

**A history of technical and further education colleges in England
from the nineteenth century to 2000**

Norman Lucas

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The impoverished legacy of further education in England.

Records from the nineteenth century concerning further or vocational education are very scant and unclear (McNair 1944). In the English context there are difficulties in distinguishing between the terms ‘adult’, ‘technical’ and ‘vocational’ education. Technical education is sometimes used to mean adult vocational education and sometimes to refer to technical education in schools. The use of the word ‘school’ can mean what we would describe today as a college, and the use of the word ‘adult’ needs to be set within the context that it was only in 1899 that the school leaving age was raised to 12, and it took until 1922 to implement its rise to 14 years of age. There are some records of public debates about technical education such as those conducted by the Board of Trade in 1851 (Bristow 1970), but most were concerned with technical education in schools. By and large, however, further education was not considered or given any priority by central government until the 1944 Education Act (Barnett 1986).

Green has argued that further education has a long, though relatively hidden, history going back to developments in the later stages of the industrial revolution (Green, 1997). Adult or community education in its broadest sense can be traced back beyond the nineteenth century; for example the Sheffield Societies were formed by mechanics in 1792 and were a mixture of self-education and radical political organisation (Thompson, 1963). There was some adult literacy education provided by the church in the eighteenth century to enable the ‘poorer classes’ to read the Bible. There were also Schools of Industry after 1795, which emphasised learning trades, manual skills and the ‘habits of industry’ (Cotgrove 1958). Most adult education for poorer people was undertaken by mutual improvement societies (Hyland and Merrill 2003).

Nineteenth century technical education and training in England had a number of strands. These included work-based apprenticeship, the various schools and self-improvement associations of the labour and co-operative movement, the Mechanics' Institutes, the Evening Institutes and other adult education institutions, which received philanthropic and state funding (Simon 1965).

The dominant form of technical training in England during the first half of the nineteenth century was the apprenticeship, which was organised by independent employers and craftsmen with no public funds and little public regulation (Aldrich 1999). It usually involved workplace training with little or no theoretical or academic study, and was distinct from mainstream educational provision. As voluntary provision made by employers without state regulation it fitted well with the dominant liberal philosophy of ‘voluntarism’ in education and training, and in many ways set the parameters for all further developments in post-school technical education and training (Green 1997).

The other main tradition of adult education in the early nineteenth century was that of working class ‘self-help education’, often organised through small associations and clubs and, on a larger scale, through the institutions of the labour and co-operative movements (Hyland and Merrill 2003). In this tradition, adult education took a myriad of different forms which were a mixture of education and radical politics,

¹ This paper is based upon previous published work of Green and Lucas 1999 and Lucas 2004.

from the common reading circles of working men and women to the Owenite Halls of Science, the 'schools' organised by the Chartists, Christian Socialists, night schools and others. An example of the latter was the London Working Men's College formed in 1854 by the Christian Socialists to provide education for working men (Harrison 1954).

The principal precursors of the late nineteenth century technical colleges were the Mechanics' Institutes, the first of which was founded in Edinburgh in 1821 (Bristow 1970). However, it was the foundation of the London Mechanics' Institution and the famous lectures by Dr Birkbeck that led to the establishment of these institutions in other parts of the country (Cotgrove 1958). The Mechanics' Institutes did not win credibility as genuinely mass adult education providers because their major emphasis was access to scientific knowledge through the reading of tracts and pamphlets (Cotgrove 1958) and assumed a high level of literacy. The increasingly middle class ethos of Mechanics' Institutes alienated potential working class recruits. Furthermore, working class initial education was often too limited to allow them to benefit from what the Institutes had to offer (Green and Lucas 1999). In fact, the Institutes established the dubious tradition of separating general, scientific and technical education from practical craft instruction (Evans 1975).

What was common to all these strands of adult education and training was their predominantly voluntary and part-time character. The state played a relatively minor role in apprentice training and formal technical schooling, at least until later in the century, and was generally opposed to the tradition of radical working class self-education (Green 1997). Michael Sadler well encapsulated the strengths and weaknesses of the part-time, voluntary tradition of evening classes in the nineteenth century;

'evening classes have borne the characteristic features of the English educational organisation. Free in their development...often well-adapted to the requirements of the persevering and strong..and from the national point of view insufficiently adjusted to the needs of the rank and file' (quoted in Roderick and Stephens 1978, p21).

By the mid-nineteenth century, there was increasing criticism of this voluntary tradition. Great concern was expressed about the state of technical education following the Great Exhibition of 1851 and a Department of Science and Art (DSA) was established under the Board of Trade in 1853 to stimulate and co-ordinate efforts in technical education (Bristow 1970).

