

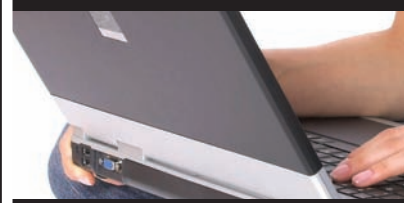
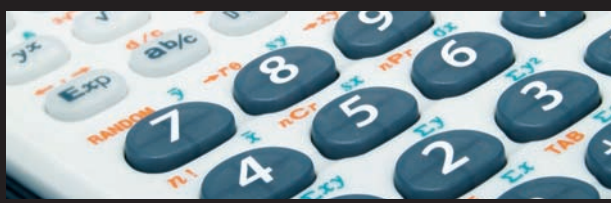
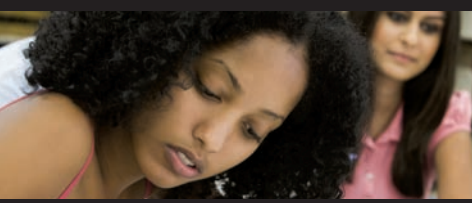
Challenge and change in further education

A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme



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In 2005, Sir Andrew Foster famously described further education as the “neglected middle child” of the British education system. While it lacks the resources and status of schools and universities, further education has a unique importance in British life. It is required to meet the skills needs of the economy, provide new chances for people whose encounter with the school system was less than satisfactory, and respond to the demands of employers as well as students. Further education is often a near neighbour for people in deprived regions and areas for whom universities are a distant and unfamiliar notion.

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme is the UK’s largest-ever initiative in education research, and has taken a strong interest in FE.

In this Commentary, one of a series designed to bring the TLRP’s work to a wider audience, its researchers explain the pressures on the further education sector and the people in it, and the many policy changes with which it has had to cope.

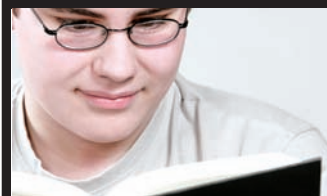
They also point out that further education is resilient and innovative. Its tutors and other staff are a unique resource for learners who are often lacking in confidence. They are at the forefront of developing students’ existing skills as well as teaching them new ones. They often recognise and nurture abilities which students undervalue or do not realise they possess.

The TLRP’s research shows that relations between tutors and students are the heart of successful further education. Unless tutors and students have time and space to work together effectively, employers, governments and the many other groups with a stake in further education will not get the results they want.

More money is going into further education than ever before, and its performance reflects these increased resources. But it is vital for this important sector of British education to continue improving the way it provides for the needs of learners, employers and the wider economy. Like all TLRP research, our work in further education aims to produce better learning outcomes. We are sure that our findings have important lessons for everyone in the sector.

We hope you enjoy this Commentary, and welcome your response via our web site www.esrc.ac.uk.

Professor Ian Diamond FBA AcSS
Chief Executive
The Economic and Social Research Council



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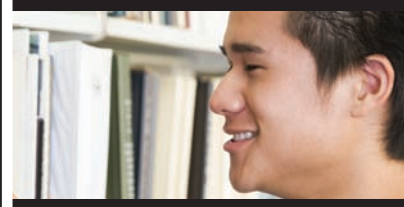
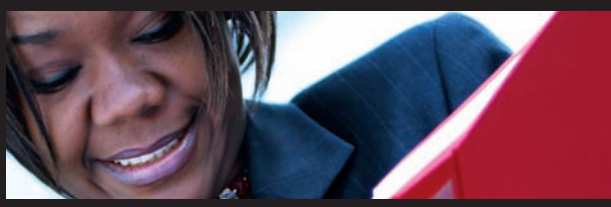
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Ten principles to support more effective Further Education

FE is large and diverse. Its requirements for staff support, development and professionalism are greater even than those for schools. But the principles of effective teaching and learning are similar in all areas of education. TLRP has published its principles for effective school education widely (James and Pollard, 2006). We restate them here to highlight how a renewed focus on teaching and learning should lie at the heart of future developments in further education.

Effective teaching and learning:

1

Equip learners for life in its broadest sense. Learning should aim to help people to develop the intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable them to participate as active citizens and workers, and to flourish as individuals in a diverse and changing society. This implies a broad view of learning outcomes, and that equity and social justice are taken seriously.

2

Engage with valued forms of knowledge. Teaching and learning should connect with the big ideas, facts, processes, language and narratives of subjects so that learners understand what constitutes quality and standards in particular disciplines. This requires an understanding of learning that goes beyond the acquisition of skills.

3

Recognise the importance of prior experience and learning. Teaching should take account of what learners know already in order to plan their next steps. This means building on prior learning as well as taking account of the personal and cultural experiences of different groups.

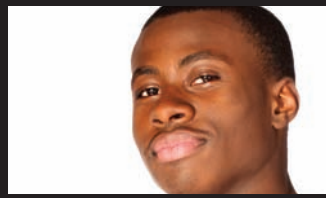
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Require the tutor to scaffold learning. Tutors should provide activities that support learners as they move forward, not just intellectually but also socially and emotionally, so that the learning is secure even after the supports are removed.

5

Need assessment to be congruent with learning. Assessment should help to advance learning as well as determine whether it has taken place. It should measure learning outcomes in a dependable way and also provide feedback for future learning, rather than being imbalanced by targets.





6

Promote the active engagement of the learner. A chief goal of teaching and learning should be the promotion of learners' independence and autonomy. This involves acquiring a repertoire of learning strategies and practices, developing a positive attitude towards learning, and gaining confidence in oneself as a learner. The work of FE tutors who support learners to do this should be recognised and rewarded.

7

Foster individual and social processes and outcomes. Learning is a social activity. Learners should be encouraged to work with others, to share ideas and to build knowledge together. Consulting learners and giving them a voice is an expectation and a right.

8

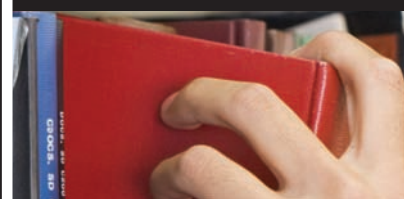
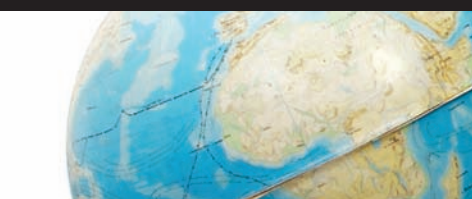
Recognise the significance of informal learning. Informal learning should be recognised as being at least as significant as formal learning and should be valued and used in formal education.

9

Depend on teacher learning. Tutors should themselves learn continuously to develop their knowledge and skill, and adapt and develop their roles, especially through classroom enquiry and other research. Teachers and tutors need more scope for professional judgement to decide "what works," freedom to innovate, and room to take risks that encourage creativity in supporting learners' needs.

10

Demand consistent policy frameworks with support for teaching and learning as their primary focus – the tutor-learner relationship should be at the centre of flexible, independently evaluated policies at national, local and institutional level. This involves creating a social partnership amongst all stakeholders and one which is less bureaucratic. They should be designed to make sure everyone has access to learning environments in which they can thrive.



TLRP's research findings on Further Education

For several decades, Further Education has played a pivotal status in enhancing national prosperity. Participation rates, quality of provision, learner satisfaction and attainment rates have all improved with significant increases in recent funding, and FE has emerged as a distinctive sector of the education system.

The TLRP is involved in research on teaching and learning at all levels from preschool provision to adult learning. All TLRP projects aim in some way to produce findings that may lead to better educational outcomes. In its work on FE, TLRP aims to make a positive contribution by developing the knowledge base of teaching and learning, bridging the worlds of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners, and encouraging evidence-informed policy and practice. All TLRP's projects in further education engage teaching staff at all stages of the research, partly to improve the research itself, but also to build research capacity within the profession and enhance opportunities for professional development.

