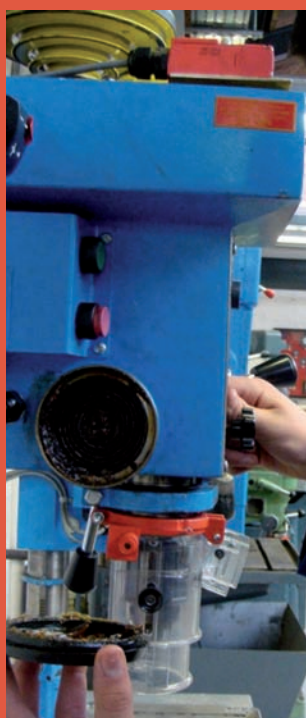


THINKPIECE

Leading learning in further education





Acknowledgments

We were very pleased when members of the 157 Group decided to prepare a paper on the leadership of learning and were delighted to work together to publish it. We have a long-standing interest in leadership and its impact on the experience of learners and hope this paper generates significant debate. We agree with Denise Brown-Sackey that this is an excellent time to seek to raise its profile.

There are many people who have been associated with this paper, but we would like specifically to acknowledge the contributions of:

- Denise Brown-Sackey, principal of Newham College of FE and lead principal for the work
- The Institute for Learning, in conducting and analysing a survey of its Fellows, which forms part of the research
- Mick Fletcher, as principal author of the report
- 157 Group principals:
 - Asha Kemkha OBE, West Nottinghamshire College
 - Richard Chambers, Lambeth College
 - Melanie Hunt, Sussex Downs College
 - Angela O'Donoghue, City of Sunderland College
 - Stella Mbubaegbu CBE, Highbury College
 - Dr Alison Birkinshaw, York College

And their wonderful staff.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Lynne Sedgmore'.

Lynne Sedgmore CBE
Executive Director, 157 Group

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Tony McAleavy'.

Tony McAleavy
Education Director, CfBT Education Trust

Publisher

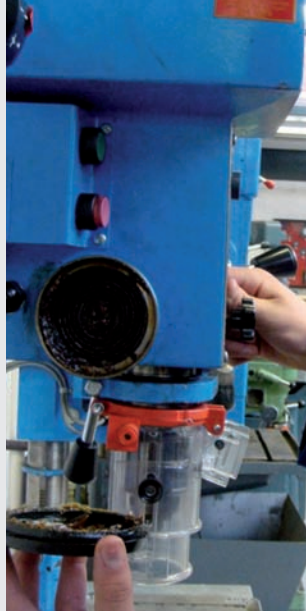
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Foreword

At this time of tumultuous change, it is tempting and understandable for college leaders to focus on what is being done to us from external sources: changes in priorities, cuts in funding, new rules on who is eligible for free education. Of course we have to respond to such influences, but there is a critical area where more than any other we can truly create our own future – leading innovation, excellence and improvements in teaching and learning.

It is, moreover, the most important thing any college does, and a field in which we, together as leaders with our teachers and support staff, are the real experts.

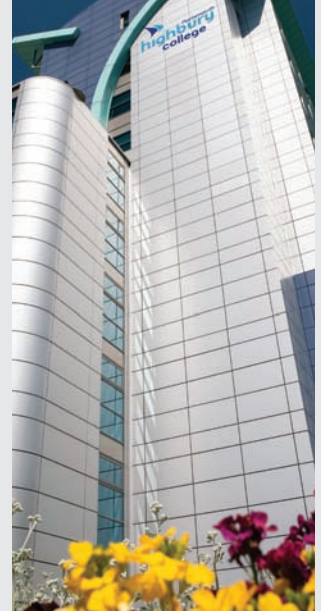
As this report shows, there are already numerous examples of good practice in the sector; examples of effective leadership at all levels supporting, encouraging, empowering, stimulating and motivating staff. There is no easy path to excellence but the same themes emerge again and again – a focus on developing people, getting closely involved with teaching and learning and setting the right climate across the organisation. Effective leaders make sure that everyone knows that excellent teaching matters.

In the 157 Group, we feel that despite all the challenges we face, now is a good time to increase our attention and focus on the leadership of learning, particularly at sector-wide level.

We intend to press for more opportunities to discuss and debate teaching and learning at a national level; we are looking for more debate and research to explore how leaders can best improve the quality of teaching and learning in the specific context of English further education. We feel also that we should be more articulate, assertive and offer strong evidence and case studies on the models of learning that work best in our sector and on which funding and inspection should be based. In these turbulent times we urge that more attention is given to leading learning and we hope that the messages and reflections in this short paper provide a good place to stimulate further debate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Denise Brown-Sackey'.

Denise Brown-Sackey
Principal, Newham College



The 157 Group

The 157 Group is a membership organisation that represents 27 large, regionally influential further education colleges in England, most of whom are highly successful. All our members are key strategic leaders in their locality, who take seriously the role of leading policy development, and improving the quality and reputation of further education.

Providing a national voice on strategy and policy for large, mostly urban colleges in England, we aim to promote change for the benefit of our members and the sector as a whole. Our members' knowledge, capability, experience and commitment brings a unique breadth and depth of expertise to bear on every aspect of further education and skills. We also work together as a peer support network, and are committed to equality and diversity.

We are actively promoting the development of a strong and world-class college sector that not only has a transformative impact on individuals, employers and their local communities, but also makes a real difference to the economic and social well-being of the nation and its global success. Together, 157 Group colleges:

- turn over £1.6 billion a year
- serve 700,000 learners
- employ 39,000 staff
- engage with 32,000 employers.

Our approach

- We strive to be thoughtful, flexible and responsive; acting quickly and decisively for the benefit of our members and the sector.
- We promote the FE and skills sector as a whole. Committed to excellence and instrumental in resolving sector debates and issues, we adopt a pragmatic approach to delivering positive solutions and achieving success.
- We are bound by a strong and unanimous commitment to using our collective knowledge, capability and experience to lead policy development, improve performance and champion the reputation not only of members but also the sector as a whole.
- We seek to be critical friends and advisers to the government and shadow government, local communities and the sector itself to achieve positive outcomes for communities, employers, businesses and individuals.
- We work with fellow 157 Group members, sharing expertise, ideas and resources.

Policy role

Our member colleges operate within a complex and volatile policy environment, and our objective as thought leaders is to exert powerful influence on critical policy priorities. Our policy and discussion papers draw on and reflect the practical experience of 157 Group member colleges. The themes, developed over a series of debates, represent the areas of greatest concern for them as leaders of some of the largest and most successful colleges. The following policy and discussion papers are available to download from our website:

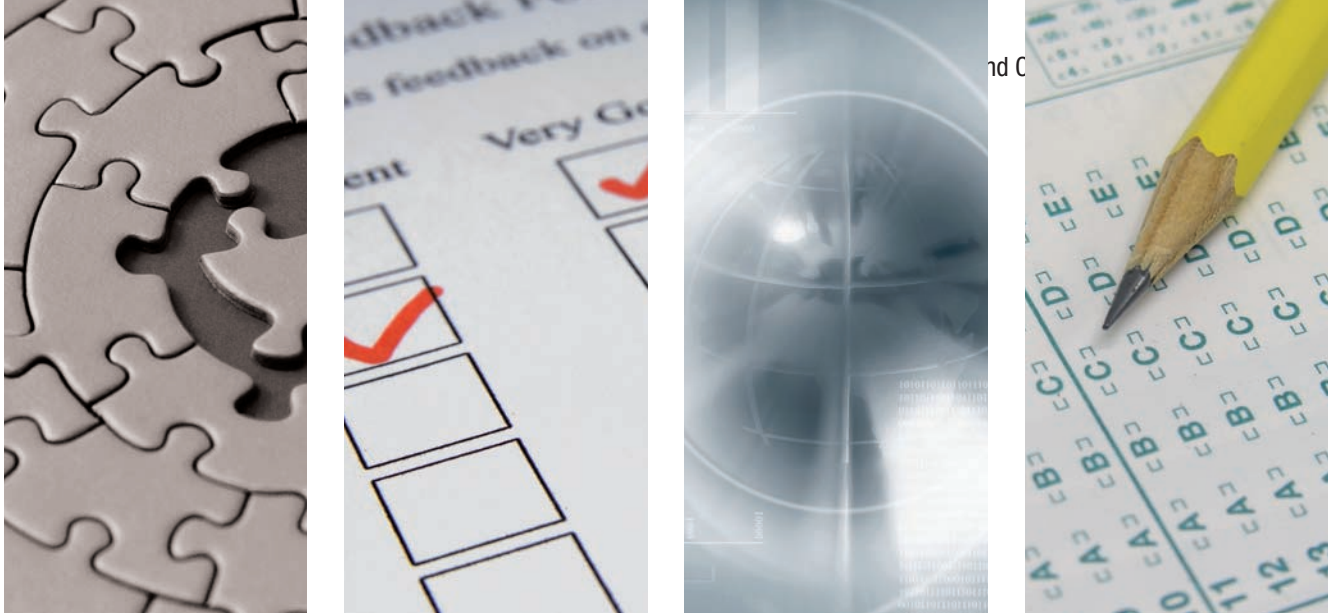
- *Protect services to students, by targeting cuts and embracing efficiency*
- *Real choices for 14 to 19-year-olds*
- *Preparing colleges for the future*
- *Learning and skills needs local leadership*
- *Strong colleges build strong communities*
- *Making the QCF work for learners*
- *Colleges' international contribution*
- *Rising to the challenge: how FE colleges are key to the future of HE*
- *Learning accounts that count*
- *Doing more for less.*

Through these papers we seek to:

- contribute a new, strong and relevant perspective, influencing national policy through offering workable and practical policy ideas
- focus our recommendations on changes that can bring improvements for learners, stakeholders, colleges and the whole sector
- raise the level of debate and discussion across the sector
- recommend improvements that can be made by colleges themselves and the sector
- raise awareness amongst sector agencies of their own roles.

