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# **Leading Local Education and Training Report**

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# Local Leadership of Education and Training

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## Introduction

How is the Further education and skill sector responding, with its local stakeholders, to the localism agenda? Though brought forward by 2010-15 Coalition Government, localism continues to feature on the government agenda. Commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation, this project has explored the response to localism and the leadership of the education and training strategy in four areas of England chosen because they offered different approaches in different contexts. They were also all actively engaged in the development of local leadership and therefore offered the prospect of something substantial to look at and learn from. Local stakeholders were offered a gateway by the leaders in four further education colleges. They explored with us the potential usefulness of some specific leadership methodologies in their various contexts. We also spent some time trawling through and analysing the ever growing pile of policy literature which helped us structure our questions (and is reported in summary in an Appendix)

In a project taking place over just ten weeks, we aspired only to try things out and establish both a snapshot of the present and some interesting areas for exploration in the future. The report contains a lot of rich detail from our four locales and offers a thematic analysis of what we found. We did not look for or expect to find a common model but we did think we might see some issues or features of significance beyond each specific area. These are reported below along with some tentative conclusions and some pointers to further enquiry.

## Project description

### Objectives

The project's purpose was to explore current activities and new possibilities for the Leadership of Localities in relation to education and training in the expectation of greater devolution of these functions to localities in the future. It was focussed on capturing key features of sector leadership geared to responding to the emerging local leadership agenda and, at the same time, testing how and/or whether leadership methodologies had anything to contribute. The approach to the project was evidence-based co-construction: the research team worked in partnership with college leaders, co-constructing the distillation of local work and the exploration of the leadership methods. The policy context (and funding) required rapid working methods offering a snapshot of the position in four areas between January and March 2015.

More specifically, the project aimed to make a contribution to the following goals:

- Building sector leadership capacity, by providing explanatory, evidence-based illustrations of strong sector leaders addressing the strategic challenges and opportunities offered through the devolution of the skills agenda
- Increasing awareness of, and interest in, collaborative, strategic leadership and governance of the local offer across complex stakeholder partnerships and increasing confidence about moving beyond competition towards collaborative, entrepreneurial solutions
- Widening understanding of newly emerging challenges amongst sector leaders and of how leadership methodologies might help leaders address them
- Persuade funders, regulators and customers of the sector leadership's readiness to challenge itself to excel in responding to local demands and opportunities

The four areas (and the gateway FE providers were):

- Bristol (City of Bristol College)
- North Warwickshire and Leicestershire – including Coventry and Leicester (North Warwickshire and Hinckley College)
- Oxfordshire (Oxford City College - Activate Learning Group)
- Walsall and the Black Country (Walsall College)

## Policy Context

### The Zeitgeist

...is Devolution, Devolution, Devolution. As the RSA's most recent report "Devo Met" [March 2015] – updating progress since publication of The Cities Growth Commission's final report in October 2014 – puts it:-

"The political landscape continues to change, fast".

The level of policy traction and rhetoric of this idea is so significant it has survived a change of government which now seems set to preside over further waves of devolution. It is important to recognise and celebrate this achievement, including devolution deals agreed for Greater Manchester, Sheffield City Region and Leeds City Region. These developments have accelerated collaboration and negotiations with other major city-regions in the UK, and all are set against a background of wider national devolution to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland".

At the heart of this momentum is the recognition that the main factors that contribute to economic growth are best decided by areas big enough to form a strategic vision and understanding of the planning, infrastructure, transport and labour market and skills needs of their locality. Such areas include the major city, and cities, regions constituting the so called Metro conurbations but also, as the Demonstration sites in this project show, extend beyond them.

Running alongside this wave of progress is another strong current, namely the drive to give employers more direct influence over economic growth and, in particular, matching vocational programmes including the apprenticeship flagship better to labour market needs and skills gaps.

The Coalition government began to enable employers to play this greater role by inviting the formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships [LEPs] and requiring their chairs to be from the business community. It seems clear that LEPs will continue to be part of the landscape and there was no resistance to this trajectory observed during the project.

### Localism: political consensus

Between 2011 and 2015 a large number of reports, reviews, analyses and policy statements focussing on localism in skills development were produced by a range of organisations, including BIS, the RSA, various national commissions, UCKES, 157 group, Ofsted, LSIS etc. (See Appendix for the full list.)

BIS has stated that its five key outcomes for publicly funded skills provision are:

- the skills that employers and higher education institutions need and value
- the knowledge and skills individuals need to: gain employment; change employment; progress in work; and progress to higher levels of education and training
- the strategically important skills the nation needs
- value for money for: businesses; individuals; the state
- positive community and social outcomes.

BIS action priorities in the 2014 workforce strategy included greater engagement with business and

improving the quality of leadership, including system leadership. Although there are nods in the direction of improving employability and life chances for NEETs and other vulnerable groups, the 'grey literature' in the past five years has consistently highlighted a shift away from the widening participation agenda and towards meeting national and local economic needs.

Increasingly, the funding approach, including City Deals, Local Growth Funds and European funding streams aims to put LEPs and employers firmly in the driving seat, giving them direct powers over strategy, funding, delivery, and future developments. Devolved funding and localism is also supported by all parliamentary parties

The literature is peppered with statements such as: *businesses benefit from solutions through tailor-made provision aimed specifically at their needs; a curriculum designed and developed to fit what they want; flexibility in terms of time, place, support with funding and the bringing together of different funding streams.* (UCKES, Gazelle, 157 Group)

*Now more than ever the sector's economic role is critical. But its economic potential can no longer be fulfilled through a top-down, delivery mindset. For 2020, we must see a culture shift towards networked local growth where the sector co-creates value, future jobs and economic growth through better relationships across the spectrum from learners to employers, to public authorities and civil society.* (RSA)

Some of the challenges in meeting local skills needs were identified by the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities (Sharpe 2011) as:

- reconciling the demands of employers with the needs of individuals
- balancing minimum contract levels with the drive to increase competition by encouraging new entrants to the market
- lack of clarity and consistency in local skills planning

They recommended "more flexibility for colleges to shift funding across ages, location and types of learner to be able to respond to communities in a cost effective way".

In their response to the Heseltine review, BIS summarised key actions as:

- decentralisation that will give business-led LEPs the power to make the choices that are right for their local economies.
- Single Local Growth Fund to generate growth;
- LEPs to develop new strategic multi-year plans for local growth
- EU Structural and Investment Funds in England and aligning priorities on the basis of the plans led by LEPs.

Government's goal, according to BIS, is to introduce greater contestability for public resources by shifting to a funding system that is driven by employers and learners rather than the traditional approach to funding where Government essentially acted as a proxy purchaser, paying grant directly to providers. They suggest that *it is now up to FE colleges to provide their own certainty by developing strong and forward looking relationships with employers, individuals and other local players.*

It was timely, therefore, to explore how local partnerships around LEPs are developing. This very short-term project sought to create a snapshot using FE Colleges with their extensive experience and expertise in the field of vocational education and training as a launchpad. The focus was on understanding how all key stakeholders including LEPs, colleges, local authorities, schools and employers are coalescing and creating positive initiatives around the task of meeting local economic

needs and how they are framing the challenge. It provides an insight into how local leaders are moving, as one college principal put it, from feeling “punished for the past towards being creative about the future”. It also provides some evidence about how leadership methodologies, particularly Design Thinking, might assist such a journey.

What we have found reflects progress on the ground as local leaders from all stakeholders are recognising the imperative to work together for the betterment of their “place” and to co-construct a better future shared by all with vulnerable groups such as potential and actual NEETs and the long-term under or unemployed sharing the benefits of economic growth.

## Site Descriptions

### Bristol and the West of England

#### Site partner and key stakeholders

The site partner for the Bristol site is the City of Bristol College, which is central to the delivery of skills in the City. Other institutional stakeholders include the local authority (represented both by an elected member and the Service Director for young people) the LEP, the social enterprise Learning Partnerships West and representatives of employers. The independent chair of the Mayor’s Commission also attended meetings.

#### Context

Bristol is the smallest and wealthiest of the eight English core cities outside London. It is also unusual in having a directly elected Mayor, though he only represents the city of Bristol, not the ‘Greater Bristol’ travel-to-work area covered by the West of England LEP. This asymmetry requires sensitive partnership working between the city and its three neighbouring unitary authorities, South Gloucestershire, Bath and NE Somerset, and North Somerset. Only one of the four universities (Bristol) and one of the four colleges (City of Bristol) for example are in the city itself.

The Greater Bristol area is economically strong with low levels of unemployment. Its current performance and ambitions for the future are built around a number of high-tech manufacturing clusters including the largest concentration of aerospace employers in the country (Airbus, Rolls Royce, BAE Systems), silicon chip design and manufacture, robotics and digital media (Aardman Animation). These industries are supported by world leading research centres at local universities and training provided by the four further education colleges. The LEP emphasises as key strengths of the area how well connected it is by motorway, rail, air and sea and the high proportion of graduates who choose to stay and work locally.

Despite its economic strength the sub region does contain pockets of unemployment and deprivation, particularly in some areas of the inner city. There continue to be young people who are NEET, many of whom have been in local authority care. A more widespread concern expressed by local stakeholders is a mismatch between the perceptions of young people and their parents about opportunities in the local labour market and the views of employers as to their future needs; the West of England LEP is one of three piloting a skills funding incentive scheme intended better to align supply and demand for SFA funded provision.

Schools in Bristol have been seen in the past as underperforming, a situation being addressed following the transfer of most secondary schools to two multi-academy trusts. The major FE provider (City of Bristol College) is now rapidly improving, though it had in the recent past been graded as inadequate by Ofsted. As in other areas it has proved difficult to secure the active engagement of SMEs, and particularly micro-businesses, with schools and colleges and to ensure that all young people have access to high quality impartial advice and guidance.

## Meeting local skills needs

There are two parallel initiatives that seek to address the skills agenda in Bristol. In the Greater Bristol area the LEP, working with the four local authorities, has produced a strategic plan including a skills strategy and secured funding to promote its priorities through a City Deal. Investment in the regeneration of an area of the inner city through the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone is one of a number of projects very relevant to the local skills agenda. In the city itself partnership working has been led by the Mayor through the establishment of a broadly based Education and Skills Commission charged with strengthening *'the link between sustainable employment opportunities in our highly-skilled, knowledge economy, and the education and training our young people receive, whether at school, college or university'*. There is clear synergy between the two approaches, for example in relation to the opportunities presented by the Enterprise Zone.

