policy consortium

The FE & Skills System

A study by

The Policy Consortium

The consequences of policy decisions
Lessons for policy makers and stakeholders

2017/18



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In association with TES

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> 'The departments and funding agencies sometimes make decisions without properly understanding the impact on learners, nor the impact on colleges' ability to compete with other education providers. Colleges face a number of substantial external challenges, some of which are exacerbated by the actions of the departments and their funding agencies.'[1]
>
> House of Commons Select Committee of Public Accounts

[1] House of Commons Select Committee of Public Accounts (December 2015) *Overseeing financial sustainability in the further education sector.* England: Crown p. 5.

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1 Foreword

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In 2017, The Policy Consortium[2] set out to study one fundamental question:

> *Are the Further Education and Skills policy makers and stakeholders[3] creating the conditions for success or failure?*

We asked the sector, through a national survey, if key stakeholders were making it easier or harder to produce outstanding outcomes for all learners. We then asked respondents to identify which policy changes had helped or hindered their ability to be successful. In response, the sector has given a level of clarity not seen before in our studies. To our fundamental question, their simple answer was: 'No.' In the view of respondents, the conditions for success in the sector are not present.

This summary study looks at the policy decisions providers feel are contributing most significantly to any perceived failure in the sector, and considers why conditions that support success are not being created.

The report then sets out a vision of how the current situation can be rectified by developing a sector in which all stakeholders systematically work together to create the conditions for success, from Parliament to provider.

Each section of the report concludes with a hypothesis about the root-cause issues that have prevented the conditions for success from being created effectively in the sector, resulting in recommendations for policy makers. A summary of adverse symptoms, root-cause issues and recommendations can be found in section 12, page 45.

The Policy Consortium would like to take this opportunity to thank all respondents for taking the time to complete this searching study.

[2] The Policy Consortium – see appendix 5
[3] See Appendix 2

2 Executive summary

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Since 1941, ministers with overall responsible for Further Education and Skills provision have served an average of only two years[4]. Justine Greening, just 18 months.

What all of these ministers[5] surely have in common is the belief that they know how education should be delivered; and arguably, in some cases at least, that the minister before them was wrong. So they set to, just as Damian Hinds is doing now, to make their mark.

There are many remarkable insights given by sector professionals in this study. Respondents are unequivocal about the policy decisions that have failed to create the conditions for success in their sector. But underneath all of the root-cause issues so skilfully identified lies a significant common denominator: the unintended consequences of policy volatility.

From medicine to engineering, all practical sectors of our society know that adverse symptoms cannot be addressed directly. We can no more fix a brain tumour with Paracetamol, or a leaking engine with thicker oil, than we can poor English skills with yet more poetry.

Sustainable quality improvement can only be brought about by addressing the underlying, root-cause issues that produce an adverse symptom.

This study does not set out to simply hypothesise what these root-cause issues may be: it sets out to use its analysis to create a sustainable, long-term vision for the future of the FE & Skills sector, beginning by resolving the 'make your mark' motivation of Ministers of Education, and so reducing policy volatility.

It is time for an end to the cliché of 'change is the norm'. We want our providers to research, invest, succeed and grow, for the benefit of those they serve now, and those they will serve for years to come. Yo-yo change does not provide the right conditions for this vision.

We are all very familiar with the phrase 'systemic failure'. It is now time to create systemic success.

The study team has identified 23 specific root-cause issues. Each issue has a corresponding recommendation, of which the following is a precis.

- Recognise that policy volatility can do more harm than good
- Establish policy around the expert-learning skills learners need to function independently and successfully in the modern working environment and in their lives outside of work
- Establish a cross-party group of political overseers

[4] See Appendix 3
[5] Or equivalent

- Create a non-political body responsible for FE & Skills provision, staffed by education experts and advised by education researchers

- Establish a list of the stakeholders needed to create a successful FE & Skills system
- Establish the contribution each stakeholder will make to the conditions for success
- Set the substantive remit of each stakeholder to be their contribution to the conditions for successful impact on learning
- Require each stakeholder to set out how it will achieve its positive impact
- Require each stakeholder to self assess its impact on creating the conditions for success in line with its remit, to enable refinement of its contributions and the system overall
- Publish apolitical, education-focused, medium and long-term plans

Tony Davis
Policy Consortium

Are we establishing the conditions for success or failure?

The survey asked respondents to comment on the work of eight stakeholders[6] with responsibility for setting policy that directly affects the work of FE & Skills providers. Alongside many of the quantitative questions, respondents added around 1400 free-text comments. Through analysis of the commentary, the following key themes emerged:

Policy
Study programmes: English and maths policy
Study programmes: Work-experience policy
Distractions from core teaching
Managing change
Funding
League tables
The FE & Skills sector's relationship with government.

These themes have been used to structure the report, with each section referring to the work of a stakeholder where appropriate. Additional themes are also captured in section 11.

It should be emphasised that the survey was neutral in its questions, asking providers to rate the extent to which each stakeholder makes it easier or harder to achieve outstanding outcomes for all learners.

3 Policy

3.1 Department for Education

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For the FE & Skills sector to improve continually and sustainably, arguably two change-management conditions must be met:

- the change must be valued and driven from within, and
- the 'investment : payoff' equation must be in balance for those who need to enact the change.

It appears that the single biggest barrier to creating the conditions needed for wholehearted investment by staff is policy makers continually changing their minds.

3.2 It is clear from responses throughout this study, however, that neither of these conditions are being met.

3.3 In most instances, changing established practice can take considerable effort, whether this be at qualification design level or in the pedagogy of individual teachers. At national level, the payoff is improved indicators of learning success. At teacher level, with a backdrop of ever-increasing individual caseloads and ever-reducing main-qualification contact hours, this payoff can be seen in the answers to three questions: will my investment:

[6] See appendix 2

- improve the efficiency of my teaching and assessment work?
- improve my learners' skills and attitudes to learning?
- improve my learners' qualification outcomes?

3.4 If the answer to any or all of these questions is 'yes', then front-line staff are far more likely to invest the time and effort needed to change; celebrating a more manageable and better life for all. If the answer is 'no', then sustainable change is highly unlikely.

3.5 It appears that the single biggest barrier to creating the conditions needed for wholehearted investment by staff is policy makers continually changing their minds. 'Policy volatility' leads to a feeling of initiative overload. At best, this leads to tacit compliance with the latest directive; at its worst, staff can attempt to ride out the initiative storm, keeping their heads down and clinging to established practice until it passes. Investment work is seen as having little value – and valued little by policy makers – due to the strong perception that yet another change will soon be on the horizon.

3.6 Almost all respondents to this study feel that the cause of policy instability is the personality politics at the heart of the relationship between government and the sector.

> 'Education is not a football. It should not be kicked around to gain a minister a reputation and a promotion. We are dealing with lives - it is not a game of egos.' (Principal)

3.7 One respondent put the frequency of change into context.

> 'Education policies take about 3-4 years to become effective. Education policy changes every 3-4 years. See the problem. The vote for an independent education governance was a good idea. Shame the government wasn't strong enough to give up power over education, as it needs a 10-year strategy informed by teachers, education leaders and education research.' (Middle Manager)

3.8 With education ministers remaining in post for an average of just two years[7], however, the urgency to make one's mark is likely to be greater than the above respondent perceives. The Institute for Government's research suggests an even more unstable picture for FE, with 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities since 1980.[8]

> 'A final conclusion is that these changes fail to endure because they are rooted in insufficient prior analysis, and have been developed in a policy process that is too restricted.'[8]

3.9 In its report: 'All Change: Why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention, and what can be done about it' (2017), The Institute for Government (IfG) argues this failure is systemic:

> 'Government has a tendency to recreate policies and organisations on an alarmingly regular basis. New organisations replace old ones; one policy is ended while a remarkably similar one is launched.

[7] See Appendix 3

[8] Norris, E & Adam, R (2017) *All Change: Why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention, and what can be done about it*. England, Institute for Government p. 4 & 5.

> The costs of all this churn and reinvention are high. There is the human cost: in the FE sector, thousands of students and employers are faced with a confusing and ever-changing set of qualifications, with no certainty that those same qualifications will exist a few years down the line. This churn highlights some persistent weaknesses in our system of government:
>
> - poor institutional memory
> - the tendency to abolish and recreate organisations as a proxy for demonstrating progress
> - a centre of government that remains too weak at long-term planning
> - a policy development process that is not as resilient as it could be.
>
> A final conclusion is that these changes fail to endure because they are rooted in insufficient prior analysis, and have been developed in a policy process that is too restricted.'[8]

3.10 With T-levels on the very near horizon, Government will do well to consider IfG's recommendations carefully if it wants a positive legacy from this latest of shake-ups. This is particularly important in light of where the Sainsbury report suggests stability lies:

> 'We welcome the Government's intention to establish the Institute for Apprenticeships as a body with a large degree of autonomy. However, it is important that Government should remain responsible for managing the design of the overall national system. We recommend that, while it is right for the Institute for Apprenticeships to be delegated wide-ranging autonomy across its operational brief, responsibility for key strategic decisions must be reserved for the Secretary of State. Crucially these decisions must include those relating to the shape of the overall national system of technical education (such as adding new or removing existing routes, or changing the title of a route) if we are to ensure the new system remains coherent and stable over time.'[9]

3.11 As the Institute for Government rightly points out, however, the role of Secretary of State is at the root of much of the policy instability and volatility.

3.12 Advice from one senior manager is to:

> 'Leave things alone and wait for things to embed properly before making yet another change.' (Senior Manager)

Negative impact:	Insufficient investment in or impact on sustainable quality improvement.
Root-cause issue 1:	Policy volatility due to personality- and ideology-driven change.

(For recommendations, see section 12, page 45.)

3.13 Ofqual

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With political change comes a wave of procedural change across key stakeholders. As a result of Secretary of State Michael Gove's own 'shake up of the system', Ofqual's subsequent insistence on

[9] Sainsbury (April 2016) *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*. England, Crown. p. 10.

external examinations in all subjects was identified by over half of respondents as a significant root-cause issue.

> 'Adding examinations as an assessment method for vocational learning… detracts from vocational pedagogy and brings in an unnecessary distraction – exam technique.' (Principal)
> 'External exams in all qualifications… *[means]* practical students *[are]* disadvantaged.' (Principal)
>
> 'Greater emphasis on knowledge/memory rather than skills in examinations.' (Vice Principal)
>
> 'Terminal exams on vocational qualifications hasn't added anything to the skills and competence of the students.' (Vice Principal)

3.14 The clear implication of all comments on this issue is that policy making appears to be overly driven by the need for static curricula and uniform assessment (exams) rather than the learner's need to function independently and successfully in a complex employment environment. Learners need to be adept at managing and solving unforeseen problems, to analyse, research and reflect and make good decisions in this new, competitive age. These 'expert learning' skills build capacity and better prepare learners for industry and new employment. These are the skills demanded by industry. Yet, the current exam policy does not reflect these requirements. It does not deliver these vital expert learning skills, and its adverse impact on learners has not been sufficiently risk-assessed. According to respondents, exam policy has at best added no value, and at worst stolen vital teaching hours from the development of higher-order skills and their context-rich application, in favour of lower-order knowledge and memory tests.

