LEADING SKILLS: PAPER 2

Policies for strong leadership in Further Education colleges

NIGEL KEOHANE

ABOUT FETL

The Further Education Trust for Leadership's vision is of a further education sector that is valued and respected for:

- Innovating constantly to meet the needs of learners, communities and employers;
- Preparing for the long term as well as delivering in the short term; and
- Sharing fresh ideas generously and informing practice with knowledge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

Dame Ruth Silver

The Further Education Trust for Leadership exists both to strengthen the quality of leadership in further education and to contribute to the creation of conditions within the sector in which knowledge-enriched, creative and autonomous leadership can take place. We are delighted, therefore, to have supported this project, which has important things to say about how leadership in further education can be strengthened and supported.

The report is timely. It comes at a point when the further education sector is under unprecedented scrutiny, with a number of reports and commissions of inquiry asking questions about the future of FE, and the main political parties seemingly keen to tap into these ideas. However, it also comes at a time when sector leaders are under huge pressure and the recruitment and development of leaders is proving challenging.

The report does two things I particularly like. First, it locates sector leaders within local systems, and acknowledges their important role in their local community, within networks to which they should be seen as key contributors. The government needs to think further about how this kind of collaboration can be supported. Second, it appreciates the challenges leaders in further education face, and the factors that can lead to leaders being isolated and demotivated, and makes concrete recommendations to address them. These have both been important strands of FETL's own work in recent months.

There are some very valuable proposals here. Current leaders need to be better supported, and I hope sector leaders and representative bodies will take seriously the recommendations concerning better networking opportunities and the sharing of best practice. There is also a pressing need both to invest in the talents of middle leaders already in the sector, and to attract people from outside the sector to key roles within it. As the authors note, approaches to the latter have not always been successful, and I welcome the proposal for some kind of induction process for leaders new to education.

Governance is another important theme here and I hope more work will follow in this area. The role of governors is often challenging, and often not well understood. The relationship between the chair of governors and the executive leader of a college needs to be close, yet distant; it needs to be supportive, yet critical. My feeling is that both governors and principals need more support in getting the most out of this relationship. An expert review of this relationship and how it works would be welcome. The role of governorship remains one of the most under-scrutinised aspects of public life. I would like to see that change.

I think the report is an important contribution to the wider debate about the future of further education. The question of sector leadership, however, should not be approached in isolation. We need to better support and promote leadership within FE, but we need to introduce this as part of a wider rethinking of the sector, and the way in which it is currently funded, regulated and scrutinised. The high-risk, turbulent and crisis-driven environment in which college principals standardly operate is not especially conducive to thoughtful, creative and collaborative approaches to leadership.

This report creates an important space for further ideas, exploration and collaboration. I very much hope it will receive the attention it deserves, in Whitehall, among sector bodies and leadership networks, and in staff rooms across the country. FETL and the authors of this report share a common goal: to create a 'learning sector', capable of reflecting intelligently and autonomously about its own successes and failures, and able to engender the next stage of its own development.

Dame Ruth Silver is President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report argues that a shift in mindset is needed to promote and strengthen leadership in further education colleges. Reforms to the system are necessary as well as cultural change in the sector and beyond. This report is an early attempt, we hope, towards prompting a bigger, deeper discussion about leadership in which sector bodies, colleges, the Department for Education, politicians, learners, and those who do the training and development can participate.

This report develops four central arguments:

- Further Education (FE) leadership needs to be thought of as a system – and policies are needed at a system level. The unique legal status of colleges, and their independence from government, means there is a growing risk that fragmentation in the sector leads to a structure overall that is too disjointed to sustain strong leadership. Government and sector bodies need to be ready to intervene and lead. While FE is not 'of' the public sector, this report argues that many of the solutions adopted in the public sector apply also to FE. A wider debate is required in the sector as to whether colleges can work more collectively in the interests of a strong future FE sector.

- Principals increasingly need to act as local 'systems' leaders, seeking to achieve outcomes for their learners and for their local economies by working with and through other partners. This means that they should be given opportunities to learn and develop, and to build networks, with other public sector

leaders locally. Such a approach could also open up opportunities to draw on external talent pools in sectors – such as local government – which comprise similar forms of leadership and values.

- There is much excellent activity taking place in the sector – the challenge now is to expand and prioritise investment. For instance, retaining and developing talented mid- career future leaders in the sector must become a (potentially the) core focus of the leadership development strategy. As noted elsewhere in this report, the Department for Education has now acknowledged explicitly the important role of leadership in FE and has started to commit resources. Now is the moment to switch to longer-term funding on a different scale – away from a quick fix to a sustainable pipeline of strong FE leaders.

- A culture change is needed to help FE become a learning sector: a sector which seeks to understand the underlying causes of failure, and to allow leaders to seek and receive support. Part of this is a challenge to FE to be a 'self-improving sector'. But, this should be part of a broader political mission to value further education and its leaders. The recent Augar Review has argued forcefully in favour of refunding and reforming FE to address a situation where 'no prior government of any persuasion has considered further education to be a priority. The consequence has been decades of neglect and a loss of status and prestige amongst learners, employers and the public at large'.[1]

Proposed reforms

The report looks at five channels through which government and the sector can influence FE leadership, and it sets out specific recommendations. Many of these reforms can be led by and through the sector, but some require government intervention and political commitment.

Supporting current leaders

We believe that networks should play a crucial function in supporting and developing current leaders. Networks can fulfil multiple functions: enabling dissemination of ideas and best practice in an era of rapid technological change and innovation; acting as sources of support for leaders when they confront challenges; and helping principals practice systems leadership.

Recommendations:

- Sector bodies should establish and coordinate a 'Principals Emeritus Network' to hang onto the experience and expertise of retiring principals, as a resource for existing principals and as mentors for those seeking to develop their career. This should be part of a wider attempt to encourage a larger number of successful principals to take on national 'systems leadership' roles for the sector itself – helping raise standards across the sector, for instance through mentoring. This could build on the DfE's National Leaders of Further Education. A similar network could be built up for college governors.
- Colleges should develop and lead cross-public sector networking and learning opportunities for leaders at a local level, where training and development can be 'context- specific'. These could be piloted through the Public Services Leadership Academy.
- Existing forums for college leaders should be strengthened and expanded.

Strengthening the leadership pipeline in FE

Middle leaders are becoming increasingly crucial to the functioning of colleges as organisations. They are also future leaders and are currently not receiving sufficient investment or attention.

Recommendations:

- The DfE and the sector should increase investment in training and development for middle leaders, and the Middle Leaders programmes should be expanded significantly.
- The DfE should also consult on whether to create a formal qualification similar to the National Professional Headship Qualification in schools, with a view to creating a qualification that can act as a signal to potential leaders and to governing bodies.
- Sector bodies should create an FE Leaders Career Plan Guide to help talented junior managers understand the paths to leadership.
- The Government should invite FE colleges to participate in its new Public Services Leadership Academy. We believe this could benefit the FE sector (especially those one- rung below principal) and other parts of the public sector.
- The DfE, in collaboration with sector bodies, should consult on establishing an independent staff college (similar to the National College for School Leadership) to promote the status of FE as well as to be responsible for system-level initiatives to retain and develop leadership talent in the sector.
- The DfE should consider a generous scheme to subsidise training and development and to reimburse colleges for time taken off to train by middle leaders.

