learning and Work Institute**, was published in August 2019. The report's starting point is the strong evidence for the wider benefits of adult learning presented, for example, by the UNESCO, the European Commission and the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. It asks how leadership of thinking can support this, and how the adult learning workforce need to change in order to support future generations, bringing together key thinkers from across the UK to contribute their perspectives. The key themes from these contributions are summarised and presented alongside the nine commissioned think pieces, as are the responses of four discussion forums, in Cardiff, Birmingham, Belfast, and Edinburgh, that took place in spring 2019. The report proposes a conceptual framework for future workforce development planning.

Capturing the life-wide, lifelong benefits of learning was also a theme of ***'A Permanent National Necessity...': Adult Education and Lifelong Learning for 21st Century Britain***, the final report of the FETL-supported **Centenary Commission on Adult Education**. It was published in November 2019 to mark the centenary of the publication of the *1919 Report*, the seminal final report of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee. The report offered a re-evaluation of twentieth-century adult education and set out a vision for life-wide adult education for the century ahead. The Commission's recommendations included the development of a national strategy for adult education and lifelong learning, an increase in funding for adult education in colleges and in the community, and the creation of regional and sub-regional adult learning partnerships. In a blog post marking the launch of the report, FETL President Dame Ruth Silver welcomed the renewal of interest in adult education, noting that 'the political, demographic, social, technological and environmental



challenges we face call for adult education and lifelong learning to be taken much more seriously': 'These challenges demand a population that is resilient, creative, critical, engaged, excited and ready to learn, as well as one that is job-ready. The question is no longer whether we can afford to invest in adult education, but whether we can afford not to.'

***A World-class Workforce for World-class Skills: The case for a national institute for technical teaching and regional knowledge centres***, by **Neil Bates**, former Chief Executive of Prospects College of Advanced Technology, was FETL's first publication of 2020. The timely report, written by an expert in the skills field, considered how Britain's technical education system could be modernized in order to match or better the world's best. While the rebuilding of technical education is a central plank of the policy outlook of all major parties, Britain continues to lag behind other developed countries in terms of high-level skills and levels of productivity. The report calls for a national institute of technical teachers, supported by a network of six regional teaching and sector specialist knowledge centres. These centres of research and innovation would act as 'professional lighthouses, muster points for the profession, and places where pedagogical and subject-specific skills can be honed and updated'. 'Learners deserve the best and the people and places that serve them need to be terrifically well equipped themselves to deliver what they need, in terms of skills, knowledge, equipment and resources,' wrote Dame Ruth in her foreword. 'Given the scale of the task at hand – and its urgency in a context in which we will have to rely more and more on our own homegrown talent and skills – asking more without investing more for is simply not a viable way forward.'

Demographic change is another enormous challenge facing the country. The questions it poses for education and education leadership were explored in ***Leadership, Learning and Demographics: The Changing Shape of the Lifecourse and its Implications for Education***, written by **Tom Schuller** and published by FETL in February 2020. As with many other countries in the developed world, the population of

the UK is ageing. Yet while the issues this raises have been well understood for some time, action has been slow, with policy in some respects going backwards. This occasional paper examines the issue from the perspective of college leadership. Colleges, it argues, 'are uniquely placed to meet the learning needs of an ageing population, in and beyond the labour market', and college leaders 'should be at the forefront of any debate on the implications of demographic change: from the building of a genuinely lifelong careers service to experimentation with education-health partnerships to making public spaces available for mutual learning across generations'. The paper draws on interviews with sector leaders to develop an agenda for getting to grips with the issue and identify future challenges.

