Leading Learning Organisations: An Analysis of Leadership in the Further Education and Skills Sector

A report prepared for the Learning and Skills Improvement Service
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Introduction

There can be no doubt that the further education and skills sector is at a crossroads. It has been subjected to unprecedented scrutiny and is on the cusp of revolutionary change. In this context, leaders across our sector need to ask: Are we equipped to lead in this new era?

For many years the sector has danced to someone else’s tune. Now we are expected to be composer, conductor and musician. The sector is, at last, in charge of its own destiny – this presents huge opportunity but represents significant challenge. As many have pointed out the sector is no longer ‘done to’ – our future is in our hands and we must grasp it with both.

It is timely then for us to look at how far we have come and to examine the distance still to travel. Strong and effective leadership, now more than ever, will be at the heart of our success. A model of leadership which relies so heavily on the talent at the top will not deliver the step-change necessary to enable us to grasp the opportunities presented to us. Our new era demands leadership at every level within our organisations and in every corner of our sector.

The quality of our core business has rightly been placed in the spotlight. Leadership of learning, of learners and of learning outcomes, should be the core focus at all levels of our organisations. However let us not forget that we must also lead our localities, our communities and respond to a system where the purchasing power now lies within the individual. Our ability to convince others of our worth, to lead not only the reputation of our own organisations but the reputation of the sector as a whole is a critical focus for this new era.

The complexity and scale of the leadership task ahead of us is without question – I passionately believe that we have the talent, the ambition and the drive necessary to take charge of our destiny and ensure that our sector takes its rightful place as the engine room of economic growth and individual prosperity.

This document takes stock of the progress we have made. It comes at a time when LSIS is nearing the end of its guardianship of sector development. LSIS leaves a huge legacy and some of that legacy is captured here. There is still much to do. This paper challenges the Education and Training Foundation to take up the mantle and ensure that we achieve the courageous, collective leadership essential for our new era.

Asha Khemka OBE
Principal and Chief Executive
West Nottinghamshire College Group
Preface

I was delighted when I was asked by the trustees of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service to produce this report. The opportunity to discuss such a vital issue as leadership in this vibrant and dynamic sector with 25 respected interviewees was both enjoyable and most importantly informative, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all for taking the time to contribute in this way.

In preparing the report I have endeavoured to portray an accurate picture of the collective views, opinions and thoughts of all the contributors in this important area, but any inaccuracies or errors contained herein remain solely the author’s.

While these are clearly times of significant change for those tasked with leading the sector and its constituent parts, what is clear from the research involved in preparing this report, is that there is a will and determination to ensure the sector plays a full and integral role in supporting the ambitions of learners, employers and government in the years ahead.

Leadership at all levels within genuine learning organisations is essential if the sector is to achieve this ambition.

Craig Crowther
Author, and Project Director
LSIS Leadership Exchange Project

Note
All documents referenced in the report, plus background reading, are included in the reference section, with links where available.
Chapter 1 – Context

“The route to a uniformly world-class system is to unlock the potential that exists across the sector, by freeing and equipping providers to work effectively with well-informed and committed communities, and to provide an outstanding service to learners and employers.”

(Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills, BIS, 2013)

Leaders in the FE and skills sector have become adept at reacting to change over an eventful decade. Central government has driven reform and expansion, using the sector as one of the principal levers it can pull in order to raise the UK skills’ levels. Since 2010 however, central government has been loosening its grip on the levers, promising providers more freedom to make more of their own decisions (RSA, 2011). With greater uncertainty, reduced central direction and decreasing government funding, this adeptness to respond quickly and effectively will struggle to deliver the organisations or outcomes needed for today’s and tomorrow’s learners.

The 157 Group of colleges has recently undertaken a piece of work known as ‘Delphi’ and have reported on this in a recent publication, Further Education in 2020: Making the System Work. In her introduction to this report, Lynne Sedgmore, Chief Executive of the 157 Group, succinctly summarises the situation:

“For so long ‘done to’, it is taking time for many in further education and skills to accept that freedom and flexibility are there for the taking; a real opportunity to do new things and to do today’s things differently… To do things differently you have to think differently.”

In a speech given by Matthew Hancock, Minister for Skills in January 2013, he outlined his vision for the sector, and what was required to make it a reality:

“Strong and effective leadership is essential if further education is to take its proper place as an engine for growth in local areas; delivering high quality teaching and learning which meets local needs.”

Leadership in further education has changed over the past 20 years from local authority managed to one of institutional autonomy, reflecting shifts in state policy and ideology (Ball, 2009). Randle and Brandy (1997) observed that as a consequence of the external demands on colleges in particular, a new form of manager had emerged within further education, with managerial values that differed from those of the academic staff. Elliott (1996) called this dichotomy a clash between “student-centred pedagogic culture” and “the managerialism culture of managers”. In recent times, there has been an increasing importance placed on restoring the ‘leadership of learning’ as being the key function of the organisation’s leadership, and this is a theme explored later in this report.
The current situation presents an exciting opportunity for government, employers, and providers to come together in a new creative partnership to better serve the needs of learners, communities and the economic wellbeing of the country at large.

Lord Lingfield, in his report *Professionalism in Further Education (2012)* recognised the situation faced by the sector, but was clear in his assessment as to where responsibility for shaping the future lay:

“Further education in this country is a developing and dynamic entity, naturally and properly diverse; we believe that its future success depends upon placing trust in the professionals who work within it to direct it, take its decisions and promulgate its priorities.”

(Professionalism in Further Education, 2012)

So what does all this mean for leaders in the sector? Bringing about such a change across the sector will require courageous strategic leadership.

We have come to expect a lot of our leaders. We expect them to have the intellectual capacity to make sense of complex issues; the imaginative powers to paint a vision of the future that generates everyone’s enthusiasm; the operational know-how to translate strategy into concrete plans; and the interpersonal skills to foster commitment to undertakings that could cost people their jobs should they fail. According to Ancona (2007) Professor of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Management, “It’s time to end the myth of the complete leader: the flawless person at the top who’s got it all figured out. In fact, the sooner leaders stop trying to be all things to all people, the better off their organisations will be.”

Such change within the further education and skills sector as outlined cannot be achieved by individual leaders acting in isolation. One of the key challenges facing the sector is to move away from the age of the heroic leader to one where leadership within organisations is a genuine team effort; where leadership is distributed throughout the organisation, and senior teams and governance structures are created that contain the right individuals with all the skills, knowledge and qualities needed to lead and manage in a complex changing environment.

