

The
College
of the
Future

The
English
College
of the
Future



A nations-specific
final report

The Independent Commission on the College of the Future is kindly supported by:



Foreword



The Rt Hon Lord Willetts FRS

President of the Resolution Foundation

This is a welcome and important report. It shows very clearly the important role that colleges play in our education and training system and sets out an ambitious programme for the college of the future to do even more.

The pressures on the labour market caused by the corona virus have intensified the focus on long-standing weaknesses in our education and training system. We need a better offer for the 50% of young people who do not go into higher education. Colleges can also help deliver higher education flexibly in partnership with universities. And we need a substantial increase in public and private resources supporting adult learning and retraining. Colleges with their strong links to local employers and their needs are crucial.

The Prime Minister's important announcements in his September speech showed how important colleges now are in the Government's thinking. There is to be much greater opportunity for everyone to obtain level 3 qualifications. Level 4 and 5 are to be more accessible and funded more flexibly. Funds are to be available for adult learning. So this report comes at the right moment as colleges will play a key role in future education and training.

A key issue at the heart of the report is the right balance between collaboration and competition in our education system. The report sets out a powerful case for greater collaboration between colleges themselves. That will enable greater specialisation and more coherent planning of capital investment. The report also argues that it requires a change in the legal framework for college governance so that they look beyond the protection of individual colleges in difficult times.

This is a bold report which does not shirk the critical and tricky issues. It merits serious consideration.

Colleges need a distinctive role which complements the role of schools for under-18 provision and universities for over-18s. The report argues that also means shifting the balance towards more collaboration and strategic oversight of relations with other providers. The report suggests some constraints both on schools creating new sixth forms and also universities delivering level 4 and 5 qualifications. There is certainly scope for better partnerships with these other providers which in turn need to respect the distinctive role of colleges. And all this needs to be balanced against institutional autonomy which remains an important principle.

There are financial implications as well to all this which the report identifies. There is a need to ensure that students can afford to devote to time necessary for education and training. That raises key issues of the costs borne by students and how benefit rules work. All of this will have to be paid for and resolving how to do this will be crucial for delivery of the ambitious proposals in this report. To what extent can the income-contingent loans which have been key to the financing of universities also play a role in funding colleges? There is a need to invest in workforce development and pay is part of this. Diversity is another crucial issue here.

This is a bold report which does not shirk the critical and tricky issues. It merits serious consideration.

**The Rt Hon Lord Willetts FRS
President of the Resolution Foundation**



About us

The Independent Commission on the College of the Future was launched in Spring 2019 as a UK-wide, four nations process, asking two simple questions: what do we want and need from colleges from 2030 onwards, and how do we get there?

The Independent Commission was commissioned by the Four Nations College Alliance – which brings together college leaders, their representative bodies and senior government officials from across the four nations of the UK.

The Commissioners - chaired by Sir Ian Diamond – have held roundtable and workshop events with a broad range of individuals and organisations across the UK. They are supported by an expert panel, who have been feeding in throughout the process.

The Independent Commission has benefited from learnings across the four nations of the UK, drawing lessons and insights from reform trajectories and from exemplary institutional practices.

Hosted or presented at over 150 events across the UK, including with senior college leaders, governors, staff and students, employers, universities, schools, local, regional and national governments, unions and many others.

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Key stages in our work

- Invited international experts from the Basque Country, Ireland, Finland, Slovenia, the Netherlands and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to contribute to the Commission's thinking – including with a public seminar held jointly with the British Academy in September 2019, with over 100 stakeholders and members of the public.
- Published the Commission's vision for the college of the future in July 2020, accompanied by a set of essays from education and skills experts.
- Published a report exploring the relationship between the NHS and the English college system in September 2020 – as an example of how the Commission's thinking can drive change with this important employer.
- Published a Progress Report - reflecting themes emanating from early engagement - with a consultation process in November 2019, receiving over 60 responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals.
- Published our final UK-wide report in October 2020.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Commission's approach

The UK-wide report (October 2020) makes a series of recommendations which provide a common framework for the reform and renewal of the individual college systems in each of the four nations of the UK. However, their relevance and application are very different in each individual national context.

The unique nature and strength of the Commission is that, for the first time, it has taken a four nations perspective on the current and future role of colleges across the UK. This approach has meant that the Commission has been able to draw on and distil the rich diversity of policy and practice across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Throughout, it has been a partnership of equals, reflected in the membership of the Commission itself, in the active engagement of stakeholders from right across the education and skills system, and beyond. This has included a large number of stakeholder events and consultations in each of the four nations.

As such, the Commission has been equally clear on the critical need to respect and acknowledge the widely differing policy and operational contexts in which colleges are working. The UK-wide report (October 2020) makes a series of recommendations which provide a common framework for the reform and renewal of the individual college systems in each of the four nations of the UK. However, their relevance and application are very different in each individual national context.



About this report

This report sets out a roadmap for taking forward the Commission's vision in England. Our vision is for the college of the future to empower **people** throughout their lives with the skills they need to get on in life, support better **productivity** and innovation of businesses, and strengthen every community's sense of **place**. This is a vision for 2030 onwards. But to achieve this vision, action is needed now.

A new dual strategic approach for systems reform

The current education and skills system in England means that colleges all too often deliver for people, productivity and place despite, rather than because of, the incentives that exist. Fundamental systems reform is needed.

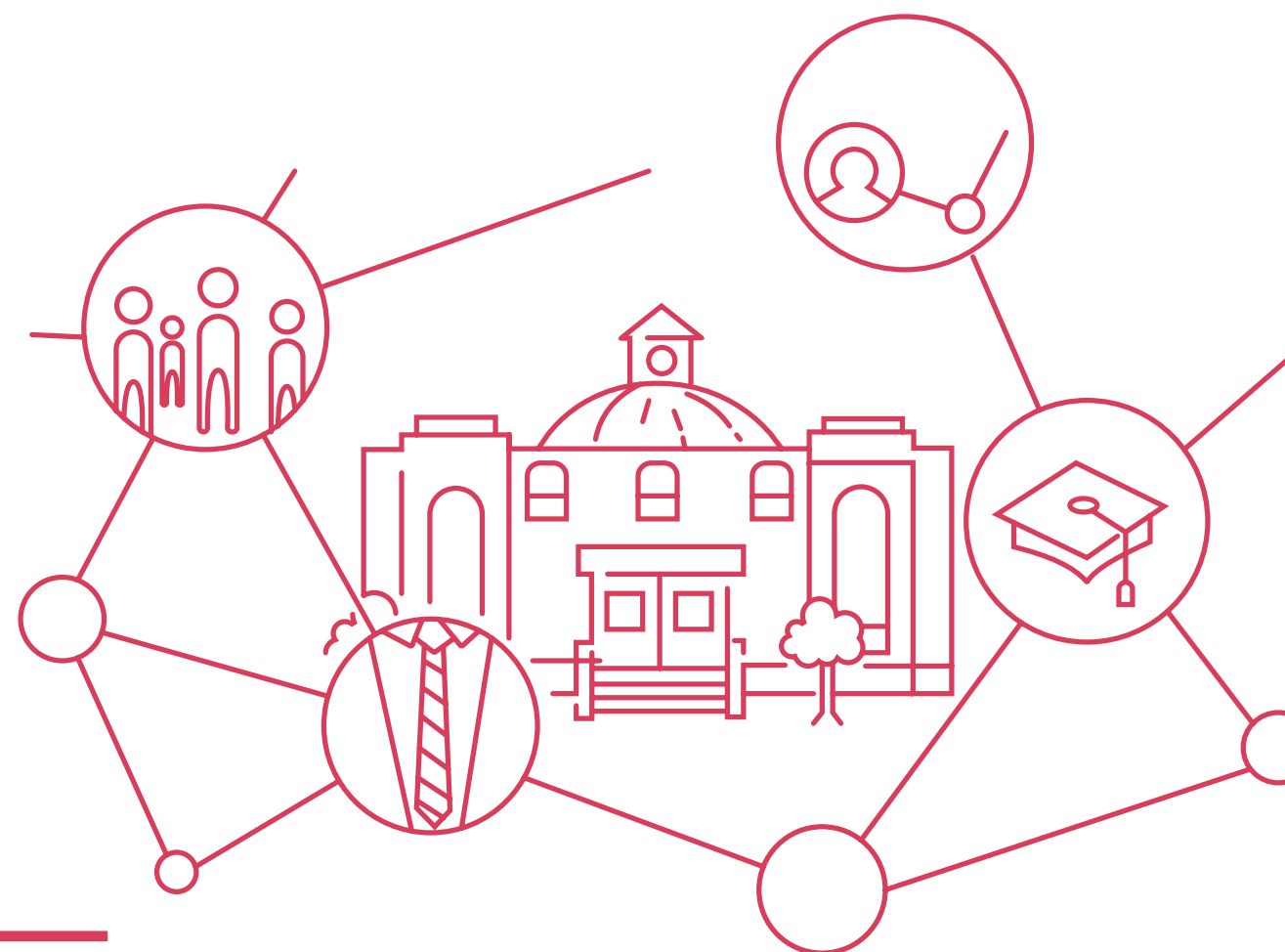
There are two sides to this. On the one hand, the proposed FE White Paper presents a critical opportunity to create a new policy environment, in which colleges can deliver on their full potential. The recommendations in this report reflect important elements which should form the basis of this agenda – for national and local government, employers, trades unions, elected mayors and education providers. This will have to be met with significantly increased and long-term investment too, from government and from employers, redressing the significant underfunding of the sector at present.

The current education and skills system in England means that colleges all too often deliver for people, productivity and place despite, rather than because of, the incentives that exist. Fundamental systems reform is needed.

This is not a report solely calling for action from government. Change must come from all actors across the education and skills system. And perhaps most importantly, it means colleges will need to step up, with collective ownership of the change agenda, living out the principles that this report describes.

However, this is not a report solely calling for action from government. Change must come from all actors across the education and skills system. And perhaps most importantly, it means colleges will need to step up, with collective ownership of the change agenda, living out the principles that this report describes. The Commission's hope is that whilst concerted action is required from all parts of the sector, people and organisations will not wait for others before acting.

The culture of systems leadership, of building new forms of collaboration and deeper partnerships, of embedding the voice of staff and students and of ensuring that all elements of the college sector are diverse and representative, is a shared responsibility. Everyone across the college sector must own this and lead the way, ahead of – and alongside – the necessary wider structural reforms that we describe through this report.



Across a great many events, visits and conversations over the past 18 months, the Commission has seen a vast array of emerging practices which reflect this trajectory, some of which are reflected in case studies set out in this and the UK-wide report. There is an undoubted enthusiasm and a collective ambition for the expanded role colleges can and must play, and this must be harnessed. There is much great work to build on already – we do not need to invent a new future, because pockets of it exist all over the four nations, with colleges fulfilling their roles inventively and expertly.

These two sides to real change are crucial, and reflect also a fundamentally new, trusting relationship: of partnership, of shared responsibility and of mutual respect. At all levels of the system, a shift from transactional relationships, to strategic partnerships is needed. It is through this shift that colleges can play their fullest role - for people, productivity and place.



Recommendations – summary

A nation-specific post 16 education and skills strategy

Recommendation 1

A national strategy for education and skills to support economic growth, industrial change and lifelong learning.

Government must develop a coherent post 16 education and skills strategy, with alignment to its industrial strategy – redressing nugatory competition that exists across the system, and setting out a coordinated approach to an expanded lifelong education service.

Crucially, this must set out the role that colleges will play as part of this wider system for people, productivity and places – as centres of lifelong learning, in providing new strategic service to employers and as anchor institutions, driving healthy, cohesive and connected communities

This strategy should be owned by a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce/ body, with DFE, BEIS, DWP, MHCLG and others represented – and must also see representation from employers, colleges, and trade and student unions. This will crucially be informed by analysis and recommendations too from the Department for Education’s new Skills and Productivity Board.