The role of further education in relation to social justice was examined in ***Leadership, Further Education and Social Justice***, by Rob Smith, Professor of Education at **Birmingham City University**, and Vicky Duckworth, Professor of Education at **Edge Hill University**. The authors note that while further education college employees see their work as contributing to social justice and college mission statements emphasise meeting the needs of their communities, local employers and the economy with outstanding provision, these commitments are often in tension with national policy directives. Through interviews with staff and students at three colleges – Fircroft College, City Lit and Hopwood Hall College – they sought to analyse how these tensions are resolved in practice and what outstanding provision with social justice at its heart looks like. Dame Ruth Silver wrote in her foreword:

*This study is important because it shines a light on a part of the work of colleges that is often hidden or neglected. It does not shy away from the complexity of the sector and resists attempts to boil its mission down to the delivery of skills for employment. We have always been about more than this and while the three colleges featured here are in some aspects untypical of the sector as a whole, the concerns and commitment of their leaders will be instantly recognizable and transferable.*



#### A WORLD-CLASS WORKFORCE FOR WORLD-CLASS SKILLS

The case for a national institute for technical teaching and regional knowledge centres

Neil Bates FCGI



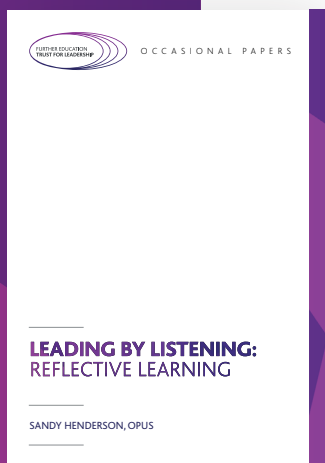
**LEADERSHIP, LEARNING AND DEMOGRAPHICS:**  
THE CHANGING SHAPE OF THE LIFECOURSE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION  
Tom Schuller



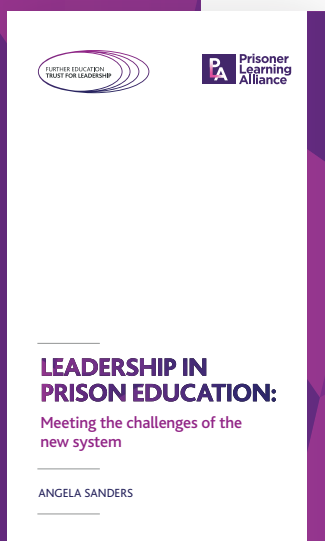
#### LEADERSHIP, FURTHER EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

ROB SMITH & VICKY DUCKWORTH





All FETL projects begin, in one way or another, with the views and perceptions of sector colleagues. This was certainly true of the **Leading by Listening: Reflective Learning** project. FETL commissioned education charity **OPUS** in 2019 to assess the mood and wellbeing of the FE sector in England – to provide a ‘snapshot’ reflecting the thoughts, concerns and preoccupations of a community of people at a particular moment in time. It used the ‘listening post’ methodology, a research tool that seeks to ‘surface’ the unspoken assumptions that frame people’s understanding of how a system or organisation functions. It began with a group discussion, based around participants’ experiences in further education, the transcripts of which were then analysed for ‘themes and patterns that speak for the whole sector’ and ‘unconsciously express some of the characteristics of the wider system to which that group belongs’. Between June and November 2019, some 33 Listening Posts were conducted in the FE sector. A set of papers, written by Sandy Henderson of OPUS, summarising the project and drawing out some of its main themes, was published in February 2020.

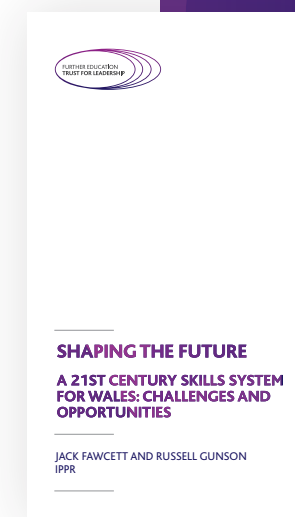


**Leadership in Prison Education: Meeting the challenges of the new system**, the outcome of a FETL-funded project carried out by the **Prisoner Learning Alliance**, reviews recent changes to policy in prison education and asks how leaders can contribute to ensuring education plays its full part in enabling the rehabilitation and reintegration into society of prisoners. Written by Angela Sanders, the report aims to identify how leaders can develop a whole-prison education culture, which would engage learners, and all staff working in the prison, to support the delivery and development of education across the prison community. While the new arrangements represent an opportunity for leaders to develop a whole-prison education culture, significant investment in development opportunities for staff is needed before this opportunity can be realized, the report argues. Joint working is also fundamental to effective education delivery in prisons. Few prisons appear to have a coherent coordinated strategic approach to allocation and activities. Sequencing is another