Bringing effective leaders in from outside the sector

The FE sector has a mixed record in terms of converting external candidates into effective college leaders. This is no justification for shutting the door. But more thought should be given to when and how external candidates are brought in and how they are supported into the sector. Such steps would help manage the risks of appointing external candidates.

Recommendations:

- Local colleges should consider creating talent pipelines in their local areas, convening leaders from allied sectors such as local government with the aim of sharing talent.
- Governors should consider looking to sectors that share similar values to FE, such as local government, the military and the wider public sector for candidates.
- The DfE and sector bodies should develop an induction programme for those joining from outside the sector who wish to become executive leaders. This should last a minimum length (such as a year) and become a norm in the sector. This should build on and expand existing programmes. This should be designed as a modular programme and consideration should be given to which modules could be delivered in conjunction with FE sectors in the devolved nations and potentially with other parts of the public sector to overcome challenges of economies of scale.

Governors and governance

Governors play many roles crucial to effective executive leadership in the sector, including: attracting and recruiting talent; holding principals to account on behalf of the communities and learners they serve; and, supporting principals in fulfilling their leadership roles.

Recommendation:

- Building on previous work by the Association of Colleges, the Education and Training Foundation and the DfE, an expert taskforce should be convened to complete a review of how college governing boards interact with principals, whether that be recruiting them, helping them through crisis situations and holding them to account.

Making FE leadership roles more attractive

There is growing unease in some quarters at the pressures faced by college principals. There is a danger that some current principals will leave the sector and that some future potential candidates may not want to step up to the top positions. The top job is fraught with risk, and leaders are open to vilification. We do not believe that the answer lies in lowering the bar of accountability for principals, nor indeed in making significant increases to executive pay.

Rather a wider cultural change is needed in the sector and in policy circles, which can:

- Make the job of principal more attractive by improving leaders' ability to achieve good outcomes for their learners – the reason why most serve in their roles in the first place.
- Improve FE's brand and reputation – by building on an emerging political momentum that champions FE as a channel for social mobility and economic success.
- Shift from a blame culture to a learning culture, for the sake both of individual leaders themselves as well as the system.

The wider context of the Augar Review is important: it sets out a more positive vision of FE where it is better resourced, less regulated and has higher status. It also concludes that 'the vision we have for FE requires a greatly enlarged and professionalised FE workforce with clear progression routes and development opportunities.'[2]

PART 1: WHY WE NEED POLICY REFORM

This report sets out how leadership in general further education colleges can be supported. It draws on evidence from interviews, roundtable discussions, surveys, discussions with those involved in public service leadership programmes as well as evidence from policy and practice in other sectors. It builds on an initial report which explained the importance of leadership in further education and described the backgrounds of current further education leaders.

Leadership for a changing sector

Our first report set out why further education (FE) should be considered a central economic and social instrument and why FE leadership matters now. The report identified a mix of factors to do with workforce challenges – such as an ageing leadership demographic and retention concerns – as well as much more fundamental demands on the sector. For instance, the post-Brexit economic landscape will mean more reliance on homegrown talent and a greater focus on technical skills. At the same time, the report emphasised the need to recognise further education as a primary channel for social mobility, given many learners are from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Such demands sit in a wider context of severe budget cuts, persistent policy change, devolution of responsibilities, competition for learners and changing institutional landscape, with a move to larger colleges.

Our report also builds on a growing body of analysis, thinking and insight that motivates big questions about the future of

FE and its leadership. Such reports and inquiries include work by the Liberal Democrats, by think tanks such as the IPPR, RSA, IFS and by the SMF itself, work by the FETL Commission, and analysis led by the sector.[3] A recently-announced Skills Commission's cross-party inquiry into the skills ecosystem is investigating the FE provider base, employer needs, and the implementation of national policy at a local level.[4]

Each in its own way wrestles with the complex web of reforms that are taking place and with new demands that are being put on the sector. These include balancing the needs of different generations of learners; responding to businesses as well as communities; balancing curriculum quality and community outcomes versus financial sustainability of the institution; innovating with new technologies and modes of learning; and, the emerging role of colleges as leaders in their local economies and communities.

Our purpose here is to discuss how the sector can develop and support leaders who can make a success of these diverse challenges.

The Government itself has acknowledged the important implications of such changes for FE leadership. Describing the impact of its Post-16 Skills Plan, the Government argued: 'Reform on this scale will inevitably pose leadership and governance challenges for colleges and other training providers. The structures arising from area reviews are likely to be significantly larger and more complex, with a different skill set needed to lead and govern them. The restructuring process opens up the potential to recruit new leaders and governors.'[5]

The focus of this paper

This second report aims to put forward new proposals for how FE leadership can be supported and developed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future:

- How can we best support current college principals and help them acquire the necessary skills?

- How can FE grow the next generation of executive leaders from within the sector? How can FE effectively draw from a wider pool of talent for future leaders?
- What policies would attract people to enter and stay in the sector?

In answering these questions, we aim to build on what is already in place wherever possible.

PART 2: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CURRENTLY

This Chapter describes what is going on currently to support further education leadership.

Leadership development in the sector at present

Standing back, it is possible to identify a shift in emphasis in government policy in more recent years towards more supportive interventions in the sector. The first part of the decade was characterised by deliberate attempts by government to deregulate the sector, promote the independence of FE institutions and reduce interventions in the sector. This was followed by more confident direct intervention to correct what was perceived as market failure (through Area Reviews) and institutional failure (for instance through remedial steps from the FE Commissioner).

Now, the start of a more supportive narrative is emerging. The Government has acknowledged underinvestment in the FE sector, especially given the important role of the FE sector for promoting social mobility: 'Historically we have not done enough to invest in further education…. The hard work and dedication of teachers and college leaders has not been matched by successive governments who have overlooked further education. This is a major problem given that the sector disproportionately serves students from disadvantaged backgrounds and challenging areas.'[6] There is also greater political focus on FE policy and outcomes.

This rhetoric has also been accompanied by some resources and measures to help the FE system strengthen its leadership and its sustainability. The DfE has been developing an improvement support structure for the sector, appointed leading college principals to 'National Leaders of Further Education' program and funding some development opportunities, such as a new Strategic Leadership Programme for FE principals offered by the ETF working in partnership with Said Business school. In total, the DfE allocated grant of £13.6m to the ETF for the purposes of activities to help improve the quality of the FE teacher and leadership professions (including requirements on participation of ex-service members and CPD for England and Maths teaching); research activities; and specific initiatives on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and the Prevent programme. In relation to leadership, the DfE grant supports the sector to help a specified number of individuals through: the Strategic Leadership Programme; the Preparing for CEO programme; the Chief Finance Officers training; and middle management training.[7] The Government has also established other support mechanisms including the Principals Reference Group and the National Leaders of Governance.