The contributions described here have led to insights relevant across the entire landscape and future of further education. We represent these through 'propositions and questions' in the following pages of the Commentary

The first five propositions are concerned with teaching, learning, and the tutor-student relationship, which has emerged as the most important link in the whole process of further education. The first draws on innovative work on literacy, which is often characterised as a problem for many FE students. It turns out that beyond college, many students have unmapped literacies which can be brought into play for their life in education. The next looks at forms of assessment that help learning rather than merely attempting to measure it, a concern which TLRP has also followed in its work on school and university education. Two other contributions here look at the distinctive role of FE in Wales and the future of bilingual FE, and the last examines the distinctive role of community learning centres in the lives of hard-to-reach learners.

The next two propositions look at people in FE. One examines the learning cultures of FE and how they can be nurtured, while the other looks at research in FE and its role in expanding the sector's professionalism.

In the following contribution we look at a series of projects on the growing links between further and higher education. Is it now valid to regard them as separate sectors?

Finally we report on FE policy itself. We look both at an ambitious and overarching project on the whole field of FE policy and at a specific study of what went wrong with one ill-focused mission to use FE to enhance skills.





This Commentary is based on the work of eighteen TLRP investments and on the wide-ranging expertise of many practitioners and researchers.

Further details of all projects can be obtained from: <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/index.html>

Assessment of Significant Learning Outcomes

Bilingual Literacies for Learning in Further Education

Degrees of Success: The Transition between VET and HE

Investigating Musical Performance (IMP): Comparative Studies in Advanced Musical Learning

Keeping Open the Door to Mathematically-demanding FE and HE Programmes

Learning and Teaching for Social Diversity and Difference

Learning and Working in Further Education in Wales

Learning in Community-based Further Education

Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Lifecourse

Literacies for Learning in Further Education

Non-participation in HE: Decision-making as an Embedded Social Practice

Policy, Learning and Inclusion in the Learning and Skills Sector

The Social-cultural and Learning Experiences of Working Class Students in Higher Education

Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education

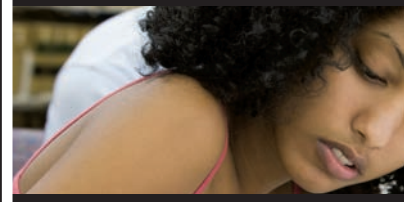
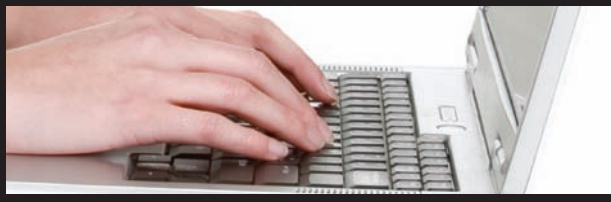
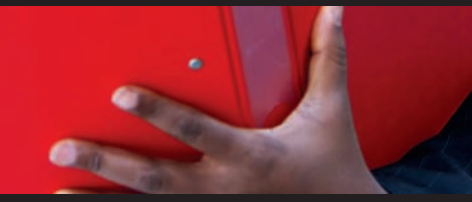
Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further and Higher Education

Using Research to Enhance Professionalism in Further Education

What is Learned at University?: The Social and Organisational Mediation of Learning

Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis





Propositions and questions from TLRP projects

Learning is enriched by tapping into the everyday literacies of students

Aims of the Literacies for Learning in FE project: To identify literacy practices that students use in their everyday lives and to investigate whether they could be used or developed to help students succeed in formal learning.

As participation in FE has widened, the student body has diversified. It now includes more people whose previous experience of education has been discouraging, who regard themselves as academically less able or who have had limited access to the English language. These students are thought to have difficulties with the literacy requirements of courses at all levels. But are these perceived deficits hiding skills that should be regarded as resources for improving learning?

Both students and teaching staff tend to talk of literacy in terms of what students cannot do. And yet in their everyday lives these apparently disadvantaged students are using a wide range of literacies to deal with hobbies and interests, culture, shopping, modern technology and the complexities of modern life such as taxation and the benefits system.

An example is a man who thought he could not cope with the literacy demands of a motor vehicle course. He had already gained a good deal of knowledge of the subject from specialist magazines.

The researchers set out to map students' literacy practices and the literacy requirements of their courses to discover whether there was an overlap, a set of 'border literacies' that could be harnessed and adapted to help the students in their learning. Success might improve their access to college, their retention, and their attainment while there.

Researchers looked at four types of literacy students need in college for:

- being a student (bureaucratic matters such as registration and using the resource centre)
- taking a course (subject content)
- being assessed
- thinking about their "imagined futures" such as workplaces and what they will do when they qualify.

The researchers involved the students in mapping their own literacy practices. One way of doing this was for the student to draw a clock face on a sheet of paper and then add notes of the different types of literacy they have used during the day, such as reading a newspaper or shopping.

Then the students were presented with an empty Venn diagram representing overlaps between college, home and work and with post-it notes bearing pictures of literacy artifacts. They were asked where on the diagram they should be placed. This got the students to examine their literacy practices and see where literacies used in different places might support each other.

The problem for many students is not lack of literacy as a technical skill, but learning new literacies for new tasks. They need to know how to judge content, vocabulary, style and even technology for new purposes and audiences.





This is more of a problem for vocational and lower-level courses than for academic ones. Courses such as A-levels use the same kinds of texts and have the same literacy requirements throughout, but lower-level courses draw on a greater variety of texts and demand a wider variety of writing. Childcare students, for example, need to address a wide variety of audiences: in college lessons, for assessments, for logbooks, with colleagues and parents in the workplace, and with children.

The researchers observed that there is a tension between the literacy needed for vocational practice and the academic style needed for writing up work and for assessments. Students are not sure which to use and it is not made clear to them. Terms such as essay, report and analyse may mean different things in different contexts. Assessment often requires a form of literacy not used in the workplace, or indeed anywhere else.

Tutors often felt that the solution might be to change how students are assessed. They did not feel able make such changes, and need more flexibility and encouragement from awarding bodies to do this.

The final phase of this research involved the tutors altering their practices to make the literacy requirements of the work more explicit, and attempting to use their students' everyday literacy practices more specifically. As a result of this intervention, the researchers refined their concept of border literacy. They found that whole literacy practices from everyday life cannot usually be harnessed as resources for learning. But aspects of those practices, such as their collaborative nature or their purposefulness, can be of value. Such fine-tuning by the tutors tended to increase the students' engagement, recall and self-confidence.

**Lead researchers:**

Prof. Roz Ivanič, Lancaster University

Prof. David Barton, Lancaster University

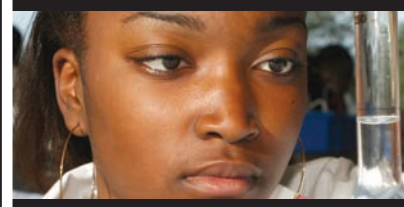
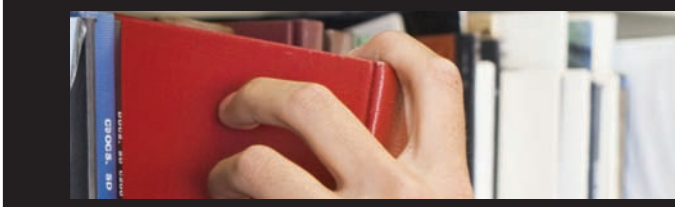
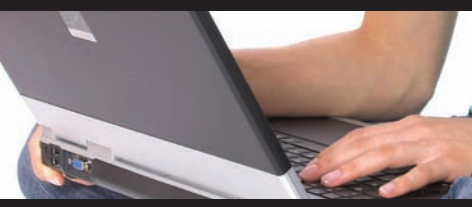
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Contributors:

The research was carried out between 2004 and 2007. It involved:

- six university researchers working with
- 16 FE tutors
- two colleges in Scotland and two in England
- over 100 students
- following 32 units of study
- across 11 curriculum areas from A Level Sociology to Painting and Decorating



The impact of assessment on pedagogy can have damaging consequences

Three recent projects have focused on the impact of formative and summative assessment on teachers' and students' attitudes to teaching and learning. The first is a project funded in 2004-5 by the Learning and Skills Research Centre that explored the effect of summative demands of assessment in five areas: work-based learning, adult basic skills, access to higher education, general vocational education and general academic education at level 3.

The second, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the Quality Improvement Agency and the National Research Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, explored factors that help and hinder improvements to teachers' formative assessment practices in four areas: Entry to Employment courses, adult basic skills and vocational education programmes at levels 2 and 3 in FE colleges, adult education centres and a school.