A networked approach

Recommendation 2

College network strategies to meet local priorities across the tertiary education system.

Government should introduce a legal duty on colleges to establish networks across appropriate economic geographies. Government should set out the principles it seeks to achieve through college networks (including across population footprint and travel to work/ learn analysis), and develop a framework for their establishment – and colleges should then be invited to come forward with their models as to how these principles can be achieved in their particular contexts, for DFE approval. Networks should be introduced in a staged approach – with the third wave to be completed by 2023/ 24.

The local strategies should focus on growth sectors as well as declining sectors in the local economy, agreeing where new skills development is needed, the priority specialisms at higher technical levels and the communities and groups of people who need to be reached. Overall, the strategy will set out the purpose of the post-16 system in a place, in agreement with employers, elected mayors, local government and others, as well as the outcomes the colleges will commit to over the medium and long term. Delivery against the strategy will require strong partnerships to stimulate demand, co-create qualifications and courses and to encourage a lifelong learning and training culture.

Crucially, networks, and the process for their establishment, must have ‘teeth’ – ensuring that funding and accountability ultimately sits at the network level rather than individual college level. There will be a range of models which can achieve these principles, including an appointed network chair, college group structures (existing or to be established) and the establishment of consortiums. Whatever the model, the ‘acid test’ lies in ensuring that college governors have a ‘dual mandate’ towards both institutional and system good.

Given the need for a much more connected and holistic education and skills system, ultimately the legal duty on colleges to develop network strategies must be matched by a duty on all other post 16 education providers to ensure that provision complements the existing offer across an appropriate economic geography. This must be a precondition of funding settlements, and a central matter of oversight and accountability regimes.

Recommendation 3

Colleges as anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem.

The role that colleges play as place-making institutions at the heart of their communities needs to become a core element of their strategic remit. New college network strategies will help to build stronger partnerships with other public and private agencies and civic partners and their wider investment plans locally and regionally.

This will seek to ensure a more coherent and connected approach not only on skills and learning but in relation to colleges’ wider civic role, adding value to the existing ecosystem in a range of areas including business enterprise, public health, lifelong learning, eliminating digital exclusion and supporting social integration. Key partners will include employers and employer representative bodies, universities, schools and adult and community learning providers, the NHS, local authorities, student and trade unions and relevant charities.



A lifetime service

Recommendation 4

A statutory right to lifelong learning

Government must set out a new statutory right to lifelong learning. This means that lifelong education must be meaningfully accessible for people, and there is significant work required to redress deficiencies in the existing student maintenance system.

As has been set out in our UK-wide report, this has to include three central principles:

1. Equal maintenance support across loans and grants is available for individuals in further and higher education and advanced skills training, adequate to an individual's needs whether part-time or full-time, in-person or distance learning, so that everyone has the opportunity to pursue the route best suited to them throughout their lifetime.
2. Flexibility in the use of the entitlement and any associated maintenance support in grants and/or loans so that individuals able to build up their skills over time to match both their evolving career development needs and their personal circumstances.
3. Unemployed people do not lose their welfare benefits where they use their entitlement to reskill/retrain full-time in areas of identified job opportunities and skills shortages.

A statutory right to lifelong learning must include entitlement to study at least up to L3 for free, which can be studied in a modular manner – with additional flexibilities for fully-funded additional L3+ qualifications as is required by local and national priorities.

Recommendation 5

Skills guarantee for a post-COVID economy and future labour market changes

The statutory right to lifelong learning must be augmented through targeted investment to upskill, retrain and reskill to help individuals find work in higher demand priority sectors, to supplement previous qualifications and to help them maintain relevant skills. A Skills Guarantee would provide free training to upskill employees at all levels reflecting national and regional priorities, with maximum flexibility to meet sector needs and to enable upskilling of employees

This would further include incentives for small and medium sized employers (SMEs) with a contribution to wage replacement costs to encourage uptake and to contribute to productivity improvements in the wider economy.

Delivering with, and for, employers

Recommendation 6

A new strategic partnership with employers

The college system needs a new, strategic partnership with employers, nationally and regionally/ locally at the network level. This means ensuring fundamentally that employers are recognised – and understand themselves to be – a crucial part of the education and skills ecosystem. This must see the voice of employers reflected centrally in the development of national and network strategies. There is a challenge here, given the insufficient sector-based employer infrastructure – and this too requires ongoing focus.

Crucially, the new relationship must be based on a genuine strategic partnership which appreciates the mutual goals of higher levels of participation in education and training which meet the needs of people and labour markets – with an employer-led system recognising college expertise and leadership in interpreting as well as challenging and stimulating employer demand.

Recommendation 7

A new strategic support service to employers

College networks must work to build on existing natural specialisms to develop 'employer hubs'. These would be sector/ occupationally focused, and would:

- Lead on higher technical level provision across the network.
- Play the lead role in providing strategic support to employers across innovation and skills.
- Coordinate engagement with the wider education and skills system, across universities, schools and ITPs, including across progression and articulation, workforce development and stakeholder engagement.

Building on and drawing from Institutes of Technology (IoTs) where they exist/ are being developed, employer hubs would become a key strategic element of the college network offer – which must be reflected in accountability structures. These must be adequately funded as part of college network grant funding settlements.

Employer hubs will complement the existing offer across an economic geography – supporting, building upon and drawing from the work led by other partners (LEPs, Growth Hubs, Catapult Centres etc). A core element of college network strategies must be to ensure that their work complements rather than cannibalises or duplicates the existing offer – ultimately leading to a better integrated service that works for employers.

Mission-driven funding, governance and accountability

Recommendation 8

Stable funding and accountability frameworks for colleges

College networks must be empowered to take a long-term systems focus, which is enabled by a shift towards three-year, grant funding settlements based on outcome agreements agreed at the network level – reflecting the role that the college network will collectively play across people, productivity and place.

This relationship should be overseen through a new single strategic regional point of oversight and accountability with college networks. This presents an opportunity for a fundamental shift towards a new nurturing strategic relationship, and for a necessary decluttering of the regulatory and oversight system. With agreement on overall purpose and new local strategies to meet local need, accountability can be clearer and focused on the longer term.

Recommendation 9

A strategic relationship with government and simplified processes

Government must work to develop simplified oversight - driving efficiency, engendering greater trust and enabling better strategic coordination. Long-term, this should see the establishment of a single post-16 education oversight and funding body ensuring a coherent lifelong education service, and addressing nugatory competition between colleges and with other education providers.



Leading the way

Recommendation 10

Diverse and representative systems leaders

Systems leadership is crucial to the successful delivery of the college system's renewal in England. The shift in funding, governance and accountability is a key element of this – but the leadership behaviours and skills are just as vital. There is a real value in ongoing engagement with leaders across the four nations, and we recommend ongoing leadership development and amplification of systems leadership through the work of the Four Nations College Alliance.

The lack of diversity across the English college sector leadership and workforce must be urgently addressed, and we recommend concerted work from sector bodies together with DFE. This must include mandatory collection of data across all levels of the college workforce, and setting robust targets to redress under-representation where that exists.

Recommendation 11

An ambitious future college workforce strategy

Pay has declined significantly over the past decade, and is a major strategic issue. We propose a new starting salary of £30,000 for teaching staff in colleges, and urgent work undertaken to prioritise increased investment in the workforce, across remuneration and investment in CPD.

A national social partnership must be established between government, the AoC and trade unions to look at long-term strategic workforce challenges. It is proposed that DFE, AoC and TUC form an initial working group to develop this model, to report by September 2021.



THE COLLEGE OF THE FUTURE: OF THE FUTURE: FUTURE:

FOR PEOPLE, PRODUCTIVITY
AND PLACE

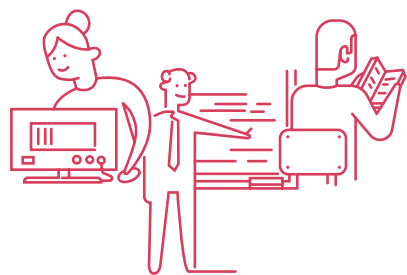


Colleges can and must play a strong and central role in responding to challenges and transformations, from global megatrends like climate change to immediate crises like COVID-19, as well as the changing demands, aspirations and expectations of people, employers and communities.

Colleges transform lives and are at the heart of communities across the UK's four nations. They are a fundamental piece of the education and skills system as centres of lifelong learning, and as anchor institutions within their communities. Despite all of this, all too often, college resources and expertise can be poorly understood, under-utilised and insufficiently funded in relation to other parts of the education and skills system.

Colleges can and must play a strong and central role in responding to challenges and transformations, from global megatrends like climate change to immediate crises like COVID-19, as well as the changing demands, aspirations and expectations of people, employers and communities. That is why the Independent Commission on the College of the Future is calling for a new vision for colleges.

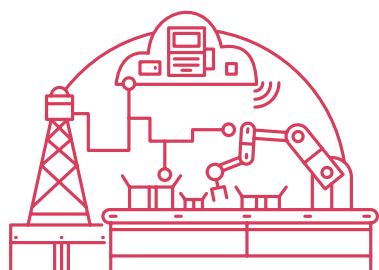
The College of the Future will empower **people** throughout their lives with the skills they need to get on in life, support better **productivity** and innovation of businesses, and strengthen every community's sense of **place**.



For people, colleges will be a touchpoint for everyone throughout their lives as the world changes.

The changes and challenges that we face mean that people need to be able to engage with education and training throughout their lives to have the skills and opportunities they need for good jobs and to live well.

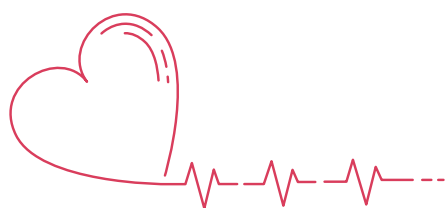
The college of the future will offer flexible and blended learning and guidance to empower each person to get a job, progress in their career and be an active citizen.



For productivity, colleges will provide and convene strategic advice and support for employers to drive business change, innovation, and future workforce planning.

Across the UK, we suffer from poor levels of productivity – and key changes mean that employers of all sizes have big challenges and opportunities to respond to, across the climate emergency, industry revolution 4.0 and changing relationships across the world.

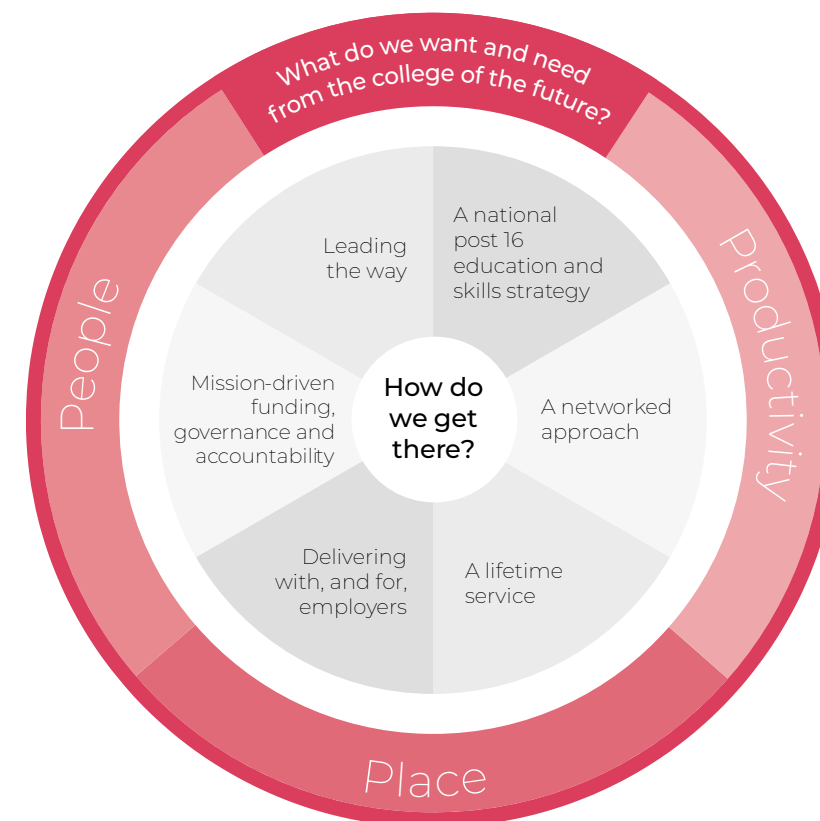
The college of the future will play an expanded role in innovation and knowledge transfer, whilst also equipping employees with opportunities to develop new skills.