This shift in approach is right: when things go wrong in the sector this brings direct costs to government (for instance through emergency financial assistance and the costs of intervention). More importantly, outcomes for learners themselves may also be damaged. It may also result in less direct adverse effects such as negative perceptions of the sector, which in turn undermine the sector and efforts to promote parity of esteem between technical and academic routes. At the heart of the viability, credibility and sustainability of the FE sector is its leadership.

Current support for FE leadership

As noted above, there is already much good work going on to support and develop FE leaders. Below we describe some of the main programmes and initiatives underway (this isn't intended to be exhaustive). We believe these are important steps in and of themselves that offer a strong base on which to build.

Table 1: Current training and development provision for FE leaders

Career phase	Development offer	Provider
Current leaders	Further Education Strategic Leadership Programme (including Development Centre)	ETF / Said Business School
	Policy Forums	AOC / ETF
	Alumni networking	ETF
FE Pipeline	Middle Managers Development Programmes	ETF
	BAME leadership coaching	ETF
	Entry to management	AOC
	Excelling as a College Manager	AOC
	Senior Leadership Management Development	AOC
	Chief Finance Officers Programme	ETF, co-developed with ICAEW
	Preparing for CEO programme	ETF

PART 3: A FRAMEWORK FOR STRONG LEADERSHIP

This chapter briefly describes five different channels for supporting leadership in further education colleges.

Five channels of reform

Human resource managers often focus on four different phases of leadership development: attracting the talent; selecting the best people; retaining and developing the best talent; and succession planning. This report adopts a slightly different structure, because many of the challenges are cross-cutting and because many of the proposed solutions have an impact across the talent journey.

We identify five channels through which government and the sector could work to strengthen FE leadership

1. Supporting and developing current leaders
2. Improving the leadership pipeline in FE
3. Bringing effective leaders in from outside the sector
4. Strengthening governors and governance
5. Changing the culture: making FE leadership roles more attractive

These five channels reflect the fact that colleges are constitutionally unique. A college possesses much of the public service ethos of a local authority, yet it is also legally an independent institution. Much of their income derives from government spending, but the days of direct grant are in the past.

Our overall view is that, on balance, the development of leaders needs to be viewed at a system level. Institutions, however well-intentioned, can be expected to prioritise their own skills requirements rather than those of other colleges. This is a particular problem in leadership development. One example is how the costs of development are met. These costs comprise both the direct costs of programmes as well as the cost of releasing staff. While some of the direct costs are born collectively by the DfE and the sector, institutions individually bear the indirect costs. Indeed, we note that some of the direct costs of leadership development are not met collectively at present (for instance, the training offer for middle leaders is thin). We accept that the sector has competitive as well as collaborative incentives and instincts. Part of the role of government is to help institutions coordinate and collaborate as a system.

In considering the training and development offer in FE, we also recognise the diversity of leadership roles in FE, even within the General Further Education College sector, where the demands on colleges vary significantly by geography, the nature of the local economy, the learner demographics, the other skills provision in the locality, and the size of the institutions itself. Creating a universal offer is therefore not always suitable. It may be more appropriate to establish a core product with modular accompaniments which colleges can tailor to their own needs – which may depend on the individual as well as the institution.

Equally, the constitutional particularity of colleges should not preclude learning lessons from other sectors where possible. Colleges have much more in common with the public sector than private sector industries because of their history and cultural norms and because of the role of government funding in determining prices as well as regulatory requirements.

On this point, we note that, despite the fact that the issue of recruiting top headteachers has received significant

attention from policymakers for 20 years and more, there is growing concern about it as a challenge. An analysis by the DfE has estimated that, unless action is taken, England could face a shortage of between 14,000 and 19,000 school leaders by 2022. Factors driving the shortfall include: rising demand for leaders and more leaders retiring or leaving the sector.[8] Research has identified four specific challenges. As will be discussed in later chapters, many of these bear close connection to challenges found in the FE sector:

- Potential headteacher applicants are deterred by the challenges of the role as it is currently, and they are not effectively incentivised to apply. Deterrent factors include high stakes accountability and a 'perception that the transition from deputy to headteacher comes with far greater accountability but not a commensurate rise in pay'.

- Recruitment of headteachers is inconsistent and insufficiently structured. For instance, there is limited succession planning because demand is only identified at an institution level and career pathways are insufficiently clear.

- Lack of a shared culture of development in the sector.

- Leaders do not receive the support or feel the motivation to stay in their roles.

CHANNEL 1: SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING CURRENT LEADERS

Context, challenges and opportunities

Existing evidence and our own discussions indicate broadly positive attitudes towards the current training options for FE leaders. A survey carried out by the Education and Training Foundation (published in 2018) found that the overwhelming majority (90%) of college staff have participated in training in the last year. Seven in ten providers report offering senior leadership development. Most staff (65%) who have received training reported that it was helpful (although we should not overlook a minority who disagreed).[9] This is positive, even if the views of future prospective leaders are harder to capture. More broadly, our interviews generated positive attitudes to the current training programme among leaders.

Despite the generally favourable views and the programmes already underway, there are important gaps in provision and specific challenges that need addressing:

- There appears to be latent demand for additional training, including a focus on leadership and management. While most nine in ten colleges (90%) report that training and development activities meet all or most of their needs, one in five (21%) providers would like to see more training and development for 'Leadership'. Where training deficiencies and gaps are reported it is most frequently concerning leadership and management skills, Maths and English and teaching.[10]

- The FE College sector is diverse and this means there is a lack of economies of scale in some areas of provision. It also makes it difficult to develop a universal offer that is valuable to all individuals and institutions given the range of individual backgrounds and college contexts.
- There appear to be significant opportunities to expand networking.

Building networks for FE leaders

Our discussions and emerging evidence from similar sectors emphasise the importance of networks to help support and develop leaders and leadership.

Networks can fulfil multiple functions: enabling dissemination of ideas and best practice; acting as sources of support for leaders when they confront challenges; and potentially a practical manifestation of emerging forms of systems leadership and influence through networks.