The third was a TLRP thematic seminar series on Assessment of Significant Learning Outcomes, and work on assessment in general vocational education.

The projects on which this section draws show the central role played by formative assessment in helping to improve pedagogy, something to which researchers in the school sector have also given much attention. Schools-based research shows that teachers make marked improvements in teaching, pupil achievement and engagement with learning when they focus on formative assessment as part of pedagogy. Even so, more work is needed to highlight the factors in different learning cultures that help and hinder such attempts.

An emphasis on target-setting and achievement, regulated through outcome-based assessment and qualification systems, has led to an impoverished curriculum for the majority of school-leavers and adults entering further education. The words "curriculum", "teaching" and "learning" appear to have less significance in FE because of its focus on "assessment" and "achievement". This focus has accompanied improvements in participation rates, the quality of provision, learner satisfaction and attainment rates. But this has been achieved at the expense of a narrowing of the curriculum. We need to recognise how this has come about and appreciate the effect of sweeping reforms on pedagogy in FE colleges if we are to find ways of improving teaching and learning in FE.

TLRP projects on the state of FE in colleges give compelling evidence of the extent and speed of continual changes to funding, curriculum content and assessment systems. Colleges have also had to cope with changing political and educational goals, structural reorganisation and the expanding roles of an increasingly fragmented workforce.

TLRP research has highlighted the effects of these changes on teachers' roles, aims and practices. It shows the need for those who control funds, as well as inspectors, institutional managers and teachers themselves, to have a far better understanding of the context in which teachers and learners have to work. Indeed, several TLRP studies showed that great things are often achieved against these odds, shielding learners from the consequences of policy change.

Changes in pedagogy cannot be achieved without this understanding. All participants need clearer insights into pedagogical needs, and a greater awareness of the positive effects that changes to curriculum content and assessment systems can have on teaching and learning activities, and on people's attitudes to learning.



The three projects on assessment show that concern about targets and the need to help learners achieve – often at almost any cost – are leading teachers and institutional managers to turn assessment methods into ‘coaching’ to raise grade achievement and keep students motivated. Everything is subordinated to the need to hit the target, including helping students understand what grade criteria mean, giving oral and written feedback on their work and using self and peer assessment. In many classes, such activities, widely and mistakenly characterised as ‘formative assessment’, have replaced teaching.

This phenomenon is reinforced by low levels of contact time and, crucially, by the perception amongst teachers and students that students need to achieve and to develop confidence and self-esteem. These projects have revealed that pressures to hit targets, combined with concerns that ‘second chance’ learners and those who teachers and others deem to be ‘fragile or vulnerable’ must ‘achieve’, have led to mechanistic forms of assessment, more coaching and the absence of any real teaching of content. This is particularly prevalent in general vocational education. Assignments for summative assessment, and work directed towards signing off targets and competences, dominate much pedagogy in vocational education.

Two forces have served to undermine the curriculum and encourage this instrumentalism. The first is bureaucratic, in the shape of the demands of the inspection and accountability mechanisms imposed on FE. The second is the hollowing out of content in vocational syllabuses. A coherent curriculum with clear progression in subject content, knowledge and skills has been replaced with endless prescriptive lists of assessment criteria and competences. There is ever-increasing talk of “evidencing”, “tracking and signing off targets”, “cross-referencing evidence”, “plugging the gaps in the criteria” and “delivering achievement”. The terminology dominates teachers’ ideas about teaching and learning, while many students expect to pass and to be coached to do so.

One effect is that teaching, learning, achievement and feedback in vocational education have become synonymous in the eyes of everyone in colleges, including teachers, learners, managers and inspectors. Assessment has replaced learning as the major function of vocational education. As a result, students are “achieving” more but learning less.

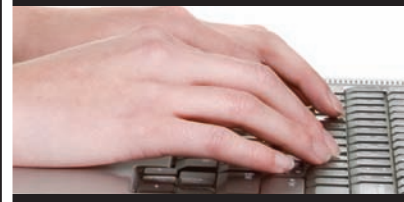
Teachers feel they have little or no scope to adapt curriculum content to match their approaches to teaching and assessment. Calls to revitalise professional expertise must address this issue. The state of teacher training in FE exacerbates these problems. Initial teacher education is largely offered by colleges and there are very variable levels of input from universities, which still validate many courses. Teacher educators, and qualifications designers in awarding bodies such as City and Guilds and Edexcel, who accredit some teacher training courses, are crucial groups who have been overlooked by researchers. We need to consider what the TLRP’s findings about FE mean for the subject content, pedagogy and assessment of teachers in their initial teacher education.

Despite these significant barriers to improving teaching, learning and assessment, the research shows that giving teachers help to change their formative assessment practices is a key factor in the drive to improve colleges.

Lead researcher:

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Better investment is needed to support bilingualism in Wales

Aims of the **Bilingual Literacies for Learning in Further Education** project: To study the everyday literacy practices in Welsh and English of Welsh-speaking FE students, to analyse the bilingual demands of their course of study and identify everyday literacies that could be used to support their learning in college.

This project ran from 2005 to 2007. It found that while progress has been made in the use of Welsh in FE colleges in recent years, there are difficulties to be overcome if the Welsh Assembly Government's ambition of a bilingual Wales is to be achieved.

Wales has 23 FE colleges, of which 14 provide at least some bilingual or Welsh-medium courses. Most of these courses are concentrated in six colleges, four of which are in North Wales.

There is a lack of Welsh-medium teaching and assessment across the sector as a whole. A few vocational courses were developed in the 1980s, and in the 1990s the Allweddiaith Project established collaboration between six colleges to develop Welsh-medium and bilingual materials, set standards in Welsh and provided staff training in bilingual approaches to teaching. In 1993 the Welsh Language Act placed a statutory responsibility on all public sector bodies providing services in Wales to produce a Welsh Language Scheme explaining how they propose to develop equality between the use of Welsh and English in their service. In 2003, Future Skills Wales conducted a survey among employers. Nearly half expect that they will have a future need for Welsh language abilities, especially in personal, professional, technical and customer services.

But progress in providing Welsh-medium education and training has been uneven, because it has been driven by individual projects rather than by an overall vision, and because colleges have been undergoing major changes in governance.

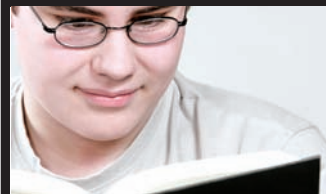
There are four main constraints to the development of Welsh-medium education:

- On-going reorganisation of the funding system for FE in Wales
- Staffing
- The availability and production of materials
- The development of course specifications, assessment standards and verification

Although there are plans for supporting Welsh-medium education by a system of weighted funding, the entire FE funding system is being reorganised to create a supposed level playing field for providers of all types. Until this is bedded down, it is difficult for colleges to plan ahead.

There is a shortage of Welsh-speaking staff with appropriate subject specialisms. Some staff confident in using the language orally are less sure about their written Welsh. There is a shortage of training to support these staff.

ELWa's Bilingual Learning Unit had been developing resources in six curriculum areas where there is strong demand, but doing this was time-consuming. There is some evidence that students are changing their stated language for learning from Welsh to English because of the lack of resources. Some popular textbooks are being translated and some Awarding Bodies are working on NVQ materials, but most Welsh-language materials are still produced by college staff in their own time. These resources might be better used, and duplication in production avoided, if there were a catalogue and possibly a web bank of this material.



There is also a need for standardised terminology, and the Welsh NVQ Scheme has produced glossaries for some employment areas. Awarding Bodies provide specifications for some qualifications in Welsh, but assessment remains difficult. This is not simply a question of translation, but also of making sure that assessments in English and Welsh are comparable and therefore fair. A further difficulty is the shortage of Welsh-speaking verifiers.