complex challenge and, in many prisons, the competing demands on prisoners’ time get in the way of delivering education. Prison officers do not always understand the importance of education, and workshop instructors and education departments are not always as integrated as they need to be, the report says.

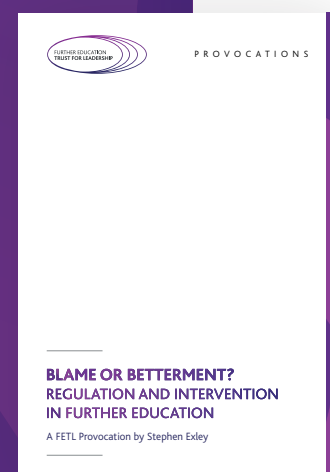
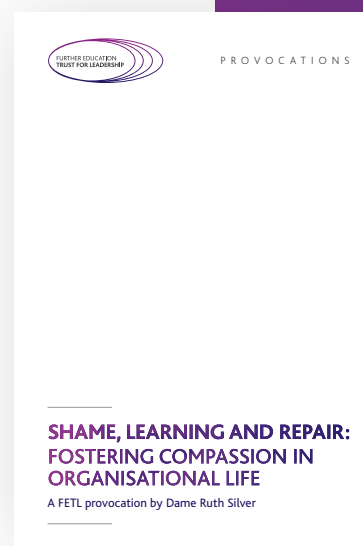
**Skills policy development** has been an important dimension of FETL’s work. This year we published two important papers reflecting, in turn, on the skills systems in Wales and England. **Shaping the Future: A 21st Century Skills System for Wales – Challenges and Opportunities**, written by Jack Fawcett and Russell Gunson of the **Institute for Public Policy Research** (IPPR) and funded by FETL, asked how Wales can develop a skills system equal to the challenges and opportunities posed by disruptive global and national trend. It argued that Wales should invest in and reform its skills system to prepare the country for the unprecedented opportunities and challenges presented by ‘disruptions’ such as technological and demographic change, Brexit and the climate crisis. The report called for a skills system with ‘a clear focus on delivering a fairer and stronger economy across the whole of the skills system’ and a ‘lifelong learning revolution’ to ensure the whole population has the skills and capabilities needed to deal with change. It also urged more ‘modular and bite-sized learning’ and more ‘flexible and responsive curricula’.

**England’s Skills Puzzle: Piecing together further education, training and employment**, produced jointly by FETL, the **Learning and Work Institute**, **Policy Connect** and the **Skills Commission**, was the result of a 12-month inquiry led by former skills minister, Sir John Hayes CBE MP, and leading figures from across further education, skills and industry. The inquiry, conducted over 2019 by Policy Connect and the Learning and Work Institute, saw the Commission hold inquiry sessions in Westminster, Lincolnshire, the Tees Valley and the West of England – receiving evidence from over 80 contributors in the process including: employers, providers, learners and representatives of local and national



government. The Commission found that employers are struggling to engage in an overly centralised skills system. Unlike other developed countries, England lacks channels to engage employers on a collective basis and has few local levers to adjust provision to meet local needs. Furthermore, a restricted and volatile funding system that promotes competition over collaboration is limiting the ability of colleges and training providers to respond effectively to local employers at a time when retraining and upskilling is becoming more important than ever. Its recommendations included a framework for skills and lifelong learning monitored by the Government's new Skills and Productivity Board, further devolution of adult skills budgets and funding reform to incentivise colleges and training providers to collaborate around meeting local learning and skills needs.