Negative impact:	Course hours diverted from skills development and their application.
Root-cause issue 2:	Introduction of terminal examinations and insufficient risk-assessment of potential adverse impacts on learning.

3.15 Department for Work and Pensions

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Providers that contract with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) also have concerns about policy instability. One respondent described the negative impact on learning of DWP's 'stop/start policy', as leaving:

> 'Learners struggling to understand what they are entitled to and when we can/cannot offer provision. Further problems occur when establishing bespoke provision for JCP *[Jobcentre Plus]* and then they make no referrals or refer entirely inappropriate clients and bully them under threat of sanction into attending, giving them a very poor experience of learning and support.' (Vice Principal)

3.16 This respondent, then, is adding instability of DWP staffing and their subsequent poor programme knowledge to the DWP-policy issues.

Negative impact:	Poor client experience of and engagement with preparation for sustainable employment.
Root-cause issue 3:	Short-term planning. Poor staff transition management. Insufficient risk-assessment of potential adverse impacts on learning.

3.17 Ofsted

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Only nine percent of respondents felt Ofsted's impact on the sector was positive. One theme that came in for heavy criticism in respondents' comments was the unintended consequences of Ofsted's policy changes.

> 'Ofsted is no longer fit for purpose. There is way too much political interference with Ofsted and they fail to distinguish between failed policy that providers are doing their best to implement, and poor quality providers. This was evident in the inspection profile of GFE *[General Further Education]* colleges when the maths and English CGSE resit policy was introduced. Colleges and providers that are inspected early on after a major reform have to suffer the brunt of this and in some cases may never recover from the unfair negative PR, not to mention the terminated contracts. (Please note I have not been directly affected, so my strength of view is not due to personal experience, but an anger about the injustice of such a system, which would be apparent to anyone that stood back for a moment to observe it.' (Principal)

'Colleges and providers that are inspected early on after a major reform have to suffer the brunt of this and in some cases may never recover from the unfair negative PR.'

3.18 For this Principal, then, Ofsted has not only contributed to creating conditions for failure in our sector through its accountability judgements on sector-level perennial issues, but it is proactively disadvantaging providers in the immediate aftermath of policy change. For some respondents, this too is a symptom of personality-driven ideology:

> 'Anti FE prejudice of previous Head of Ofsted *[Sir Michael Wilshaw]*. Using Poor English and maths results as a stick to beat FE despite the national scandal of secondary school learners leaving school without D or above in GCSE in English and maths.' (Vice Principal)
>
> 'Constant change of focus – no appreciation of the difficulties faced for maths and English post 16 – these learners have 'failed' these subjects despite 11 years of teaching, it takes a lot of time to break down barriers and resistance.' (Tutor)

Negative impact:	Increased number of providers labelled as 'failing', undermining their stability and reputation, and so the climate for improvement.
Root-cause issue 4:	Lack of understanding by Ofsted of the pragmatic and learning implications of the GCSE English and maths policy change.

4 Study programmes: English and maths policy

4.1 Department for Education

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Of the principals, vice principals and governors who responded to this study, almost two thirds feel that the biggest negative impact on their work is due to the change in the GCSE resit policy for English and maths – changes instigated by the Wolf Report and the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove.

'Students have failed more, and feel more like failures.' (Principal)

'Sustainable quality improvement can only be brought about by addressing the underlying, root-cause issues that produce an adverse *symptom*.'

4.2 It is clear, however, from respondents' very many commentaries on this subject, that it is not the aspiration of 'secure literacy and numeracy skills for all' that is being criticised, but the manner in which the Department for Education (DfE) attempted to implement change.

4.3 Sustainable quality improvement can only be brought about by addressing the underlying, root-cause issues that produce an adverse *symptom*. In this instance, the adverse symptom is the poor level of achievement of a 'recognised pass' (grade C/4 or above) in GCSE English and maths at the end of the school years. The secondary adverse *symptom* is that the majority of those pupils who failed to gain a recognised pass at age 16, failed again – whether in the school or the FE system[10].

4.4 It is clear from respondents' comments that the root-cause issues of resit failure were *not* the grading system or the compulsion to resit, nor, ironically, that the qualifications were insufficiently "rigorous and stretching"[11], and yet this was largely the change-management approach taken by the DfE to improve results. The root-cause issues have not been addressed; respondents are clear that they have been compounded and exacerbated by the Secretary of State's preferred strategy.

4.5 For many respondents, the most important root-cause issue with resit GCSE English and maths is clear. A majority of responses to this question ranked the following comment highest:

- GSCE *[English and maths]* programmes do not provide a relevant basis for developing learners' employability skills.

'Try explaining to a trainee bricklayer why the analysis of an unseen poem is going to help him in his career…'

4.6 The following individual comments also serve to illustrate a point made by many:

[10] See appendix 4

[11] Michael Gove (11 June 2013) *Oral statement to Parliament by on education reform.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/oral-statement-on-education-reform

'Learners who have previously struggled to achieve *[are]* forced to resit an inappropriate qualification (Senior Manager)

'Try explaining to a trainee bricklayer why the analysis of an unseen poem is going to help him in his career…' (Principal)

'Please take poetry out of GCSE English Language. GCSE English should return to the basics.' (Other)

'Many students taking vocational courses do not learn best via classroom learning. It's very difficult to teach the more abstract content of GCSEs in a practical way. The more practical and skills-based a learner, the poorer the GCSE outcomes are - a clear correlation (see AoC research on GCSE pass rates by vocational subject area).' (Principal)

'They feel the English isn't relevant to the skills they need, and maths is so abstract it's meaningless and frightening.' (Middle Manager)

'Insistence that GCSEs are the only qualifications that are suitable as a passport to vocational and higher qualifications instead of investing in the rigour and effectiveness of functional skills. This is being consolidated by the new GCSEs with increased syllabi and an even higher bar to achievement. This works against the interest of adults and post-16 learners making it almost impossible to clear this hurdle in the single academic year that is funded.' (Vice Principal)

4.7 An irony of transferring ideology into an inappropriate context is that the outcome can be the exact opposite of that intended. Instead of the new GCSE English syllabus enabling learners to develop an appreciation of, or even a love for, literacy:

'After intense 'hot-housing' at school, our students tell us they can't face studying Of Mice and Men for yet another year; they have come to hate GCSE English.' (Principal)

4.8 This poor risk-assessment of adverse learning impact by government departments was a serious concern of Education Select Committee in 2015.

'The departments and funding agencies sometimes make decisions without properly understanding the impact on learners, nor the impact on colleges' ability to compete with other education providers. Colleges face a number of substantial external challenges, some of which are exacerbated by the actions of the departments and their funding agencies.'[12]

An irony of transferring ideology into an inappropriate context is that the outcome can be the exact opposite of that intended.

4.9 For one respondent, the alternative to the resit GCSE English and maths issue is worthy of particular note. The governor's proposed solution is to identify the ideal impact we want to have on resit learners' skills and attributes, and to develop a strategy to meet that challenge.

'Include a 'Use of mathematics/English' unit in every vocational course.' (Governor)

[12] House of Commons Select Committee of Public Accounts (December 2015) *Overseeing financial sustainability in the further education sector*. England: Crown p. 5.

4.10 Alison Birkinshaw, President of the Association of Colleges, suggests it is time to get rid of the policy.

> 'I think it is important to emphasise that I do see it as important to work with our students to make sure they are literate and numerate, but the curriculum for English, in particular, is just so inappropriate.
>
> If the policymakers actually looked at the specifications that they are making our hospitality and catering or our motor-vehicle students sit, they would be really shocked. I would also challenge our policymakers to sit the exam themselves and see what mark they would get, because it is really hard.'[13]

Negative impact:	Insufficient impact on the development of resit GCSE English and maths learners' literacy and numeracy skills.
Root-cause issue 5:	Change strategies focused on attempting to repair adverse symptoms rather than underlying root-cause issues, particularly the content of the resit qualifications and the irrelevance of some aspects to employability and progression.

4.11 Comment is also made on the stark contrast between learning environments in schools and FE. In schools, arguably over three quarters of pupils have between a good and an excellent attitude towards the study of these subjects. This creates a positive learning ethos, and these pupils (the three quarters) go on to gain a C/4 or above in the final exams[14]. By contrast, resit classes in FE are made up exclusively of the remaining quarter of learners who fail in the school system. Many have an overt dislike of these subjects specifically, and issues with academic study skills more generally.

> 'The FE teachers start with a group of students that have ALL failed their GCSE. This is in contrast to schools who have a group of mixed ability students. The pass rate for the FE college will naturally be lower.' (Other)
>
> 'Many students arrive in FE having had a torrid time with GCSE EM *[English and maths]* at school. Some describe EM lessons in school as being in a 'big grey cloud', and their confidence in their own ability is very low.' (Principal)

4.12 Respondents feel it is folly to believe that the ingrained barriers and issues presented at FE by resit learners can be fixed in so little time, with largely unwilling learners and a chronic shortage of staff (even before the new policy was introduced).

> 'As one head teacher said to me: 'I am amazed you get any of our students a grade C. If they don't get it with us after 11 hours of intervention per week, per subject in year 11, they won't get it anywhere!' (Principal)

[13] Birkinshaw, A (23 September 2017) *Government 'starving' post-16 education, says AoC president*. England, TES

[14] See appendix 4

'Schools have spent many hours and resources trying to get these students to C grade. FE has just a few weeks to achieve what the schools couldn't. We have to offer them something different e.g. a functional skill or smaller classes.' (Tutor)

Negative impact:	Insufficient impact on the development of resit GCSE English and maths learners' literacy and numeracy skills.
Root-cause issue 6:	Repeating the programme of study in which learners previously failed, in distilled cohorts of often unmotivated, disaffected learners.
Root-cause issue 7:	Insufficient time to resolve fundamental barriers to learning these subjects.

4.13 The lack of risk assessment of the decision to make resitting GCSE English and maths compulsory for many FE learners was a final significant point made by many respondents.

'This policy was first published 4 December 2014, giving the sector less than 9 months to recruit or retrain staff to deliver GCSEs. There were no new trainee teachers in the pipeline, and prior to this point, English and maths functional skills qualifications had been taught by vocational teachers, without the prerequisite knowledge to deliver an academic GCSE. The result has been that colleges have had to establish provision practically from scratch. Currently, there are over 100,000 resits in each GCSE subject by 16-18 year olds nationwide. Since these changes, colleges have reported difficulty in recruiting good staff (competing directly with schools), demotivated students (forced to retake a qualification that doesn't prepare them for vocational careers), low national achievement rates (23% for English and 22% for maths), and a financial penalty if they failed to enrol and ensure attendance of at least 95% of their students at the GCSE.' (Vice Principal)

'Staff with no functional skills abilities, no training or experience, and no extra time have to deliver English and maths to students. The students are disadvantaged then.' (Tutor)

'Huge struggles to recruit good quality maths tutors is the biggest factor - we can't attract the talented tutors needed to overcome the emotional barriers our students have toward maths. Sadly, maths tutors in FE tend to be those who can't get employment in schools.' (Tutor)

'Too big a proportion of staff who teach maths in FE are not themselves sufficiently qualified to teach at the level involved. (Governor)

Negative impact:	Insufficient impact on the development of resit GCSE English and maths learners' literacy and numeracy skills.
Root-cause issue 8:	Insufficient qualified/experienced staff to teach the GCSE examinations leading to poor quality learning experience and larger class sizes.