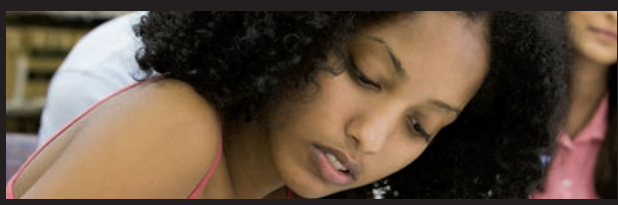
Lead researchers:

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Prof. Roz Ivanič, Lancaster University

Dr Daniel Chandler, University of Wales, Aberystwyth





Students reap benefits but lecturers are under stress

Aims of the **Learning and Working in Further Education in Wales** project: To gain greater understanding of the ways in which learning in FE colleges is the product of social interaction between teachers and students, the prior experiences of both groups, social and economic conditions, and the policy framework.

Most teachers at FE colleges in Wales work with students well beyond their timetabled hours. Researchers for this TLRP project reported extensive one-on-one teaching, both within timetabled classes and beyond them, at every site they studied. In an effort to get the best results out of their students, teachers accepted numerous draft submissions of coursework. Many were weary of the slow pace at which students built incrementally on the formative feedback they received.

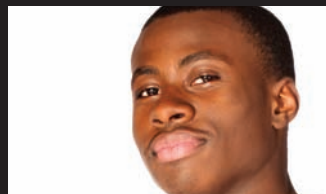
Teachers established nurturing relationships, chased up missing students via texts and telephone calls. They generally felt that the emotional labour they undertook, although draining, was part of being an FE professional. However, there was another reason for the growing pressures on teachers. Since 1992, they have been working under the long shadow of incorporation and are still feeling the effects of the new managerialism and the intensification of work which this has created. Teachers in the TLRP project described how it shapes and constrains what they do in their working lives, its impact on their private lives, and the levels of stress and anxiety which they take home. Nor has devolution altered the experience of being an FE teacher in Wales. The researchers say that the necessary conditions are not yet in place for current initiatives intended to reshape 14-19 education in Wales to succeed.

The research revealed a far more complex picture than had previously been recognised of students' "learning journeys" and the interplay between college and their wider lives. The students' own accounts, and researchers' observations, show that being at college and following courses of study should be seen as part of these wider lives

Older learners had many motives for returning to learn and may return on a full or part time basis. Both types of student viewed their commitment to FE in a focused and purposeful way. During interviews with researchers, they said they were compensating for earlier missed opportunities in order to gain credentials and increase their confidence. Younger learners often claimed that the main benefits of college were "making new friends" or "having more free time than in school". Their teachers maintain that these younger students struggle to balance study against their wider social lives.

There was substantial evidence from the research that post-compulsory education and training contribute to what is commonly referred to as the "wider benefits of learning". Learning is influenced by social and economic factors beyond the classroom. Students gain more benefits from college life than qualifications, important though these are.

The broad significance of college attendance puts pressure on staff to do more than they are paid for to help their students. Teachers, especially women, invest considerable emotional labour in responding to and accommodating external and internal college pressures. Students' prior experiences of schooling are often negative and students cite this poor experience to explain and justify their current attitudes to learning. For this reason, many teachers perceive FE as the "last chance saloon" for their students.



Lead researchers:

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Prof. Gareth Rees, Cardiff University

Contributors:

The research took place between 2005 and 2007. It involved:

- three FE colleges comprising seven campuses

- interviews with 27 teachers

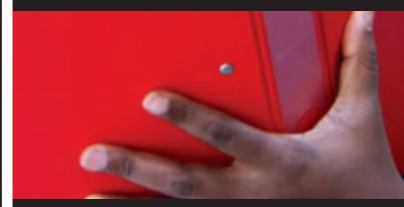
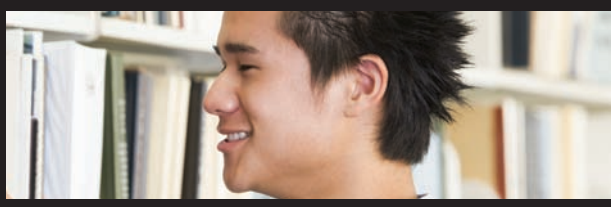
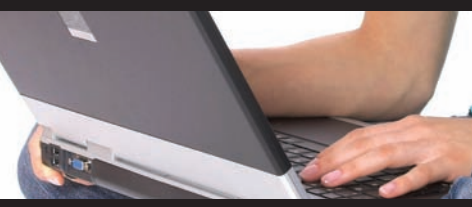
- interviews with 45 students

- learning journals by teachers and students

- eighteen focus group interviews, each with about eight students

- classroom observations and ethnographic fieldwork





How best to overcome isolation in community learning centres?

Aims of the research in the **Understanding and enhancing learning cultures in community-based FE** project: To deepen understanding of the learning cultures in community-based FE and identify practices that increase re-engagement with learning.

This Scottish project focused upon how community-based learning could help people engage with learning. Community-based learning has expanded considerably across the UK in recent years. It promises to reach people who, for a range of reasons, cannot or will not return to learn in traditional colleges. Programmes aimed at bringing adults back into learning have been a central policy in Scotland. But despite its important role in re-engaging the hard to reach, community-based learning is often marginalised and of low status.

The small-scale and informal nature of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) makes them attractive to reluctant learners. They are less intimidating and formal than colleges and have more permeable boundaries. Colleges can look too like the schools where the learners these centres aim to encourage may well have failed before. Students value CLC tutors, who treat them more equally and whose style is not didactic or hierarchical.

Support staff also have a key role. They are an important part of the learning culture because they are often the first point of contact with students and are often more permanent than the teaching staff.

But the research team, focusing on two colleges in Scotland and the community learning centres attached to them, witnessed a range of problems hampering the work of very dedicated tutors and support staff. Two factors were of particular significance.

First, because community learning inherently happens in small sites such as community centres and annexes, it is physically isolated from the main college campus. Although this is a strength in attracting learners, it can leave the staff relatively cut off from their colleagues.

Second, tutors' roles in CLCs differ markedly from those of their colleagues in mainstream college work. Tutors in CLCs are often more directly concerned with supporting fragile and uncertain learners than with specific subjects or disciplines.

These factors can turn a simple geographical fact into a problem of status. But if community-based education is to fulfill its potential to re-engage learners, tutors will need greater recognition and support, and learners will need more support to move on.

Tutors in these centres carry out a great deal of emotional labour. Many of the learners lead complex and difficult lives, facing poverty, social isolation or fraught emotional relationships. Tutors often put a lot of non-contracted and unpaid time into supporting them.

This method of working puts pressure on the tutors. Because of the mixed nature of the student groups, tutors have to work at different levels in the same class. They also have to negotiate a balance between the informality of CLCs and the formality of the FE system. Assessment and qualifications can require an official approach, like school, which is alien to the more friendly style of CLCs.



Paradoxically, the very success of CLCs raises the issue of progression for the students. Having succeeded in a supportive and informal atmosphere, students can find it difficult to progress into more formal situations, such as employment or further courses on the main campus. The CLC becomes a comfort zone which the researchers term the fur-lined rut, and students need help to move out of it.

These pressures need to be acknowledged and taken account of by funding authorities and senior management when considering decisions about sites and buildings, staff appointments, peer working, CPD and student support, say the researchers.

Colleges should develop strategies to select suitable staff for these demanding roles, and support them with appropriate training. They also need to be fully included in the work of the college. Learners in CLCs are also likely to need additional guidance, mentoring and bridging courses to help them progress.

Lead researchers:

Prof. Jim Gallacher, Glasgow Caledonian University

Dr. Bethan Crossan, Glasgow Caledonian University

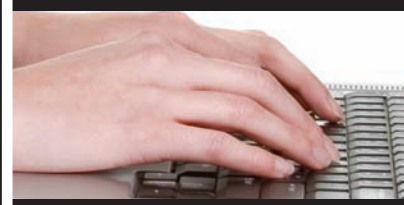
Prof. Terry Mayes, Glasgow Caledonian University

Contributors:

The research was carried out between 2003 and 2005 as an extension of the Transforming Learning Cultures project. It involved:

- four community-based learning sites in two Scottish FE colleges – one city-based and one more rural
- interviews with 20 staff and 34 learners
- informal observations
- quantitative studies of the two colleges to understand their contexts
- workshops with staff and students in each centre
- meetings with senior management in each college





Professionals need more room to decide “what works” in further education

Aims of the research in the **Transforming Learning Cultures** project: To deepen understanding of the complexities of learning cultures, to identify pressures and threats to learning in FE and to identify, implement and evaluate strategies to improve learning opportunities

Classrooms are microcosms of their surrounding society, and are not detached from it. Each has its own complex set of relationships, which we term its learning culture. At its best, education builds on these learning cultures to encourage and challenge students to go beyond their existing dispositions and undergo personal change as well as acquiring knowledge. But such change is rarely recognised by a system in which success is measured by qualifications. Treating education as a simple mechanical process risks diminishing its transformative power.