Our members

- Barnet College
- Bedford College
- Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Chichester College
- City and Islington College
- City of Bristol College
- City of Sunderland College
- College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
- Cornwall College
- Derby College
- Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
- Highbury College Portsmouth
- Hull College
- Lambeth College
- Leeds City College
- Lewisham College
- Newcastle College
- Newham College
- New College Nottingham
- St Helens College
- Stoke on Trent College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Manchester College
- The Sheffield College
- Warwickshire College
- West Nottinghamshire College
- York College.



CfBT Education Trust

CfBT Education Trust is a leading charity providing education services for public benefit in the UK and internationally. Established over 40 years ago, CfBT Education Trust now has an annual turnover exceeding £100 million and employs more than 2,000 staff worldwide who support educational reform, teach, advise, research and train. Since we were founded, we have worked in more than 40 countries around the world managing large government contracts and providing education services as well as managing directly a growing number of schools.

The principal object of CfBT Education Trust is to advance education for the public benefit. This includes:

- Promoting and assisting teaching in educational or training establishments or other organisations throughout the world
- Carrying out or commissioning educational research
- Providing counselling and guidance
- Providing advice and consultancy services on education matters
- Providing training and other support for educators, which enable them to improve the quality of education.

Our values

Our values flow from our objects. They are as follows:

- Securing high quality learning and teaching is at the heart of all that we do: we value educational activities which are inclusive and sustainable
- We are an international organisation committed to sharing our expertise as widely as possible
- We believe in diversity of educational provision, thus giving our beneficiaries a real choice
- We strongly encourage staff to take responsibility for securing consistently high standards in the belief that well managed institutions, good support, and training for teachers provide the basis for excellence
- Our practice is informed by commitment to robust research and evaluation
- We have strong roots in English language teaching and the promotion of English-medium schooling to enable economic development and social mobility.

We seek to apply these values to all of our activities, our interaction with our clients and our relationship with our beneficiaries.

Our research

As a not-for-profit organisation CfBT commit around £1 million of our surpluses every year for practice-based educational research. There is an ambition within CfBT to ensure that the organisation's investment in educational research has a direct impact on beneficiaries via practitioners and policy makers. This investment is channelled through our Evidence for Education (EfE) Research Programme; a distinct and original research programme designed by CfBT with the intention of helping to establish education as an evidence-based profession.

CfBT Perspective Papers are research publications aimed at influencing national education policy. Perspective reports are a series of thinkpieces or commentaries that aim to contribute to the debate on key educational issues or topics. These reports are often cited in the mainstream and specialist press, as well as being widely referenced in academic and policy literature. The following recent Perspective Papers are available to download free from our website:

8

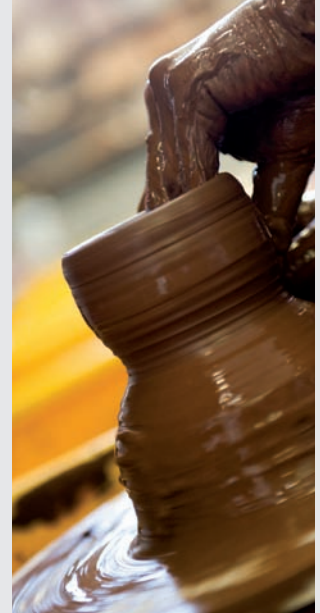
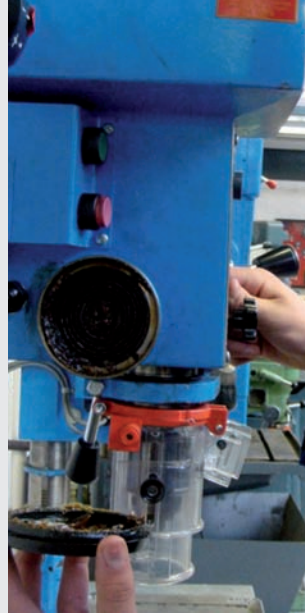
- *Raising the participation age: Keeping it on track*
- *By accident or design: Is our system of post-16 provision fit for purpose?*
- *Learning Matters: Making the 14 -19 reforms work for learners*
- *Adult skills and higher education: separation or union?*
- *Raising the leaving age to 18: symbol or substance?*
- *Still waiting for 'big ideas' on adult skills*
- *Funding the Pupil Premium: Fairness for young people and parents*
- *Instinct or Reason: How education policy is made and how we might make it better*
- *Funding upskilling and reskilling in the 21st century*
- *Should we end the Education Maintenance Allowance?*

Our Trustees

CfBT has 11 Trustees who make up the Board of Trustees. They are legally responsible for all of CfBT's affairs and are ultimately responsible for the performance of the organisation and the quality of service it offers.

The Education Committee is the Trustee Committee which oversees the educational impact of the Trust's work. It also decides on the funding for CfBT's research projects. Trustees who are members of this Committee are:

- Sir Jim Rose (Committee Chairman)
- John Harwood DL (Chairman of Trustees)
- John Webb
- Sara Hodson
- Margaret Platts MBE
- Alison Macleod.



Leading learning in further education

Executive summary

In 2010 the 157 Group and CfBT agreed to collaborate to produce a report on the leadership of learning in the further education sector in England. Its purpose was to identify those things that college leaders do that have the most impact on the quality of learning. The report was planned to involve a review of the relevant literature and a series of interviews with strategic leaders.

Subsequently, the Institute for Learning (IfL) agreed to support the project by conducting an online survey of its Fellows – a subset of members who are experienced and highly qualified practitioners. The report is based therefore on three sources of evidence. The literature review was undertaken first and its findings used to help structure both the survey and the individual interviews.

Findings

There is a range of evidence from inspectors' reports, from the work of sector organisations and the academic literature describing how effective leadership can improve outcomes for learners. A number of large-scale reviews of international evidence offer particularly robust findings. A recent review published by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) provides a helpful basis for categorising aspects of leadership that have proved successful in improving the quality of teaching and learning. According to the authors of that report, the key elements are seen as:

- Involvement in the professional learning and development of staff
- Active engagement in managing the teaching programme
- Sending clear signals about the importance of teaching and learning
- Creating a climate where staff feel empowered to innovate.

The online survey asked respondents about a series of leadership activities organised under the above headings. There was very strong support from the whole sample and major subgroups that these activities were central to effective leadership. Interestingly, activities that are specifically and directly concerned with teaching and learning were seen as less important than the overarching tasks of setting the vision and goals for the organisation and particularly setting the organisational tone. This latter was echoed in a number of written comments emphasising the need to respect the professionalism and autonomy of teachers.

The survey also asked for respondents' views on how well their current leaders performed in respect of teaching and learning. In general, they were seen as performing better in those areas that are more clearly linked with teaching and learning such as monitoring quality or engaging in continuing professional

development (CPD). “Creating a supportive environment”, which was consistently identified as the most important activity, was also the one on which both strategic and middle and first-line managers were scored least well.

The interviews with college principals produced findings that were consistent with the other two sources. Principals spoke enthusiastically about the importance they attached to teaching and learning and readily described a range of activities that could be placed under one or more of the headings identified. Several identified involvement with and listening to students as an additional aspect of effective leadership. A number of mini case studies, illustrating approaches used are included in the body of the report. Although the principals interviewed were all active in promoting improvements in teaching and learning, it appeared that the colleges were acting largely independently. Several principals mentioned that there were few opportunities to address teaching and learning issues collectively at a national level. Many referred to the effects of constant organisational churn, which distracted them from what they saw as their main purpose. Some also made reference to the inspection and performance management regimes, which tended to make institutions too risk-averse.

Conclusions

There is a high degree of consensus between the literature on how leadership can best bring about improvements in teaching and learning and the views of the principals and experienced practitioners surveyed for this report. Although the samples were relatively small, the consistency of findings gives confidence in their robustness. A summary of the findings and the practical examples that illustrate them could be useful support materials for developing new and existing leaders.

Although individual leaders were well able to articulate a clear view of what constitutes good teaching and learning within their own institution, there is a lack of such clarity at sector level. A consequence is that models of good practice in FE tend to be externally derived, whether explicitly by Ofsted or implicit in funding models. There is a need for the sector to develop and articulate its own models of what good practice in vocational learning looks like.

National organisations could do more to provide opportunities for strategic leaders to develop and share approaches to the effective leadership of learning. The sector would also benefit from a reduction in the rate of organisational change, which claims the attention of leaders and displaces time spent supporting teaching. It would assist institutional leaders to create a climate more favourable for the improvement of teaching were the monitoring and inspection arrangements less intolerant of instances of failure.

Recommendations

Current and aspiring leaders should:

- Review their own practice in the light of the evidence presented and referenced in this report
- Note the importance of creating a supportive and enabling culture in the organisation as well as actions more directly focused on teaching and learning
- Work collaboratively to help develop a shared sector view of good practice in vocational teaching and learning.

Sector bodies should:

- Provide more opportunities for strategic leaders to debate and discuss approaches to the leadership of learning
- Help develop a sector-owned view of what constitutes excellence in vocational education and training
- Commission research on the leadership of learning in the specific context of English further education.