It was not until the late 1880s that a more dynamic and systematic approach was adopted in relation to the development of public technical education, in part as a response to the criticisms of the existing system made by the Samuelson Royal Commission on Technical Instruction in 1884 (Roderick and Stevens 1978). Examination boards had been established with the foundation of the Royal Society of Arts Examination Board (1856) and the City and Guilds of London Institute (1879); the latter was created by the City of London Livery Companies to give accreditation to the growing number of vocational students (Foden 1992). An important development during this period was the establishment of the London Artisans' Club in 1868. This was supported by the emerging trade union movement because of the growing demand by craftsmen to improve their training, a role for which science and art classes were unsuited (Cotgrove 1958).

The pattern of technical education which developed in the nineteenth century was not only institutionally marginalised from mainstream education; it was also intellectually adrift. Science also became separated from the classical curriculum.

'This distinction was not apparent in the 18th century when scientific and technical studies were

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widely included in the curricula, especially in private academies, as part of general education. But classical education divorced from science became a sign of social privilege, and science became identified with useful knowledge, to be studied as a vocational subject, rather than as part of a liberal education'.² (Cotgrove 1958, p16.)

While in most of the more advanced northern European countries such as France and Germany technical education was closely allied to general education, in Britain a sharp divide grew between the two, separating skills and knowledge (Day 1987). The continental system was particularly strong in preparing those who would eventually occupy higher level positions as technicians and engineers (Weiss 1982).

By comparison with the French system in the mid-nineteenth century, English technical training was a very minimalist affair (Green 1997). Its prototypical form was the employer-controlled apprenticeship whose archetypal product was the useful 'practical man' and whose main standard of quality was time served (Sheldrake and Vickerstaff 1987). Sylvanus Thompson, the first Principal of Finsbury Technical College, referred to the apprenticeship as six years of dull, repetitive drudgery that failed 'to make anything but a bad, unintelligent machine' (Thompson, 1879). This may be rather harsh since, whereas with a neglectful employer the apprentice might learn very little, with a conscientious one he (rarely she) might at least get a good grounding in the basics of his trade. However, what he did not acquire, at least not through his apprenticeship, was any broader culture or much theoretical knowledge. The technical colleges later made up for the latter but not the former (Green and Lucas 1999).

The overall picture of nineteenth century technical and vocational education is therefore one of fragmented, *ad hoc* and marginalised provision. This is related to the fact that unlike in other European countries, the state in England did not initially play a direct role in fostering industrialisation either by directing capital into industry or by training in new skills. Companies were left to invest in training as they saw fit and many did not see it as a high priority (Barnett 1986). The liberal, voluntarist creed, which generally preferred voluntary initiatives to state intervention in education and training, applied particularly in the area of technical education, which was seen as a low priority for government and whose public promotion raised fears about increased taxation, loss of trade secrets, restrictions on child labour and the undermining of employer initiative. Records about the quality of teaching are very scant (McNair 1944). There were some complaints concerning the quality of Science instruction in 1868 and there were complaints that 'instructors' received no training (Richardson 1939).

Despite some advances towards the end of the century, nineteenth century technical education in England thus left a distinctly impoverished legacy. It was overwhelmingly part-time, intellectually narrow and it never acquired a status comparable with that achieved in certain other continental countries. Its form became characterised by what has been describe elsewhere as an historical absence - the lack of any legitimated notion of general culture and general education within which to frame technical skills (Green and Lucas 1999). Further education would find it hard to break out of this mould and to rectify this absence.

² Cotgrove goes on to outline how the study of Science declined at Oxford and Cambridge universities in the late nineteenth century. He argues that educational provision was linked to the class structure and church.

From 1889 to 1944: A period of Marginalised Provision, Crisis and Drift

Following the Technical Instruction Act of 1889, public funding for technical education became available, although the teaching of trade and craft processes was expressly excluded, thereby continuing the distinctions first made by the Mechanics' Institutes. Technical instruction was defined as instruction in the principles of Art and Science applicable to industries (Edwards 1961). This was a 'late outbreak of good sense' (Green 1997); it continued the tradition of the Mechanics' Institutes but excluded the teaching of trade and craft processes and established a link between local authorities and colleges that was not broken until incorporation in 1993. However, in many ways it came too late to alter the patterns which had already been established (Green and Lucas 1999).