The recommendations of the Commission, together with other drivers such as a city wide 14-19 strategy, are being taken forward by a Learning City Partnership Board. The Board works through four 'Challenge Groups' of which the one focussed on 'Learning in and for work' is most directly engaged with the skills agenda. (The three others focus on lifelong learning, full time education in schools and colleges and provision for those at risk of being excluded.) The priority tasks for the 'in and for work' group are to develop an 'Engagement Hub' in the Enterprise Zone and a 'Passport for Employability' to help young people acquire and demonstrate the attributes employers look for. The City Council has consciously adopted a 'systems leadership' approach to its work with activities having been provided for chief executives of relevant organisations across the city alongside a particular focus on schools. A senior member of staff has been brought in on an interim basis to lead the latter work. Mobilising the necessary support for a wider view of leadership among institutional leaders, many of whom have difficult internal issues to address, has been challenging but not impossible.

Several stakeholders recognise that while Bristol has made great strides in developing a shared understanding of what needs to be done, it has not yet found an effective way of translating ambition into action. While implementation of the Learning City proposals is at an early stage and membership of the challenge groups has not been finalised, there is recognition of the need to find new and more effective ways of working together in order to make progress.

## North Warwickshire & Leicestershire

### Site partner and key stakeholders

The site partner was North Warwickshire & Hinckley College, a good quality local further education and skills training provider. The College is federated with South Leicestershire College, and the federation crosses a county border meaning that it operates within the area covered by two LEPs and two county councils. Other key players in the locality are Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Coventry University, a variety of local SMEs and larger national employers, and the Midlands Academy Trust.

### Context

The site exists in an area that is a mix of rural and urban and links two cities, Coventry and Leicester. The sub-region generally has a robust economy, but there is a significant degree of variation within the area. Unemployment is close to the national average, but there are pockets of more significant deprivation (both rural and inner city), and a number of emerging shortages. Communications links at the national level (road, air and rail) are excellent, but within the area public transport structures are weak to nonexistent, in particular those linking residential and commercial areas.



The area is a major venue for logistics and advanced manufacturing/engineering (AME), with the result that skills needs, from an employer's perspective, are highly polarised. There is a network of local centres of excellence in manufacturing, engineering and automotive disciplines in further and higher education, mirroring the concentration of high-tech industries. Other key employment centres are construction, health and social care, space and aerospace, and tourism and hospitality. The two LEPs which cover the area are active and strategic, and relationships between various post-16 education and training providers are generally strong.

There are a number of challenges facing local education and training providers which stem from the area's specific circumstances. First, there are a large number of current and future jobs available in AME, and many of the skills required for these roles are not currently present in any qualification. Secondly, there is also a deficit of young people with skills related to STEM subjects. Engagement between employers and training providers tends to be limited mainly to larger employers, who engage with providers either directly or via trade associations or LEPs, while SMEs and micro-businesses are not often part of the dialogue.

The configuration of local employment tends to form an hourglass-like structure, with large volumes of both high- and low-skill work, but with very little to provide a transition between them. Large amounts of low-skill work in logistics tends to reduce aspirations of young people to aim for high skills occupations in growth industries, and this is exacerbated by a relatively high degree of distance between the schools system and other parts of the "skills community", caused in part by a perception among employers and FE providers that some schools are not interested in engaging with local skills shortages. The current conception of IAG is very narrow, and there is a strong desire to broaden it in order to encompass more facets of "employability".

Finally, another complication is brought about by the hinterland-like nature of the area's profile – the existence of multiple LEPs and other networks and collaborations poses challenges in terms of both engagement and resources from the perspective of education providers.

### Meeting local skills needs

Both LEPs have separate City and Growth Deals in place, and the area is developing a hub-based strategy which aims to support skills and business growth and will underpin a series of local economic strategies in both LEPs and informing City Deal bids. A series of bi-lateral and multi-lateral initiatives and projects have been either proposed or initiated, including:

- Development of a STEM centre (under joint development by two FE colleges), consolidating existing provision and focused on apprenticeships
- A Skills Centre supporting disadvantaged young people gaining skills for employment
- An apprentice employment agency to reduce/remove some of the barriers to entry and recruitment young people experience
- Development of a new NWHC creative arts campus, supported by the district council
- Transport initiatives (supplied by a private company but brokered via council and college) to provide links between workplaces and residential areas

There have also been a number of examples of powerful, effective local leadership of education and training, such as:

- A Skills 4 Growth programme targeting skills needs of AME sector
- Engagement of NWHC personnel with LEPs (on board of one and skills delivery of the other)
- A 6-school multi-academy trust actively led by the College
- A Skills Training Centre (MIRA Enterprise Zone) involving a LEP, NWHC, and 2 universities
- Active engagement in the Skills Show and World Skills competitions



- Membership of governing bodies (particularly NWHC and SLC) embodying linkages between public and private sector agencies and actors

## Oxfordshire

### Site partner and key stakeholders

The site partner for Oxfordshire was City of Oxford College, which is part of the Activate Learning Group. Further support/collaboration was obtained by the Activate Learning Group from the Local Enterprise Partnership, Oxfordshire County Council (in particular the Skills Board), several local employers, and other individuals with relevant posts from within the College.

### Context

Oxfordshire's local economy is considered very successful – it has a rapidly changing high-tech environment, with particular successes in the Space, Creative and Digital industries. Automotive and complex construction are also strong industries in the area, and there is a large hospitality and tourism sector. The area has low unemployment and there are a number of major new retail developments in planning which are expected to create 6,500 new jobs. Capital funding is provided through a variety of avenues including City Growth deals. The Local Enterprise Partnership is active and engages in sophisticated strategic planning thanks to a well-established and cohesive local leadership architecture.

As a result, rather than unemployment, the principal issue for Oxfordshire is underemployment. Qualified graduates tend either to leave or to take up low level work. This is made more intense by the strong pull of the University and a process of over “academisation”. The general perception is that the focus of local schooling is too academic and doesn't do enough to help promote vocational routes to higher level skills. The area also has a plethora of training providers (over 400) as well as a large number of SMEs, many of which are niche operations, and as a result communications are a challenge. The area struggles to retain many SMEs both for the reasons mentioned above and also due to high costs. There is a general lack of awareness of apprenticeships and the role they can play in developing higher level skills, including degrees. This points to the need for better quality IAG and an effective means to create awareness of SME needs and vocational pathways so that people are better informed about the career pathways open to them. There are tensions between the funding regime, which tends to primarily follow student choice, and the skills needs and provision for them in the area, and the national FE funding framework exacerbates this due to a lack of accounting for local variations and requirements.

### Meeting local skills needs

Oxfordshire's approach to meeting skills needs in the area is multifaceted, and includes:

- Involving providers and employers on LEP and Oxfordshire Skills Boards in strategic local decision making and preparing and delivering the Strategic Economic Plan
- Using local Labour Market Information and analysis to forecast skills requirements
- Accessing City Growth Funds and using capital programme funding to establish new skills centres and upgrade provider facilities
- Agreeing and delivering the City Deal
- Controlling and targeting European Skills Funding monies
- Creating new IAG initiatives
- Brokering contacts between providers and employers
- Large increases in STEM focused apprenticeships (1,500)

Examples of local leadership of education and training in Oxfordshire include:

- Development by the Activate Learning Group of two University Technical Colleges and a STEM Centre
- Representation of employers on college governing bodies and advisory boards
- Representation of colleges in LEP and Oxford Skills Board and local business forums
- Dedicated analysis by OSB of local skills needs, communicated biannually
- Creation of an Apprenticeship Launch pad as a strategic approach to interest Y10 students, bringing together schools, the local authority and businesses around IAG
- Creating effective bilateral partnerships – for example City of Oxford College worked with employers to deliver the targets for apprenticeships, and collaborates with health and care organisations, for example and the police, on new course development
- Holding county-wide skills festivals aimed mainly at primary age children
- Requiring developers to have employment and skills plans to share with providers, schools and Jobcentres
- Developing long term career paths from basic apprenticeships through foundation degrees via a partnership with Oxford Brookes University
- Opportunities to Inspire – a program aimed at getting business people to go into schools to spread understanding about career paths and promote apprenticeships
- Addressing the (relatively minor) NEET issue by creating new traineeships with City Deal funding

## Walsall

### Site partner and key stakeholders

The site partner for Walsall was Walsall College, the largest provider of qualifications in the borough. The key stakeholders involved in the project include the LEP, Black Country Consortium and Walsall Council.

### Context

The Black Country prides itself on its strong manufacturing base, sophisticated supply chain and its location at the heart of the national transport network. Yet, based on a range of variables relating to business, people and place, it is the least resilient of 39 LEP areas in the country: it was, for example, particularly badly affected by the latest recession. The rate of economic growth is one of the lowest nationally. There are fewer businesses than can be expected for an area its size, with the largest gap being amongst micro-businesses employing fewer than ten staff. The area is not generating enough jobs and since the turn of the century there has been a loss of over sixteen thousand jobs.

Unsurprisingly, unemployment in the area is high and incomes are low. The rate of unemployment amongst young people (aged 16-24) is almost twice the national average.

There are areas (Walsall being one of them) where there are concentrations of deprivation due to generational unemployment and worklessness. In these instances barriers to employment and learning are often complex and multiple, for example ill health and disabilities, poor levels of education and skills, poor parenting, lack of aspirations, etc.

Generally, there are significantly more people with no qualifications and fewer people with higher qualifications than is average nationally. There are also many instances of skills mismatch: despite high levels of unemployment, employers report a lack of candidates with the relevant knowledge, qualifications and skills. Transport and building technologies are amongst the top priority 'transformational' sectors for the Black Country. Others include business services, health and social care, retail and leisure. Despite this challenging environment, the numbers of applications to and take up of apprenticeships run by the college are growing. The college also has oversight of a great deal of work based training managed through sub contracts with private training providers. As

stakeholders at the meeting remarked, “in many senses the College is seen as The Social Enterprise for Walsall”.

