TAKING THE PULSE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

The Great FE & Skills Survey of 2014

policyconsortium

FE Week
HOT NEWS
ANALYSIS AND JOBS

Contents

INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps not surprising that when 'FE Week' and the Policy Consortium invited staff across the sector to highlight the issues that really concerned them, they should paint a rather troubling picture. Over a thousand people – many in very senior roles from across the learning and skills sector – responded to the opportunity to record what they thought about the state of further education (FE), and their comments make disturbing reading. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss these concerns as just an inevitable consequence of allowing hard-pressed staff to let off steam: there are clear patterns in these responses that deserve serious attention.

One headline finding is the extremely high level of concern about institutional funding, common across all sectors. It is revealing that the highest degree of concern is among the most senior staff – those best placed to see what is going on and perhaps what further cuts are just around the corner. With protection being given to pre-16 school budgets, cuts in the Department for Education inevitably focus on 16–19 year olds, despite their already being less well resourced than those in Key Stage 4. With university teaching largely funded through student fees, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) funding cuts also focus on the FE sector; and with Apprenticeships given priority, everything else is under threat. Staff are fearful of the future for their learners and their institutions, and perhaps rightly so.

Another message that comes through strongly is concern over the pace of change – whether in funding mechanisms, curriculum content or institutional arrangements. Staff report that they have not had time to assimilate one set of changes when another is upon them, giving nothing time to bed down or be thoroughly tested. In most cases, this is not hostility to specific innovations as such; there is little criticism of fundamental changes such as the move to study programmes or the new priority given to English and Maths, for example. What comes across is the sheer frustration of not being given a chance to get on and do a good job before the rules change yet again.

Two specific changes stand out as exceptions to this rule. Proposals to transfer Apprenticeship funding to employers attracted serious criticism in a series of comments from those in training providers but also from staff in colleges. Staff echoed concerns made by many national organisations about the potential impact on the engagement of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the Apprenticeship programme. Secondly, transferring funding for those with high-level needs to local authorities raised similar fears for both college staff and those in independent specialist providers, sometimes linked with fears about the reduction in funding levels for learners with disabilities more generally. In both cases, staff concern is focused around a move away from established arrangements that are understood and work tolerably well to a new system that in their view threatens to destabilise provision and restrict opportunities for learners.

Several respondents were very sceptical of the Inspectorate's independence from government and the centralist influence on both inspection findings and inspection priorities. Inconsistency was also felt to be operating at ground level, where individual inspectors were seen as having individual agendas leading to considerable variability. The inspection framework and its operation were often felt to ignore the contexts in which individual providers were working in. This applied to the type of provider (college, independent training provider, etc.), provision (especially for learners with learning needs and disabilities, LLDD, and special educational needs, SEN) and also in addressing deficits that were perceived as primarily the responsibility of schools rather than further education.

Finally, many comments suggest that FE staff do not see government-sponsored changes to the sector as wholly legitimate. Initiatives are described as politically-inspired and respondents talked frequently of political 'interference' or 'meddling'. There is not so much a sense of partnership between internal and external stakeholders as of the sector being 'used' by politicians for their own, often short-term and extrinsic, ends. If political leaders are to secure sector support to take forward the reforms they believe in, they will need to make far greater efforts to convince staff that they are motivated by a genuine desire to improve outcomes for learners, rather than just indulging in change for its own sake.

This introduction by Mick Fletcher of the Policy Consortium first appeared as an article in Edition 100 of FE Week, on 24 April 2014. It has since been slightly revised, for this context.

TOP ISSUES OF CONCERN

RANK	VARIABLE	CATEGORY/CHAPTER	CONCERN RATING
1	Level/rates of institutional funding	Organisational funding	3.59
2	Adequacy of learner funding	Learner funding	3.57
3	Broad government 'direction of travel' for FE	Wider policy context	3.29
4	Workload	Staff recruitment, retention etc	3.25
5	External bureaucracy	Organisational funding	3.25
6	Sector complexity	Wider policy context	3.14
7	Pace and volume of change	Curric. & qualification change	3.14
8	Maths & English assessment & delivery	Curric. & qualification change	3.06
9	Complexity of the offer	Curric. & qualification change	3.02
10	Capital funding	Organisational funding	3.01

METHOD

Data was analysed[1] using a combination of statistical analysis software and spreadsheets. Ratings were developed using the following formula: [1*1+2*2+3*3+4*4]/[Total respondents], where 1 equated to 'Not at all concerned'; 2 equated to 'Somewhat concerned'; 3 equated to 'Moderately concerned'; and 4 equated to 'Extremely concerned'[2]. The maximum rating possible for each variable is 4.

Differences between groups were tested using the following categories: job role and organisation type.

Job role was recoded into four categories. 'Institutional Leadership' incorporated principals, vice principals and governors/board members. 'Middle Management' incorporated senior managers and middle managers. 'Teaching and Support' incorporated tutors and administrators. 'Other' incorporated inspectors, consultants and a range of roles not otherwise described.

Organisation type was recoded into three categories. 'Colleges' incorporated General FE colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist colleges. 'Private and Third Sector Providers' incorporated private/independent training providers and third sector training providers. 'Other' incorporated adult and community education providers, sector support organisations and/or membership bodies, local authorities, government bodies/departments, independent organisations and otherwise.

While differences have been presented using the ratings shown above, statistically significant differences between groups were calculated using cross-tabulation in the form of chi square tests. Where differences between groups have been included in this report, they are all significant at the 5% level (p is less than or equal to 0.05).

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, data was kept in the categories for which it was entered in the survey. Where people entered both a category assignment and 'Other', the category assignment was given preference. 'Don't Know/Not Applicable' responses were categorised as missing data.

[2] In a few cases five point likert scales were used; in these instances, they were recoded into four point likert scales by recoding 'Slightly concerned' as 'Somewhat concerned' in order that data could be analysed comparably.

Note: no claim can be made for the statistical representativeness of the survey's responses, since the participants were a self-selecting group, and no attempt at any scientific sampling was intended or undertaken. Awareness of the survey was also necessarily limited: of 792 participants (~73% of the total of those responding, overall) answering the final question about how they came upon it, a total of 555 (~70%) were 'FE Week' subscribers of one kind or another. Others responding to this query indicated that they had had the survey hot-link sent to them independently of 'FE Week' – by a colleague, organisation or other route.

Where quotations from respondents' comments to questions have been incorporated within this report, they are presented as originally typed, without correction of any errors.

RESPONDENTS

The survey opened for responses on Friday 21 March 2014 and closed at midnight on Friday 4 April 2014. A total of 1091 responses were received, although not all of these were complete responses with answers to every question.

Respondents were asked to self-identify in four categories: current role/level in the FE and skills sector; current employment status in the sector; length of experience in FE; and the nature of the organisation with which they were associated/employed, if any.

999 respondents (91% of the total opening the survey) chose one of the nine roles presented as options. Of those, the largest number (305, or 31%) considered themselves to be 'middle managers'. The next largest role selected was 'senior manager', with 182 (18%). This means that nearly half of those responding consider themselves to be managers. This does not include senior leaders such as principals and chief executives (CEOs) (88, or 9%), vice-principals or similar (73, or 7%) and governors/board members (16, or 2%). Precisely 100 respondents self-identified as 'tutors/lecturers' (10%), while 152 (or 15%) chose the 'support/admin worker' option. Thus, a total of 252 (or, 25%) of the response could be considered as coming from 'main-grade, front-line' staff. Six inspectors responded to the survey. Finally, 77 respondents (8%) self-identified as 'consultants'. There were also 99 responses under the 'other' option. These included roles such as doctoral student, careers adviser, teacher educator, policy analyst, professor, volunteer and journalist.

The question about current employment status produced 1073 responses (98% of all respondents). Of these, some 855 (80%) were full-time permanent employees, while a further 15 (1%) were full-time, but temporary. For 100 of those responding (9%) their status was part-time and permanent; 20 more (2%) were both part-time and temporary. 'Self-employed' was chosen by 65 respondents (6%), 'not currently employed' by 6, and 'retired' by 12 respondents (1%). One respondent was a student.

Length of experience in the FE and skills sector was identified by 99% of all those taking the survey. Very experienced respondents (with 13 or more years in the field) predominated: some 597, or 55%. The next-largest group stated 6-12 years' experience (301, or 28%). This was followed by 99 respondents (or 9%) who indicated 3-5 years' service, and 75, or 7% who selected 0–2 years. Finally, 9 respondents stated that this question was not applicable to them.

In terms of the sort of organisation where the respondent spent most of his or her time, colleges of one type or another predominated, at 64%. Of the 1033 replying to this question (94% of all those responding to the survey overall), 565, or 55%, chose 'General FE college'. A further 42, or 4%, chose 'Sixth form college', and 52 (5%) chose 'Specialist college'. The next biggest cohort (158 respondents or 15% of those replying to this question) selected 'Private/independent training provider'. Some 77 (7%) were from 'Adult and community education providers', while a further 36 (3%) self-identified as 'Local authority'. 'Sector support organisation and/or membership body' was chosen by 37 respondents (4%). 18 people (2%) selected 'government body/department'. 25 respondents (or 2%) indicated that they were not affiliated to any specific entity, but were wholly independent. Finally, 58 chose 'other', and specified such affiliations as 'recruitment website', 'awarding organisation', 'NHS', 'trade union', 'school', 'research centre' and various kinds of higher education (HE) institutions.

FINDINGS

ORGANISATIONAL FUNDING

FIGURE 1. LEVEL OF CONCERN ATTACHED TO ORGANISATIONAL FUNDING

Levels/rates of institutional funding	3.59
External bureaucracy	3.25
Internal bureaucracy	2.75
Capital funding	3.01

As indicated above, the single area of greatest concern recorded in the survey related to the level or rate of institutional funding. Levels of concern were consistently high across different types of provider and different occupational roles.

Around 15% of those answering this question also explained the reasons for their concern and raised a wide range of issues. Some expressed their fears in general terms, eg 'We are constantly being asked to do more and more with fewer resources. Staff are already at breaking point (high turnover, sickness, stress, etc) and already working 80+ hour weeks – but the trend is just set to continue'. More than one expressed worries about the financial viability of institutions – 'I fear for the future of GFEs'. Most, however, identified more specific issues – particularly the cut to funding rates for 18 year olds, cuts in Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding, the proposed reforms to Apprenticeship funding, changes in additional support and the impact of FE loans.

A recurring theme was anger at the 'political' nature of the reductions: 'Rates of funding are complex and subject to change for political rather than educational motives' and the disparity in treatment between pre-16 schools and FE: 'Funding rates for FE and skills appear to be the easiest 'pot' from which government can ease the economic pressures, against a backdrop of protected school funding.' There were several comments on the pace of change with one referring to politicians as 'flighty'.

It is significant (see the figures below) that concern is greatest among the most senior and most experienced staff who, it must be assumed, are in a position to see more clearly what is happening. It adds weight to the conclusion that sector staff see both overall funding cuts and specific policy choices as seriously threatening to reduce the availability and quality of provision for learners.

It is perhaps not surprising that the bureaucracy surrounding FE funding came in for considerable criticism. Several respondents noted that the rhetoric of simplification or 'bureaucracy busting' had failed to translate into real change –'Attempts to make the funding system simpler have led to it being made more complex' or more pithily – 'Simplified? Who are you kidding?' External bureaucracy was of greater concern than internal bureaucracy and was sometimes cited as a cause of the latter – 'external bureaucracy frequently cuts costs by shifting the data burden to the colleges'. However, a few clearly felt that problems were compounded by the response of their own institution: 'I'm concerned about the internal response to external demands as my organisation seems to want to find a one-size-fits-all standardisation of their bureaucratic processes.'

All the occupational roles, particularly middle managers, felt concern about the demands of external bureaucracy. Concerns about internal bureaucracy were felt more

sharply by front-line staff than managers (who presumably had some responsibility for developing it) but it is significant that even senior managers were clearly much more concerned than not.

The level of concern about capital funding was among the highest in the whole survey – 10th place overall – and attracted the largest number of specific comments. These comments fell into two clusters. Most frequently, staff in private or voluntary providers complained about being unable to access the capital funds available to colleges –'Capital funding to support funded learning in private provider environments is limited in comparison to that on offer to colleges', while a smaller number of college staff complained about the limited FE capital pot being made available to other organisations ('commercial organisations accessing funds that should be supporting existing colleges' estates') or managed by local enterprise partnerships (LEPs): 'Major concerns about capacity and capability of LEPs to handle FE Capital'. It is a little surprising, given the relative frequency of comments, that overall college staff registered greater concern than those in independent training providers.

LEVELS/RATES OF INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING

FIGURE 2. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.84
Middle Management	3.66
Teaching & Support	3.26
Other	3.59

FIGURE 3. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.64
Private & Third Sector Providers	3.53
Other	3.49

EXTERNAL BUREAUCRACY

FIGURE 4. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.18
Middle Management	3.32
Teaching & Support	3.11
Other	3.34

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around external bureaucracy.

INTERNAL BUREAUCRACY

FIGURE 5. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.41
Middle Management	2.72
Teaching & Support	2.95
Other	2.98

FIGURE 6. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.80
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.50
Other	2.81

CAPITAL FUNDING

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around capital funding.