For place, colleges will have the resources and funding to play an even greater role in fostering healthy and connected communities.

Colleges are important anchor institutions in communities across the UK, but this dimension is all too often not sufficiently supported or incentivised.

The college of the future will position this role as a central part of their strategic mission, for example promoting public health and social inclusion



RECOMMENDATIONS

National strategies for education and skills to support economic growth, industrial change and lifelong learning.

College network strategies to meet local priorities across the tertiary education system.

Colleges as anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem.

A statutory right to lifelong learning.

Skills guarantee for a post-COVID economy and future labour market changes.

A new strategic partnership with employers.

A new support service to employers.

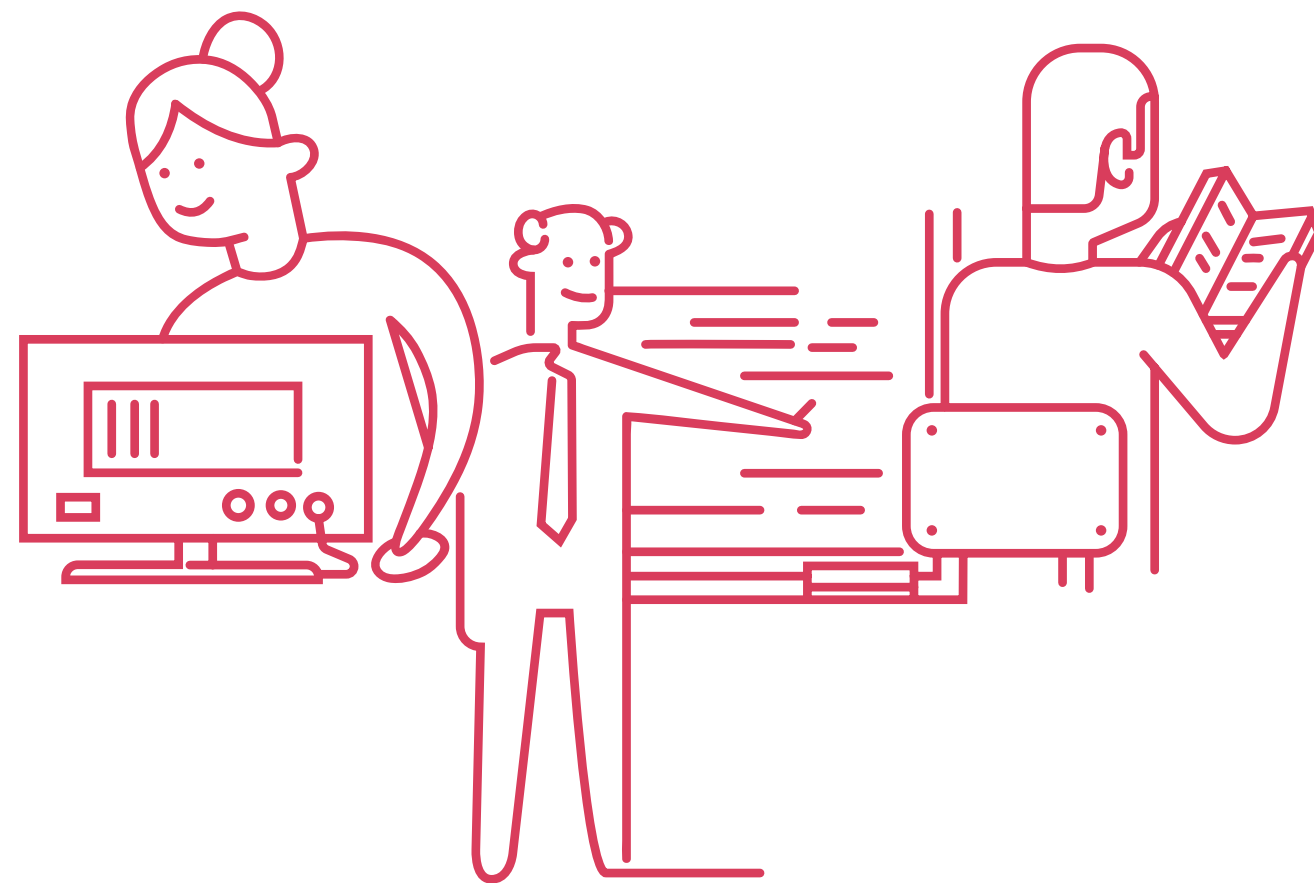
Stable funding and accountability frameworks for colleges.

A strategic relationship with governments and simplified processes.

An ambitious future college workforce strategy.

Diverse and representative systems leaders.

THE ENGLISH COLLEGE SYSTEM



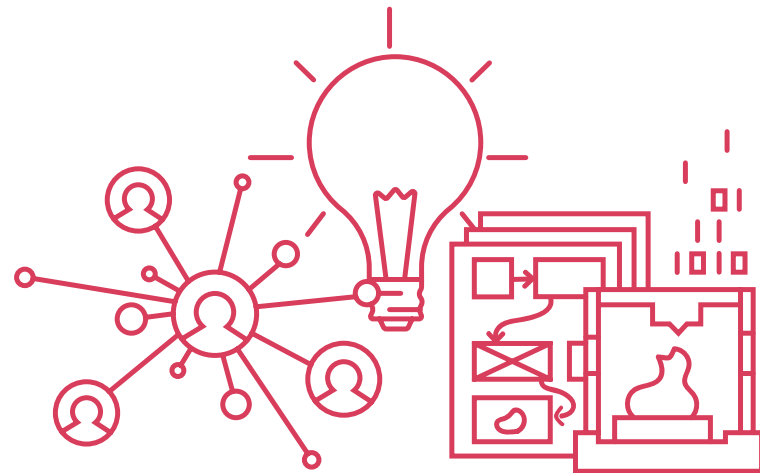
Colleges are poorly understood and their potential as public and economic assets is greatly under-utilised.

Colleges are a critical element of the English education and skills system, making a major contribution to people's life chances, to business success and to wider society and the economy. However, this contribution is all too often despite, rather because of, the environment in which they operate. In general, they are poorly understood and their potential as public and economic assets is greatly under-utilised. In large measure, this is due to the absence of a coherent structure within which individual colleges themselves operate. This, in turn, is compounded by the lack of a clear definition of their role alongside schools, universities and independent training providers within an overall framework for education and skills.

If their potential is to be fully realised in meeting the immediate and long-term challenges facing us as a society, this requires a fundamental reset of colleges' role within the English education and skills system.

Challenges currently exist at all levels of the system:

- Nationally, there is poor alignment between the role of colleges across different areas of government policy
- Colleges operate in a quasi-market and are forced to compete with each other and with schools, universities and independent training providers – driving inefficiency and at times insufficiency of provision across a locality, as colleges are incentivised to focus on provision that is viable in terms of student demand and affordability, rather than necessarily aligned with local or national labour market demand.
- Funding and accountability are focused on input/ output measures, rather than long term strategic outcomes.
- Funding levels are wholly inadequate. Compounding this, is the complexity and short-term nature of funding mechanisms – which acts to impede the ability of colleges to plan for the long-term, and to focus on strategic systems outcomes. Instead, colleges are all too often focused primarily on immediate financial survival.
- Governance likewise is all-too-often forced to focus on institutional self-interest and indeed survivalism, rather than the system's good.
- The college workforce has suffered severely from the insufficient funding of the sector – including across pay and investment in professional development.



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**Gavin Williamson,
Secretary
of State for
Education**

Reform of
Further
Education,
July 2020

***“This autumn I will be publishing a White Paper that will set out our plans to build a world-class, German-style further education system in Britain, and level up skills and opportunities... to put further and technical education at the heart of our post-16 education system. This will not be about incremental change, but a comprehensive plan to change the fundamentals of England’s further education landscape, inspired by the best models from around the world... We need fundamental reform: a wholesale rebalancing towards further and technical education... (and) establishing a high-quality system of higher technical education.*”**

***“Further education is central to transforming regions and transforming lives. ...fundamental to social mobility...fundamental to businesses and the economy and to levelling up the country. Colleges already play a leading role in many local communities and work with local businesses on skills and economic development, but we need to build on this in a far more systemic way. Colleges (should) be pivotal in their communities.... playing a leading role in developing skills in their areas, driving an ambitious agenda that responds to local economic need and acting as centres for businesses and their development.*”**

“As we emerge from Covid... the development of technical and vocational skills will be vital to charting our course to recovery... (with) a tremendous need for upskilling, reskilling and retraining. Getting people back into work as quickly as possible. They should (also) work with small, local businesses to support the introduction of new technology and processes, and offer training in emerging skills....”

TAKING THIS FORWARD IN ENGLAND



A nation-specific post 16 education and skills strategy

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Recommendation 1

A national strategy for education and skills to support economic growth, industrial change and lifelong learning.

Government must develop a coherent post 16 education and skills strategy, with alignment to its industrial strategy – redressing nugatory competition that exists across the system, and setting out a coordinated approach to an expanded lifelong education service.

Crucially, this must set out the role that colleges will play as part of this wider system for people, productivity and places – as centres of lifelong learning, in providing new strategic service to employers and as anchor institutions, driving healthy, cohesive and connected communities

This strategy should be owned by a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce/ body, with DFE, BEIS, DWP, MHCLG and others represented – and must also see representation from employers, colleges, and trade and student unions. This will crucially be informed by analysis and recommendations too from the Department for Education's new Skills and Productivity Board.

There is a vacuum in strategic leadership on skills and employment at national level in England, mirrored all too often at a local and regional level. This is equally unsatisfactory for both colleges and wider stakeholder interests - in particular employers - with the absence of coherent structures, through which they can come together with policy makers in government to agree skills and economic priorities.

At a national level, there is a lack of alignment with the industrial strategy and across other areas of public policy. And at a local/ regional level, colleges and employers are faced with a confusing patchwork of bodies with, at best, limited powers to co-ordinate strategy and set priorities, often at odds with the operational priorities set at national level. This leaves colleges to respond individually and on an ad hoc basis, to the ever-increasing complexities of the labour market.

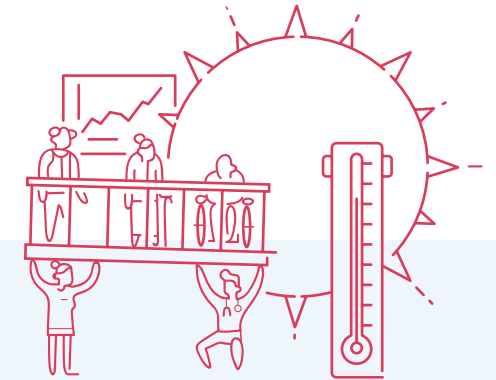
In the context of any crisis or major economic shock, such as the pandemic, this problem is compounded by the lack of any collective structure or system through which colleges can be mobilised to work collectively as a system. Operationally, any strategic response is further hampered by the transactional nature of their relationship and funding agreement with government and its agencies.

The lack of an agreed strategic role and remit for English colleges is reflected in an approach to oversight and regulation which is highly transactional, and centred on redressing the failures that always arise within markets.