4.14 Ofsted

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Over three quarters of respondents' comments are focused on Ofsted's inappropriate expectations set out in both inspection practice and the new Common Inspection Framework (CIF). Respondents feel there is a direct link between falling inspection grades and the increased expectations of Study Programmes. In particular, the comparison between school first-time English and maths GCSE high-grade success rates and resit rates for these subjects in FE was felt to be wilfully inappropriate. This is of particular concern when analysis of both school and FE *resit* pass rates shows a very consistent picture of resit failure. In FE & Skills, however, poor resit results in English and maths can have a significant adverse impact on a provider's inspection grade.

> None of the Ofsted inspectors who responded to this survey chose to answer or comment on questions about resit GCSE English and maths.

> 'Disproportionate focus on English and maths.' (Principal)
>
> 'Reduced grade profile within the sector as a whole *[due to]* policy and procedure - CIF has changed the goalposts.' (Vice Principal)
>
> 'Their stance on mandatory GCSE resist… *[while]* recognising the policy is not working.' (Governor)

4.15 None of the Ofsted inspectors who responded to this survey chose to answer or comment on questions about resit GCSE English and maths. However, it can be seen in inspectors' report writing that they acknowledge the issue is not lazy learners, but the resit subjects themselves. The following extract is from Sussex Downs College's 2017 Ofsted inspection report:

> 'Students' and apprentices' attendance at lessons, other than for English and mathematics qualifications, is high. They have positive attitudes to learning and turn up promptly. They are well prepared and they work hard.'[15]

> If you can't afford the solution, you haven't got a solution.

4.16 In some institutions, such as Leeds College of Art and Design[16], Ofsted's policy on resit GCSE English and maths has led the college to deny access to its further education courses if applicants have not achieved a recognised pass grade while at school, despite the fact that they may be extremely talented artists.

4.17 Other institutions complain that the stigma of a low Ofsted grade affects its entire provision, whether in scope for Ofsted scrutiny or not:

> 'The scale of FE delivery (breadth, level, type of qualification and student age range) means the *[data]* tables represent only 22% of our total qualification offer.' (Principal)

4.18 And for one college running highly successful and completely separate provision for international students, the Ofsted grade 3 for its FE work resulted in a block on international recruitment, and the loss of key staff who had spent years investing in developing this high-quality provision.

[15] Ofsted (2017) *Sussex Downs College inspection report*. England: Ofsted p. 6.
[16] Ofsted (2016) *Short inspection of Leeds College of Art*. England: Ofsted

'Inability to recruit international students; loss of numbers and income for niche subjects. Removal of Tier 4 licence due to Ofsted grade (should be irrelevant to HE recruitment).' (Principal)

Negative impact:	The relationship between Ofsted and the FE sector has been undermined by inappropriate comparisons with the school sector. Adverse impact on inspection grades and unintended impact on successful out-of-scope aspects of provision. Learners denied access to FE providers specialising in their skill areas.
Root-cause issue 9:	Ofsted policy on the inspection of resit GCSE English and maths.

4.19 Education and Skills Funding Agency

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English and maths resit policy, and in particular its funding, continues to be a key area of concern for respondents when commenting on the work of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Many respondents report critical unintended consequences of the policy change: a reduction in learner success, as well as the stamina and motivation of resit learners to continue to study these subjects through the GCSE syllabus.

'Low financial support to resource and staff a shortage subject, so higher workload, larger classes, less timetabled hours to deliver subject, fewer staff willing to take role.' (Middle Manager)

'Significant increase in GCSE English and Maths re-take volumes and constraints on study programme delivery. Significantly more resource required, but with no increase in funding.' (Senior Manager)

'Resit policy on maths and English with punitive funding measures is asking for the impossible. Funding cuts and less funding per FE learner has serious impact at the chalk face, putting huge pressure on teachers with higher than ever stakes.' (Tutor)

4.20 If you can't afford the solution, you haven't got a solution. That government is unwilling to afford the study programme 'solution' is of particular importance given its desire to adopt all of the Sainsbury review recommendations, but without the additional funding the report states as being essential to success.[17]

Negative impact:	The ability to craft learning experiences that will enable GCSE English and maths resit learners to overcome the issues preventing them from succeeding.
Root-cause issue 10:	Insufficient funding of new initiatives.

[17] Sainsbury (April 2016) *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*. England, Crown. p.68.

5 Study programmes: Work-experience policy

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5.1 The other substantial change introduced as part of the Study Programme strategy was the requirement for learners to undertake work experience. Respondents are concerned that Ofsted has adopted a mechanistic approach to the evaluation of this policy, arguably departing from the primary role of inspection: to evaluate the *impact* of education on learning – which in this instance, is the development of employability skills. Instead, respondents are concerned that Ofsted is simply *auditing* the numbers of learners who take part in (a narrow view of) work experience, and using this as a proxy with which to make a judgement of adequacy.

'Ofsted should avoid focusing on what can be measured, at the expense of what is important to learners and providers.'

'Work experience is not appropriate for all learners, however, increased understanding of employment opportunities and awareness of work ethic are relevant to most. Therefore, it is important that Ofsted keeps a broad view on how organisations promote these priorities. Ofsted should avoid focusing on what can be measured, at the expense of what is important to learners and providers.' (Other)

'Unrelenting challenge over progress on maths and English, and work experience for 16-19 year olds.' (Vice Principal)

Negative impact:	Diverting staff attention away from the development and evaluation of learners' employability skills.
Root-cause issue 11:	An audit-led approach to evaluating work experience.

6 Distractions from core teaching

6.1 Ofsted

Contents

Many respondents feel that the initiative overload resulting from policy volatility is stifling their ability to provide outstanding learning experiences. They argue the need to:

'We have to focus on too wide a set of indicators than is effective so don't concentrate on the core activity.'

- include regular references to British Values and The Prevent Duty, while
- embedding English and maths skills development, and
- continually *evidencing* of the checking of progress in lessons,

are undermining their ability to maintain the essential learning momentum and engagement that inspires and motivates learners to do well in their primary learning goal. These issues are compounded by short-notice inspection and often no-notice observation systems.

> 'So much to cram into an apprenticeship now because of Ofsted's expectations – Prevent and British values.' (Principal)
>
> 'We have to focus on too wide a set of indicators than is effective so don't concentrate on the core activity.' (Principal)
>
> 'Disproportionate amount of time spent doing things for Ofsted rather than focus on delivery *[due to]* new inspection framework and particularly the focus on British values.' (Vice Principal)
>
> 'Thanks to Ofsted inspectors (as directed by the Government) putting pressure on senior staff, there has been a large push for awareness of the controversial British values and PREVENT agenda in my FE college. The issue with this is that I teach mostly 19+ adults who are not dim, and questioned it when these subjects were shoehorned into a lesson on molecular biology. However, I am expected to do exactly that, otherwise I would have failed an inspection (which is what I was told by my area manager).' (Tutor)
>
> 'British Values and Prevent get in the way of teaching, and can cut across valuable E&D work and messages.' (Tutor)
>
> 'Punitive Ofsted inspections make knee-jerk leadership responses to do more mock-steds and demands to show progress in lessons every 15 minutes.' (Tutor)

6.2 A recurring theme throughout the comments is the increased stress staff feel by being required to be inspection-ready at all times. It is clear that for many, being inspection-ready is synonymous with a requirement to keep clear documented evidence for everything they have done in the classroom. As this adds no value to the planning or provision of immersive and engaging learning experiences, it is considered a bureaucracy that distracts them from their primary goals as teachers.

'*[Ofsted is a]* Complete & utter distraction, undermining of relationships with learners and employers, and destabilised the organisation.'

> '*[Ofsted is a]* Complete & utter distraction, undermining of relationships with learners and employers, and destabilised the organisation. Much of the Common Inspection Framework is not applicable to workplace learning, but we felt it was necessary to revise our policies and procedures to fit the framework and to train staff to meet the Ofsted criteria. When they came, none of our Ofsted inspectors had experience of workplace learning or apprenticeships and did not understand the provision. They assessed safeguarding according to criteria based on children and vulnerable adults rather than employees.' (Senior Manager)
>
> 'The organisation's energy sucked into pleasing Ofsted, leading to a culture of managerialism, compliance and bullying.' (Middle Manager)

Negative impact:	The 'initiative driven' agendas required to be addressed in every lesson are preventing learners from immersing themselves in subject explorations and learning.
Root-cause issue 12:	Short-notice inspection and its consequential requirement to be 'inspection ready' at all times, and the inspection agenda of perceived 'limiting grades'.

7 Managing change

7.1 Ofqual

Contents

From the evidence presented, it could be argued that Ofqual's actions have had the effect of systematically and directly disadvantaging a whole annual cohort of learners by failing to adequately support providers with the introduction of curriculum changes. This poor management of change also includes the tools with which providers should interrogate their data.

'Reforms are rushed through at obscene pace, without the national infrastructure to ensure their success, for motives that are seldom transparent and feed cynicism. A constant barrage of ill-thought-through reform after ill-thought-through reform being introduced by people who are either foolish or arrogant enough to think that: a) the problem they are trying to solve is much simpler than is the case, b) they know exactly how to solve it, and c) nobody else's view is important or relevant if it is contradictory to a) and b).' (Principal)

'Reforms are rushed through at obscene pace, without the national infrastructure to ensure their success, for motives that are seldom transparent and feed cynicism.'

7.2 The accusation from providers is that these changes are for change's sake, adding no value to either providers' ability to produce outstanding outcomes, or learners' acquisition of essential high-level skills. The changes, then, are viewed as a costly distraction.

'Introduction of new performance and accountability measures, resulting in us having to make changes to curriculum, before awarding organisations are fully prepared.' (Vice Principal)

'Constant changes to specifications. Very little guidance as to how to deliver new specs and why the changes have been made.' (Tutor)

'Specimen material appalling, probably due to being rushed.' (Tutor)

'Time and money are spent on researching and redesigning courses for new specs which would be better spent on addressing students' needs.' (Tutor)

'Ambiguity over qualifications such as changes to QCF, Frameworks/Standards, The Hub/LAD, changes to Z00 codes all add up to confusion and change for the sake of it. Probably not all Ofqual's fault, but they, together with BIS/DfE and the SFA's data side, have made the Learning Aims side of the funding mechanism unnecessarily complicated and arcane with poor tools for accessing and interrogating.' (Vice Principal)

7.3 To cope with high levels of contact time, teachers need to *invest* in the development of high-quality lesson materials that can form the basis of future lessons. With virtually no paid time, if any, for inventive lesson planning, this is usually done in staff's own time. Teachers need this (their) time and personal investment for increasing innovation through research, rather than simply rewriting previous material to fit yet another specification.