In preparing this report, research interviews have been conducted with 25 key leaders, influencers and practitioners who between them have a wealth of experience and understanding of the sector. A list of those participants, and a copy of the semi-structured interview questions used are included as Appendices A and B. The findings from these interviews will be outlined and analysed in detail in later chapters. Kanter et al (1992) conducted extensive research into the types of actions that are used to achieve change in organisations, and explored how effective these were in achieving sustainable change. They identified ‘bold strokes’, those decisions that are swiftly initiated, based on management decisions and have an immediate impact, as being useful in kick-starting change processes. However, what they described as the ‘long march’ was found to be a far more dependable means of achieving sustainable change, but they acknowledged this as being the more difficult journey as it requires broad support and sustained commitment over a period of three to five years.
In the remainder of this report, some of the drivers of change affecting the sector will be considered, the current state of leadership in the sector assessed, and the implications for the future discussed.

“An instrumentalist and qualifications-driven culture has narrowed understanding of further education’s broader social value… At best, the further education sector can be life transforming. At worst, it can be a production line, obsessed with qualifications and narrowly instrumental in outlook.”

(RSA, 2011)

The further education and skills sector stands at a crossroads. Those tasked with leading the sector and all its constituent parts have the opportunity to seize the initiative and create a sector with a clear identity and a convincing narrative, but most importantly, one that delivers outstanding and valuable learning opportunities for individuals that meet their needs, and the needs of local communities and employers.

“Those organisations which can identify and respond to the opportunities in the current changes will thrive in what I believe to be a new era. They’ll be characterised by a focused mission, and an independent, responsive and efficient organisation.”

(Chris Banks, AoC Governors’ Conference, 2012)
Chapter 2 – Drivers of change

In the spirit of the Lingfield report, the Delphi work commissioned by 157 Group to envisage what the sector may look like in 2020, brought together a group of ‘time travellers’ from across the sector in a series of workshops to envisage the extremes of what the sector might look like in the year 2020 and the implications of this. An example of a positive perspective on the role FE may play within a given locality as defined by this ‘time traveller’ group is outlined below, along with what this will require from the sectors leaders:

“FE is regarded as a ‘place leader’; a social, economic and educational choreographer drawing together different strands of local activity so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Important features of this new vitality are settled and willing partnerships between FE providers in different forms of ownership, based on mutual respect for their various strengths and limitations… The role of strong, visionary, entrepreneurial leadership in achieving this (positive) outcome will be pivotal…Much depends on the level of expertise among leaders in FE, their boldness and attitude to risk, and their ability to convince those in government, local communities and business to work with them towards a common goal.”

At the other end of the scale, the negative outlook for the sector in 2020 may well resonate with many as being all too close to current reality:

“Chasing the latest initiative, securing a share of what government money there is, and achieving a passable Ofsted grade continue to be the preoccupations of many leaders. They have no independent strategy and little entrepreneurial initiative to satisfy the learning needs which surround them… Leaders of providers are inward-looking, managing for survival and struggling to maintain staff morale. The best leaders are quitting FE. Distressed mergers and business failures are frequent. The community footprint of FE is both diminishing and increasingly uneven.”

The two extremes outlined above offer a stark indication as to the journey ahead from where many of those interviewed for this report believe the sector is now, to the ‘nirvana’ position as outlined in the positive narrative above.

In this chapter, a number of the key drivers of change that have and will continue to significantly affect the further education and skills sector, now and in the foreseeable future, are considered in more detail. This section is not intended to be a fully comprehensive PLESCT (Political, Legislative, Economic, Social, Competitor and Technology) analysis of all drivers affecting the sector, as this would constitute a report in itself, but a summary of those drivers identified as being most significant by contributors to this report. They include:

- *New Challenges, New Chances*, BIS 2011
- *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*, BIS 2013
- The economic climate
- Funding
- Ofsted
New Challenges, New Chances

*New Challenges, New Chances* was published by BIS on 1 December 2011, and set out the government’s vision for the further education and skills sector. Its overarching aim was to release sector leaders and their institutions from top down central control. The aims and intentions outlined in this government publication are succinctly summarised in the quote below:

“The FE sector is moving into a new era, where there is a fundamentally different relationship with government. Our radical reform programme is freeing colleges from central government control and putting responsibility firmly on the shoulders of colleges themselves. This requires a change in thinking, where colleges will no longer look to central government for detailed steers and permissions. Accountability will be outwards to the colleges, communities, learners and employers…”

After years of central command and control, overseen by the Learning and Skills Council, this change in direction met with a mixed response from the sector. Some chose to keep their heads down in the hope that it would all go away as quickly as it had arrived (similar messages had been delivered previously); some took it as a green light to build ever bigger and more diverse businesses; while others seized this opportunity to revisit the organisation’s core purpose and values, and develop a strategy that would deliver better outcomes for its primary customers.

What is now clear is that, irrespective of the hopes and fears of some within the sector, the publication of *New Challenges, New Chances* (BIS 2011) did signify a significant shift in the operating environment for FE and skills provider organisations. This was subsequently built on in the spring of 2013 with the publication of *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* (BIS, 2013) following the appointment of a new Minister for Skills, Matthew Hancock.

Rigour and responsiveness in skills

“The bureaucracy and target culture that was stifling colleges and providers, reducing their ability to respond to the needs of employers and learners, has been stripped away… But we need to go further if we are not to be left behind by our competitors, and to give everyone a chance to reach their potential. We need to put rigour and responsiveness at the heart of our skills system, to put employers and learners more directly in the driving seat, and to create incentives for all training providers to deliver excellent programmes.”

(Matthew Hancock, Minister for Skills, page 3)

*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* updated the government’s vision for the further education and skills sector, and the contribution it requires from the sector in helping the country recover from one of the longest periods of sluggish economic growth in recent years. It builds on the theme of offering freedoms and flexibilities to the sector that was started with the publication of *New Challenges, New Chances* (BIS 2011), and lays the challenge to respond positively at the door of provider organisations, and those responsible for leading them.
“The skills system can only be as good as the institutions and individuals who actually train and educate learners. So it is vital that the system improves standards, to ensure it prepares learners for new jobs, and is stretching, innovative and responsive to the needs of employers. To achieve all this strong leadership is vital.”

(Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills, BIS 2013)

Having outlined the hopes and vision, the document issues a rallying call to the sector:

“We know that institutions across the sector are ready for this challenge. The route to a uniformly world-class system is to unlock the potential that exists across the sector, by freeing and equipping providers to work effectively with well-informed and committed communities, and to provide an outstanding service to learners and employers.”

The publication of this revised skills strategy is clearly a significant driver for change, and we shall explore in detail in Chapter 3 how far key leaders in the sector agree with the assessment above in terms of the sector’s potential and readiness for the challenge laid down.