In the 1902 Education Act (Balfour Act) the basis was laid for the expansion of post-primary and secondary education which, combined with the economic growth of the late nineteenth century, should have provided the basis for growth in technical and further education. This was to be only partially the case (Bristow 1970). Further education did expand, particularly in the commercial fields, whose popularity grew in line with the growing army of clerks servicing Britain's imperial expansion in the pre-World War One period. However, the school sector, and especially the growth of state grammar schools, continued to receive higher priority than technical colleges, and all areas of education were squeezed through the expenditure cuts in the inter-war era (Kitchen 1944). The 1902 Act did provide for some expansion of the evening continuation schools (later called Evening Institutes). More importantly, it led to the establishment of senior and junior technical schools (JTS); the latter were designed to fill the gap between the school leaving age and the age when it was possible to begin an apprenticeship. These JTSs, as they came to be known, were organised alongside senior technical schools and technical colleges and often ran their own evening classes. They were never numerous but in time some developed into technical and further education colleges (Bristow 1970). There are some records of the difficulty those schools faced getting teachers during this period³ (LCC 1903) and there is evidence that unimaginative teaching, combined with the problems of learning after working long hours, led to poor attainment and low levels of retention (Edwards 1961).

With the end of the First World War and the rhetoric of creating a 'land fit for heroes', came the 1918 Fisher Act. This required all Local Education Authorities to provide free and obligatory Day Continuation Schooling for those leaving school at 14 (Bailey 1990). The intention was to make attendance at Day Continuation Schools for one day a week compulsory between the ages of 14 and 18, but this proposal was lost as soon as amendments to the Act made attendance voluntary (Ferguson and Abbott 1935). There were frequent complaints that industry did not support day-release education and most students had to continue their education in evening classes (Edwards 1961). Junior Technical Schools providing post-elementary vocational education did continue to expand, with enrolments reaching around 30,000 students in 1937, but they did not develop into a comprehensive national system, and no more achieved parity of status with academic secondary schooling than did the Secondary Technical Schools which followed the 1944 Butler Act (McCullough 1987). During this period, there was also some development of adult non-vocational education. Henry Morris pioneered community education in Cambridgeshire in the 1920s and 30s and the Women's Institutes were founded in 1924, some years after the inauguration of the Workers Education Association in 1903. All of these developments added to the richly diverse landscape of post-school education, but fell far short of creating a national further education system (Green and Lucas 1999a).

³ Edwards (1961) suggests that the only way of obtaining teachers was to recruit the best students who had taken the course.

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The failure to establish the day continuation schools meant that by the 1930s most further education had reverted to its pre-war pattern and remained predominately a system of evening classes, mainly vocational in character. Edwards (1961) argues that day continuation schools would have helped technical education to escape from this confined system by beginning the transfer of work from evening classes to day time attendance (a development anxiously awaited from 1904 onwards):

‘The new schools would have solved the intractable problem of the junior evening institutes; they would have persuaded both employers and workpeople that technical education is not inevitably a matter of evening classes for the ambitious student; courses could have been transferred from scattered evening classes to day technical schools properly equipped for the purpose; technical schools relieved of the overwhelming load of junior work, would have been reorganised for advanced work built upon the solid preparation of the secondary schools and day continuation schools.’ (Edwards 1961, p93.)

By 1937/8, only one in five children leaving elementary school at age 14 went on to any kind of further full-time education; the rest went straight into the job market. Of the 3.3 million 14-18 year olds in England and Wales who were receiving no full-time education in 1937/8, 1 in 25 were on part-time courses and 1 in 123 in voluntary day continuation schools. Of the 80,000 pupils in 1937 who began secondary school, 1 in 12 ended up with the Higher School Certificate, a sixth went to some form of further education and 1 in 20 went to university. Most people went into the job market with no training (Barnett 1986). The attitudes of employers to training reflected the suspicion towards further education, established in the previous century, that practice is best learned in the workplace and that theoretical learning for young people resulted in them being less adaptable to ‘the rough and tumble of industry and to understand more fundamentally the outlook of workmen’ (Richardson 1939, p473).

The 1940s to the 1970s: Technical colleges, day release and local expansion.

The educational debates in the inter-war years had been dominated by the need to reform secondary education and raise the school leaving age. The war years saw a large increase in training programmes in colleges. There were 6,000 state bursaries for two-year technical degree courses; more than 4,000 students in technical colleges following six month long Higher National Certificates courses serving both industry and the armed forces; and nearly 4,000 Engineering Cadetships (Davis 1990). However, some interesting debates on post-school arrangements were aired during the war, stimulated by the publication of the Education White Paper of 1943 (Argles 1964). The John Lewis Organisation, a large retail chain, advocated a day-release for one year for all employees to study in a Technical College. The Building Apprentices and Training Council wanted compulsory technical education for apprentices up to the age 18 (Dawn 1995). MPs and Ministers also spoke of the importance of expanding technical education because of the need to rebuild and establish industry in the post-war period. There was further rapid growth after the Second World War as troops returned home requiring training for civilian life. Alongside the technical colleges, adult education institutes were established which catered for part-time academic, vocational and leisure activities (Peters 1967). Regional Advisory Councils and a National Advisory Council on Education and Industry were established and some National Colleges were set up, reflecting the growing interest amongst employers.