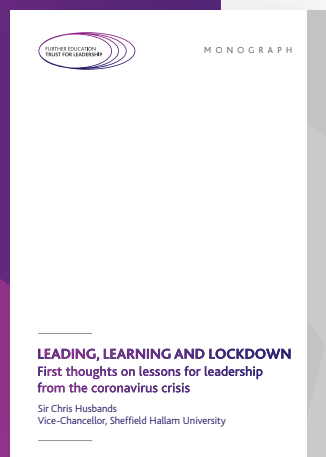
In April 2019, FETL published a short 'provocation', written by **Dame Ruth**, on the topic of **shame and repair**. Entitled ***Shame, Learning and Repair: Fostering Compassion in Organisation Life***, the paper reflected on the 'harsh and intemperate' criticism sometimes levelled at leaders in the 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. These themes were taken up and developed further in a series of FETL publications on shame and shaming, published in 2020. The first of these, ***FE and skills and shame within organisational life*** (published in May 2020), written by organisational consultants **John Bazalgette** and **Susan Harrison**, aimed to stimulate fresh thinking about the function and impact of shame in organisational life in the hope of supporting 'action to do things differently in the service of all those involved in further education'. A second paper, published in June 2020, looked at shame from an individual perspective. ***Voices of the shamed: The personal toll of shame and shaming in further education***, commissioned by the **Chartered Institution for Further Education** and funded by FETL, focused in particular on how shame is produced and dealt with in struggling organisations, and the impact this has on 'shamed' leaders. Through a series of interviews, it focused closely on the experience of leaders, while seeking also to put these accounts into a wider systemic context.



A third book in the series, ***Blame or betterment? Regulation and intervention in further education*** (July 2020), by former *TES* FE Editor **Stephen Exley**, explored the regulatory system within which providers operate and asked whether the prevailing system, with its tendency to focus blame on institutions and individuals, is conducive to sector improvement, and, ultimately, better teaching and learning. The study combined analysis of government data and interviews with further education leaders in evaluating what obstacles stand in the way of a genuinely 'self-improving' system and how they might be overcome. The analysis revealed leaders' experience of regulation to be highly varied, with some finding it overbearing and 'terrifying' and others praising its 'light touch' and 'generosity'. Dame Ruth Silver wrote in her foreword:

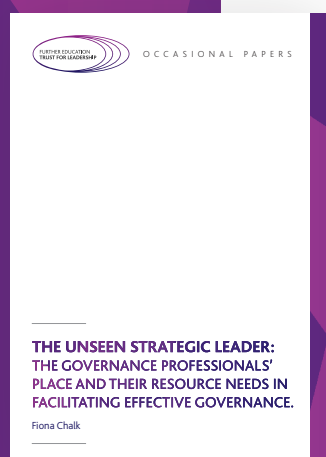
*Stephen's paper highlights the importance of communication and the need for different parts of the system to talk to each other. I would second this. There is a general need for better communication, between regulators and providers, between providers and government, and among providers and their leaders. We need regulators that understand the sector and we need a sector that trusts the regulatory system they work within to deliver fair, informed judgments and reasoned and reasonable critique. We also need to ensure that when things go wrong, there is support, including peer-to-peer support, and that leaders are not afraid to acknowledge vulnerability and ask for help, as, very sadly, many are.*

A fourth paper in the series on shame and repair, focusing on loss, mourning and reparation in organisations, will be published later in 2020.



In May 2020, FETL published *Leadership, learning and lockdown: First thoughts on lessons for leadership from the coronavirus crisis*, written by **Sir Chris Husbands**, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University. The paper reflects on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on education leadership and asks what lessons can be learned as we look towards an uncertain and, almost certainly, very different future. It gives an inside view of how staff, leaders and institutions have coped with the unprecedented circumstances in which they find themselves. The crisis has obliged education institutions to adopt new ways of working, almost overnight, to ensure continuity of learning, and Sir Chris's paper gives draws lessons from the crisis for leaders and learning, outlining cautious but informed conclusions about the 'new normal' that will emerge from the pandemic. Dame Ruth says in her foreword: 'The transition from face-to-face teaching to online and distance learning placed significant and unprecedented demands on leaders, their institutions and staff. The response in further education, and in the education system more generally, has been remarkable, but there are also important lessons to be learned from all of this, and this FETL monograph begins the process.'