The economic climate
As new ways of stimulating economic growth are sought, there is a groundswell within Westminster amongst all parties and across government departments, that the sector should have a far clearer remit to deliver the programmes needed to get more young people into work, and to enhance the technical skills base of the country to enable the UK economy to compete in a rapidly advancing global marketplace. Such a strategic shift would present a real challenge to many existing providers who have an incredibly diverse, some would say disparate, offer that has often resulted from the pursuit of government funds, rather than a direct response to the needs of learners or the local community. The new Minister for Skills, and senior figures within Ofsted, believe that an increased focus on technical skills leading to meaningful work would provide the sector with a clear raison d’etre in the years ahead.

Such a shift in emphasis, if it was to translate into policy, could have significant implications for both the sectors leaders and the organisations they lead, and this is an area which will be explored further in Chapter 3.

Funding
For most providers in the further education and skills sector, one of the most obvious implications of the challenging economic climate has been the reduction in central funding for learners. This has led them to review their offer and seek cost savings, initially in support and management areas, but more recently in terms of programme offer and associated delivery staff.

“The lesson of the past 2 years is that it is possible to do things differently… So we will not return to the funding system that we inherited in 2010, which for all of its good intentions had lost the connection between money being spent and the objectives to be achieved. There is clearly a case for further reforms.”

(Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills, BIS 2013)
The following principles, which place the needs of employers at the centre of planning, underpin these reforms.

- The employer should be the customer.
- The employer should co-invest.
- The government should not set the price of training.
- Government funding should be linked to achievement.

The introduction of loans for adult learners less than three years after the end of the relatively generously-funded ‘Train to Gain’ era has, and will continue to have, significant financial implications for providers who anticipate a significant reduction in adult learner numbers. The further spending restrictions outlined in the *Comprehensive Spending Review* (HM Treasury, June 2013), and the above promised reforms will continue to act as a significant driver of change, and are aspects explored in more detail in Chapter 3 where we examine how the sector’s leaders believe this driver has affected, and could affect, the sector in the years ahead.

**OFSTED**

“In education and learning and skills, the best leaders focus on the leadership of teaching and learning, no matter what the size of their institution. Just as in successful business, great leadership is never detached from the core purpose and processes of the enterprise.”

(Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted Annual Report, 2011/12)

The last two years has seen the introduction of a new *Common Inspection Framework* by the sector inspectorate. Under the leadership of Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted has placed a clear emphasis on the delivery of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment as being necessary conditions for any provider to be considered outstanding overall. This same period has also seen the removal of the ‘Satisfactory’ descriptor for Grade 3 providers, and its replacement with ‘Requires improvement’. Ofsted’s approach to grading descriptors has produced quite a defensive response from many within the sector who claim it is ‘moving the goalposts’ and has significantly contributed to the feeling of ‘being under attack from all sides’, as expressed by some within the sector.

The message is clear: as an educational institution there is nothing more important than delivering the highest quality product to your customer (the learner) and this should therefore be the primary focus of leaders across the sector. As a driver for change, the approach of Ofsted in the last two years has certainly had as big an impact as any of the other drivers listed here, and the implications of this for leaders in the sector are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

“Strong and effective leadership is essential if further education is to take its proper place as an engine for growth in local areas; delivering high quality teaching and learning which meets local needs.”

(Matthew Hancock, Minister for Skills, 2013)
Chapter 3 – Interview findings and analysis

“Excessive control and interference have characterised developments in the last decade, to the extent that they now risk limiting people’s energy, confidence and ambition. We have welcomed the opportunity to break from the culture of being ‘done to’.”

(“It’s about work”, CAVTL, 2013)

In Chapter 2 some of the drivers of change affecting the sector are described briefly and indicate a real sense of the level and pace of change the sector is facing. In the research interviews conducted in preparing this report, each of the interviewees was asked to outline what they saw as being the key challenges facing leaders in the sector in the next few years. There was considerable agreement amongst many of those interviewed. The following key challenges identified are examined in more detail below.

• the level and pace of policy change;
• the need as a sector to move from being reactive to being proactive;
• financial viability in light of funding changes;
• understanding what ‘good’ looks like in a changed operating context;
• ensuring the organisation is equipped to deliver; and
• developing effective partnerships with employers and communities.

The level and pace of policy change
As discussed in earlier chapters, the change of government in 2010 signalled the start of a new era for what had been the Learning and Skills Sector, and which politically, and for some controversially, was to become the further education and skills sector. For over a decade the sector’s offer had been centrally driven, with funding directly linked to the achievement of government skills targets, rather than being driven primarily by the needs of learners and employers.

The publication of *New Challenges, New Chances* (BIS 2011) met with a mixed response from those within the sector, ranging from hope at one end to widespread scepticism at the other; many felt that, while the rhetoric may have changed, the ‘new world’ described in the document would not actually come about. What has become clear since 2010 is that this is very much not the case, and this significant shift in policy from central command to providing freedoms and flexibilities to providers is very much here to stay.

Subsequent events – the publication of *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* (BIS 2013); changes to funding rules; a significant reduction in central funding; a move away from a qualifications focus to an employability and advancement focus; an inspectorate-driven focus on teaching and learning quality – have combined to make the external environment in which leaders operate challenging.
In interviews for this report, participants were asked whether they felt the sector’s current leaders were suitably equipped and ready to lead in this new era. Below is a selection of interviewees’ comments:

“Whether our current crop of leaders is competent and capable enough to address these challenges is questionable.”

“Some have the necessary skills to deal with these challenges but many currently do not.”

“I believe many senior leaders recognise the need for change but may lack the skills needed to effectively lead it.”

Whilst this may appear a somewhat critical analysis of the sector’s current leaders, it is also reasonable to interpret these comments as being more about the scale and pace of change they are being asked to deal with rather than the competence of the leaders, as such a change will require very different behaviours and qualities.

From reactive to proactive

One of the consistent themes throughout the interviews for this report was the effect that the continual central direction had had on how leaders and organisations planned strategically. Many interviewees felt that the sector had become reactive to government policy over the years and chased funding as it became available, rather than being driven by a clear organisational strategy.

The year-on-year increases in funding from 1997-2010 had seen many providers grow exponentially, with an increasingly complex and diverse offer, but in some cases at the expense of quality, and in others with too little regard for the needs of learners, employers or their local communities.

The majority view of interviewees mirrors closely the negative outlook for the sector as described in the Delphi report referenced previously:

“Chasing the latest initiative, securing a share of what government money there is, and achieving a passable Ofsted grade continue to be the preoccupations of many leaders. They have no independent strategy and little entrepreneurial initiative to satisfy the learning needs which surround them.”