Across hundreds of conversations over the past year, the Commission has heard this reflected as a profound lack of trust that permeates right across the system – between colleges, government and regulators. Colleges feel that they are not-trusted, and tend to not trust others to deliver as they would wish – and this represents a fundamental barrier to the effective delivery of a coherent education and skills ecosystem that works for people, employers and communities.

In response to these challenges, government must develop, with colleges and others, a post 16 education and skills strategy, which offers strategic clarity as to the role, remit and purpose of colleges within the wider education and skills system. This ministerial taskforce/ body would see strong cross-departmental representation (DFE, BEIS, DWP, MHCLG etc) alongside wider stakeholder representation, including across colleges, employers and staff and student unions. Crucially, education strategy must speak to industrial and social inclusion strategies, with strong alignment across other obvious areas of public policy whilst giving space for college networks, employers and other key stakeholders to determine priorities at a regional/ local level too.

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CASE STUDY

Colleges and universities driving change on the climate emergency

The Climate Commission was created to address the climate emergency and drive change across the FE and HE sectors. The Commission is a partnership between Association of Colleges, EAUC, GuildHE and Universities UK to establish a comprehensive plan for sustainability in the sector.

At the centre of the plans is the FE Climate Action Roadmap, which provides clear actions and guidance on how colleges can respond to the climate emergency and be net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. College leaders and students were at the heart of creating the Roadmap and to ensure no-one is left behind, the Roadmap is organised in three levels – from colleges who are just starting to address sustainability, to colleges with a clear approach and who are models for others to learn from.

The Roadmap is to be used by Principals and their leadership teams, but also their students who should be partners in co-developing and implementing the college's approach. With capacity and resources being a challenge for all colleges, the Roadmap highlights activities in terms of cost and time to allow colleges to choose how to build up to longer term initiatives. The Climate Commission also has an influencing role with key sector bodies to ensure the policies and drivers are in place to support colleges in their journeys.

“Government needs to set a more explicit strategic vision for colleges. It should outline priorities for their role and the expectation of their contribution to the skills base in their localities aligned to the skills employers need, their local economy, and Local Industrial Strategy.... The vision needs to celebrate the proactive contribution that colleges can bring to their localities.... It should be forward looking and enable colleges to develop their own college forward plan for at least a three year period.”

Dame Mary Ney DBE, Independent Review of College Financial Oversight (July 2020)

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Government should introduce a legal duty on colleges to establish networks across appropriate economic geographies. Government should set out the principles it seeks to achieve through college networks (including across population footprint and travel to work/ learn analysis), and develop a framework for their establishment – and colleges should then be invited to come forward with their models as to how these principles can be achieved in their particular contexts, for DFE approval. Networks should be introduced in a staged approach – with the third wave to be completed by 2023/ 24.

The local strategies should focus on growth sectors as well as declining sectors in the local economy, agreeing where new skills development is needed, the priority specialisms at higher technical levels and the communities and groups of people who need to be reached. Overall, the strategy will set out the purpose of the post-16 system in a place, in agreement with employers, elected mayors, local government and others, as well as the outcomes the colleges will commit to over the medium and long term. Delivery against the strategy will require strong partnerships to stimulate demand, co-create qualifications and courses and to encourage a lifelong learning and training culture.

Crucially, networks, and the process for their establishment, must have ‘teeth’ – ensuring that funding and accountability ultimately sits at the network level rather than individual college level. There will be a range of models which can achieve these principles, including an appointed network chair, college group structures (existing or to be established) and the establishment of consortiums. Whatever the model, the ‘acid test’ lies in ensuring that college governors have a ‘dual mandate’ towards both institutional and system good.

Given the need for a much more connected and holistic education and skills system, ultimately the legal duty on colleges to develop network strategies must be matched by a duty on all other post 16 education providers to ensure that provision complements the existing offer across an appropriate economic geography. This must be a precondition of funding settlements, and a central matter of oversight and accountability regimes.

Recommendation 3

Colleges as anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem.

The role that colleges play as place-making institutions at the heart of their communities needs to become a core element of their strategic remit. New college network strategies will help to build stronger partnerships with other public and private agencies and civic partners and their wider investment plans locally and regionally.

This will seek to ensure a more coherent and connected approach not only on skills and learning but in relation to colleges’ wider civic role, adding value to the existing ecosystem in a range of areas including business enterprise, public health, lifelong learning, eliminating digital exclusion and supporting social integration. Key partners will include employers and employer representative bodies, universities, schools and adult and community learning providers, the NHS, local authorities, student and trade unions and relevant charities.

“To enable colleges to improve their own curriculum and financial planning, there needs to be robust ‘capacity and curriculum planning’ at a local geographical level in the context of the national strategy that has been set by government.”

*Dame Mary Ney DBE,
Independent Review of
College Financial Oversight
(July 2020)*

The overlapping and very different competing pressures that colleges face are seen starkly at a local level, where the inefficiencies of the (quasi) market approach are most apparent. Colleges operate in competition with one another and with schools, universities and independent training providers (ITPs). AoC research (2020) has highlighted the impact that excessive local competition has in terms of inefficiency and at times insufficiency of provision across a locality, as colleges are incentivised to focus on provision that is viable in terms of student demand and affordability, rather than necessarily aligned with local or national labour market demand.

This analysis shows in particular:

- The breadth of subjects on offer per provider is lowest in areas of highest competition.
- The financial health of general further education (GFE) colleges tends to be worse in areas where competition is higher.
- General further education (GFE) colleges tend to have lower Ofsted Grades for Overall Effectiveness where local school sixth forms recruit a large proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds.

College networks

A national college system must be delivered through the development of networks of colleges that are empowered – and held accountable – to strategically coordinate across appropriate economic geographies. This must reflect the ability to develop a coordinated strategy across provision, strategic stakeholder engagement (including with universities, schools, ITPs and employers) and workforce development.

Criteria that networks must meet should include the following:

- Each network relates to an appropriate economic geography, to be agreed in consultation with colleges and other providers, employers and employer representative bodies, and across local, regional and nation government.
- Governance must be developed at the institutional and/ or network level to ensure that institutional and network strategies are aligned – crucially including coordination of provision, capital investment, workforce development, strategic employer engagement and relationships with other parts of the education and skills system.
- Networks must be dynamic – working nationally on the basis of relevant specialisms to drive further efficiencies and improvements in quality.
- Networks must also avoid parochialism – with a presumption that where resources can be developed at scale at a national level this should be done, and in turn applied within a regional/ local context. This is particularly evident for example in the context of the digital transformation of the English college network, where resources can be developed nationally, driving both efficiency and ensuring coherence across the system.

These networks must have ‘teeth’ – with governance and accountability ensuring that the strategy is delivered on by providers.

There will be a range of different models that can be developed – and it should be for colleges to propose models that will work in their particular context, subject to them meeting relevant criteria.

These networks must have ‘teeth’ – with governance and accountability ensuring that the strategy is delivered on by providers.

However, there are common elements that will ensure that alignment between network and institutional strategies is not a matter of voluntarism, and moves beyond solely ‘win wins’ – ensuring that the system good is a fundamental focus.

- Alignment of network and institutional strategies as basic precondition of new three-year grant funding settlements.
- Network strategies to include coordination of capital investment, based on agreed specialisms across the network.
- Network strategies must describe the complementary role that they will play – alongside other key partners – for people, productivity and place.

A networked approach is critical to colleges delivering in a coherent and connected manner on their core public purpose, particularly if they work with other partners. College networks will also achieve other objectives. They can maximise value from public funds, can ensure that specialist provision is protected and can provide clear choices for employers and learners. There is some uncertainty about how competition law applies to further education because there has been no case law. In our view, government should offer advice about the scope of lawful collaboration between colleges and consider adjustments to the law in the forthcoming FE white paper.

A staged approach to developing college networks

1. Define the principles of a college network, and the benefits of being part of one (both in legislation). Use existing college groups and emerging networks to illustrate the features, and explore the barriers to unlocking the potential these networked approaches offer.
2. Develop a map of appropriate geographies across England, based on the principles set out above. Set out a deadline by which time colleges must have established networks (2023/ 24).
3. Invite college groups and other emerging networks to come forward as a ‘first wave’ with their proposed network structure. Networks of colleges might take different forms to achieve the agreed strategic aims, and will be invited to make counter-proposals to DFE’s proposed geographies.
4. This first wave will likely principally include college groups who will already fulfil the features of a college group, and perhaps additionally include areas where colleges are already working together closely.
5. Work with a ‘second wave’ of colleges who volunteer to form networks with the right support. Again, they will agree an approach and a model appropriate to their local / regional context.
6. A ‘third wave’ to be supported through the process (could be through an appointed chair to oversee the establishment of networks). Process to be completed by 2023/ 24.

CASE STUDY

West Midlands Colleges



Colleges West Midlands is a formal partnership of 21 further education colleges situated in, and adjacent to, the West Midlands Combined Authority area. The colleges support in excess of 250,000 students and more than 12,000 employers. 74,000 young people aged 16 to 18 participate in full-time programmes, alongside 145,000 adult students and 27,000 apprentices.

Colleges West Midlands recognises the need to raise the technical skills of young people and adults whether in full-time education or in the workforce, to support the upskilling and promote inclusive growth. Core to achieving this is the creation of a regional skills ecosystem which coherently shapes future skills provision. Colleges in the West Midlands have come together to build this eco-system. The colleges have been working together in a largely self-funded formal collaborative model for over three years and now are supported by an independent chair.

This has resulted in the following:

- Collaborative strategic working groups have led to new provision in priority sectors such as construction, advanced manufacturing and digital.
- The colleges analyse and publish the impact of their regional provision through a public facing web-based data dashboard and adopt a coherent and transparent approach to monitoring the destinations of learners in the region.
- The colleges have a Safer Student Charter supported by the Mayor and Police Commissioner and work with the police in delivering it.
- In response to Covid-19 Colleges West Midlands has developed a regional skills recovery programme prioritising the use of the region's adult education budget on supporting adults recently made redundant, at risk of redundancy or furloughed, and in reskilling adults who are aiming to transition into employment in a growth industry. This includes a regional prospectus for the colleges.
- The colleges published a prospectus for capital investment in the region's FE estate, which identifies where investment is required across the region to support of a comprehensive curriculum entitlement for young people and adults. The prospectus provides the foundation for a future regional skills capital plan which will set out to identify where specialisms will be developed and delivered in priority higher technical skills areas.

Relationships with schools

The competitive environment between colleges is compounded by the competition that exists within the wider education and skills ecosystems within which colleges operate. 16-19 provision is a highly contested space, and there is no strategic oversight of provision – such that a school can set up a sixth form centre with no regard as to whether this is needed, or complements existing provision. The Baker Clause, requiring that all school pupils are made aware of the full set of post-16 options remains frequently flouted by schools (IPPR 2019), and in many instances productive local partnerships have broken down in the context of insufficient funding.

The review on financial oversight (Ney 2020) argues that coordinated capacity and curriculum planning should include all 16-19 provision across schools and colleges, and we agree that this alignment is crucial. We hold that college networks should in the long-term include oversight of all 16-19 provision. This has implications for the strategic relationship that will be required between regional school commissioners and the expanded strategic regional ESFA function, where we will need strategic and indeed practical alignment.

We have a unique opportunity to build on existing successful school / college networks as part of a place-based solution -strengthening collaboration between schools and colleges, ultimately driving learner outcomes, creating efficiencies, supporting employers, students and their localities.

We have a unique opportunity to build on existing successful school /college networks as part of a place-based solution - strengthening collaboration between schools and colleges, ultimately driving learner outcomes, creating efficiencies, supporting employers, students and their localities. However, there are several examples of substantial college-sponsored academy trusts across England which although successful are hampered by current policy. These include issues to do with related party transactions, employment restrictions and governance and structures. We recommend a time limited pilot, subject to controlled conditions, with a geographically diverse representative sample of college/ academy groups to test progressive policy changes such as a permissive approach to Related Party Transactions, employment structures to share experienced personnel in a cost-effective manner with auditable contractual guarantees around service controls and the development of new legal and governance structures appropriate to local need.

