

# **A dynamic nucleus Colleges at the heart of local communities**

The Interim Report of the Independent  
Commission on Colleges in their  
Communities

July 2011

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**This interim report details the initial findings of the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities led by Baroness Sharp of Guildford. It summarises the initial five months of work and looks at challenges to funding, leadership, change and localism. Work to date has included a full-scale international literature review, a series of thematic seminars and a further 70 submissions of evidence.**

**We hope our interim findings and recommendations to government and colleges will encourage more experts and stakeholders to add their views to the volume of evidence already submitted to the inquiry, submit additional case studies and to comment on our recommendations to ensure an even more robust and effective document for maximum impact.**

## Foreword

I was asked by NIACE in December 2010 whether I would be prepared to chair a Commission of Inquiry they were proposing to sponsor, together with the Association of Colleges and the 157 Group of large colleges, about the role colleges might play in their communities. As a Liberal Democrat member of the Coalition in the House of Lords, where I had spoken over the course of many years for my party about the value of the Further Education (FE) sector, I had little hesitation. The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable, whose remit includes skills and further education, was a long-time friend and shared with me an admiration for the achievements of the sector. I also knew and trusted his Minister of State dealing with these issues, John Hayes, whom I gathered had endorsed the suggestion that I might lead this inquiry. Only the previous month he (John Hayes) had spoken of further education colleges as 'the great unheralded triumph of our education system' and had gone on to say 'we will free the colleges to innovate and excel'. Echoing Foster and Leitch there was much talk within the Coalition about colleges being more responsive to learner and employer choice, but often linked to the loose phrase about serving their communities. My job, as I understood it, was to give some substance to that phrase. It was an exciting challenge and one worth taking up because it highlights not just the narrow skills remit for colleges but the wider public benefits that can flow from their activities and their contribution as state funded assets.

Six months later I feel in some ways we have only just begun. There is a wealth of information in the literature which we are endeavouring to master; we are looking internationally as well as nationally, and at experience also in Scotland and Wales from which England may well have things to learn. We have put out a call for evidence and to date received 70 responses but we hope perhaps this interim report will stimulate more evidence from readers. We have held a series of seminars on different aspects of our remit, and there have been visits and discussions all over the country.

Above all I have learned from my fellow commissioners, who come from many different parts of the sector and understand both its achievements and its limitations. My own experience as a governor of Guildford College – as a Parliamentarian I have always found it useful to see how the legislation we put through works out at the coalface – gives me some insight into the sector, but I have benefitted enormously from the visits I am making to other colleges. It reinforces one of our conclusions – that there is no such thing as a standard national FE college brand; each college faces different challenges and responds in different ways.

We were asked to produce an interim report at the six-month mark to provide some indications of the way our thoughts are developing. We have sought to be open in what we do – all papers and proceedings are logged up on our website (<http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/colleges-in-their-communities-inquiry>). The report is also, however, meant to encourage more ideas and more feedback—from learners, teachers, support staff, community stakeholders, as well as from college leaders. The operative word above is 'developing' – our ideas are not set in stone. We hope you will read this short report with interest and let us know where you agree or disagree, send us more evidence and give us specific examples to back up your case.



Baroness Sharp of Guildford

July 5 2011

## Introduction – the remit

“High skills have always been an enabler of social mobility. Even more important we know that gaining and using skills gives individuals and their families a stronger sense of purpose and pride in their own achievements. It is also clear that learning, including perhaps in its more informal sense, strengthens communities by helping bring people together and encouraging active citizenship... But the skills revolution we seek and the benefits we look to it to bring cannot be led from above. It needs the active involvement of you [as college leaders] and your learners as well.”

*John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education,  
Skills & Lifelong Learning, June 15 2011*

This inquiry was set up in January 2011 with the purpose of investigating the role that further education (FE) colleges can and do play within their communities and the added public value that they can bring to those communities in their role as leaders of learning. Ministers in the new Coalition Government recognised the significant role that FE colleges were playing as providers of education, training and skills for their communities but they also saw them as a resource, and importantly as a leadership resource, within their communities. At a time when colleges were being freed up to take more responsibility for the shape and balance of their educational offering and to respond to employer and learner needs, Ministers were anxious to explore the wider role they might play within their communities.

The term ‘community’ is itself vague and we needed to define it in order to impose boundaries on the inquiry. Primarily we saw communities as meaning spatial communities in the geographical area served by a college but we recognised that there can be overlap and that specialist colleges or specialist departments within a college served a more specific interest group which might be geographically dispersed. In addition, with the development of digital technologies and distance learning, colleges were also creating, and serving, virtual communities.

Our remit required that the inquiry was an independent one with its membership drawn from a wide range of stakeholders – from principals and governors; employers, local authorities and unions; from NIACE, the AOC, the 157 Group and LSIS; and with observers from BIS, the Skills Funding Agency, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and Ofsted. We have met and talked at length with learners and employers as part of the process. We were required to review the evidence, both national and international, and we have called for (and received) written evidence and set in train a wide literature review. In addition we have held seminars and made visits and had discussions around the country. More specifically we were asked to identify a ‘vision, framework and potential models of delivery’ and to make recommendations to Government and the FE sector as a whole.

We are only half-way through our allotted time of 12 months, but we were asked to make an interim report at the 6 month mark to indicate the way our thoughts and recommendations were developing. This is the purpose of this document. It is important to stress that the views that it contains are preliminary and may change over the course of the next few months as more detailed evidence becomes available.

## Synthesis of findings to date

“Key strengths included extensive partnerships with local businesses, the local authority, schools and charities which create real projects that have high impact on both learners and the immediate community. These colleges are key players in the development of an effective community ethos. They develop strategies to engage hard-to reach groups, and support them back into learning. Links with employers help them to become more competitive, enable them to secure their future workforce, and provide opportunities to local people. Students highly value work placements and have a very good choice of experiences through extensive links with employers, schools, nurseries, community organisations and universities.”

*Evidence to the Commission from Ofsted – college inspection reports*

### Many colleges are already embedded in their communities

What stands out from the work we have undertaken so far is the fact that many colleges are already deeply embedded in the communities they serve. They represent 100 years of publicly funded investment by the state in an infrastructure that provides professional, craft and technical skills training and educational opportunities both for young people and adults. Their role is respected and colleges are viewed as part of the fabric of their community. In particular, colleges have a positive role in providing opportunities and training for the many who for one reason or another miss out on education first time around. They provide local, ongoing opportunities to individuals to continually develop their skills, knowledge and expertise to match their personal aspirations. In addition, colleges, through their working relationships with local employers, also meet the specific needs of the local labour force and this too can be seen as part of the service they provide to the community. In these ways colleges are already shapers in their community, fostering aspiration and providing real opportunities for individuals to advance their social, economic and personal ambitions.