The loss of an experienced cadre of leaders

In line with much of the public sector, FE is facing a demographic squeeze. This brings two parallel challenges – first a straightforward need to recruit replacements; second, the loss of an experienced cadre of leaders. Participants at our discussion event emphasised how costly this loss is, and will be, to the sector.
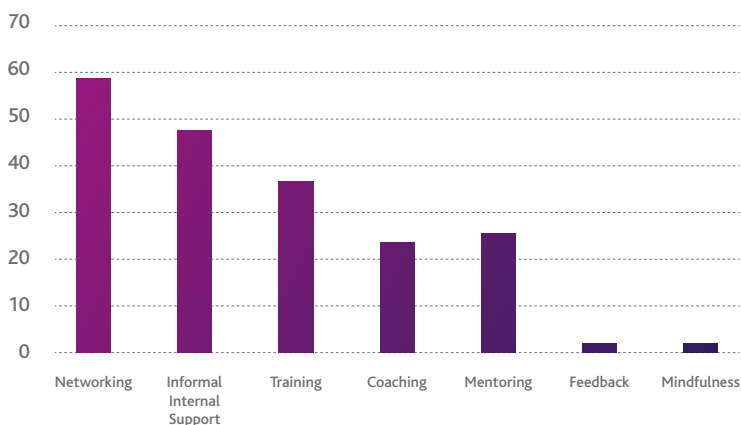
The importance of networks to support leaders

College principals are exposed to significant challenges and risks – these may be delivery or operational dilemmas, or reputational issues. Combating isolation and isolationism among leaders and helping them manage risks could be addressed in part via support of networks of peers who understand the context. Public service leaders often refer to the 'isolation' of the top job.[11] Leaders may find it difficult to

access advice from others who have gone through or are going through similar experiences.

Analysis carried out by the Public Services Leaders Academy taskforce found that 'networking' was rated as a support that leaders valued most. Anecdotally, we heard of programmes that had allowed principals to build networks of colleagues that provided on-going value beyond the end of the formal programme.

Figure 1: Types of support public service leaders reported valuing (%)

Source: Public Service Leadership Taskforce interviews from Cabinet Office, Better Public Services – Report by the Public Services Leadership taskforce *(2018)*

The importance of local networks to enable 'systems leadership'

As discussed in the first report, principals increasingly need to adopt systems leadership. 'Systems leadership' is the recognition that individuals operate in complex environments where desired outcomes can often only be achieved by working with and through other local partners. For college leaders, this is likely to include Local Enterprise Partnerships, local authorities and city government, the local business community and the wider local public sector.

Strong networks at the local level are therefore crucial to success for college principals, and to what elsewhere has been called their 'connective' role.[12]

Sharing ideas

Networks are also increasingly central to stimulating and enabling idea sharing, and to ensuring that learning content is relevant by generating more content from among wider leaders themselves. This is likely to be particularly important as the pace of technological innovation requires more and quicker sharing of practice among leaders.

Proposal 1: A mechanism for retaining leaders when they leave

The DfE has recently established its National Leaders of Further Education program[13] as well as its Principals Reference Group (PRG). The PRG convenes a small number of experienced FE leaders into an advisory panel, who can help inform policy as well as provide practical advice to other principals and colleges and advise the FE Commissioner. Others, including Dame Ruth Silver from FETL, have proposed creating a body of experienced 'elders' from the FE sector and beyond, which could speak with authority and independence.[14] As such concepts are developed further, we would like the experience of those leaving the sector to be captured. This could present valuable advisory, mentoring and other functions to leaders. We believe that the sector and the Government should establish a mechanism for keeping hold of leaders when they leave.

Proposal 2: Stronger networks among college principals

Although many challenges are context- and locality-specific, we believe that networks among college principals could help leaders share ideas and support each other, helping build a more collaborative sector. Some existing training programmes contain alumni networks, such as the Said Business School programme at Oxford University. We believe that these

could be strengthened if resources were set aside for such activities. These should be designed to be complementary and to build on existing initiatives such as existing forums run by the Association of Colleges, such as Chief Executives', Principals' and Chairs' Forums.[15] These networks should be a mix of digital networks as well as other more traditional opportunities. Lessons could be learned from the NHS Leadership Academy which has been praised for having a well-maintained alumni network.[16]

Proposal 3: Helping principals build local leadership networks

As discussed above, partnership with other leaders and organisations locally is increasingly central to the purpose of FE colleges. Partnership allows colleges to respond to local needs as well as to play a market-making and place-shaping role in the local skills arena. For instance, this may see a college deliberately working with industry to establish an area as a place with competitive strengths in specific sectors or certain types of occupation, whether that is manufacturing, creative industries or technology.

Networking and partnerships are important from a college perspective looking out. They are also important in the other direction. Local authorities see colleges as key partners to engage to deliver place-based transformation as well for economic growth.[17]

We also believe that these forums could be the basis for context-specific training and development which could be delivered to a range of local leaders in their own setting. This approach to systems leadership has been taken forward in other areas such as health and local government.[18] There remains however much more to be done to establish and convene opportunities for local leaders from different parts of the public and allied sectors to lead and learn together. At a national level, this agenda can be led by the Public Services

Leadership Academy. Locally, as learning institutions, colleges could be the hub for such training and development activities in the locality.

> Recommendations:
>
> - A 'Principals Emeritus Network' should be established and coordinated to hang onto the experience and expertise of retiring principals, so that these can be established as a resource for existing principals and for those seeking to develop their career.
> - Colleges should develop and lead cross-public sector networking and learning opportunities for leaders at a local level, where training and development can be 'context-specific'. These could be piloted through the Public Services Leadership Academy.
> - Existing forums for college leaders should be strengthened and expanded.

Training and development programmes for leaders

As discussed above, individual training programmes appear to be perceived well. The issue is therefore not replacing existing programmes but expanding and building on them. Our discussions with those in the sector suggest that the following should be considered as priorities for additional training and development:

- 'Just in time' training: Given the pace of technological change and policy change, there is a need for 'Just in time' training which could help senior leaders understand the impact or application of a new policy or technology.
- Financial management: As our first report concluded, there is an increasing need for leaders who are rising

up, or who have risen, through, the further education sector to manage complex businesses and make big financial decisions. We heard through the research about the very significant step up from director to principal in terms of financial management.

- 'Crisis management': The FE sector is facing huge funding constraints and competitive pressures, as well as major institutional reorganisation. We note the recent efforts by the DfE to make early and proactive support available to institutions before formal intervention is precipitated.[19]

- Challenges of running a large merged college: The task of running a large college is likely to require a very different skillset to running a small to medium-sized college.

Recommendations:

- The DfE and sector bodies should consider whether additional modules or training and development could and should be provided including 'Just in time' training; strategic financial management; and crisis management.

CHANNEL 2: IMPROVING THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE IN FE

Context, challenges and opportunities

A major challenge facing the sector is how to encourage and develop future leaders through the pipeline. This is particularly important, because (as discussed in the next chapter) there are question marks about whether and how suitable candidates can be brought in from outside the sector.

Unlike many of its comparators in the public and private sectors, the FE sector does not have a graduate programme for bringing in and developing talent. This can be attributed to multiple factors. First, the unusual constitutional make-up of the sector means that fewer centralised functions and mechanisms exist because colleges are independent institutions. Second, we heard scepticism towards a traditional graduate management programme because of the technical nature of colleges and the prevalence of dual professionals. Dual professionalism requires lecturers to be both occupational professionals passing on their expertise as well as teachers with access to pedagogical techniques.[20]
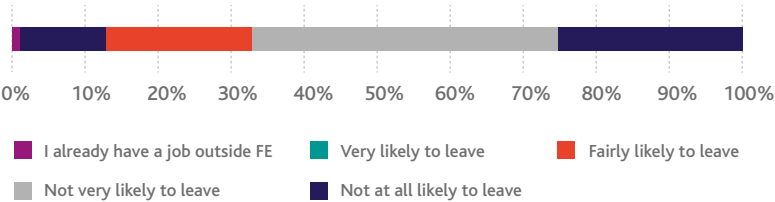
Notwithstanding these important contexts particular to the sector, this leaves a significant vacuum to be filled. Perhaps the greatest challenge is the absence of a systematic approach to the pipeline of talent.