### Meeting local skills needs

There are a number of projects and initiatives in the area, all aiming to attract new business and strengthen existing ones, thus supporting economic regeneration. Walsall College’s new *Business and Sports Hub* is just one example of such work. The Hub will include a business incubation centre for start-up businesses, as well as recreational and leisure facilities. It forms part of Walsall Council’s long-term £400 million Gigaport initiative, which is creating business and office development along the ring road corridor. It also offers Walsall College apprentices the chance to develop their skills on a live brief which will deliver Walsall College’s vision to promote a healthy Walsall.

The local authorities and the LEP work with providers in the education and skills sector to address skills shortage in the area. For example, the *Black Country Skills Factory* is an employer-led education and training collaboration being coordinated by Black Country Consortium Ltd with funding via UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). The Skills Factory concept builds on the Black Country’s long tradition of engineering excellence and an existing cluster of High Value Manufacturing (HVM) businesses. This project aims to address the current shortfall in HVM skills in the Black Country for both large and small employers, increase the pipeline of suitably skilled staff to respond to the growth of the sector, establish the Skills Factory as a self-financing first point of contact for skills development.

In another instance, local partners were able to secure European funding to help address skills gaps in the area. Six of the region’s further education colleges, led by Walsall College, work collaboratively on delivering *the Skill Up* project. Small and medium employers are offered industry-specific courses and programmes targeting basic literacy and numeracy skills of their staff. Short units of training are being offered in a wide range of areas such as Business Administration, Health & Social Care, Customer Service, Engineering, ICT, Manufacturing and Building Technologies. Training is tailored to meet the specific needs of employers, and where possible delivered on site.

To help local people, particularly young people not in employment or training (NEET) to progress into employment, the local council in Walsall offers a range of programmes in partnership with local education and training providers. These include for example, traineeships, offering ‘extra help’ to those who wish to gain an apprenticeship or job through work preparation training, English and maths for those who need it, and a high quality work experience placement.

Raising (young) residents’ ambitions and aspirations is a key priority for all partners involved in education and training and economic regeneration in the area. It takes a variety of forms, yet, remains a challenge. In the context of generational unemployment and young people lacking positive role models in their families and clarity about possibilities open to them and routes towards them, high quality career information, advice and guidance (IAG) is particularly important. Despite some attempts of collaborative efforts in this area, local stakeholders acknowledge that IAG remains an area for development: too many young people make their career choices without information about e.g. local labour market and therefore their personal employment prospects.

### Metaphors for local leadership

Each group of stakeholders was asked to identify a metaphor for the way they understood the needs in their local area and the experience of leading local responses to them. A list of possibilities was offered but stakeholders were also encouraged to introduce their own. The purpose was to prepare the ground for creative thinking about local leadership and Design Thinking. But the results also provide a vivid window into the similarities and differences between the sites.

## Bristol

The suggestion emerging from the group discussion was a jazz ensemble, which has to balance out creativity and individual inclinations with the need for collective/collaborative efforts. The jazz element is particularly significant for Bristol in that there is both the impulse and the space for improvisation, but in order for it to work you have to be hyper aware of what is happening with the other components. There is also a need for trust in one another's skills, and a need to consider pace and how it changes and what the response to that is.

The group also noted that the jazz ensemble is more relevant than a classical orchestra because the orchestra is highly dependent on the conductor, who provides a single point of reference for all the performers, whereas jazz is more distributed. They felt that this provided a good reflection both of the diverse range of challenges they face in Bristol, and the diversity within the City itself.

## NWHC

There were several suggestions raised. One was a Roman legion – they are trying to develop their ethos, civilisation & way of working, and are vulnerable to being over-stretched and exposed to new civilisations/ideas that they're not necessarily organisationally capable of responding to effectively. They also have to pathfind, and they tend to take straight lines when sometimes they really ought to go around. They can find new territories which might present great opportunities but also present significant potential challenges. They are also directed by a very central, remote location that doesn't necessarily understand the circumstances they exist within but continue to issue orders.

The Jazz ensemble was also appealing because even though there is an underpinning coherence in what they do, everyone involved is afforded the ability to be an individual and express themselves, and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Silicon Valley also came up because of the geographic context, but they weren't able to find a way to marry the two concepts.

The idea of building and operating a theme park was another – this came from people who work closely with the student side of the college's operations, and they felt that, for example the emphasis on creating engaging and fun activities that draw people in mapped well.

One pair initially thought about the crew of the Beagle, but instead diverted slightly onto the team behind Voyager 1, and then evolved again into Nokia, trying to find a way to overcome the dominant leader through innovation.

## Oxfordshire

Oxford chose the Formula 1 metaphor because they thought that if you viewed it holistically, there were quite a number of resonances. In particular, they thought it was important to think not just about the racing drivers, or the cars, or the pit-stops, but also to think about the infrastructure required, the hospitality industry surrounding racing events, the supply chain of parts and engineers, and the road system to enable people to access the race track. The particular point they were making about Oxfordshire was that Oxford University is the equivalent of the star racing drivers and cars. It acts as a huge magnet and generates a great deal of IP, but isn't well integrated into the local economy.

They thought the catering staff represent the large numbers of low paid, low skill workers required to service the local economy, and that the road system needed to access events was a good analogy for the intense challenges they experience around housing due to extremely high house prices, which mean that it's very difficult for low paid employees and employers to remain in the locality economically. They thought that the specialist engineering and state-of-the-art car design was a good metaphor for the development of the local space industry, and they thought that the need to make a whole bigger than the sum of the parts they were experiencing around the local economy

required the same kind of holistic vision that it takes to understand Formula 1 as part of an ecosystem.

## Walsall

Walsall also chose the Formula 1 metaphor because they thought that the urgency of e.g. changing tyres during a pit-stop represents how it feels to support urgent and intense local needs. But they then thought that because Walsall is a very deprived community, the vehicle that they would be supporting would be more like a bus, i.e. something that needs to carry lots of people, moves much more slowly, and involves a community. In noticing that it involved a community, they also decided that there was a weakness in the metaphor because what they are trying to support are people, and they are trying to provide a service to large numbers of individuals with differing needs. So the clarity of purpose and precision of effort represented by servicing a Formula 1 race car simply won't help the Walsall community – something much more diffuse and responsive would be required.

## Metaplanning Outcomes

All of the stakeholder meetings included an activity that asked them to highlight issues that they thought would be crucial to success in local leadership of education and training. The precise focus varied from site to site but the process and purpose, framing the Challenge through a vision of success, remained constant. The outcomes help to add texture to the analysis of documentary and interview evidence that underpinned the creation of posters, their interpretation and the description of each site above. We have clustered them together in the report because we think they also combine to illustrate the ambition of local leadership and the creativity we saw about effective ways of facing the future.

## Bristol

There are a total of six categories of suggested outcomes which came out of the Bristol event. They are:

- Hub purposes
- Meeting employer needs
- Peer and Parental engagement
- School engagement
- Tackling NEETs, unemployment, and social justice
- Pathways & options

With regard to Hub purposes, suggestions included positive outcomes for young people, such as “there’s impartial advice and support available” and “if there’s a ‘no wrong door’ approach”, as well as suggestions for the Hub itself, such as “the Hub might need to do scaffolding, including tapping into existing City resources”, “[not just] something done to young people, role as a strategic conduit” and “businesses use the Hub to reach students”.

There were a number of suggestions relating to meeting employer needs, which covered several bases such as outcomes for employers (“employers do not receive unsolicited work experience requests”, “hi-tech businesses can recruit from local labour pool”) and young people (“numbers of young people applying for apprenticeships increase”, “young people are better prepared for the world of work opportunities in Bristol”). There was also one unusual suggestion revolving around realigning expectations of employers so that they are better able to recognise the value vulnerable young people can provide and see them as an asset rather than a problem.

In terms of peer and parental engagement, there was a consistent trend of proposals to build a more holistic model for communication – “supporting young people as role models who can widen

parents' thinking", "young people/employer/parents tell their friends/family to get in touch with the Engagement Hub", "connect with young people's peer and community (including extended family and peers)", "influence of parents and community". There was also an interesting conceptual point: "is engagement better than conversation?"

School engagement arose as something of a sub-theme of peer and parental engagement, and surfaced a total of three suggestions: "schools use the Hub to access employers", "space for educational establishments to engage effectively with SMEs in hi-tech/creative sectors", and "ALL Bristol schools engaged positively".

The category with the largest number of suggestions was dedicated to tackling NEETs, unemployment and social justice. The bulk of suggestions here were focused on outcomes for disadvantaged groups – "young people from disadvantaged communities are involved", "NEET % decreases", "numbers of young people applying to HE increases", "vulnerable young people find sustainable employment", and several others in a similar vein. Another trend was more closely linked to HOW to achieve this – "if every young person is able to access up to date, INDUSTRY RELEVANT careers advice", "scaffolding ENGAGEMENT by parents, SMEs and vulnerable young people", "work with sub-groups of SMEs eg aerospace – Rolls Royce's work its SME supply chain, asking SMEs to step up."

Finally, the pathways and options category includes suggestions around the mechanics of bringing Bristol's goals to fruition – "translation of language around jobs & employability – role for "Passport for Employability", "Hubs might [sic] a virtual as well as a physical space – eg Raspberry Pi clubs", "Schools & parents know what skills are required to work in hi-tech/creative industries". This group also reiterated sentiments about desirable outcomes for young people, such as "Bristol students secure high-level Bristol jobs".

## NWHC

There are five major themes emerging from the post its colleagues at North Warwickshire and Hinckley created, along with one more minor theme that is worth bearing in mind but is perhaps less directly relevant to this project. These themes are:

- Employers
- Collaboration
- Aspirations & quality
- Responsiveness to learner needs
- Employability
- System change (referring to creating conditions which limit the number of national initiatives being enacted, or enabling more time for educators to focus on change and improvement)

Suggestions related to employers include things like developing a communication strategy which engages with them, engaging with all sizes of employers and focusing on new programmes for micro-businesses in a sustainable fashion.