(Further Education in 2020: Making the System Work, 2013)

The opening quote in this chapter from the report of the recent Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, led by the principal of City and Islington College, Frank McLoughlin, talks of how the government approach described earlier has limited people’s energy, confidence and ambition, and this sentiment resonated with many interviewees. One participant spoke of a “shortage of people with a positive outlook and the energy to make it happen, which when combined with a lack of vision and an inability to plan strategically is a dangerous situation.”
These are potentially very serious issues that demand attention. There was a widespread feeling among participants that the operating environment that has existed in the FE and skills sector in the last 15 years has quite naturally led to many leaders, governing bodies and organisations becoming very operationally focused, with little time spent developing strategic plans based on values and evidence-based demand. One CEO interviewed for this report summarised this challenge as being able to move from “a supply-led offer to a demand-led offer.” Such a paradigm shift from vertical accountability to horizontal accountability requires a change of mindset within the organisation, but also requires a particular range of leadership skills that may not have been developed or used in recent years, around environmental scanning and strategic planning. The implications of this for both leaders and governing bodies are considered further in Chapter 4.

**Financial viability**
The issue of reduced central funding and the move towards learners funding their own learning through the introduction of 24+ adult loans were identified by most as being significant challenges that need to be addressed in the months and years ahead. The immediate impact of both is identified as being a reduction in income for the vast majority of providers, but the interesting debate centred on the observed response to this situation.

The reaction of many to funding reductions has been in line with the caution and operational focus outlined earlier, with an almost instinctive reaction to cut programmes and staff based on a cost analysis, rather than a fundamental review of the provider’s broader offer driven by the needs of learners, the local economy and community.

When asked how they saw these drivers affecting the sector in the next three to five years, a number of likely outcomes and scenarios were envisaged by interviewees. A summary of the views is outlined below:

- There is an expectation that some providers will no longer be financially viable as their central funding falls.
- This is likely to lead to a number of mergers and the appearance of new delivery models within the sector including:
  - geographic groupings of schools, colleges and private providers
  - larger consortia of colleges based on specialism, not geography
  - the formation of federations between education providers from across the whole of the education sector.
- Some providers will use this as an opportunity to revisit their core purpose and values, and design and deliver a commercially sustainable, needs-driven curriculum that meets the needs of their core, and increasingly fee-paying customers.
- In some cases falling income will lead to falling quality and under the processes outlined in *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* (BIS 2013), intervention by the new FE Commissioner will follow.
What is clear is that the economic operating environment with which many providers are only just getting to grips will have a significant impact on the size and shape of individual provider organisations and the sector as a whole in the months and years ahead. External drivers are beyond the control or influence of leaders in the sector, but the response to these external stimuli sits squarely with the leadership of the organisation – the executive and the governing body. How they respond will undoubtedly have significant implications for learners and local communities, and most likely the further education and skills sector in its current form.

Meeting and exceeding expectations
In interviews for this report, Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools and Michael Coffey, Director, Learning and Skills, both of Ofsted, provided a clear view of what they believe to be the key challenges ahead for sector leaders:

- Firstly, a key challenge is to develop provision and a curriculum offer that meets the needs of individuals, the local community and national priorities.
- Secondly, leaders need to ensure that an ethos of high expectations is embedded in their organisation, coupled with a strong system of accountability, covering staff at all levels and governors or other supervisory bodies.
- Crucially, leaders need to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that they meet the diverse needs of all learners, and support learners in progressing onto their next step.

All of these are real challenges that provider organisations need to address successfully to meet the demands of a rapidly changing sector – not because the Inspectorate says so, but because these are at the heart of running a customer-responsive, high-quality, sustainable organisation.

Ensuring the organisation is equipped to deliver
As one interviewee put it, “Half of the job is knowing what to do and how to do it – the other half is ensuring that the organisation is equipped and resourced to actually do it.”

While the financial challenges facing provider organisations have been considered earlier in the chapter, ensuring the organisation has the right people with the right skills, working in a positive learning environment are equally, and some would argue, more important.

The primary focus of this report is on leadership within the sector, but there has been an increasing emphasis within the sector in recent times on the quality of ‘teaching’ staff, and in particular the professionalism of that workforce. This was the subject of the review by Lord Lingfield which concluded that the future success of the sector “depends on placing trust in the professionals who work within it to direct it, take decisions and promulgate its priorities.”

One of the areas that has been raised is a concern about the detachment of many of the sector’s teaching staff, particularly in the vocational skills areas, from the world of work, and the impact this has on their ability to teach their vocational specialism. This concept of ‘dual professionalism’ was examined in detail by the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning:
“What is clear is that the best vocational teaching and learning is a sophisticated process; it demands ‘dual professionals’ – teachers and trainers with occupational expertise and experience, who can combine this with excellent teaching and learning practice… and are trusted and given the time to develop partnerships and curricula with employers.”

(“It’s about work”, CAVTL, 2013)

The challenge for any provider organisation is to recruit, train and retain teachers and trainers who demonstrate the best of the ‘dual professionalism’ qualities in a financially constrained environment. However they approach this challenge, creativity and innovation will be required of sector leaders, employer partners, and the teaching staff themselves, in a constructive partnership, if this vision of excellent vocational learning is to become a reality.

Developing effective partnerships

The need to develop effective partnerships was highlighted by most interviewees as being a key challenge for sector leaders. These partnerships are multi-faceted but the key ones were identified as being with employers, geographically-based communities, and of increasing importance following the government’s acceptance of many of Lord Heseltine’s recommendations, Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The ability of leaders to create new partnerships was seen as being a key ‘must-have’ skill moving forward, and some concerns were expressed as to how well-equipped the sector currently was to develop such partnerships. The importance of these relationships and partnerships existing at multiple levels across the organisation, and not just through the principal or CEO, was highlighted as being essential to effective operational delivery.

Many senior leaders are well connected in their local communities and with local employers, but most interviewees questioned how effective these relationships were in advancing the strategic aims of the organisation. If provider organisations are to take part in addressing some of the broader skills’ challenges facing individuals, communities and the country as a whole, then they will need to engage proactively with their customers, understand and respond to their needs, and create effective partnerships to deliver against those needs.

Many of those interviewed see the devolving of skills’ budgets to LEPs as being potentially risky due to the varying stages of development and effectiveness of these bodies. However they also recognise this as being a potential opportunity for the sector’s leaders to seize the agenda and present their organisations as key components in delivering local, regional and national solutions for the country’s employment and economic challenges. Such an opportunity will certainly require courageous leadership and boldness across the sector; a theme we shall return to later in this chapter.

Having established the key challenges faced by leaders in the sector in the years ahead, the interviews then went on to look at the current state of leadership in the sector and explored how well-equipped it was to address the challenges and seize the opportunities identified.
An analysis of sector leadership

Leading in the further education and skills sector is not without its challenges or its rewards, and has without question become more complex and challenging in recent years. In a complex, changing environment, the skills and behaviours required of leaders will undoubtedly change, and this is not unique to the further education and skills sector. Chapter 2 looked at how government and the inspectorate recognise and highlight the critically important part played by leaders in delivering the challenging agenda set out for the sector.

