

Success for All Young People

The Role of the Further Education Sector

**Peter Lauener, Chief Executive,
Young People's Learning Agency**

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It is a great privilege to be standing before you today. A year ago at this conference I was part of a question and answer panel and I was asked the question 'what is the problem to which the YPLA is the solution?' It was a good humoured question and I gave what I hope was a good humoured answer but I would like to give a more considered answer today.

The answer to the question is in our mission which is simply to champion young people's learning. And the problem which we seek to help fix is that there are still young people who have not had the opportunities they need to get them on the right path to success.

But in truth it is not the YPLA that will fix that. It is colleges, schools, academies and other providers who will do that and it is our job to make it as easy as possible for you to do that.

And it is colleges who have done more than any other sector to open up opportunities for young people and put them on that path to success.

Nothing has given me greater pleasure over the last year than to visit your colleges and talk to your young students and see the difference that their learning environment and learning route has made to their lives.

What I would like to do today is to sketch out some of the history of your role, say a little about achievements in the last ten years and then offer one particular challenge for the next ten years.

But let me start with one particular quotation which seems to me apposite for the challenges ahead. It is this:

*We can't solve problems by using the same kind
of thinking we used when we created them*

Albert Einstein

I will come back at the end to Albert Einstein and another of his quotations but let me first sketch in a bit of history.

History

I know you will know the story of the sector better than any other audience but this is still a story that is not as well understood as it should be.

While there are a hundred different histories, there are some common features. In the latter part of the 19th century there was widespread political concern about Britain falling behind its commercial competitors - especially Germany - because of its lack of technical skills. There were a series of Royal Commissions on technical education which led to the Technical Instruction Act 1889. This permitted the newly formed county and borough councils to provide day and evening classes. Funds were found from excise revenue (the so-called 'whisky money'). Many colleges can trace their origins to these funds.

The 1902 Act then gave local education authorities a greater role in co-ordinating technical, commercial and 'continuation' classes, and 'trade schools', and the concept of 'further education' began to emerge in a series of Regulations before the first world war.

Another ingredient from the start was the involvement of local business and what is now Westminster Kingsway College's School of Hospitality in Vincent Square emerged in this way. It was formed exactly one hundred years ago when a committee of concerned academics and hospitality representatives, which included Auguste Escoffier and Cesar Ritz came together to develop a school for professional cookery. The first course to be developed was the Cookery Technical Day School course, which was soon to be formulated into the Professional Chef Diploma, which is still going strong today.

I like to think that my own grandfather might have learnt there. He came to this country as an economic migrant from Switzerland to work in the great London hotels; he lived just round the corner from Westminster Kingsway in what was then the centre of an immigrant community and he learned his trade as a chef at this time.

The 1918 Education Act then established the requirement that all young people should receive continuing education up to 18. The Act specified 320 hours of instruction per year (they had clearly not caught on to the concept of guided learning hours) – but this requirement was never implemented because of lack of funds.

This lost opportunity meant that FE developed through local rather than national initiatives during the 20s and 30s. Take one example. Dudley Technical College was located in a major new building in 1936 that included a junior tech which was all boys and a commercial school which was all girls.

The junior tech selected young people at 14. It gave them a grounding in engineering—technical and geometrical drawing, workshop practice, maths and science. But the curriculum also included English and 'civics'. This was a rounded technical education turning out the young people that industry needed.

A place at the junior tech was highly regarded—apparently the grammar school heads complained about the college poaching able students that might have gone into their sixth forms. So some things don't change!

After the 1944 Butler Act some junior techs became 'technical schools' under the tripartite system but this third part of the system never really established itself nationally as an alternative to the grammar/secondary modern divide. So a valuable route for young people was not developed further.

There is a common line which can be traced here - a national focus on giving better routes for success for our young people but local decisions about what might work best.

The last ten years

Let me change tack and look in a bit more detail at the last twenty and in particular the last ten years. This has been a time of unprecedented expansion of post 16 opportunities – led again by your sector. Let me remind you of some of the key facts.

Let's start with a big figure. Since incorporation in 1993, you have provided education and training for some six and a half million 16-18 learners who have attended FE colleges. A gigantic achievement.

Let's also look a bit more closely at the last few years when there have been dramatic increases in the participation rate. The percentage of the 16-18 population attending FE colleges has increased from 32.7% in 2003 to 39.1% in 2009.

Because of the sector's work to increase participation this now means that 127,000 more 16-18 learners are attending FE and sixth form colleges each year. And this has been a major reason why we are approaching in the whole education system full participation at age 16 and 17.

And over this time, the number of young learners achieving the full level 2 at FE colleges has more than doubled. And full level 3 achievements have trebled since 1993/94.

A new challenge

These are great achievements which the sector should feel proud of – but of course there are still challenges – the challenges of improving still further participation and progression post 16. But there is a new challenge – working in partnership with others – of transforming the school sector. And that is what I would like to say something about now – a challenge I am particularly interested in because I have already seen the contribution that outstanding colleges have made to transforming school provision through academies and I believe there is so much potential and opportunity to go further and faster.

I imagine this is part of the story that in its scale will be less well known to you. So let me tell you some impressive facts.

There are now 26 colleges and sixth form colleges who are lead sponsors for academies. Between them they sponsor 33 academies. Here is the pattern of growth from the first college academy openings in 2007.

[Show slide]

Between them these academies have 30,000 children and young people on their rolls. Their combined revenue budget is some £190 million. And the average increase in the 5 GCSE A* to C measure including English and Maths compared to the predecessor school is already nearly 7 percentage points. This is topped by Barnfield West Academy with an outstanding increase of 39 percentage points over three years.

Now these are early days on this particular journey – and it is fair to say that there are some that have still to realise the benefits they have planned but I think there is enormous potential here for example:

- The opportunity to share CPD across sectors;
- The skills that the FE sector brings in managing capital investment;
- The opportunity to build new pathways post 14;
- The opportunity to share the expertise of the FE sector in offering personalised learning and excellent data management; and
- The skills of financial management which have been honed in the college sector over nearly twenty years of incorporation.

The Government has clearly set out its vision for academies as a major way of developing the school sector to the next stage. I believe colleges need to be part of this vision. Colleges should be looking for the opportunity to partner schools as they undertake this journey – to build even greater success for young people.

Conclusion

So my message today is that this sector has a proud tradition of serving the young people of this country through extending opportunities and providing the highest standards of education and training. But there is now a new opportunity through academies to realise yet more of that original mission which led to your colleges being established over the last hundred years.

There will be challenges ahead and we will all need to manage the need to secure savings. I am not able today to provide the detail that you will want to see of the budget settlement for young people for the next four years but that will come in due course.

So let me come back to the role of the YPLA. Our role is to run a national funding system for 16-18s which is fair, equitable and as simple as possible.

This system operates across all sectors for 16-18 so that you can get on with the job of providing success for your young people.

I and my colleagues in the YPLA are committed to working openly, transparently and professionally with you, respecting your autonomy and realising that you, not we, are the people who know how to get the best outcomes for our young people. One particular area where I would like to work with you over the next year is to simplify the funding system so that we can get as much funding as possible to the front line. I will be writing shortly to Martin Doel about taking this forward. So I would like to end with a quotation in praise of simplicity:

Say what you will about the Ten Commandments, you must always come back to the pleasant fact that there are only ten of them

H. L. Mencken

And finally, I promised to end where I started. Albert Einstein does seem to have a suitable quotation for all occasions and here is one more:

Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler

Albert Einstein

Colleagues – thank you for all you have done for young people over the last hundred years. And thank you for the new challenges you are taking on. I look forward to working with you.