FIGURE 7. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.06
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.81
Other	2.99

LEARNER FUNDING

FIGURE 8. LEVEL OF CONCERN ATTACHED TO LEARNER FUNDING
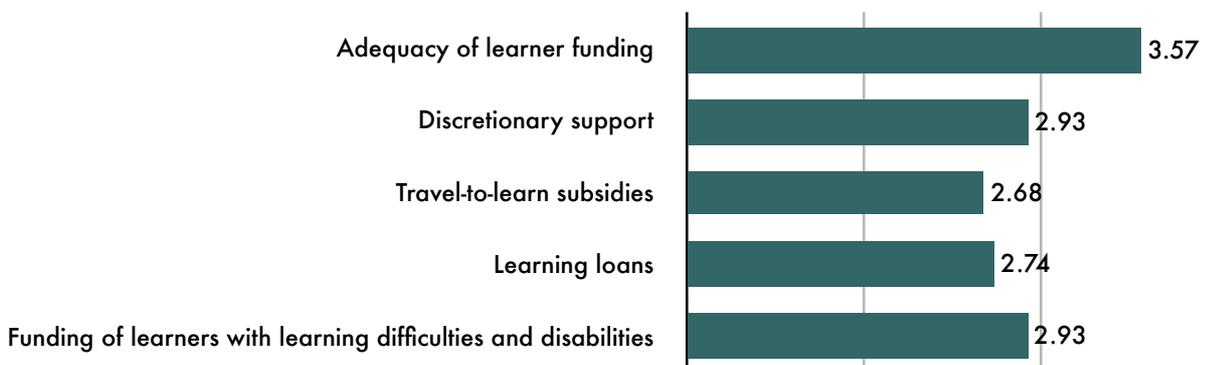
The adequacy of learner funding was the second greatest area of concern in the survey, with two-thirds of respondents describing themselves as extremely concerned. Concern is positively associated with length of

time in the sector and seniority, though not with provider type. As with organisational funding, senior managers probably have a better overview of the changes affecting the sector now and in the future than front-line staff and therefore their greater concern may reflect fears for the future rather than current impact.

Some comments suggest that not everyone made a clear distinction between organisational funding that supports learning and funding streams that give financial support to individuals. Thus, when invited to identify other issues under this heading, some highlighted themes such as the Apprenticeship reforms, cuts to the 18-year-old funding rate or 19+ funding in general; others repeated general fears for the future of the sector –'we still haven't really seen the full force of the govt's austerity plans. The sector is due for a 15% cut next year and the year after. what will be left?' The apparently high level of concern reported here therefore may overstate worries about specific financial support for learners.

Around a third of all the specific comments on this section related to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD); sometimes in general terms – 'LDD particularly is harder to fund – very uncertain future' and sometimes much more specifically: 'Lack of clarity on availability of HNB [High Needs Budget] element 3 funding for SEN learners without EHC[Education Health and Care\LDA[Learning Disability Assessment\Statement who are in need'. A recurring theme was the implications of the transfer of responsibility of high-needs students to local authorities. This was expressed by both private providers – 'The funding of high needs learners being delegated to local authorities is a major threat to specialist foundation programmes and is likely to result in the closure of specialist residential provision' and by FE colleges –'the new funding mechanism for SEN-D learners will mean there will be a cost-inspired race to the bottom as LAs seek to get FE to provide specialist support for less and less'.

There was little comment on discretionary learner support funding and the few comments made were equally balanced between those who highlighted problems and those who reported no special issues in the area. Only two comments referred to the loss of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), suggesting that this may no longer be a headline issue. A couple of comments highlighted the problems of transport in rural areas.

Several comments referred to the impact of loans. Some did so in general terms:

'Concerned that adults have to take loans for Level 3 quals, meaning that those who missed out at school or did not progress directly to L3 at 16/17 lose opportunities for supported L3 study.'

And some were more specific:

'The loans have really worked for us in Access to HE, but they've decimated our vocational provision.'

Some respondents identified the need to generate more fee income – 'We need to focus on commercial operations to move away from the reliance of governmental funding' but the overall message about loans was that they were seen as part of the problem rather than a potential solution.

ADEQUACY OF LEARNER FUNDING

FIGURE 9. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.81
Middle Management	3.63
Teaching & Support	3.25
Other	3.59

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the adequacy of learner funding.

DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern for discretionary support.

FIGURE 10. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.04
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.62
Other	2.84

TRAVEL-TO-LEARN SUBSIDIES

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern for travel-to-learn subsidies.

FIGURE 11. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.79
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.39
Other	2.55

LEARNING LOANS

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern for learning loans.

FIGURE 12. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.74
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.53
Other	2.93

FUNDING OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern for the funding of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

FIGURE 13. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.99
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.58
Other	3.02

INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITION

FIGURE 14. LEVEL OF CONCERN ATTACHED TO INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITION

Competition with other providers	2.60
Local provider range and quantity of provision	2.61

COMPETITION WITH OTHER PROVIDERS

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around competition with other providers.

FIGURE 15. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.71
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.33
Other	2.48

Although a substantial minority of respondents welcomed fair competition as a means of sharpening the focus on quality and performance, the substantial majority said new funding rules, unplanned post-16 expansion through university technical colleges (UTCs), free schools and academies and the failure of government to ensure impartial careers advice were damaging. There were similar criticisms over what was seen as damaging competition between colleges, independent training providers and others, with funding arrangements working against the best interests of the learners.

Damaging competition with schools featured most significantly, with one respondent saying: 'Competition has reduced partnership opportunities and trust with schools'. A common concern was reflected in a comment that 'the presumption of approval for sixth forms in schools where local decision has been made to concentrate provision in tertiary providers is destabilising and dilutes the quality of provision available to local students'. The feared reduction in quality was a constant theme.

The most common observation was that current schools expansion policy creates places where they are least needed. For example: 'The opening of six new school sixth forms in our outer catchment area is impacting severely on us and applications have plummeted. There is now a huge oversupply of places.' Another remarked that they were 'worried about school sixth forms springing up with small and poor provision diluting the sector.' And a third said: 'One additional free school and one UTC [university technical college] – most of the numbers can only be moved from our catchment area – and our future funding.' Such concerns are fuelled by the opening of the new schools which are 'speculative providers who are selective in their intake (despite what is said in their materials)'. Respondents say the 'floodgates have opened', with student expansion taking precedence over monitoring quality, in the drive to hit recruitment and success targets.

Another common criticism was the way schools exploit poorly-regulated information, advice and guidance (IAG) to dissuade students from considering alternative education and training. For example: 'The abuse of the IAG requirement in schools is worrying; there have been numerous examples of learners being deliberately misled in order to keep them in the school system. The concern is now the institution not the learner.' Many respondents suggested the bias is damaging for all, not just the colleges. This was summed up by one who spoke of 'concern regarding the lack of proper impartial careers education advice and guidance and the need for learners to be aware of the curriculum offer in colleges and WBL [work-based learning].' As another suggested, this is undermining quality throughout tertiary education: '[We are] particularly concerned about new academy sixth forms springing up in what has previously been a tertiary model locally. It is fragmenting post-16 provision, and some of the academy sixth forms are very small (uneconomic) and of very poor quality. It's stopping 14–16 year olds accessing appropriate, impartial IAG as well.'

At post-school level, views on competition with providers were mixed. Some were emphatic about the merits. For example: 'Competition is improving quality in the sector and is to be welcomed, exposing weaker providers for what they are'. But, equally, there were concerns with competition driven by unrealistic constraints set by funding agencies. 'Avoid the race to the bottom,' wrote one. 'It isn't just about lowest price. Allow colleges and training providers to market themselves rather than forcing judgements.' There was concern too about government's approach to employer-directed funding. 'Government policy to pass Apprenticeship funding to employers will destabilise the provision,' wrote one respondent. Another saw an alarming narrowing of provision in response to ill-considered labour market demands: 'Local providers offer too much of 'the same' across a wide range of subjects as regards Apprenticeship frameworks. This waters down the quality of delivery.'

A range of serious concerns were expressed in relation to the effects of competition on adult learning, in a skills-driven utilitarian market, particularly for the most needy and disadvantaged. These ranged from the erosion of outreach work aimed at recruiting under-achievers to funding of specialist provision for people with learning difficulties and disabilities, where a common concern was over unrealistic competition driving out the small, high-quality specialist provider. The following was typical of the concerns expressed:

> 'An ISC [independent specialist college] only deals with a specific category of student generally and has small student numbers. A mainstream GFE has a wider

catchment and greater numbers on which to rely. Competition could be a case of who provides the 'cheapest' rather than the 'best'.'

Reports of this happening were widespread, along with the loss of support staff and cash for bus fares to help the needy in rural areas to access learning. There is also concern that competition from Department for Work and Pension (DWP)-driven initiatives is driving out more general adult learning courses with a proven track record for getting the unemployed back on the skills training ladder. Concerns were summed up by one respondent who said:

'In my experience a lot of JSA [Job Seeker's Allowance] clients are very keen to get work and approach us proactively to undertake vocational training, only to have it undermined by overtly blinkered views of some staff in job centres. Other candidates, despite focussed support, need more time to become work ready and this is not being realised.'

LOCAL PROVIDER RANGE AND QUANTITY OF PROVISION

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around local provider range and quantity of provision; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

STAFF RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND MORALE

FIGURE 16. LEVEL OF CONCERN ATTACHED TO STAFF RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND MORALE

PAY AND CONDITIONS

Although there is slightly less concern about pay and conditions than workload, approximately a third of respondents to questions about staff recruitment, retention and morale added comments about pay and conditions. The specific issue of pay (some arguing that conditions should be separated from this) was seen as having a negative impact.

As the figure below shows, the level of concern about pay and conditions was highest among teaching and support staff respondents. They feel most acutely the impact of pay freezes, or as some report, actual reductions in their hourly rate:

'I am at the top of my scale, my pay has dropped in real terms in the last five years. I have a degree, PGCE and teach computing, my skills are not being rewarded compared to what I could earn in industry, but I choose to teach as I love it. I'm heartbroken when my students are earning more than me within three years of leaving, despite my knowledge and skills. I feel that I'm being used to train the new workforce with excellent professional skills and being paid very poorly.'

'It is difficult to get full time permanent work within this sector. Often I have to join more than one agency and work at more than one college.'

'The hourly paid rates for lecturers have stayed the same and in some cases decreased in the past 10 years. This makes it difficult to recruit well-qualified and experienced staff, especially with the large amounts of admin. involved that should be covered by the hourly rate.'

Some respondents criticised the differences between pay for senior managers and teaching staff:

'My main concern is the pay discrepancy between very senior managers and tutors.'

'Pay across the sector static at best whilst salaries of senior staff appears to be following bankers' pay argument – "We need to pay the going rate to recruit\retain people to do the job."'

However, a few more positive views were expressed by some respondents:

'I am in a very good organisation.'

'Most of the [issues in Q12] is in the hands of the Governors and SLT – many colleges do have motivated staff and offer competitive wages.'

This perhaps indicates that some organisations are managing pay and conditions to the satisfaction of some of their staff.

FIGURE 17. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.87
Middle Management	2.90
Teaching & Support	3.23
Other	2.87

Pay rates are seen by many respondents as having a negative impact on recruiting staff with the specialist skills needed for both vocational and higher level provision:

'Local economy for those in employment is traditionally high skill high wage; FE is losing good teachers to schools where pay and conditions are seen to be better and fewer middle career staff are leaving industry to enter teaching in vocational education.'

'Funding controls is leaving pay rates behind industry, many sectors such as health, engineering and construction require apprentices and skills training but the people are no longer around to train or are able to earn significantly more in the industry.'

'Colleges are unable to compete with industries currently coming out of recession strongly such as construction while FE has just entered recession.'

'Pay is not always sufficient to attract the best into the sector, especially for professional and HE courses.'

There are also difficulties reported in relation to the comparability of pay rates between schools and FE colleges:

'Pay freezes will impact badly on recruiting excellent people to work in FE particularly because we pay less than school teachers earn and less than most of the teachers could earn by working in their professions. This will impact on motivation and we need highly motivated staff to support some very needy learners.'

And between colleges and private and third sector providers:

'As ACL [adult and community learning] we are not able to compete on pay with colleges.'

'Although private sector provider tutors must be qualified to the same degree as FE staff, it is very difficult to offer comparative salaries due to funding differences of organisations.'

The combination of lack of pay increases and increased workload was also commented on:

'There have been no pay rises in the sector for many years yet job roles are much larger and the impact of those responsibilities are greater.'

'Again over the past few years we have seen pay effectively frozen or cut once inflation is taken into account with no signs of this changing in the near future. At the same time, workload has increased significantly due to external and internal bureaucracy and natural wastage within the organisation.'

And some saw the impact of poor pay on the quality of service:

'Effectively in common with other public-sector industries we have had a pay cut in recent years, with no end in sight to this. Whilst personally I am not too affected by this, we are losing good well-motivated staff as a result, the best people with transferable skills will walk, leaving the sector short of these people and probably a reduction in the level of service/teaching provided.'