TLRP researchers argue that teachers and managers need room to manoeuvre and exercise their professional judgement if they are to get the best out of the situation to benefit their students.

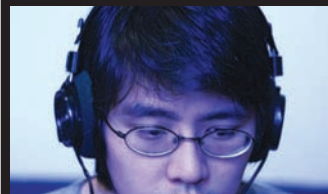
Learning cultures in FE derive from the interactions of complex sets of relationships. Students and tutors each have their own set of attitudes, based on their personal and socio-economic experiences. They work together in changing groups, in different buildings, within differing institutions, and are affected by different local management policies and by national central policy. No single factor can be identified that is always of central importance in understanding how learning happens in FE. It is the unique combination of these and other factors that determines each situation.

Despite this complexity, the sector was often managed until recently as though desired outcomes can be engineered through targets and funding mechanisms. The project data collection was completed in 2004, and since then there has been much greater recognition of some of the problems associated with targets and the audit culture. For example, it is noticeable that the interviews with policy-makers carried out up to 2007 in the later LSS project picked up this unease. The LSS project findings came at a time when the sector was much more responsive to the idea of reform, in contrast to the defensive response encountered in the early years of the decade. This approach was a hangover, we think, from the era in which the sector lacked the resources to carry out the diverse missions ascribed to it. But it is still important to realise that centrally imposed targets can constrain effective teaching and learning.

FE is subject to greater central direction and management than other education sectors. Partly because colleges have traditionally been welcoming to second chance students who have experienced little educational success and have a vocational emphasis, FE has traditionally had lower status than other sectors. This has left it open to more extreme forms of managerialism, stricter auditing disciplines and more severe funding changes than either schools or universities.

The research shows that all FE institutions have undergone mergers or other forms of major restructuring, many of which were seen as having had a generally negative effect on learning. The inspection regime in force at the time was seen as rigid. It had failed, according to people within FE, to recognise that what may work for one set of students is not necessarily right for another, requiring uniformity in teaching and learning rather than trusting to the tutor's judgment.

Auditing systems were also seen as inflexible by staff. In one college where TLRP researchers worked, the register system could not recognise photography students as present when they were working in the darkroom because they were not in a classroom. So systems intended to raise standards worked at cross-purposes to effective learning.



Moreover, much of the drive to raise standards in FE has had little to do with teaching and learning. FE is expected to tackle all kinds of issues, from the moral standards of the young to the nation's industrial and commercial skills deficit. These demanding requirements exist alongside the drive to make FE more cost-effective. The result was pressure on the system to provide ever more solutions, and at a lower cost per student. The pressure to increase participation, retention and attainment rates at the same time meant that many tutors were doing a lot of 'underground' work, supporting their students at the expense of their own time, energy and morale. These pressures increased during the period of the research, with some tutors opting to leave the system altogether.

Yet tutors are the key feature of any learning culture. Although many factors are outside their control, they have a central significance in learning. This goes beyond methods of pedagogy. They have to interpret the meaning of their courses in social and economic terms for the students. They often work to ameliorate harmful effects on the students of college reorganisations, inflexible assessment systems and funding cuts, and they must cope with the effects of training people for low-status occupations.

For in following a course, students are gaining far more than knowledge of its content. Some but not all of this knowledge is helpful to them. Nursery nurses may gain self-esteem through knowing how to be good at their job, but they also learn that it is highly gendered and has low status. Such negative factors are all part of the learning culture that tutors have to interpret and mediate for their students.

The researchers conclude that the sector needs to be managed on a more flexible basis that allows room for professionals to act according to their own judgment of the local situations, within a set of national principles. These principles are:

- Learning is about more than gaining qualifications. These hard-to-measure gains should be acknowledged and celebrated
- In trying to improve learning cultures, professionals should be able to choose systems and procedures that work together and support each other rather than undermining learning
- Professionals should be able to decide "what works" for their own situation and not be confined to rigid procedures
- There needs to be space for more localised judgment and creativity
- Improvement in learning requires critical reflection at all levels; government, college, tutor and student.

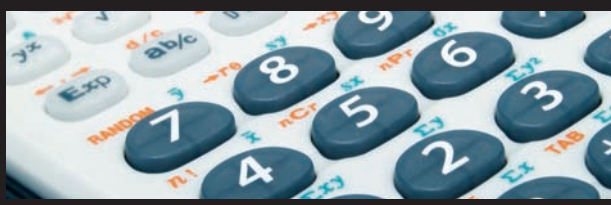
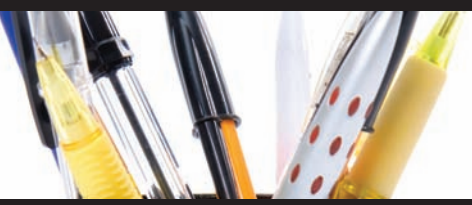
Lead researchers:

Prof. Phil Hodkinson, University of Leeds
Prof. Denis Gleeson, University of Warwick
Prof. David James, University of the West of England
Dr Keith Postlethwaite, University of Exeter
Prof. Gert Biesta, University of Exeter (from 2003), now University of Stirling

Contributors:

The research was carried out between 2001 and 2005. It involved:

- 4 universities
- 17 FE learning sites in colleges in the North, Midlands and South of England
- Over 600 interviews with students and tutors
- 150 observations
- 1043 questionnaires to students
- making it the largest investigation of learning in FE in the UK to date



The place of research in FE professionalism must be protected

Aims of the **Using research to enhance professionalism** project: To investigate the effects that doing research has on the professional identity of practitioners in FE, and to investigate ways in which research could enhance professionalism within FE.

Research has played a role in professional staff development and curriculum improvement in FE. Some of the best colleges have built a tradition of involving practitioners at every level. Research Networks have been developed to support classroom and workshop-based investigations. However, TLRP research reveals a disturbing picture of diminishing practitioner involvement and declining funds. Valuable studies are being refused funding, as the limited resources available for research are redirected towards improved performance.

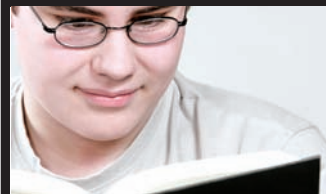
In this study of research in FE, the key practitioner participants were interviewed twice over 18 months. All were enthusiasts for research. They saw it as part of their professional identity, it made them feel positive about their work, and they believed that the learners also benefited. The advantages, they said, were clearly indicated by enhanced retention, achievement, and changes to learning cultures.

But by the time of their second interview, all the participants were doing less research, and some were unhappy about the direction that research was taking in FE. In a few cases, the participants had gained promotion, which could account for their reduced time for research. But all agreed that their working conditions and opportunity for meaningful research had declined between the two interviews.

Where research was continuing, it was increasingly closely focused on organisational and national priorities. Some participants questioned whether under such constraints, research would really be about genuine enquiry. They described how projects were being influenced by college management and how they were being aligned to other purposes, such as supporting a coaching initiative.

The short-term nature of funding for research often meant that sustaining or extending particular initiatives depended on funding from the college itself. In one college, this had led to a 'costed model' of research. If it was anticipated that the results of the research would lead to more funding coming into the college, perhaps through increased retention or attainment rates, than the research would cost, then it would be supported. Practitioners expressed grave doubts about whether such a model would be sustainable without additional project funding. It would also be dependent on producing quick and instrumental results. It would not accommodate research that questioned how the sector operated, or its policies and practices.

When research is squeezed in this way, evidence-informed practice becomes more difficult. If research is to be sustained in FE, we need a new model that has room for organisational priorities and for more fundamental and critical questions. This in turn would need stronger links between further and higher education. It would need conditions of work to be reconfigured and it would need a change in FE training from "reactive compliance" to external pressures to an attitude of critical inquiry.