“Leaders are the key people in changing and improving the culture and performance of the organisation.”

(Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted, 2012)

Research by Lambert (2012), specifically focused on the college part of the sector, described the role of the college principal as being tri-dimensional, summarising this as below:

• a public role – figurehead and community leader;
• an internal-public role – leading learning and dealing with long-term staff and student issues; and
• an internal-private role – strategic thinking, creativity and innovation.

In developing the LSIS Leadership Exchange, there was an attempt to deconstruct the various elements of the leadership role fulfilled by leaders within the further education and skills sector, and six distinct aspects were identified:

• a leader of learning
• a leader of a business
• a leader of locality
• a leader of people
• a leader of innovation
• a leader of change.

Many of those interviewed for this report highlighted ‘Heroic leadership’ as still being prevalent within the further education and skills sector. Some referred to this in its most extreme cases as being a ‘Presidential Leadership style’, where the leaders concerned had become such dominant figures that the institution they led had become indistinguishable from them as individuals. Without exception, interviewees felt that such a model of leadership, whilst prevalent, was outdated and not fit for purpose for the sector at this time.

One interviewee described the situation thus:

“Heroic leadership models encourage people to come up with the right answer, and in the current climate there often is no ‘right’ answer.”
Keith Grint re-introduced the concept of ‘wicked problems’ to the world of leadership literature in 2009 when he defined wicked problems as “problems that involve complex, messy and often intractable challenges… There are no known solutions.” The implication for leaders is that they have to be comfortable working with the continued emergence of the new policies and practices, nurture innovation and develop an organisational culture that “creates safety and comfort in tackling the unknown.”

This reflects a sentiment first expressed by Ancona (2007), Professor of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Management, “It’s time to end the myth of the complete leader: the flawless person at the top who’s got it all figured out. In fact, the sooner leaders stop trying to be all things to all people, the better off their organisations will be.” The concept of distributed leadership has been around for a number of years. Senge (1996) stressed that leadership is not solely the responsibility of the CEO, but can and should permeate all levels of the organisation. The formal definition is shown below:

“Distributed leadership is leadership exercised by multiple leaders throughout the organisation – some in formal positions of authority and some not – working collaboratively across organisational levels and boundaries.”

(Senge, 1996)

The extent to which genuine distributed leadership has been enacted across the sector is questioned by many of those interviewed. While accepting that responsibility rests with the principal / CEO, the role of leading an organisation in the sector is recognised as not being a solo pursuit. In our networked age, the ability to connect and build trusting relationships is a key competency (Ancona, 2007), and the need for strong and effective leadership teams, supported by an effective governing body, was deemed by the interviewees to be essential for organisations to succeed in this new era. One interviewee summarised these views succinctly:

“Leading is very much a team game, and there is still far too much emphasis on the individual leader. As a sector, we have not broken away from the myth of the perfect leader who is all things to all people.”

The discussions around the ‘leader’ were inextricably linked to discussions about roles and responsibilities for leadership within the organisation, and the relationship between the executive and the governing body within providers.

In assessing the state of sector leadership, a number of themes developed during the interviews around the issue of governance and leadership, and these are summarised below and are explored further later in this report:

- There is a need to clearly define the role of governing bodies and the relationship between these and the organisation’s leaders.
- Historically, and particularly in the college part of the sector, governing bodies have largely assumed an oversight and audit role, rather than a strategic role.
There is a real and urgent need for governing bodies across the sector to pro-actively develop and define, in partnership with the executive team, their organisational strategy based on the following aims (as suggested by a current college principal):

- improving the deal for the learner
- improving the deal for the employers
- improving the deal for communities.

A sector-wide ‘stock-take’ needs to take place to ensure that governing bodies have the right people with the right skills and experience to support and deliver organisational strategic aims and vision.

**Leading learning**

As outlined in earlier chapters, one of the key drivers of change in recent times has been an increased focus from Ofsted on the quality of teaching and learning within provider organisations, and by default this has increased the focus on the role of the principal / CEO in this area. During the interviews, participants were specifically asked what role they believed the principal / CEO should have in relation to the ‘leadership of learning’, and how important a knowledge of learning pedagogy was for leaders in the sector. Below is a selection of some of the views of interviewees:

“This is the single most important part of the role, the importance of which has diminished and been lost to some extent in recent years. While I don’t believe all leaders have to have been teachers, they do need to know what good teaching and learning looks like.”

“Leaders need first and foremost to have a passion for learning that allows them to have informed conversations and ask the right questions as it is a primary focus of the role. In order to make strategic and operational decisions, it is important to understand the latest thinking around how our customers actually learn.”

“I do not think it is important for the CEO role as this should be more externally focused and leave the leadership of learning to an expert within the senior team.”

“If you see the curriculum as your product, then the role of the principal / CEO is as ‘evangelist-in-chief’ who is also the setter of standards for the organisation.”

“At the end of the day we are talking about running educational establishments, so you need to understand the day job. The senior team should have the requisite skills to run all aspects of the business.”

Whilst there was not universal agreement amongst the interviewees in this area, what was apparent was that the quality of teaching and learning, and the importance of this for leaders and their institutions are at the forefront of everyone’s thinking.

Ultimately the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are the core products of a learning institution and the principal / CEO needs to have an understanding of their core products, as well as access to expertise in this area if they do not possess a detailed understanding. The mixed views represented here are reflective of the views of many governing body representatives, and this clearly has implications when examining the next theme explored with interviewees – whether the sector would benefit from having its own leadership framework.
Leadership frameworks

Leadership frameworks have been around for many years, and different sectors have at different times attempted to codify and describe what skills, knowledge, qualities, behaviours, qualifications are required by leaders in that particular sector. Research has attempted to examine their usefulness, but this is largely subjective as usage and usefulness are heavily dependent on the accuracy and fitness-for-purpose of the framework being used.

The development of a leadership framework for the further education and skills sector was commenced by the Centre of Excellence in Leadership (CEL) back in 2006, but the framework had not been shared with the sector before CEL’s merger with QIA to form LSIS, and was not developed further. The concept of a framework was then revisited during the development phase of the Leadership Exchange but there was no clear agreement on what the framework should include; how it would be maintained to ensure accuracy and relevance; and who would own / maintain it. As such, and with the demise of LSIS and the birth of the FE Guild (now known as the Education and Training Foundation), interviewees were asked whether they believed the sector would benefit from developing a sector-specific leadership framework.