The **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)** and **Skills Funding Agency (SFA)** should:

- Recognise that constant organisational change can distract leaders from a clear focus on improving teaching and learning
- Recognise in performance management arrangements that innovation and experimentation, with attendant risks of occasional failure, are essential for the improvement of professional practice.



Introduction

There seems to be a new consensus about the importance of teaching and learning in FE. It was summed up perhaps by John Hayes, minister of state with specific responsibility for FE colleges, when he said recently:

“As politicians we can play our parts but much more important are the teachers and the learners that really make the difference.”

His colleague, David Willetts, made much the same point when speaking shortly after the election in 2010:

“A key aim of the coalition is to recognise good teaching at all levels.”

Finally, in November 2010 the government produced a white paper called *The Importance of Teaching*.¹ Both its title and the introduction to the paper by the secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, sought to underline the centrality of teaching to the process of education:

“At the heart of our plan is a vision of the teacher as our society’s most valuable asset. We know that nothing matters more in improving education than giving every child access to the best possible teaching. There is no calling more noble, no profession more vital and no service more important than teaching. It is because we believe in the importance of teaching – as the means by which we liberate every child to become the adult they aspire to be – that this White Paper has been written. The importance of teaching cannot be over-stated.”

Opinions will differ as to how far the specific reforms outlined in the white paper will really bring about improvements in teaching and learning, but few in the world of education would contradict the initial assertion – that teaching really matters. It is a welcome restatement of one of the fundamentals of education after nearly two decades in which public policy has seemed to focus on almost anything else – structural reform, new buildings, testing and targets or financial autonomy. As the prime minister and his deputy write in the introduction:

“The first, and most important, lesson is that no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers.”

1 www.education.gov.uk/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching

The white paper is principally about schools, but its message resonates in further education. The incorporation of colleges in 1993 brought many benefits but also focused the attention of leaders at all levels on the skills needed for colleges to survive and thrive as independent businesses. Success for many was judged in terms of an ability to understand and exploit the complexities of the FE funding methodology or to have a comprehensive knowledge of HR legislation. It may be significant that the Principals Qualifying Programme,² which for a while all new principals were required to undertake, contained separate support units on funding and finance but only one on teaching and learning. The national standards underpinning the programme rightly emphasised the leadership of learning, but the focus of many was on the newer skills of business management.

There are now signs that things are beginning to change. Although principals still need to pay attention to the turbulence caused by constant changes to the organisation of the sector, they are also more and more overtly focused on the core business of teaching. As one leader of a 157 Group college argued forcefully in the course of research for this paper:

“I am principal and chief executive. As chief executive I run the business. As principal I am the academic leader of this institution. I have to be good at both.”

It is not altogether clear why the pendulum appears to have swung back in this way. It may reflect the increasing maturity of the sector; after nearly 20 years of running independent colleges leaders recognise that running the business well is a necessary but insufficient condition for success. It may be that the work of bodies such as IfL has brought a focus on teaching more to the fore; or after some years of focusing on standards it has been accepted that the major way in which institutions can influence students' performance is by improving the quality of teaching. It may be a consequence of moves towards self-regulation in the sector, taking responsibility for its own improvement; or it may simply be the zeitgeist, an idea whose time has come.

Whatever the reason for the renewed focus on teaching and learning, the 157 Group and CfBT welcome it. A focus on quality and improving the student's experience is central to the mission of both organisations. This paper results from their asking a simple question:

“If the quality of teaching is the thing that makes the most difference to a student's learning, what is it that institutional leaders can do to improve teaching?”

Or in other words, what makes for the effective leadership of learning?

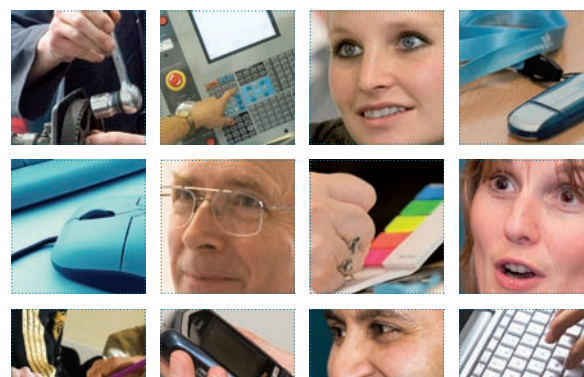
Sources

This paper draws on three main sources. It looks at what we can learn from the literature, both the academic literature on effective teaching and learning (of which there is a large and increasing body) and reports of sector bodies such as Ofsted, IfL and LSIS. There are clear and consistent messages to be found there about the key role of leadership and the behaviours that seem to make for success.

The 157 Group has also collaborated with IfL to explore the views of experienced teachers in the sector. A survey was undertaken of IfL Fellows – highly experienced practitioners in post-16 education and training, who hold higher degrees (master's and doctorates) in the areas of education and training, in addition to their teaching qualification. They were asked to comment on a summary of the research findings in the light of their experience and to reflect on the effectiveness of the leadership of learning in the sector.

Finally, the research involved a series of semi-structured interviews with principals drawn from 157 Group colleges. The colleges that participated are all acknowledged as having highly effective governance and management, so may be expected to reflect best practice. They are also similar in that they are all large and predominantly urban; the perspective of their leaders therefore is likely to be different from those of school headteachers, or principals of sixth-form colleges.

2 Now replaced by the Executive Leadership Development Programme, and no longer mandatory, but it still has no support unit specifically on teaching and learning.



What the literature tells us

Effective teaching and learning depends on a number of factors and many of them can be affected by clear and focused leadership. The best leaders can influence the selection of teachers, facilitate their subsequent growth and development through CPD and performance review, and can organise an environment where teachers are able to give of their best. Individual leaders cannot affect the status accorded to teachers by the wider society – said by some to be one of the best predictors of the performance of an education system³ – but they can and do affect their status in their institutions.

Ofsted clearly sees a link between the quality of teaching and effective leadership. For example, the annual report for 2008/09 states that:

“There is a close link between the judgements for leadership and management, overall effectiveness and the capacity to improve.”

The report for 2009/10⁴ gives more detail, particularly in relation to 16 colleges that had improved since their previous inspection:

“In these colleges, excellent leadership and management galvanise staff and students around a shared vision and a commitment to raise outcomes and aspirations. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, reinforced in some cases by lesson observation and targeted professional development. Robust performance management and accurate self-assessment systems are informed by the good use of data. The involvement of leaders at all levels and close attention to the views of learners both contribute strongly to improvement.”

The Welsh Inspectorate, Estyn, comes to very similar conclusions:⁵

“Ineffective leadership and strategic management often leads to weaknesses in many areas of an organisation’s work. This has a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning, the standards that learners achieve and the value for money that the organisation provides.”

3 See McKinsey www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf

4 www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Annual-Report/2009-10/The-Annual-Report-of-Her-Majesty-s-Chief-Inspector-of-Education-Children-s-Services-and-Skills-2009-10

5 Estyn, 2007. *Leadership and strategic management in the further education, work-based learning and adult community-based learning sectors*.

The inspectorates are not alone in recognising the connection between teaching quality and leadership. IfL considers it important that college leaders not only promote the importance of high-quality teaching but are themselves experts in teaching and learning. In a recent publication on teaching quality in the FE sector,⁶ IfL notes that to give their best, teachers

“require the support of leaders who are experts in learning and can prioritise improving teaching and learning. The best leaders set the tone for brilliant teaching and develop a culture of self-improvement.”

The IfL study reiterates the evidence from inspection but adds to it on the basis of feedback from a survey of IfL membership and a review of the wider literature.

“Evidence from Ofsted shows that brilliant teaching and training is more likely to occur where organisations and leaders focus on continually improving teaching and learning. Several sources advocated a more consistent provision of leadership and workforce development, where leaders themselves become experts in learning. Respondents also emphasised the role of leaders in setting the organisational tone, giving priority to improving teaching, training and learning amongst other conflicting demands and developing a culture of professionals’ self-improvement as a vital element in realising brilliant teaching.”

The IfL report concludes with a series of recommendations, aimed at both individuals and organisations, on how to achieve the highest quality learning experiences. Among those directed towards organisations is a useful summary of how leadership can best support teachers and teaching.

Leadership

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish an organisation-wide vision and strategy for brilliant teaching and training. ● Set the organisational tone and priority for exceptional teaching, training and learning amongst all other conflicting demands. ● Identify ways to build organisational focus, culture and understanding of self-improvement as a vital element in realising brilliant teaching. ● Integrate teacher and trainer support into organisational priorities through a whole-organisation approach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage leaders and managers to engage with teaching and learning, to recognise the leader impact on learner outcomes. ● Develop a more consistent provision of leadership and management for teacher and workforce development. ● Consider in-house development with individual teams and across the wider workforce to build a common understanding of brilliant teaching. ● Encourage and support registration and active engagement with IfL, and the use of REfLECT, the online tool that IfL provides for members to record, reflect on and share their CPD activities. |
|---|--|

A similar set of recommendations for college leaders is contained in the 2008–09 review of CPD⁷ carried out by IfL, which looked, inter alia, at the variation in practice between teachers in highly supportive and less supportive institutions. The review, according to IfL, “clearly demonstrated the impact” that supportive leadership has on the development of teachers and trainers.

Our understanding of how to improve student learning through the professional development of teachers has been greatly assisted recently by a number of influential research reviews. Helen Timperley,⁸ for example, in a review for the New Zealand government, summarised 97 research studies from a range of countries in order to help identify the preconditions for successful interventions. She identified six characteristics of staff training that were necessary for CPD to work exceptionally well. They included the key role of leadership.