### The funding system is unduly complex

Colleges receive the vast majority of their funding from central government agencies and are therefore highly dependent on the funding criteria set by these agencies. However, criteria from funding bodies do not always reflect conditions in local labour markets or the demand from local individuals or employers. Although there is strong support for the statutory entitlements which enable full funding of those in most need, the current funding criteria are highly complex and are determined by age, prior qualifications, employment status and qualification aim; moreover they have often changed one year to another at short notice. For example there are 81 different criteria set by the Skills Funding Agency affecting the provision for the 19+ age-group. This system is more complex than that faced by colleges in any other country, or by schools or universities in the UK.

### Too much top management time is consumed by this complexity

The sheer complexity of the funding criteria forces college leaders and managers to spend a disproportionate amount of their time juggling provision and ‘managing upwards’ towards government and may reduce the time and energy they can devote ‘outwards’ towards the communities that they serve. While nationally such funding criteria may seem easy to administer, the burden of administration and bureaucracy is pushed toward the front-line, making the system less efficient than it appears to be to central government. Government agencies that fund colleges have also been reformed a number of times in the last decade and these reforms have often been accompanied by year on year changes to funding criteria, adding to the difficulties of management. Colleges as a whole have been very responsive in delivering government priorities but could be more responsive if the system was less complex and time consuming.

## **Some colleges have learned to manage the system to the benefit of their communities**

Leading colleges in the sector have developed systems to manage these processes. Despite the complexities of the funding system many colleges have learned to ride the roller-coaster of uncertainties and have delivered year on year increases in efficiency and effectiveness. Colleges are often enrolling learners with significant social and interpersonal needs, requiring resources and support. Through their expertise and well developed information, advice and guidance services, they are able to use the funding system to meet complex learner needs, providing opportunities to individuals some of whom are otherwise at risk of being marginalised. This is one of the real success stories of colleges, benefiting individuals, employers and their communities. Recent moves towards earned autonomy are welcomed but they still do not provide the freedom that many colleges feel they need if they are expected to deliver more with less resource. In particular colleges need the flexibility to shift funding across ages, geographical locations and type of learner in order to respond to their communities even more effectively.

## **There is no such thing as a national brand**

There are immense differences between colleges because they have grown from a wide range of different traditions and missions. Colleges have never been part of a nationalised service and this is a real strength. Within the framework of national funding priorities and guidance (e.g. around fee income), colleges have developed different ways of adapting central policy to local circumstances and have developed strong local brands, and it is this that counts most with local employers and prospective learners. To varying degrees, each college both influences and adapts to its local learning eco-system, working with other colleges, schools, employers, universities, local authorities, hospitals, and other training providers as seems appropriate. The importance of college leadership in simultaneously shaping and responding to the local skills eco-system should not be underestimated.

## **And by no means all colleges match up to best practice**

The quotation from Ofsted at the beginning of this section reflects best practice in the majority of colleges. In weaker colleges, Ofsted reports, partnerships are too often limited to work placements and there are insufficient links with community partners and organisations aimed at improving learning opportunities. Likewise, not enough thought goes into progression opportunities through university linkages. These colleges need to be more responsive to the needs of their local communities, including employers, and more pro-active in projecting themselves as a strategic leader in the local community. The challenge even for outstanding colleges is to recognise the unarticulated demand from poorly represented sections of their communities: meeting this sort of need is a mark of effective community engagement and requires imaginative outreach work.

## **The need for co-ordination of skills demand at a local level**

With the abolition of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) there is currently no consistent approach to local skills planning. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are yet to bed down and it is unclear how colleges will be involved. Some colleges are already playing a central role but others are at present sidelined despite their critical role as key strategic players in the skills agenda. The role played by local authorities varies. Employers, particularly those involved with inward investment decisions, are often concerned at the lack of coordinated approaches to skills training at the local level. Partnership between different players at a local level can be immensely powerful and many colleges are playing a central role in creating such partnerships.

## **The acceptance of reform**

The financial downturn has accelerated the move to local solutions, with the 'double devolution' towards community decision-making. Our evidence indicates that there is general consensus on the need for reform and strong support for the general principles of freedom, fairness and responsibility that underpin the

Coalition's strategy. Colleges are ready and keen to rise to the challenge of innovation and strengthening their community leadership, but they need more space, deeper trust and more flexibility in funding mechanisms to do so.

### **But governance structures need to change alongside financial reform**

If reforms give colleges more freedom to decide on local priorities, then accountability needs to shift from the 'upwards' (to funding agencies and 'Big Government') to the 'outwards' (towards local communities and stakeholders). The basic mission of colleges remains that of education and skills training and the success of that mission must remain central to accountability. Within colleges, however, it is the responsibility of the Governing Body (the Corporation) to set the college's mission and strategic plans. These plans add most value locally where Governing Bodies develop, and regularly refresh, their understanding of the present and future needs of the communities the college serves. Likewise, they are more readily accepted where colleges proactively develop community understanding of the college's plans and measure and publish its performance against needs and expectations. Over the longer run, colleges need to develop metrics which can measure the wider social benefits and contribution deriving from community engagement, influence and impact.

## Towards a shared vision

Our remit requires us both to identify a vision and to suggest ways in which that vision might be implemented. Our findings suggest that in some respects the 'vision' is already there. In spite of the difficulties that have confronted them, many colleges are already embedded in their communities and serving them in a variety of ways that add public value and contribute to social and economic well-being. Colleges, however, are frustrated by what they see as 'shackles' which still tie them down unnecessarily and prevent them from developing new initiatives. As one college principal remarked, 'Given what we are already achieving, just imagine what we could do if all the shackles were taken off!'

The vision is essentially that of colleges as the 'dynamic nucleus' within their communities, forging, as they do now, 'neural networks' of partnerships – down into the education community, the secondary and primary schools, the early years and Sure Start centres, and upwards towards employers, local authorities, universities, hospitals, police, youth offending teams, community organisations, youth services and housing associations – forging links and developing partnerships. The college therefore becomes a prime player within the community, sensitive to its educational and training needs and proactive in finding ways of meeting these needs.

Colleges are already centrally positioned between the educational community on the one hand and the employer community on the other. They work closely with local authorities and other local organisations such as Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authorities and the police. They are linked into community organisations such as youth groups and faith communities. Many raise further funds for community activities via sources such as the Big Lottery and European Social Fund – as one college put it:

Whenever we have a chance to put in bids for a new pot of money, we do so. We win some, we lose some, but all told we gain and from our core funding, we can leverage a lot more towards community projects.

In other words many colleges are already at least halfway towards this vision. They need the freedom to develop their networks further and to take additional initiatives – in direct response and service to their localities and in tune with national priorities. This vision has much in common with the Big Society ideas: that it is a 'can do' vision which links together public and private, community and charitable institutions.

What needs to be stressed is, first, the importance of giving all colleges a greater degree of freedom to innovate and experiment, and secondly, the need for this freedom to be balanced by systems of governance which bring proper accountability but which at the same time reflect the wider public benefit to be gained from such activities. The issue of governance will be a major focus during the second phase of this Inquiry.