Lead researcher:

Mark Goodrham, Leeds College of Technology

Contributors:

The research was carried out between 2001 and 2006. It involved:

- five general FE college sites
- a key 'research enthusiast' (ranging in role from senior lecturer to instructor/trainer grade, identified through LSN) and three to six colleagues at each site
- yielding 41 interviews with 28 practitioners
- observations of participants





Many concerns are shared between further and higher education

Conventional ideas about widening participation in post-compulsory education, and how learning outcomes can differ through a student's life, are challenged in 7 TLRP studies on widening participation in higher education. HE is often taught in FE institutions, and FE is sometimes taught in higher education institutions. This means that the boundaries between these so-called sectors are becoming more permeable and the institutional forms of post-compulsory education more diverse. England has what has traditionally been regarded as a dual sector for post-compulsory education, in that there are separate institutions for FE and HE.

TLRP researchers Gareth Parry, Ann-Marie Bathmaker, David Smith and Greg Brooks have been investigating the influence of a division between FE and HE on strategies to widen participation in undergraduate education. As 'mixed economy' institutions, FE colleges that teach higher education and HE establishments that offer further education are expected to build strong and smooth progression between the two sectors. However, the interfaces between FE and HE are configured in different ways and do not necessarily enhance internal progression. Furthermore, many FE colleges are dependent on HE institutions for the funding and validation of their HE courses and, typically, they compete as well as collaborate in the same market for students.

All the TLRP HE projects have looked at how cultural, economic and social influences affect policy changes, decisions on types of participation in learning, and the outcomes. They are revealing how complex people's lives and experiences can be during their lifelong education. The decision to continue to participate in education beyond the current compulsory age of 16 is influenced by a range of factors and variables to do with school, family and wider social contexts, in addition to policy measures aimed at encouraging wider participation. Anna Vignoles has conducted a quantitative analysis of national administrative data to track the various influences on types of participation in relation to educational achievements. The analysis highlights that inequalities in educational achievement emerge very early and factors in primary school will influence individuals' subsequent participation in both FE and HE.

Using large administrative data sets combined with case studies Geoff Hayward, Hubert Ertl, Michael Hoelscher and Harriet Dunbar-Goddet have identified that while there are progression opportunities to HE for those with VET qualifications these on the whole provide access to a limited range of institutions and programmes. This pattern of participation means that while certain under represented groups gain access to HE via VET pathways their future trajectories are likely to be more constrained than those following the still dominant GCE A level pathway to Higher Education.

Students' experiences of higher education are influenced by the interrelationship of social class, gender and ethnicity with the conditions of learning provided by the institutions themselves. Gill Crozier and Diane Reay have looked at the experiences of working class students in four types of higher education including one FE college. They found divergent experiences across the HEIs marked out by for example, immersion as students in a holistic experience on the one hand and a fragmented, disjointed experience on the other. Similarly, in a study across fifteen HEIs and three subjects - biosciences, business studies and sociology - John Brennan, Mike Osborne and colleagues found that social and personal factors are as important as institutional ones in influencing student learning.

Williams et al analysed the progression of students into and out of mathematically demanding programmes of further and higher education. They found that the main effects were due to the nature of the course programmes and the teaching methods used. Few other socio-cultural variables were statistically significant in adding value, except for an indicator of ethnicity. However, Hernandez-Martinez et al (2008) reported that students' aspirations are expressed in distinct, culturally mediated, ways. For example, 'becoming a success' and 'personal satisfaction' appeal to contrasting perspectives on progression. They concluded that appeals to students to increase their participation need to be multi-voiced.



Alison Fuller, Sue Heath and Karen Paton found that decisions about whether to participate or not in HE were embedded in the attitudes to educational and career progression that existed in their family and friendship networks. Flora Macleod and Paul Lambe used the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) to look at adult participation in post-compulsory education and found that two-thirds of this population is moving in and out of participation. They describe this as 'hidden turbulence' and consider that it influences learning outcomes.

Teaching groups in all areas of HE are becoming more diverse. Christine Hockings and Sandra Cooke have looked at how teachers were using and reflecting on different pedagogies to keep all their students engaged in classrooms in two very different HEIs. In a case study of two contrasting computing classrooms they found that teachers need to become more sensitive to diversity. Many of these researchers argue that as HE - wherever it is taught - becomes more diverse, it is essential to develop a range of appropriate pedagogies.

The *Research Papers in Education*, 2008, Vol. 23, No. 2, Special Issue contains eleven contributions with implications for FE:

Miriam David Editorial Introduction: *Challenges of diversity for widening participation in UK higher education*

Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Greg Brooks, Gareth Parry and David Smith, *Dual-sector further and higher education: policies, organisations and students in transition*

John Brennan and Mike Osborne, *Higher education's many diversities: of students, institutions and experiences; and outcomes?*

Gill Crozier, Diane Reay, John Clayton, Lori Colliander, and Jan Grinstead, *Different strokes for different folks: diverse students in diverse institutions - experiences of higher education.*

Steve Gibbons and Arnaud Chevalier, *Assessment and age 16+ education participation*

Paul Hernandez-Martinez, Laura Black, Julian Williams, Pauline Davis, Maria Pampaka and Geoff Wake, *Mathematics students' aspirations for higher education: class, ethnicity, gender and interpretative repertoire styles*

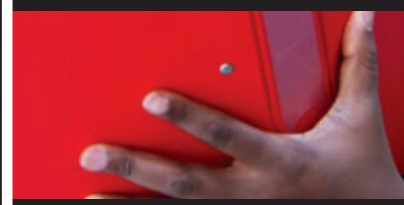
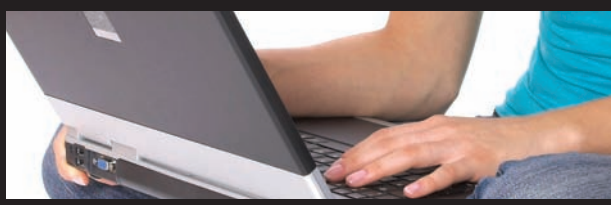
Sue Heath, Alison Fuller and Karen Paton, *Network-based ambivalence and educational decision-making: a case study of 'non-participation' in higher education*

Christine Hockings, Sandra Cooke, Hiromi Yamashita, Samantha McGinty and Marion Bowl, *Switched off? A study of disengagement among computing students at two universities.*

Michael Hoelscher, Geoff Hayward, Hubert Ertl and Harriet Dunbar-Goddet, *The transition from vocational education and training to higher education: a successful pathway?*

Flora Macleod and Paul Lambe, *Dynamics of adult participation in part time education and training: results from the British Household Panel Survey*

Graham Welch, Ioulia Papageorgi, Liz Haddon, Angela Creech, Frances Morton, Cristophe de Bézenac, Celia Duffy, John Potter, Tony Whyton and Evangelos Himonides, *Musical genre and gender as factors in higher education learning in music*



FE needs more partnership and collaboration in decision making

Aims of the **Policy, Learning and Inclusion across the Learning and Skills Sector** project: To analyse the impact of Government policy on learning and inclusion for three disadvantaged groups who are a priority for the LSC: 16-19s in colleges on level 1 and 2 courses, adults improving basic skills in community learning, and those in work-based learning with basic skills content. The policy levers under examination were targets, funding, planning, inspection, and policy initiatives such as Skills for Life.

Since the formation of the Learning and Skills Council in 2001 there have been important advances in the sector, focusing on the needs of learners and employers. Participation rates, the quality of provision, learner satisfaction and attainment rates have all improved. There has been a significant increase in funding and much greater recognition of the sector's role in promoting national prosperity.

Set against these gains is the turbulence created by policy change. The LSC has been substantially restructured, institutions have been reorganised and there has been a major reallocation of funding for adult learning.

While the sector is more managed than before, policy tensions remain between local flexibility and central control, and between competition and collaboration. Parity of funding between providers has not been reached and some areas of training, such as Jobcentre Plus, remain outside the LSC's remit.

The governance of FE has undergone a fundamental shift since 2004. "Top-down" area planning has been replaced by an equally top-down market model. Targets have become the dominant lever, with a stronger focus on national priorities. This trend has been accelerated by the Foster and Leitch reviews of the future of colleges and the skills needs for the UK to the year 2020. This has produced a system with a clear focus on skills and the demands of employers.