6 www.ifl.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/16400/IfL2010-BrilliantTeachingAndTrainingGuide.pdf

7 www.ifl.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/13970/2008-09IfLReviewofCPD.pdf

8 Timperley, H et al, 2007. *Teacher Professional Learning & Development*. Available at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341

“The leaders in the institution should actively lead the learning opportunities, monitoring the implementation of the training by their teachers, and monitoring any improvement in student outcomes. They should develop a learning culture among teachers.”

Geoff Petty, one of the most influential writers on teaching and learning in the UK,⁹ makes a very similar point. Drawing on a major review of research by Joyce and Showers,¹⁰ he maintains that leaders can help the improvement of teaching and learning by:

- Acknowledging and promoting the need for collaborative work, e.g. peer coaching in meetings
- Ensuring that meetings are frequent and long enough and sufficiently well attended
- Expecting a high standard of peer coaching
- Expecting that trials of new methods are sufficiently informed by evidence, and sufficiently self-critical to learn from
- Monitoring the middle manager's role described above. Are they being effective in maximising the degree of implementation of strategies for example?
- And throughout being positive, and inspiring, by promoting the view that improving teaching is both vital for the learners, and possible.¹¹

Petty quotes with approval a research project undertaken by Martinez and Maynard¹² in the FE sector, which illustrates a paradox in relation to increasing the quality of teaching. They, like Petty and others, identify teacher autonomy as a characteristic of high-performing teams; but while this sometimes resulted from deliberate management action it sometimes came about as a result of management neglect.

“More importantly, effective teachers and effective teams proved to be relatively autonomous. In one highly successful college, a senior management team had fostered this autonomy through a strong commitment to improving teaching and learning. In another, however, a successful team had operated for a year without a section leader or head of department ...”

In this account, effective leadership is a sufficient but not necessary condition for improving performance. Successful leaders need to find a management style that combines a clear emphasis on raising quality with an approach that gives space to teachers to lead innovation.

LSIS recently published a literature review undertaken by CUREE,¹³ which sought to answer the question:

“What do institution leaders do that is effective in facilitating quality improvements in teaching and learning?”

As well as confirming many of the findings outlined earlier, this piece of work provides a convenient analytical frame for exploring the issue. According to the review, leadership approaches that help improve teaching and learning can be categorised under four broad headings – developing people, managing the teaching programme, setting directions and building relationships.

- **Developing people.** Researchers argue that the most effective thing a leader can do is to involve themselves in the professional learning and development of their staff. This can involve participating with staff in learning activities, talking about teaching and effective practice, keeping abreast of current research, theories of pedagogy etc and encouraging staff to do the same. It can also include encouragement for teachers to reflect on their own practice and involving staff, as professionals, in institutional decision-making.

9 www.geoffpetty.com

10 Joyce and Showers, 2002. *Student achievement through staff development*. ASCD.

11 This is ‘culture management’; see chapter 25 of *Evidence Based Teaching* by Geoff Petty.

12 Maynard and Martinez, 2002. *Pride or prejudice: College Teachers' Views on Course Performance*. LSDA.

13 www.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/Welcome%20to%20Research/leadership-literature-review.doc

- **Managing the teaching programme.** Effective leaders are those who get directly involved in teaching and learning, either leading changes in teaching themselves or ensuring that changes are led by the most effective colleagues. They are also actively engaged in monitoring the effectiveness of the teaching programme, providing formative and summative feedback to teachers and ensuring that they get the support they need to provide a high quality learning experience. This is possible, it is argued, only if leaders are knowledgeable about pedagogic theory and processes and use it to identify and address problems.
- **Setting directions.** An important ingredient of effective leadership is the ability to set and articulate a vision for the organisation and translate that into concrete goals. Clarity about the central importance of teaching and learning, allied to actions that reinforce that centrality is therefore a key driver of teaching and learning quality. The ability to communicate expectations to staff and students, and maintain a focus on key organisational goals even in a turbulent environment is associated with consistent improvements in performance.
- **Building relationships.** Effective leaders are good at building organisations where staff enjoy effective working relationships, both with each other and with leaders and learners. Characteristics of organisations that promote effective teaching and learning include workplaces where the leadership is seen as accessible to all staff; where there is a high degree of mutual trust and there is support for collaborative working. A distributed leadership model, where most staff take on some form of leadership role, is often cited as a particularly effective approach to establishing an environment that favours excellent teaching and learning.



Survey of IfL Fellows

In January 2011, IfL circulated a questionnaire on the leadership of learning to its Fellows on behalf of the 157 Group. IfL Fellows are a special subset of the membership who in addition to their teaching qualifications hold a higher degree related to education and training. They are experienced professionals who are well placed to comment on the importance of leadership in relation to learning, and to identify which aspects of leadership practice make the most difference.

The sample

The survey was sent electronically to 1,873 Fellows who are drawn from all sectors of post-compulsory education. In the event, 142 replies were received, of which almost exactly half of the 122 who identified their subsector came from further education colleges. The FE subsample has been analysed separately and the results are not significantly different to the overall average. Apart from FE, the other major subsectors represented were adult and community learning (14 per cent) and work-based learning (8 per cent).

It should be emphasised that the sample is not an accurate cross section of the learning and skills workforce. It was deliberately skewed towards the older and more experienced practitioner and this is reflected clearly in the age profile of respondents. Some 90 per cent of respondents are aged 45 or older and 89 per cent have been in teaching for 10 years or more. The findings therefore do not necessarily represent opinion in the sector; they constitute feedback from a small but relatively well-informed sample.

The well-informed, but less representative nature of the sample is underlined by an analysis of job roles. As expected, the largest proportion of those responding described themselves as lecturers, teachers or tutors – just over 45 per cent of the total. Over a third (35 per cent), however, described themselves as having a management role, including four individuals (3 per cent) who reported that they were a principal and chief executive. This pattern is not surprising, given that the group is drawn from the better qualified and more experienced in the sector, but needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

A detailed analysis of subsets is difficult because of the small scale of the sample, but the responses of the group describing themselves as teachers or lecturers have been considered separately. In general, their responses to questions about the importance of certain aspects of leadership are much the same as for the sample as a whole; the scores are the same order of magnitude and vary in much the same way between the different aspects of leadership. Their assessment of the effectiveness of their own strategic and middle-level leaders is, as might be expected, somewhat harsher than average though not dramatically so: it amounts pretty consistently to around three quarters of a point on a 10-point scale.

The survey was sent out with a covering note describing its purpose and a link to the LSIS research review, which gives the most succinct account of the basis for the survey. That at least one person accessed the link is evident from a comment criticising the apparent absence of research conducted since 2007. Respondents were invited to give a few details of their background (role, sector, age and gender) answer four questions rating aspects of leadership on a 10-point scale, and finally to offer any further comments they wished on the leadership of learning.

The survey instrument

The core of the questionnaire was constructed around a list of 12 activities identified from the literature review as strongly correlated with the effective leadership of teaching and learning. Respondents were asked how important they felt that these activities were for strategic leaders and for middle or first-line leadership. They were also asked to rate how far the leaders in their organisation practised these same activities. The 12 activities described are set out below.

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An effective leader of teaching and learning:

- Is actively involved in CPD alongside staff
- Discusses teaching and learning approaches with staff
- Encourages staff to reflect on their own practice as teachers/trainers
- Is actively engaged in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning
- Is familiar with pedagogic theory and current research
- Undertakes classroom observation and provides feedback
- Sets clear expectations about the importance of teaching and learning
- Can translate a vision for the organisation into concrete goals
- Communicates goals effectively to staff at all levels
- Is accessible to staff
- Adopts a distributed model of leadership
- Creates an environment that supports trust and collaboration.

Findings

The research findings were endorsed by the survey

The headline finding is that there was very strong agreement from those responding to the survey with the importance of each of the activities identified. On a scale of 0 to 10, the average score for the importance of the 12 items in respect of strategic leadership was 8.3. This was almost exactly the same for the two subgroups analysed separately; the FE group averaged 8.3 whereas the teachers and lecturers category averaged 8.2.

A supportive environment is seen as most important

The activity that was rated as most important by the whole sample and each of the subgroups was number 12, “creates an environment that supports trust and collaboration” with an average score of 9.3 (or 9.4 for teachers and lecturers.) It was closely followed by “communicating goals” (9.1) and “translating the vision into goals” (9.0).

The least important activity for strategic leadership, again across the subgroups as well as the overall average, was seen as involvement in classroom observation with an overall score of 6.8 (6.2 for teachers and lecturers). This was followed by “involved in CPD alongside staff” (7.5) and “engaged in monitoring teaching and learning” (7.8).

On a 10-point scale, scores of 7.0 to 7.5 do not suggest in any way that something is considered unimportant, but the order is significant. It appears that for this group at least **activities that are specifically and directly concerned with teaching and learning are less important than the overarching tasks of setting the vision and goals for the organisation and particularly setting the organisational tone.** This latter is echoed in a number of written comments emphasising the need to respect the professionalism and autonomy of teachers.