Regarding collaboration, the consistent pattern advocates mechanisms for making it easier and more prevalent, such as through valued and successful delivery partnerships, developing relationships between providers and the communities they serve, and increasing collaboration between various providers especially across the College sponsored Multi-Academy Trust schools.

The suggestions around aspirations and quality were fairly varied – they included suggestions to focus on imaginative and fun teaching which generates engagement and accelerates learning, and also thought about more holistic outcomes providers can achieve such as creating good citizens and



developing courage and curiosity. They also looked beyond learners to raising the aspirations of local community more generally.

In terms of responsiveness to learner needs, the post its were diverse and emphasised things like providing an offer that meets the needs of learners and enables students to progress, enabling students to understand better how they can develop, and celebrating/role-modelling outstanding achievement. Another interesting and creative suggestion was to have leadership performance indicators across all providers which require destination outcomes for learners.

Finally, suggestions relating to employability looked at bringing out different outcomes in young people, such as developing their mindset more towards “work” or “employment” values, or teaching them/helping them to learn social skills. There was also an important emphasis on the work currently starting involving all providers developing clear pathways for learners across schools and other providers (such as FE or HE).

## Oxfordshire

There were 6 clusters that emerged from the Oxfordshire meta-planning activity:

- Linking education and skills
- Working creatively across boundaries
- Inclusive modes of working
- Operational and technical
- Remembering to be aspirational
- Ambitious outcomes indicators

There were a large number of suggested outcomes related to linking education and skills. Specific suggestions included things like relating educational subjects to vocations, becoming better at spotting skills gaps, and delivering individually tailored programmes to every learner. An emerging sub-theme also emerged around information advice and guidance, with several different suggestions expressing a desire to expand, redefine and even revolutionise it.

The post its included a variety of suggestions for working creatively across boundaries, such as investigating said boundaries, generating a culture of creativity, effectiveness, innovation and impact, redefining what success looks like, and looking at behaviours over qualification.

There were only a few suggestions around inclusive modes of working – encouraging everyone to enjoy the journey, developing a mechanism to enthuse and engage schools and parents, and including parent education.

Similarly, operational and technical suggestions were: building intelligence and the capacity to use it, understanding the future better, and taking control of skills funding.

By contrast, “remembering to be aspirational” involved a large number of strikingly coherent purposes and outcomes relating to a local model of vocational pedagogy. These included asking for more, giving young people confidence and belief in the future, helping people to become lifelong learners, helping young people find what they love to do, giving people experience and skills alongside knowledge, and passing vocational knowledge to students.

“Outcomes indicators” was the category encompassing the largest number of suggestions. They covered two main areas, business outcomes (“create the next Apple/IBM etc”, “stop medium-sized businesses from leaving Oxfordshire”, “have successful entrepreneurs who create economic growth”), and collaboration (“have co-creation of what we need with both education and employers”, “crack the SME/education relationship”, “have Businesses involved in every bit of the Curriculum”).



## Walsall

Walsall participants' post its suggestions were grouped into four categories:

- Attracting Learners
- Local Collaboration
- IAG
- Meeting individual and employer needs

Suggested outcomes in the “Attracting Learners” category focused on things like marketing and PR (and its capacity to motivate, inspire and sustain a pipeline of provision), expanding demand for college places and in particular across generations, developing innovative techniques to address participation issues, and allocating more funding around delivery.

On the topic of Local Collaboration, suggestions included things like partnerships across families, role models, teachers and other influencers, improving information between partners, focusing on who is to be targeted, and better methods of working with employers. One post it sums up the general zeitgeist well by advocating a “whole-family approach”.

Around IAG, people wanted to see honest and open IAG in schools, provision of suitable training for both teachers and parents, reaffirmation of the positive impact of maths and English through IAG, and for IAG to support individuals effectively both not to become NEETs and to give realistic aspirations and ambitions.

Meeting the needs of individuals and employers meant to event participants things like considering the specific needs of individuals and the business community as opposed to the requirements of funding bodies, raising attainment in Maths and English (with the desired outcome of reducing the number of NEETs), treating people as unique individuals, and tracking and understanding school leaver destinations.

## Thematic Analysis

### Meeting economic needs

A number of different types of organisation play a significant role in identifying local economic needs and responding to them to set the skills agenda. Local Enterprise Partnerships set the growth strategy and develop skills strategies for their area, and influence skills capital and EU investment. Local authorities play a role in planning, infrastructure, child and adult services, and “place shaping” (i.e. promoting collaboration with the aim of creating prosperous communities). Colleges are (usually) the largest providers of Skills and Education Funding Agency-funded programmes and general 16-19 provision, and also work with employers to devise appropriate course content. Private providers typically deliver apprenticeships, other work-based programmes, and engagement services. Schools may be involved through Multi-Academy Trusts and employability initiatives, and HEIs typically deliver high-level skills and provide research on skills needs. A crucial question identified through this exploration of local leadership is in what ways do these players come together and for what purposes? Our summary of key theme starts to illustrate answers to this question.

### Key themes

The common issues surrounding identifying and responding to economic needs revolve around four key areas. First, all sites involved in this project cited specific skills gaps or shortages as being a key issue, specifically engineering/advanced manufacturing and STEM (or STEAM in Bristol where the emphasis on arts in urban regeneration calls for a focus on the arts as a core subject). Specific sites also cited other gaps which are common in the national discourse, such as retail, health, the creative

industries, and software development. Particularly interesting in Walsall was the extent to which thinking about the skills needs around health care extends to embedding modules within other programmes such as catering in care homes within catering programmes.

Second, these concerns about specific skills gaps are drivers for greater collaboration – they are frequently the primary goal for collaborative working across the sites, and the Partnership and Collaboration section of this report looks at this issue in more detail. The headline from this point, however, is that there are extensive overlaps between identifying and responding to economic needs and partnership and collaboration.

Third, there are concerns that young people are generally lacking in “work readiness” (which was usually broadened to encompass lifelong learning skills and dispositions and defined as employability. This is addressed in more detail elsewhere in this report). It was also clear that there are particular challenges in engaging with disadvantaged communities or groups in three of our four sites. Discussion of the role of the Engagement Hub in Bristol, for example, included clarifying the degree of scaffolding some vulnerable young people need in the early stages of work, alongside recognition of the assets such as nurturing releases. But there was awareness too that this, like many other aspects of developing employability dispositions and awareness, is particularly challenging for very small employers.

Fourth and finally, there is recognition of the need for all stakeholders to have a better understanding of the labour market, but also the difficulty of sustaining employer engagement in helping other stakeholders develop this, particularly for SMEs.

### Tensions and challenges

There are also some common tensions/challenges, which consistently emerge in moving from the status quo towards provision that responds proactively to economic needs. These include questions about how to:

- engage employers in education and training without overwhelming them with approaches from large numbers of organisations or individual pupils;
- balance a focus on support for newly emerging industries such as Aerospace in Oxford and growth sectors, with support for more established, often less glamorous large employers;
- deal with overlapping local contexts emerging from LA boundaries, LEPs, providers, and supply chains;
- develop joint approaches to provision in a competitive environment;
- respond to assessments of employer needs in the context of evidence of learner demand (and funding that is responsive to the latter), and finding ways of bridging the two through mechanisms for enticing learners towards areas prioritised by employers;
- deliver sector-specific skills whilst also promoting wider employability skills; and
- align courses/subject areas with occupations, and with priority industrial sectors.

### Shared targets across sites

There are several common targets or success criteria across the four sites’ responses to economic needs:

- One consistent set of targets is an increase in the numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships being offered and taken up, as well as in the numbers studying STEM subjects or preparing for STEM occupations.
- Another (unsurprisingly) common goal is to reduce the number of young people who are NEET, and the number of long-term unemployed; a goal or focus that was in some cases a driver for key actors becoming engaged as civic as well as economic players.

- An increase in the number of new, sustainable job opportunities available in the local area was also frequently laid out as an explicit target; and, pleasingly,
- a reduction in the proportion of the working age population who lack basic qualifications.

## Responses to challenges

Finally, but perhaps most crucially, there were some common responses to this challenging array of actors, topics, tensions and targets surrounding identifying and responding to economic needs:

- The first group of responses involve, increasing capacity in the local system through *investment* in new delivery centres, engagement hubs, apprenticeship agencies, and other intermediaries and or creating common spaces for interaction between groups.
- Second, sites frequently worked to *shape demand* through a variety of means, such as encouraging increased take up of STEM subjects in schools, and promoting apprenticeships to employers, young people, parents and schools.
- Another common tactic was to enact measures to *improve stakeholder understanding*, through both better data analysis and provision of better opportunities for dialogue between employers and training providers.
- Finally, all the demonstration sites sought to support *skills development in new ways*, such as through learning companies, tailored in-house provision, and promoting and participating in skills competitions.

## Partnerships & Collaboration

### Key players in partnerships

Partnership and collaboration were key to the leadership of education and training in all four sites. All the sites aspired to establish, improve and sustain effective collaborative partnerships across the locality. The key players tended to be LEPs, colleges, local authorities, training providers and (some) employers. Leaders across most sites see collaboration as crucial to an issue they saw as a key determinant of success: improving Information Advice and Guidance (IAG). Despite a commitment to collaboration, it was clear that aligning diaries and maintaining continuity of personnel at partnership meetings was a significant challenge.

Three are still grappling with mechanisms to bring about greater engagement with and of schools as part of efforts to expand IAG services and to connect them with the development of employability skills and dispositions. IAG is universally thought to be in need of a radical overhaul. The structural involvement of North Warwickshire and Hinckley College with schools through its sponsorship of six local academies (through a multi-academy trust), is seen as advantageous and enables players in both sectors to get some insight into the pressures bearing on the other. In this relationship there is a better chance of understanding the academic accountabilities in schools which militate against developing 'employability' skills. These relationships also help in brokering a substantive partnership to provide a common IAG service across all providers.

Collaboration with universities varied between sites. In some areas, some universities are key players and have an active role in encouraging partnership working. Other universities represent a challenge to collaboration because of their location or particular history or mode of operation.

There were also significant differences between the sites in their collaborative aspirations. In Walsall, for example, the driving force behind collaborative local initiatives was job creation, in a challenging economic environment. Whereas in Oxfordshire, collaboration cohered around the development of employability skills and dispositions and higher level skills, targeted at specific local industries and focussed on eliminating 'underemployment' in a successful economic environment. Partnerships operated in a number of different ways.