In the event, much of the debate was futuristic and the role of further education was squeezed out by other issues (Bristow 1970). However, the birth of further education as we know it came into being in the form of a term introduced in the Education Bill of 1944, to describe what would follow the new notion of secondary

education. The 'humble little clause' (41) said; 'it shall be the duty of every local education authority to secure the provision of adequate facilities for further education' (Dawn 1995, p9). It was as a result of clause 41 that it became possible for local government to build the present FE system. Although the clause was very important, the term 'further education' was only introduced following the new notion of secondary education, indicating the continuation of the marginal nature of the technical and FE colleges, in comparison to the emphasis given to schools.

The 1944 Education Act sought to achieve for further education what the Fisher Act had failed to achieve with its largely un-implemented Day Continuation Schools policy (Dawn 1995). The new Act was the first to make it a legal duty for LEAs to provide further education. Although no specific timetable was set, LEAs were required to establish and maintain County Colleges which provided school leavers with vocational, physical and practical training reinforcing the vocational tradition of technical colleges. In the first year after the Act nothing extra was spent on colleges, and over the next six years the total spent was half of that spent on school medical care and nursery schools (Barnett 1986). With the election of a Labour Government in 1945 the growth of FE rose dramatically. By 1947 there were 680 establishments, double those in 1938. Full-time students increased by some 130% and the number of part-time students trebled during the same period (MoE 1946). This increased demand put pressure on supply of teaching staff and on finding suitable accommodation (Cripps 2002). Employers were asked by Government to associate and co-operate with the new colleges and this approach led to the growing occupational training role of 'technical colleges', which gradually became institutions for 'day-release' vocational education of those in employment or those serving apprenticeships (Spours and Lucas 1996).

The White Paper of 1961 entitled 'Better Opportunities in Technical Education' put a greater emphasis on the training of technicians, craftsman and operatives (MoE 1961). By 1960 the numbers in these categories had risen to 283,000 on part-time or block release courses, 152,000 on evening only courses, and 14,000 on full-time courses. Between 1959 and 1965/66, there was a significant shift towards full-time, sandwich and day-releases courses (Bratchell 1968), as colleges became responsive to government initiatives, reaching the high point of establishing links with local industry and employment in the late 1960s/early 1970s (Spours and Lucas 1996). Selby-Smith (1970) shows how in one college in 1937/8, 78 per cent of its students were part-time, 3.8 per cent were day-release students, and 17.3 per cent full-time students. By 1964/5, the proportions had changed to 40 per cent part-time, 50.2 per cent day-release and 9.4 per cent full-time.

Throughout this period, apprenticeship remained the main vehicle of vocational training and was usually completed without any parallel off-the-job general or technical education (Summerfield and Evans 1990). For all its strengths as a means of imparting job-specific vocational skills, the apprenticeship system was being questioned as an adequate vehicle for meeting the skills needs of the economy (Sheldrake and Vickerstaff 1987). The craft unions tended to see the apprentice system as a means by which they could protect their skill status and differentials through restricting entry into tightly demarcated trades. Employers often valued the system as a way of gaining cheap labour in the absence of statutory obligations on them to provide training to given standard. Both sides of industry agreed on limiting the number of apprentices which resulted in repeated skills shortage crises not only before and during the world wars, but also increasingly during the expansionary post-1945 period (Barnett 1986).

Not only did the apprentice system provide an inadequate supply of skilled workers but it was deficient in many other ways, as the 1958 'Carr Report' made plain (Perry 1976). It involved unduly lengthy periods of time-serving, failed to train to any specified standards, was overly narrow in the skills it imparted, and impoverished in terms of general education and theory; most damagingly, it ignored the training needs of

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semi-skilled workers and severely limited access to many groups, most notably women (Sheldrake and Vickerstaff 1987). As Lipshitz notes in her study of craft apprentice students, most of those released by employers to the technical colleges were boys:

'The problem for girls is intensified because fewer of them get job opportunities for any type of training, especially through part-time day release... They have greater problems convincing employers that they are worth training at all because women are considered as having a shorter working life than men, and in effect not many courses of skilled training are open to them.'
(Lipshitz 1972, p2.)