The research findings were endorsed for middle managers

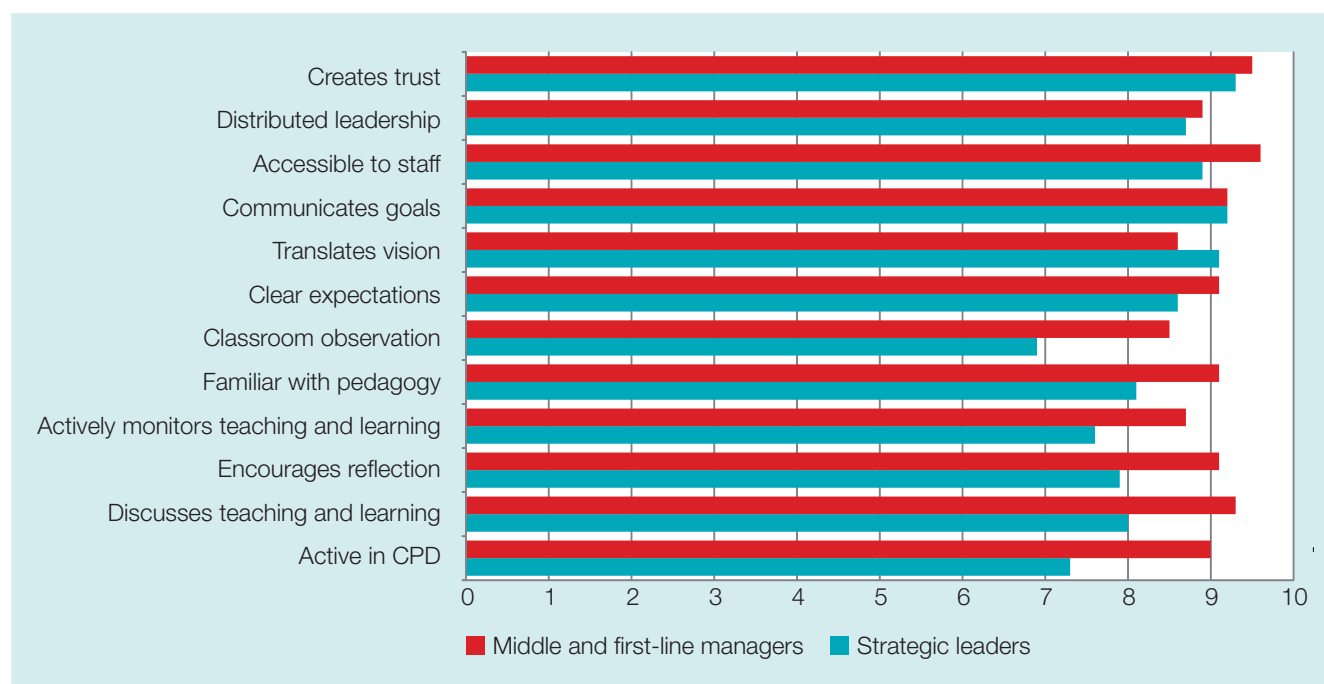
On average, the 12 items were considered even more important in relation to the role of middle and first-line managers. The overall average score was 9.1 (9.0 for teachers and lecturers) with the averages for individual items varying between 8.5 and 9.5. This represents a strong endorsement of the research findings from the review.

Interestingly, creating an environment that supports trust and collaboration was seen as the most important activity for middle and first-line managers as well, not just something for strategic leadership. Thereafter, however, there were some significant changes in the rank order. Accessibility to staff is the next most important (9.4) and third and fourth in the list come items 2 and 3 – “discusses teaching and learning with staff” and “encourages reflection” with scores of 9.3 and 9.2 respectively. For these leaders, activities much closer to the craft of teaching seem to be rated as relatively more important.

The importance of close involvement with teaching does not extend to classroom observation, however, which occupied the penultimate position overall (8.6) and the bottom spot for teachers and lecturers. Translating the vision into goals falls just below in terms of the overall average (8.5), presumably reflecting the view of respondents that this is really a matter for strategic leaders.

The scores for each of the 12 items in respect of both groups of leaders are illustrated in the chart below. These data are taken from the FE subsample, but the rank order and values for the sample as a whole is very much the same.

Figure 1. Importance of activities for teaching and learning (FE respondents)



It is not surprising that scores for the effectiveness of current institutional leaders are lower than the scores for the importance of leadership. They are measuring different things, and while the latter represents views of an ideal world, the former reflects the complexity of reality. The main interest in these scores therefore is not the absolute level but the pattern: where does this sample feel that current leaders perform relatively well and where relatively badly.

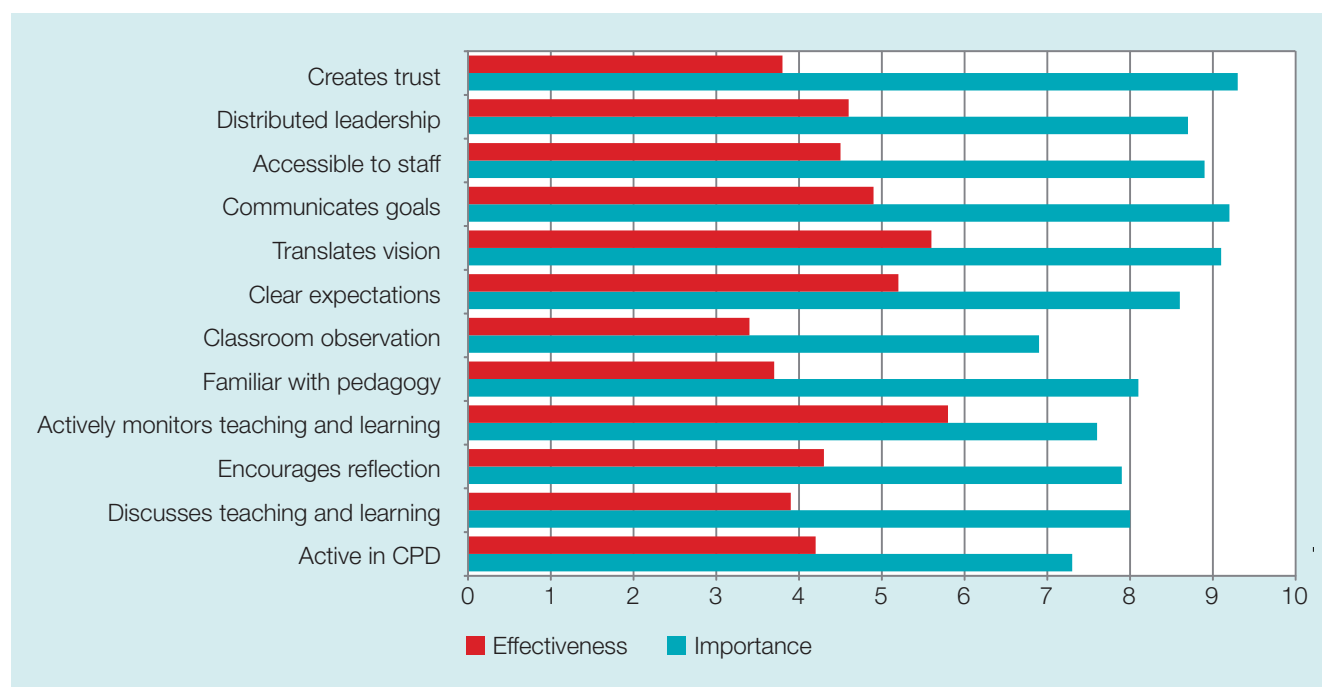
Leaders seen as most effective in monitoring quality

For strategic leaders, the overall average score against the 12 items is 4.8; the FE subsample is much the same at 4.5 but teachers and lecturers judge current performance at 3.7. The rank order is much the same for the three groups with the highest ratings being for leaders' engagement with monitoring the quality of teaching (5.7), followed by setting expectations about the importance of teaching, and translating vision into goals (both 5.5). The lowest overall score is for undertaking classroom observation (3.7) though the teachers and lecturers rank creating trust marginally lower (2.9 against 3.0).

A crude assessment of the areas of mismatch between expectations and performance can be gleaned from the difference between scores for importance and effectiveness. Creating a supportive environment for example consistently comes out top in terms of importance but at or very close to the bottom in terms of the effectiveness of current leaders. Some of the more instrumental items – classroom observation, monitoring quality and engagement in CPD are seen as less important but accomplished better. This is true of the perceptions of teachers, but it is equally true of the significant proportion of the sample with some leadership responsibility.

The figures for strategic leaders are presented in figure 2; as before they reflect the FE component of the sample.