## Different modes of operation

Partnerships could be strategic, as in the collective analysis of local labour market information, or long term collaborative partnerships to achieve a strategic solution to a persistent local issue. One example of this is the Engagement Hub which is being set up in Bristol to facilitate more and better relationships between employers, training providers and learners.

In other instances partnerships are project-based – for example the development of a project to address employability as well as broader social issues in four generational unemployment estates in Walsall or around travel to work in North Warwickshire. Partnerships often operated bilaterally/multilaterally – for example between colleges and particular employers in areas such as curriculum development and the creation of new apprenticeships. City of Oxford College, for example, has worked closely with employers to deliver targeted numbers of new apprenticeships in line with SEP targets for Oxfordshire.

## Why collaborate?

There is a strong consensus across all sites on the need to align the local skills supply more effectively with employer need and to improve the work-readiness of young people. Although the LEPs and LAs have a responsibility to deliver, they can clearly only do this through working with others. In some sites leaders are beginning to successfully broker and build relationships between providers and employers - which is especially challenging where there are numerous and diverse SMEs. Collaboration across localities also enabled local stakeholders to maximise the impact of local initiatives and to provide coordinated support for vulnerable groups of young people and adults.

In some areas the specific rationale behind collaborative working is to overcome vested interests and to develop more cooperation between large providers and smaller, more flexible training companies and to find a way through fragmented and overlapping provision by brokering collaborative ways of working.

Some examples of collaborative partnerships across the sites include:

- *Opportunities to Inspire*, a collaboration between businesses, training providers and schools to promote vocational career paths and apprenticeships;
- work preparation programmes, including but not limited to those targeted at specific groups such as NEETs;
- college-employer partnerships through established local groups, including LEP membership, involvement in local authority skills analysis and planning, chambers of commerce, local business groupings etc;
- training providers working directly with local employers on course provision and curriculum design, and
- developing programmes and pathways involving different combinations of school, college, university and employers to help young people advance through employment and training to access higher level qualifications.

## Challenges for collaborative working

There are however, some significant challenges to effective collaborative working. At a strategic level, one issue was ensuring key stakeholder buy-in to the local Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and creating clarity about how different stakeholders could contribute meaningfully to the strategy. Another issue relates to the scope of collaborative working. Stakeholders could remain unaware of new or ongoing local initiatives, leading to duplication and inefficiency. This put the development of an effective communications infrastructure at the heart of successful partnership working. For some stakeholders, particularly colleges, the array of collaboration forums was not just bewildering, it represented a direct opportunity cost in the senior staff time involved. Though the colleges and

many SMEs recognised that trust in relationships had to be built up over a sustained period, they felt under increasing pressure to justify participation in real, short term and often direct financial terms. Finally, it would be naive to ignore the substantial competitive pressures – between sectors and between providers in the same sector – which covertly influenced the overt efforts at collaboration

## Vulnerable groups

### Target Groups

Young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) were consistently identified as a key focus of local leadership of learning and skills activities across all four sites, although there were significantly fewer in Oxfordshire. The precise nature of the way they were conceptualised and/or targeted, however, varied depending on details of the local context. For example, in Walsall NEETs are seen as just one manifestation of a larger issue around poverty and long-term, potentially inter-generational, unemployment and lack of employability (other aspects of which include poor parenting skills, poor educational attainment and skills, poor general health, and high levels of deprivation). Elsewhere, NEETs were more likely to be seen as a specific group to be addressed directly, and often one of a subset of larger groups of vulnerable people. In Bristol, for example, NEETs are part of a larger group of vulnerable people for whom support is being developed, including teenage mothers, people with disability and mental health issues and care leavers (previously looked-after people).

### Funding

What is consistently articulated as being necessary to provide appropriate, effective support for vulnerable groups such as NEETs is partnership working to provide co-ordinated support. However, the nature and operation of funding streams tend instead to militate against this, and instead encourage one-off projects and events led, generally, by the colleges, local authorities, or various not-for-profit organisations such as charities. There are however some examples of programmes which are delivered by colleges and other training providers (which can include third sector organisations) but initiated and/or led by local authorities or LEPs. Funding for such projects is generally secured through Growth or City Deals (this was true across all four sites), European or other similar grants, local authorities, and some other targeted national government funds.

### Local Strategies

A variety of local approaches are being employed to respond to NEETs and other vulnerable people. A number of programmes are being trialled to help get more people work-ready and into employment, such as work preparation training, English and Maths where needed, high quality work placements and mentoring. There have also been several investments, some of them involving sums in the millions, with the goal of “unlocking new jobs” often specifically targeting NEETs. Localities have also hosted events, drop-in sessions, employability hubs and “job shop” facilities to provide advice and guidance and raise aspirations – in some cases there have also been efforts to address negative stereotypes and fixed mindsets in employers to encourage them to see vulnerable or challenging young people as a potential asset instead of a burden. More creative approaches include using sport, music and other performing arts to either engage or re-engage young people, and in some cases also parents and ethnic and/or religious communities, e.g. through “Integrated case management” and “trusted adults” approaches.

While NEETs have generally been the primary focus, other specific vulnerable groups have also been the target of efforts made to help engage and support them in the workplace, following the principle that “learning is not just for young people”. However, a lack of funding for meeting the learning and training needs of the wider local community, especially those parts of it which are particularly deprived and/or under-resourced, remains a significant obstacle. One site, Walsall identified local SMEs with an intense loyalty to the locality as being likely to want and be in a position to focus on

meeting broader social needs in particular estates if the College, as social entrepreneur, could act as midwife. A LEP colleague at the cross site event also identified changes to rules around EU funding as being likely to be helpful when addressing the needs of very vulnerable communities to connect them with economic development required a more holistic response.

The final piece of the puzzle, one which leaders in the Demonstration Sites are still exploring, is the need to strike a balance between the “social justice” agenda (as it is known in one of the sites) and the need to support local economic growth and progress.

## Leadership and Governance

The focus of local leadership for skills in our demonstration sites has often centred on shorter-term, operational collaboration involving the executive and staff teams, more than governance *per se*. In general, local leadership appears to have been emerging through a series of bi-lateral, “bottom up” interactions between organisations, and it is often patchy. For example LEP governance varies in form and LEP leadership rarely touches governance of colleges and schools.

On the other hand, where statutory devolution of powers has occurred such as in Manchester under the “devo-Manc” model or in mayoral offices (such as the Mayor’s commission in Bristol), local area governance has been much more developed and has played a larger role in shaping approaches.

Ultimately the governance picture reflects patterns on the ground. Some local areas, such as Walsall, comprise a series of relatively isolated micro-localities so leaders are attempting to build a more connected infrastructure. In other areas, such as Oxfordshire, there is a stronger and more coherent existing ecosystem which affords governance the ability to add value on a more strategic basis. Here, interestingly, the development of a strategic approach to vocational pedagogy was evident across all stakeholder groups and seems to have played a role in mobilising and sustaining collaboration beyond organisational boundaries at a strategic level.

But in general and especially in the context of intense local competition and vulnerable communities, partnerships that are capable of holistic responses to economic needs challenge organisational boundaries and remit and so call for governance contributions. Where there was an explicit conduit for governance as was the case, for example, in the Elected Mayor’s Skills Commission in Bristol, the need/potential for governance to strengthen local strategic leadership across organisations for skills and innovation was recognised. Leadership of partnerships was seen as vital especially in the context of rapidly-shrinking public funding. For example stakeholder participants in project events recognised the potential of collaborative governance and across schools and colleges (for instance via employer members of both) to ‘undo blockages’ relating to IAG. But without an explicit governance starting point, developing partnerships at a purely executive level may constrain responses to economic needs to that possible within existing organisational structures.

## Models of leadership

We set out specifically to explore whether particular leadership models or methodologies had anything to offer the stakeholders – and specifically the colleges – in developing their local leadership role. Those three models called Futures Thinking (FT), Design Thinking (DT) and System Leadership (SL) and are compared in the table below.

### Futures thinking

Very early in the project we concluded that FT was not helpful or relevant in the context. FT is similar to an approach used by military and civil authorities to model disaster and other future scenarios. It is long range, time consuming and expensive and is designed to be particularly useful in situations when little is known about what is likely to unfold. Our early interviews with local stakeholder and



analysis of the policy and research literature suggested the match was not a close one. The costs and uncertainty of return on investment also suggested a poor fit with both the project parameters and the practice of the demonstration sites.

## System Leadership

SL engages participants in an expansive engagement with other stakeholders facing new challenges where the interests of one may not be the interests of the many. The project team expected this to be of interest and indeed it was in Bristol. In practice, we and our Demonstration Site partners concluded that SL had much to recommend it but that it is essentially holistic in nature and so ill suited to the timescale of our project except where it was underway already, as was the case in Bristol. There we were able to see explicit and tangible evidence of the benefits of sustained system leadership, for instance in the sophistication and layeredness of the analysis behind the Bristol poster and the scale and vision behind the plans for an Engagement Hub and the Passport for Employability. Nonetheless even in Bristol, now that the vision setting and analysis is complete key players from the Local Authority who are acting as convenors for the Mayor's Skills Commission thought that Design Thinking could be useful in "sharpening up thinking about how the big building blocks of the plan, like the Engagement Hub, should be enacted on the ground".

## Design thinking

There were several features of Design Thinking that were seen as attractive to Demonstration Sites. First the focus on nudging behaviours rather than establishing systems was thought particularly apt for addressing issues like expanding notions of IAG to encompass both mindsets and skills about the world of work and securing buy into a more independent, approach that starts much earlier than 14 and extends into choices made by employees as well as students. It was also thought as highly relevant to organising efforts around moral purpose and a vision for the future across competing stakeholders.

Second the fact that Design thinking has been used so extensively in education and training contexts and is well documented was interesting to stakeholders. Two quotes from users involved in Education and training were particularly interesting to several groups of stakeholders"

'The problem is trying to reengineer what exists, rather than stepping back and thinking about what is actually needed'

'... public services are too often designed for the "average" user, when in fact they are best designed if they take fullest account of "extreme users". Extreme users ... might be e.g. skilled computer hackers or digitally illiterate. Designing to the average produces average services. Designing with the extremes in mind produces inclusive services'

Third was the fact that the stages of Design Thinking are layered, structured and relatively self contained meant that it was possible to dip toes in the water and experiment with techniques and activities geared to the initial stage and still generate something of worth.