**Our vision for 2014–15**

A further education system with colleges at its heart, responsible for and responsive to the needs of all adults and young people, employers and local communities.

- Colleges will have a central leadership and coordinating role in the funding and regulation of this system as the major public sector infrastructure investment for adult learning and skills.
- Colleges who meet the required criteria will have the security of stable core funding over three years to enable them to respond, adapt, innovate and deliver more for their communities.
- In return, government will see greater levels of investment in the system by employers and individuals alike.
- Colleges will provide customer-focused, accessible and transparent information to employers and individuals to support their choice of provision.
- Communities will feel that colleges are more accountable to them through hearing their voices, responding to them more systematically and speedily through improved transparency; involving them more effectively in joint planning and delivery.
- There will be simpler financial accountability to the Government’s funding agencies but accountability to the local community will also be written into governance.



**By September 2012**

**Government to:**

- review and amend the funding guidance and audit regime, stripping out the detailed bureaucratic controls;
- work with the representative bodies to ensure the changes to colleges governance meets the needs of government policy governance;
- pilot three year funding for outstanding colleges.

**Colleges to:**

- develop good practice guidelines on how to engage, listen to and respond to their communities;
- develop good practice guidelines on how colleges will exercise their leadership and co-ordinating role at the local level with other learning providers and key stakeholders;
- review and amend college memorandum and articles of association to support greater freedoms and enhance local accountability and improved.



**Action in 2011–12**

**Government to:**

- allow colleges to use up to 25% of their Adult Skills Budget to meet locally assessed priority needs;
- pilot the funding of outcomes as opposed to student numbers or qualification outputs;
- pilot extending funding of units to all adults considered to be a priority in a community;
- reconsider the role of SSCs in the approval of qualifications;
- include ‘Good’ colleges in exemption from full inspection;
- instigate a dialogue across government about the wider role of colleges in social and economic life and the Big Society.

**Colleges to:**

- put forward to government a model for funding colleges through a community plan;
- set out how they will engage, listen to and respond to their communities;
- work closely with sector representative bodies to develop a common approach to providing public information to the communities they serve;
- demonstrate how they will deliver greater co-investment through greater flexibility of funding;
- open up their premises for community use, and allow greater access for external examination candidates.

## Context, colleges, communities

### Background data

This inquiry focuses on further education colleges in England, but the scope includes evidence from the rest of the United Kingdom and overseas. Our primary focus is on where the majority of learners are in the 227 General Further Education Colleges (GFE), 95 Sixth Form Colleges (SFC), 16 Land-Based Colleges (AHC), four Art, Design And Performing Arts Colleges (ADPAC), and ten Special Designated Colleges (SD)<sup>1</sup>.

Colleges are a key part of the further education system, working alongside the voluntary sector, local authorities and private training providers. Local authorities are pre-eminent providers of informal adult and community learning; whilst independent providers are major deliverers of work-based learning or all kinds. It is important to see colleges within this 'eco-system', often working in partnership with other providers in the private, public and third sectors.

However to give a sense of the contribution of colleges to this ecosystem, it is worth noting that during the 2009–10 academic year:

- Colleges educated and trained approximately 3.4 million people.
- Eighty-six per cent of students (1.6 million) over the age of 19 who receive any form of public funding, studied or trained in a college. This compares with 254,000 who studied in other contexts.
- There are 831,000 16–18-year-olds studying in colleges, compared with 423,000 in maintained schools, academies and city technology colleges.
- Although 67 per cent of apprenticeships are delivered by private training providers, colleges are responsible for a quarter of the total.
- Of those achieving a Level 3 qualification (A-level equivalent) by the age of 19, 44 per cent do so at a college.
- Forty-one per cent of all vocational qualifications are awarded via colleges.
- In the area of informal adult and community learning – learning for its own sake – Local Authority provision accounts for the vast majority of students, but colleges are still delivering 14 per cent of the total.
- Two-thirds of large employers who train their staff do so through a college.
- Colleges provide 38 per cent of entrants to higher education.
- There were 168,000 students undertaking higher education at a college.
- Half of all Foundation Degree students are taught in colleges.
- Colleges deliver 78 per cent of HNCs and 59 per cent of HNDs.
- Although colleges are minor providers of Higher Education with 12 per cent of the market share, almost all of this is employer-facing provision.<sup>2</sup>

So in terms of volume colleges are significant players. But this is also matched by a profile of improving quality:

- Eighty-one per cent of students who enrol achieve their qualification aim.
- In 65 per cent of colleges, provision is good or outstanding.
- Ninety-six per cent of colleges are judged satisfactory or better for their overall effectiveness;
- Sixty-three per cent of colleges were judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted in 2009–10.
- Of the 75 best public sector employers listed by *The Sunday Times*, 20 are colleges. A high percentage of college leaders and senior staff are women.

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<sup>1</sup> AoC (2010) *Number of colleges in England by type*. London: AoC, November 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Widdowson, King and Brown (2008) *Higher education and colleges: a comparison between England and the USA*. London: CIHE.

Colleges also contribute to social mobility and their local economies:

- Ethnic minority students make up 19 per cent of students in colleges, compared with 12 per cent of the general population.
- 16 per cent of 16–18-year-olds in Further Education Colleges and 10 per cent in Sixth Form Colleges are from a disadvantaged background, compared with 7 per cent in maintained school sixth forms.
- Eighty per cent of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students study at a college.
- Colleges employ 265,000 people, 140,000 of whom are teachers and lecturers.

## The role played by colleges

“In short, colleges of Further Education are commonly treated as maids-of-all-work, that is, centres where all forms of post-school education ...take place. For a time there was a danger that they would neglect non-vocational courses altogether, but this danger seems to have been averted following the issue of a government directive enjoining Principals to make proper provision for ‘other further education.’”

*Adult Education in England and Wales, John Lowe, 1970*

This quotation comes from the 1970s. On the face of it, the situation has not changed much. Colleges still have a tendency to be defined by what they are not. But this has been described in a positive way: colleges ‘fill a vacuum’ or they are the ‘adaptive layer’ of the education system. On the one hand everyone knows what a school or university does, on the other both schools and universities have an ‘isomorphic’ tendency – merging until recently into one type of institution, one set of choices, a ‘vanilla’ system.

Colleges are not like that. They are diverse. But with diversity comes the issue of public image and reputation. It has thus been argued that colleges have a weak brand (weakened further by the ability of any organisation to call itself a ‘college’). But in reality colleges have very strong *local brands*; ‘local’ in the sense of being known in communities they serve, whether they be communities of place, interest or specialism (such as those served by land-based or specialist colleges).

## The moves for reform

This inquiry takes place at a time of rapid and uncharted change affecting colleges. The global financial crisis has resulted in a reshaping of the UK’s political economy, and one that is in the early stages of its implementation. The dominant narrative is one of smaller government, a ‘reinvigoration’ of community leadership and action to support those areas where the State would have previously intervened.