Figure 2. Importance and effectiveness – strategic leaders



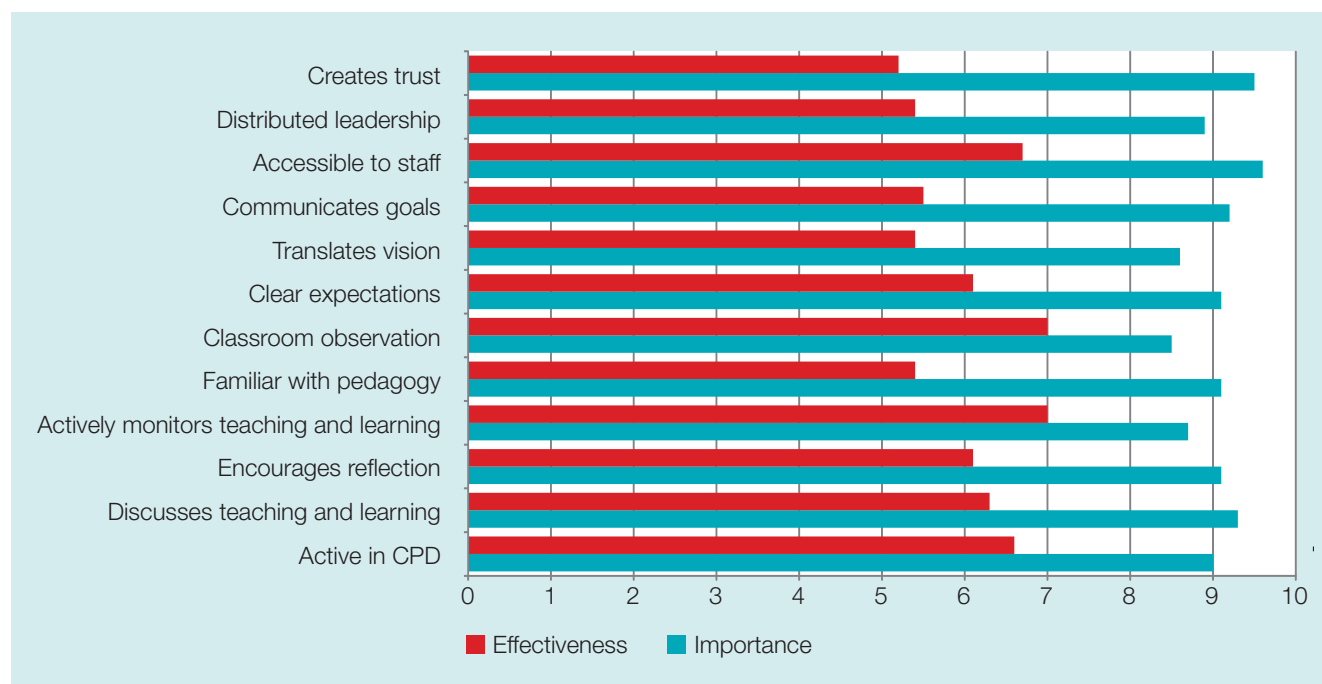
Middle and first-line leaders rated more highly

The effectiveness of middle and first-line leaders in promoting the quality of teaching and learning is rated more highly than strategic leaders on all dimensions except “translating the vision”. The overall average score for the 12 items is 5.9; among the FE sample it is higher, at 6.1, but teachers and lecturers are again more critical, at just under 5. The three groups agree substantially on the rank order; as for strategic leaders, they see middle and first-line as relatively least effective in building an environment that supports trust and collaboration, and relatively most effective at monitoring quality.

Once again the gap between importance and effectiveness seems to be greatest for the more general aspects of leadership – communicating goals, setting the tone – and least for those actions more obviously focused on teaching and learning. The figures, again for the FE subsample, are set out in figure 3.

The survey invited respondents to add any further comments on how leadership impacted on teaching and learning. The question asked: “Please indicate any other characteristics of effective leadership that in your view are critical in promoting effective teaching and learning? You can give an indication of the degree of importance by using the same scale as before; and add any further comments you wish to make.” The results are not altogether congruent with the answers above.

Figure 3. Importance and effectiveness – middle and first-line leaders



Respecting professionalism

Out of the 82 respondents who gave an answer, some 10 per cent talked in terms of trusting teachers, giving professionals space to innovate, and respecting the professionalism of the workforce. This is wholly consistent with the high importance placed on creating an atmosphere that is conducive to trust and collaboration and the view that in general it is not well done.

A higher proportion however, almost twice as many, spoke in terms of the need for “active engagement” or “leading by example”; five referred specifically to leaders actually teaching and others of “leading from the front”. In the light of these comments, which are consistent with the wider research evidence on the effective leadership of learning, it is not clear why the examples of more active engagement were not more highly rated.

There were few comments that indicated leadership actions that could not be accommodated under one or more of the 12 headings derived from research. Those that offered a different insight referred to the need to listen to and value students, and the need to secure resources to support both teaching and CPD.

Summary

The overall conclusion from this short survey is that current experienced practitioners endorse the importance for teaching and learning of the leadership activities headlined in the research literature. It appears that creating an environment where trust and collaboration can flourish, an institutional culture where teachers can take part in “supported experiments”,¹⁴ for example, is considered more important than activities more obviously and directly associated with teaching, such as engaging with teachers in CPD. This is particularly true in respect of strategic leaders.

In terms of the current effectiveness of institutions, performance is rated weakest in the area thought most important, developing a culture of trust. This is true of leadership at all levels. A couple of the comments acknowledge that the constant policy changes and funding cuts that leaders have to deal with may contribute to this gap between the ideal and the actual. Nevertheless this survey suggests that strategic leaders wishing to achieve further improvements in teaching and learning might be better focusing on the organisational culture as a whole rather than seeking a more detailed involvement with teaching and learning itself.

14 See, for example, the work of Geoff Petty.



What effective leaders think and do

As part of the research, seven interviews were conducted with principals of colleges in the 157 Group. The responses cannot be taken as representative of the views of college principals as a whole since the group is drawn from large and successful colleges in largely urban settings. The views expressed by those interviewed were consistent, however, and give a useful insight into the ideas and actions of some of our more experienced college leaders.

The interviews were a mixture of telephone conversations and face-to-face discussions and followed a semi-structured format. Principals were sent a copy of a paper in advance summarising some of the key findings from the literature review and advising the areas for consideration.

The interviews were based around the same 12 activities as highlighted in the IfL questionnaire, but summarised under four broad headings as in the LSIS review. Thus involvement in CPD, discussing teaching and learning with staff and encouraging reflection were grouped under “Developing people”; monitoring quality, classroom observation and pedagogic theory under “Managing teaching”; setting expectations, translating and communicating goals under “Setting directions” and accessibility, models of leadership and creating the right environment under “Building relationships”. Principals were asked whether they agreed with the importance of these items, whether anything was omitted, and in so far as they agreed to give examples of actions they had taken which exemplified them.

All the principals agreed that the items listed were key to the effective leadership of teaching and learning. One “agreed absolutely”; another found “nothing at all to disagree with” and a third stated that it accurately described “things that we know intuitively; it just makes sense”. Subsequent answers confirmed this with examples of effective action falling easily into one or other category. There were few suggestions for important elements that were missing, though listening to students was perhaps one that is not well captured by the analysis and came up more than once in the interviews.

Several made the point at the outset that while it was clear what ought to be done, the real difficulty was how to keep a focus on teaching and learning despite the many distractions impinging on the role of a principal. As one put it:

“Everything militates against it; the need to maintain financial viability, implement continual policy changes ... the challenge is making time and keeping teaching and learning at the forefront.”

Another made the same point in a slightly different way:

“The government has to realise that we can deliver the changes they ask for but it always comes at a cost; it distracts attention from the real business, which is about high-quality teaching and learning.”

The sense from the interviews is that these were offered not as excuses for neglecting teaching and learning, but out of a real sense of frustration at not being able to spend even more time on what everyone agreed was the core business. A third colleague said the same thing indirectly when talking about the “luxury” of a short overlap with her predecessor, which allowed her to spend most of that time talking to staff about what they were doing.

Developing people

All those interviewed saw the development of their staff as vitally important to improving teaching quality; as one said:

“There needs to be an active and sustained senior management interest in the progress of teachers’ development.”

This can take many forms, from formal involvement alongside staff in CPD sessions to frequent informal contacts talking about what makes for effective teaching. These are not “either or”; an active promotion of CPD applications needs to happen alongside “regular conversations about the craft of teaching” as one colleague put it. Leaders need to “recognise that practitioners learn best by reflecting together” and that such learning can often be best supported by sharing reflections and giving formative feedback.

Opinions diverged on whether principals needed to be *personally* involved with teachers’ professional development. One made a special point of being involved, as a participant, in regular good practice sessions showcasing teaching and learning approaches. She felt that this both helped her own learning and demonstrated the importance that she attached to professional development. Another spoke of her strategy of hot-housing new areas of learning, which gave her the opportunity to work intensively alongside a group of staff to develop and test new learning materials and approaches; again there were direct benefits to herself and the selected team and indirect benefits in signalling the importance of teaching and learning to the wider staff.

Others felt that what was important was not being personally involved but ensuring that professional development happens. One colleague had employed a senior manager at senior management team (SMT) level to lead an evidence-based approach to teacher development. The operating principle was to identify with teachers where there was a need for skills development and to make sure that this need was met. An example was given of A-level teaching where it was felt that in order to improve outcomes teachers needed to do more to develop students’ higher order thinking skills rather than simply pass on facts. A programme was jointly devised and delivered by a mixture of internal and external experts resulting in “a huge impact” on student outcomes.

Leading from the front

At **York College**, the SMT has deployed a series of strategies designed to signal clearly the central importance of teaching and learning to the institution. All members of the SMT, including the principal, can be called upon to cover for staff absence in their area of specialism and the principal has a regular teaching commitment. Members are also involved in the supervision of extended projects. This involvement has a dual purpose – keeping senior staff closely engaged with the core activity of the institution and underlining for all staff the fact that teaching really matters.

The principal has deliberately structured the SMT so that a majority of its members have responsibility for a cohort of learners as their major role. The SMT’s focus on teaching and learning is reinforced by a standing item, following the minutes, which focuses on good practice in teaching and on potential ‘hot spots’ – areas of the college that require support. The principal chairs a teaching and learning strategy group, which steers the strategic plan and seeks to take account of relevant research.

Two college-wide events promote and celebrate good teaching; an annual two-day teaching and learning conference and a one-day ‘celebration of teaching’ at which anyone can present, demonstrate or host a session that all colleagues experience as students. Examples have included plumbing, motor vehicle maintenance, catering and even a session on safer driving mounted by the estates staff.