Engagement with the leadership methodologies was necessarily brief. It comprised:

- activities to recognise the different functions of the different methodologies and their purposes. Table 1 offers an overview of similarities and differences used in this process
- meta-planning activity to ensure mapping of stakeholders and framing of the challenge works backwards from a vision of success



- illustrations of activities for mapping stakeholders holistically to include service users and of the potential of surfacing stories that crystallise “the word on the street” to ensure leadership connects with the things that drive and motivate as well as rational analysis.

One college leader had recently participated in Design Thinking training and although its use was not currently understood by local stakeholders they expressed an interest in following this up. Other sites also expressed an interest in the potential of DT to support local leadership in future.

## The Three Leadership Models Compared

Function	Design thinking	Futures Thinking	System leadership
<b>Framing the challenge</b>	<b>Discovery</b> - reviewing the challenge, sharing information collaboratively	<b>asking the question;</b> developing an enquiry questions that define the scope re both timescale and participants	<b>values-driven</b> , reorientation of analysis of challenge for the system as a whole and individual leaders.
<b>Environmental scanning</b>	<b>Interpretation</b> – using data to generate meaningful design concepts, sharing “stories” and analysing them thematically to identify opportunities, and making them actionable.	<b>scanning the world; this</b> entails looking at what other discussion, thinking, and responses already exist to the problem articulated in the “asking the question” stage.	<b>Reviewing ground rules to map</b> activities and direction, what they are, how they operate , who shapes them- why hwo they are set up and monitored by leaders etc and the defining features or spheres of operation across which ground rules operate
<b>Generating ideas</b>	<b>“Ideation”</b> - generating ideas, via eg brainstorming, and collectively refining them into something practicable	<b>mapping possibilities;</b> - the bulk of the process, identifying ways to apply both internal and external thinking (from “scanning the world”) to develop responses	<b>Creating a climate of professional generosity and exchange,</b>
<b>Trialling and evaluating - preparing for implementation</b>	<b>Experimentation,</b> - creating prototypes, identifying and getting necessary feedback and capturing and integrating it to identify what else is needed and experimenting again	<b>asking the next question.</b> Bringing the stages together by taking the thinking from the previous step and applying it to the question that was originally asked. Considering what would/might/will happen next, and if that requires another response cycle.	<b>Providing a new skill-set for system leaders</b> in two key areas, namely vision, and capacity-building.
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Evolution</b> - developing the concept over time, via planning next steps, communicating the idea to people involved in realising it, and documenting stakeholders and compelling narratives .	<b>thinking it through</b> - connecting responses with current practice and ideas to the outcomes articulated through the process described above	<b>Leadership drive and modelling.</b> Enquiry oriented, organisation to organisation support

## Summative Event at RSA

First of all Simon Beer provided a brief account of the context the research project emerged from and where ETF saw it in the context of their wider work. Sir Geoff Hall introduced the project team and the way the work draws on work from deep within the sector's leading edge practices but also explores this in the context of evidence from other sectors.

Philippa Cordingley then introduced the themes set out in this report. She also encouraged colleagues present to see the meeting as a chance to inform the final report and to influence follow up work on localism through their questions. More specifically, she asked what the different stakeholders gathered together wanted to know more about, what they thought needed to be developed further and what issues might be missing from evidence and analysis in this short snapshot project that longer term work might helpfully explore further.

This was followed by brief presentations from the three Principals able to attend. The presentations briefly exemplified specific initiatives they had taken which are explored in the report:

- **Oxfordshire** – Sally Dicketts illustrated how Active Learning, the education and training group and the principles that underpin it, had provided the focus for engagement with the localism agenda in Oxfordshire. At the heart of Activate Learning lay the goal of transforming lives through learning in ways that provided explicit and powerful connections between providers of learning and business. Recognising the local economic community's role in the global economic community, the college also used its Activate Learning approach as a springboard for supporting learning on the global stage. It worked locally through connections with the LEP and local businesses, and internationally through partner colleges and employers. They saw the major lesson as being that partnerships (true partnerships, not mergers or acquisitions) were going to be essential to college's continuing survival, along with having commercial outlets which were run by and for students.
- **North Warwickshire & Hinckley** – Marion Plant echoed Active Learning's focus on success in learning. She illustrated how North Warwickshire and Hinckley College have reached out to the local school system to create a more coherent 14-19 offer through establishing a Multi Academy Trust at the same time as responding to the National Skills Agenda through, for example the World Skills Challenges. Fundamental to cross institutional local leadership had been bringing schools and colleges together to plan positive initiatives around the task of meeting the needs of the local economy. Key challenges the partnerships were seeking to address include a local, cultural lack of aspiration, high levels of NEETs, skills shortages, underperforming schools and poor school-to-college transition, and rising expenditure. Early progress in working with the LEP and employers to identify young people (from the age of 11 onwards) coherent pathways to maximise opportunities coupled with cost saving measures such as shared back office services to ensure funds were focused where they needed to be - on creating learning opportunities.
- **Bristol** – the focus in Bristol was less on the College as a driver for collaboration and more on the College's role within the wider local partnership which also included the LEP, the City Council and the City Mayor's office. The Mayor's goal was from the outset for Bristol to be a Learning City, and he cast himself as "chief learner", setting up commissions to look, in particular, at bringing together enterprise zones and the skills people would need to engage with them. From these commissions a number of key components of Bristol's drive to engage with localism have emerged, such as investment an Engagement Hub. A core mission had been to consider the collective resources available across organisations for meeting the needs of the community and the economy as a shared resource; separately no one institution had the funds to meet wide ranging local needs. Together this would be possible. As with the other two site partners, a key element for Bristol had been the formation of local partnerships (in Bristol's case the Learning

City Partnership) to enact their vision. These partnerships followed a distributed leadership model working through a leadership board to co-ordinate their work in accordance with the strategic vision.

After these presentations, the group split into table discussions, attempting to address some provocations provided by Matthew Taylor – “what do you see as the 3 most important things that have emerged from this project”, and “is there anything crucial missing?”

**Key points** emerging from the subsequent discussion included:

- Too many chiefs...– there was a proliferation of agencies like LEPs etc trying to steer the ship and commission work, while there were attempts to consolidate delivery agencies. There was a certain amount of consolidation that appeared to be inevitable, but just exactly how much was still up in the air. Particular pressure points included
- A lack of national vision about making improvements and the benefits of localism happen for young people across the board.
- In an environment where there continued to be both a proliferation of agencies and austerity, the ability of local leaders to consolidate, achieve economies of scale etc was variable. Where that capacity was strong progress was possible but where it was weak the offer risked being slow to respond, piecemeal and organised to reinforce the status quo.
- Timescales – rising above the here and now, short term outputs etc. and looking further ahead. There was (or seemed to be) a big deficit in collaborative, long-range thinking and planning. There should be a broader conversation about institutional leadership, and ways to make taking part in this form of leadership genuinely beneficial to everyone involved
- A Research question – what are the factors at play when institutional leaders decide or decide not to become involved in localism/local leadership?
- How much effort do you need to put in to localism before you start having a genuine impact?
- What is the right balance between meeting the requirements of funding schemes and national policy agendas and local needs?
- What is a locality? It is only recently that the national agenda has addressed local needs. At the same time many government policies have increased fragmentation – through for example the proliferation of academies in trusts which have no local connections.
- Is local leadership about a charismatic/dynamic leader bringing their organisation into a bigger mix? Or is it more about a group of people/organisations all moving in roughly the same direction?
- We have examples of local leaders using a strong vision to bring their own organisation’s resources to bear effectively on addressing local education and training needs through partnerships thus forming a hinge around which really effective and positive local action can move. Walsall College for example, was spontaneously identified by other local stakeholders as being **the** social enterprise for meeting the needs of the economic community when viewed through the lens of what Design Thinking might add to local leadership – because of its fleetness of foot and its efficient business like delivery coupled with its social mission. It was on this basis that the stakeholders were able to identify local SMEs, very loyal to the community as likely contributors to a more holistic approach to engaging vulnerable communities in an area with the economy through education and training. Research opportunity- in the context of the changes reflected in this work there is a need to explore the incentives and inhibitors for local authorities to provide a real, holistic place leadership role in relation to education and training.
- Another key aspect of local leadership is getting things done effectively – it’s not enough to focus efforts on developing harmonious relationship and shared vision, the model for leadership, has to be able to design, commission and oversee projects, plans rapidly and effectively - as the Walsall example shows.

- A big obstacle to effective collaborative patterns of working involving colleges (and, for that matter, any other organisation with roots in a locality and constrained financial resources) is confidence in the security of one's own existence. FE Colleges individually and collectively face significant financial and policy based existential challenges. Broader local leadership can help with this and being part of that can be a defence against the risks. But it takes a lot of confidence to cede even a small element of authority or autonomy under those circumstances.

Matthew then offered challenges and reflections to help shape further thinking and development:

- If you don't have a credible strategy as a provider and business you can't really put yourself forward as an effective local leader. The question is, should collaboration in local leadership be part of that credible strategy?
- One part of the place-shaping agenda is highlighted by the upcoming general election: electoral campaigns are battles over which questions are asked and explored in the debate. So an important question for locality leadership may well be "What is the question that institutions in a locality want to answer together"?
- One of the big challenges for all local economies is how they can create an ecology of innovation that connects those who are driving innovation with those who are tasked with actually putting those innovations in place.

Sir Geoff Hall's concluding reflections explored whether there was a missing link in the thinking about localism, relating to what happens when you add the other nations of the UK into the mix. They were smaller countries so the nature and dynamic of localism offers a potentially fruitful contrast. He pondered too on the extent to which the FE system in England was experiencing greater turbulence than other sectors/contributors to local leadership. In some ways the project had highlighted what four experienced and talented FE leaders were doing to respond to and get in front of this turbulence. These truly were demonstration sites rather than representative samples so conclusions must be tentative and cautious; they took the form of questions rather than answers But they did seem to open up a valuable seam of enquiry and illustration of what was possible..