These nationally derived drivers and targets do not take account of the complexities of the system and can have unintended consequences at a local level. This is partly to do with the ways in which people at all levels translate policy as it is passed down, and partly results from the ways in which providers try to adapt policy to suit local needs, which may not align with broad national requirements. This top-down approach has left some practitioners with little room for professional judgment or manoeuvre. The gap between practitioners and the designers and administrators of policy seems to be growing. Moreover, the benefit gained from initiatives such as Skills for Life can be undermined by the instability caused by frequent shifts of policy and funding. This has led to a belief amongst practitioners that some of the gains made are not sustainable.

An example of this is the focus of funding on Level 2 qualifications. The intention is to increase social inclusion by improving employability. But learners who take "too long" to reach Entry Level 3, or who need to be drawn into learning through unassessed courses can find themselves excluded, while those who achieve a Level 2 qualification are expected to pay for further courses and so find it difficult to progress. Thus the very groups the policy was intended to support can be marginalised.

Learners have a high level of confidence in their tutors and other support practitioners, and the learner-tutor relationship is crucial for success. But the bureaucracy deriving from accountability procedures limits practitioners' room for professional manoeuvre and the time they can spend with learners. There is little opportunity for practitioners to offer feedback to policy makers and administrators, so policy cannot benefit from their experience. The researchers argue that it would be more meaningful to see the tutor-learner relationship as the centre of the system, not simply the learner.



The researchers conclude that the learning and skills sector remains an unequal and divided one that is not operating as a system. They argue for an alternative vision based on a devolved social partnership between government, employers, trade unions, professionals and community representatives, with more local and collaborative decision-making. This would allow for more professional participation and feedback, making change more gradual and reflective. Inequity, both within the system and between it on the one hand and schools and universities on the other, should be addressed, with disadvantaged groups receiving greater resources.

Lead researchers:

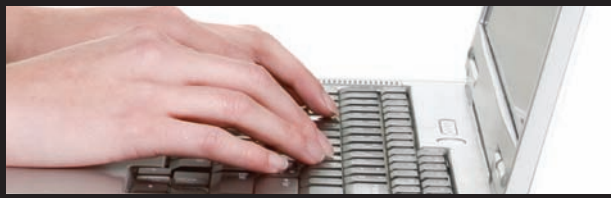
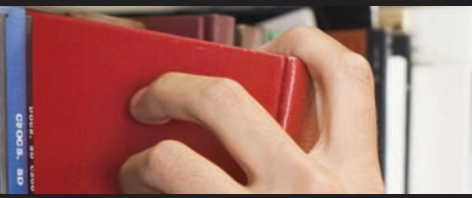
Prof. Frank Coffield, Institute of Education, University of London
Dr Ann Hodgson, Institute of Education, University of London
Dr Ken Spours, Institute of Education, University of London
Dr Ian Finlay, University of Strathclyde
Richard Steer, Institute of Education, University of London
Sheila Edward, Institute of Education, University of London
Maggie Gregson, University of Sunderland

Contributors:

The research was carried out between 2004 and 2007. It involved:

- 24 learning sites in London and North-East England (8 adult courses in the community, 8 work-based learning and 8 in FE colleges)
- over 500 interviews with learners, tutors and managers
- over 100 interviews with policy makers and other key players, from European Commission to local LSC Partnership level
- survey of policy documents
- questionnaire to key players on the research findings





How firm is the evidence base for policy-making?

Aim of the **Centres of Vocational Excellence** project; To analyse the evaluations of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) undertaken by central government and other organisations in order to test the extent to which their establishment was evidence-based.

Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) were created by the Government to raise the level of skills for work, with the promise of continuous and thorough evaluation in order to gain evidence to inform future policy development. However, TLRP research reveals that they were poorly evaluated, and that the analysis of the initiative failed to produce the hard evidence promised.

The CoVEs offer specialist higher vocational education based on skills needs. They were set up from 2001 following a speech by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and were intended to address the need to compete in a global economy and tackle social inclusion. The aim was to replace competition between training providers with strategic planning based on partnerships between public and private providers and between colleges and schools, guided by a strong employer voice.

CoVEs were also part of the Government's modernisation agenda to increase flexibility in the provision of skills training and enhance specialisation, diversity and choice in this provision. The Government contributed £100 million to establish 400 CoVEs by 2006.

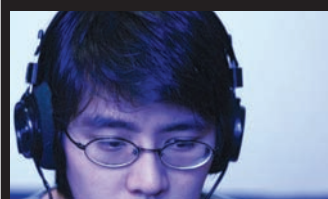
An important element of the thinking behind the modernisation agenda was that policy should be evidence-based, grounded in "what works". A TLRP project examined a range of evaluations of CoVEs carried out by government, agencies and consultants and interviewed individuals involved in policy making and implementation to find out what had been discovered about CoVEs and how far this information had influenced developing policy.

The first finding of this "evaluation of the evaluations" was that the second phase of the policy had been launched before the research on the initial Pathfinder group had been completed. In any case, the evaluations themselves were of questionable worth.

The CoVE programme originally had plans for a research unit. This never materialised, so the evaluations were carried out by a variety of organisations in the public and private sectors. And although they looked at what various CoVEs had done, they did not evaluate the actual policy of establishing them.

Some evaluations were simply descriptions of what was taken to be good practice. Others were based on very small samples. It was rarely apparent just where the boundary of what a CoVE actually included lay, which made the collection of relevant data problematic. Moreover, it was not clear what effects the CoVEs had had on learning compared with other factors, or whether the institutions involved had been having these effects anyway before achieving CoVE status. There was no attempt to estimate whether the same effects could have been achieved by other policies. Nor was it clear how much money had been spent on the CoVEs, making value for money judgments impossible. Moreover, the evaluations were unable to show what effects the CoVEs had had on training in the locality as a whole. Had employers really increased the amount of training offered, or merely moved it from one provider to another?

So, far from being evidence-based, CoVEs were just one of the changes introduced into the sector at a time when there was confusion of purposes, and like many of these changes, they were not rigorously evaluated.



Lead researchers:

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Prof. Prue Huddleston, Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick

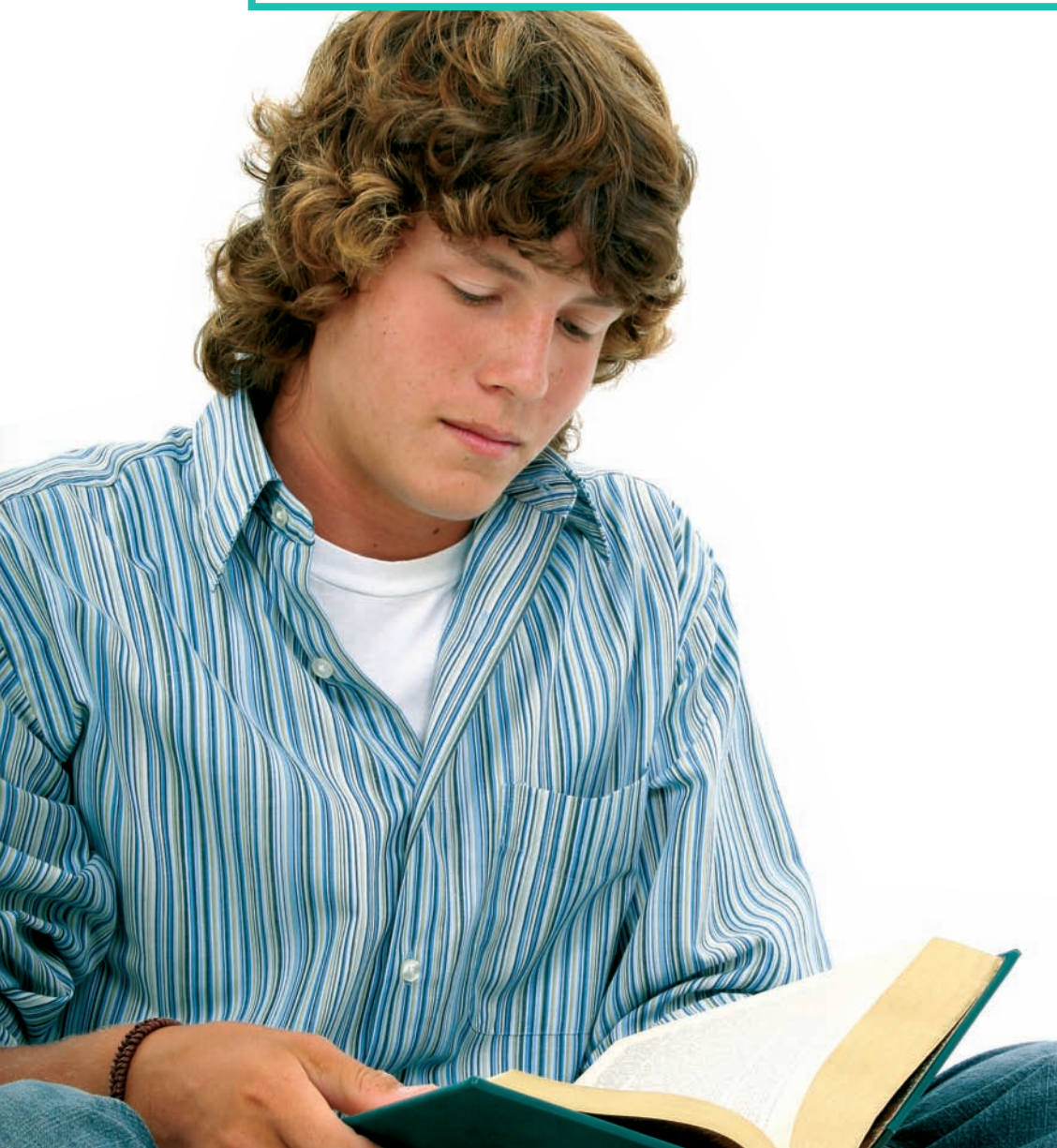
Prof. Denis Gleeson, Institute for Education, University of Warwick