'Constant change before we have even implemented the previous changes.' (Tutor)

7.4 Only six percent of respondents were positive about the work of Ofqual.

Negative impact:	If staff are working in a continually changing, political-initiative driven environment, they will not invest the energy needed to make new initiatives successful, as they know another 'fundamental shake up of the system' will be hard on its heels.
Root-cause issue 13:	Policy volatility.

7.5 Ofsted

Contents

A small number of respondents specifically identify the approach of Ofsted's previous Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, and his political interference as reasons Ofsted has made it harder or much harder to achieve outstanding outcomes for all learners.

'Dramatic drop in inspection grades which in turn denigrates FE *[due to]* measuring FE colleges via mechanisms far more suitable for schools – policy change – Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector.' (Principal)

'Constant changes to the inspection framework together with a moron running OfSTED.' (Principal)

'Overly political appointments of Chief Inspectors (hopefully less applicable now).' (Middle Manager)

'Continual change of Ofsted's expectations. Education is not a political tool.' (Tutor)

'Public perception of FE has been diminished in recent years by significantly lower Ofsted grades across the sector *[due to]* Ofsted's failure in recent years to recognise the strengths and positive impact *[of]* FE on learners' lives.'

7.6 Arguably, over the last inspection cycle, Ofsted has made it harder for providers who failed to meet its expectations in the previous cycle to improve outcomes for learners; they have inadvertently created the conditions for failure, rather than for success.

'Low *[inspection]* grade has had an *[adverse]* impact on student applications and therefore has led to job losses.' (Tutor)

'Public perception of FE has been diminished in recent years by significantly lower Ofsted grades across the sector *[due to]* Ofsted's failure in recent years to recognise the strengths and positive impact *[of]* FE on learners' lives.' (Other)

Negative impact:	The perceived effectiveness, and as a result, the actual effectiveness of the FE & Skills system.
Root-cause issue 14:	Policy volatility, personal political agendas, insufficient understanding of the FE & Skills sector by the Chief Inspector, and poor risk assessment of policy change.

7.7 Education and Skills Funding Agency

Contents

Just under a third of respondents question ESFA's fitness for purpose, in particular, its capacity and individual staff ability to manage its remit effectively. Providers feel they are being destabilised, for instance, by the 'uncertainty and chaos in recent procurement processes' (Principal) and the loss of funding due to errors. Without an assured financial footing, providers are less willing to be innovative and respond confidently to change.

'Delayed publication of data and breakdown in system processes. Lack of advisors to contact and no advice & support available.'

'Difficulty in correcting funding errors and poor guidance that is not joined up resulting in loss of funds for us and a devil of a job to have it corrected and the correct genuinely-earned funds reinstated. So few staff *[at ESFA]* there is no one to talk to and those you do meet have such a poor understanding of how providers and Teaching and Learning actually works; but they make crucial decisions and provide key information to govt.' (Vice Principal)

7.8 Providers feel that the funding model has been rushed, is over-complicated, and insufficiently understood even by its own staff.

'Confusion over funding and quality processes *[due to]* difficulty in planning what can or cannot be delivered to leaners and their employers.' (Principal)

'Confusion *[due to]* constant change.' (Principal)

'Delayed publication of data and breakdown in system processes. Lack of advisors to contact and no advice & support available.' (Senior Manager)

7.9 The policy for, and management of, apprenticeship funding is severely criticised by principals and senior managers. Specifically, respondents feel ESFA staff do not have sufficient understanding of work-based learning to be able to risk-assess any unintended consequences of policy decisions.

'The amount and significance of change (Frameworks to Standards) Levy/Non levy, changes in how data is calculated, lack of clarity, Simplified system? = TOTALLY DISAGREE, and I would challenge anyone to be able to demonstrate how it has been made simpler. Real danger of the sector going into meltdown. Finally, please define what off-the-job is and be clear in the Funding Rules (they are full of ambiguous statements open to interpretation)'. (Senior Manager)

'We are headed, yet again, for catastrophic and highly predictable failure from a strategic reform perspective.'

'We are headed, yet again, for catastrophic and highly predictable failure from a strategic reform perspective.

ESFA have only been going a short while, but they are highly ineffective when presented with potential unintended consequences of the apprenticeship reform usually because: a) they are too junior and have no influence, b) they don't even understand the question, let alone the answer, c) they are not in listening mode as they are following orders from ministers and civil servants.' (Principal)

'The shambolic mess they are making of the non-levy funding would be a sackable offence anywhere else.' (Senior Manager)

Negative impact:	Destabilising of providers' financial position and increased bureaucracy distract leaders and managers from their primary work on learning, preventing innovation and improvement.
Root-cause issue 15:	Ill-conceived policy changes with insufficient understanding of impact on providers, and lack of capacity within ESFA to manage change.

8 Funding

8.1 Education and Skills Funding Agency

Contents

By far the biggest concern with ESFA, expressed by nearly two-thirds of respondents, is the inability to provide learners with high-quality learning programmes as a result of the reduction in funding. In addition, some respondents report that they can no longer recruit learners to the programme of study most suitable to their needs and abilities due to the complete removal of funding from the course components they need. Similarly, policy changes around the funding of low-level provision and high-needs learners is preventing providers from creating the scaffolding structures needed for these learners to progress.

'Lack of resources to enable medium to long-term investment to meet learner needs.'

'Reduced level of funding and reduction in qualification choice *[due to]* funded qualification policy.' (Principal)

'ESFA is grossly underfunding GFE colleges and has unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved with on-going cuts in funding.' (Principal)

'Less funds v increased learner entitlements.' (Vice Principal)

8.2 These findings are by no means new to this study. In 2015, the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts in its report: 'Overseeing financial sustainability in the further education sector' was unrestricted in its condemnation of the DfE and the Skills Funding Agency:

'The declining financial health of many colleges is potentially damaging for learners and local economies, but the funding and oversight bodies have been slow to address emerging financial and educational risks.

Recommendation: We expect the departments to report back to us on their progress in understanding the risks facing colleges and efforts to address these within 12 months, including progress against the specific recommendations we set out below.'[18]

8.3 The committee's concerns have clearly not been addressed.

8.4 Respondents report that inappropriate and volatile policy and funding have the unintended consequence of destabilising provision and making long-term planning impossible. This has a detrimental impact on the quality and availability of provision for current and future learners.

'Redundancy/threat of redundancy leading to loss of focus on learners *[due to]* removal of funding at short notice.' (Principal)

'Lack of resources to enable medium to long-term investment to meet learner needs. Year-on-year funding reductions and short notice of changes (cuts) to funding militates against medium to long-term planning.' (Vice Principal)

'Funding has had a huge impact on FE since 2012; redundancies, increased workloads, bigger class sizes. Redundancies due to less funding per FE learner, and constant changes to funding of individual qualifications. (Tutor)

8.5 That funding for the schools sector has been (so-called) 'ring-fenced' during the period referred to above is yet another reason why any performance comparisons with schools are highly inappropriate.

That funding for the schools sector has been (so called) 'ring-fenced' during the period referred to above, is yet another reason why any performance comparisons with schools are highly inappropriate.

'Students coming to the College are often from the most deprived wards, generally have achieved fewer high grades at school, and haven't been well supported to make positive informed choices whilst at school – FE should get at least equal per-pupil funding as schools and pupil premium should be maintained during the student's journey in education.' (Middle Manager)

8.6 The funding of apprenticeships, and the management of this funding, are also of great concern to respondents.

'Funding is insufficient to deliver high quality learning programmes. Per capita funding and the ridiculous change to apprenticeship funding.' (Vice Principal)

'ESFA recalculated apprenticeship achievement rates, and automatically failed those apprentices with a break in learning that exceeded a contracted year.' (Vice Principal)

We are also still trying to work out why apprentices who work with people in Adult Care and Children should be so poorly funded.' (Senior Manager)

'In regards to the mess they have made of apprenticeship funding, I have no words.' (Tutor)

[18] House of Commons Select Committee of Public Accounts (December 2015) *Overseeing financial sustainability in the further education sector*. England: Crown p. 5

8.7 Other funding organisations

Contents

The above themes of poor funding levels and poor management of funding are by no means unique to ESFA. Comments from respondents about the operation of Local Enterprise Partnerships and the National Citizen Service strongly suggest that these issues are ubiquitous and symptoms of root-cause issues which may also lie in the Department for
Education and with the Secretary of State for Education.

> 'Convoluted bidding process with a high rate of failure for Skills Deal Funding in association with employers. Skills Deals Funding bids require the employer to submit the bid to the LEP *[Local Enterprise Partnerships]* regarding the skills that require support, and that they can match fund – in essence the employers come to the colleges anyway, and ask how we can resolve their skills needs.' (Vice Principal)

> 'In January 2017, the NAO *[National Audit Office]* found that "the cost per participant needed to fall by 29% to £1,314 in 2019 for the Trust to provide 300,000 places and stay within the funding envelope". In February 2017, the Commons Select Committee (CSC) and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) began an enquiry into whether NCS *[National Citizen Service]* offers good value for money to the taxpayer. This report was published on the 14 March 2017 and is awaiting a Government response. We are facing having to pull out of delivery of this excellent programme, because the restrictive funding rules mean that it is not fit for practice.' (Vice Principal)

Negative impact:	Destabilising of the sector, preventing medium- and long-term planning, and increasing redundancies, workloads and class sizes. Reducing opportunities for learners to engage with further education.
Root-cause issue 16:	Poor levels and poor management of funding.

9 League tables

Contents

9.1 The overwhelming consensus from respondents is that league tables are not in the best interests of learners and work actively against creating the conditions providers need for providing high-quality learning experiences for all.

> 'A source of limited information that people use to draw limitless and often inappropriate conclusions.' (Tutor)

9.2 Major concerns voiced by respondents are that the information used to generate the league table data is in no way representative of the whole range of learning programmes provided, and that the threat of a low league-table position causes inappropriate decision making.

League tables are not in the best interests of learners and work actively against creating the conditions providers need for providing high-quality learning experiences for all.

> 'League tables are dangerous and unhelpful as they strip out any meaningful context that a person would want to bear in mind when making any important judgements or decisions. My own college was reported as being at the bottom of the league table for vocational value added. We have about 9,000 learners in

> the college, mostly on apprenticeships which do not count, and this measure was being calculated on 12 learners. Of the 12 learners, they were nearly all doing the government 'flagship' Traineeship, and gaining jobs at a prestigious automotive manufacturing organisation. However, because there was a 6 month imposed duration limit on traineeships, the vocational qual within it is invariably narrower and therefore generates fewer points. Even the learners that had achieved a triple Distinction were shown to have a negative value added score! I had to be interviewed by the press in relation to our 'poor performance'!!' (Principal)
>
> 'The government/Ofsted obsession with league tables leads to perverse outcomes including cheating, not accepting learners who are at high risk of failure, and a whole range of unacceptable practices. The Ofsted stakes are high for colleges and this can result in wrong behaviours - many of which can be to the detriment of learners.' (Principal)

9.3 Cross-comparisons with school data is also felt to be unacceptable, due to different base-line data rules in each setting, which consider retention and pass rates differently.