FIGURE 18. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.10
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.56
Other	2.87

Although the figure above indicates that there is less concern about pay and conditions among private and third sector providers than among colleges, some respondents commented that uncertainty about future funding and the retrospective payments for providers was having a bad effect on what they were able to pay their staff, thus affecting whether they could retain good staff:

'Uncertainties about long-term funding for various projects and qualifications make it difficult to make long-term commitments to staff. This often leads to loss of good staff, particularly younger tutors with families who need more stability of employment.'

'The lagged funding approach to delivery costs makes development of services very difficult – experienced staff can be tempted to move on quickly if we cannot offer them appropriate employment and are behind with payrates and conditions so still having to have part-time staff.'

MOTIVATION

Over two-thirds of respondents said that motivation of staff was an issue of extreme or moderate concern, with over one-third saying it was of extreme concern.

As with other issues, there were many reasons given for poor motivation and it affects other aspects of the service.

For example, the amount of change and flux in the system is reported to have a harmful effect on motivation:

'Staff are very demotivated with all the changes which keep taking place in the sector.'

And this in turn has an impact on staff retention:

'What can I say? We're are under massive pressure, not enough time to do a proper job, to reflect and develop new systems, etc… A recent staff survey indicated how low staff morale was. Staff retention would be dreadful if there were more jobs, those who have been able to get out have when the opportunity has arisen.'

'Higher turnover than ever, with many colleagues planning to leave the profession due to low morale and motivation, stress and anxiety.'

A key issue that emerged from the commentary on staff recruitment, retention and morale is the poor image of the service, which has a detrimental effect on the people working in it:

'Sector has had so many knocks/bad press/government criticism and cutbacks that it doesn't seem to be about teaching and learning at all – just a battle to see who can knock education next. This sends really bad messages to parents who become critical instead of supportive.'

'The sector must make itself more attractive as a place to work. No one's ever going to go to a careers advisor age 14 and say "I want to work in an FE college", but we need to be a viable choice once people are in the real world.'

There were also several cries for a stronger voice for teachers and lecturers:

'So far the new ETF [Education and Training Foundation], the supposed professional body for the sector, has shown little regard for conditions within the sector, and appears more concerned with appointing expert specialist panels of ambitious careerists. Where is the practitioner and the middle manager voice?'

'No one nationally is speaking up for delivery staff.'

And as one respondent noted:

'Successful economies invest in their teaching professionals.'

FIGURE 19. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.76
Middle Management	2.93
Teaching & Support	3.07
Other	3.23

Teaching and support staff respondents were the most concerned about motivation, which could suggest that people delivering the service have an unsatisfactory day-to-day experience Middle managers are more likely to need to deal with this issue as a routine part of their job, which perhaps explains why their concern was more in line with the teaching and support staff than those in a leadership role.

As the figure below shows, staff motivation is also more of an issue in colleges than in private and third sector providers.

Respondents commented on the changes they have experienced in their jobs – worsening pay, increased workload and having to do more with less:

'The workload within all colleges (specialist or GFE) [is] beyond a joke … some people are working way beyond the legal hours just to keep their heads above water due to the amount of recording and paperwork that is now required in a teaching role.'

'With new specs and Ofsted inspections, staff are expected to complete more and more paperwork taking an extremely large amount of time and yet still get paid the same amount as when all of this wasn't required.'

However, the changes being experienced in colleges around inspection and bureaucracy are the same for private and third sector providers, and in some cases are more difficult to implement in smaller organisations:

'Inspection, minimum standards and other quality standards are often based on full-time college style provision and translating these into part-time community learning settings with sessional tutors has always been and continues to be one of the greatest challenges.'

FIGURE 20. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.08
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.51
Other	3.02

WORKLOAD

Workload is a serious concern across the sector as a whole: it is ranked fourth in the top ten issues of concern. This is reinforced by the relatively high levels of concern about workload across all job roles of respondents to the survey.

FIGURE 21. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.05
Middle Management	3.35
Teaching & Support	3.21
Other	3.25

Increasing and excessive workloads are said to have implications for several aspects of the service, particularly staff retention, motivation and morale:

'Staff leave as workload increases causing workload to increase more and more staff to leave…'

'Tutors are … finding it increasingly difficult to meet all of the increased expectations on sessional contracts.'

'Younger people who come into the service do not always stay long due to the workload as there is a lot of goodwill expected.'

'Our staff are over stretched and under paid. The morale is on the floor.'

Even respondents with less gloomy attitudes to increasing workload see associated problems as goodwill among delivery staff declines:

'Fortunately, staff where I work are very dedicated and have coped with ongoing change for a prolonged period. However, an organisation can only rely on goodwill for so long and my concern is that as workloads rise, budgets fall, that we will continually be asking already highly pressured staff to do even more with even less.'

The link between time in the sector and level of concern about workload (see earlier figure) is reinforced by comments from respondents described as having been in the service for some time:

'15 years ago FE lecturers would be paid more than their industry counterparts, but now the reverse is true, even with good pension attractions, so attracting and keeping good staff is a real challenge.'

'As the sector is going through ever demanding times, and in a constant state of flux, I am seeing more people who are becoming disillusioned with the sector. Workloads are increasing which is affecting the decision-making process, and ultimately quality of provision and accountability.'

FIGURE 22. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.34
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.88
Other	3.27

As the figure above shows, the levels of concern about workload are lower for private and third sector organisations than for colleges. This may be because private-sector organisations have traditionally been run on more business-like lines, although perhaps also with fewer demands for extra activities than there are in the college sector:

'The attitude towards public funding must change and this can only be achieved if the same rules and work ethic is introduced as in private sector.'

There may also be other, compensating factors in smaller organisations, or where groups within larger organisations such as local authorities feel they are more valued and have greater autonomy:

'We have an established staff group who have been with the service for many years. The local authority offers flexibility and work–life balance, so even though the pay is comparatively low to FE colleges, the other perks attract good calibre of staff and they stay on.'

STAFF RETENTION/TURNOVER

Although the figures below indicate that staff retention was not as great a concern as other issues, the commentary from respondents gave a different picture. Many respondents expressed the fear that they might lose valuable staff. Some already had:

'We have lost really good staff this year because there is no funding for review time for our students which means we review in our own time.'

'We cannot provide the structure to retain and develop younger and good members of staff to prepare them for roles that will become available over the next few years.'

'It's becoming impossible to recruit for some subject disciplines.'

However, the current economic climate and scarcity of jobs may prevent some staff from seeking alternative occupations. Many of the comments refer to fears about what might happen, rather than what is currently happening. As job opportunities across the economy increase the issue of staff retention may become a more immediate concern.

FIGURE 23. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.32
Middle Management	2.70
Teaching & Support	2.91
Other	2.92

FIGURE 24. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.75
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.47
Other	2.76

COMPETITION FROM OTHER SECTORS/INDUSTRY

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around competition from other sectors/industry; nor were there significant differences by organisation type. There was, however, a significant, positive link between length of time in the sector and level of concern about competition from other sectors.

The difficulty in attracting specialist staff was a recurring theme. Many noted that FE salaries now lag behind those of teachers in schools and say that this is having a detrimental effect on recruiting high-calibre staff:

'Pay and conditions with FE are still falling behind that of schools – this should be addressed and quickly otherwise we will lose skilled and qualified teachers.'

There were concerns about the negative perception of teaching in FE as a career, and the implications of this for attracting high flyers:

'There is evidence that policy instability, lack of coherent information, deregulation and insecure employment makes FE less competitive and attractive for top graduates. Every year the FE sector loses thousands of potentially amazing teachers to other professions. The same issues make them less likely to even consider a career in teaching later in their life.'

The rise in pay rates in jobs in vocational areas outside the education and training sector was also seen as having an impact on the recruitment of specialist staff:

'With workloads high and 4 years of 0 pay increases, wages are seriously falling behind especially in vocational areas where industry experts can earn far more 'on the tools' than they can in FE.'

There also appeared to be concern about recruiting high-quality staff to teach English and Maths:

'Can't find teachers/tutors who are good enough to teach English and maths.'

'Issues with recruitment of English maths and ESOL teachers.'

'Very limited pool of high quality maths and English teachers despite recent initiatives.'

These concerns may also be linked to the lack of appeal of a career in FE teaching.

AVAILABILITY OF OPPORTUNITIES AND BUDGETS FOR STAFF TRAINING

Although this area was of less concern to leaders and managers than others, some respondents (perhaps those responsible for or particularly wanting to take part in staff training) expressed disquiet at diminishing resources and the effects of this on developing staff skills. Some respondents raised the erosion of budgets for initial teacher education and commented on the resulting lack (or reduction) of dedicated time for trainees to undertake training and also for mentors to provide them with the support they needed.

The impact on the infrastructure to support staff development and training was also commented on:

'…hours for the programme constantly reduced, tutorials and observations of teaching are done in their own time, work not recognised or valued by the college, even though they are producing well trained staff for the colleges.'

Some examples of the lack of support in specific areas included:

'There are tutors that have worked a few hours a week for the service for years who are not IT literate and it is important that they are encouraged and supported to move on but this is expected to be done in their own time.'

'Need more training to develop specialists in fields of LLDD. There are bursaries for this for school age staff, but not post-16.'

Overall, it was noted that as remission for training decreased, staff would need to train in their own time. Lack of clarity about the requirement for Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) may hinder the motivation for staff to become qualified teachers and invest in continuing professional development (CPD).

FIGURE 25. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.71
Middle Management	2.96
Teaching & Support	3.11
Other	3.20

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the availability of opportunities and budgets for stuff training.

AGE PROFILE OF WORKFORCE

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern about the age profile of the workforce. However, 20 respondents expressed views about this issue in certain sectors, such as engineering, and the gender imbalance in adult and community learning. Some suggested that there was little prospect of promotion for older employees. There is also the reportedly widespread practice of making more experienced (and therefore more expensive) staff redundant and appointing younger and inexperienced staff who are likely to be paid less.

FIGURE 26. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.34
Private & Third Sector Providers	1.99
Other	2.67

STAFF QUALITY

FIGURE 27. LEVEL OF CONCERN ATTACHED TO STAFF QUALITY

Skills and qualifications of support staff	2.21
Skills and qualifications of teaching/training staff	2.41
Flexibility of staff in the context of new and changing demands	2.76
Performance management	2.55
Succession for leadership and management	2.78
Quality of middle managers	2.53
Quality of senior managers	2.62
Communication between managers and front line staff	2.75

Most concerns in this section were signalled under 'Flexibility of staff in the context of new and changing demands'.

Concerns regarding staff capability with technological developments were expressed in terms such as 'Workload issues mean this can erode goodwill which impacts on flexibility. New skills around e-learning remain a challenge for existing staff and CPD, especially if this development interacts with BAU (Business As Usual)' and 'The new Feltag [Further Education Learning Technology Action Group] report concerns me that teachers and managers don't have the skills and expertise for the new digital age.' The link between time served in the sector and concerns about flexibility is significant and could be explained by the collectively greater number of senior staff responding who will have a wider insight into future needs and current workforce issues.

The lowest level of concern in the quantitative data related to the quality of teaching and support staff. Many written responses referred directly to issues regarding staff qualifications which can be categorised in three ways.First is the issue of initial teacher training, where concerns were expressed about the perceived 'deregulation' of requirements and the impact on the overall quality of staff. Comments here included:

'Concerned that previously required qualifications may no longer be consistently asked for across the sector; too much flexibility for individual colleges' and 'worried about "race to the bottom" of quality for teaching qualifications'.

Secondly, new requirements for English and Maths at GCSE level within Apprenticeship pathways was also mentioned:

'I am concerned at the proposals that GCSEs are included in Apprenticeship provision. Staff who deliver Apprenticeship programmes can just about cope with Functional Skills delivery. GCSEs will be a step too far. It is unreasonable to expect WBL to make good what 11 years of schooling has failed to do, ie allow learners to achieve GCSE grade C English and Maths.s

Thirdly, there were comments regarding changes to the level of professional skills and qualification in the 16+ sector:

'We went through a period of driving up professionalism of the sector and for what. Now apparently it's OK for each institution to have their own internal CPD. Funded how? Who then benchmarks the standard of these internal training opportunities?'

'More money and time put into CPD for teaching staff while support staff are overlooked. Feel I won't reach my potential in this sector without funding any developmental courses myself.'

Performance management procedures received a range of comments. Negative points included: 'managers and teachers increasingly seem to have wildly differing priorities...' making the setting of common aims and objectives difficult and

'Performance management has become increasingly aggressive at the management level … managers expected to drive up standards and meet tougher cost saving targets … narrow focus on quantitative targets in such a high stakes environment is leading to .. "gaming" and deception which have been recently publicised'.

At the other end of the spectrum, one respondent stated: 'The CIF's [Common Inspection Framework] demand for Performance Management although initially stressful .. had a good impact at the ISP I work for.'

In terms of succession, the popular idea that '…to promote good teachers into middle management posts makes no sense' appears here. In addition. One comment suggested: 'Economic climate has led to lower qualified staff being targeted for lower paid support jobs. Roles that were aimed at graduates are now being targeted at L2/3 apprentices...'

16% of comments expressed concern about the quality of senior and middle managers. An example was:

'The complex funding, quality and compliance regime has created a cadre of senior managers who lack vision and understanding of learner/employer needs because they are pre-occupied with bureaucratic box-ticking' and 'internally promoted people keep colleges a closed shop and this does not allow new ideas and innovation to be developed'.