The majority of interviewees believed that a framework could add value, though two believed that such a framework was no longer relevant for the sector. There was also consensus amongst those supporting the development of a framework, that it should focus on the characteristics and behaviours required for leadership in the sector, and not try to be a prescriptive set of roles, responsibilities and knowledge / qualification requirements. Below are some of the quotes from interviewees relating to this aspect.

“Someone needs to do this at a sector level as no single provider is big enough to do this themselves. How can you develop people and plan succession, if you do not know what criteria you are developing them against?”

“I can see some merit in a leadership framework, but it must be simple and straightforward, and easy to self-assess against.”

“This would help provide clear pathways for individuals. The framework should be externally accredited and should lead to recognisable qualifications. It could support progression and relate to key roles within the sector.”

“A framework that people can adapt would be essential and must include management and leadership competencies and behaviours. This could be the spine to support people’s development. Such a framework could support the development of a critical mass of aspiring leaders, and prepare them to move from functional leadership to organisational leadership.”
The added value from the development of a leadership framework for the sector is not universally accepted, but was largely supported. For some, such a development would provide a structure for leadership development that at present is seen as lacking. For others, this would act as a useful supporting tool when recruiting leaders into the organisation. Developing such a framework in a way that would make it specific enough to be meaningful across the diverse further education and skills sector would be challenging, but the benefit of such a framework in helping to address very real succession planning and talent management issues, was seen by most interviewees as being sufficiently important to justify taking this concept forward.

Succession planning
While there has been talk of an imminent crisis in terms of a shortage of suitable leaders in the sector for many years, this remains a real issue for many organisations who report that they are struggling to find people with the right skills and characteristics to fill current senior leadership vacancies in organisations across the sector. As this had been highlighted as one of the three key challenges facing the sector in previous research (Leadership Exchange 2012), it was deemed worthy of exploration during the interview process. The following questions were considered:

• Do you believe there is a shortage of suitable future leaders in the sector currently, and if so why?
• Do you think the sector would benefit from having more senior leaders who have not spent the majority of their careers within the sector?

There is little data to confirm the assertions on which these questions are based, but recent research conducted as part of CAVTL (the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning) found that 41 per cent of current principals / CEOs are over 60 years of age. This finding is corroborated by Gazelle Group research which suggests that around 40 per cent of college principals are planning to retire in the next couple of years, a number that has been boosted by recent changes to pension schemes which make it less attractive for many principals over the age of 60 to remain in post. In interviews for this report, the majority of college principals interviewed said they had struggled to find suitable people to fill senior posts within their own organisations within the last 12 months.

Taking all of the above into account, if it is not yet a succession planning crisis, it is certainly sufficiently important to look more closely at some of the issues that need to be addressed before identifying and exploring some possible solutions and recommendations (see Chapter 4).

A number of contributory factors were cited as being noteworthy in the area of succession planning:

• The sector has always been poor at considering future needs and identifying talent.
• The sector is not as attractive to external applicants as schools and universities.
• A number of heads of department who are approaching retirement no longer want to take on a senior leadership role due to the significant increase in responsibility.
• Leadership roles being advertised require a skill set that many existing middle leaders in the sector do not possess, such as income generation experience and commercial experience.
• Due to the pressures associated with senior leadership roles in the sector, many are choosing not to apply.
• There is a lack of a clear progression pathway for aspiring leaders.
• Many existing second-tier leaders are not being exposed to all aspects of the business and as such are not job-ready and deemed too risky by interview panels, particularly for larger providers.

Taking into account all of the above, many of those interviewed felt that the sector will need to look outside to bring in new leadership talent in the years ahead, and for some this was viewed as a positive choice, rather than a ‘needs must’.

“The sector would benefit hugely from an influx of new senior management talent with fresh perspectives to help shift the sector mindset, but this talent needs properly integrating and embedding.”

“Personally I think personal qualities and attributes are most important and we should recruit the right person for the right job, not the person with the right background.”

All of those who were positive about recruiting senior leaders from outside the sector felt that it would be important for these individuals to come into the organisation at a deputy / vice principal level, which would allow them some time to learn about the sector; this time would be critical in readying them for the top roles.

A desire to recruit talent from outside the sector is not seen as an easy option, and a lack of such applicants was noted by the interviewees. A number of them attributed this to the lack of a clear narrative around the sector and what it can offer, meaning advertised roles were not sufficiently understood or interesting to attract the quality of applicant desired.

However, the need to get better at identifying and supporting existing talent within the sector was also recognised as being essential:

“We need to nurture, support and develop future potential, and talent identification is essential, as is retention of existing middle leaders within the sector.”

The changing demands on leaders in the sector clearly have implications for the knowledge, skills, behaviours and qualities being sought. If we are to ensure that the sector has the outstanding leadership needed to shape its own destiny and thrive in the years ahead, then a multi-pronged approach to leadership development and recruitment will be required. These are explored further in Chapter 4 where options and recommendations for action are considered.
Chapter 4 – Recommendations and concluding thoughts

The operating context for the sector, the drivers of change, and analysis of the current state of leadership in the sector from sector leaders’ own perspective have all been considered. What does this all mean for the sector’s current and future leaders and what needs to be done to increase the chances of success for the sector? In this final chapter some thoughts and recommendations in answer to each of these questions are outlined.

Establishing a baseline

In producing this report, a number of sector leaders have offered opinions and thoughts on the current ‘state of the sector’ in relation to leadership and its readiness for the times ahead. But it is clear that in order to make significant progress in outlining a map or route to addressing some of the leadership challenges outlined, a rigorous and representative analysis is required to identify, describe and analyse the current behaviours, knowledge and characteristics of leaders across the sector. By doing this, it would provide a ‘point in time’ baseline against which individual, organisational and sector-wide progress could be assessed.

Conducting such a diagnostic process with a number of leaders in the sector to identify the predominant leadership characteristics currently being demonstrated, and how these relate to the qualities needed by the sector moving forward, could help to inform the development of the framework of leadership qualities that many of the interviewees felt would be useful for the future. Such a framework could focus on the knowledge, characteristics and skills that make an outstanding leader, but also strive to identify and share what it is they are actually doing; the practices they employ; the styles and approaches they adopt; and the impact they are having on individuals, their organisations, and their communities.

At the core of such an approach is the belief that, through a robust evaluative and investigative programme that feeds into an overarching sector leadership framework, the qualities, characteristics, traits, skills, attitudes, practices and experiences of excellent leaders could be captured and shared to drive up the quality of leadership in the further education and skills sector.