> 'Because schools are judged on PASS rates and not ACHIEVEMENT rates as in the FE sector, some schools will withdraw students who are likely to FAIL their GCSEs, in order to preserve their PASS rate. This artificially inflates results, and disadvantages some learners.
> It also makes comparison with the FE sector (who are judged on RETENTION and PASS rates) impossible.' (Vice Principal)

Negative impact:	League tables are too often unrepresentative of a provider's work, yet can destroy their whole reputation. Due to the actual and perceived value placed on league tables by stakeholders such as Ofsted, ESFA and also the press, the temptation to make questionable decisions to influence rankings positively can be overwhelming. These can include denying learners access to provision.
Root-cause issue 17:	The publishing of achievement data in a league table – directly, or in such a way that it can be used by others to create a league table.

10 The FE & Skills sector's relationship with government

Contents

10.1 Respondents were given free-text space to answer the question: 'What would be your ideal relationship between the education sector and government?'

10.2 At the heart of over half of the comments was the need to remove direct policy-making from the short-term political agenda of a minister or government department. The creation of a body that could sustain a long-term vision of how to create the conditions for success for all, accountable to, but not a department of, government was a key goal.

> 'Accountable to, but not run by. A bit like the Bank of England monetary policy committee.'

'The education sector should have a long-term strategy that is removed from party politics.' (Other)

'Accountable to, but not run by. A bit like the Bank of England monetary policy committee.' (Middle Manager)

'Independent of government with laws protecting it from the whims of politicians. There should be a council made up of elected experts; past teachers, academics etc that discuss and set policy.' (Tutor)

'Minimum Government Minister influence - Michael Gove is a prime example of how that influence destroys education.' (Governor)

10.3 Similar suggestions include education being led by an all-party group, informed by expert education professionals.

'DfE separate but accountable – cross-party select committee in charge of steering/ governorship.' (Middle Manager)

'The education sector should be governed by a stable leadership of professionals with front-line experience in education. Government should not have a say in areas such as curriculum or teaching methods, they should only have a role in decisions such as funding and building new schools and monitoring progress at a national level.' (Tutor)

10.4 The theme of genuine dialogue and partnership with the sector is very strong throughout the comments, with a particular reminder that front-line staff should be part of this collaborative approach.

'They should be separate. An education 'principal' as such should be voted in; the term should be long enough to implement their terms as well as be held accountable for their failings. People within education: teachers, governors and heads of providers, should be involved in the voting process, as the future of the education system should be decided by the people who influence it or deliver it.' (Tutor)

'Long-term strategies created with cross-party consensus and new policy changes given enough time to embed.'

10.5 A coda to these discussions on the makeup of a new governing body for education is that once it is established, with the correct blend of education professionals and evidence-based research, strategies should be given time to embed and to fully realise the benefits of everyone's investment in making them work. The ultimate aim should be sustainable progress from a stable and successful base.

'Long-term strategies created with cross-party consensus and new policy changes given enough time to embed.' (Middle Manager)

'Evolution rather than revolution.' (Principal)

Negative impact:	Constant change and initiative overload leads to insufficient investment by front-line staff in quality improvement.
Root-cause issue 18:	Volatile policy making due to party-political ideology.

11 Additional themes for policy makers

'Do people who devise government education policy actually have any understanding of implementing these policies in a real institution with real students? There are so many terrible ideas coming out lately and so many poor strategies for implementing these changes over time.' (Middle Manager)

11.1 Parity of esteem between vocational and academic education

Contents

'Vocational courses are for Other People's Children. Civil servants and politicians have no connection to or understanding of the content or use of such provision and thus can't grasp what needs to change.' (Consultant)

'Vocational courses are for Other People's Children' is a common theme in the comments received on this subject. Recent government intervention has again attempted to resolve this issue; but will repackaging content and changing qualification names actually resolve the root-cause issues? Our study strongly suggests the issues to be resolved lie elsewhere.

Perceived parity by pupils in years 10 and 11 is essential if they are to make an informed decision about their education route, free from any stigma schools, parents or other pupils may attach.

11.2 Respondents were asked to rank a number of potential root-causes. Qualification content and qualification names came bottom of their list. Here are the top five potential reasons for the lack of parity of esteem between vocational and academic provision:

The lack of public awareness and understanding of vocational qualifications.	1
The perception in schools (of both staff and peers) that pupils choosing vocational/apprenticeship routes are 'weaker' learners.	2
The ability of vocational/apprenticeship providers to present themselves as an aspirational destination for all, including the most able, learners.	3
That lower-level vocational feeder courses do not contribute positively to schools' league-table positions.	4
The availability of degree-level vocational/apprenticeship qualifications to which learners can aspire (for instance, degree apprenticeships).	5

11.3 If we now look back at government's current resolution strategy, we can see that it will not impact positively on any of the above likely causes of the disparity. One respondent feels this failure is systemic.

'The public at large (and particularly employers) get confused with all the new 'qualifications' each session of Parliament feels like trying out as a potential good idea, while teachers waste hours wading

> through all the new decrees churned out each week - that time would be much more usefully spent in co-operating with the afore-mentioned experts (those who have most experience and the greater stake in young people's futures) to work out what would be most productive for each particular group of students or learners.' (Tutor)

11.4 It is also important for us to consider why this parity is important. It is not to prevent vocational graduates feeling in anyway inferior to their academic colleagues; our starting point should be that they do not. It is the perceived parity by pupils in years 10 and 11 that is essential if they are to make an informed decision about their education route, free from any stigma schools, parents or other pupils may attach.

> 'The value of a programme should have nothing to do with this notion of "parity of esteem". Many working people (from groups never really representative of policy makers) despise those who are A level/Uni educated so would not consider an "academic" education to have parity with a good solid BTEC and/or apprenticeship. The issue at stake should be whether a qualification is up to date, relevant, useful for employment, further learning etc. not whether it is considered to be equivalent to something else.' (Principal)

Parity of esteem requires more than uniformity of funding.

11.5 Some respondents were quick to point out a key finding from Lord Sainsbury's report on technical education: that his proposals require an increase of Study Programme funding to achieve the aims of the report.

> 'The reforms we have proposed can only be successful if they are supported by adequate funding. However, published evidence shows technical education in England is underfunded in comparison to other international systems. Funding per 16-19 year old in England pays for, on average, 20 hours per week, compared to, for example, 28 hours per week in Norway. *[This would represent an increase in study programme funding from 600 guided learning hours to 840.]*
>
> This limits programme size, teacher contact time, tailored support and advice, enrichment and the take-up of higher-cost subjects. This particularly impacts the highest quality technical education, where individuals learn practical skills, use specialist equipment and visit employers to learn skills on the job. All these activities are more expensive than academic provision: they require costly equipment, larger facilities and a lower teacher-student ratio (because practical work requires more supervision and in-class assessment).

11.6 Lord Sainsbury goes on to make his recommendation.

> *Recommendation 34:* We recommend the Government reviews what constitutes sufficient funding for technical education to deliver on its aims of meeting employer needs. This work should benchmark expenditure in England against that in other countries and be used to set appropriate funding levels for technical education when the new routes system is introduced.'[19]

11.7 One respondent quotes the following response from government:

[19] Sainsbury (April 2016) *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*. England: Crown p. 68.

'The Government's response in its Post-16 Skills Plan was: "We accept and will implement all of the Sainsbury panel's proposals, unequivocally *where that it is possible within current budget constraints*".' (Vice Principal)

11.8 Parity of esteem, then, requires more than uniformity of funding.

Negative impact:	Policy volatility and system instability, leading to confusion for learners, parents and employers fails to produce the outcome of parity of esteem.
Root-cause issue 19:	Improvement strategies not focused on the resolution of the underlying, root-cause issues. The underfunding of improvement initiatives, as well as vocational provision generally.

11.9 Area Reviews and mergers

Contents

The survey at the heart of this study was balanced in providing respondents with equal opportunity to say what had helped or hindered their ability to provide outstanding learning experiences for all. It is clear that most respondents chose to identify constructively the root-cause issues and decisions that have frustrated their attempts to do so. However, when we asked the question below, most respondents appeared uninterested in being constructive:

'Area Reviews have been a colossal waste of money.'

Does the creation of larger colleges help to create the ideal conditions to meet the needs of all potential learners and produce outstanding outcomes for all?

'The Area Reviews have been an expensive nonsense.' (Principal)

'The Area Review process has been a spectacular failure!' (Vice Principal)

'It's been a catastrophe for FE Colleges. It will be a disaster for those 14+ who want a vocational skill as they won't have access to them.' (Senior Manager)

'A merger has been disastrous for my college with four out of five English teachers choosing to leave the profession as a direct result.' (Tutor)

'This will ultimately reduce the offer of FE courses to learners.' (Tutor, row 29)

'Area Reviews have been a colossal waste of money, distracted senior teams from doing the day job, excluded a significant proportion of the sector in terms of school sixth forms, and the mergers themselves have cost an awful lot of money. The track record of merging failing/nonviable colleges, isn't a good one e.g. K college. Whoever thought up Area Reviews really didn't do their research!' (Vice Principal)

11.10 Does this last comment suggest that the architects of the Area Review programme were not clear about the positive impact on learning they wanted, nor risk-assessed the potential adverse impacts? There is certainly a significant tension in the government's initial guidance document, which sets out their steering aim on its first page:

'The work of the FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners has identified there is significant scope for greater efficiency in the sector, in a way that frees up resources to deliver high quality education and training which supports economic growth.'[20]

11.11 Tensions are clearly evident in the government's guidance document for Area Reviews.

'We will need to move towards fewer, often larger, more resilient and efficient providers. We expect this to enable greater specialisation, creating institutions that are genuine centres of expertise.

This will need to be done while maintaining broad universal access to high quality education and training from age 16 upwards for students of all abilities including those with special educational needs and disabilities.'[21]

11.12 These tensions are mirrored by our respondents' comments.

'The whole premise of Area Reviews was flawed.'

'Currently going through a merger and initially believed it would mean we'd spend less on SLT and admin and more on teaching, resources and SEND support - instead we have a larger management team with larger salaries, courses which will be moved to one campus so some learners cannot access it, limits on SEND support based on E and M level rather than need, mass teacher redundancies and disenfranchisement of teachers' voices to improve policy. There are no positives for learners.' (Tutor)

'You only have to look at the size of the colleges in receipt of notices to improve and notices of concern to identify that being part of a larger college does NOT guarantee high performance, either in quality or finance. The whole premise of Area Reviews was flawed.' (Principal)

'Larger colleges are very likely to (eventually) abandon less economically viable programmes or centres. In years to come, I would predict concerns about "further education" cold spots.' (Principal)

'It would appear that Area Reviews have learnt nothing from Regionalisation in Scotland and have refused to take advice in how to develop sustainable colleges.' (Other)

11.13 What lessons can be learnt about quality improvement from policy change driven by cost-saving rather than evidence-based intervention?

11.14 All comments made by respondents are in stark contrast to those of the Further Education Commissioner in his letter to Principals only a few months before this survey.