Although individual institutions have an incentive to develop leaders for their own purposes, this motivation is weakened by the fact that individuals may move to different institutions and colleges may therefore lose the investment they made.

Succession planning is limited because demand is only identified at the institution level and few individuals have clear pathways to leadership through a single institution. The same problem has been identified in school leadership recently (even though government has more control there over career structure, training and development and pay).[21] Evidence suggesting high levels of churn within the sector at senior management level[22] indicates that this lack of a system approach is likely to be damaging in the long-term.

The absence of progression opportunities also appears to manifest itself in the views of college leaders. Across all leaders (i.e. middle leaders as well as senior leaders), around one in three report that they are likely to leave the sector in the next year. Three quarters (72%) of leaders who said they were dissatisfied with the opportunities to develop their career said they were likely to leave in the next 12 months. Leaders at colleges with lower Ofsted ratings are more likely to report expecting to leave the sector than those in higher rated institutions.[23]

Figure 2: Likelihood to leave FE in the next 12 months: leaders

■ I already have a job outside FE ■ Very likely to leave ■ Fairly likely to leave
■ Not very likely to leave ■ Not at all likely to leave

Source: DfE, College Staff Survey 2018 – research report *(November 2018)*

The challenge of developing future leaders is particularly acute given two other factors. First, middle leaders play a fundamental role in many colleges. Research has shown that post- incorporation, middle managers took on more responsibilities, managing budgets and management information systems. Middle leaders handle pressures from

above and below as well as horizontally from other departments. As recent research from Birmingham City University has found, when leadership is distributed through the organisation, middle managers can also play crucial roles in facilitating effective training and development among teachers.[24]

Second, the move up from the second-tier position to the top job is becoming more a leap than a step. This is not unique to colleges. In fact, the new Public Services Leadership Academy has put its focus on 'unique challenges of transitioning from being part of a senior leadership team to becoming the person with principal executive responsibility' (media scrutiny, accountability, community leadership).[25] The step up in colleges brings much greater demands across a range of disciplines as well as exposure to significant risks. Our discussions underscored the conclusion reached elsewhere that the step up from middle management to leadership or even from senior leader to principal can be large – both in terms of skills sets and in terms of risks. For instance, the need for a structured future leaders' programme was identified by an LSIS report in 2013.[26] Past studies have suggested that there has been a mismatch between expectations and provision of training among middle managers, and that they are less likely to be developed and supported than their more senior peers.[27]

There are now some programmes being piloted. There is already a Middle Management programme available, although the absolute number of candidates who can benefit is small relative to the sector's size.

Policy proposal: More structure to career progression

SMF research into schools has noted the important role that the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) plays.[28] It acts as a signal to recruiting panels that the applicant is a viable candidate. It simultaneously acts as a signal to ambitious future leaders that there is a path to sector

leadership. Funding is available to cover the entire costs of the NPQH for candidates in Opportunity Areas.[29]

Previously, the FE sector had its Principals' Qualifying Programme (PQP). The Further Education (Principals' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2007 required newly-appointed principals to have a PQP. This requirement was removed in 2010 because its compulsory nature was considered by the Government to be unhelpful.[30] Currently, the ETF runs the 'Preparing for CEO Programme' for second tier FE leaders who are ready to step-up to the role of Principal or CEO in the next one to two years.[31]

We observe that the sector is moving towards a more structured framework for career development. We propose additional steps that could be considered and piloted by the sector:

- **Taking measures to ensure that the Programme acts as a signal to both individuals and appointment boards**. This may involve introducing selection methods to ensure participants are of the highest quality and potential. It should also involve considering whether a formal qualification should be provided to accredit skills gained.

- **Managing finances** at Principal level is very different from managing a departmental budget. Considering how the next generation of leaders can be equipped with requisite financial management training given the funding constraints, increasing size and complexity of college finances. This may involve enrolling more future leaders on the Finance Programme or strengthening the financial modules in the wider Preparation course.

- **Creating an FE Career Plan guide** so that those working in more junior management positions or in teaching can see the different paths through to sector leadership. This is likely only ever to be a guide as the paths to leadership are diverse and multiple, but it

could help future leaders understand better the steps needed to succeed.

- **Expanding participation in middle leader programmes**. Currently the level of participation in DfE funded middle leader programmes is low compared to the size of the sector. This area of training and development is deserving of significant investment. We have heard that there will be a wider roll out of the programme this year and this is to be welcomed.

Recommendation:

- Expand significantly the availability of training and development for middle leaders.
- Sector bodies should create an FE leaders Career Plan guide to help talented junior managers understand the paths to leadership. In combination, the DfE should lead a review of how different programmes across the career pathway cohere.
- The Government should also consult with colleges and sector bodies on whether to create a formal qualification similar to the National Professional Headship Qualification in schools.

Policy proposal: Including FE in the Government's Public Services Leadership Academy

Further Education currently does not feature in the Public Services Leadership Academy. There are rational explanations for initially focusing the project elsewhere: better, arguably, to focus on some not all of the public sector to start with; logical, arguably, to exclude the FE sector as the institutions are legally independent of government, and thus different from schools, police and NHS Trusts. However, we believe that its cross-sector focus, means that the FE sector would benefit much as well as contribute much to shared learning.

This is an important initiative which can lead to more effective leaders who are better-positioned to manage the complexities of public service delivery. Beyond this the networks could provide valuable support to individuals. Experiencing challenges from different sectors is likely to contribute to greater cross-fertilisation of talent across the wider public sector.

> Recommendation:
>
> • The FE college sector should be part of the Public Services Leadership Academy. We believe this could benefit the FE sector and other parts of the public sector.

Policy proposal: Better infrastructure and coordination

The FE sector previously had a range of support systems and infrastructure. It had a 'staff college' with a physical presence at Coombe Lodge which ran from the 1950s to the turn to the century.[32] The sector also had specific institutions to promote leadership, development and best practice.

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) was established as a national government agency in 2003 and became an independent charity. In 2008 the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) was set up as a charity, receiving funds transferred from the CEL and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) in 2008. It operated between 2008 and 2013.[33] More recently, training and development for the sector has been coordinated by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), which receives funding from the DfE for some of its activities. The sector also has the Association of Colleges and the AELP (for independent providers).