More generally, college-school partnerships should see colleges and schools developing joint plans on careers education and guidance to individuals from 14 - 19, as part of the much more holistic approach to careers information advice and guidance that we advocate elsewhere.

Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) - Collective local responsibility

“Excessive local competition is not in the best interest of students or institutions. Post-16 providers should be able to act as a system and take “collective local responsibility” for provision. We need local co-ordination and collaboration where colleges, schools, universities and ITPs work together to improve the quality, sufficiency and breadth of the offer and meet the needs and aspirations of all people. For example, colleges generally have a broad offer based on the range of student starting points and they are well placed to be hubs for local post-16 provision and to help protect specialist, ‘minority’ or ‘niche’ provision.”



CASE STUDY

College and schools collaborate to deliver digital campus for year 11 students during COVID-19

In response to the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, Truro and Penwith College set up The Digital Campus to engage year 11 with their intended progression to a vocational or academic area. The project allowed school pupils from any of the 35 state or independent secondary schools in Cornwall to virtually self-study and prepare for their intended college courses in September 2020.

This approach offered the prospect of allowing students to taste and start working on the skills and knowledge for their chosen pathway knowing and to discover if this really was the course for them; with the opportunity for further advice and guidance from college staff remotely. As a result, the college saw fewer course transfers. Additionally, the online support included work placement preparation units, setting out and allowing students to develop their understanding of work placement standards and expectations.

“The pre-course work has been very well received by our students. Parents have shared that it has definitely helped to enthuse and motivate their children. Students have said looking forward to Truro and Penwith College this has really helped them through lockdown and they cannot wait to start and meet their new course mates.”

James Davidson,
Head teacher of Penair School, Truro

College networks across appropriate economic geographies provide a mechanism for developing much better coordination and collaboration across the education and skills ecosystem – and this coordinated approach must be met by universities too.

Relationships with universities

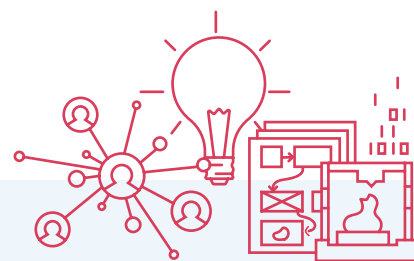
The competitive relationship also exists starkly in the case of universities, with particular pressure in terms of level 4-5 provision. This risks being accelerated further as funding pressures on universities increase over the coming year, with the potential shift towards a ‘survivalist’ relationship between colleges and universities. This must be avoided at all costs – and involves instead pausing and reflecting on the complementary relationships that must be developed.

There are a large number of exemplary partnerships that exist between universities and colleges, including in strategic employer engagement, innovation, workforce development, civic impact and outreach – all of which suggests opportunities for a much deeper strategic partnership. However, these relationships are often fragile, because universities hold all the cards, resulting in a simple power-imbalance between them and colleges.

College networks across appropriate economic geographies provide a mechanism for developing much better coordination and collaboration across the education and skills ecosystem – and this coordinated approach must be met by universities too. Serious reflection should be given to ensuring that provision complements the wider offer available, including with reference crucially to college networks. Whilst we do not endorse a delineation of level 4-5 and 6, provision across a locality/ region must offer a coherent offer and play to the strengths of the institutions involved. This means that colleges will be well-placed to deliver a lot of the growth in level 4-5, but so will some universities, just as universities will continue to deliver the bulk of level 6, but so will some colleges. University delivery at level 4-5 must exist where it meets needs and complements existing provision from colleges, and colleges with provision at level 6 must be able to account for the way in which this in turn meets need and complements existing provision.

Growth in higher technical, L4-5 requires a strong focus on the labour market, relationships with employers, skilled and experienced staff with industry knowledge and a teaching and training approach. Government seems to be moving to a model in which funding will be equal across colleges and universities and for qualifications which reflect occupational standards. With suitable investment and oversight, this should offer fertile ground for colleges to develop and grow their offering, in partnership with universities. That partnership will be vital for employers to know where to go, for pathways to be clear to learners and for priorities to be met which enhance the local economy.

College networks present a new strategic interface which can play a central role in convening strategic employer engagement between providers within a region/ locality. Employer hubs would form the basis of this specialisation – as sector or skills focused specialists, that would provide strategic support to employers across innovation and skills and convene engagement across the wider education and skills system. Employer hubs would also draw on university research in relevant areas, in order to inform curriculum development, workforce development and support the strategic support offer to employers. We see this as a natural development of the introduction of Institutes of Technology (IoTs).



CASE STUDY

Partnership between colleges and Open University to deliver on functional skills

The Open University launched a scheme in 2018 to provide free functional skills courses online in partnership with three colleges. Using an innovative blended learning approach, the scheme aims to allow learners to develop level one skills in English and maths, and receive a functional skills qualification from a local college partner.

The online courses are a flexible, low-risk way for people to develop their basic skills, gaining confidence and even a qualification, helping to transform career prospects within the local community. An initial survey of some Level 1 learners in the colleges taking part in the scheme showed 53% were studying to improve their career prospects.

The three colleges involved in the partnership, Bedford College Group, Middlesbrough College and West Herts College, partnered with The OU to produce the courses. The project was funded as part of the Government's £11.7m flexible learning fund to help more adults back into the classroom.

“We’ve already seen the positive impact Maths and English courses from The Open University have had across the community.”

Zoe Lewis,
Principal and
chief executive of
Middlesbrough
College

Given the need for a much more connected and holistic education and skills system, ultimately the legal duty on colleges to develop network strategies must be matched by a duty on all other post 16 education providers to ensure that provision complements the existing offer across an appropriate economic geography, as well as working closely together across employer engagement and support and careers advice and guidance.

Relationships with ITPs

The independent review of post 18 education and funding (2019) notes the independent training provider (ITP) sector to be a quite particular feature of the English education and skills system, with a high number of providers.

There is a real opportunity with the upcoming FE systems reforms to embed them more clearly within the skills system, with college ‘employer hubs’ convening engagement with high quality providers right across the local education and skills ecosystem. This ensures a ‘whole systems’ approach, and crucially allows for colleges, universities and ITPs to play a coordinated role in stimulating and responding to employer needs.

Taken together – alignment across tertiary providers

Given the need for a much more connected and holistic education and skills system, ultimately the legal duty on colleges to develop network strategies must be matched by a duty on all other post 16 education providers to ensure that provision complements the existing offer across an appropriate economic geography, as well as working closely together across employer engagement and support and careers advice and guidance. This must be a precondition of funding settlements, and a central matter of oversight and accountability regimes.

“We recognise that different models can work for different local contexts and do not want to be prescriptive on the form that further consolidation and collaboration should take. We do, however, believe that the government should actively promote partnerships, group structures, and specialisation, in order to deliver a national network of colleges that puts all learners within reach of high quality provision.”

REVIEW OF POST 18 EDUCATION AND FUNDING (MAY 2019)

A lifetime service

Recommendation 4

A statutory right to lifelong learning

Government must set out a new statutory right to lifelong learning. This means that lifelong education must be meaningfully accessible for people, and there is significant work required to redress deficiencies in the existing student maintenance system.

As has been set out in our UK-wide report, this has to include three central principles:

1. Equal maintenance support across loans and grants is available for individuals in further and higher education and advanced skills training, adequate to an individual's needs whether part-time or full-time, in-person or distance learning, so that everyone has the opportunity to pursue the route best suited to them throughout their lifetime.
2. Flexibility in the use of the entitlement and any associated maintenance support in grants and/or loans so that individuals able to build up their skills over time to match both their evolving career development needs and their personal circumstances.
3. Unemployed people do not lose their welfare benefits where they use their entitlement to reskill/retrain full-time in areas of identified job opportunities and skills shortages.

A statutory right to lifelong learning must include entitlement to study at least up to L3 for free, which can be studied in a modular manner – with additional flexibilities for fully-funded additional L3+ qualifications as is required by local and national priorities.

Recommendation 5

Skills guarantee for a post-COVID economy and future labour market changes

The statutory right to lifelong learning must be augmented through targeted investment to upskill, retrain and reskill to help individuals find work in higher demand priority sectors, to supplement previous qualifications and to help them maintain relevant skills. A Skills Guarantee would provide free training to upskill employees at all levels reflecting national and regional priorities, with maximum flexibility to meet sector needs and to enable upskilling of employees

This would further include incentives for small and medium sized employers (SMEs) with a contribution to wage replacement costs to encourage uptake and to contribute to productivity improvements in the wider economy.

“The truth is we’re not giving anywhere near enough of the right kind of training or support to the fifty per cent of young people who don’t want to go to university, and so we’re depriving them of the chance to find their vocation and develop a fulfilling, well-paid career.

And so the result is business isn’t happy; the economy is under-productive; and many working adults are stuck in jobs without much future when they are hungry for new opportunities.

So it is time for change, and for radical change.”

**Boris Johnson,
Prime Minister,
Exeter College,
September 2020**

Colleges must act as a touchpoint for people throughout their lives. There is a clear need for people to be able to reskill and retrain throughout their lives, in response to changes in the world of work, technological change and the need to move towards a carbon-neutral economy and respond to the impacts of climate change.

But this also reflects an ambition regarding the societies we want to live in. A much more holistic lifelong education and training offer is also about supporting people to live full and flourishing lives, to develop their capacities as democratic citizens and to support good ongoing health and wellbeing.

At present, the English system is failing to deliver on this critical – and growing – need.

- At a time when more and more jobs require education at Level 3 and above, only 60 per cent of young people reach this level by age 19, while 15 per cent fail to reach Level 2.
- Participation in adult education and training has fallen at all qualification levels (below degree level).
- The number of adults taking a funded non-apprenticeship course has fallen by two-thirds.
- Only one in three adults self-report any participation in learning (the lowest level in 22 years). Participation in basic English and maths 19 provision is falling.
- Meanwhile, the number studying higher and intermediate technical courses is lower than desirable given current skills shortages and those that can be predicted given retirements and economic change.
- Those who do participate are far more likely to be well-educated and better off. The poorest adults with the lowest qualification levels are the least likely to access adult training despite being the group who might benefit most.
- Over the last 15 years the UK has seen a significant decline in the levels of participation in adult education. Since 2004 participation rates have almost halved (down 49 per cent) from 29 per cent to just below 15 per cent.

Ensuring a balanced and coherent education and skills ecosystem means ensuring that the system must be meaningfully accessible to all. Everyone in England must be able to access free education up to at least level three, and it was right for the Prime Minister to set this out in a recent speech at Exeter College (September 2020). This must now be set out as a new statutory right.

Recent research from CBI predicts that 9 in 10 workers will have to retrain and reskill by 2030 (CBI 2020). This means that the L3 entitlement should not be exhaustive – and that should be funded for subsequent qualifications up to L4 where this reflects strategic priority need.

Financial support is currently not available to people right through their lives, to support the part-time and flexible learning that people need. Student finance in England compares poorly to other nations across the UK, and must be addressed as part of wider systems reforms.

The fundamental principles are as set out in our UK-wide report:

- That funding and finance should be adequate across the whole system. In England, there is inadequate student support available across all elements of further education, including 16-19 and adult education.
- That students should be able to access funding and finance flexibly, throughout their lives, including on a part time basis.
- That people should not lose out on welfare entitlements where they need to engage in work-relevant education and training.