'It is encouraging that colleges are now seeing the area reviews as an opportunity rather than a threat and engaging fully in endeavouring to provide a stronger and more resilient sector at a time when it is most needed.' [22]

11.15 If this study's respondents' comments are representative of the whole sector, then the concerns of the Select Committee have not been allayed.

[20] HM Government (2015) *Reviewing post-16 Education and Training Institutions*. England: Crown p. 1.
[21] HM Government (2015) *Reviewing post-16 Education and Training Institutions*. England: Crown p. 2.
[22] FE Commissioner letter (October 2016) *Area reviews and reshaping the college sector: FE Commissioner letter* . England: Crown.

'It is unclear how area-based reviews of post-16 education, which are limited in scope, will deliver a more robust and sustainable further education sector. The departments appear to see the national programme of area-based reviews, which they announced in July 2015, as a fix-all solution to the sector's problems. But the reviews have the potential to be haphazard… Each review only covers further education and sixth form colleges, and does not include school and academy sixth forms or other types of provider. If a review concluded, for example, that there was over-provision of education for 16- to 19-year-olds in an area, it is not clear that this conclusion would have any influence over decisions regarding provision by local schools and academies. *Recommendation:* The departments need to demonstrate that the area-based reviews are taking a sufficiently comprehensive look at local provision taking into account all FE providers and school sixth forms, that they are fair, and that they result in consensus on sustainable solutions to meet local needs.[23]

Negative impact:	Inappropriate use of sector funding; poor track record of improving quality; increased travel time for learners; reduced access to specialist provision.
Root-cause issue 20:	Poor risk assessment of policy decisions. Imposed sector change does not command the respect or personal investment required to make it successful.

11.16 The risk-assessment of policy change

Contents

Following on from concerns raised in 11.9 Area Reviews, this section engaged respondents in consideration of the risk assessment of proposed policy change for potential adverse impact on learning. The survey asked respondents to rank eight statements on a continuum ranging from 'decision-making autonomy' to 'consultation'. The two lowest ranked statements arguably represent our current position, which are:

Ofsted should hold providers to account against new policies as soon as they come into force.	7
Policy makers must be able to take decisions without having to consider the pragmatic challenges providers will then face.	8

11.17 Ranked highest were:

Policy makers should work with sector representatives to complete an impact assessment of proposed changes.	1
Policy makers should consult on any changes to policy that might adversely affect providers.	2
Ofsted should work with the sector to mitigate the new challenges, rather than penalise immediately.	3

[23] House of Commons Select Committee of Public Accounts (December 2015), *Overseeing financial sustainability in the further education sector*. England: Crown. p. 6.

11.18 These statements could be interpreted as 'reverse accountability', ensuring that FE & Skills stakeholders continually and demonstrably act in the best interests of the sector and its current and future learners.

'Reverse accountability', ensuring that FE & Skills stakeholders continually and demonstrably act in the best interests of the sector and its current and future learners.

'All Ofsted did was hold providers to account against the new policy without actually taking any consideration of what was happening in real life.' (Tutor)

'One of the key problems in FE is constant unfettered "reform". I doubt whether any other part of the public sector has had such a disruptive set of continual reforms as those inflicted on FE colleges: reforms to qualifications are constant, resulting in disruption and confusion; funding reforms are frequent; teacher education reforms; reforms to apprenticeships, both curriculum and funding; reforms to staff development; Ofsted; QAA. If reform created a better sector, FE would be in heaven. It is rare that FE reforms are based on proper evidence and research and extremely rare that any consensus is sought from the sector prior to implementation.' (Principal)

'Policy makers should stick to one policy and properly resource it over a number of years instead of seeking to micro manage a whole sector.' (Governor)

'The FE college sector is run by the wrong people.' (Tutor)

'Surely someone has to point out to the Emperor that his new clothes are not achieving the desired results?' (Tutor)

'Policy makers should present cogent arguments from evidence-based practice, clear guidance and realistic implementation schedules.' (Tutor)

11.19 A final comment on this theme serves to sum up a golden thread throughout this study:

'Research in FE sector needed to identify the problems - then make policy based on research to address problems.' (Other)

Negative impact:	Formation of policy that negatively impacts on learning.
Root-cause issue 21:	Insufficient risk assessment of policy decisions for their potential negative impact on learning, and 'poor institutional memory'[24].

11.20 Should FE & Skills teachers hold a teaching qualification?

Contents

Yes	**94%**
No	**6%**

Despite the very high percentage of respondents stating that teachers should hold a teaching qualification, additional comments added nuances essential to a full understanding of this question.

[24] Norris, E & Adam, R (2017) All Change: Why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention, and what can be done about it. England, Institute for Government p. 3

11.21 Around a quarter of respondents were clear that while qualified status was indeed important, it should not be a barrier to *entry* into the sector. Almost half argued that a requirement to be qualified produced a valuable 'dual professionalism' for teachers in the FE and skills sector: as subject experts, and as educators.

> 'Those without should be supported to gain the appropriate qual within a given period.' (Principal)
>
> 'This is essential to providing outstanding education. This will also mitigate against 'teaching on the cheap' using any person who thinks they can teach due to the acute shortage of teachers. It may also get all stakeholders to respect teachers and to acknowledge their insane workload.' (Middle Manager)
>
> 'You may be a brilliant plumber, but it took a lot of time to train to that level. Likewise, it takes training and time to become a brilliant teacher; a dual professional.' (Tutor)
>
> 'It is good to have staff with recent vocational experience enter FE but they should have to undertake a CertEd/PGCE in their first year as a contractual obligation.' (Tutor)
>
> 'You cannot just "become" a teacher. You need a background in pedagogy and educational principles to make any impact on learning. I truly believe even if you are a natural teacher you would be better if you completed ITT.' (Tutor)

11.22 A signification minority or respondents were concerned about the content of current teaching qualifications. A salutary addition to this was that the rules on what constituted qualified status should not change continually as this is a disincentive to participation.

> '(Yes) Teaching is powerful (in a positive and negative sense). But teacher education needs to be RADICALLY reviewed, as it is not fit for purpose (speaking as a former teacher educator). (Middle Manager)
>
> 'PGCE is enough. No need for anything else like the stupid QTLS by the bureaucratic monster – the IFL.' (Other)
>
> 'But do not need an Institute or other body that they must join for 12 months until the next one appears.' (Principal)

Negative impact:	Lack of professionalism for the FE & Skills sector and the insufficient pedagogy skills of vocational specialists new to the teaching profession.
Root-cause issue 22:	Abolition of the rules requiring teachers in the FE & Skills sector to be qualified.

11.23 The role of a professional body in the FE and Skills sector

Contents

Respondents were asked to rank nine statements to show what they believed the role of a professional body in the FE & Skills sector should be. Answers across the statements were fairly evenly spread. All those statements receiving 10 percent or more in the ranking exercise are reproduced below.

To set sector standards for training and professional development.	1
To raise the profile and reputation of the sector with the outside public.	2
To conduct research that benefits members and the sector as a whole.	3
To provide guidance on government policy.	4
To provide an appropriate structure of career development for all staff in the sector.	5

11.24 It is clear from this ranking that respondents feel a sector body should conduct research, set standards for professional development, and raise the sector's profile. A number of respondents who gave additional comments feel that the Association of Colleges (AoC) does this well for the college part of the sector, while others fear the former Institute for Learning (IfL) had failed to make a sufficiently positive contribution. Other respondents recommended that a professional body should be member-funded, and so independent of government control; and a small number of comments urged us to remember that unions also have a key role to play in this area for work. It is interesting to note that neither the Society for Education and Training nor the Chartered College of Teachers were referred to by respondents.

> 'Sector professional bodies should be member-led and democratic. The IfL wasn't and neither is ETF. Unless professional bodies are member-led and democratic they will have no credibility among the professionals they claim to represent.' (Middle Manager)
>
> 'Anything would be better than the ineffective IfL, which only managed to produce four glossy magazines a year spouting the latest government mantra.' (Middle Manager)
>
> 'I don't think one is needed. It's window dressing. Providers and unions already fulfil these functions.' (Middle Manager)

Negative impact:	Insufficient respect for professional bodies that are not member-led and democratic.
Root-cause issue 23:	Government directive on professional body constitution.

12 Policy changes recommended by the FE & Skills

Contents

Section 3: Policy	
Negative impact	DfE Insufficient investment in or impact on sustainable quality improvement. (Page 12)
Root-cause issue 1	Policy volatility due to personality- and ideology-driven change.

Policy recommendation

- Recognise that policy volatility can do more harm than good
- Establish policy around the expert-learning skills learners need to function independently and successfully in the modern working environment
- Establish a cross-party group of political overseers
- Create a non-political body responsible for FE & Skills provision, staffed by education experts and advised by education researchers
- Establish a list of the stakeholders needed to create a successful FE & Skills system
- Establish the contribution each stakeholder will make to the conditions for success
- Set the substantive remit of each stakeholder to be their contribution to the conditions for successful impact on learning
- Require each stakeholder to set out how it will achieve its positive impact
- Require each stakeholder to self assess its impact on creating the conditions for success in line with its remit, to enable refinement of its contributions and the system overall
- Publish apolitical, education-focused, medium and long-term plans

Negative impact	Ofqual Diverted course hours from skills development and their application. (Page 13)
Root-cause issue 2	Introduction of terminal examinations and insufficient risk-assessment of potential adverse impacts on learning.

Policy recommendation

Precisely determine the skills most relevant to a given pathway, then use these skills to determine the assessment regime for that qualification. Consistency, or rather uniformity, is unimportant when compared to appropriateness – achieving the best positive impact on each type of learner.

This recommendation, to be clear about the ultimate impact of education ahead of any policy reform, is echoed by sector commentators such as Eddie Playfair, Principal of Newham Sixth Form College:

- 'Ask ourselves what we mean by an educated adult and try to describe our educational aspirations for all 16-19 year-olds, rather than allowing ourselves to be limited by the 'skills' agenda and our students to be characterised as either 'vocational' or 'academic'.[25]

[25] Playfair, E (1 January 2017) *Sixth form resolutions for 2017*. England, Blog.

Negative impact	DWP Poor client experience of and engagement with preparation for sustainable employment. (Page 14)
Root-cause issue 3	Short-term planning by DWP. Poor staff transition management. Insufficient risk-assessment of potential adverse impacts on learning.

Policy recommendation

Establish long-term funding, including periods of transition to enable providers to gear up or wind down to funding changes.

Undertake thorough human resource transition planning to ensure staff changes do not adversely affect providers and their learners.

Negative impact	Ofsted Increased number of providers labelled as 'failing', undermining their stability and reputation, and so the climate for improvement. (Page 15)
Root-cause issue 4	Lack of understanding by Ofsted of the pragmatic and learning implications of the GCSE English and maths policy change.

Policy recommendation

Recognise that challenges with resit GCSE English and maths are sector wide, and that down-grading providers because of these ubiquitous issues is unfair, inappropriate and detrimental to providers, potential learners and the sector as a whole. (See also recommendation 1, page 59.)