According to Gleeson and Mardle (1980), an important role of technical colleges during this period was to fulfill the requirements of employers and prepare apprentices or trainees to fit in with the existing occupational structures and cultures, including the division of labour based upon gender. Any questioning of the dominant assumptions was not tolerated either by technical teachers or college administrators, although some 'ex-industrial workers' were criticised for a 'lack of a professional attitude towards education' and for acting more like representatives of industry than teachers' (Venables 1967, p130). This reflected the legacy of policy makers, employers and teachers in technical colleges who saw industrial or subject expertise as a sufficient qualification to teach. Concern was expressed that newer ideas on teaching and learning did not penetrate many departments in technical colleges (Tipton 1973) and that teaching remained 'pedestrian and uninspiring' (Bristow 1970).

However, no government action was forthcoming. In 1952, the Ministry of Labour and National Service was still upholding the traditional government line that 'employers bear the major responsibility for the training of their own employees' (Sheldrake and Vickerstaff 1987, p27). The *'laissez-faire'* era in British training policy thus continued until the beginning of the 1960s when renewed skills shortages, the challenge of Soviet technology, and the bulging youth cohort finally convinced government that policies on vocational training had to change (Barnett 1986). The 1964 Industrial Training Act inaugurated the tripartite Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) to promote and co-ordinate training in the different sectors, and empowered them to redistribute the costs of training between employers by means of the levy-grant system (Senker 1992). Organised by industrial sectors but without achieving full coverage, this was never quite a national apprenticeship system, and still less a national training system for all grades of employees. However, as is suggested elsewhere, it was as near as Britain had ever come to this in its history (Green and Lucas 1999). During the brief ten years this system was in operation the volume of training did marginally increase (up by 15 per cent in those areas of manufacturing covered by the ITBs between 1964 and 1969) and notable advances were made in improving the quality of training (Sheldrake and Vickerstaff 1987). Day-release became common in many apprentice schemes; group training schemes proliferated, helping smaller firms to participate in formal training programmes; and the engineering ITB's modular training systems paved the way for greater flexibility and breadth in apprentice training (Perry 1976). However, the system was far from achieving its objectives because the quantitative gains in training provision were limited to certain skilled areas and were, in any case, soon wiped out by the decline in apprentice places which followed the onset of the recession in 1973 (Raggatt and Williams 1999). The ITBs failed to open up access to apprenticeships for previously excluded groups and did little to change the old practices of time-serving and age entry restrictions. Most seriously, little headway was made in the setting and monitoring of standards in training (Senker 1992).

Unlike in Germany, Britain's national federations and organisations for employers and unions (including the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress) lacked binding powers over their

members, and local Chambers of Commerce never attained great influence. The Central Training Council, as the TUC frequently complained, never had adequate powers to compensate for this and to ensure that the system fulfilled its objectives in meeting those long term skills needs of the national economy which individual employers were always prone to ignore (Ainley and Corney 1990).

Despite the advances of the post-war years, what emerged was a highly uneven provision that varied substantially from one locality to another. Legislation had been permissive, not mandatory, and allowed LEAs wide scope for interpretation. Vocational education and training remained low in status and apprenticeships were dominated by the engineering and construction industries which, by the 1970s, were in decline along with other traditional industries such as ship-building and heavy engineering (Gorringer 1996). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the economic and work-based role of technical colleges declined. As a consequence technical colleges began to transform themselves into colleges of further education, providing a wider range of academic, vocational and pre-vocational courses. In the process they began acquiring a multi-purpose educational function (Tipton 1973).

The 1970s and 1980s: Diversity and Change' the growth of general further education colleges.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, full-time participation in further education rose steadily and colleges were required to respond to the needs of new types of learners including, notably, adults and school leavers who previously would have directly entered the labour market. Colleges increasingly saw themselves as 'responsive' institutions that not only served the needs of local employers but also the needs of individuals in the wider community, catering for a more diverse student population and with a mission of offering a second chance to 16-19 year-olds and adults to learn and achieve (Spours and Lucas 1996). This coincided with a period where more interest was shown in the initial training and professional development of FE college teachers⁴ and the proportion of teachers who were teacher trained gradually rose (Cantor and Roberts 1986, Foden 1992). During this period, there was a shift from the typical technical college focus on vocational day-release and evening study to the far more complex offer of the new style further education college with its increased load of full-time students following a variety of general education, vocational, general vocational and higher education courses (Hall 1994). Within the transformation of technical colleges into colleges of further education, two trends had particular influence.

