
A FRAMEWORK FOR LEADING IN FE AND SKILLS: 2021



Further Education Trust For Leadership
Simon Kelleher

The world we're in: 2021

For many in FE the 2020s began in quiet optimism, with high hopes for a white paper and a mooted 'end to austerity' for the sector as Boris Johnson's new government sought to level-up the nation.

While the promise of the FE White Paper remains, the disruption caused by the onset of the pandemic and counter measures have created social, economic, educational and health related challenges for sector leaders the like and scale of which would have been unimaginable as the decade began.

The current situation necessitates, not only crisis management from leaders, but an ability to anticipate the wider and less immediate challenges born out of the pandemic whilst also handling pre-existing pressures. Leading a college or training provider has always been a challenging, often frustrating and sometimes lonely role. It carries a huge responsibility for the learning and life aspirations of young people and adults, including many vulnerable and disadvantaged people. And while the work is frequently hugely rewarding, the stakes are often high and the costs of failure substantial, not only for the individual but also for the institution and the community in

which it is located. The personal toll can be heavy, not least in the absence of meaningful, targeted support or advice.

Just as we need to understand the drivers of institutional success and failure, we need too to recognise the multiple pressures on leaders, acknowledging that healthy institutions depend on healthy leaders.

The table below provides a breakdown of the roles senior leaders and leadership teams may take on. While these will be configured differently between institutions, they represent the core responsibilities and challenges of leadership in the current climate. Leaders and leadership teams must traverse these worlds, prioritising and balancing their multiple and sometimes competing demands.

The second table provides an overview of the wider policy, financial and regulatory landscape that leaders operate within, showing significant developments over the past decade. They are separated into 'architecture' (those reforms which are systemic in nature) and 'apparatus' (that which relate to the system's component parts or significant drivers of behaviour).

THE SECTOR LEADER IN 2021

	The Leader	The Manager	The Educationalist	The Public Servant	The Business Leader	The Innovator
	External: Shaping and reacting to the wider world (concept of Leaderhood)	Internal: Staff and financial management	Developing teaching and learning, curriculum and the pastoral support	Accountability to regulators, budget holders and local stakeholders	Creating growth opportunities and symbiotic relationships with employers	Identifying and making the case for innovation and driving effective organisational and sector change
Immediate and oncoming challenges:	<p>Delivering coordinated public service /community pandemic responses</p> <p>Responding to food poverty, mental health issues, Black Lives Matter etc.</p> <p>Shaping the organisation's role in the post-pandemic world</p> <p>The outcome of the FE white paper, and response to the Augar Review</p>	<p>Maintaining a safe environment for staff and learners</p> <p>Adapting to pandemic disruption</p> <p>Responding to increased demand</p>	<p>Delivering teaching, learning, pastoral support and assessment</p> <p>Providing opportunities for all who need them</p> <p>Guaranteeing high quality remote and digital learning experiences</p> <p>Providing a compensatory offer for disrupted learning</p>	<p>Ensuring provision complies with Health and Safety Executive guidance</p> <p>Delivering virus testing with the NHS</p> <p>Maintaining standards and budget expectations during the pandemic</p>	<p>Finding work experience placements for learners</p> <p>Engaging employers in apprenticeships, traineeships and T-levels</p> <p>Anticipating falling levels of employer investment in training</p>	<p>Taking imaginative approaches to delivery – 'going digital', outreach and reviving the 'highstreet'</p> <p>Thinking beyond the current emergency</p> <p>Learning positive lessons from the pandemic – seeing how differently things can be done</p>
Existing and persistent issues:	<p>Adapting to frequent policy change</p> <p>Finding and promoting the organisation's 'place' in the locality, region or national picture</p> <p>Working collaboratively in a system that incentivises competition</p>	<p>Managing a complex funding system</p> <p>Recruitment, retention and shortages of skilled staff</p> <p>Sector morale and industrial action over pay and pensions</p> <p>Performance management and CPD for staff</p>	<p>English and maths attainment</p> <p>Offering high quality careers guidance</p> <p>Keeping pace with industry developments</p> <p>Funding high need support for learners with multiple barriers to learning</p>	<p>Taking on more responsibilities such as numeracy and literacy, and Prevent</p> <p>Navigating a complex funding and regulatory landscape: Ofsted, the ESFA, IfATE, OFS/QAA, the FE Commissioner</p> <p>Managing a shifting landscape of mergers, Area Based Reviews, and the practical and motivational impact of high profile provider failures</p>	<p>Diversifying income streams</p> <p>Understanding the needs of SMEs</p> <p>Effectively marketing the organisation and responding to just-in time and bespoke training needs</p> <p>Resources and capital to ensure training is in line with the latest industry innovations</p>	<p>Finding the space to think and innovate</p> <p>Creating new partnerships, specialisms and new models of provision</p> <p>Limited capacity to take risks</p>
Long-term challenges and prospects:	<p>The civic role of the organisation in light of new social ills: falling levels of trust and social cohesion, loneliness, poverty etc.</p>	<p>Continued budget limitations / managing central, devolved and private funding streams</p>	<p>Funding/developing emerging pedagogical approaches in VR and mixed reality</p> <p>Implementing T-levels into the existing mix of provision</p> <p>Moving towards modular and flexible models of delivery</p>	<p>Tensions between public and private sector character of organisation</p> <p>Managing misalignment between funding incentives and ambitions of LEPs and Local Industrial Strategies</p> <p>The role and capacity of voluntary governing boards</p>	<p>Developing partnerships with employers in a difficult business climate</p>	<p>Adapting to the 4th Industrial revolution: Labour market disruption, automation, casualisation, servicetisation</p> <p>Catering for longer working lives – requiring new thinking on lifelong learning and social care</p>