The problem of coordination occurs across many labour markets especially where pay is not determined solely by the market and where institutions are independent or semi-autonomous from central government (such as NHS Trusts,

local authorities or schools). The schools sector previously had its own independent college: the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The functions of the NCSL were subsequently absorbed into the DfE as the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) when it was merged with the Teacher Development Agency. The College was terminated in 2018.[34] Meanwhile, the Rose Review recommended that the NHS should have a central body to coordinate training, so as to guarantee consistent, replicable and responsive training.[35]

We believe that it would be worth building on the current architecture to strengthen the infrastructure of the sector. The purpose of such reform would be twofold: to give a signal of the status of the sector; and, to provide system-wide talent management and succession planning coordination. We are agnostic on who runs this college. We note however that the ETF already has many of the features of a college. Therefore, the College could grow out of the current ETF offer.

Recommendation:

- The DfE, in collaboration with sector bodies such as the Association of Colleges, AELP and ETF, should consult on establishing an independent college to promote the status of FE as well as to be responsible for system-level initiatives to retain and develop leadership talent in the sector.

Policy proposal: Rewards and retention of middle managers

As the Augar review noted, 'recruitment of high quality teachers and leaders is made challenging by direct competition from schools, HEIs and business, all of which typically offer more attractive rates of pay for comparable roles'.[36]
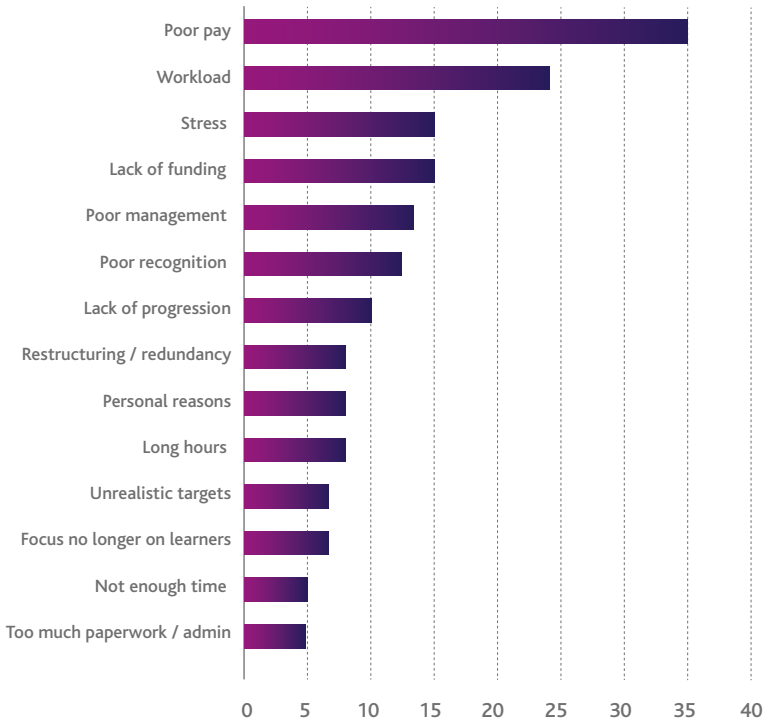
Colleges compete for middle leaders with a range of sectors including schools and industry. We heard anecdotally through our research that pay and rewards are low compared to these

competitor sectors. We are not aware of robust data that demonstrates this specifically for middle leaders, though persistent concerns about the status and profile of the sector suggest that this is likely, as does data on teacher pay in FE compared with schools. Median full-time pay is higher for school teachers (£38,473) than college teachers (£36,139).[37] Principals identify higher salaries in industry (22%) and in schools (17%) as challenges to recruitment and retention.[38]

Recruitment and retention difficulties are reported in surveys more frequently in FE than schools, with average teacher turnover of 16% compared to 10% in schools.[39] Colleges also struggle to attract and retain teaching staff who could find roles in industry. For instance, sectors such as construction, engineering, manufacturing and digital / IT were industries identified as vocational subjects with particular recruitment retention challenges, and those with the highest vacancy rates.[40] As the Social Mobility Commission notes, this is concerning given the fact that these are sectors where the new T Levels will be rolled out.[41]

Research by the DfE found a correlation between teachers' satisfaction with opportunities to develop their career in FE and the reported likelihood of leaving the sector. As the study concluded, 'this reinforces the importance of staff feeling they are able to develop their career in FE if they are to remain within the sector'.[42] Survey data suggests that this is a problem. For instance, a recent survey found that a third (33%) of current FE leaders are considering leaving the sector. Of these, a third (35%) cite poor pay, and this is the factor reported most frequently. Factors to do with poor college management also featured large, being cited by 44% (when grouped together).[43]

Figure 3: Reasons for considering leaving FE (%) (of leaders considering leaving)

Reason	%
Poor pay	35
Workload	24
Stress	15
Lack of funding	15
Poor management	13.5
Poor recognition	12.5
Lack of progression	10
Restructuring / redundancy	8
Personal reasons	8
Long hours	8
Unrealistic targets	6.5
Focus no longer on learners	6.5
Not enough time	5
Too much paperwork / admin	5

Source: DfE, College Staff Survey 2018 – research report *(November 2018)*

The DfE has carried out extensive analysis of pay in schools and the issue of teacher recruitment, and retention is a matter of public debate. We note also that the DfE found an additional £1.8bn over 2017 and 2018 to allow an increase in teacher pay of up to 3.5%.[44] Much less attention has been dedicated to pay in the FE sector. Although we recognise that FE colleges are free to set their pay at the level they like, we propose that the DfE evaluate pay and rewards for teachers and middle leaders in further education.

We note also that surveys of the wider FE and skills sector and our own discussions with colleges identify funding and the costs of releasing staff for training as barriers. Nearly half of institutions (46%) reported that 'It is difficult to allow staff to have time off-the-job for training', whilst a third (32%) reported that there was 'Insufficient funding or income to the organisation'.[45]

Recommendation:

• The Government should consider a generous scheme to subsidise training and development and to reimburse colleges for time taken off to train by middle leaders.

CHANNEL 3: BRINGING EFFECTIVE LEADERS IN FROM OUTSIDE THE SECTOR

Context, challenges and opportunities

Historically the FE sector has relied heavily on its own pipeline of talent to fill principal roles. For instance, our first report revealed that most current principals have risen up the ladder in FE.

As noted previously and elsewhere, the experience of leaders who have joined from outside has not been universally successful. On the positive side, past analyses have recommended more openness to outside talent as a route to bringing new perspectives into the sector's leadership. External candidates can also help fill shortfalls in the sector's pipeline.[46] Research undertaken in 2016 by FETL, AELP and the 157 Group argued that recruiting from outside the FE sector has often been successful, bringing a 'more commercial edge' and stimulating new thinking.[47] Research has also suggested an inherent bias against external candidates. Greatbatch and Tate in their study for the DfE concluded that: 'The extent of recruitment from beyond the sector and levels of cross-sector movement in leadership roles is unclear, however there is evidence to suggest that recruitment and selection panels are generally more likely to choose a 'safe' internal candidate over an 'unknown' external applicant.'[48]

Set against this, is the recognition that there have been some external leaders who have left the sector in high profile departures.[49]

The challenge therefore is to ensure that the right external candidates are brought into appropriate roles with suitable support.