Section 4: Study programmes	
Negative impact	DfE Insufficient impact on the development of resit GCSE English and maths learners' literacy and numeracy skills. (Pages 18 to 20)
Root-cause issue 5	Change strategies focused on attempting to repair adverse symptoms rather than underlying root-cause issues, particularly the content of the resit qualifications and the irrelevance of some aspects to employability and progression.
Root-cause issue 6	Repeating the programme of study in which learners previously failed, in distilled cohorts of often unmotivated, disaffected learners.
Root-cause issue 7	Insufficient time to resolve fundamental barriers to learning these subjects.

Policy recommendation

Set out, by broad areas of learning, the essential literacy and numeracy skills for learners who do not wish to progress onto level-3 provision in English or maths. Create a range of new level-2 resit-only literacy and numeracy qualifications for each of the 15 broad areas of learning. Involve employers in the development of the qualifications to ensure that all English and maths skills are relevant to their broad vocational area. The aim is for the qualifications to be appropriate, useful and valuable, rather than uniform. The current Functional Skills qualifications are an ideal starting point for this work. *[This recommendation corresponds well to that made in the Sainsbury report.[26]]*

[26] Sainsbury (April 2016) *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*. England, Crown. p. 12.

Create a bank of resources to support the delivery of these new qualifications.

Set up action research projects to develop strategies for unblocking learners' dislike of these subjects and re-engaging them with this new relevance to their future.

Decouple judgements on these new level-2 qualifications from overall judgements by Ofsted for five years. This is to enable providers to take the risks needed to find, test and refine workable solutions to these perennial, sector-wide problems. Require Ofsted, instead, to evaluate the extent to which providers are engaging with research, planning and experimentation with the delivery of these subjects. The essential focus during this moratorium is on evaluation and learning, rather than exam pass rates. The tried and tested approach in schools demonstrably does not work for a quarter of learners who then progress into FE & Skills. Providers need to be confident that during their search for effective new approaches to deal with these learners' challenges they will need to take the risks associated with real innovation. Ofsted should then work hard to publish and promote effective practice during and beyond the sector's initial research phase. (See also recommendations 2 and 7, pages 60 and 63.)

Root-cause issue 8	Insufficient qualified/ experienced staff to teach the GCSE examinations leading to poor quality learning experience and larger class sizes.

Policy recommendation

The above strategy would also have the added benefit of putting the development of learners' vocationally-focused literacy and numeracy skills back into the hands of vocational teachers, so helping resolve the issue of too few specialist staff.

Negative impact	Ofsted The relationship between Ofsted and the FE sector has been undermined by inappropriate comparisons with the school sector. Adverse impact on inspection grades and unintended impact on successful out-of-scope aspects of provision. Learners denied access to FE providers specialising in their skill areas. (Page 21)
Root-cause issue 9	Ofsted policy on the inspection of resit GCSE English and maths.

Policy recommendation

Where an Ofsted grade of 3 or 4 will impact adversely on elements of a provider's work that are out of Ofsted's scope, a judgement should be made by the lead inspector on the limit or extent of this collateral damage. For instance, if a college's work with international students is separate from its in-scope work, and judged separately by its regulator, then the lead should recommend that its tier-4 licence should not be blocked. These judgements on out-of-scope impacts should be open to appeal.

Just as Ofsted expects providers to self assess their impact on learners, so Ofsted should self assess its impact on providers' ability to produce outstanding impacts on learners. This evaluation should whole-heartedly take into account the views of the providers it inspects. Ofsted should then use this evaluation as the basis of any revisions to its inspection methodology.

In all inspection reports and public pronouncements, Ofsted should also make a clear and public distinction between issues with individual providers, issues with which the whole sector is grappling, and unintended consequences of government policy decisions.

When making comparisons with schools, Ofsted should never undermine its credibility by using misaligned data. (See also recommendation 1, page 59.)

Negative impact	ESFA The ability to craft learning experiences that will enable GCSE English and maths resit learners to overcome the issues preventing them from succeeding. (Page 22)
Root-cause issue 4	Insufficient funding of new initiatives.

Policy recommendation

Notwithstanding previous comments about the proposed body governing Education, ESFA should work with the Department for Education to fully cost and risk-assess proposed policy changes. If insufficient funds are available to support policy change, an alternative strategy should be found.

Section 5: Work-experience policy	
Negative impact	Ofsted Diverting staff attention away from the development and evaluation of learners' employability skills. (Page 23)
Root-cause issue 11	An audit-led approach to evaluating work experience.

Policy recommendation

As it does throughout its Common Inspection Framework, Ofsted should set out an illustration of 'outstanding' and 'good' development of learners' employability skills to guide both the evaluation by inspectors and providers' strategies for achieving them. Ofsted should not audit learner activity as a proxy for learning impact, nor should it assume there is uniformly easy access to external work experience in every sector subject area. It is the acquisition of learning and skills, not the carrying out of tasks, which is of paramount importance. (See also recommendation 3, page 61.)

Section 6: Distractions from core teaching	
Negative impact	Ofsted The 'initiative driven' agendas required to be addressed in every lesson are preventing learners from immersing themselves in subject explorations and learning. (Page 25)
Root-cause issue 12	Short-notice inspection and its consequential requirement to be 'inspection ready' at all times, and the inspection agenda of perceived 'limiting grades'.

Policy recommendation

Ofsted rightly states that it has 'no preferred teaching style' and no preconceived idea of how a teacher should teach a lesson. However, this does not appear to be the case in practice. Ofsted should evaluate the extent to which its rhetoric impacts appropriately both on inspectors' work and the

way teachers maintain their inspection readiness – as demanded by Ofsted's short-notice approach and, as a consequence, providers' internal quality systems and triggers for capability.

Using 'Prevent' training as an instance of lesson distraction, (and notwithstanding the debate about whether it is an appropriate strategy and whether its consequences are actually opposite to those it intends) is it appropriate to include 'Prevent' training or references to the Prevent Duty in every lesson? Clearly the answer is 'no'. The implication of this for Ofsted is that it is highly likely that an inspection's lesson observation evidence base could contain no references to the Prevent Duty, as direct training and references would have happened in lessons outside of the inspection window.

Being publicly clear on this would prevent teachers from inappropriately shoehorning the agenda into far too many lesson where it can cause more damage than good. This damage is not just in terms of a backlash to the constant references made to these issues by 'the establishment', but more profoundly on a teacher's ability to plan and craft an immersive learning experience in which learners lose themselves in the vocational topic.

Here are Ofsted's current evaluative statements to support this view:

> 'Teaching and assessment methods and resources inspire and challenge all learners… enabling them to enjoy learning and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding.'
>
> 'Learners are curious, interested and keen to learn. They seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive in learning sessions.'

While inspection *practice* is interpreted as requiring teachers to include evermore external agendas in almost every lesson, the chance of achieving these excellent impacts are significantly reduced.

Other contenders for lesson distractions are: English and maths; equality and diversity; employability skills development; the direct setting of targets by teachers for every learner; the direct monitoring of targets by the teachers with every learner. If these agendas were trusted to the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as: analysis, problem-solving, synthesis, evaluation, learner critical reflection and communication, then these tensions would be resolved.

A recommendation specific to British Values and Prevent has been proposed by one respondent:

> 'The re-branding of the British Values System & Prevent to something accessible to all students at all colleges; to shift the focus from the national fear rhetoric to 'Community Citizenship'. This would allow for the principles of both to remain championed but in a format that actively encourages students and staff to participate. This could be a significant change that would also improve intelligence and reduce the radicalisation of people in the community.' (Other)

(See also recommendation 8 page 63.)

Section 7: Managing change	
Negative impact	Ofqual If staff are working in a continually changing, political-initiative driven environment, they will not invest the energy needed to make new initiatives successful, as they know another 'fundamental shake up of the system' will be hard on its heels. (Page 26)
Root-cause issue 13	Policy volatility

Policy recommendation

Set out the ideal skills development required of learners, within the context of a future where a significant proportion of the careers learners are being trained for do not yet exist – skills such as creativity, problem solving, project management, analysis, research, evaluation, critical reflection, and communication, and their transferability to different situations.

The short-term memorising of facts for testing in examinations is a poor proxy for real impact on learning and preparation for valuable contributions to society's future.

Responsibility for the long-term planning to achieve these outcomes should be given to a non-political body responsible for FE & Skills provision, staffed by education experts and advised by education researchers.

Any changes to the long-term plans should be rigorously risk-assessed for any potential for adverse impact on the central aims. Changes driven by political personalities are at the heart of the damaging policy volatility. Changes should also be thoroughly risk assessed to ensure that providers inspected in the period following the change are not disadvantaged.

Wherever possible, innovation should be driven by the sector, through the non-political body responsible and its co-opted education researchers. This is very much in line with a recommendation by The Institute for Government:

'Outsiders – including external experts and citizens – should be involved in the policy development process, to strengthen the basis of the policy and generate a broad coalition for change that will increase the possibility of the policy enduring, even when political interest wanes.'[27]

[27] Norris, E & Adam, R (2017) *All Change: Why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention, and what can be done about it*. England, Institute for Government p.8

Negative impact	Ofsted The perceived effectiveness, and as a result, the actual effectiveness of the FE & Skills system. (Page 27)
Root-cause issue 14	Policy volatility, personal political agendas, insufficient understanding of the FE & Skills sector by the Chief Inspector, and poor risk assessment of policy change.

Policy recommendation

Notwithstanding all comments above, Ofsted should consult on *the changes it should make to its inspection methodology and framework*, rather than on its own ideas about what these changes should be.

Along with Ofqual and the DfE, Ofsted should also thoroughly risk-assess any policy changes that affect providers to ensure that those inspected in the period following the change are not disadvantaged.

Negative impact	ESFA Destabilising of providers' financial position and increased bureaucracy distract leaders and managers from their primary work on learning, and prevent innovation and improvement. (Page 29)
Root-cause issue 15	Ill-conceived policy changes with insufficient understanding of impact on providers, and lack of capacity within ESFA to manage change.

Policy recommendation

ESFA should recognise the significant detrimental impact on learners of poorly supported policy changes.

ESFA should only develop and promote policy it can support effectively. Funding rules should be transparent, fair and unambiguous. ESFA should have complete confidence in its staff's understanding of the rules and their ability to train the sector so that providers are not destabilised or disadvantaged.

Funding rules should promote long-term planning by providers to ensure the stability of provision for future learners and the investment by providers in meeting new initiatives.

Section 8: Funding	
Negative impact	ESFA and others Destabilising of the sector, preventing medium- and long-term planning, and increasing redundancies, workloads and class sizes. Reducing opportunities for learners to engage with further education. (Page 31)
Root-cause issue 16	Poor levels and poor management of funding.

Policy recommendation

ESFA should recognise the significant detrimental impact on learners of insufficiently funded policy changes.

ESFA should only develop, support and promote policy it can fund sufficiently.

Funding should promote long-term planning by providers to ensure the stability of provision for current and future learners and investment by providers in meeting new initiatives.