Firstly, there was the growth of academic courses for both adults and young people who wished to have a chance at achieving O and A levels (Ainley and Bailey 1997). This growth was stimulated by the expansion of higher education, which was now becoming accessible to some of those who would previously have been excluded, and by the difficulty that many schools found in maintaining viable sixth forms in the face of the falling numbers of 16-19 year olds. Many LEAs attempted to encourage links between schools and sixth-forms by establishing consortia or sixth form centres in order to offer a reasonable range of academic courses and maintain reasonable class sizes (Green and Lucas 1999). Other LEAs removed sixth forms from schools and merged them into sixth form colleges, or combined sixth forms with FE colleges to form tertiary colleges that provided both academic and vocational courses. Some tertiary colleges included adult education, while some LEAs maintained separate adult provision (Spours and Lucas 1996).

The second important and related factor was the decline in youth employment from the mid 1970s (Gleeson 1990). The Government, in reaction to the rise in youth unemployment, took important initiatives by developing schemes for the unemployed school leaver such as the Youth Opportunities Scheme (YOPs) and

⁴ This was the time of the Haycocks Reports.

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later, the Youth Training Schemes (YTS). For unemployed adults there was the Training Opportunities Scheme (TOPs) and later, Employment Training (ET) (Raggatt and Williams 1999). These government initiatives reduced the levels of young people registered as unemployed, and some young people did find employment through the schemes. On the whole, however, most young people failed to find employment as a result of these schemes, although the extent of this varied from region to region depending upon the local employment opportunities (Unwin 1997).

During the mid 1980s there was a growing realisation that the disappearance of the youth labour market was not a temporary phenomenon, and this was linked to reports that stressed the importance of increasing the knowledge and skills of the workforce for changes in economic production (Gleeson 1996). Unfavourable comparisons with participation rates and education levels in other countries were made, and some reforms of the post-16 curriculum took place, expressed in proposals for a national qualifications framework. These developments in general vocational education were directly funded from central government bodies and created the mechanism for more national regulation over assessment and quality assurance. With the later development of GNVQs and NVQs there was also a greater national regulation over awarding bodies (Ecclestone 2000).

However, despite all these new initiatives and growing regulation from central government, the institutional structures of post-16 education and training were not fundamentally changed, and England and Wales continued to have a mixed system of academic and vocational courses offered by a variety of different institutions with considerable competition in the education and training market place (Hodkinson 1998). Although FE colleges were increasingly becoming a major provider of full-time 16-18 education, they failed to match the status of secondary schools because of the prestige attached to sixth forms, which remained the preferred option of many parents (Green and Lucas 1999a). Where tertiary colleges were established, and in the rare cases where they became the sole 16-19 provider in an area, a new institutional model could be seen to exist in embryonic form (Reeves 1995). Further education colleges and most tertiary colleges continued to be an awkward mixture of 16-19 and adult provision. These mixed purpose institutions continued to form part of a complex institutional patchwork of post-16 provision which included sixth forms, sixth form colleges and training providers, all of which came under different statutory regulations and state bodies. This patchwork of 16-19 provision was addressed in 1979 by the Macfarlane Report (DES 1979), which recommended what amounted to a new national structure of 16-19 tertiary colleges. However, the report was at odds with the government's educational agenda, and the chance to reform the system and produce an institutional structure that would be more simple, coherent and transparent disappeared amidst the vagaries of electoral politics (Green and Lucas 1999).

FE colleges during the 1980s were extremely diverse in character and levels of resourcing. They reflected the priorities of their respective LEAs and the different communities and labour markets they served. They also reflected the diversity of policies of the different government departments, such as the Department of Employment and the Department of Education, and the agencies and awarding bodies to which they were accountable. There was no obligation on FE teachers to gain an initial teaching qualification and there was no minimum entry qualification for those seeking to teach in FE colleges. The effect of the growth of FE in the 1980s was to produce a sector which had experienced 'expansion without strategic leadership' (Green 1997). However, by the end of the 1980s the issue of corporate identity and strategic planning was beginning to be discussed. The Report argued persuasively for greater consistency and efficiency in the use of resources. It was hard at this time to argue that FE formed a sector in any real national sense.

During this period of expansion and change, FE colleges failed to achieve the status of schools or the prestigious autonomy of universities; nor did they have a formalised relationship with employers (Hall 1994). The previous 'technical phase' of FE, related to the post-war expansion of the economy and the development of apprenticeships, had been relatively short-lived, and confined the period of the 1950s and 1960s (Spours and Lucas 1996). Vocational education and training in England was not institutionalised in the same way as in other European systems where specialised vocational institutions were closely tied to vocational qualifications and the labour market (Green 1997). The English approach to vocational education, even at the height of its close relationship with the economy after WW2, always reflected its inferior status and lack of national coherence (Matlay 1997). By the late 1960s only a small proportion of 16-19 year olds were involved in full or part-time education and training and the majority of young people in work did not receive any form of further education and training (Pring 1995).