Managing teaching

All principals readily described ways in which they were actively involved in the management of the teaching programme. Most were involved in lesson observation, though the approach varied; in one case the emphasis was on being part of the team of observers; in another it was felt more important to share in the design of the assessment instruments and thereby influence how teaching was evaluated; in yet another the focus was on working with new and trainee teachers as an area where impact could perhaps be greatest. Colleagues spoke of the need for feedback to be formative, and focused on improvement rather than simply a grading exercise.

Leading the teaching programme raised directly the issue of whether principals should have a teaching programme themselves. One felt strongly that they should. She not only had a regular teaching commitment but was available for cover and on occasions had been called upon to do so. While acknowledging the difficulty of maintaining this as a priority she felt that it was important for both her credibility and currency that she maintained her classroom experience and direct contact with students.

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This was, however, a minority view. Others argued that the scale of demands from the “chief executive” part of the job made a regular commitment to students unfeasible; and irregular participation in teaching could be unfair to students. In the smaller scale and relatively more stable setting of a school or a sixth-form college, a regular teaching slot might be feasible but in the turbulence of a large, general further education college it was not. It was also suggested that working with one group of students had less of an impact than interventions that had a multiplier effect, such as supporting staff development or working with groups of staff on curriculum change.

The acknowledged importance of leading the teaching programme led to questions about whether it was necessary to have been a teacher to lead a learning organisation. The consensus was that it was not strictly necessary but would present difficulties for anyone without a teaching background. Persuading teachers to change practice, or to simply engaging in informal discussions about how to improve student outcomes was made easier by being able to call on personal experiences to which teachers could relate. Several principals made the point that although they felt unable to maintain a direct teaching role, they had credibility through their previous experiences of teaching or through involvement with inspection or staff development.

Although only a minority felt personally able to take on a teaching programme, it was widely agreed that other senior staff should do so. The fact that third or even second-tier managers were expected to teach was seen as important in symbolising the centrality of teaching to the college mission.

Several colleagues spoke about how difficult it was for senior managers to remain up to date with educational research and the lack of systematic external support. Individuals talked of “grazing the literature” or of welcoming the opportunity to get involved with initial training as a way of keeping abreast of developments. They noted, however, the lack of a support unit on teaching and learning in the former Principals Qualifying Programme, the lack of CPD specifically aimed at the strategic leadership of learning and the lack of opportunities to discuss teaching and learning at national events such as the Association of Colleges (AoC) conference.

Setting directions

A key role of strategic leaders is shaping and communicating the vision that drives the organisation and all those interviewed were in no doubt that a key part of their role was to underline the centrality of teaching and learning to the purpose of their college. There was a feeling that in the early days after incorporation this had tended to be lost, in part because of the urgency of acquiring the new skills needed to manage independent organisations and ensure survival. In the last five or six years, the pendulum had swung back strongly.

One principal described how she had inherited a college that was far too focused on maximising funding, an emphasis on “tariff farming” as she put it rather than the needs of the student. To reverse this tendency, she embarked on a process of culture change “using really simple messages”. One such message “right student: right course” for example conveyed the importance of initial assessment and matching programmes to student needs rather than filling timetables. “Skills for life for every student” signified a college ambition to get every student to level 2 in literacy and numeracy. The focus on a set of simple but important aims helped develop a common purpose across the institution.

Several principals spoke of the need to have a common and coherent model of learning applied across the college; the need to be able to say “this is what learning looks like here”. A shared understanding of the learning process can not only help organise CPD, facilitate joint working and inform lesson observation but can help define a clear student entitlement. The process of developing a shared model of learning can also be an important developmental tool in its own right. One colleague described how changing government priorities made it imperative to develop a consistent approach to delivery in the workplace; another had used the introduction of a new information and learning technology (ILT) system to catalyse the development of new ways of working.

One colleague spoke about using the development of a new learning model to “refresh the quality strategy”. Drawing on experience gleaned from a study of small high schools in New York, staff worked to create a common approach that included greater use of formative assessment and individual learning plans with stretching goals. There was a new ethos and a new set of expectations, including an emphasis on negotiated “behaviours for learning” or agreed rules on what was acceptable in the classroom. By contrast, another college sought inspiration for change by observing classroom practice in local primary schools.

Setting the direction of the college can be done in many ways. As one principal pointed out, there are “plenty of things that can be done for free”. A leader can choose what to talk about on formal and informal occasions and people will notice whether it is education or money; attention to teaching and learning can be encouraged by standard items on SMT agendas focusing on quality or reports on lesson observations or whatever. Another colleague explained her decision to retain an academic board as important in emphasising that the college is above all an educational institution and as a way of stopping meetings “degenerating into a discussion of car parking”.

Creating a climate where staff can take risks

Research suggests that one of the key ways to improve teaching and learning is to create a climate where staff feel empowered to experiment with new teaching approaches and to take risks. Developing such a culture is, however, far from straightforward. Asha Khemka, principal at **West Nottinghamshire College**, agrees that there are no easy solutions, but suggests the following strategies have worked for her:

- Making people at all levels believe in their own ability, through constantly celebrating success
- Ensuring that people know the purpose of their job, not simply a set of rules they have to follow
- Always delivering on promises, to build up and maintain an atmosphere of trust
- Being honest about one’s own mistakes and showing how it is possible to learn from them
- Not setting people detailed targets, but nevertheless keeping your finger on the pulse.

Finally, this is not something you have to do just once. It needs to be a constant feature of your practice; and it is hard work.

Building relationships

All the principals interviewed were very clear about the effect on teaching and learning of the organisational culture and the importance of their role in defining and promoting it. Several spontaneously spoke of their first task on taking up a new post as “culture change” or as challenging the prevailing culture. At the same time, they were conscious that the culture they wanted to create was one in which staff were confident and challenging, not compliant. One principal summed it up by saying that staff needed to be encouraged “to be brave and bold”.

One colleague described how the college he inherited had been very centralised and in his view it was not possible to run a large college that way. First and middle-line managers were not able to provide professional leadership or to engage with the new policies to which the college needed to respond. He described the cultural change process he introduced as starting “a migration from management to the leadership of learning”.

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At another college, the principal stated that she wanted to create a climate where people felt able to say, “I’m not very good at this”. This involved avoiding a blame culture and promoting one where support is freely available. It involves making the focus of classroom observation the offer of formative feedback not a summative grade, and it seeks to build a body of staff that are confident about what works rather than feeling the need to second guess the inspectorate. Another made a similar point by saying that she “wanted people to believe in themselves and in their own ability”.

Several colleagues spoke about the importance of being accessible, though they tackled the issue in different ways. Two emphasised their systematic involvement in staff development activities alongside colleagues; another talked of the value of working in depth with staff in specific curriculum areas that were struggling; another simply of the value of wandering around and yet another in terms of an open-door policy. In one college, this informal approach had been formalised into a practice of “learning walks” where senior managers take part in a shared professional review of one area at a time, becoming a very visible presence but seeking to learn rather than judge.

Learning walks

Learning walks provide an opportunity for members of the college leadership team at **Sussex Downs College**, along with the relevant curriculum manager, to drop into classes and workshops, talk to students and staff, and experience first-hand the college learning environment.

A learning walk schedule is produced each term and senior managers are asked to book themselves on to it. Feedback is provided via a ‘wash up’ session, and key issues and actions are recorded and shared by the manager with staff, students and the college leadership team. The aim is to keep paperwork to a minimum, provide quick feedback and focus on key outcomes and actions.

Over 40 learning walks have taken place across the college since September 2010, creating a wealth of information about the college and the students’ experience. They have helped to inform quality improvement, identify good practice, reaffirm – and in some cases challenge – senior managers’ views of the college. Learning walks have also created an additional opportunity for managers to talk to students and staff about all aspects of college life.

Leading learning: the concept classroom

Newham College is one of a handful in London that are graded outstanding by Ofsted. Learners at the college come from a diverse range of backgrounds: over 60 per cent begin their studies at level 1 and below; 70 per cent are ethnic minorities; many have English as an additional language and many left school with negative learning experiences. The college has two main campuses and several smaller ones. The East Ham site is of 1960s construction and Stratford is a mishmash of buildings from the early 20th century right through to construction in 2006.

The pedagogic origin of the concept classroom arose from a desire to improve the standards of teaching and learning. In coffee break discussions, senior managers thought about the possibility of using the structure, layout and interior design of the classroom to stimulate learners in their environment and to encourage interactive teaching and learning techniques by building on the different ways in which people sit down to learn and work. A taskforce of students, staff and senior managers, led by the principal, was formed to design a classroom of the future: one that would drive up teaching and learning standards as well as creating excitement and a buzz.

Two classrooms were installed, one on each main campus. The one at East Ham is a long, narrow room, three classrooms knocked into one, and the Stratford one is a square room, part of the former college science laboratory. At East Ham the classroom is on the fifth floor of a seven-storey building. At Stratford it is in the grounds of the college. The concept is that the centre of the room, which is almost encased in a floor to ceiling glass wall, is a group learning zone and each of the four corners of the room supports a different style of learning, from self-research, from printed materials, through to PC-based research, through to small discussion areas.