Recommendation

A sector leadership framework, detailing the qualities, characteristics, traits, skills, attitudes, practices and experiences of excellent leaders, and founded on a need for a rigorous and representative analysis would significantly aid the development of sustainable sector leadership.
Research and innovation
Creativity and innovation are often mentioned but there is seldom an attempt to codify exactly what is meant by the terms, or even more importantly how these attributes can be supported and encouraged amongst the sectors leaders. This paper has reflected on the fact that just doing more and doing it more efficiently, will not be sufficient to allow organisations to thrive in the years ahead. Management is often defined as knowing what to do when there is something to do; while leadership has been defined as knowing what to do when there is nothing to do. Keith Grint’s work on the concept of ‘Wicked Problems’ was referenced earlier in the report, and his theory potentially takes the above definition a stage further: leadership today is knowing what to do when there is nothing to do and no precedent to learn from.

In the absence of previous experience and the opportunity for learning from it, it becomes increasingly critical for leaders in all sectors to share thinking, ideas and learning as a way of increasing the collective knowledge base. Much is made of the ‘competitive’ operating environment in the further education and skills sector, but without a commitment to shared learning, leaders across the sector will miss the opportunity to learn and innovate faster for the benefit of their organisations, and even more importantly the learners they support.

Whilst we have argued the merits of devolved leadership throughout this report, and highlighted the need for leadership to be seen as a ‘team activity’, there is recognition that the current group of senior leaders across the sector are shouldering an increasing burden of responsibility. Over the last 12 months, during the development of the Leadership Exchange, a large number of sector leaders have highlighted the desire to come together with colleagues in similar positions from inside and outside the sector, to share experiences, challenges and learning in a safe, open learning environment. While we often think of the sector as a collective, and whilst recognising that a number of leaders in the sector do come together for a number of events across the year, there is still a strong view that senior leaders would benefit greatly from having a place or forum for such interaction and debate.

Compared to other parts of the broader education sector, schools and higher education in particular, the further education and skills sector has been under-resourced and poorly supported in terms of sector research focused on sharing best practice and fostering creativity and innovation. To create a truly dynamic, self-supporting sector moving forward, this is something that needs to be addressed.

It is suggested that two specific areas of activity could be supported to rectify this situation. The first is a research programme of projects relevant to leadership, leadership development, and governance in the further education and skills sector. Specifically, this programme of activity could seek to inform the development and ongoing updating of the sector leadership framework by identifying and exploring the best of what is currently being done in these areas. This research should be published, but could also be used to inform a series of round-table events to allow senior leaders from across the sector to explore, debate and discuss the findings in a safe, dynamic environment.
In parallel to this research programme, there is a need to stimulate debate about the future shape of, and direction of travel for, the sector, and it is hoped that the new Education and Training Foundation (ETF) will play a lead role in this area by commissioning a series of stimulus papers to inform thinking, choices and decisions at the organisational and system level.

The sector needs to find a way to engage a broad range of leading academics and academic practitioners in the further education and skills area. One way of doing this that has proved effective in other sectors is to hold an annual Learning and Skills Innovation Competition, where people from inside and outside the sector would be invited to submit research papers to share, challenge, or stimulate innovative practice relevant to leadership, management and governance of the sector. A panel from the sector would then select a number to receive development bursaries, potentially funded by the ETF or other educational charities such as the Edge Foundation, to develop their thinking further, and these projects could underpin a series of round-table innovation events each year.

Recommendation
The debate on the future shape of the leadership needs of the sector must continue. This should be informed by a focused programme of research, where leaders should have opportunities to discuss and explore, and continue to develop.
Developing our future leaders
We reflected in earlier chapters on the difficulty currently being experienced across the sector in recruiting leaders for more senior positions. While there are a number of contributory factors, two specific elements recur:

- The individuals applying for these roles from within the sector lack some of the necessary qualities and experience being demanded, such as commercial experience, as these are relatively new requirements.
- Those applying from outside the sector are too few in number, and the lack of a sector background is still proving a barrier to recruitment, as governing bodies and existing senior leaders are often risk-averse when it comes to recruiting to senior positions.

Whilst the development of a framework of leadership qualities would go some way to helping individuals seeking advancement into senior leadership roles in the sector, the scale and urgency of the situation, as described in Chapter 3, demand a more proactive and sector-wide response, similar to that which has been developed in the schools sector in England. The development of a co-ordinated and sector supported ‘Future Leaders Programme’ is essential if the sector is to have the right quantity and quality of leaders needed to lead this next phase of maturity.

The Future Leaders Charitable Trust was established as a registered charity in 2006 with the goal of “improving the life chances of disadvantaged young people by developing quality head teachers with the skills, experience, support and networks to lead and transform challenging secondary schools and hence raise student achievement”. The Future Leaders programme in the schools’ context is a three-year programme consisting of the following main elements:

- training events and other development opportunities
- a one-year placement
- individual coaching and career support
- performance management
- the Future Leaders network.

While the desire for centrally designed and delivered development programmes has diminished in recent years, this particular area is one where it is felt such an approach is not only the most cost-effective but also the most efficient way of addressing the problem. It is therefore a recommendation that the Education and Training Foundation seek to learn from the schools sector’s experience in this area of work, and look to commission the development of a Future Leaders Programme for the further education and skills sector, if a potential crisis of leadership in the sector is to be averted in the years ahead. Such a proactive, sector-wide initiative underpinned by a dynamic leadership qualities framework, would ensure a steady stream of role-ready, well-networked, senior leaders, equipped and driven to lead commercially sustainable organisations committed to delivering the very best for their learners.

**Recommendation**
Learning from work in the schools’ sector, as well as in the further education and skills sector, establish a sector-supported Future Leaders’ programme, to ensure the quantity and quality of leaders needed for the future.
A self-supporting system
As outlined in Chapter 2, the sector is being asked to take more responsibility for its own development and improvement, and in the current climate of austerity, this needs to happen with less central support and funding. As such, the most sustainable way of driving improvement within the sector is to become more effective at harnessing the experience, expertise and learning that currently exists.

In developing the Leadership Exchange, and in research for this report, there was widespread support for exploring how the sector’s current leaders could play a greater role in not only supporting future leaders, but in supporting each other to raise standards across the sector and, by doing so, deliver better outcomes for learners.

The new Education and Training Foundation is ideally placed to explore how it can work with leaders and organisations across the sector to develop and implement a self-improving system approach, whereby leaders across the further education and skills sector take collective responsibility for leading, challenging and delivering sustainable sector improvement that is essential in delivering better opportunities for all learners. Within the schools’ sector, the National College for Teaching and Leadership has performed a similar function to increasingly good effect and there is shared learning here which could assist in this work.

There are many leaders in the sector who care about and have the skills and capacity to work for the success of other learners, as well as those within their own organisations. The approach being advocated would look to encourage collaboration amongst leaders from across the sector to exchange and develop solutions, making efficient and effective use of resources to raise standards of teaching, learning and assessment.