As FE colleges entered the 1990s, they were both locally and nationally funded with approximately 20 per cent of their budgets consisting of targeted funding from central government departments and national government bodies (Ainley and Corney 1990).⁵ Alongside this targeted funding, more regulation had also been introduced increasing the 'influence of factors usually associated with the market, including performance indicators, accountability and vocationalism which have all been key features of the FE sector since the 1980s' (Elliott and Hall 1996, p6). Local funding levels for FE colleges were very uneven and reflected local political decisions (Audit Commission/OFSTED 1993). Furthermore, pressure for cuts in public expenditure and the introduction of Local Management of Colleges (LMCs)⁶ following the 1988 Education Act, which gave college governing bodies more power, were creating very real tensions between colleges and their LEAs.

The Incorporation of Colleges from 1993: Diversity, Competition and Regulation

One political aim of central government during the late 1980s and early 1990s was to undermine the power and influence of LEAs. This aim was underpinned by a belief that the introduction of markets and competition would improve provision (Smithers and Robinson 1993). Incorporation came about in the political climate of a government in its third term of office determined to give schools and colleges greater autonomy from LEAs and to introduce competition between providers, while at the same time giving a greater emphasis to national regulation and public accountability (FEFC 1992). The incorporation of FE colleges was a result of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. It removed FE and sixth form colleges from local education authority control and changed the composition of governing bodies. For the first time FE colleges were funded centrally through the Further Education Funding Council; they became independent self-governing corporations with responsibility for their own staff, budget, assets, course planning and marketing. For Randle and Bradey (1997), this was all part of the swing towards 'New Managerialism' which emerged in the 1980s and spread throughout the public sector.

As a result of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, sixth form colleges found that they were incorporated as private limited companies into the FE sector, making it more diverse than ever before. The basic purpose of the form incorporation took was to make colleges focus on recruitment, growth, and student retention (Drodge and Cooper 1997). The aim was to create a sector with a higher national profile and more standardised funding methods and levels so that it could be judged by national criteria for

⁵ There was a growing tendency towards regulation in the 1980s, which laid the ground for the incorporation of colleges in 1993.

⁶ LMC shifted the existing balance of power away from LEAs. It established a new funding formula, changed the composition of governing bodies towards more employer representatives and gave governing bodies more control over their own budgets.

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efficiency and effectiveness. The rationale for the change was to direct funds to support student learning and put pressure on colleges to focus on improving retention rates. Gleeson (1996) and many others argue that the incorporation of FE colleges was an attempt to create a national college sector through standardised funding, inspection and auditing within which colleges compete, in what is seen by government as an education and training market. This development in FE was reflected in other public services which were also experiencing 'new public management' (Leathwood 2000). While colleges had governors, the real line of accountability was to the FEFC. Therefore, within the context of marketisation competition there was a strong strand of national regulation (Gleeson 2001). Although centrally controlled, colleges existed in an education and training market. This led them to sometimes adopt a form of managerialism more associated with private companies in which students become customers (Elliott and Hall 1996).

The idea of a market is clear in economics; however, it is hard to see how FE colleges can operate in a market in any classic economic sense because the relationship between colleges and the vast majority of students is not determined by price (Harper 2000). As suggested elsewhere, college incorporation is perhaps better described as the creation of a 'quasi-market' within which incorporated colleges, schools, TECs and private sector trainers compete (Lucas and Mace 1999). A 'quasi-market' is where on the supply side there is competition between providers, but on the demand side purchasing power is not expressed in money terms but by a centralised regulatory agency influencing policy decisions (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993). Ultimately, the combined effect of the FEFC model of incorporation was the creation of 'bureaucratic-markets', in which a centralised authority exercised control by making funding conditional on obeying rules and regulations they lay down (Lucas 1999). Ainley (1993) argues that a 'quasi-market' is an increasing feature of the 'contract-state' that applied to many public services. He contrasts this with the old 'corporate-state' which met the needs of the social partners of the former mixed economy. The contract-state represents a centralisation of power, which operates by franchise, contract and consumer charters untrammelled by social obligations, or even representative democracy.