There is a strong belief across all areas of policy in putting ‘power’ and often resources into the hands of service users (often via income contingent state loans) to purchase the service they think they require. In a sense this is a continuation of recent policy direction, but what is different is the *pace* at which change is being enacted. There is also the recognition that it is not just individuals acting as atomised consumers who count, but that there is also a place for groups engaging in some form of collective action.

But changes to the global economy and public policy in the UK and England are not the only contextual factors to consider. For example there are changes to the culture of learning, what individuals or groups *expect* from a learning experience, their attitude to paying for it, as well as our knowledge of intelligent systems for organising the educational infrastructure of a society. Colleges have met with colleagues in local government and the business community to share perspectives and to articulate a common agenda.<sup>3</sup> The new ‘localism’ agenda and the ‘Big Society’ idea of devolved responsibility and increased levels of community ownership and volunteering have been well-documented without being rigorously defined.

<sup>3</sup> Local Government Association/157 Group/British Chambers of Commerce (2010) *Local learning and skills conversations: new responses to local needs*. London: LGA, November 2010.

This presents a huge opportunity for colleges and other players to define what is meant by these terms locally and therefore how they are shaped and enacted.

This leads to a vision for further education 'that is fundamentally more collaborative, networked, and socially productive; where colleges are incubators of social value and hubs for service integration; where further education serves the needs of learners through being a creative partner in local growth and service reform agendas.'<sup>4</sup> There is ongoing work led by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service to explore elements of FE's role in securing social productivity through research and prototyping. This indicates an appetite for colleges to shape reform as well as respond to it.

A paragraph in the current skills strategy, *Skills for Sustainable Growth*, under the heading 'Freedom' states:

Control should be devolved from central government to citizens, employers and communities so they can play a greater role in shaping services to ensure that they meet their needs efficiently. We will increase competition between training providers to encourage greater diversity of provision, including, for instance, FE colleges offering more Higher Education courses. This, together with empowering learners by providing better information on quality and tackling poor performance, will drive up standards. We will free providers from excessively bureaucratic control and centrally determined targets and radically simplify the formulae which determine funding for adult education, so that providers can effectively respond to the needs of business and learners.<sup>5</sup>

This principle of funding reform is reiterated in the *Skills Investment Strategy* published at the same time:

Freedom does not just mean abolishing stifling bureaucracy and meaningless targets. It means trusting people to do their job. The adult education movement was not born of Government, but of the people. And its primary accountability today should be not to the Government, but the people it serves.<sup>6</sup>

The proposed freedoms present challenges to funders and colleges alike to respond to the local skills agenda as well as the demands of employers and individuals. For colleges, if this freedom is enacted it will mean having a greater control over what is offered, how that 'offer' is developed and priced. How will these factors result in benefits for the communities that colleges serve? With freedom, it is argued, comes the responsibility to deliver not just institutional success but wider benefits for the local community.

## Constraints on reform

It is not clear that these sentiments about freedom are shared throughout Government. For example, in the *Guidance Notes* that the Skills Funding Agency sends to providers it states, 'Guidance Notes form part of the Chief Executive's Funding Requirement and are therefore *contractual for all colleges and training organizations* that are funded by the agency.' (Italics added) These are important in that colleges are required to take note and they form the basis therefore of how colleges are audited. They do, however, set quite detailed parameters around the proposed freedoms.

The context is also wider than that presided over by one department of state. On the one hand, colleges are profoundly influenced by policy from the Department for Education (DfE), which has the 0–19 remit. Colleges, already a major player in the expansion of post-16 learning, now increasingly cater for students from 14 upwards. As well as changing the tenor of such organizations, it means that proposed changes to 14–19 have the potential to distort the whole FE curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> RSA/LSIS (2010) *The further education and skills sector in 2020: a social productivity approach*. London: RSA/LSIS, May 2011.

<sup>5</sup> BIA (2011) *Skills for sustainable growth*. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, November 2011

<sup>6</sup> SFA (2010) *FE: New horizon, investing in skills for sustainable growth*, November 2010.

<sup>7</sup> NIACE (2011) *Policy briefing: The Wolf Report – its potential impact on adult learning*. Leicester: NIACE, April 2011.

Furthermore, spending on employment and skills for unemployed adults through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), as the UK Commission for Employment and Skills has pointed out, is almost half of the total spend on *adult skills*. One way both departments are working together in on the policy of Skills Conditionality, where claimants are referred to a colleges or an advisor with potential benefit sanctions for non-participation.<sup>8</sup>

Put together the funding from DWP with the funding through the Department for Education for 16-19 provision and it suggests there is significant resource in the system which could give colleges considerable leverage if there were really the discretion suggested by the Skills Strategies. However this is far from the case, despite the recent successes with apprenticeships and the integration of employment and skills started under the previous Government.<sup>9</sup> This failure to develop joined up government means fragmentation of effort.

A further important player that is emerging is the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEPs). LEPs are locally-owned partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They are seen as playing ‘a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs. They are also a key vehicle in delivering Government objectives for economic growth and decentralisation, whilst also providing a means for local authorities to work together with business in order to quicken the economic recovery.’<sup>10</sup>

On 28 October 2010, Government announced 24 LEPs that were ready to move forward and establish their boards. A further nine partnerships have been announced since and 23 had appointed Board members by May 2011. Of the 203 non-council appointments, there are 30 Higher and Further Education staff. Only two LEPs are chaired by women, and seven boards have no female appointments at all! <sup>11</sup> So development is slow, and the remit is emerging. Already some are pushing for a locally pooled skills budget.<sup>12</sup> The lack of college representation in the majority of LEPs is a cause for concern alongside wider concerns about how representative these bodies are; and, therefore, how well-placed they are to influence skills provision in a locality should their remit or ambition be extended.

### **The need for reform of governance**

Currently there is no one model for dialogue and accountability. Each college has its own Corporation and that body is in turn responsible for the satisfactory performance of the college. They appoint the Principal, often now called the Chief Executive, and oversee his/her running of the college. Each Corporation has to consider with its various communities the processes that best suit each side and the success measures that are most appropriate to their particular circumstances. There is potential for sector-led bodies to support Governors in identifying a range of models that could be useful, and for greater peer review between colleges to help promulgate what works well.

Some have suggested to us that the statutory Instruments and Articles which governs the functions of Corporations should be amended to underpin this new focus and ensure that all colleges take it on board. The suggestions include a new duty to have regard to community skills needs alongside quality improvement and financial health, a new duty to publish reports on performance in meeting skills needs, and changes to the composition of the Corporation to reflect more fully the communities it serves. Others have suggested that Government funding should be made conditional on the production of a Community Plan based on the college’s dialogue with its communities, and other approaches to engagement based on social networking.