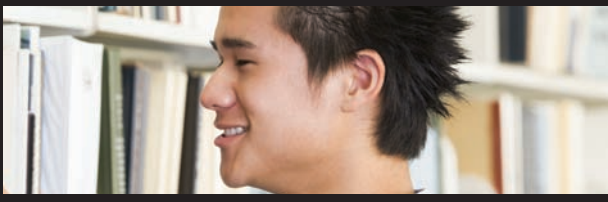
Contributors:

4 FE colleges

29 evaluation documents

29 interviews with policy makers including a Minister, policy implementers, stakeholders, users and consultants





Further Education: supporting the “neglected middle child”

The TLRP’s research has highlighted the central role of the tutor-student relationship in FE. This partnership has emerged as the bedrock of important advances and has permitted a clearer focus on the needs of learners and employers.

Tutor-student relationships are also crucial to the success of FE in helping disadvantaged, under-achieving and excluded people of all ages to develop their often fractured identities as learners, with the aid of government initiatives to widen participation. The importance of FE is seen in plans for post-14 provision and the requirement for schools and FE to collaborate in order to deliver the new 14-19 Diplomas.

While the new Diploma Development Partnerships in England highlight how FE can complement school provision, the Government announcement in March 2008 that it plans to support the development of 20 new higher education centres based in colleges in towns currently without universities is indicative of their role in further widening participation this sector too.

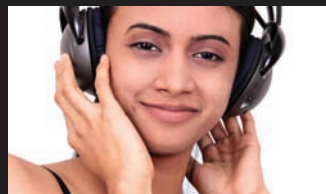
These gains have been achieved in a situation of almost constant policy change with implications for funding, governance and the curriculum. Only GCSE and A level have remained comparatively stable. Structures, funding mechanisms and vocational and adult learning have been the areas of most policy turbulence. Since colleges were removed from local education authority control by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, and made quasi-independent corporations, governments have sought ever-increasing flexibility and accountability, with little investment to underpin their demands until the late 1990s. When significant investment was made colleges were not always free to deploy resources as they saw fit. Much of the new money was tied to specific initiatives and achievement targets. Growth in investment has been considerable, but less than for schools and universities.

Governments regard FE as a vital contributor to national prosperity. This means that colleges have come under pressure to concentrate on skills for employability, and to respond to employer demands. At the same time, there has been a growing focus on the personal development of young people and on work and life skills. These new priorities have often been at the expense of lifelong learning programmes. The result is a rapidly changing teaching and learning landscape with a succession of policies ranging from lifelong learning to uncapped 16-19 expansion, a renewed push on adult basic skills, and now a new focus on 14-19 growth. At the time of writing (March 2008), the policy turbulence continues. In England, the Learning and Skills Council has been restructured prior to eventual abolition, colleges have been reorganised and money for adult learning has been reallocated. The TLRP projects have shown how tutors shield learners from the consequences of policy change. Learners regard FE as a stable environment in which they can flourish despite educational failure elsewhere, while the workforce has experienced constant change.

The TLRP’s research shows that throughout recent changes, FE has exhibited three consistent characteristics. It is enduring, entrepreneurial - and inequitably treated in comparison to schools and higher education. As Sir Andrew Foster put it in the 2005 report of the inquiry he chaired into the future of colleges in England, *Realising the Potential - A review of the future role of further education colleges*, “FE is the neglected middle child.”

This inquiry was the culmination of successive attempts by government and policy makers to analyse the diversity of colleges, pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses and make skills for employability their core business.

Sir Andrew suggested that diversity in colleges was a weakness and that they should specialise. But the



findings of several TLRP projects suggest otherwise. Effective teaching and learning work in different ways with different people, which calls for the flexible approach characterised by FE.

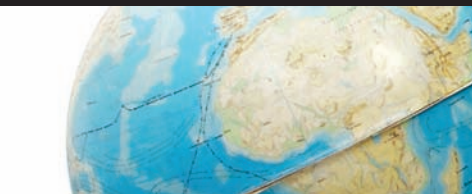
Our research offers positive ways of building on the gains of the past seven to ten years. It shows that the keys to good teaching and learning are the relationship between the teacher and the learner, and appropriate resources and spaces for that relationship to flourish. Colleges and other institutions in FE are not just second-chance centres for 'failed' students. They also include 'rebels' who have chosen not to remain in the school environment. FE is about exploring possibilities and offering new starts, new directions, and changes of identity. A variety of teaching and learning approaches is essential. Our research shows that there need to be fewer constraints upon the scope of teachers for professional judgment.

Colleges' efforts to meet the needs of learners are also hampered by the multiplicity of agencies with which they have to work. The best of intentions become distorted when subject to so many intermediaries, so that colleges often have too little room to adapt to differing local circumstances and learner needs.

FE is entrepreneurial, and deals with issues and groups that schools and universities do not tackle. But our research shows that the audit culture is distorting the priorities of people working in FE. Everyone is spending more time providing paperwork to protect themselves. Local community links and second-chance education are being replaced as priorities by cost-effective recruitment, retention and achievement, almost irrespective of the quality of the learning taking place. There is also too much emphasis on assessment, at the expense of real learning. In some vocational areas, the focus on assessment overwhelms curriculum and pedagogy, and an over-emphasis on qualifications acts as an inadequate proxy for learning. This thinking centres on the completion of "units" and not on the course as a whole, nor on progression.

More recently, the problems associated with targets and the audit culture have been recognised by ministers and policy makers. Considerable changes are still needed, however, if professional staff are to be able to build on their success. Under the current system, tutors have too little intellectual space, capacity and freedom to do a wider job of educating the whole person. The research points to a limited understanding of learning by government agencies and policy makers, who often see it simply as a process of acquisition of knowledge and skills. This narrow approach does not link with our knowledge of effective pedagogy nor to the idea that learners are often engaged in a process of constructing identities for learning and work. The question is whether FE is about acquiring knowledge and skills alone, or is also about learning which changes the learner by engaging them in the process. From this perspective, FE is about learning how to become a learner and how to develop an identity across education, training and perhaps also employment. It is about learners changing aspects of their lives and also the way they relate to the world.

TLRP research offers policy-makers tools to help improve FE. In common with other areas of education, FE needs to develop a learning culture, using research to examine ways in which teaching and learning in the sector can be enhanced. This will mean reframing the culture of audit and accountability to accept risk and encourage creativity among staff at all levels. While skills for employability may be the current focus, they are not the whole story. Learners embarking on FE routes need doors kept open to wider choices.



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