## Methods and Process

The project team worked with colleges to

1. Identify local stakeholders/ key documents and issues
2. Recruit key stakeholders to participate with appropriate college personnel in:
  - a. phone interviews to enable efficient local scoping and/or
  - b. small start up seminar,
  - c. a bigger, second workshop involving a wider group of local stakeholders
  - d. a cross-site event involving 1-3 stakeholders from across the 4 sites coming together to compare local experiences and identify follow-up actions and to enable triangulation of our interpretation of the evidence based co construction; and
  - e. participation in a summative event at RSA and facilitated by them

Overall, the project involved seventeen interviews, between 10-15 stakeholders per site and face to face co-construction with over forty stakeholders. In addition a review of key policy documents, commission reports and other relevant "grey" literature was carried out to establish the contours of the localism agenda and to ensure that the lines of our inquiry were consistent with the policy context. Twenty-eight documents were included in the review, a summary of which can be found at Appendix A.

Site leaders in the project team worked initially with demonstration site leaders to establish:

- the key stakeholders who define and drive education and training in the locality – eg providers, employers, councillors/officers, LEP, third sector etc
- the extent of the local area and key landscape features
- key documents that are driving the partnership(s) and/or skills development

Following an analysis of the key strategic documents for each site (eg college strategic plan, SEP, Growth Deals, Local skills analyses etc) site leads interviewed a range of key stakeholders, including senior college leaders, LEP board members and CEO, key local authority players, local employers. Amongst a range of other things, interviewees responded to questions about:

- their roles in terms of leading local learning
- key organisations with which they worked on this
- the main vehicles/mechanisms/avenues for working collaboratively
- challenges to collaboration and partnership working
- short and long term aspirations and plans
- key influences on their selection of priorities for these
- successes and challenges

Based on the contributions from stakeholders and key documents, a ‘poster’ was constructed for each site as the basis for co-construction at the events. The poster described the local skills landscape as per the illustration below. (See Appendix A for these detailed site landscapes)

Who?	The key players in leading local learning
What?	What they have agreed to do/are doing – e.g. developing apprenticeship schemes, new STEM centres, using local labour market data
How?	Forms and ways stakeholders 1) work together, 2) identify local needs and challenges and 3) examples of how they respond to these
Why?	Needs that sites are focussed on and the underpinning models/logic behind the ‘how’

Stakeholders:

- were introduced to leadership methodology as a potential method of increasing the power and effectiveness of the local offer
- used the posters of their local skills landscape to contextualise the leadership of local learning both on individual sites and on a cross site basis, where emerging cross site trends and patterns were discernible
- were able to compare thinking and plans with other college leaders and stakeholder groups in non contiguous/ competing areas

In addition to the project’s contribution to the goals outlined in the introduction, the project deliverables for the Sector include:

- An illustration of the contributions of sector leaders to the local leadership agenda
- A cross site analysis of key patterns in issues being addressed, strengths and challenges
- A preliminary analysis of the fit between sector practices and key leadership methodologies
- An opportunity to respond to and test the findings through a national summative conference at RSA

## Conclusions

This was a very short project conducted at lightening pace amongst a small number of locales chosen because they seemed to offer:

- distinctively different responses to the localism agenda
- a developed approach (or approaches) to the local leadership of education, training and skills or, at least, an active engagement with it

We did not look for or imagine we would find some kind of common model or but wondered whether there might be some pointers towards common features. We, and the Foundation, were striking up a conversation in what we envisaged would be a longer journey. This section flags up some of the themes which the evidence to date suggests that journey might cover.

## Models of leadership

We set out to explore whether particular leadership models or methodologies had anything to offer the stakeholders – and specifically the colleges – in developing their local leadership role. Three models are described in more detail above.

Of these three, Futures Thinking seemed to offer the least to the sector. It was too long range, time consuming and expensive, none of which features commended it in the context of this project

System Leadership had relevance and had indeed been used extensively in one of the sites prior to the start of the project. It did commend itself to some other sites but was beyond reach in the context of the particular constraints of this project. It could well be valuable in different circumstances and further testing of it could be worthwhile

Design Thinking had the best fit with the context and objectives of our stakeholders. Indeed a senior manager in one college had recently undertaken an intensive two day course in Design Thinking and was considering its use in a range of contexts. But within this project there was time only to try it on for size. Some more work – with these Sites and elsewhere – could capture and support the tailoring of the model to fit more closely the needs of the sectors' leaders. In particular, our experience suggests that whilst some of the tools in the 'toolkit' of the Design Thinking are of value, its configuration as a detailed sequence of activities needs streamlining for use across groups of senior leaders whose time together is precious and scarce and in a sector where financial constraints are acute.

Finally, we saw, in our very brief project, glimpses of sector leaders already using some aspects of both System Leadership and Design Thinking instinctively and using each appropriately at different stages along a strategic journey. This suggests that further mapping of existing Sector Leadership approaches against the main functions of these methodologies would be useful to other colleagues and stakeholders.

## Employability, Information, Advice and Guidance

One of the few topics to feature strongly across all four of our locales was Information, Advice and Guidance. There was widespread recognition of the inadequacies of the local information base for the traditional 'careers guidance' aspect of IAG. Several stakeholder representatives questioned the value to employers of the 'natural' learning path of young people from school to sixth form and on to university and thought (more accurately, hoped) that a – now largely non-existent - independent IAG service would disrupt this. The FE providers felt this issue even more strongly and there were some examples of efforts to create IAG delivery organisations operating 'independently' of providers. But, though this was often the starting point, in all our stakeholder meetings, thinking moved rapidly into a broader more expansive conception of IAG to encompass dispositions as well as skills, especially soft skills, and work readiness. It was widely recognised that young people could only really acquire work skills in a workplace and stakeholders of all stripes recognised the tendency for employers to bemoan a lack of work readiness without recognising and fulfilling their role in enabling it. The other side of this coin for employers (particularly SMEs and micro-businesses) was



the problem of being overloaded with requests from young people and education providers for work experience opportunities. There was considerable creativity in thinking about how to address this in stakeholder discussions, especially in Bristol and Oxford

This did not mean that schools had no role and many stakeholders looked to schools, including primary schools to support the development of dispositions such as resilience and self-efficacy. In couple of cases, (North Warwickshire and Oxford), FE providers were using their structural links with schools to develop alternative pathways with different mixes of conventional academic and vocational components taught in either school or college or both.

What is needed next is research which:

- Tracks the extent to which the aspirations/ambitions held by those shaping and leading the sector are achievable, and how this achievement can be supported (i.e. what can be done and how)
- Considers how governors (of both colleges and schools) could and or do work together, either in formal or informal alliances or through other modes of partnership, to help create more complete information and identify opportunities for longer-term development of work-oriented skills and dispositions
- Explores specifically whether collaborative development of pathways is effective, how it can be so, and what the important constituent elements of this collaboration are (for instance, is there a single group whose inclusion or exclusion is essential to success?)

## Partnerships

The partnerships we worked with were driven variously by a single leadership figure with a coherent, place based civic agenda to which many local players were committed, a shared and ambitious model of vocational learning, and a series of strategic strands of activity and/or projects organised around specific locales. The snapshot provided by this very brief study of collaborative local leadership spanning organisational boundaries raises, but cannot answer, questions about how building strategic alliances translates into practice on the ground, or how can-do projects on the ground affect and are affected by strategic partnerships, and these seem likely to us to be productive avenues of further enquiry through more long-lens investigation/research.

It also seems to us that the movement between strategy and practice across organisational boundaries is a crucial one and one where both the leadership methodologies and R&D techniques built into this project may have something to offer on a more sustained basis. For example, the attention to building and involving an “audience” and collecting and working through the “word on the street” narratives of all key stakeholders embedded within design thinking appears to us to offer something powerful to the challenging task of translating the ambitious vision for an expanded notion of IAG into reality.

## Governance

We saw many examples of collaboration across our four sites which, at executive level, were often focussed on deals around defined projects. Governors (of colleges and schools) are looking inward more and focussing on institutional solvency and sustainability in the context of funding reductions and increasing competition, plus high levels of scrutiny from Ofsted; all of which impacts on reputation and funding. The history of instability in government-funded local area bodies with short life spans discourages investment by other stakeholders of both time and capacity because it generates scepticism about the longevity, effectiveness and consistency of mission of new structures such as TECs, local LSCs, RDAs and LEPs.

We saw, in our four locales, various attempts to grapple with the larger problem of the *governance* of the local system without, by and large, the coherent engagement of *governors*. And the demands



of the new localism involve permeability across existing organisational boundaries or remaking them altogether to open up new possibilities. We saw several examples of college governors being members of local networks which cut across institutional boundaries (e.g. industry representatives being on both college and school governing bodies *and* part of a local trade association) but these linkages were not often exploited.

Gaps in local leadership which call for governance contributions include:

- creating a shared vision
- mapping the ecosystem
- learning how the local collaborative architecture can work to best effect (and the role of governance within it)
- relationship-building
- analysis
- innovation and action, and
- reflection and evaluation of impact.

Governors operate within different, sometimes less constraining, organisational contexts than executive leaders (though they might be bounded by other communities of interest such as a particular industry). Individually, they can reach across those boundaries and foster collaborative linkages. Collectively they represent a strategic resource in a locale which is underutilised.

Communities of practice are emerging as a response to gaps at executive level, and this project suggests that research and development to explore the potential of communities of practice in a governance context would be helpful too. The expertise needed in creating strategic collaboration and building its effectiveness and impact involves a range of specific leadership and governance expertise. Current leadership programmes tend to focus on leading 'an institution' rather than leadership of an ecosystem.

However, the good news is that strategic governance may only need to create conditions where stakeholders give, as stakeholders in Walsall put it "a few extra inches in order to bring about miles of benefit for the locality".