<sup>8</sup> DWP/BIS (2011) *Skills conditionality—the government response to the consultation*. London: DWP/BIS.

<sup>9</sup> UKCES (2011) *The review of employment and skills*. London: UKCES, April 2011.

<sup>10</sup> DCLG (2010) *Local Growth: realising every place’s potential*. London: DCLG, October 2010 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/local/localenterprisepartnerships/>

<sup>11</sup> “The agenda: RDAs out... LEPs.in.” *Local Government Chronicle* research, 19 May 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Bolton (2011) *Sink or swim? What next for local enterprise partnerships?* London: Centre for Cities, May 2011.

## Communities: what we mean by the term

### *Colleges are answerable to local communities*

“There is increasing evidence that many people today feel alienated from the political process and powerless in the face of rapid social change. Education is one means by which individuals can start to take charge of their lives and seek advancement at work or a change of direction. It is equally important, however, that people feel their local schools and colleges are answerable to them rather than to an impersonal bureaucratic machine.”

*Strong colleges are needed to build strong communities, 157 Group May 2010*

If colleges are to be answerable to their communities we need to be clear what we mean by the term. ‘Community’ has long been the subject of scrutiny in academic texts. As one commentator said, ‘the word ‘community’ is one which has the power to inspire a reverential suspension of critical judgement in the minds of adult educators... It is a premature ultimate; that is, as a word possessing such emotional potency that its invocation precludes further debate’.<sup>13</sup>

As a starting point, we decided to use the term ‘communities’ rather than ‘community’ in this Inquiry. This is an important distinction: the plural is helpful reminder of the plurality of communities both in terms of groups of people (‘community groups’), but also of *types* of community (of interest, and today, of course, also, virtual ones).

How people engage with the learning and skills system is changing. In 2002 only 2 per cent of people surveyed by NIACE got information about learning opportunities from the Internet. By 2011, this figure had risen to 43 per cent. In the same period, those getting information direct from a college also rose: but from just 11 per cent to 12 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

The radical adult education tradition sees ‘communities’ referring to ‘specified groups of actual people, not society as a whole and certainly not a market ...[using] the term to indicate the “place” and “moment” of engagement with specific groups of people around their interests.’<sup>15</sup> Central to this view is that it the group’s interest that is paramount; the debate belongs to them, it is theirs. Adult and further education should start from the concerns of the community and develop the learning programme from that point.

This is not mere semantics; Commission staff have had feedback about sensitivity around the use of ‘their’ in the title of this Inquiry. It has been put to us that looking at colleges’ role in ‘their communities’ suggest that colleges somehow ‘own’ their local communities and therefore seek to engage with them *on their own terms*. This will be considered further in stage two of the Inquiry.

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<sup>13</sup> see Brookfield (1983) *Adult learners, adult education and the community* (60–89) for a discussion of the distinction between adult education ‘for the community’, ‘in the community’ and ‘of the community’.

<sup>14</sup> Tuckett and Aldridge (2011) *Tough Times for adult learners: The NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2011*. Leicester: NIACE.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson op cit 194

## Inquiry process and timetable

Our aim, as stated in the Inquiry's scoping paper, is to:

“report on the strategic role colleges can play and the added public value they can bring in leading adult learning and serving local communities at a time when colleges are once again expected to take responsibility for the shape and balance of educational offer to their locality.”

The remit of the Commission is to:

- Review literature, existing national and international policies and models of delivery, and carry out necessary research.
- Open discourse and inquiry with successful community colleges from other countries to identify good practice and transferrable learning.
- Identify a vision, strategic framework and potential models of delivery for enhancing the role of colleges in their community.
- Identify 'practice worth sharing' on colleges in their communities and a strategy for sharing good practice.
- Make realistic recommendations to government and to the further education sector on the implementation of the proposed strategy.

<b>November 2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch seminar at the AoC Annual Conference</li> </ul>
<b>January 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of Commissioners and observers</li> </ul>
<b>February 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First meeting of the Commission</li> </ul>
<b>March 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence collection: issue of call for evidence Literature Review phase 1</li> <li>• Second meeting of the Commission</li> </ul>
<b>April 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence collection: Thematic seminars Literature reviews for seminars</li> </ul>
<b>May 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence collection: Thematic seminars (continued) Literature review for seminars</li> <li>• Review of evidence received from call for evidence</li> </ul>
<b>June 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third meeting of the Commission</li> <li>• Emerging findings and conclusions presented to Commission</li> <li>• Interim report drafted</li> </ul>
<b>July 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fourth meeting of Commission</li> <li>• Interim report approved</li> <li>• Further research and investigation</li> </ul>
<b>August 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review concluded</li> <li>• Analysis of research and evidence concluded</li> </ul>
<b>September 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fifth meeting of Commission</li> <li>• Findings, conclusions and recommendations presented to the Commission</li> </ul>
<b>October 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sixth meeting of the Commission</li> </ul>
<b>November 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final report published</li> <li>• Launch of Inquiry report at AoC Annual Conference</li> </ul>

## Research evidence

The initial evidence-gathering phase of the Inquiry analysed evidence from a variety of sources. These were:

- A systematic literature review, comparative analysis and peer review.
- A Call for Evidence.
- Notes from discussions and presentations at Commissioners' Meetings.
- Thematic seminars for invited specialists and stakeholders.

The research questions posed by the Inquiry were:

1. What is the relationship between colleges and their communities?
2. How do colleges contribute to local/ community leadership?
3. How do colleges develop, implement and refine national adult learning policies and plans?
4. How do colleges define and arrive at an adult curriculum for their communities?

A systematic literature review was carried out to identify, screen, categorise and analyse relevant published and unpublished literature. This process resulted in a critical analysis of 289 documents. The first phase of the literature review focused on the six themes of the expert seminars below. The second phase of the literature review will be focused on all aspects of the Inquiry.

The call for evidence resulted in the 72 documents being submitted, a number of which written specifically in relation to the research questions posed by the Inquiry. These responses were analysed and summarised. These are briefly summarised on the following pages.

The expert seminar programme comprised of six thematic seminars, identified by the Commission. These were:

- Business and employer voice
- Learner and citizen voice
- Civil society and the wider community
- Local social and economic planning
- Curriculum and qualifications
- Leadership and governance

Each seminar was led by a Commissioner and had an invited audience drawn from FE colleges, learners, governors and stakeholder organisations. A total of 62 people participated in the seminars. The seminars produced a rich source of evidence for the Inquiry and a copy of the notes of each seminar, together with the associated literature review can be found on the Inquiry's website

A brief summary of each theme follows on pages 19–25.

The meetings of the Commission also contributed to the knowledge base of the Inquiry. The minutes of the four meetings of the Commission held before the publication of the Interim report are also available from the Inquiry's website.

## Call for evidence

### Summary of responses

Colleges, stakeholders and other organisations with an interest in the Inquiry were invited to submit evidence to address the Inquiry's four research questions.