Policy proposal: Focusing on specific sectors

We are sympathetic towards suggestions received during our work that colleges should focus foremost on sectors with common features to the college sector. Previous reports have indicated that there are significant levels of movement within the wider further education and skills sector, such as from and to independent providers.[50] Local government appears to be a natural source of potential candidates, given its geographic span, its connections to economic development, and its focus on partnership working and community leadership. Local authorities are also 'value-driven' rather than 'profit-driven' institutions. Moreover, in their heterogeneity, leadership roles in FE arguably have much more in common with council leadership roles than those in the private sector. Like local government, further education colleges must deal with complexity and with people from a range of different starting points. Other 'value-driven' sectors that may be worth considering include (though are not limited to) the military, schools and universities.

In recent decades, there has been more cross-fertilisation between local authorities and the civil service than in the past. For instance, the civil service was led by the former chief executive of Sheffield City Council. However, this phenomenon still seems to be rare in FE.

Recommendations:

- Local colleges should consider creating talent pipelines in their local areas, convening leaders from allied sectors such as local government with the aim of sharing talent.

- Governors should consider looking to sectors that share similar values to further education, such as local government, the military and the wider public sector for candidates.

Policy: Preparing external leaders for further education

Recent experience in the sector with some of its external candidates, as well as the broad and complex range of competences required in FE leadership, suggests that governors should consider carefully whether appointments direct to principal or chief executive are appropriate or whether candidates would be better appointed initially to second-tier positions.

It is likely that training and support for external recruits will need to be tailored and intense. A study for the DfE concluded that 'those who are recruited from outside the sector require support to understand curriculum issues.'[51] The wider context is that although colleges have become more commercial over the decades, principals nevertheless are leading learning institutions and are providing leadership of learning. We also believe that many external candidates are likely to need support in understanding the ethos of the sector, as well as the policy and political dimensions of FE leadership.

Lessons can be learned from elsewhere. For instance, in the Netherlands schools' system, one-year training courses are run to convert business managers from non-teaching backgrounds into education leaders.[52] The Rose Review of NHS leadership completed in 2015 concluded that 'there often appear to be barriers to recruiting externally'. It also noted that the challenges of leadership in the NHS are complex to those coming from outside and that therefore there should be high-quality mentoring and support available to leaders who come in from outside.[53] Previous research by the AELP argued in favour of a 12-month induction period to enable new leaders to build up broader sector knowledge as well their understanding of their specific institution.[54] We are sympathetic to this idea.

There are multiple challenges in designing an induction programme. First, there is an absence of economies of scale because this is still a minority channel into FE leadership. Second, there is likely to be very significant diversity of needs due to the different size and type of college, different local

contexts and the different backgrounds of candidates coming from outside. A single, homogenous programme is unlikely to meet the needs. However, we do believe that a modular programme could offer a menu of options for colleges and candidates. This could also offer induction placements at a number of colleges. There may also be benefits in designing and offering this course beyond England, with specific modules covering policy in the different devolved nations.

An alternative or complementary approach would be for external candidates to be recruited initially to deputy roles. A 2013 study by LSIS found that all those in favour of recruiting leaders from outside felt that such individuals should be brought into the organisation at a deputy or vice principal level.[55]

Recommendations:

- The DfE and the sector should develop an induction programme for those who wish to become sector leaders, which has depth and longevity. This should build on and expand the current 'Senior Leadership in Further Education' programme. This should be designed as a modular programme and consideration should be given to which modules could be delivered in conjunction with FE sectors in the devolved nations and potentially with other parts of the public sector.

CHANNEL 4: GOVERNORS AND GOVERNANCE

Context, challenges and opportunities

While our research has focused on executive leadership, it is impossible to consider executive leadership of FE colleges without also reflecting on the interaction between principals and governors. Governors play many roles crucial to effective executive leadership in the sector, including: attracting and recruiting the best talent; holding principals to account on behalf of the communities and learners they serve; and, supporting principals in fulfilling their leadership roles. As the Government has noted, 'the relationship between the Chair of Governors, the Clerk and the Principal is fundamental to strong governance'.[56] An analysis completed by Ofsted into factors driving college performance and improvement highlighted the 'importance of the relationship between governors and college managers in ensuring a culture of accountability and success'.[57] However, as Greatbatch and Tate note, the relationship between chair of governors and the principal is 'complex and nuanced', involving 'a range of different and often conflicting sub-roles', such as adviser, founding board and performance manager.[58]

Particularly important roles that Boards hold in relation to principals include:

- **Recruitment**: Governors are ultimately responsible for being able to attract and recruit high quality candidates to executive leadership roles. This includes proactive succession planning in their organisation

so that senior leadership roles can be filled with strong candidates. The AoC survey found that almost half of colleges (44%) had appointed a Vice-Chair to assist with succession planning for the position of Chair of Governors.[59] However, we are not aware of evidence on what policies governing boards put in place to ensure good succession planning among executive leaders, although we recognise that the Association of Colleges has sought to promote the importance of the concept.[60] Chairs of Governors are also in an important position to insist that appointees participate in training and development programmes.

The DfE has recently established a National Leaders of Governance for further education. Members will 'support college improvement by working with a college board of governors'. Roles include: reviewing governance, helping develop improvement plans; developing board capacity; and, coaching and mentoring.[61] One potentially important role for NLG members could be advising on recruitment of principals given this is an infrequent yet crucial action.

- **Balancing accountability and support:** As noted above, governors fulfil responsibilities that can be in tension. Governing Boards must hold principals to accountable on behalf of learners and their communities, whilst supporting principals as they manage risks and address challenges through their jobs.

  Interviews with governors conducted by Greatbatch and Tate suggest that governors are generally more confident challenging principals on financial matters than on matters of curriculum or learning.[62] According to a 2015 survey only half (49%) of independent / external governors have business or employment experience of operating at board level or equivalent.[63]

The same survey found that finance was the skill type both most highly-sought after as well as most difficult to recruit. Accountability must be based on a culture of open and transparent information between principals and governors.

There is now a range of training and development products for governors, including, the Further Education Chairs Leadership Programme which started in spring 2019, and a Governor development programme.[64] But, boards need to be encouraged to take up these opportunities.

Recommendation:

- Building on previous work by the AOC, the ETF and the DfE,[65] an expert taskforce should be convened to complete a review of how college governing boards interact with principals. Aspects to be assessed include: how effective boards support principals; how boards can establish strong succession planning and recruitment policies for top executive leaders; how effective accountability can be underpinned by transparent information flow; what skills and competences are needed around the Board table; and whether all boards are taking up training and development.