The practice of leaders within the further education and skills sector supporting each other in the way described has already been used successfully within the sector by organisations such as LSIS. However, the implementation of a national, co-ordinated sector-wide support system on the scale being envisaged is not something that has been tried before within the sector.

The potential benefit of such an approach for the further education and skills sector is that, if successfully implemented and supported, improving the leadership of learning is placed in the hands of the people who have most direct influence over this. It is designed to share the learning and experience of those within the sector to the benefit of all sector organisations and the learners they support.

Recommendation
Explore the possibility of a national, co-ordinated, sector-wide programme, which enables leaders of the further education and skills sector to take collective ownership for the future leadership of the sector.
Supporting governance

Addressing some of the governance challenges and better supporting governance in the further education and skills sector, are seen by those many of those interviewed for this report as being essential areas for increased activity. A recent paper from Ofsted (2012), commissioned by LSIS, How Colleges Improve, highlighted some of the same issues that were originally highlighted in the Schofield report (2009) that raised sector-wide concerns in the area of strong governance. The report stated:

“There continues to be concern about variability in the quality of governance within the sector, including the extent to which some corporations or governing bodies are strategic in outlook and provide leadership for change.”

This report has highlighted the critically important strategic leadership role that governing bodies across the sector have in delivering the sector’s ambitious agenda for learners, but there are too many examples of organisations in the sector where this does not occur effectively.

Building on the work of LSIS and the AoC (including their Governors’ Council), two specific challenges that need to be effectively addressed are:

- to increase the supply and availability of governors, trustees and non-executive directors with the right skills, experience and qualities, to take on governance roles within the sector; and
- to ensure the continued development and delivery of high-quality programmes and activities to ensure that those in governance positions across the sector have the right balance of skills, knowledge and experience to help drive the change agenda.

In developing the Leadership Exchange, a number of conversations were held with sector representatives and BIS, looking at how best to attract new individuals with the necessary skills and experience into governance roles within the sector. One option that should be further explored is the establishment of a ‘matching’ website that allows individuals wishing to become involved as governors, trustees or non-executive directors to match this desire with an organisation that currently requires such an individual. Such an approach has received widespread support from sector representatives in discussions to date and has been used effectively in the schools arena since 1999; for more information see the School Governors One Stop Shop.

Recommendation

Explore the development of national advertisement and recruitment services, and facilities for those from the full spectrum of society interested in becoming governors, to be matched with those who need to strengthen and diversify the governance of their organisations.
**Concluding thoughts**

As LSIS prepares to close, and the Education and Training Foundation comes into being, it is wise to consider what has been achieved and what lessons can be learned, but it is a strength and not a weakness to recognise and accept that much still needs to be done to support the sector and its leaders to deliver this exciting agenda. This report has been commissioned and written with the aim of establishing an accurate picture of what it means and feels like to be a leader in the sector now, and to gather together the collective thoughts, learning and ideas of a cross-section of senior sector leaders to help support and inform the thinking of those tasked with supporting this agenda in the future.

There is much to celebrate in the further education and skills sector. There are outstanding examples of leadership and governance practices that benefit learners every day across the country. But to secure the future desired for learners, sector leaders must challenge themselves every day to strive to do better for the learners, employers and communities they serve.

The sector requires leaders who recognise that they too must continue to learn and develop if they are to ensure they and their organisations are equipped to meet the needs of their customers now and in the future. It will require leadership that creates a culture where feedback is seen as a positive thing, the ‘rocket fuel’ that can drive their organisations to even greater things. It will require leadership that seeks to create genuine learning organisations with a culture that encourages and supports all to achieve and fulfil their potential.

Leaders must individually and collectively decide whether to stay where they are and wait to see what comes along the road, or whether to identify a clear destination and route and embark on the long march to get there. The time for heroic leadership has passed; the time for collective courageous leadership has arrived.
References

Key

BIS = Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
DfE = Department for Education
LSIS = Learning and Skills Improvement Service

All documents referenced in this report, plus background reading, are included here, with links where available.


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Appendix A

Interviewees from leading learning organisations

Bob Powell  Chief Executive  Holex
Chris Moody  Chief Executive  Landex
David Hughes  Chief Executive  NIACE
Lynne Sedgmore CBE  Chief Executive  157 Group
Martin Doel OBE  Chief Executive  AoC
Tony Fazaeli  Chief Executive  IfL
Dame Ruth Silver  Chair  LSIS
Asha Khemka OBE  Principal / CEO  West Notts College
Matt Atkinson  Principal  City of Bath College
Mike Smith  Chief Executive  Gen II Training
Denise Brown-Sackey  Principal / CEO  Newham College
Rob Wye  Chief Executive  LSIS
Neil Bates  Chief Executive  Prospects Training
Mike Smith  Director  Beyond Standards
David Sherlock CBE  Chief Executive  Gazelle Group
Fintan Donohue  Principal  City of Islington College
Chris Banks CBE  Chief Executive  Vocademix
Sir Bill Moorcroft  Principal / CEO  Trafford College
Frank McGloughlin CBE  Principal  City of Islington College
Professor Bob Garvey  Professor  York St John University
Larry Shulman  Director  Shulman Consulting
Bobbie McLelland  Deputy Director  BIS
Sir Michael Wilshaw  Director  Ofsted
Matthew Coffey  Director  Ofsted
Rajinder Mann  Executive Director  Black Leadership Initiative
Sue Daley  Director  Women’s Leadership Network
Appendix B
Interview Questions for Learning Leadership report

What do you see as being the key challenges facing leaders in the FE and Skills sector in the next two years?

What are the prevalent leadership styles you have encountered in your work within the sector?

What do you believe are the specific qualities, behaviours and skills required to lead effectively in the sector now and in the future?

What role do you think a principal / chief executive should have in ‘leading learning’ within their organisation?

Do you think that some knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment pedagogy should be a pre-requisite for anyone running / leading an FE and skills sector provider?

Do you believe that there should be a leadership framework for the sector as there is in many other sectors and if so how do you envisage this relating to the development of current and future leaders in the sector?

Do you think the sector would benefit from having more senior leaders who have not spent their careers within the sector?

Do you believe there is a shortage of suitable future leaders within the sector currently? If so, why?

What do you think is the solution to this issue?

How best do you think the sector can utilise the existing outstanding practice and excellent leaders in the sector to:

a) Support the development of current and future leaders?

b) Support other sector organisations that are looking to improve?

Recent research by Lambert describes the role of a college principal as tri-dimensional, incorporating:

- a public role (figurehead and community leader)
- internal-public (leading learning and dealing with long term staff and student issues)
- internal-private (strategic thinking, creativity and innovation)

How far do you agree with this assessment? Are there any other aspects you would consider including?