Digital transformation

As set out in the UK-wide report (2020), being accessible to more people and employers will require ongoing focus on digital transformation (Jisc and AoC, 2020; Colleges Scotland 2020), moving towards more advanced blended and modularised learning and digital platforms for employers. Much of this should be coordinated at the national level rather than within college networks, for cost and efficiency reasons. Significantly, the online offer cannot be seen as a cost-saving measure, and is in no way cheaper to deliver than in-person learning and it will have to be supported by dual professional teaching staff to ensure resources are up-to-date and that there is quality engagement throughout with learners. Digital transformation also critically includes coordinated ongoing investment in the digital skills and capacity of the college workforce.

“To realise the potential of lifelong learning in supporting social justice, we need a significant, wide-reaching and long-term shift in how we approach it as a society. For too long lifelong learning has suffered from a lack of support and leadership at the heart of government. Shunted between departments and ministers, across governments of all stripes this vital policy area has never been a genuine priority. Embedding lifelong learning across the government’s policy agenda and establishing clear mechanisms to support strategic, evidence-based policy making will be central to a successful approach.”

Independent Commission for Lifelong Learning (November 2019)

Lifelong careers and skills advice

As set out in our UK-wide report, making lifelong learning meaningfully accessible to all must see colleges working with others to deliver a much more holistic lifetime skills and careers guidance service. A new lifetime skills and careers advice and guidance service would be hosted within colleges, where appropriate – and where holistic services already exist, will build strong links to complement this, ensuring a coherent and connected community service. This must also include quality information and guidance about available student finance.



CASE STUDY

City Lit online learning introduction in the lockdown period

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown period, City Lit – England’s largest adult education college – ensured that they remained ‘open for learning’ by transferring a significant amount of their provision online. As part of this, City Lit developed a programme of support scaffolded around Deaf and hard of hearing students who were otherwise unable to access online teaching and therefore at risk of missing out on essential skills during lockdown.

City Lit engaged with these students in their first language (for many this was British Sign Language) to explain how to access and make the most of the online content provided, developing tailored resources and a package of support to ensure that they were able to fully engage with the online learning offer.

The response from the students was overwhelming - some of the students cried because they didn’t expect teachers to contact them personally. We were told by some of the students that they would not have been able to continue with their course online because they didn’t think they had the skills to access it.

‘This intervention has meant that communities already at risk of isolation due to their disability, were not further marginalised by being unable to access ongoing education during lockdown. Additionally, this exercise improved the skills of those assisting students with additional needs in how best to deliver technical assistance through BSL or visual aids.

**Phil Chamberlain,
Executive Director (External Engagement)
CityLit**

Delivering with, and for, employers

Recommendation 6

A new strategic partnership with employers

The college system needs a new, strategic partnership with employers, nationally and regionally/ locally at the network level. This means ensuring fundamentally that employers are recognised – and understand themselves to be – a crucial part of the education and skills ecosystem. This must see the voice of employers reflected centrally in the development of national and network strategies. There is a challenge here, given the insufficient sector-based employer infrastructure – and this too requires ongoing focus.

Crucially, the new relationship must be based on a genuine strategic partnership which appreciates the mutual goals of higher levels of participation in education and training which meet the needs of people and labour markets – with an employer-led system recognising college expertise and leadership in interpreting as well as challenging and stimulating employer demand.

Recommendation 7

A new strategic support service to employers

College networks must work to build on existing natural specialisms to develop ‘employer hubs’. These would be sector/ occupationally focused, and would:

- Lead on higher technical level provision across the network.
- Play the lead role in providing strategic support to employers across innovation and skills.
- Coordinate engagement with the wider education and skills system, across universities, schools and ITPs, including across progression and articulation, workforce development and stakeholder engagement.

Building on and drawing from Institutes of Technology (IoTs) where they exist/ are being developed, employer hubs would become a key strategic element of the college network offer – which must be reflected in accountability structures. These must be adequately funded as part of college network grant funding settlements.

Employer hubs will complement the existing offer across an economic geography – supporting, building upon and drawing from the work led by other partners (LEPs, Growth Hubs, Catapult Centres etc). A core element of college network strategies must be to ensure that their work complements rather than cannibalises or duplicates the existing offer – ultimately leading to a better integrated service that works for employers.

There is clearly a significant amount of support already being delivered, which must be built upon. However, colleges report significant barriers to developing a more effective and more holistic service.

Colleges by their very nature work closely with employers of all sizes – and act as a central pivot between the education and skills system and the labour market. AoC research has found that the average college works with more than 600 businesses (AoC 2020). But these relationships can and must be strengthened – and the move to a more networked college system, and wider tertiary education and skills system, provides an opportunity to develop a much more holistic and better coordinated approach.

A service with and for employers

Colleges in England have a wide range of strong relationships with employers, and are particularly important in supporting SMEs. A recent AoC-Gatsby survey (2020) found 98 per cent of colleges to have an employer engagement strategy – with 80 per cent of these strategies having innovation and business support embedded within that.

Of those colleges providing business support to local employers, the most popular forms of support are through dedicated account managers (79 per cent) who work with or offer growth support to specific local businesses and/or SMEs, and also through access to technical and vocational staff in college (79 per cent) with know-how and/or expertise in technical equipment and facilities.

- Just over half of those colleges responding said that they provide meeting space for local businesses and SMEs to use.
- 40 per cent said that they provide space for SMEs to engage with each other to enable innovation stimulation and business ideas.
- 8 per cent provided innovation zones exclusively for local businesses and/or SMEs.
- 11 per cent seconded college staff to local SMEs or had SME staff seconded to the college.

There is clearly a significant amount of support already being delivered, which must be built upon. However, colleges report significant barriers to developing a more effective and more holistic service.

Colleges described the key barriers to an expanded and more holistic service to employers as including:

- The lack of funded support for high-spec, state of the art equipment (75 per cent).
- The lack of capital funding to develop innovation spaces (74 per cent).
- The lack of financial support to fund specific business innovation account managers (72 per cent).
- The high level of nugatory competition that exists locally/ regionally – with 68 per cent of colleges reporting that they could do more by working collaboratively with other providers.

Employer Hubs

“New Institutes of Technology will offer higher-level technical education to help close skills gaps in key STEM areas. They will focus on the specific technical skills at Levels 4 and 5 required in their area.”

Department for Education Guidance, July 2019

Employer Hubs will build on the original policy initiative establishing a network of Institutes of Technology:

- Widening their remit to encompass business support and innovation, in particular, in support of SMEs.
- Positioning them within a coherent regional system as the key interface with employers in the development and delivery of specialist workforce development programmes to meet the current and future needs of their sector.
- Aligning the work of colleges with regional Industrial Strategies/ local economic development for their sector and combined authorities (where they exist).
- Playing a lead/ co-ordinating role in their sector/ occupational specialism within the regional network in the development of learning programmes and materials, standards and accreditation as well as the development of the college workforce and relevant CPD.
- Acting as the fulcrum for progression into higher technical education and skills from the wider college and provider network and onward into Level 6/ full-degree programmes.
- Natural specialisms will be based on evaluation of the current institutional infrastructure and the wider labour market composition and structure – ensuring that hubs align to sector needs and existing products/ programmes at the appropriate geographical levels.

Facilities and Resources

- State-of-the-art equipment including demonstration facilities for SMEs to test out the potential application and value of new equipment/processes, and prototyping facilities to support product development and innovation.
- Specialist teachers/trainers and advisers with knowledge and experience of leading-edge industry practice and technological advances.
- Consideration should be given to accredited status for specialist staff working within employer hubs, including ensuring they have regular exposure to current industry practice through placement/ exchange and upskilling opportunities.
- Materials bank for specialist learning materials for the whole network with particular focus on on-line learning.

Teaching/ Learning and Workforce Development Services

- Development and delivery of full and part-time higher technical and professional programmes at Level 4 and 5.
- Development and delivery of specialist workforce development and tailored in-company retraining programmes for businesses across the relevant sector.
- Co-ordination of employer services to include student placement, apprenticeships and local employer compacts to tackle key recruitment needs.
- Support to employers in developing their own, in-house training capacity, individually and collectively, to enable more and better on-the-job learning and higher quality industry placements and apprenticeships.

Business Support and Innovation

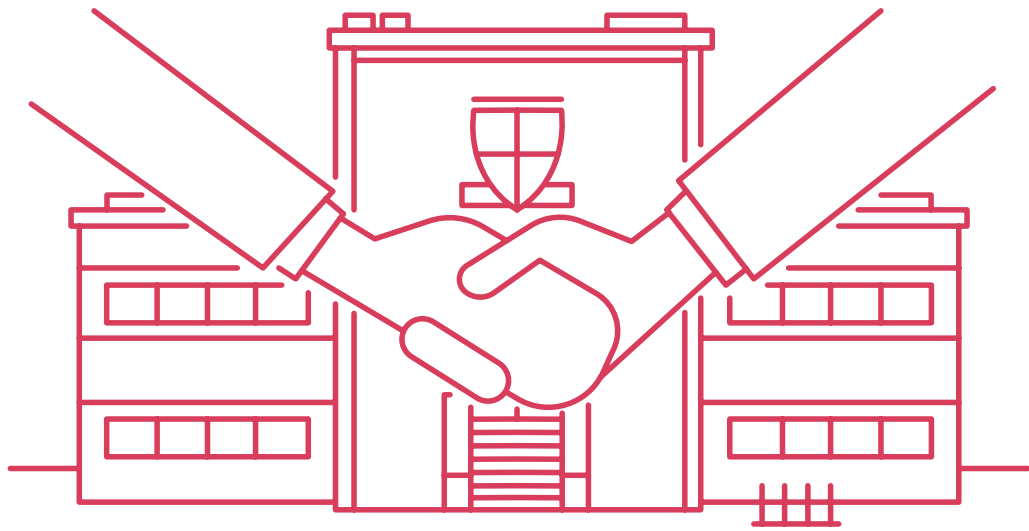
- Advice and demonstration facilities for local employers on new technology and processes with access to state-of-the-art equipment.
- Practical, hands-on opportunities to try out new equipment and applications, including Prototyping.
- Signposting and advice on funding available regionally and nationally (e.g. APC16, NATEP).
- Innovation projects at individual company and/or supply chain level to support improvements in productivity through the adoption of new technologies.
- Act as a dynamic forum (Innovation Clubs) for local employers, particularly SMEs, for knowledge/best practice transfer in relation to business innovation and productivity, and as a catalyst for action in addressing issues critical to the future development of their businesses.
- Support in the transition to more sustainable, greener practices.

Planning/ Inter-agency Working

- Working collectively at regional level with economic/ employment agencies and employer networks to identify and meet the skills and productivity needs of the wider economy.
- Responsibility for ensuring the right volume and appropriate mix and balance of provision for the sector at all levels across the regional college network and in consultation with independent training providers.
- Liaison and coordination with local union learning representatives (ULRs).
- Development of partnerships with HEIs, Catapult Centres and private sector networks.
- Aligning the work of colleges with regional Industrial Strategies/local economic development and combined authorities (where they exist).

Developmental Role

- Lead responsibility for the development of common curricula, standards and accreditation, including work with employers on the design of apprenticeships, traineeships and T Level industry placements.
- Development/negotiation of a single set of articulation agreements with respective higher education partners.
- Development of or support for local employer networks in the relevant sector/ curriculum specialism.
- Responsibility for the development and implementation of a comprehensive workforce development programme for staff within the college network to include development and delivery of a CPD programme to ensure the regular updating of specialist skills and teaching and learning competence.
- An employer placement programme to ensure staff remain fully up-to-date with current skill requirements and business practices.
- Development with employers of a cadre of interchangeable practitioners working in industry and teaching in the hub.



A new partnership

A more holistic, strategic relationship between employers and colleges needs to be based on meaningful, long-term partnerships of equals. This is fundamentally reflected in the way college networks will base their strategies on employer need and analysis, together with extensive consultation and engagement with employers of all sizes throughout, and in the ongoing expanded support that they will offer across innovation and skills. There are examples of this across the college network in England already which show how well this can work, but the system does not foster them adequately.