The centralised and marketised system of funding had some unintended consequences (Leney et al 1998). Ways of maximising units were learned very quickly by colleges, yet maximising funding by maximising units may benefit individual colleges but may not benefit the sector as a whole. Although the period of incorporation from 1993-1997 was one of financial crisis for FE colleges, the period can also be seen as having some positive benefits (Graham 1997). The effects of growth on the diversity of learner needs, and the influences of community and adult education traditions⁷ (combined with the FEFC's pressure to make more 'efficiency savings'), caused colleges to seek new, more flexible ways of delivering learning programmes and to become more responsive and flexible organisations (Drodge and Cooper 1997). From this point of view, the period of incorporation up to the General Election in 1997 represented a period of further diversity and innovation, albeit market driven, and relatively unplanned.

In 1995 FE colleges were catering for far more 16-19 year olds than schools they also catered for older students, with 76 per cent of all FEFC-funded students being over 24 years of age (AfC 1996). While it is widely accepted that full-time 16-19 year olds have common sets of needs regardless of whether they are at school or college, adult students are far more diverse in their needs, many of which differ from those of younger students. They may need flexible modes of study that are locally available at different times of the day or evening, accreditation of prior learning, and child-care support (Derrick 1997). In providing for adults in the mid-1990s, colleges had to become more customer-oriented and more locally responsive in

⁷ Which were being absorbed by FE colleges.

order to meet their diverse needs (Reeves 1995). However, the pressure from the FEFC to create a national sector, and the imperative to respond to local needs if they were to meet the growth targets set by the FEFC, caused confusion concerning the boundaries of the role and responsibility of FE colleges in relation to school sixth forms, TECs, higher education and LEA adult provision (Lucas et al 1999).

Despite the fact that FE college incorporation was supported by the majority of college Principals (Atkinson 1995), few realised that the move away from LEA control would mean so much FEFC regulation (Perry 1997). A number of issues appear to stand in the way of FE colleges becoming a coherent national sector. Colleges appeared to be meant to cater for everyone - 16-19 year olds, both academic and pre-vocational, adult returners, vocational courses and links with employers, access students, HE students, those with special needs, the socially excluded, basic skills provision and those not involved anywhere else. As part of the growing emphasis on lifelong learning, it seemed that if you were not in a school sixth form, at work or at university then you should be involved with the local college (DfEE 1998). Within this vision of FE colleges there was great diversity and excellence (Kennedy 1997) but alongside the virtues there were also potential pitfalls. The virtue is increased commitment to access and achievement for all, but the possible pitfalls are that FE colleges lack a clear strategic role, either nationally or locally (Green and Lucas 1999).

Between 1993 and 1999, FE colleges were treated and funded as a national sector, and given a national profile. However, this period also saw a further increase in the diversity of learners and curricula programmes. As FE colleges increased their student numbers, they further reflected the heterogeneous nature of local and regional needs. In this respect FE colleges became 'all things to all people', with no clarity of mission or distinct function that set them apart from competing institutions. Furthermore, colleges received mixed messages from national agencies. For example, FE colleges received funding to enable them to increase co-operation at a local level. But at the same time they still had to work within a funding system that encouraged competition with other colleges, schools and HE institutions for students (Graham 1997). Similarly colleges were urged and funded to widen participation and reach the socially excluded, while their core funding and the basis upon which they were ranked in league tables required them to give priority to retention and whole course results.

The haphazard development described above left FE colleges, in the year 2000, in an ambiguous position. Even defining what FE colleges predominantly offered was difficult, as no two colleges were the same and most had different traditions within them. As institutions in 2000, FE colleges are perhaps best understood not as institutions with a clear identity, but as a number of segments existing in a disparate relationship to each other. Within this context, FE college teachers lack a clear identity and professional practice often reflected in the segmented nature of the FE sector (Robson 1999). FE colleges had become, caught half-way between catering for 16-19 year olds and adult returners, full-time students and part-time students. Furthermore, they offered vocational and academic courses, provide programmes such as HNDs as well as those geared to adults needing basic skills, and cater for those wishing to gain access to higher education. In other words, FE colleges can be seen in this period as both preparatory and lifelong learning institutions, as institutions contributing to national training targets, and as organisations responsive to local needs. It is this legacy of diversity, and lack of a clear strategic mission that distinguishes the FE sector so clearly from schools and universities.

By the year 2000 the old model of incorporation was drawing to a close with the end of the FEFC, which gave incorporation its particular form, was in sight. The new stage had been brought about by the Labour Government's proposal to restructure the further education system. This was signaled in the Government's White Paper 'Learning to Succeed' (DfEE 1999) which heralded fundamental change in the funding and strategic direction of the FE sector.

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