Between February and April, 71 responses were received, some providing specific responses to the questions, others providing general information. The responses are summarised under each of the questions:

#### **1. What is the relationship between colleges and their communities?**

The term 'communities' generates a range of interpretations and responses, illustrating both the multiplicity of communities served by colleges and the need for clarification of the terminology.

Responsibility for defining and prioritising communities served by colleges, particularly within the context of localism, is pertinent as educational landscape in which FE colleges operate is rapidly changing. This includes higher education, schools and the opening up of the market to the private sector.

Colleges are recognised, and perceive themselves, as having a wide social and economic impact in their areas: as employers, as contributors to community cohesion and economic development, as providers of facilities for a wide range of community and charitable use. Larger colleges also are significant procurers of goods and services which can benefit local suppliers.

A shared understanding in respect of the different roles and the specialist expertise of the main providers of adult learning within communities can enable colleges, local authorities and voluntary sector consortia to plan and manage provision strategically and efficiently.

#### **2. How do colleges contribute to local/community leadership?**

Taking leadership roles within the community is a key responsibility for most colleges. This role is often viewed within principles of corporate social responsibility.

Colleges actively contribute to the local community leadership through participation in a range of local and regional groups, at both strategic and operational level. These encompass education, business, employment, regeneration, social, economic and health groups.

Many colleges demonstrate responsiveness to the multiple communities that they serve. Community based provision can be used to develop leadership skills and capacity within the communities themselves.

There is a lack of consistency in colleges' missions, particularly in relation to provision for disadvantaged groups, offenders and informal adult learning. Consequently, access to provision can be determined or limited by local management priorities.

Governors who represent the communities that colleges serve are an important means of providing community links.

There is a complementary role played by other providers, particularly local authorities, in both leadership and delivery of learning.

### **3. How do colleges develop, implement and refine national adult learning policies and plans?**

Colleges seek to balance the needs of their communities within the framework of government policies on funding and eligibility.

Colleges generally feel constrained by the funding guidelines and eligibility criteria, a view echoed by stakeholders.

Colleges provide an important progression route for community-based learning and also a 'second chance' in learning. Funding and eligibility criteria for pre-level 2 qualifications may restrict the ability of colleges to make 'first step' provision.

Some colleges, particularly larger colleges, have diversified their funding bases and therefore have more scope to respond to local priorities.

### **4. How do colleges define and arrive at a curriculum for their communities?**

Local partnerships have an important role in planning provision, particularly with local authorities and the voluntary and community sector. Although some of these partnerships are well-established, others are new alliances to enable strategic and local collaboration.

Stakeholders regard colleges as key and active participants in a partnership approach to adult learning but not necessarily the lead organisation for adult learning in a locality.

Direct links with voluntary and community organisations can be a mechanism for ensuring that the curriculum developed is relevant to the local community and particularly to disadvantaged groups.

Links with employers and businesses are used to inform other areas of the curriculum and in some areas, the Work Programme is a catalyst for developing new programmes.

**We would like to invite further responses to these questions,  
or case studies that you think support a particular argument.**

**Please contact:  
collegesincommunities@niace.org.uk**

## The evidence to date

### Colleges, businesses and employers

“Businesses and local communities should be in charge of their own futures and via the LEP and other strategic partnerships should have the autonomy to pursue their own agendas on economic growth and skills according to local needs”

*157 Group, British Chambers of Commerce and Local Government Association.*

Colleges have a wide range of approaches for working with employers but some may see the business community primarily as *customers* for learning products rather than as *co-designers* of provision to meet specific business needs. The notion of a continuum ranging from selling to engagement through to co-design may be a useful way of reflecting on colleges’ relationship with employers. This mirrors a similar continuum suggested in relation to engagement and involvement of learners through ‘learner voice’ activity. Engagement with employers in co-designing relevant qualifications and units at a local level is preferable to a process of approval through Sector Skills Councils.

There is a lack of clarity for employers on the availability of skills provision in an area and on how this provision links to the local labour market. This confusion can be compounded by the number of competing providers and the complexity of sourcing impartial advice. Such lack of clarity can deter or delay inward investment decisions by businesses. Colleges need to articulate the benefits of learning clearly and to be clear about their offer to employers.

Local authorities have an important role in economic development and engagement of businesses. This should include integrated and coordinated information on all providers of skills and local labour market intelligence within a locality. Colleges need to be closely aligned with the economic development function of their local authority.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have been established too permissively, resulting in considerable variation in membership and too frequently with limited college involvement. The majority of colleges perceive that they have a key role and contribution to make in supporting local economic growth: this is not always recognised or understood by LEPs.

A shift to sharing investment in training between the state, the individual and the employer is challenging. The perceived culture in England in which employers do not regard paying for training as a priority, combined with free courses being delivered for competitive advantage by competing providers, may make it difficult for colleges to achieve a significant shift to co-investment without incentives for employers.

#### Messages for the Inquiry

**Colleges should develop business engagement plans and customer relationship systems** covering all sizes of businesses to support local economic development

- How far can colleges support business planning need alongside skills demand?
- How should engagement with micro-businesses be incentivised to enable future co-investment?
- How can colleges further stimulate and support the development of entrepreneurs and new businesses in their community?

## The evidence to date

### Colleges, learners and citizens

Colleges serve multiple communities, across a number of geographical areas: these communities are not homogeneous and their role requires a differentiated approach to capturing, and responding to, learner voices.

Most colleges work along a continuum, with feedback from learners (at one end) to co-production (at the other). Where they position themselves on that continuum depends on the situation that presents and the specific purpose for engaging with learners. For example, colleges may work with existing learners as a route into their communities to extend reach and responsiveness to groups and employers who do not currently access provision. Or engagement can be linked closely with the 'enrichment' curriculum, where community groups are invited into college (e.g. for Volunteering Week) or placed in the community as part of their course. This parallels 'service learning' models in North America and has resonance with the principles of the Big Society.

The notions of 'consumerism' and 'demand-led' in educational provision are largely outdated: regarding participants in education as 'consumers' may oversimplify the process of learning and also fails to recognise the role of the learning in empowering individuals.

A strategic, whole college approach is required to engage, understand and work with learner communities. College corporations need to develop a better understanding of the needs of their communities and to increase transparency and accountability to them. They need also to reflect both the geographical communities and communities of interest they serve.

Understanding what is relevant to learners and providing the right type of information is vital. The FE Informing Choice Framework is a positive step forward and should address learner perspectives as well as those of employers.

Learners also recognise the importance of professional advice in helping them understand their needs:

"Looking at myself as an adult coming into education for the first time in thirty years, after a period sidelined with depression, the provider...had a much better idea of my requirements ... than I as an individual, or as part of a community, would ever have known."

*Student Union President/College Governor*

#### Messages for the Inquiry

##### **Colleges need to better stimulate, understand and respond to changing learner motivation**

- How can college learner voice activity support the co-design of learning as well as responding to customer demand?
- How can learner feedback systems help direct the offer to communities and enable co-investment?