**Governance** has been an important strand of FETL's work this year, and this was reflected in the publication of two reports on this under-researched and under-understood aspect of institutional life. *The Unseen Strategic Leader: The governance professionals' place and their resource needs in facilitating effective governance* (July 2020), written by **Fiona Chalk** and commissioned and funded by FETL, builds on previous research into the role of the governance professional (the clerk) by analysing the views of clerks, principals, chairs and other stakeholders, including regulators and clerks from other sectors. It highlights the role played by governance professionals in the performance of boards and the organisations they oversee, and sheds light on both the obstacles that prevent them exerting appropriate influence and the importance of college leaders understanding the lines of accountability and how they should work, among other key messages.



A second, related, report, *The Further Education Governance Maturity Matrix* (June 2020), funded by FETL and developed by the **Skills and Education Group**, the **Good Governance Institute** and **Nottingham Trent University**, draws on interviews with governors to explore what makes for good governance in FE and to ask how governance can be moved on to its next phase, what the report terms 'maturity'. The 'maturity matrix' gives governing bodies an opportunity to 'drill down and review performance' against the Association of Colleges' Code of Good Governance. The report aims to enhance capacity for governance and support the development of governance-wise strategies within institutions.

Webinars, videos and other **digital resources** continued to be an important part of our work and our approach to dissemination. A highlight of this work was a series of 10 'hearts as well as minds' films involving participants in the **Working Well** programme, *'How can psychoanalysis and systems theory contribute to the leadership of thinking in the Further Education and Skills Sector?'* The short films showed how colleagues who participated in the programme of nine strategic seminars and workshops were taken to new ways of thinking, gaining new perspectives on themselves as people, and as leaders in their roles. For some, it was a highly personal, often quite challenging, experience. Most emerged with a strong sense that their own thinking had changed and with an enhanced sensitivity to, and curiosity about, the relationship between their own internal lives, their organisation, and the wider system. FETL also sponsored a series of six briefings with *FE Week* on the further education sector's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Speakers included Mark Dawe, Chief Executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, and Toby Perkins MP, shadow FE minister.





FETL also posted 21 new **blog posts** across the reporting period, including contributions on leadership, lifelong learning, prison education and a '2020 vision' for skills (Dame Ruth Silver), demographic change and college leadership (Tom Schuller), leading by listening (Sandy Henderson), leadership and self-care (Jill Westerman), psychoanalysis and leadership (Gabriella Braun) and the applicability of a German skills system to the UK national context (Stephen Exley).

FETL also maintained a strong presence in the **education press**, with articles on our work appearing regularly in *TES*, *FE Week* and *FE News*. Dame Ruth was regularly sought out for comment by sector journalists and also contributed articles on op-ed topics on topics such as the concept of 'leadership' and its usefulness in further education and the need for a fresh vision for FE beyond 2020 (both for *TES*).



FETL

FUTURE SIGNALS

## 7. Future signals

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, in our final year of operations, 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 leadership of thinking, particularly around the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in securing the legacy of FETL's work.

Important projects to be completed during the next period include: the Colleges of the Future project, with the Association of Colleges; an examination of 'unconditional devolution' from the New Local Government Network; a reflection on the future of further education in England from think tank EDSK; the last of our series of papers on shame; an analysis of the impact of the pandemic on relationships in FE, with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers; and a further elaboration of the concept of 'leadership'.

All of this represents timely and essential work. At a time when the future of further education feels profoundly uncertain, and many old orthodoxies look suddenly weak, it is more important than ever that we fill the space between where we are and what we will become with our future-focused, evidence-based ideas and reflections. That is what FETL was created for, that is the legacy of our work and that is what we will spend our final year of operations doing.



**Published October 2020**

**The Further Education Trust for Leadership**

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