The highest score for 'extreme concern' in this section regarded communication between management and front-line staff. For example: 'It seems that decisions are made at the top level and not filtered down to front line staff. This affects morale etc.' The reasons for this as given by a middle manager are as follows:

'Having to move fast and keep up with lots of funding changes is putting a pressure on communication with staff, change is often met with resistance. We have gone from being a very easy-going/supportive organisation towards the FE/business model and many tutors are finding this transition difficult. It is difficult as a middle manager to find a balance in presenting the changes in a positive way.'

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF SUPPORT STAFF

FIGURE 28. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	1.97
Middle Management	2.23
Teaching & Support	2.22
Other	2.42

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the skills and qualifications of support staff.

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF TEACHING/TRAINING STAFF

FIGURE 29. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.35
Middle Management	2.38
Teaching & Support	2.29
Other	2.71

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the skills and qualifications of teaching/training staff.

FLEXIBILITY OF STAFF IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW AND CHANGING DEMANDS

FIGURE 30. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.83
Middle Management	2.77
Teaching & Support	2.52
Other	2.99

FIGURE 31. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.76
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.57
Other	2.91

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

FIGURE 32. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.33
Middle Management	2.58
Teaching & Support	2.70
Other	2.83

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around performance management.

SUCCESSION FOR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around succession for leadership and management.

FIGURE 33. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.86
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.48
Other	2.80

QUALITY OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

FIGURE 34. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.52
Middle Management	2.31
Teaching & Support	2.74
Other	2.87

FIGURE 35. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.60
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.26
Other	2.53

QUALITY OF SENIOR MANAGERS

FIGURE 36. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.24
Middle Management	2.53
Teaching & Support	2.89
Other	2.92

FIGURE 37. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.66
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.35
Other	2.71

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MANAGERS AND FRONT LINE STAFF

FIGURE 38. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.32
Middle Management	2.63
Teaching & Support	3.11
Other	3.07

FIGURE 39. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.81
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.47
Other	2.81

CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATION CHANGE

FIGURE 40. LEVEL OF CONCERN ATTACHED TO CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATION CHANGE

Category	Value
Pace and volume of change	3.14
Complexity of the offer	3.02
Resources for curriculum delivery	2.80
Personalised learning	2.50
Learner self-guided/independent learning	2.52
Maths and English assessment and delivery	3.06
Making sense of the system of qualifications and pathways for new learners	2.90

The pace and volume of change were the greatest concern, with Maths and English assessment and delivery following closely behind, and then the general complexity of the curriculum offer. Overall, there was slightly more concern from those in leadership roles than from middle management, with teachers and support staff being slightly less concerned then the other two groups. Those from colleges were slightly more concerned than those from independent training providers.

Comments covered a wide range of issues, with several recurring themes. Clarity about the changes themselves and their complexity was a worry, with one survey participant saying, 'If I as a principal …. do not understand the present curriculum reforms what chance does a student/parent have?' There was equal concern about industry understanding the changes. Then there was the problem of implementing the changes, creating as one respondent put it: 'massive stress on an overloaded workforce who haven't got the last lot of changes sorted satisfactorily yet'. There was a feeling that: 'the sector spends too much time having to interpret the rules rather than focussing on delivering excellent learning'. There were several comments on the pace of change and the 'lateness of information about curriculum changes', as well as about a 'qualifications database which changes month on month', with the need for staff to find time from an already busy schedule to see whether anything has changed.

A few respondents brought up the issue of 'government interference' in education: 'There is a relentless political agenda for change which is based on unrealistic ideology from politicians with no experience of 16–19 year olds and their needs and motivating factors.' Others suggested there should be consultation with 'those that know' about education, ie managers and practitioners in education and employers.

As regards English and Maths, participants were dubious about success: 'How can we fix in two years what schools have failed to achieve in eleven years?' Doubts were also expressed about GCSE Maths and English qualifications 'being fit for the purpose of improving adult skills'. The difficulties surrounding the recruitment of maths teachers were mentioned.

Although one person commented that they had no problems with personalised learning, some people were concerned about 'writing appropriate resources or finding the right learning package', which 'can be time consuming'. Another participant thought that 'personalised learning is an excuse to cut further the taught hours offered to young people'. There was also considerable doubt about the ability or motivation of some learners to carry out learning on their own: 46% of participants were extremely or moderately concerned about learner self-guided/independent learning.

PACE AND VOLUME OF CHANGE

FIGURE 41. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.33
Middle Management	3.20
Teaching & Support	2.78
Other	3.26

FIGURE 42. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.12
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.99
Other	3.34

COMPLEXITY OF THE OFFER

FIGURE 43. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.13
Middle Management	3.12
Teaching & Support	2.66
Other	3.06

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around complexity of the offer.

RESOURCES FOR CURRICULUM DELIVERY

FIGURE 44. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.81
Middle Management	2.79
Teaching & Support	2.73
Other	2.91

FIGURE 45. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.80
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.63
Other	2.94

PERSONALISED LEARNING

FIGURE 46. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.42
Middle Management	2.51
Teaching & Support	2.44
Other	2.68

FIGURE 47. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around personalised learning.

LEARNER SELF-GUIDED/INDEPENDENT LEARNING

FIGURE 48. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.40
Middle Management	2.58
Teaching & Support	2.36
Other	2.75

FIGURE 49. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.52
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.34
Other	2.70

MATHS AND ENGLISH ASSESSMENT AND DELIVERY

FIGURE 50. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.34
Middle Management	3.08
Teaching & Support	2.59
Other	3.32

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around Maths and English assessment and delivery.

MAKING SENSE OF THE SYSTEM OF QUALIFICATIONS AND PATHWAYS FOR NEW LEARNERS

FIGURE 51. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.93
Middle Management	2.92
Teaching & Support	2.67
Other	3.14

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around making sense of the system of qualifications and pathways for new learners.

CURRICULUM RESPONSIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS

FIGURE 52. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY CURRICULUM RESPONSIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS

- Range and breadth of qualifications and progression routes: 2.58
- Funding pressure on enrichment activities: 2.97
- Assessment methods: 2.55
- Workplace training experience and work experience: 2.84

This question elicited less concern among respondents than organisational funding, learner funding or the impact of government initiatives on the sector.

RANGE AND BREADTH OF QUALIFICATIONS AND PROGRESSION ROUTES

Respondents' level of concern over curriculum and responsiveness was less than that over funding or pace of change in the curriculum. Those in the 'other providers' category expressed slightly greater concern than colleges and private and third sector providers.

Causes of concern included the advice and guidance available for learners to make the correct choices, lack of opportunity to develop appropriate or specialist courses, and the focus on courses for university entrance:

'Are learners aware of what is available for them? I believe more could be done to help learners to the path that interests them.'

'There is little opportunity due to funding and resources generally to offer wider vocational and informal learning.'

'Management not understanding requirements for work experience or valuing progression routes which do not include university.'

There were particular concerns about the range of qualifications for certain groups of students:

'There is too much emphasis on accredited courses for learners who are not ready to take qualifications. Non-accredited courses with progression links to qualifications should be funded under ASB [Adult Skills Budget] as per Formal First Steps).'

'Getting the offer right for a learner depends on good initial assessment but the funding for this (especially in the areas of ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] and Basic Skills) is not available. Colleges have to top slice or find other ways to provide for this detailed assessment that for ESOL and Basic Skills is very complex.'

There are also concerns about the funding of several courses, summarised by one respondent as: 'The ongoing funding simplification process is increasing the challenge of delivering a balanced curriculum offer that meets the needs of learners as well as employers.'

Several respondents raised concerns about particular courses; for example:

'Edexcel BTECs not written for land based. We can only do City and Guilds. 14–16 yr quals in land-based no longer funded.'

'Opportunities now severely limited for 19+ learners to get a second chance because of a combination of 30% cut in adult funding.'

'ESOL is an issue again. As we do not know how ESOL will be funded as the qualifications are not on the QCF [Qualifications and Credit Framework] yet and we have no idea whether non-accredited ESOL will be funded, which in many cases is the most appropriate route.'

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around succession for leadership and management.

FIGURE 53. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.56
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.41
Other	2.78

FUNDING PRESSURE ON ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

This was more concern about than this than about other parts of the question. Senior and middle management in colleges expressed the greatest concern. Respondents were also concerned over the lack of vision about the benefits of an enrichment curriculum:

> 'We seem to have lost all sight of long term benefits and preventative value of sport, arts, events, etc in favour of short term "hits".'

> 'Enrichment is being secretly scrapped…'

> 'As funding reduces, the first things to stop are enrichment-related activities.'

> 'There will be no money for extras after this year.'

> 'Enrichment funding cuts have seriously hurt the sector's ability to provide a rounded curriculum.'

Some respondents expressed their concern over the lack of enrichment opportunities for students in the workplace and work experience and how best to manage this:

> 'Work-based learning as far as I'm aware receives no funding for enrichment activities and would be difficult to achieve.'

> 'Work experience is being cut and enrichment opportunities in areas other than sport are virtually impossible to find these days.'

> 'We have been working with other partners to deliver workplace and enrichment activities in things like our traineeship programme. It is about recognising own strengths and weaknesses to work with others to bridge these gaps and provide a better more holistic learning experience for our learners.'

FIGURE 54. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.12
Middle Management	3.01
Teaching & Support	2.70
Other	3.10

FIGURE 55. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	3.09
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.46
Other	3.02

ASSESSMENT METHODS

FIGURE 56. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.66
Middle Management	2.48
Teaching & Support	2.36
Other	2.88

FIGURE 57. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.60
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.21
Other	2.68

WORKPLACE TRAINING EXPERIENCE AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Although the concern rating was moderate for workplace training and work experience, a detailed analysis of the comments revealed a high level of concern. Of the 78 given, 47% related to workplace training and experience. There was little difference between the job roles of the type of provider in level of concern, although 'Other providers' indicated more concern.

Respondents raised a wide range of issues which can be grouped under several categories.

The first of these is the perceived lack of engagement with employers, as indicated in these comments:

'Lack of engagement with employers a long standing issue and not yet solved. Everything's just too damn complicated.'

'Getting employers buy in on work experience can be a challenge.'

'Access to the workplace is easy in theory but far harder in practice.'

'Workplace training and issues such as traineeships are a challenge to deliver well. Demand is not great and employers not that responsive.'

Next was a set of comments regarding lack of placements as the demand for those increases, including:

'With everyone looking for work experience opportunities, including traineeships, it is getting harder and harder to find employers who will take more students.'

'The expectations of employers to offer work experience for traineeships or the study programme will put more pressure on employers as we compete for work from schools, colleges and providers.'

'Finding all of the work placements for study programmes, traineeships while still trying to persuade employers to take on apprentices.'

'Ability to bring on board enough employers for volumes of placements needed.'

The particular difficulties with engaging small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was a third category:

'Very difficult to engage the SME sector in Apprenticeships, government policy appears to have a gap in addressing their needs.'

'Our local economic make up is one of many SMEs with very few large employers. This makes appropriate and useful work experience very difficult to find.'

Fourthly, there were comments about problems with work experience for Level 1 learners, such as:

'Employers that will engage with work experience have reduced, mainly I believe because of the pressure for their businesses to perform and time pressures they experience. This is especially difficult for our Level 1 learners.'

'Finding sympathetic employers can be a major issue, if you have young learners at level 1 or below or for those students with BESD [behavioural, emotional and social difficulties[. Additional resources such as staff time are required to then support said employer.'

Incentivising employers and long-term concerns also produced respondent comments, including:

'I think there needs to be more incentives for employers to engage with local authorities and other training providers.'

'Every provider and job centre is trying to find work placements and employers are getting tired of being harassed. This was not thought through very well! Government needs to give some incentive for employers to have placements!'

'There is a real need for greater collaboration right across the whole spectrum of educational providers, Government and employers to ensure that we do not let down future generations.'

'Workplace experience for the thousands of 16–18 year olds, without some central support or employer compulsion, will be impossible.'

A further category of comments arose on issues around traineeships and Apprenticeships:

'The government should leave Apprenticeships alone and allow maximum flexibility for delivery as a one-year training programme; traineeships should be axed and more flexibility provided in Apprenticeships to accommodate different types of employment.'

'Traineeship as route to Apprenticeship for YP opportunity not taken up by as they cannot afford to work and not be paid and\or lose benefits.'

'Work experience achievement on traineeships is going to be a challenge.'

Finally, there was a group of comments about the types and/or appropriateness of work experience/placements and assessment:

'The new trailblazer Apprenticeship frameworks are extremely worrying, the move towards far more end testing and graded assessments for WBL raises real concerns and we are now beginning to reap the rewards for slashing enrichment funding.'

'For learners with physical or learning difficulties it is increasingly difficult to find good and relevant work experience or work opportunities.'

'The pressure and emphasis being put on work placement for certain client groups and NEET [not in employment, education or training] learners is unrealistic! These learners struggled all through school with attendance and other issues. Many have social issues and are not suited to work environment. The time involved to get employers on board and then have a learner only stay for a day. This then results in losing the employer and struggling to find another!'