## The evidence to date

### Colleges, civil society and the wider community

“As providers, whether public, third sector or private, we now recognise the imperative of working together. Not merely to ‘protect’ what we, as individual institutions, provide, built to enhance the whole.”

*Joint evidence from a local authority and a college*

Colleges always have been involved in their communities, but the principles of the Big Society suggest differences in terms of responsibility and accountability. The assumption that all people are ready, able and willing to engage with aspects of the Big Society is questionable. Nevertheless, colleges do have a role in developing the skills that are required for active citizenship, engagement in the Big Society and also providing the skills needed by the likely growth of social enterprises. These skills will only be effective if they are located in a context that is relevant to individuals and communities. Close working with voluntary and community groups is needed to develop an appropriate curriculum. Barriers to entry to learning need to be understood from learners’ perspectives: are individuals ‘hard to reach’ or are institutions ‘hard to enter’? Colleges may wish also to develop as social enterprises in their own right.

Outreach and development work, together with non-accredited courses, are required to support the engagement and response to the most disadvantaged learners. The development of practical skills to encourage advocacy and democratic engagement are applicable in many aspects of learners’ lives and link with the principles of the Big Society. Freedom to respond to local priorities and needs will enhance the accountability and reputation of colleges. To achieve these, a more flexible funding system is required as current funding regimes are constraining the fuller and more effective responsiveness of colleges, particularly in their localities.

Colleges and communities may have different perceptions of accountability. Rather than seeing representation on governing bodies as the main indicator of accountability, communities may be more concerned with the practical manifestation of how a college delivers learning to its communities. This might include the geographical location of learning centres, responsiveness to local issues, availability of transport, course fees or childcare facilities. New measures of accountability and approaches to governance may need to be developed to reflect local priorities and responsiveness.

In order to achieve long-lasting and effective social and economic impact on an area, there needs to be collaborative approaches across the public sector: colleges on their own are not be able to achieve this. A sub-regional and local public sector infrastructure is required to achieve long-term social and economic impact and to engage the private sector. Colleges have a key role and could make significant contributions within this infrastructure. A college could develop as a local brand which over time becomes perceived as a trusted provider of services: responsiveness would be a key factor in achieving this.

#### Messages for the Inquiry

**Colleges have a role in enabling learners to engage in wider civil society** through the curriculum offer and enhanced learner engagement strategies

- How can colleges develop the capacity to enable learning in communities by working closely with third sector learning providers and community groups to deliver learning in their own right?
- How should colleges further support third sector providers and other community groups by making their existing infrastructure, its systems and staff more accessible to them on a win-win basis?

## The evidence to date

### Colleges and local social and economic planning

“Like other land-based colleges we engage with 700 businesses (mostly SMEs), scores of community groups, several local authorities, and dozens of schools, universities and learned bodies, and private sector partners.”

*College governor*

Colleges serve multiple communities that are determined by geography, by colleges’ specialisms and by local responsiveness. This complexity, and the variety of the communities served by colleges, is a key distinguishing feature of colleges. The balance between the different communities served by a college is best achieved through local decision making rather than by central direction. Local governance and accountability arrangements should inform these strategic planning decisions.

The tensions between central policy direction and local accountability need to be addressed within the context of the public value that colleges bring to their communities. Colleges can be demonstrating local leadership and responsiveness that illustrates the principles of localism in a practical way and yet sometimes be at variance with central policy direction.

Colleges are significant strategic partners and their contribution to social planning and impact is often understated in relation to their economic role and contribution. Colleges not only are providers of learning but also are major employers, regenerators of community assets, contributors to social cohesion and to other areas of social policy, such as health and well-being. This wider role of colleges in many localities differentiates their provision from that of other learning providers.

The strategic contribution of colleges also should be recognised in the context of a shift to greater commissioning of public services where colleges could be involved in shaping and planning services relating to the areas they serve. A greater understanding of commissioning processes and commissioning cycles in the public sector, particularly in local authorities, would be beneficial. Experience from other parts of the public sector, such as the health services, provides models where providers can both contribute to planning and engage in delivery of service without conflict of interest.

Colleges both respond to, and shape, demand. Demand is generated by communities and determined by government policy, particularly through its funding regimes. Colleges also are considerable shapers of demand, such as using local labour market intelligence and their knowledge of the economy to develop and promote programmes that increase opportunities for employment of local residents.

#### Messages for the Inquiry

**Colleges to be represented on the LEPs and play a full part in economic planning nationally and locally** as the lead professionals for adult skills, as well as large employers in their own right

- How can college-led provider networks be established in every LEP area to feed in supply-side concerns and pre-employment ‘work readiness’ planning?
- Should LEPs’ remit be extended to include skills planning?
- How can we ensure that skills needs are an intrinsic part of economic development planning both locally and by sector?

## The evidence to date

### Colleges, curriculum and qualifications

“A Certificate or Diploma of Further Education would go a long way to providing the sector with a signature qualification to sit alongside employer specific qualification requirements for licence to practise areas of study.”

*College principal*

The curriculum offered by colleges cannot be considered in isolation from external strategic factors that drive or limit colleges’ abilities to respond. Funding and regulatory regimes particularly are limiting factors in curriculum development and delivery. Although the Skills Funding Agency has established a single budget, the funding methodology relating to qualifications and units still effectively micro-manages the way in which the budget stream can be used. Thus the potential of the Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) to provide a flexible and accessible curriculum for adults in particular is seen as being constrained by current funding methodologies.

Inspection and regulation systems can discourage innovation or work with non-traditional learners because of the potential impact on minimum performance levels, retention rates and inspection grades. This may narrow rather than widen participation, particularly amongst those adults who are most disadvantaged. It may also discourage colleges from offering part or unit qualifications if success rates are still relate to full qualifications.

The personal commitment of colleges’ senior management teams is a key factor in determining the range of provision for adults. Whilst this can provide local responsiveness, it also can result in provision for adults, particularly community-based, to be left to the decision of senior management teams.

Much adult learning is episodic and a distinction was made with provision for younger learners. Adults may have long-term goals but often will seek to achieve them through short courses or part-time learning. Flexibility of provision can provide different routes and pathways in learning and also recognises that adults may be unable or unwilling to make long-term commitments either in time or financially. The Open University was cited as a model from Higher Education where learners are able to undertake learning in self-contained units and are aware that the credits obtained can be used to achieve a full qualification at a future date.

A curriculum for adults would have an emphasis on the processes of learning as well as the content, in order to develop confidence and self-esteem; the QCF would be used to develop flexible unit-based programmes that enable episodic learning; it would develop practical skills to encourage advocacy and democratic engagement; encourage enterprise and development of business start up skills within vocational areas of learning.