CHANNEL 5: MAKING FE LEADERSHIP ROLES MORE ATTRACTIVE

Context, challenges and opportunities

There is growing unease in some quarters at the pressures faced by college principals, following high profile departures of leaders in the recent past. In November 2018, David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges argued that: 'We will struggle to create the culture, the environment and the institutions we want if the leadership roles are fraught with risk and potential vilification.'[66] As Dame Ruth Silver has noted, such a situation is 'not conducive to smart, open and learning-focused leadership, it creates an environment in which leaders can become secretive, myopic and introverted, unwilling to display vulnerability or to ask for support when they need it'.[67]

We question here whether the current balance of risk and reward is equal. It is right that failure in the sector is identified and addressed promptly and robustly. The question must be asked though: will talented individuals want to make the big step from senior leader to accountable executive officer if the stakes remain so high? Is the pay differential between the job of principal and the job of Director sufficient to compensate for the much larger risks that the individual faces? This problem is not unique to FE. For instance, a recent report into headteacher shortfalls in schools, found that potential headteacher applicants are deterred by the challenges of the role as it is currently and are not effectively incentivised to apply. Deterrent factors include high stakes accountability and a 'perception that the transition from deputy to

headteacher comes with far greater accountability but not a commensurate rise in pay'.[68] Vilification in social media is just one such risk facing principals.

Financial rewards

Research across countries in the school sector by the OECD has found that relative salaries for school leaders influences the supply of high-quality candidates.[69]

However, we are not convinced that significantly higher pay is the answer to the challenges facing the sector. The role of pay as a reward in quasi-public sector markets is debatable because workers are also motivated by intrinsic factors, such as contributing to society. Meanwhile, research by CVER has found that there is no correlation between principals' salary and their performances as leaders.[70] More anecdotally, this same argument has been made by commentators who have noted that higher pay is not always a proxy for higher quality at an individual level. Indeed, of the 12 top-paid principals in 2017-18, four of these colleges have since been subjected to intervention by the FE commissioner.[71] In April 2019, the DfE noted that 'there has been no evidence of runaway executive pay in further education in recent years'.[72]

Ultimately, attracting talented individuals to lead in the sector is much more than about pay. As discussed below, FE leaders are predominantly motivated by achieving for their learners. This suggests that a lot could be achieved without the need to make substantial increases to the pay and reward of college principals.

Helping principals achieve their goals

When asked about the main challenges of being an FE leader, FE leaders are most likely to point to funding shortages, workload and constant changes by government. Only 13% cite pay.

Figure 4: Main challenges or difficulties working in FE cited by leaders (answers grouped by topics)
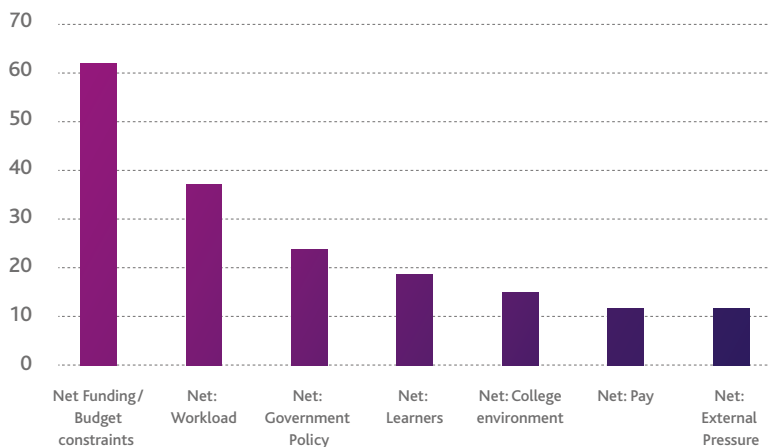
Source: DfE, College Staff Survey 2018 – research report *(November 2018)*

It is likely that funding is a powerful demotivator: when asked to identify the best element of working in the sector, 85% of leaders cited learners' achievement and development. The shortage of funding therefore is likely to not only make the job of leadership much harder, but it may also undermine the positive motivation of leading an organisation that has an impact on learners.[73]

It is important to note that those who reported that being part of the senior leadership team was their main role were more likely to cite changes in government policy as the largest challenge (35% compared to 20% among other leaders).

Addressing these constraints, such as funding, is likely to have an impact far beyond improving the straightforward bottom line.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the DfE has now explicitly acknowledged the important role of leadership in FE and has started to commit resources. This recognition is important

as are the initial funding commitments. However, now is the moment to switch to longer-term funding on a different scale – away from a quick fix to a sustainable pipeline of strong FE leaders. We have identified some specific areas of focus such as middle leadership, and we also make the argument that the 'system' must take more responsibility for leadership development

Improving the brand and reputation of FE

Reputation and brand are central to the ability to attract and retain talent. The National College for School Leadership, absorbed into the Department for Education in 2017, stressed in a report that attracting quality teachers into senior leadership roles requires effective and honest communication externally.[74] The same is true for further education colleges.

The Social Mobility Commission recently noted that Further Education 'is also consistently valued below higher education' among the public and is considered the education option for 'other people', and policy and funding have followed this.[75] The SMF itself has previously noted that the sector receives too little political and policy attention because the overwhelming majority of parliamentarians and Whitehall officials followed an academic route through university. Reports by successive leadership bodies have commented on the challenges that the sector faces in attracting talent, as it is not as attractive to external candidates as schools and universities.[76]

Here, at last, there seems to be growing momentum on which to build. The sector appears to be receiving more analysis and political emphasis than it has for some time, not least because of a growing acceptance that those who have not gone to university have been unjustly neglected.

Establishing a more mature learning culture

The sector would benefit from a more mature culture of learning from mistakes and failure. It would also benefit from a more even discussion of the successes of the sector as well as its shortcomings. The danger is that a comparatively small number of cases of failure dominate the central narrative in the sector, demotivating current leaders and dissuading high-quality candidates from becoming principals.

Learning from failure

As the Institute for Government concluded in a report on public sector failure: 'Failure matters because failure happens. The system of organisations that deliver public services in the UK is complex and it is inevitable that failures will occur.'[77]

At an organisational level, there is now increasing emphasis on establishing methods to learn from failure and to ensure that individuals can take reasonable risks in pursuits of goals. This does not mean instilling an 'anything goes' culture.[78] However, it does start from the basis that there may be multiple (and quite possibly coexisting) reasons why failure occurs, which range from exploratory interventions, through to uncertainty and process complexity, across to inattention and deliberate violation or deviance. Arguably, this is particularly important in a sector that has historically been considered risk-averse.

There is also a widespread recognition that there is much more scope for sector-wide learning from failure than currently exists in the public sector.[79]

We heard anecdotally in our research that other sectors may be better than FE at responding to failure: where strong efforts are applied to understand failure, to comprehend what went wrong and how, and to identify the lessons to be learned from failure.

The necessary infrastructure for institutional turn around is now being put in place with mechanisms for early intervention. Consideration should be given as to how these can support a learning rather than blame culture.

Praising success as well as chastising failure

The Skills Minister has acknowledged the importance of leadership to FE: 'We want every college to have great leaders, both principals and governing bodies'.[80]

Simply saying such things matters, as does praising success, and the Government should make more concerted efforts to identify and publicise success stories in the sector.

ENDNOTES

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