'I'm very concerned as to the quality of work experience if the EFA [Education Funding Agency] insist it must be with an external company. We will see students ending up in a work experience role just to meet the criteria and nothing to do with their job.'
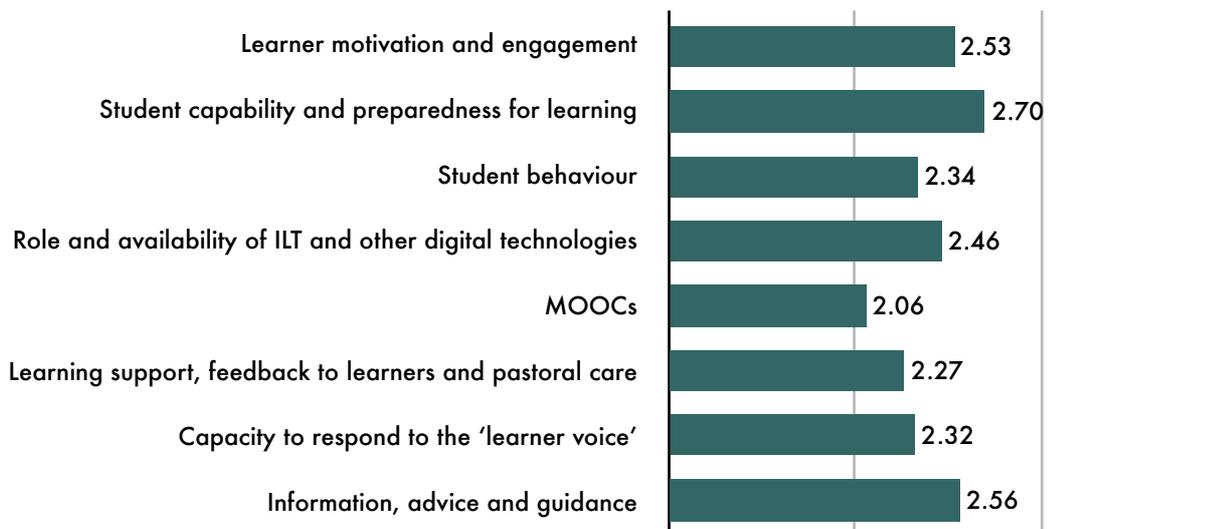
FIGURE 58. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.94
Middle Management	2.88
Teaching & Support	2.52
Other	3.07

FIGURE 59. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.88
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.59
Other	2.94

TEACHING/TRAINING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

FIGURE 60. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY TEACHING/TRAINING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

	Concern Rating
Learner motivation and engagement	2.53
Student capability and preparedness for learning	2.70
Student behaviour	2.34
Role and availability of ILT and other digital technologies	2.46
MOOCs	2.06
Learning support, feedback to learners and pastoral care	2.27
Capacity to respond to the 'learner voice'	2.32
Information, advice and guidance	2.56

Answers to the questions in this section mainly registered the middle and lower range of concerns. Differences in job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern with any of these issues, nor were there any significant differences by organisation type.

As will be seen from the figure above, the greatest concern related to student capability and preparedness for learning. Respondents suggested that learners were often ill-prepared for further education by schools, and that this was an increasing trend. They commented:

> 'Learners come from secondary very ill prepared due to being taught to the 'test' real lack of motivation to learn independently and use actual resources.'

> 'Learners have no real 'common sense' skills that prepare them for the world of work and further study.'

> 'Some learners take no responsibility for their learning, unfortunately this percentage seems to be increasing and tutors report that they are almost expected to drag the learners through their programme.'

A common theme was that not only do learners lack the skills to learn effectively and independently, but they also enter with poor levels of English and Maths.

> 'FE continues to pick up the legacy of poor English and maths standards nationally pre-16 without any thought to how they will deliver high quality diverse programmes with reducing funding.'

There was frustration that staff were being pushed to ask their students to retake GCSE English and Maths until they pass. They were critical of the change from functional skills to English and Maths and felt that this would be demotivating and could result in young people becoming disengaged, just as they had become disengaged from school.

> 'Asking post-16 students to do GCSE English – especially the literature – is a nightmare, not too bad with Functional Skills, but GCSE is bad news as the schools sector have done a dreadful job already. It's like trying to repair a bridge with cardboard.'

Some who answered the question were very critical of changes to the curriculum and laid the blame for this change on government and policy-makers.

> 'Very concerned about learner motivation for the majority of our Vocational learners forced to re-take English and maths GCSEs until they pass. Functional Skills can be better integrated and explained. We feel more will become disengaged like they were at school. Gove/Wolfe have removed our greatest strength – well done!'

> 'Learner engagement is a big problem and an increasing one with curriculum changes taking us back to the 'dark ages'!'

Concern about learner motivation and engagement was intrinsically linked to learner preparedness to learn. Respondents, with few exceptions, commented that learners were increasingly arriving demotivated and with a sense of hopelessness.

> 'Learners often come to us demotivated and with little confidence and interest in completing training quals. They seem to have little or no hope of getting a job in their chosen field. Almost a lost generation.'

> 'Why should learners be motivated when so many have seen their parents and peers go through educational establishments with negligible/no profit from the experience?'

Lack of preparedness and motivation tended to arise particularly when learners were sent by the Job Centre and attended only to avoid financial penalties:

> 'Learner motivation and their preparedness for learning is big concern for me when I have to deal with adult ESOL learners (only the ones that are sent by the Job Centre). They have no motivation to learn other than the financial element from Job Centre. They lack motivation, come ill prepared and

they even express that they don't want to learn and it's only because of the Job Centre that they are here!'

In contrast, where teachers delivered well and learners were pursuing their chosen career, motivation was not an issue (and neither were capability or behaviour):

'Motivation, capability and behaviour vary very much from learner to learner but in general as they are employed in their chosen profession these are generally good.'

'Student/learner motivation will be there if the teacher/coach/trainer is able to deliver.'

There was concern that learners were increasingly ending up on inappropriate provision. This was linked to the second highest area of concern – the inadequacy of information, advice and guidance (IAG). This topic elicited by far the most comments:

'The increase in demotivation is extreme and learners are being completely misguided through lack of careers advice funding being significantly reduced.'

'Extremely concerned about information, advice and guidance because there is so little time to do this to give learners sufficient info and understanding of the demands and suitability of a course before they begin that learners can end up on wrong courses.'

'We are being pushed to increase level of achievement when the learners do not have the ability to reach the level.'

Many respondents answering this question spoke of their concerns that IAG and careers systems were simply not working properly. Common themes could be grouped under several headings.

One was the loss of Connexions and resulting lack of independent careers education and IAG (or, in some cases, any at all) together with a lack of any controls over the quality of the service:

'The IAG and careers systems are not working; students are not getting independent advice of careers or provision and there are no 'real' controls to ensure that they do. Local support is skewed to schools and otherwise very patchy'

'The absence of quality careers education IAG which has been provided to those coming to us is acutely worrying.'

Schools not offering the full range of options was also a common theme -- this was seen as being either because they do not know what is available or because they prioritise their A-level offer post-16:

'IAG in schools is often of very poor quality. Many young people have no idea about the post-16 options available other than A-levels. The schools are often only interested in those who progress to study A-level.'

'IAG generally needs to improve especially in schools as the options being presented are not always complete. Young people are making decisions on a limited set of facts.'

Problems with careers education and IAG in colleges was also mentioned, regarding too few staff with the necessary knowledge and qualifications and too little funding to deliver effective careers education programmes:

'The lack of independent IAG, and a sound process of personal decision-making in schools can result in inappropriate course choice. Good guidance at enrolment also assists course selection. Too few qualified IAG staff in colleges and few robust

programmes of careers education to underpin post FE choices.'

The comments suggested that the lack of IAG harmed recruitment, with numbers decreasing as a result:

'Lack of IAG in schools a major issue for Apprenticeship programmes. Now seeing this in the decrease in Apprenticeship take-up.'

'IAG within our local schools is a disaster. Our area has completely lost its Connexions service and we have seen Level 1 numbers fall dramatically as a result.'

The level of concern about massive, open, online courses (MOOCs), was the lowest in the entire survey. However, interestingly, a significant proportion of comments asked what MOOCs were, suggesting that they are not yet widely used, or even known about, in some areas of provision. Teaching and support staff were even less likely to consider MOOCs a matter of concern than managers. A high proportion of respondents decided not to choose a concern option around MOOCs, which must be borne in mind here.

LEARNER MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around learner motivation and engagement; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

STUDENT CAPABILITY AND PREPAREDNESS FOR LEARNING

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around student capability and preparedness for learning; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

FIGURE 61. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	1.98
Middle Management	2.37
Teaching & Support	2.55
Other	2.36

FIGURE 62. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.49
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.07
Other	2.07

ROLE AND AVAILABILITY OF ILT AND OTHER DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the role and availability of ILT and other digital technologies; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

MOOCs

FIGURE 63. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.04
Middle Management	2.04
Teaching & Support	1.92
Other	2.26

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around MOOCs.

The lack of knowledge about MOOCs suggested that there might be an issue about staff using technology in general to support learning. This links to the role and availability of information learning technology (ILT) and other digital technologies, which also elicited concerns about ILT uptake and use in the sector.

'We are well behind the curve on ILT, needing a far tighter focus on creative developmental skills rather than being able to use Windows, Excel, etc.'

'Colleges have been slow in using ILT and embedding e-learning process, staff generally do not use ILT effectively and to support the learners.'

'Barriers to e-learning remain which can impact on the delivery development – see recent FELTAG report.'

Responses expressed concern about the lack of staff knowledge and skills and the implications of this for working with industry.

'Digital literacy is assumed. Staff skills don't always match students – more IT-related CPD.'

'I'm at the leading edge of using technology in my teaching, I feel that I am being held back due to the lack of knowledge from the rest of the staff. Due to overloaded timetables, there is no time to develop new methods and help staff to embed them into their teaching. There is fear as staff are not given access to methods of working that would improve their workflow and systems are running far behind industry.'

No comments were unreservedly positive about the use of MOOCs. Although some saw a limited role for them, they were much more concerned that there should not be wholesale promotion of and a switch to MOOCs as a mode of delivery. It might be seen as an attractive way of cutting costs, respondents felt, but in reality they would only be suitable for a few able learners who could work relatively independently.

'Having completed a number of MOOCs myself, I view them as tasters - they give me an opportunity to try a field of study without wholesale investment.'

'MOOCs do not necessarily provide a learner with the competence required for the workplace. For underpinning knowledge, this is a great concept.'

'MOOCs tend to work best for more learners who are independent and require less support. The concept of a MOOC as presented in HE contexts would need significant unpicking and refinement for the majority of FE learners. I fear that, like the expectation that technology and e-learning will save time and money, too much hope and emphasis is being place on this as opposed to personalised, high-quality learning and SUPPORT.'

'Risk to structures if FE colleges adopt MOOCs as major delivery mechanism to reduce costs rather than using it to support learning.'

'I think MOOCs are a red herring for FE. There is a lot of evidence that the MOOCs that exist today are a) funded by universities as marketing activity to attract physical students and b) in the northern hemisphere 75% of students are professional adults... see 'Guardian' debate on 'A free education for all - too good to be true'.'

Concern was expressed that without investment in both ILT and CPD for staff, there were potential dangers ahead.

'We are also worried about signals from government that ILT will become more important (ie it's potentially – but only potentially – cheaper than traditional classroom delivery) when it's absolutely clear that there will be no additional resources to facilitate its growth.'

'Lack of capital to invest in level of ILT if we are to create a step change.'

The three questions on: student behaviour; capacity to respond to the 'learner voice'; and learner support, feedback to learners and pastoral support, elicited a lower level of concern and fewer comments than the others in this section.

Some comments indicated general concern about behaviour and the impact this could have on both staff and learners; others indicated that challenging behaviours were increasing:

> 'More challenging learners coming through need to have more time spent supporting them which will stretch further already stretched resources.'

> 'Our learners are motivated to develop; however as a specialist college and with the changes that have happened over recent years we have seen a marked increase in learners with more challenging behaviour.'

> 'Some students are very good and wish to learn. Their education can be wrecked by others who are unable to behave and engage.'

> 'The behaviour of students is concerning due to the fact that the majority have no idea about the value of money and the value of working for your money.'

LEARNING SUPPORT, FEEDBACK TO LEARNERS AND PASTORAL CARE

FIGURE 64. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.12
Middle Management	2.24
Teaching & Support	2.27
Other	2.52

The figure above suggests that there was a progressive increase in concern from leadership to middle management with, perhaps unsurprisingly, teachers and support staff expressing the greatest concern. This pattern was mirrored for capacity to respond to the 'learner voice' and learner support, feedback to learners and pastoral support.

FIGURE 65. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.27
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.00
Other	2.46

CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO THE 'LEARNER VOICE'

FIGURE 66. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.16
Middle Management	2.29
Teaching & Support	2.32
Other	2.62

FIGURE 67. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.27
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.24
Other	2.54

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

FIGURE 68. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.72
Middle Management	2.45
Teaching & Support	2.43
Other	2.86

FIGURE 69. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.55
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.31
Other	2.81

There was some doubt expressed about the value and impact of 'learner voice' activity. Lack of resources to respond effectively was also mentioned frequently:

'Learner voice is in reality a tick-box exercise.'

'A consumer driven society is all very well, but responding to the learner voice can also lead to kneejerk responses which send out mixed messages to a population.'

'With regard to learner voice, we are creating a generation of learners who have their rights and expectations unfettered, but no sense of their own obligations and duties, With current funding cuts we are not going to be able to respond to every wish and whim.'