Senior management leadership of this initiative was important from a number of perspectives:

1. By involving learners, it said to learners we understand that the world you live, work and learn in is unique to your generation, teach us and help us to understand your world. It acknowledged that formal learning can take place in comfortable, even luxurious, settings and that hi-tech, beautiful surroundings can stimulate learners to want to do well and aspire to beautiful surroundings once they embark on their career.
2. By involving teachers in the design, it acknowledged them as stakeholders, enabled sharing of ideas with managers, in particular building understanding about the demands of external quality standards and the need to find methods of engaging learners from non-traditional educational backgrounds.
3. Senior management involvement indicated to both students and staff that their work environments were important and central to the success of learners and worthy therefore, of the highest level of investment and involvement.
4. Other unanticipated benefits included closer understanding of the limitations of the physical estate, thanks to unguarded feedback on the current quality of teaching and learning – from both staff and students. Openness between the different teams and stakeholders helped build trust and mutual respect.

The result is a multi-activity concept of promoting learning. The high-quality furniture makes the whole area feel different from traditional college learning environments. The whole facility is completely wired up for web-based learning and there are cupboards for text books, videos, CD-ROMs, plasma televisions and so forth. The physical layout of the room and the use of floor-to-ceiling curved glass screens means that there can be sound separation between the areas and at any one point there could be five members of teaching and learning staff operating in the room.

As well as promoting a different approach to teaching and learning, these concept classrooms have a 'wow factor' – a learner walking into the classroom will be excited, stimulated and invigorated in their learning. The learning environment makes learner-centred learning hard to avoid.

Other issues

One of the key themes to come up in each conversation was professional development for strategic leaders. In part this concerned the difficulty of keeping up to date with relevant research on pedagogy and assessment as well as the policy context of FE. In part it concerned how to maintain or refresh the vision of education that inspires or drives leaders and which they need to project.

Most colleagues made reference to the lack of structural support for the principals as leaders of learning. Sector bodies and private organisations ensured that those who needed updating in relation to funding, pensions or employment law for example had ample opportunity to meet and discuss issues. There was little parallel activity in relation to teaching and learning focused specifically at strategic leaders. National conferences covered policy changes well, but had few sessions on teaching and learning. Bodies like LSIS organise opportunities for teachers and middle managers to improve their skills and understanding in relation to teaching, but offer little that addresses the needs of experienced leaders.

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Two principals had clearly drawn inspiration from an international exchange or visit that had led to thinking “outside the box” and helped challenge their assumptions. Others referred to reading, exchanging books and articles with colleagues, sometimes in a relatively unstructured way. Some referred to the benefits that came from working closely with students, or leading through a new initiative. There was, however, a general sense that more might be done to address the needs of strategic leaders.

Developing a learning framework

In April 2008, **City of Sunderland College** developed and implemented the learning framework. This approach systematically integrates classroom practice, quality assurance, quality improvement and professional development. It brings together several areas of college practice with one common aim; to enhance the learning experience of our students. The aims of the learning framework are:

- To develop a common vocabulary for learning
- To develop a holistic approach to learning, integrated induction of staff, professional learning, coaching, focused CPD conferences and impact assessment of quality improvement
- To identify and use research evidence to inform teaching and learning strategies
- To identify a clear structure to a lesson (the learning cycle)
- To describe and share clear expectations of professional standards and behaviours.

The learning framework consists of eight elements:

1. The learning policy, which delineates definitions of learning, identifies students' and colleagues' rights and responsibilities and develops a common language of learning.
2. A complete focus upon evidence-based practice, derived from empirical research in which clear effect sizes for various teaching strategies are reported.
3. Specifically focused cross-college CPD conferences, the content of which are related to analysis of quality improvement plans.
4. A team of selected and trained teaching and learning coaches, each of whom is assigned a caseload of:
 - one-to-one coaching, which is differentiated according to the outcomes of the lesson observation and internal inspection process
 - embedded coaching, in which the coach works alongside a curriculum or sector subject area (SSA) team over a half-term 'unit' of allocation. Progress is reviewed monthly and impact measures are identified prior to the coaching proceeding.
5. The learning cycle, which describes the structure of a learning session.

Devolution of leadership

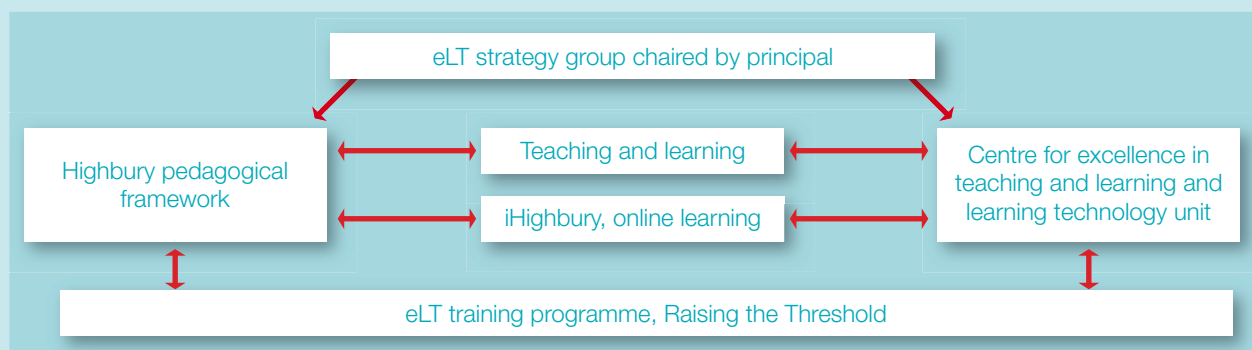
Lambeth College needed to improve the management skills of a team of newly-appointed curriculum managers responsible for subject-specialist provision. The college needed a more devolved management model to empower middle managers to take greater leadership of the curriculum, improve teaching and learning, and the learner experience.

This year, the college worked in partnership with teachers, managers and other stakeholders to develop and introduce a learning framework. This combines a model of entitlement for all learners with development projects covering various aspects of learning. To take this framework forward, managers were trained in relevant skills such as project management, evaluation and peer assessment. They were then tasked to work in cross-college project teams researching best practice relating to their project and subsequently present their work to the whole college community. The virtual learning environment has been the primary dissemination medium to embed their aspect of learning into college practice.

The college's underpinning aim is to develop communities of practice amongst these managers, which will work collaboratively to radicalise curriculum delivery and engage teachers in developing and applying new techniques for improving learning in their areas. They are an excellent way of developing new skills and knowledge for members, leading their teams in change processes and stimulating innovation in the organisation. In providing access to resources and opportunities for learning, the college enables managers in communities to take actions and make decisions based on shared learning experiences.

Centre for excellence in teaching and learning

Highbury College aspires to be acknowledged as a centre of excellence for the use of technology in teaching, learning and assessment in a vocational and applied academic context. The college recognises in order to reach full e-maturity, it is essential to adopt an organisational approach for using technology. It believes that this can be achieved only through strong leadership and embedding the use of technology at every stage of the learning process. The college recognises that the key to success is not only in having reliable equipment, but also having well-trained staff who are confident in the use of technology.



Highbury College takes an integrated and holistic approach to teaching and learning and e-learning and technology (eLT). The principal chairs the eLT strategy group, which leads on all aspects of development and implementation of eLT and innovative teaching, learning and assessment practice. It has been responsible for a major theoretical innovation, the Highbury pedagogical framework, which provides the underpinning principle for innovative practice. The centre for excellence in teaching and learning and the learning technology unit are responsible for implementing and supporting these developments through the advanced practitioner team and learning technologists. Underlying all these developments is a whole-college approach to changing the culture of learning by 'raising the threshold' of IT use, competence and confidence.



Conclusions

There is a substantial degree of consensus between the literature on how leadership can best bring about improvements in teaching and learning and the views of the principals and experienced practitioners surveyed for this report. Although the samples were relatively small, the consistency of findings gives confidence in their robustness. The effective leadership of learning appears to involve four areas of practice:

- Investing time and resources to promote the professional development of staff
- Having a close involvement in the management of the teaching programme
- Setting clear directions for the organisation, including the centrality of teaching and learning
- Establishing a culture that respects the professionalism of teachers and empowers them to innovate.

A summary of these findings and the practical examples that illustrate them could be useful support materials for developing new and existing leaders. In contrast to the years immediately following incorporation, when FE leaders needed to acquire knowledge that was largely held outside the sector, the experts in teaching and learning in FE are its current leaders.

Although individual principals were well able to articulate a clear view of what constitutes good teaching and learning within their own institution, there is a lack of such clarity at sector level. A consequence is that models of good practice in FE tend to be externally derived, whether explicitly by Ofsted or implicit in funding models. There is a need for the sector to develop and articulate its own models of what good practice in vocational learning looks like.

National organisations could do more to provide opportunities for strategic leaders to develop and share approaches to the effective leadership of learning. The sector would also benefit from a reduction in the rate of organisational change, which claims the attention of leaders and displaces time spent supporting teaching. It would assist institutional leaders create a climate more favourable for the improvement of teaching were the monitoring and inspection arrangements less intolerant of instances of failure.

Recommendations

Current and aspiring leaders should:

- Review their own practice in the light of the evidence presented and referenced in this report
- Note the importance of creating a supportive and enabling culture in the organisation as well as actions more directly focused on teaching and learning
- Work collaboratively to help develop a shared sector view of good practice in vocational teaching and learning.

Sector bodies should:

- Provide more opportunities for strategic leaders to debate and discuss approaches to the leadership of learning
- Help develop a sector-owned view of what constitutes excellence in vocational education and training
- Commission research on the leadership of learning in the specific context of English further education.

The **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)** and **Skills Funding Agency (SFA)** should:

- Recognise that constant organisational change can distract leaders from a clear focus on improving teaching and learning
- Recognise in performance management arrangements that innovation and experimentation, with attendant risks of occasional failure, are essential for the improvement of professional practice.

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