The overarching systems shift is to foster deep, and genuine strategic partnerships, and is made possible by the wider reforms set out through this report: in alleviating nugatory competition, delivering simpler, longer-term and sufficient funding settlements and in ensuring that strategic support to employers is a central element of national and regional strategies. Crucially, the new relationship must be a 'two-way street', and strategies must be developed together.

In developing college network strategies, there remains a challenge in the inconsistent sectoral skills landscape across England. College employer hubs will provide an interface that can over time support the development of this skills infrastructure, building on the best of what already exists.

The overarching systems shift is to foster deep, and genuine strategic partnerships, and is made possible by the wider reforms set out through this report: in alleviating nugatory competition, delivering simpler, longer-term and sufficient funding settlements and in ensuring that strategic support to employers is a central element of national and regional strategies.

Creating the workforce of the future: a new collaborative approach for the NHS and colleges in England

Creating the workforce of the future: a new collaborative approach for the NHS and colleges in England

In September 2020, the NHS Confederation and the Independent Commission on the College of the Future published a joint report calling for a renewed relationship between the NHS and colleges. While colleges already play a leading role in recruiting, training, upskilling and reskilling the health and care workforce for many roles, we believe there are ways to unlock the potential of colleges to support the NHS to meet its challenging recruitment targets.

The report was based on contributions from and conversations with leaders from both sectors and addressed how together, they can:

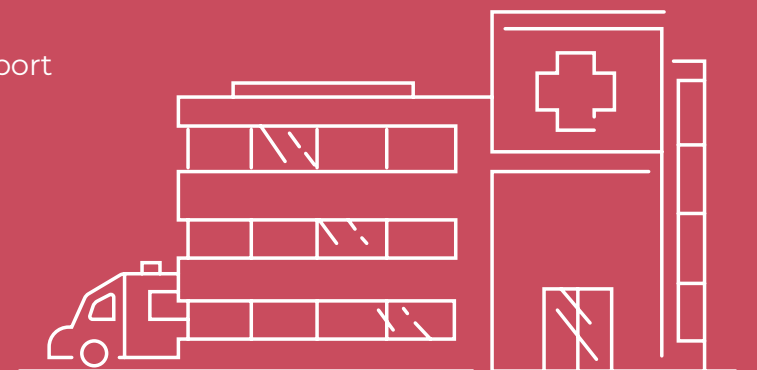
1. Create the healthcare workforce of the future by better making the case for colleges to play a greater role in our workforce development
2. Build strategic and collaborative relationships between colleges and employers that embrace a culture of system partnership and learning
3. Recognise the power of place-based leadership of anchor institutions to support the wider health and prosperity of our communities.

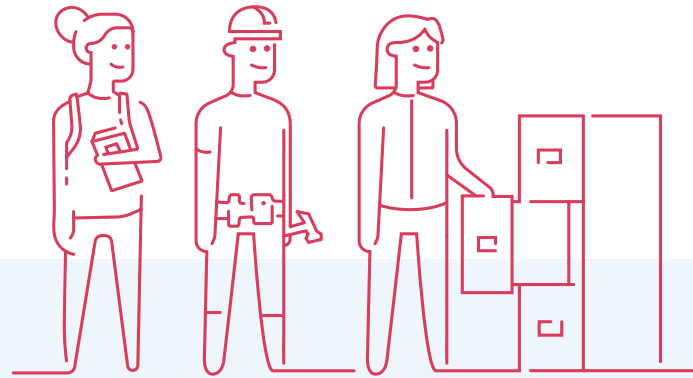
In *Creating the Workforce of the Future*, the organisations called on the government to:

- invest £5m over two years to pilot employer hubs in each of the seven NHS regions in England, to help NHS and care organisations' recruitment and training
- support the creation a Health and Care College Council in England, with £2m funding over three years to coordinate between the health and care sector across education
- embed the role of colleges in the local delivery of the national NHS People Plan.

"The government's commitment to level up the country, tackle regional inequalities and solve the workforce crisis across health and social care will fall flat without targeted action to improve supply, including investment in colleges to support local upskilling, retraining and recruitment into these vital roles."

Danny Mortimer, Interim Chief Executive, NHS Confederation





CASE STUDY

College supports people, productivity, and place in COVID-19 recovery

Destination Recovery is a programme developed by Burnley College in response to COVID-19 to play a central role in boosting the region's economic recovery and skill base. The project has been created in collaboration with a diverse range of employers and business networks across Lancashire. They identified a need to support workers whose jobs may be threatened to secure gainful employment elsewhere.

It uses the college's expertise to provide bespoke, viable pathways and change management solutions for employers and individuals, alongside accredited, independent careers advice and access to professional networks.

The National Careers Service at Burnley College has helped employees in local firms who are facing redundancy through careers guidance and support to recognise their skills, expertise, and training needs to facilitate and fast-track their journey into new employment or self-employment. A number of employers have also taken advantage of specialist and tailored training for their leadership team, enhancing their ability to adapt and diversify to new working practices imposed by Covid-19.

"They have partnered with us to ensure that our Apprentices have been able to continue learning, that our experienced staff have been supported in determining their next steps through redundancy processes, and have boosted our future recruitment plans with their Pre-Apprenticeship programmes. Throughout this period of uncertainty for our business and our industry they have been an invaluable partner, supporting our continued growth through every stage of this pandemic."

**Matthew Pemrick,
Managing Director,
Paradigm Precision**

Mission-driven funding, governance and accountability

Recommendation 8

Stable funding and accountability frameworks for colleges

College networks must be empowered to take a long-term systems focus, which is enabled by a shift towards three-year, grant funding settlements based on outcome agreements agreed at the network level – reflecting the role that the college network will collectively play across people, productivity and place.

This relationship should be overseen through a new single strategic regional point of oversight and accountability with college networks. This presents an opportunity for a fundamental shift towards a new nurturing strategic relationship, and for a necessary decluttering of the regulatory and oversight system. With agreement on overall purpose and new local strategies to meet local need, accountability can be clearer and focused on the longer term.

Recommendation 9

A strategic relationship with government and simplified processes

Government must work to develop simplified oversight - driving efficiency, engendering greater trust and enabling better strategic coordination. Long-term, this should see the establishment of a single post-16 education oversight and funding body ensuring a coherent lifelong education service, and addressing nugatory competition between colleges and with other education providers.

Funding

The strategic challenges facing the college sector in England are all compounded by the lack of funding – indeed, many people very understandably say that this is the most critical issue of all. Despite this year’s funding uplifts - in the 16-19 base rate and several new targeted funds, including for capital investment - funding remains inadequate, and compares extremely unfavourably with both university and school funding. As an example, annual public funding per university student averages £6,600 compared to £1,050 for adults in further education (AoC 2020).

And despite the recent uplifts, funding levels have fallen significantly over the past decade. Recent research from IPPR has found that if FE funding had kept up with demographic pressures and inflation over the last decade, we would be investing an extra £2.1bn per year on adult skills and £2.7bn per year on 16-19 further education (IPPR 2020).

The National Audit Office (NAO) notes that despite the financial pressures colleges face, at August 2019 more than four in five colleges were graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted. The NAO argue however that financial constraints have meant that colleges have had to narrow their curriculum and to reduce the broader support they offer to students – including across careers advice and mental health services (NAO 2020).

Alongside the inadequate funding levels is the current complexity of the approach to funding, with numerous funding streams often with highly restrictive conditions attached to them – leading to planning uncertainties, burdensome data management and turbulence in cash flow (Ney 2020).

Colleges must be empowered to focus on long-term systems good, through a new three-year funding settlement for colleges, alongside a shift in approach away from the current restrictions toward a more integrated and streamlined offer. This would allow for a focus on longer-term strategic outcomes for the system, as against the existing focus overwhelming on shorter-term institutional financial health and viability – with incentives delivering much greater clarity and coherence. This crucially will require a much more trust-based system, and needs to reflect a focus on the strategic scope and accountabilities of colleges within the wider education and skills ecosystem.

Recent research from IPPR has found that if FE funding had kept up with demographic pressures and inflation over the last decade, we would be investing an extra £2.1bn per year on adult skills and £2.7bn per year on 16-19 further education (IPPR 2020).



Accountability and oversight

The independent review into financial oversight argues that there is a profound shift required towards a new, strategic ‘nurturing’ relationship between the ESFA and colleges, which we strongly endorse (Ney 2020). This nurturing relationship requires a streamlining and clarifying of the role of the many agencies working with colleges – with colleges currently variously accountable to the ESFA, the FE Commissioner, Ofsted, IFATE, the Office for Students (OfS), QAA, any relevant Combined Authority and others. This can lead to a highly confused and complicated landscape, with multiple and at times competing points of accountability.

The issues with accountability and oversight have been subject to much debate within the college sector, leading to recent AoC qualitative research (2020), across 15 in-depth interviews with college leaders who have experienced intervention. Regardless of where colleges were in the intervention cycle, several consistent themes emerged about the need to review and improve the intervention regime. There were consistent concerns from all leaders about the confused accountabilities and communications across the multiple agencies involved in intervention and the need for a more strategic and supportive regime which works with leaders to identify forward-looking plans. It is a complex picture for colleges, particularly given that the majority of general FE colleges are also subject to regulation and oversight for their higher education provision – with the OfS regulating and funding 168 colleges on its register, along with its designated bodies (QAA, HESA). This in effect duplicates the work of FE funding agencies and regulators (ESFA, Ofsted, IFATE), which can lead to both complexity and inefficiency.

This together points to the need for a significant streamlining and simplification of accountability structures – ultimately with a move towards a single point of accountability, through which the relevant agencies coordinate. A nurturing relationship must also see a clearer demarcation between intervention and support. Intervention should be as short and focused as possible, working to identify whether the college has the leadership and capacity to succeed – and if it is determined they do, the wider system should act to empower their work.

A new approach could see the role of the FE Commissioner collapsed into the ESFA, and indeed suggests a fundamental shift away from the existing approach which colleges describe as being a long way from a nurturing dialogue. This trajectory is important, but does require a quite fundamental change in culture, and would have implications for the capacity of the ESFA and the wider regional strategic oversight function. This move towards a strategic, trust-based relationship is critical. The reform process itself must reflect these principles of engendering trust with colleges as strategic partners.

A more networked approach to colleges within economic geographies precisely allows for the new, nurturing strategic relationship with an expanded strategic regional function – agreeing on longer-term strategic priorities, and the role college networks must play together in delivering them.

Accountabilities must reflect the strategic role that colleges within a network will play across people, productivity and place – and must reward collaboration and systems leadership with other key partners, including across schools, universities, local authorities, the NHS and others.

As set out in the UK-wide report, as well as the structure of governance, college governing bodies need to ensure that they appropriately reflect the wider community within which they sit. Serious work needs to be undertaken to ensure that governing bodies are diverse and inclusive.

Governance

This will have significant implications for governance. At present, a fundamental flaw in the system is that college governors have no legal duties towards the wider system – meaning that their focus on institutional health can stand in tension with the wider systems good. A networked college model must see governors given an explicit duty to ensure that institutional strategy is aligned with an overarching strategy for the network of colleges within their relevant economic geography. Ensuring alignment between institutional and network strategies would be a basic condition of funding agreements, and ensuring that this is reflected in ongoing practices would be a key element of oversight and inspection regimes.

As set out in the UK-wide report, as well as the structure of governance, college governing bodies need to ensure that they appropriately reflect the wider community within which they sit. Serious work needs to be undertaken to ensure that governing bodies are diverse and inclusive, as well as having clarity on the particular expertise that governors respectively contribute to the board.