'Budgets are so tight due to funding cuts I don't think many colleges have the resources/staffing to respond to learner voice in any way that would cause significant impact!'

'Reducing enrichment funding reduces ability to meet learner voice.'

The only question in this section for which there was a significant positive link between time in the sector and level of concern was learner support, feedback to learners and pastoral support. Most of the comments suggested withdrawal or reduction of these aspects of provision in response to funding cuts.

'Re learner support, we are seriously considering withdrawing our Student Counselling service. It costs £15k a year to run and with ongoing, crippling funding cuts it's becoming a luxury we simply can't afford. We don't want to do this, but our backs really are against the wall now.'

'Learning support could be lost due to competing demands for low level ALS [additional learning support].'

'Pastoral support will have to be cut as teaching will be protected.'

In contrast to the many concerns expressed, however, one respondent suggested that the solution lay with providers. What was needed was:

'Good staff and a well managed college will provide what is needed – all these issues are internal to the college to improve.'

INSPECTION AND QUALITY

FIGURE 70. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY INSPECTION AND QUALITY

Uncertainties and/or clarity of Ofsted criteria and emphases	2.65
Reliability of Ofsted inspection findings	2.74
Reliability of and confidence in internal systems	2.39
Data-handling and use	2.44
Administrative burden of quality and inspection systems	2.89
Responding to inspection reports	2.48
Resources and support from Ofsted	2.54
Resources and support from agencies/membership bodies	2.41

Several comments referred to data and its presentation, including the Inspectorate's sector subject areas (SSA) categorisation and the mapping of historical and current data to these groups. There was concern that the Ofsted narrative did not go beyond the data and that providers needed to invest in large teams to manage and handle the data. The importance of benchmarking was emphasised, including for FE Initial Teacher Education.

Other comments focused on the inspection process. Perhaps the increased emphasis on teaching, learning and assessment is reflected in the comment:

> 'We found that the pressure seemed to shift from the management to being on the tutors, so one of our major concerns now is preparing tutors to be able to deal with inspection (eg walk throughs, being seen several times during one inspection, etc).'

The authenticity of the inspection process (or the lack thereof) was commented on, as for example:

> 'Often the inspectors are inexperienced or out of touch with how 'everything works' and there is confusion and inconsistency'.

One respondent bemoaned the 'lack of an inspection body that understands the sector'. The impact of political intervention was hinted at in the comment: 'Moving goalposts from those on high. External influence on the process'. Despite the use of short-notice inspection. one respondent still felt that observations lead to underperformance and that the paperwork is extremely burdensome. Some suggested that alignment with Quality Assurance Agency HE processes would be beneficial.

There was little mention of external resources to support providers and the ETF offer was seen as 'untried and untested' compared to that of the former Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

UNCERTAINTIES AND/OR CLARITY OF OFSTED CRITERIA AND EMPHASES

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around uncertainties and/or clarity of Ofsted criteria and emphases; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

RELIABILITY OF OFSTED INSPECTION FINDINGS

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the reliability of Ofsted inspection findings; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

Many respondents saw consistency of inspection as a major issue, typified by a comment about individual inspectors having their own pre-judgments and criteria when carrying out an inspection. In a broader context, validity was also seen as being affected by political interference and an inspectorate that was not perceived as independent, for example:

> 'Ofsted is an inefficient quango that works to its own agenda rather than those of schools, colleges and students. The role of Ofsted is extremely questionable, as is the ability and experience of inspectors'.

Some inspectors were reported as being supportive but other respondents saw Ofsted as intimidating, with inspectors that merely criticised and then left.

The issue of context was raised by many respondents, especially the difficulties caused by using a single framework for different provider types and different types of provision within individual providers:

'Ofsted's understanding of FE remains weaker than for other sectors. Frameworks and inspections are not appropriate for the complexity of large colleges.'

A respondent from an outstanding college noted that colleges are:

'picking up students with huge morale and confidence issues but we are being judged harshly by Ofsted on this agenda. We are supposed not to let anything slip (student support, IAG, teaching standards, achievements, etc, etc) but all the time resources are being undermined.'

In terms of training and support for inspections, one response indicated that Ofsted's role in providing training on key issues such as teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) 'has been refreshing' but the majority of responses were more pessimistic, highlighting that little support was provided for good or outstanding providers. National agencies including NIACE, the National Association for Managers of Student Services and updates from 'FE Week' were all seen as useful and relevant both for bringing people together and providing important information regarding inspection. Others highlighted a vacuum:

'Closure of key agencies like Becta and LSIS will soon be deeply felt by the sector and has set the sector back. Inordinate delay in ETF becoming effective has not helped either.'

The 'quality industry' was seen in one comment as costly and unsustainable.

Many responses highlighted frustration on the use of data and resources needed to manage this matter of quality and inspection. There was also concern that the inspectorate and funding agencies needed different information. One respondent saw the role of the SFA as a bigger problem here than they did those issues arising from inspection:

'Can they stop providing late changes and 'rules' (counting and funding) that take place in-year – or even worse at the end of the year'.

The requirement for the same profile of students for each organisation was unhelpful as:

'the people who come to my organisation are those who have found learning difficult – they do well but not in the same way as those from different backgrounds and in different settings!'

Another respondent saw data as part of:

'a managerialist and metrics-based approach, coupled with a business-orientated leadership and management culture, that had potential to misrepresent the quality of teaching and learning'.

RELIABILITY OF AND CONFIDENCE IN INTERNAL SYSTEMS

FIGURE 71. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.03
Middle Management	2.37
Teaching & Support	2.55
Other	2.63

FIGURE 72. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.43
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.19
Other	2.41

DATA HANDLING AND USE

FIGURE 73. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.13
Middle Management	2.51
Teaching & Support	2.38
Other	2.74

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around data handling and use.

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN OF QUALITY AND INSPECTION SYSTEMS

FIGURE 74. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.76
Middle Management	2.92
Teaching & Support	2.86
Other	3.01

FIGURE 75. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.94
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.66
Other	2.93

RESPONDING TO INSPECTION REPORTS

FIGURE 76. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.29
Middle Management	2.47
Teaching & Support	2.58
Other	2.61

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around responding to inspection reports.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FROM OFSTED

Differences by job role were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around resources and support from Ofsted; nor were there significant differences by organisation type.

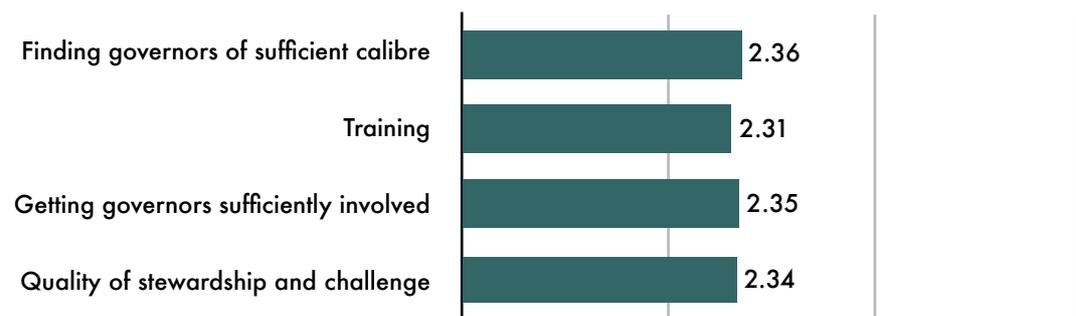## RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FROM AGENCIES/MEMBERSHIP BODIES

FIGURE 77. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.33
Middle Management	2.40
Teaching & Support	2.31
Other	2.65

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around resources and support from agencies/membership bodies.

GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNORS/BOARD MEMBERS

FIGURE 78. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNORS/BOARD MEMBERS

Finding governors of sufficient calibre	2.36
Training	2.31
Getting governors sufficiently involved	2.35
Quality of stewardship and challenge	2.34

Overall, survey results relating to governors and governance superficially suggested relatively low levels of concern.

There was a relatively low level of response to issues in this section which, nevertheless, appears to show a lack of understanding among more junior staff about what governors are for and what they do. The relatively low levels of concern mentioned above appears to show reflect pockets of low awareness, at most levels, of the importance of governors in the smooth running of organisations.

Comments made by respondents elaborating their concerns generally reflected this. One respondent said:

'I have no idea who our governors are or what they do.'

Another suggested this revealed a deeper-seated problem, saying:

'I'm sorry – I don't know anything about governorship of the college – perhaps that in itself is an issue?'

Where there was a firm knowledge of governors and their responsibilities, doubts were expressed over their role. One respondent commented:

'I know we have governors, but they do not appear to challenge any decisions made by the CEO.'

There was also concern that priority was given to the 'wrong' issues; for example a focus:

'on the business skills/experience of governors at the expense of community involvement and diversity'.

Where excellence was reported, it was sometimes seen as the exception not the rule:

'We have an excellent board of governors with highly skilled and experienced local people. Perhaps we are lucky?'

As the figures below show, levels of concern were highest among teaching and support staff and lowest among the senior managers and leaders who would be most closely involved in the work of governors. Concern was relatively low in private and third sector organisations compared with colleges and other organisations. That said, the figures also show relatively low levels of concern by all categories, when compared to the areas where respondents really are concerned.

At a general level, there was concern that governors and the Association of Colleges (AoC) Governors Council attract people like themselves – 'white middle class, who are retired or semi retired', a concern reflecting the evidence in the recent AoC publication, Reflecting Excellence in College Governance. The result is a 'lack of diversity'. There were similar comments from survey respondents over difficulties experienced in getting good governors since the role is seen as very demanding:

'good people are usually busy people and so it is difficult to attract them'.

As a result, said one respondent, there is 'too little time and capacity to be involved so it's lip service'. This was a common concern, even in the best-run colleges:

'Generally this College has benefited from good Governance. We have been able to find good quality individuals who appreciate their role and bring valuable skills to the table. However, sometimes they are too deferential and need to challenge more (in an appropriate way).'

'Far too many governors fail to get to know their college and accept as gospel what they're told by the CEO. We need more governors with commercial and business experience.'

Equally, there were calls for more community learning partnerships and democratically elected local councillors to balance commercial interests on governing bodies.

In any case there was a perceived need to shakeup governing bodies. One respondent said:

'The governor system is flawed (I have previously been a governor so have seen it from the inside). Many governors take on the role for personal kudos and career enhancement, but have little knowledge of education...and in many cases don't even attending meetings!'

Even when organisations succeeded there was surprise or doubt that it could last in the current climate. One commented:

'It amazes me how we consistently find governors that are happy to invest their time to support FE. One of FE's hidden success stories.'

But another asked how long can that last:

'We are blessed with excellent governors and a waiting list. However concerned about increased workload and responsibilities on those we have.'

Overall, many concluded that there is a real need for change. But even this was seen as fraught with difficulties:

'On the basis that we've got more freedom to experiment with governance models these days, I'd be fascinated to see some different models. However, as Ofsted focus ever closer on the relationship between governors and college performance, who would dare go first?'

FINDING GOVERNORS OF SUFFICIENT CALIBRE

FIGURE 79. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.34
Middle Management	2.25
Teaching & Support	2.24
Other	2.84

FIGURE 80. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.36
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.05
Other	2.57

TRAINING

FIGURE 81. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.09
Middle Management	2.26
Teaching & Support	2.36
Other	2.72

FIGURE 82. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.27
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.14
Other	2.62

GETTING GOVERNORS SUFFICIENTLY INVOLVED

FIGURE 83. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.21
Middle Management	2.24
Teaching & Support	2.43
Other	2.78

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around getting governors sufficiently involved.

QUALITY OF STEWARDSHIP AND CHALLENGE

FIGURE 84. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.14
Middle Management	2.27
Teaching & Support	2.40
Other	2.71

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around quality of stewardship and challenge.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

FIGURE 85. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

As the figures above show, employer engagement is a medium level of concern for respondents, with the

Range and quality of employer contacts	2.46
Retention/maintenance and churn of employer contacts	2.44
Burdens/costs of employer engagement	2.60
Effectiveness of engagement with employers	2.56

highest level of concern associated with the burdens and costs of employer engagement. Alongside the lack of an associated 'history' of concerns about employer engagement with longer-serving respondents and the commentary discussed below, this may indicate that respondents were aware that they should engage with employers but it was relatively low down their list of priorities:

> 'At the moment we have only a limited involvement with employers, and we are only now "dipping in" to traineeships with a very small involvement. This is not an area with which I am currently involved, however, I am aware that everything is being pushed in this direction, so my concern is that as an organisation we have little experience in this area and will not be able to engage in it as much as we need to.'

RANGE AND QUALITY OF EMPLOYER CONTACTS

FIGURE 86. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.42
Middle Management	2.47
Teaching & Support	2.19
Other	2.78

The range and quality of employer contacts appear to be of greater concern to leaders and managers than to teaching and support staff. Although there are many reasons for needing employer contacts, including work placements, support for Apprenticeships and direct, and sometimes bespoke training, some respondents may have little involvement in these activities. For those who are involved there are several pressing concerns, for example:

> 'Trying to identify employers for all vocational areas is a challenge, especially sciences.'

> 'I work on the work placement programme and creative Apprenticeship diploma. The most tricky industry is the music business. Also level of experience can be a burden as they would rather take on graduates who can do internships for free.'