#### Messages for the Inquiry

**Provision for adults needs to be structured** to acknowledge that learning takes place in more complex personal, workplace and financial circumstances than for younger people

- Should unit funding be extended to all learners deemed to be in local priority groups?
- Should a review of the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) should be undertaken to see whether approved qualification are sufficient to meet the needs of all learners?
- Should there be a review of QCF approvals process, including the role of sector skills councils and other experts in qualifications design?

## The evidence to date

### Colleges, leadership and governance

“There needs to be a dramatic reduction in central control but an enhanced and clearly defined role of how college Governance will ensure accountability and effective community engagement”

*AoC President*

Colleges are major public assets in their communities and leadership of colleges is informed by the principles of public value. These values and collaborative leadership styles should guide colleges' role in their communities. Leadership in colleges cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider context within which colleges operate, both politically and financially. Colleges take a holistic approach to leadership and planning for the multiple communities and age-groups that they serve: the separation of policy guidance and funding streams are an impediment to this process. For example, the separate funding of 16–19 and adult learning is considered an artificial division. Due to funding pressures, college leaders may spend more time managing 'upwards' to government than 'outwards' to their communities and beneficiaries.

Local accountability needs to be enhanced as colleges serve their communities in more sophisticated and transparent ways. There can be immense mutual benefit to communities and colleges when colleges play a wider and more strategic leadership role in their communities.

Colleges have a key role in the development of leadership capacity in communities and should develop this in association with stakeholders and community groups. This building of this capacity can serve a number of purposes: provide colleges with routes of engagement with a variety of communities, develop new curriculum responses to leadership, and potentially increase accountability to wider communities. Although colleges' relationships with their local communities are important, increasingly this is only one facet of their work, which can encompass regional, national and international work with different community and business sectors. A core purpose of governance is guardianship of public funds. Different models of governance are needed, particularly those that address benefit to beneficiaries and the increased involvement of stakeholders in wider governance. New approaches to accountability, which could include more sophisticated and immediate ways, such as social networking, need to be explored.

#### Messages for the Inquiry

**Governing bodies should deepen their engagement with communities** to gain a better understanding of local needs and priorities, and to explain performance and future plans in helping to meet them:

- Should there be a statutory duty on corporations in preparing their business plans to have regard to the skills needs of the various communities they serve?
- Should government funding of colleges be made conditional on evidence of engagement with the various communities and/or their endorsement of a 'Community Plan'?
- Should there be a duty on corporations to account to their various communities on their performance in meeting local needs?
- Should colleges be required to appoint governors to reflect the interests of the various communities the college serves?

**Leaders across the sector including funding agency staff, college senior managers and governors need to have access to transition support.**

- How should sector-led bodies support governors and staff to implement change and to develop a more systemic view of the local skills ecosystem?

## Summary of messages and questions

### Colleges should develop business engagement plans and customer relationship systems

- How far can colleges support business planning need alongside skills demand?
- How should engagement with micro-businesses be incentivised to enable future co-investment?
- How can colleges further stimulate and support the development of entrepreneurs and new businesses in their community?

### Colleges need to better stimulate, understand and respond to changing learner motivation

- How can college learner voice activity support the co-design of learning as well as responding to customer demand?
- How can learner feedback systems help direct the offer to communities and enable co-investment?

### Colleges have a role in enabling learners to engage in wider civil society

- How can colleges develop the capacity to enable learning in communities by working closely with third sector learning providers and community groups to deliver learning in their own right?

### Colleges to be represented on the LEPs and play a full part in economic planning nationally and locally

- How can college-led provider networks be established in every LEP area to feed in supply-side concerns and pre-employment 'work readiness' planning?
- Should LEPs' remit be extended to include skills planning?
- How can we ensure that skills needs are an intrinsic part of economic development planning both locally and by sector?

### Provision for adults needs to be structured

- Should unit funding be extended to all learners deemed to be in local priority groups?
- Should a review of the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) should be undertaken to see whether approved qualification are sufficient to meet the needs of all learners?
- Should there be a review of qcf approvals process, including the role of sector skills councils and other experts in qualifications design?

### Governing bodies should deepen their engagement with communities

- Should there be a statutory duty on corporations in preparing their business plans to have regard to the skills needs of the various communities they serve?
- Should government funding of colleges be made conditional on evidence of engagement with the various communities and/or their endorsement of a 'Community Plan'?
- Should there be a duty on corporations to account to their various communities on their performance in meeting local needs?
- Should colleges be required to appoint governors to reflect the interests of the various communities the college serves?

### Leaders across the sector need to have access to a transition support

- How should sector-led bodies support governors and staff to implement change and to develop a more systemic view of the local skills ecosystem?

## What happens next? A shared agenda

This is our position at July 2011. Here is what we are doing over the coming months and some ideas on how you can contribute:

Commission	You
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalising our literature review (August 2011)</li> <li>• A second call for evidence (July–August 2011)</li> <li>• Responding to the Government’s consultation (August 2011)</li> <li>• Working up our recommendations and ideas for action (September 2011)</li> <li>• Looking for case studies to inform our final report (August–October 2011)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please read our thematic summary and individual reports on seminars on our website</li> <li>• Please let us know about anything you think we have missed</li> <li>• Please feel free to quote our report in your individual or institution’s response</li> <li>• Please let us know where you agree or disagree and any possible solutions you think would work</li> <li>• Please do contact us, or invite us to visit or talk to you</li> </ul>

### How to contact us

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## Members of the Commission

### Commissioners

- Baroness Margaret Sharp – Chair of the Inquiry
- Mike Atkinson – Governor, Plumpton College
- Denise Brown-Sackey – Principal, Newham College (from May 2011)
- Michelle Dawson – Community Manager, Hammerson PLC
- Sally Dicketts – Principal, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
- Beverley Evans – Chair, Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults (LEAFEA)
- Geoff Hall – Principal, New College Nottingham (until May 2011)
- Maggie Galliers CBE – Principal, Leicester College
- Satnam Gill OBE – Principal, Working Men's College
- Stella Mbubaegbu CBE – Principal and Chief Executive, Highbury College
- Elaine McMahon CBE – Chief Executive and Principal, Hull College
- David McNulty – Chief Executive, Surrey County Council
- Chris Morecroft – President, Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Lynne Sedgmore CBE – Executive Director, 157 Group
- John Widdowson CBE – Principal and Chief Executive, New College Durham
- Tom Wilson – Director, Unionlearn

### Observers

- Verity Bullough – Executive Director, Capacity and Infrastructure, Skills Funding Agency (from June 2011)
- Lorna Fitzjohn – Divisional Manager, Learning and Skills, OFSTED
- David Hughes – National Director of College and Learning Provider Services, Skills Funding Agency (Until May 2011)
- Bobbie McClelland – Deputy Director for Post-19 Landscape, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Alison Morris – Programme Manager, UK Commission for Employment & Skills
- Alan Tuckett OBE – Chief Executive, NIACE
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CFE is the Inquiry's independent research partner  
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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

You can find NIACE online at [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

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