### Trust, confidence and national agendas

Finally, we noted some interesting differences between the tone and content of the formal documentation and the tone and content of the discussions between stakeholders at our various local meetings. The documentation by and large reflected and responded to national government policy drivers, priorities, structures and processes. The language and organisation of those responses was shaped by the national agenda - to which, of course, funding is attached. This 'public' discourse was formalised, protective of institutional or sectoral interests and 'ownership' by the stakeholders was rarely communicated in compelling ways

In discussion round a table, however, the stakeholders raised and explored genuinely local strategic aspirations especially those developed from a strong shared vision of success and in the context of creativity about core organisational leadership. Elements of the (Design Thinking) methodologies gave participants some tools and processes through which real local concerns and shared responses to them could emerge and also be communicated to others.

The parallel Foundation-funded project (Holex/157 Group) noted in their second policy seminar the significant contribution made to local collaboration of establishing relationships of trust and confidence over time. The role of a 'reservoir of relationships' was similarly noted in our project. On the evidence of this short project, some Design Thinking tools offer an effective vehicle through which sustainability in those relationships can be strengthened.

## Appendix A - Summary of Policy Literature

### Introduction

Between 2011 and 2015 a large number of reports, reviews, analyses and policy statements focussing on localism in skills development were produced by a range of organisations, including BIS, the RSA, various national commissions, UCKES, 157 group, Ofsted, LSIS etc. (See Appendix for the full list used here.)

BIS has stated that its five key outcomes for publicly funded skills provision are:

- the skills that employers and higher education institutions need and value
- the knowledge and skills individuals need to: gain employment; change employment; progress in work; and progress to higher levels of education and training
- the strategically important skills the nation needs
- value for money for: businesses; individuals; the state
- positive community and social outcomes.

BIS action priorities in the 2014 workforce strategy included greater engagement with business and improving the quality of leadership, including system leadership. Although there are nods in the direction of improving employability and life chances for NEETs and other vulnerable groups, the grey literature in the past five years has consistently highlighted a very significant shift away from the widening participation agenda and towards meeting national and local economic needs.

Key indicators of this shift are included here under the “dual mandate” (BIS) themes of:

- Understanding and meeting the needs of the local economy
- Understanding and meeting the needs of vulnerable groups

and two key processes involved in this:

- Governance
- Partnership and Collaboration

By far the most attention in the literature reviewed to date has been paid to meeting skill needs.

### Understanding and meeting the needs of the local economy

Increasingly, the funding approach, including City Deals, Local Growth Funds and European funding streams aims to put LEPs and employers firmly in the driving seat, giving them direct powers over strategy, funding, delivery, and future developments. Devolved funding and localism is also supported by all parliamentary parties

The literature is peppered with statements such as: *businesses benefit from solutions through tailor-made provision aimed specifically at their needs; a curriculum designed and developed to fit what they want; flexibility in terms of time, place, support with funding and the bringing together of different funding streams.* (UCKES, Gazelle, 157 Group)

*Now more than ever the sector’s economic role is critical. But its economic potential can no longer be fulfilled through a top-down, delivery mindset. For 2020, we must see a culture shift towards networked local growth where the sector co-creates value, future jobs and economic growth through better relationships across the spectrum from learners to employers, to public authorities and civil society.* (RSA)

RSA goes on to recommend the establishment of area-based curricula – more in tune with the needs of local enterprise.

The 2015 Cross Party Manifesto for Skills and Employment called for employers to make a commitment to placing engagement in education and training at the top of their organisational agendas and for government to introduce fiscal incentives for employers to invest in college infrastructure and facilities. The UKCES employer survey showed that only 13% of the money employers spend on skills development goes to colleges and universities.

Amongst other things, the cross party manifesto called on Ofsted to develop new collaborative performance measures, and consider whether providers should only be judged ‘outstanding’ if they have supported improvement in other providers, or at a system level. Members said that league tables should give a greater focus to destination data of progress, including employment and value added and local and regional structures should have a greater role in oversight and accountability of skills policy and development.

Some of the challenges in meeting local skills needs were identified by the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities as:

- reconciling the demands of employers with the needs of individuals
- balancing minimum contract levels with the drive to increase competition by encouraging new entrants to the market
- lack of clarity and consistency in local skills planning

They recommended *more flexibility for colleges to shift funding across ages, location and types of learner to be able to respond to communities in a cost effective way.*

The Ofsted Chief Inspector’s report for 2014 concluded that *providers and employers are not doing enough to ensure that training through apprenticeships match local and national skills shortages.* The most popular apprenticeships (75%) were in the service-related industries of business, administration and law; health, public services and care; and retail and commercial enterprise, but the greatest skills shortages identified by employers were not in these areas.

The Skills Commission concluded that existing government strategies were hindering, rather than helping the creation of highly skilled individuals that are ready to enter the flexible 21st century economy. Their analysis identifies four distinct trends the Commission argues have developed into “significant barriers to a successful skills policy” capable of providing a labour market skilled to meet the needs of both individuals and employers across the UK economy. These four strategic alerts are:

- Uncertainty around the responsibility for training in an increasingly flexible labour market.
- Declining social mobility owing to a reduction in the alignment of skills provision to work.
- Fragmentation in the system making it difficult for employers to engage.
- Alarming policy dissonance between different central Government departments

*Siloed thinking from government departments, a lack of engagement between major components of the system such as schools, colleges and employers, and a narrow political focus on some aspects of vocational provision or particular policy levers is hampering our success.* They concluded that “a genuinely collaborative approach” is needed, based on a shared understanding of the problems to be solved, the potential solutions and the business benefits of working together.

UKCES pointed out that England has very little higher level technical provision below degree level compared to international competitors and suggested that further education colleges are well placed to fill the gap through developing locally relevant specialisms that meet the needs of industry, for example, Blackpool and The Fylde’s school of Maritime Studies – and via closer

employer engagement in the design and delivery of higher level vocational qualifications – resisting the temptation to fit them into academic structures. Their analyses also suggested that schools should have links with local businesses and use those links to inform and inspire young people about the breadth of career opportunities available.

Only 10 per cent of UK employers actually employed apprentices (UCKES Nov 2014.) The problem according to UCKES is that successive governments have managed apprenticeships as programmes run by training providers and regulated by government – not as a form of employment and a means by which means by which businesses recruit and develop their talent pipeline.

In their response to the Heseltine review, BIS summarised key actions as:

- decentralisation that will give business-led LEPs the power to make the choices that are right for their local economies.
- Single Local Growth Fund to generate growth;
- LEPs to develop new strategic multi-year plans for local growth
- EU Structural and Investment Funds in England and aligning priorities on the basis of the plans led by LEPs.

Government's goal, according to BIS, is to introduce greater contestability for public resources by shifting to a funding system that is driven by employers and learners rather than the traditional approach to funding where Government essentially acted as a proxy purchaser, paying grant directly to providers. They suggest that *it is now up to FE colleges to provide their own certainty by developing strong and forward looking relationships with employers, individuals and other local players.*

## Vulnerable Groups

There was considerably less emphasis in the literature on the widening participation agenda, although the 2015 BIS "Dual Mandate" consultation paper does align the needs of vulnerable groups with those of the economy. Most commentators believe that providers and regulators have to reconcile minimum performance levels with widening participation objectives, and, crucially, linked to the world of work rather than qualifications *per se*. The fundamental purpose of excellent vocational teaching and learning – *it has a clear line of sight to work. Vocational learners must be able to see why they are learning what they are learning in connection to longer-term work goals.* (CAVTL review 2013)

Overall, policy involves placing a greater emphasis on longer-term outcomes of education – progression to higher education and employment – by publishing destination measures and publishing data to hold local authorities to account on reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

## Governance

Governance in the local context was seen as an important factor in knitting local strategies and partnerships together. The RSA (Devo Met 2015) identified capacity and collaboration as a key ingredient in the devolution agenda, and governance will clearly play a key role in their development. There needs to be a shift in accountability from Big Government to stakeholders and to new models of governance and accountability, based on collaboration, co-operation and facilitation that *extend the role of college leaders into their communities and jointly identify key success indicators with stakeholders.* (Colleges in their Communities Report 2011.) BIS also called for appropriate accountability structures at local and national levels to be in place to deliver this step change [to devolved skills planning and delivery] and *it will be up to local areas to determine which governance structure is right for them.*

IfL suggested that freedom to innovate (as distinct from freedom from regulation) focuses on democratic powers to act collectively to improve outcomes locally and regionally. It involves going beyond the search for institutional autonomy and its attendant market logic and, instead, requires local practitioners, policy actors and community groups to be given the powers to work effectively with a wide range of inter-connected local and regional factors. And in its guidance to college to college governors, AoC made it clear that accountability extended beyond the institution. They suggested that questions which governing bodies may wish to consider included whether they had sufficient access to up-to-date local economic and social data and the scope for direct briefing from key external stakeholders. Where governors are linked to particular curriculum areas, they should have means of ensuring they are informed about sectoral developments.

*Local government cross-sectoral strategic planning agreements can be seen as the beginnings of a movement towards the idea of 'freedom to'. 'Freedom to' not only represents a more ambitious stance towards governance than 'freedom from': it can be considered as part of a different political paradigm, aiming to empower those closest to learners and their communities.(IfL)*

## Partnership and Collaboration

Partnership and collaboration at local level was a consistent theme of the literature. But Ofsted (2014) found that local collaboration was often “insufficient to ensure that vocational training is planned to help reduce skills shortages and equip learners with the skills employers are looking for”. Ofsted also emphasized that collaboration and partnership are central to local responsiveness although they acknowledged that partnerships with SMEs remain a challenge.

There was a consistent theme in the literature that curricula and teaching content can best respond to needs if their design is carried out in a genuinely collaborative fashion – not an “impractical” supply and demand model. There was also a suggestion that real joint planning might lead to partners ‘sacrificing’ or giving up areas of provision and resources. Ofsted, for example, called for coordination of provision between schools, GFE and sixth form colleges and other providers in a local area so that they collectively supplied a broad and balanced offer at 16 that reflected the employment offer in that region.

In its 2013 report on Leading Partnerships with Employers, the 157 Group suggested that providers need to add a third dimension of expertise to their professional skills in the new devolved environment: Is it time, they ask “to expand the concept of dual professionalism, beyond the twin tracks of vocational and teaching expertise? Is there a need for a third layer that acknowledges and supports the key roles played by professional educators in driving the business of education and learning forward and through expertise in partnership working?”

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