Some respondents also commented on the difficulty of engaging sufficient employers to provide the number of placements required:

> 'There are not enough employers to meet the need for placements!'

> 'Could wish for more given the competition for placements.'

FIGURE 87. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.36
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.36
Other	2.80

The similar levels of concern for colleges and private and third sector providers may indicate that in both sectors, the need to engage with employers is becoming more urgent as proposals to shift funding for Apprenticeships to employers are implemented, alongside a reduction in the adult learning budget:

> 'With the Government's plan to move Apprenticeship funding to Employers, links are crucial and we need to improve this.'

RETENTION/MAINTENANCE AND CHURN OF EMPLOYER CONTACTS

FIGURE 88. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.38
Middle Management	2.47
Teaching & Support	2.22
Other	2.69

Once again, middle managers were considerably more concerned about retaining and maintaining employer contacts than leaders and teaching and support staff. Gaining employer contacts is a time-consuming process and takes a great deal of nurturing and maintenance. As budgets are squeezed, the resources for external relationship building become comparatively more expensive but increasingly important:

> 'Employer engagement is expensive as it takes a long time to build the relationships; this gets harder with less staff which inevitably will affect responsiveness, particularly where a specialist college like mine works predominantly with SMEs and micro-businesses.'

> 'Networks are not being used affectively and awareness of our services is still limited. Staff workload can often inhibit opportunities to engage with employers but this needs to change.'

Respondents' comments on employer engagement were mixed. Some were vehemently opposed to it:

> 'There is no requirement for employers to be involved – why do they get involved? To be nice ? To exploit people? Because they have a conscience?'

Others were concerned that employers are not interested in training or just want free training:

> 'It is high time that employers were made accountable for their neglect of training. Colleges are berated for insufficient employer engagement but it takes two to engage.'

Others noted the difficulty of engaging SMEs – which are often the majority of employers in many areas.

> 'Particular problems associated with time and costs of engagement with small and micro businesses when your local area is made up of over 50% of businesses in these categories.

> In an area characterised by many small,ie micro, businesses, it can be difficult to recruit employers who are able to leave their workplace for the time required and are of the calibre to become

engaged. Often not able to accommodate work placements due to the size of the premises.'

However, some respondents report significant progress or greater willingness to work with employers:

'Levels of employer engagement vary considerably depending on providers, but over recent years the effectiveness and types of engagement seem to have developed in many positive ways. More still needs to done, but I feel that there is growing respect among employers for what FE offers and recognition by providers of what employers can do.'

'We develop and maintain good relationship with those employers who use the college.'

'We have a fantastic relationship with local employers, and they are a credit to the education system.'

FIGURE 89. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.37
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.41
Other	2.68

Private-sector employers may depend more than colleges on funding for Apprenticeships (for which employer involvement is a prerequisite) and may have a smaller portfolio of other services. They may therefore be more concerned about gaining and maintaining employer contacts. They may also have fewer staff to make the contact with employers and therefore feel the pressures of this more acutely:

'Many of our training providers struggle to engage with employers or do not have the capacity to follow up potential leads.'

BURDENS/COSTS OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

FIGURE 90. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.68
Middle Management	2.67
Teaching & Support	2.22
Other	2.74

Middle managers and leaders have significantly greater levels of concern about the costs and burden of employer engagement, perhaps reflecting their ultimate responsibility for finding the money. As the funding for Apprenticeships moves across to employers, who will decide which (if any) providers they will engage with, the importance of this to the bottom line of budgets will increase.

'Giving employers funding and course design powers [is] a huge concern.'

FIGURE 91. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.53
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.55
Other	2.84

The same level of concern about the costs and burden of employer engagement appears to be shared across the college and private and third sector providers. However, some respondents did comment on the benefits of employer engagement:

> 'Whilst not directly responsible for the Apprenticeship offer, I feel there is MUCH more scope for local support from local employers. One of my main issues is lack of hours in the day to follow this up.'

> 'Employer engagement works, but it needs to be funded and employers need to receive the necessary finances to employ their own designated staff to enhance this role.'

One respondent noted:

> 'There needs to be less emphasis on 'how much can be get in funding' and more 'what can be achieved'.'

This implies a switch in mission and perception to seeing employer engagement as a vital part of what providers offer.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYERS

FIGURE 92. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.52
Middle Management	2.57
Teaching & Support	2.30
Other	2.90

FIGURE 93. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.48
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.44
Other	2.88

As the figures above show, there is a similarly moderate level of concern among leaders and middle managers and across the college and private and third sector providers about the effectiveness of employer engagement. There were some calls for more collaborative efforts to engage with employers and for 'shared approach across local areas'. One respondent commented:

> '[It] would be nice if providers could buddy up on this and have some localised/sector-based arrangements – too much wasted effort and employers must get annoyed with all the duplication.

Another said:

> 'It is very time consuming and difficult to engage with employers individually, and very difficult to get significant numbers of employers to make really useful contributions to education and training.'

And another commented on the lack of collaborative activities between providers and colleges:

> 'The UK has been increasingly poor about enabling low-cost joint activities between its education system and its economy.'

Overall, the impression from the survey was that some providers still do not see employer engagement as an area in which they should be involved – whereas others are making valiant efforts to engage with employers, many of whom have too few resources or are just not interested in developing long-term relationships with education and training providers.

There were significant concerns about the switch of funding from providers (and learners?) to employers, based largely on the difficulty that providers have experienced in getting employer buy-in to education and training:

> 'Colleges and providers have much better employer engagement than the Government gives them credit for. It suits Govt to say they are all rubbish – to justify the direct investment in employer funding.'

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

FIGURE 94. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

Uncertainties of roles/power — 2.71
Communicating/co-working/influencing — 2.72

Relative to other issues, concerns about LEPs ranked 29th and 31st out of 70 issues in level of concern. They included worry about lack of engagement with or understanding of the breadth of the skills agenda, illustrated by comments such as:

> 'Focus on high end skills, lack of engagement with or understanding of issues re low skilled adults, disadvantage, unemployed adults, those furthest from the job market.'

> 'Our LEP has no idea of the skills issues in its area and consists of the 'great and the good'.'

> 'LEP focus on "high profile" skill issues eg high level manufacture while forgetting the importance of eg childcare, adult care to future society and economy.'

Several themes emerged from the specific comments made by the 6% of respondents who commented. First was a concern that LEPs are not accessible to many parts of the sector. They 'appear to be remote' ; or are seen as insufficiently engaged with them – 'LEPs not truly engaged with FE':

> 'Colleges and providers may have more than one LEP to liaise with which is time consuming. FE sector may not adequately be represented on LEP Boards.'

> 'Cannot even find out who should be working with with local LEP's as VCS [voluntary and community sector] this means once again we are forgotten.'

There was a corresponding view that LEPs: 'seem pre-occupied with big business and high-level skills'. Another comment suggested that:

'Small training providers and SMEs have no involvement, they only seem interested in large companies'

And a further respondent simply wrote: 'Generally – it's who you know!'.

Other themes included the range of approaches and varying levels of effectiveness of LEPs:

> 'The range of LEPs all at very different stages is acutely worrying'

> 'We work with three LEPs (the boundaries don't align with FE at all). Three completely different models, three completely different approaches to FE, three completely different approaches to capital and ESF, three completely different agendas.'

> 'LEPs are so variable in focus and quality.'

> 'They are so variable across the country - we are a national provider.'

There was also general concern that LEPs are unclear about their remit:

> 'What do they do?'

> 'Lack of spend confirms their own lack of clarity in purpose.'

lacking in capacity and resources:

> 'Some LEPs have no resources to be able to plan effectively; others have resources but are unsure of remit.'

> 'They are already chasing the funds rather than solely being driven by what is best for the whole patch.'

and are making little impact:

> 'As yet, our LEP has proved to be largely ineffective. Engagement is difficult and the Board is insufficiently transparent.'

> 'No compelling evidence that they are having any sort of impact.'

Remit, momentum and impact were particular concerns within the London region, in some comments:

> 'Not sure what the vision is in London'

> 'The London LEP doesn't seem to be fully formed at all and we are collectively unclear about what its vision is and what it is actually supposed to be doing?????'

> 'London providers are going to get left SO far behind. How can you have one LEP for 22% of the country's GDP? More importantly, how can it be the last one to be set up? We've completely dropped the baton and all the ESF money will end up going to switched-on bits of the regions.'

There were, however, a few positive comments about LEPs, including: 'Our local LEPs are good so far'; and there were suggestions that some LEPs are improving their communication and effectiveness.

Concern about uncertainties of the role/power of LEPs was significantly stronger in those with the longest time in the sector, and correspondingly more senior staff. This could be because staff in senior leadership and (to some extent) middle management roles are more likely to need to engage with other bodies such as LEPs.

With concerns about communicating, co-working and influencing, significantly greater concern was again expressed by more senior staff, also once again perhaps because of their greater awareness of LEPs and their potential importance. Interestingly, there was also a significant difference in levels of concern according to type of organisation, with less concern expressed by colleges than private providers, third sector providers or other types of organisation. This contrasts with the levels of concern reported about

uncertainties of role and power, for which differences by organisational type were not statistically significant.

UNCERTAINTIES OF ROLES/POWER

FIGURE 95. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.91
Middle Management	2.70
Teaching & Support	2.36
Other	2.85

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around uncertainties of role/power.

COMMUNICATING/CO-WORKING/INFLUENCING
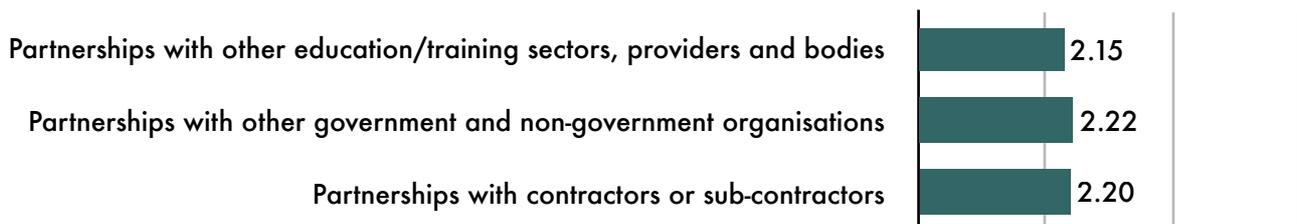
FIGURE 96. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.96
Middle Management	2.70
Teaching & Support	2.43
Other	2.79

FIGURE 97. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.63
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.79
Other	2.92

PROVIDER AND CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

FIGURE 98. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY PROVIDER & CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with other education/training sectors, providers and bodies	2.15
Partnerships with other government and non-government organisations	2.22
Partnerships with contractors or sub-contractors	2.20

By comparison with concern about other issues, there was relatively less concern about all types of partnerships. Such concerns were ranked 66th or lower, out of 70 issues. Those in middle management roles were more concerned than those in leadership or teaching and support roles, perhaps because their roles involve them particularly in operational responsibility for making partnerships work. This possibility is supported by the finding that the reported level of concern was almost as high for those in leadership roles as for those in middle management roles regarding the potentially more strategic types of partnerships with other governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Differences in organisation type were not significant in levels of concern about partnerships with provider and other sector bodies, nor with government and non-government organisations. But there were significant differences in the perceptions of partnerships with contractors and subcontractors; those from colleges reported significantly less concern than those in private and third sector providers, and from other organisations.

There were a few positive comments about partnership working:

> 'We have strong robust working practices around subcontractor management and working principles.'

> 'Good links with agencies, employers, schools and relevant bodies.'

but many more specific concerns were expressed by the 7% of respondents who commented. Recurring issues are headed by the lack of time and resources needed to make partnerships work effectively:

> 'Now there isn't enough time to do the work for your own organisation and job role. let along look externally.'

> 'Time needed to build and maintain partnerships is a real issue.'

> 'The only concern is finding the time to do all that is necessary to make it happen and to sustain it for the benefit of the students.'

> 'When partnerships are formed they are strong but it is finding the time to forge these links that is the difficulty.'

Reduction in size and staffing capacity at the relevant funding agencies (SFA/EFA), made communication difficult:

> 'Given the number of staff reductions in both EFA and SFA it's going to be very difficult to have any sort of relationship, let alone partnership!'

> 'I have concerns about links with organisations such as NAS [National Apprenticeship Service], SFA and similar that are disappearing.'

> 'I am extremely concerned by the continued reduction in SFA staff. There have been several instances recently where we have needed our relationship team to get clarification for us from the centre and to feed back issues with new projects. I am concerned that without them this will disappear. I have not met our EFA contact since I started at this college last August and have not had any contact from him even via email.'

In addition, the move to contracting with larger providers and intermediary bodies was an issue raised in some comments, with the possibility of damage to smaller bodies reliant on securing subcontracts:

> 'Smaller providers without direct SFA contacts are still being subjected to excessive management fees and are heavily reliant on main contractors so are just having to put up with it!'

> 'Third sector partners are unable to survive on the contract margins from organisations drawing down SFA funding.'

> 'Off site partners are much better at identifying and meeting the needs of their communities than FE. However their capacity to deliver has been curtailed by the funding system'

> 'Lack of funding available for sub-contractors.'

'Too little trust in partnerships with subcontractors. SFA need to realise they aren't all bad!'