This must include:

- Effective staff and student voice represented at the governing body level, who must be supported to undertake this role – including with fully funded sabbatical positions for elected student union representatives, and ensuring that staff representatives have sufficient time outside of contractual duties to undertake their additional responsibilities.
- Development of the student voice function, understood as critical both in ensuring that the college reflects and responds to student priorities, but also crucially as a key element of enrichment and in developing diverse future leaders.
- Governing bodies must also involve representation from relevant appropriate regional/ local as well as national stakeholders, appropriate to the size of the college/ network. This will be likely to include employers, local government and other education providers.
- The robust, professional relationship between governors and executive leadership will be strengthened through ensuring that governors serve a maximum of two terms, and ensuring that governors are supported with high-quality training and support delivered through relevant agencies.

NUS Learner Voice Framework

The Learner Voice Framework is an online self-assessment and development tool based on five sector-shaped principles: Partnership, Empowered Learners, Inclusive, Embedded & Valued, and Being Invested, Strategic and Sustainable. The framework is intended to be a development tool as well an assessment – a way to improve the impact of learner voice through sustainable and inclusive practice. The online self-assessment is linked to a development plan – as the self-assessment is completed, participants can select a box to automatically start populating a development plan.

Every educational provider should be able to use the framework – the framework sets out principles rather than specific structures or activities, because to do so would exclude some of the most innovative and exciting practice in the sector. The Learner Voice Framework is also complimentary and supportive of existing legislation and frameworks that direct the quality of learning.

- 1. Partnership.** This is about having an equal and valued partnership between learners and the organisation to co-create a quality education. Without a partnership approach, we are not going to be successful at any part of developing learner voice. It takes a team to work through the framework itself, and we know that one person on their own cannot be responsible for all of this. It's also important to make sure our partnerships are genuine and equal – no matter who that partnership is made up of.
- 2. Empowered Learners.** It's what the framework is all about! We want learners to discover and use their voice effectively.
- 3. Inclusive.** We believe that all learners should be actively involved in shaping their education, and sometimes this will mean we need to look honestly at our activity and challenge under-representation and limited or no-engagement with particular groups of students. We want all learners to feel empowered and know they have a voice on their education – and we need to work proactively to find ways to support them to use their voice effectively.
- 4. Embedded and Valued.** Where there is meaningful learner engagement and partnership throughout the organisation. If there's one department or one area of the organisation that doesn't quite "buy it" or invest in it, it undermines a whole-organisational approach. It is important for everyone to have an understanding of what learner voice is, what it can achieve and how valuable it is.
- 5. Being invested, Strategic and Sustainable.** This is the formal strategy and investment in learner voice to ensure it is long lasting. It needs resourcing, there need to be policies and other documents to back this all up, and we want there to be space to come up with new ideas and share the existing good ideas so that we keep hold of the talent, stay fresh and adapt to whatever the sector changes next, and still meaningfully give students a voice on how their education should be delivered.

Leading the way

Recommendation 10

Diverse and representative systems leaders

Systems leadership is crucial to the successful delivery of the college system's renewal in England. The shift in funding, governance and accountability is a key element of this – but the leadership behaviours and skills are just as vital. There is a real value in ongoing engagement with leaders across the four nations, and we recommend ongoing leadership development and amplification of systems leadership through the work of the Four Nations College Alliance.

The lack of diversity across the English college sector leadership and workforce must be urgently addressed, and we recommend concerted work from sector bodies together with DFE. This must include mandatory collection of data across all levels of the college workforce, and setting robust targets to redress under-representation where that exists.

Recommendation 11

An ambitious future college workforce strategy

Pay has declined significantly over the past decade, and is a major strategic issue. We propose a new starting salary of £30,000 for teaching staff in colleges, and urgent work undertaken to prioritise increased investment in the workforce, across remuneration and investment in CPD.

A national social partnership must be established between government, the AoC and trade unions to look at long-term strategic workforce challenges. It is proposed that DFE, AoC and TUC form an initial working group to develop this model, to report by September 2021.

SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

“Systems leadership is a set of skills and capacities that any individual or organization can use to catalyze, enable and support the process of systems-level change. It combines collaborative leadership, coalition building and systems insight to mobilize innovation and action across a large, decentralized network.”

(Dreier et al, 2019) Dreier, L., Nabarro, D., & Nelson, J. (2019). Systems leadership can change the world - but what exactly is it? Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/systemsleadership-can-change-theworld-but-what-does-it-mean/>

Leadership

The fundamental trajectory that we describe – echoing other recent reviews – is for colleges to have a clear and confident role working cohesively within a wider, collaborative education and skills ecosystem. This must be reflected in the development of a culture of systems leadership across the college sector.

A consideration of the community within which colleges sit is at the very heart of college leaders' natural priorities – and so the shift is in large part about changing the incentive structures to ensure that this outward looking approach is expected, and is expected and recognised where it exists.

But as across the rest of the UK, and in other sectors, there is also significant work to support the development of these capacities – including crucially ensuring a pipeline of future leaders.

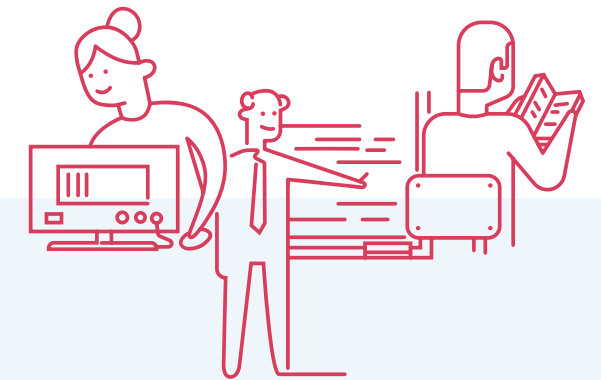
There is a major challenge in the lack of diversity across executive and non-executive leadership in colleges – with college leadership fundamentally failing to reflect the diversity of their student populations and the wider communities that they serve. This requires urgent and concerted action, led by government with AoC and colleges themselves. This is key priority, and a responsibility for everyone across the sector. Useful lessons can be drawn from previous initiatives to address poor representation, including the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI). In addition to developing programmes for BAME staff to progress, we need to train and challenge white leaders to create and understand the cultures they need to put in place which welcome, promote and make diverse communities feel safe and secure.

Workforce

It is impossible to discuss the workforce without noting the impact that long-standing funding cuts have had on pay, workload and career development opportunities. The reforms we set out must address this, and a starting point would be to note that as the average pay for teaching staff in colleges sits £7000 below that of their colleagues in schools, we urgently need funding rates to be increased in order for colleges to be able to deliver the required renewal of the sector. With UK Government proposing a new starting salary of £30,000 a year for teaching staff in schools, there is no case for this not being the same too for college staff. The pay context requires a 'catch up and keep up' strategy.

There is a major challenge in the lack of diversity across executive and non-executive leadership in colleges – with college leadership fundamentally failing to reflect the diversity of their student populations and the wider communities that they serve.

The professional status of the teaching workforce requires ongoing investment and support for career development, including secondments into industry. An expansion in the role and status of colleges must also see the development of new routes in teaching in colleges – from universities and schools, and also from industry.



CASE STUDY

Increasing diversity in leadership

The Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) was a very successful positive action programme that started in September 2002 CHECK to develop and increase the number of black staff at senior levels in the FE sector. The initiative was undertaken in partnership with key sector agencies and colleges, and the two key elements were in developing mentoring and secondment opportunities.

The BLI also ran a successful partnership in the Ofsted Inspection Shadowing programme. The evaluation of the initiative shows that participation contributed to achieving promotion more rapidly. However, only 6.9% of staff in management positions were BAME by 2011, so while progress has been made in some contexts, much further progress is needed as a matter of priority.

“There will continue to be an urgent need for leadership commitment to developing the colleges of the future, that subsumes both behavioural and attitudinal change within leadership, in an effort to embed diversity and racial equality.”

I was involved in the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI), as part of the Senior Leadership Development Programme, almost two decades ago – specifically the Mentoring Programme. It made a difference as it acted as the catalyst to form my growth mindset and confidence.

The role of leaders from diverse backgrounds must be key to discussions in shaping the colleges of the future.”

Altaf Hussain, Principal & CEO, Luton SFC

The reforms we outline must see colleges leading a significant expansion in higher technical education in England, which will mean an expansion of teaching staff at this level, and a fundamental emphasis on the dual professionalism required to both be leaders in learning and to have an intimate understanding of employers in their sector. This must include significant investment in continuous professional development opportunities – including investment in the digital skills of the college workforce (Jisc-AoC 2020).

A shift towards increasing specialisation across college networks will create new, strategic teaching leadership positions, with staff supporting the development of provision, strategic support for employers across innovation and skills, workforce development and pedagogy. These represent new career pathways for those within the sector – with strategic teaching leads coming together regionally and nationally (and internationally) to drive up quality and standards.

The professional expertise and ongoing developments in teaching and learning must also be developed as an area of ongoing research and development within the sector. College networks will work together to develop research connected with occupational areas that they specialise in, aligned to pedagogy, curriculum design and assessment. This will be supported furthermore through the development of a UK-wide teaching network, as set out in our UK-wide report.

A return to flexible evening and weekend provision, with online learning, for people will reflect the role colleges will continue to play as civic anchors, and in responding to demand for an increasingly flexible and personalised community service. This will be supported by the return of more part-time and flexible teaching positions for people working in industry too, further increasing entry points into the sector.

A more networked approach to the college system – with strategic coordination between college networks across local economic geographies, also represents an opportunity and need to develop and reintroduce a range of support and professional services roles, many of which have been lost in recent years as a result of funding cuts. These will include the need for an expanded lifetime careers and skills advice service to be located within college networks, the resourcing of independent student voice functions within college networks and new strategic employer support roles.

The reassertion of a college system which is built on trust and expertise must also be reflected in a new more strategic and trust-based approach to industrial relations. Nationally, a new National Social Partnership model would bring together colleges, employers, government and trade unions together to look at long term strategic challenges facing the workforce, making recommendations for action – including looking at particular recruitment challenges in priority sectors, staff development and the drive towards dual professionalism.

A new chartered status for those who teach

College teaching staff should be supported and expected to work towards professional status which is recognised as equivalent to the PGCE and qualified teacher status in schools. The pathways into college teaching should be clear and acknowledge the current routes noted above. The model should enable on the job training as well as full time courses. PGCE students should be aware of college teaching opportunities and be enabled to undertake placements in colleges as a matter of course.

Teacher training should be reflective of the individual's teaching role and learning style. There should be the opportunity for trainees to take part in action research alongside or instead of purely written assignments. There should be an emphasis on learning effective teaching strategies. All teachers should be required to hold or work towards at least English-NI-Welsh L2/Scottish L4 English and maths (with exemption for recognised and documented learning difficulties).

The dual professional status of the teaching positions (where sector relevant) requires much deeper joint working between employers and colleges. Businesses should be recognised for enabling this flexibility and offering industry updating placements for both staff and students.

A college teaching framework should allow for industry and managerial experience to be recognised on the pay scale at recruitment rather than expecting highly qualified industry professionals to take significant pay cuts when embarking on the teaching stage of their career. Industry experience could also count towards professional status. Developing a clear management framework would also support progression opportunities, including supporting targeted work to ensure leadership and management teams reflect their wider communities.

Staff new to teaching should be enabled to have a lower teaching load and paid time to work towards teaching qualifications and professional status.

Implementation of the above should go some way to encouraging recruitment and retention. A recognised mentoring/ 'buddy' system would also help as would greater opportunities to share good practice with other teachers at different organisations. Taking on mentoring and quality roles should be acknowledged with time given (remission) for doing so.

Taking Teaching Further (TTF)

TTF is a strong model in England which needs to be scaled up and extended with investment in a qualification and remission for teacher training and mentoring as part of the programme. It would benefit from a longer timescale to continue support beyond year 1 and 2 of a new start.

Teaching apprenticeship

This provides a way for industry professionals to train on the job, but needs a thorough review to ensure it is fit for purpose.

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The
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Future