CHANGES TO / SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS OF THE FE AND SKILLS LANDSCAPE

The Architecture	The Apparatus
<p>The overarching policy framework in which actors operate, and without policy or legislative change, will be constrained by</p>	<p>Initiatives and bodies intended to either deliver the objectives of the former category or which exist independent of it, yet play a significant role within the system</p>
<p>Changes to departmental and commissioning structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehousing of FE and HE into the Department for Education 2016 • Localism Act 2011, Heseltine Review 2012, Northern Power House 2014, Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial changes: Skills (G. Keegan, A. Milton, R. Halfon, N. Boles, M. Hancock, J. Hayes); Education (G. Williamson, D. Hinds, J. Greening, N. Morgan, M. Gove). • Education Funding Agency, and Skills Funding Agency combine to form the ESFA 2017. • City Deal devolution sees seven Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority begin to administer over half of the Adult Skills Budget 2019/20. • Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) set skills plans and sign-off FE capital investment.
<p>Austerity and funding policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office for Budget Responsibility established, the Spending Reviews of 2010, 2015 and 2020 and annual budgets and Finance Acts • Education Act 2011 • Finance Act 2016 and Apprenticeship Levy 2017 • Student Loans reclassified as public debt 2018, FE staff Pensions increase 2019 • Spending Review 2020 – one year settlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16-19 funding: EMA, Entitlements cut. New Funding Formula 2013. FT funding rate for 18 year olds reduced 2014/5. Total expenditure on 16-19 education fell by 21% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2017/18. • Adult funding: Grants limited and replaced with Advanced Learner Loans from 2013. Adult Skills Budget → Adult Education Budget 2015. Spending on apprenticeships and work-based learning falls by c25% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2018/19, with a greater proportion going towards apprenticeships. • The levy generates c£2.5bn annually, but annual starts remain below pre-levy level and significant numbers of employers do not recoup their funds. • 2020 sees a 4.7% increase to the per-student base rate and £2.5 billion to be spent on the National Skills Fund over the course of the 2019 Parliament. • Post-18 (Augar) Review of Funding – <i>pending response</i>. Panel member Baroness Wolf brought into to the No 10 Policy Unit to advise on skills and productivity.
<p>System and strategic reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour market intelligence and industrial strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending Review 2015 • The Industrial Strategy 2017 • SoS Williamson's 2019 Conference speech • Provider base and recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academies Act 2010, SR 2015, Industrial Strategy 2017, HE & Research Act 2017, Area Reviews from 2015 • Careers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Challenges New Chances 2011, Baker Clause, Careers Strategy 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer ownership of skills pilots 2013, closure of UKCES 2017. • Local Industrial Strategies, Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs). • Skills & Productivity Board established 2020. • University Technical Colleges 2011, National Colleges 2015, and Institutes of Technology introduced. Student number controls removed and degree awarding powers expanded 2017. • Mergers and Area Review resulting in over 70 college to college mergers since 2015. • National Careers Service 2012, Careers and Enterprise Company 2014, Gatsby Benchmarks.
<p>Curriculum, qualification, and pathway reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16-19 reforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education and Skills Act 2008 • Government response to the Wolf Review 2011 • Sainsbury's Review → Skills Plan 2016 → Technical and Further Education Act 2017 • Apprenticeship reforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government response to the Richards Review 2013 • Apprenticeship Levy 2017 • Adult learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Retraining Scheme 2017 → National Skills Fund 2019 • Lifetime Skills Guarantee 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising of the participation age to 18 2014/15. • Study Programmes 2013, qualifications streamlined, employer design and Tech Levels 2014, funding requirement for English and maths resits for those below grade C 2014. • First T-levels introduced 2019 • Trailblazers and the transition of Frameworks to Standards. • Traineeships introduced 2013 and Degree Apprenticeships 2014. • National Retraining Partnership formed, Get Help to Retrain pilots 2017 → integrated into the National Skills Fund 2020. • First level 3 for +24s to be funded, Skills Boot Camps in select subjects and locations funded.
<p>Quality, regulation, and intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education Act 2011 • New Challenges, New Chances 2011, Rigour and Responsiveness 2013 • Technical and Further Education, and Higher Education and Research Acts 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closure of LSIS and the Education and Training Foundation established 2013. • FE Commissioner, intervention and insolvency regime introduced. • Office for Students established 2017, IfATE - Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education 2017/9.