The issues raised appear to suggest a general view that partnerships are currently high risk because of funding issues:

'Reductions in budget allocations will have a negative impact on some partnerships.'

'We are reducing our partnership involvement due to funding cuts.'

A volatile climate was also cited:

'Constant staff and structural changes hamper relationships; something colleges no longer have time for!'

'Partnerships are increasingly volatile as other providers fail or have difficulty performing, meaning the risk is increasing.'

Quality issues arose, as well:

'Quality and compliance issues sometimes over-govern working with partners'

'Have stopped sub contracting because of the potential risks involved'

And finally, there was some mention of a climate of mistrust and competition:

'Partnerships do not exist due to competitive market where even a FE college for another region is your competitor.'

'Negative influence of competition in partnership working'

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER EDUCATION/TRAINING SECTORS, PROVIDERS AND BODIES

FIGURE 99. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.04
Middle Management	2.13
Teaching & Support	2.04
Other	2.45

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around partnerships with other education/training sectors, providers and bodies.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS
FIGURE 100. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.20
Middle Management	2.22
Teaching & Support	2.01
Other	2.52

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around partnerships with other government and non-government organisations.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH CONTRACTORS OR SUB-CONTRACTORS
FIGURE 101. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.09
Middle Management	2.18
Teaching & Support	2.07
Other	2.54

FIGURE 102. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY ORGANISATION TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Colleges	2.14
Private & Third Sector Providers	2.23
Other	2.34

WIDER POLICY CONTEXT
FIGURE 103. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY THE WIDER POLICY CONTEXT

Broad government 'direction of travel' for FE	3.29
Sector complexity (e.g. BIS/DfE boundary)	3.14
Role/effectiveness of ETF/other bodies	2.93
Media coverage and sector reputation	2.84

The highest levels of concern were for the broad government 'direction of travel' for FE.

As with other issues, levels of concern about the wider policy context were significantly greater for those who had spent more time working in the sector.

The concerns about the broad 'direction of travel' for FE and about sector complexity were in the top 10 issues (ranked 3rd and 6th, respectively, out of 70 issues). Concerns about the role/effectiveness of ETF/ other bodies, and about media coverage and sector reputation were both in the top 20 issues (17th and 20th respectively).

For all four policy areas covered in the survey, there were no significant differences in the responses according to the organisation type of those responding.

With the relationship between levels of concern and seniority or role, for concern about broad government 'direction of travel' for FE, those in leadership roles expressed more concern than middle managers, who in turn reported more concern than those in teaching and support roles. This pattern also holds for sector complexity and media coverage.

For concern about the role/effectiveness of ETF/other bodies, those in middle management roles expressed more concern than those in leadership roles, with those in teaching and support roles reporting relatively lower levels of concern. Those in other roles consistently reported relatively higher levels of concern across all four areas of wider policy context.

There were some positive comments about developments within the sector and some open views:

'The role of ETF is yet to be seen and judged.'

but most of those making specific comments (7%) on this were identifying concerns rather than positives.

There were many comments about an overall negative direction and impact of government policy:

'One policy/scheme often seems to contradict another.'

'Anti FE stance of DfE [Department for Education] and increasingly BIS [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills]'

'Direction of travel appears to benefit the minimum proportion of people.'

'The government seem to dismiss FE in their ideas for education, and not value it.'

There was also a view that government is out of touch with FE and does not understand it:

'It seems the sector has no allies at all in high places, and a shocking amount of ignorance about the complexity of the sector is shown by politicians..'

'Government policy shows their lack of understanding of the nature of FE student base. Their understanding of what learning is required and the likely participation of employers and learners is lacking.'

'This Government neither understands or values FE and will only know what it has lost when we have gone.'

'The core focus of FE has been lost'

'Currently FE is being marginalised as it is not understood by key political players and the potential the sector has for contributing to economic and social well-being is being lost.'

Other points made in this section were again ones about reduction in funding:

'The constant reductions in funding force colleges to cut staff and increase workloads of the remaining staff.'

'Funding being eroded all of the time.'

'Direction of travel for FE is largely about cutting services. 19+ college-based provision is disappearing. 16 –18 funding is being cut substantially and far lower than what is deemed acceptable for schools.'

Lack of coordination, effectiveness and clarity of role of different government departments were mentioned:

'Clear lack of coordination between the departments, this rolls into funding and policy'

'Lack of coordination between BIS/DfE is a big concern'

'The future for the sector is extremely uncertain, funding is at best short term and we're reaping the rewards of so much tensions existing between BIS and DfE'

'There appears to be no joined up view on FE – DfE and BIS do not share a view. DfE very clearly doesn't think FE is important – as demonstrated in their funding decisions.'

The role of some sector bodies also produced some respondent comments:

'ETF is a mistake.'

'I believe the ETF is an unnecessary organisation which diverts funding away from the front line and into the pockets of 'experts"

'More information needed on IFL [Institute for Learning] and QTLS.'

'Far too many external bodies that 'come and go"

In terms of provision, there were specific concerns about adult and community learning:

'Government has lost its way with adult learning and it will all come home to roost in the economy and society in general the not too distant future.'

'Concerned about reducing investment in adults despite challenges of too many adults with skills below Level 2 ... Not thinking about the future competitiveness of the UK economy.'

'The direction of travel for FE does not translate well to ACL.'

'Community learning is the Cinderella within a sector that is lacking investment'

'There seems to be short-sighted approach in the education for adults that it must be immediately vocational. There is a real need for broader adult education to engage the older population, ward off ill health including mental health and to facilitate engagement with the "host" community.'

Apprenticeships also came in for comments here:

'The media has shown little or no interest in Apprenticeships, or the demand from employers for young people to go into manufacturing, etc.'

'I think the focus on Apprenticeships is damaging to the rest of the vocational provision'

'The proposed funding regime for Apprenticeships is misguided and likely to result in a substantial drop in this excellent provision'

Another theme raised was the diversion of funding to employers and to other sectors:

'Current government sees FE as only three things:i)Apprenticeships (and I am not sure values providers in the long term) with employers being the key relationship with government rather than employers AND providers; ii) short/on-line programmes to get people into work; iii) Advanced Level Learning only for those who can afford it. There is so much more to FE and Skills and my worry is that the sector will be squeezed as priority funding goes to the schools and universities, with what is left going to employers who will engage providers in a contest to

drive down costs to the absolute minimum to deliver training.'

'There seems to be an obsession in government to give the employers more involvement – I do not think SMEs want to be as involved as government thinks.'

Some respondents answering here wanted to mention that the GCSE Maths and English requirements were unrealistic and underfunded:

'Government have abused our sector by heaping burdens, eg Maths and English, without funding'

'Why force irrelevant qualifications such as GCSE English and maths when we have Functional Skills which is fully accepted as relevant, rigorous and useful to employers. Employers don't like GCSE – it does not show people are either literate or numerate in the real world environment.'

Finally, there were comments about general lack of understanding and negative coverage by the media:

'Media coverage and Government pronouncements are currently further eroding fragile staff morale in the sector.'

'Where are the mainstream media in all these changes? Why haven't the funding cuts been made national news?'

'National media simply not concerned enough. We are still the neglected middle child of the Foster report'

'Media has no concept of FE other than a place that plumbers go to.'

BROAD GOVERNMENT 'DIRECTION OF TRAVEL' FOR FE

FIGURE 104. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.60
Middle Management	3.32
Teaching & Support	2.94
Other	3.32

It is worth noting that the higher you go up the staffing grades, the greater is the level of concern. Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the broad government 'direction of travel' for FE.

SECTOR COMPLEXITY (E.G. BIS/DfE BOUNDARY)

FIGURE 105. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB ROLE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	3.43
Middle Management	3.16
Teaching & Support	2.70
Other	3.30

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around sector complexity.

ROLE/EFFECTIVENESS OF ETF/OTHER BODIES

FIGURE 106. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.98
Middle Management	2.98
Teaching & Support	2.58
Other	3.14

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around the role/effectiveness of ETF/other bodies.

MEDIA COVERAGE AND SECTOR REPUTATION

FIGURE 107. LEVEL OF CONCERN BY MAIN JOB ROLE

JOB TYPE	CONCERN RATING
Leadership	2.95
Middle Management	2.88
Teaching & Support	2.63
Other	2.92

Differences by organisation type were not statistically significant in terms of the level of concern around media coverage and sector reputation.

APPENDIX: CONCERN BY RATING

RANK	VARIABLE	CATEGORY/CHAPTER	CONCERN RATING
1	Level/rates of institutional funding	Organisational funding	3.59
2	Adequacy of learner funding	Learner funding	3.57
3	Broad government 'direction of travel' for FE	Wider policy context	3.29
4	Workload	Staff recruitment, retention etc	3.25
5	External bureaucracy	Organisational funding	3.25
6	Sector complexity	Wider policy context	3.14
7	Pace and volume of change	Curric. & qualification change	3.14
8	Maths & English assessment & delivery	Curric. & qualification change	3.06
9	Complexity of the offer	Curric. & qualification change	3.02
10	Capital funding	Organisational funding	3.01
11	Availability of opportunities and budgets for staff training	Staff recruitment, retention etc	2.99
12	Motivation	Staff recruitment, retention etc	2.98
13	Funding pressure on enrichment activities	Curriculum responsiveness etc	2.97
14	Pay and conditions	Staff recruitment, retention etc	2.97
15	Discretionary support	Learner funding	2.93
16	Funding of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities	Learner funding	2.93
17	Role/effectiveness of ETF/other bodies	Wider policy context	2.93
18	Making sense of the system of qualifications and pathways for new learners	Curric. & qualification change	2.90
19	Administrative burden of quality and inspection systems	Inspection & quality	2.89
20	Media coverage and sector reputation	Wider policy context	2.84
21	Workplace training experience and work experience	Curriculum responsiveness etc	2.84
22	Resources for curriculum delivery	Curric. & qualification change	2.80
23	Succession for leadership and management	Staff quality	2.78

RANK	VARIABLE	CATEGORY/CHAPTER	CONCERN RATING
24	Flexibility of staff in the context of new and changing demands	Staff quality	2.76
25	Internal bureaucracy	Organisational funding	2.75
26	Communication between managers and front line staff	Staff quality	2.75
27	Learning loans	Learner funding	2.74
28	Reliability of Ofsted inspection findings	Inspection & quality	2.74
29	Communicating/co-working/influencing	Local Enterprise Partnerships	2.72
30	Staff retention/turnover	Staff recruitment, retention etc	2.71
31	Uncertainties of roles/power	Local Enterprise Partnerships	2.71
32	Student capability and preparedness for learning	Teaching/training etc	2.70
33	Travel-to-learn subsidies	Learner funding	2.68
34	Uncertainties and/or clarity of Ofsted criteria and emphases	Inspection & quality	2.65
35	Quality of senior managers	Staff quality	2.62
36	Local provider range and quantity of provision	Institutional competition	2.61
37	Competition with other providers	Institutional competition	2.60
38	Burdens/costs of employer engagement	Employer engagement	2.60
39	Range and breadth of qualifications and progression routes	Curriculum responsiveness etc	2.58
40	Information, advice and guidance	Teaching/training etc	2.56
41	Effectiveness of engagement with employers	Employer engagement	2.56
42	Assessment methods	Curriculum responsiveness etc	2.55
43	Performance management	Staff quality	2.55
44	Resources and support from Ofsted	Inspection & quality	2.54
45	Quality of middle managers	Staff quality	2.53
46	Learner motivation and engagement	Teaching/training etc	2.53
47	Learner self-guided/independent learning	Curric. & qualification change	2.52
48	Personalised learning	Curric. & qualification change	2.50

RANK	VARIABLE	CATEGORY/CHAPTER	CONCERN RATING
49	Competition from other sectors/industry	Staff recruitment, retention etc	2.48
50	Responding to inspection reports	Inspection & quality	2.48
51	Role and availability of ILT and other digital technologies	Teaching/training etc	2.46
52	Range and quality of employer contacts	Employer engagement	2.46
53	Data-handling and use	Inspection & quality	2.44
54	Retention/maintenance and churn of employer contacts	Employer engagement	2.44
55	Skills and qualifications of teaching/training staff	Staff quality	2.41
56	Resources and support from agencies/membership bodies	Inspection & quality	2.41
57	Reliability of and confidence in internal systems	Inspection & quality	2.39
58	Finding governors of sufficient calibre	Governance & governors etc	2.36
59	Getting governors sufficiently involved	Governance & governors etc	2.35
60	Age profile of workforce	Staff recruitment, retention etc	2.35
61	Quality of stewardship and challenge	Governance & governors etc	2.34
62	Student behaviour	Teaching/training etc	2.34
63	Capacity to respond to the 'learner voice'	Teaching/training etc	2.32
64	Training	Governance & governors etc	2.31
65	Learning support, feedback to learners and pastoral care	Teaching/training etc	2.27
66	Partnerships with other government and non-government organisations	Provider & cross-sectoral etc	2.22
67	Skills and qualifications of support staff	Staff quality	2.21
68	Partnerships with contractors or sub-contractors	Provider & cross-sectoral etc	2.20
69	Partnerships with other education/training sectors, providers and bodies	Provider & cross-sectoral etc	2.15
70	MOOCs	Teaching/training etc	2.06