Section 9: League tables	
Negative impact	League tables are too often unrepresentative of a provider's work, yet can destroy their whole reputation. Due to the actual and perceived value placed on league tables by stakeholders such as Ofsted, ESFA and also the press, the temptation to make questionable decisions to influence rankings positively can be overwhelming. These can include denying learners access to provision. (Page 33)
Root-cause issue 17	The publishing of achievement data in a league table – directly, or in such a way that it can be used by others to create a league table.

Policy recommendation

Ensure data is managed securely and sensitively for the benefit of learners and the providers that serve them. Prevent the publication of league tables or the raw data from which others can produce them. Instead, invest more in positive, supportive strategies, such as the writing and promotion of case studies of successful practice, from which all can learn.

Section 10: The FE & Skills sector's relationship with government	
Negative impact	Constant change and initiative overload leads to insufficient investment by front-line staff in quality improvement. (Page 35)
Root-cause issue 18	Volatile policy making due to party-political ideology.

Policy recommendation

Action research to inform all sector developments by an education body independent of government, which is provided with sufficient funding and stability from which to grow and improve.

Section 11.1: Parity of esteem between vocational and academic education	
Negative impact	Policy volatility and system instability, leading to confusion for learners, parents and employers fails to produce the outcome of parity of esteem. (Page 38)
Root-cause issue 19	Improvement strategies not focused on the resolution of the underlying, root-cause issues. The underfunding of improvement initiatives, as well as vocational provision generally.

Policy recommendation

Policy makers should work with sector representatives to identify root-cause issues that need to be addressed, the positive difference any changes should make to learning, how these positive changes will be measured, the cost of and support for any changes, and to risk assess the potential for adverse impact on learning.

Section 11.8: Area Reviews and mergers	
Negative impact 20	Inappropriate use of sector funding; poor track record of improving quality; increased travel time for learners; reduced access to specialist provision. (Page 40)
Root-cause issue	Poor risk assessment of policy decisions. Imposed sector change does not command the respect or personal investment required to make it successful.

Policy recommendation

[As above]

Section 11.14: The risk-assessment of policy change	
Negative impact	Formation of policy that negatively impacts on learning. (Page 42)
Root-cause issue 21	Insufficient risk assessment of policy decisions for their potential negative impact on learning, and 'poor institutional memory'.

Policy recommendation

Policy makers should work with sector representatives to complete an impact assessment of proposed changes, then work with the sector to develop the policy, implementation plan and on-going support to fully mitigate the challenges and make the policy a success.

Section 11.18: Should FE & Skills teachers hold a teaching qualification?	
Negative impact	Lack of professionalism for the FE & Skills sector and a reduction in pedagogy skills of vocational specialists new to the teaching profession. (Page 43)
Root-cause issue 22	Abolition of the rules requiring teachers in the FE & Skills sector to be qualified.

Policy recommendation

Reintroduction of mandatory teacher training to raise the professional expectations and skills of teachers in the sector.

Section 11.21: The role of a professional body in the FE and Skills sector	
Negative impact	Insufficient respect for professional bodies that are not member-led and democratic. (Page 44)
Root-cause issue 23	Government directive on professional body constitution.

Policy recommendation

Government (or the independent body set up to lead and manage education) to provide the infrastructure for member-led and democratic professional body representation to oversee the commissioning and dissemination of research and associated findings.

13 Further recommendations for Ofsted

This section is a supplement to, and should be read in conjunction with, the recommendations for Ofsted in section 12.

13.1 Inspection

Contents

Can the root of providers' issues with Ofsted be found in a phrase that lies at the core of inspection practice: 'To inspect without fear or favour'?

13.2 Its intentions are clearly honourable, though a moment's consideration shows an implicit arrogance from the Ofsted executive that we would surely hope does not manifest in inspection practice: *that inspectors do not care about the medium- and long-term damage the inspection process has on learners*.

Readers may be forgiven if their first reactions to this recommended philosophical change is thoughts of tokenistic or watered-down inspection practice.

13.3 In their comments to this study, respondents are clear that they would like a different rhetoric: that Ofsted cares so deeply about its impact on the sector that it will risk-assess all of its policies, frameworks and inspection methodology to ensure that it does not damage, directly or inadvertently, the fabric of the sector and so disadvantage current and future learners.

> 'The power of Ofsted in FE is almost overwhelming and blindly accepted by many. They are in fact largely a stick designed to beat colleges into adopting government policies regardless of the quality and relevance of those policies to learners.' (Principal)

13.4 Readers may be forgiven if their first reactions to this recommended philosophical change is thoughts of tokenistic or watered-down inspection practice; but what are the alternatives?

13.5 Ofsted reports

Contents

Arguably, in the increasingly distant past, teachers would publish their learners' test results on noticeboards without fear or favour, confident in the knowledge that naming and shaming learners who were struggling would somehow help these learners to succeed. In class, teachers may deliberately play on learners' vulnerabilities, particularly if their skills were not first and foremost about regurgitating facts, to make the point that they should work harder.

13.6 In the 21st Century, however, pedagogy in further education has moved on. The sector now knows that in order for learners to overcome their blocks, we must help them discover what these are, then assist with strategies to overcome them. For this, building confidence and the motivation to succeed are essential. And it is clear from the ideals set out in the Common Inspection Framework that Ofsted wholeheartedly agrees:

- 'Learners are curious, interested and keen to learn. They seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive in learning sessions.

- Staff are determined that learners achieve well. They have excellent subject knowledge and motivate and engage learners who enjoy the work they complete. Staff have consistently high expectations of all learners' attitudes to learning…' [28]

13.7 To achieve this, demands an environment conducive to learning and a determination not to undermine learners' endeavours.

Ofsted does not appear to know how to practise what it preaches.

13.8 If we replace 'learners' with 'providers', and 'staff' with 'Ofsted' in the above statements, we begin to see the type of environment the inspectorate needs to create in order to achieve the same successes with those in its charge:

- '*Providers* are curious, interested and keen to learn. They seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive.'
- *Ofsted* is determined that *providers* achieve well. It has excellent subject knowledge and motivates and engages *providers* who enjoy the work they complete. *Ofsted* has consistently high expectations of all providers' *attitudes to learning*…'

13.9 In fact, Ofsted already has a comment very similar to these in its *Handbook for Inspectors*, designed to influence how leaders create the right learning environment for staff:

- 'Staff reflect on and debate the way they teach. They feel deeply involved in their own professional development. Leaders have created a climate in which staff are motivated and trusted to take risks and innovate in ways that are right for their learners.'[29]

13.10 The irony, then, is that Ofsted does not appear to know how to practise what it preaches. Here are some illustrative comments from the sector:

> 'OFSTED grading of FE colleges should be abolished, it is the most destructive force in further education.' (Other)
>
> 'Recommendations from Ofsted: they change considerably from one inspection to another; by this I mean not only from one inspection cycle to another, but from one quarter to another in any given year. Clear themes and change of focus in evidence. English & Maths was certainly not a limiting grade, yet it was perfectly obvious that that was exactly how judgements of EM were being reached. *[The]* translation of school performance measures into the world of FE, despite the radical differences in age groups, breadth, type and level of curricula; the measures are crude, flawed, partial and statistically unsound.' (Principal)
>
> 'Management jump around after Ofsted designing new policies in order to look good. They aren't sincere. They change the policies as soon as Ofsted takes up a new theme. If they believed in the policies, they'd do them regardless of what Ofsted or anyone else thought.' (Tutor)

13.11 So what should Ofsted publish?

[28] Ofsted (2015) *The Common Inspection Framework*. England: Ofsted.
[29] Ofsted (2015) *Further education and skills inspection handbook*. England: Ofsted. p. 39.

'Like you would do with students - praise them publicly for what they are doing right and deal with areas for improvement privately. Encouragement is key!' (Tutor)

'Name and shame is not a supportive policy, it creates a culture of fear and stress. Ofsted's role should be one of support, of the type we are expected to offer students.' (Tutor)

Acknowledge sector-level, as distinct from provider-level, issues.

Recommendation 1

13.12 To acknowledge sector-level, as distinct from provider-level, issues – for instance, the challenge of developing the literacy and numeracy skills of learners who have failed in the school system and do not wish to continue on to study A-level English or maths. To work with the sector to identify or hypothesise the root causes of these sector-wide issues, and to publish case studies showing strategies for overcoming them. (See also issues 4 and 9, section 12)

13.13 In acknowledging the difference between sector-level and provider-level issues, only the latter should impact adversely on the grade for overall effectiveness.

'Staff in FE are experts in judging which students will benefit most from GCSE and which from FS *[Functional skills]*. Despite the rhetoric, employers do not actually want GCSE EM *[English and maths]*. They think they do; they have been told they do. But what they actually want is a reasonable standard of literacy and numeracy in their employees, and for this FS is a very effective learning route.' (Principal)

Recommendation 2

13.14 To foster, sponsor and value a culture of longer-term, sustainable research and organisational learning in all providers, avoiding distortions caused by the short-term accountability agenda.

13.15 Long-term, sustainable quality improvement comes from a cultural, whole-organisation approach to capacity to improve, and the risk-taking associated with the innovation required to solve these ubiquitous issues. Ofsted should make this its steer for providers, and so avoid the scrabble for short-term fixes that demonstrably fail and fail again.

13.16 The degree to which sector-level problems are resolved by individual providers should not, then, contribute to any grading for a period of five years; so fostering the 'climate in which staff are motivated and trusted to take risks and innovate in ways that are right for their learners.'[30] (See also issue 5, section 12)

'I would much prefer to see Ofsted moving to a model of oversight of a peer development and review.' (Principal)

'Work needs to be done to encourage colleges to give Ofsted a true image of what happens, rather than a rose tinted version, in order to get real support and evaluation.' (Tutor)

[30] Ofsted (2015) *Further education and skills inspection handbook*. England: Ofsted. p. 39.

Recommendation 3

13.17 To find new ways to evaluate providers' success in developing learners' employability skills that do not rely on the proxy of auditing the quantity of external work placements. Ofsted should work with the sector to identify the positive impact providers ideally need to have on learners' employability skills. Correct inspection practice (the evaluation of impact, not the auditing of activity) should then be used to evaluate the extent to which these employability skills have been developed – opening up many more possibilities for their development and positive impact. (See also issue 11, section 12)

Recommendation 4

13.18 As often reported by the former Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the change in inspection emphasis around GCSE resit English and maths and work experience in September 2014 has resulted in many more providers receiving a judgement of 'requires improvement' or worse. The publishing of detailed reports of the extent to which providers are not meeting Ofsted's new foci is designed to give prospective learners better information about where to study. This logic then suggests that some learners, arguably the more academically able, will be put off joining a college Ofsted deems to be underperforming. Ironically, these more academically able learners would not be concerned about policies around resit GCSE English or maths, and yet will now be denying themselves access to potentially high quality vocational provision.

Ofsted's public denouncements become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

13.19 In short, the content of Ofsted's reports can severely damage providers' reputations, making it harder to recruit more able learners, and so increase the proportion of learners who may not go on to achieve high grades, when compared to the institutions these learners go on to study with. Ofsted's public denouncements become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

13.20 To break this cycle, Ofsted should adopt the approach that a commercial organisation would take when working to improve its quality: publish what it is good at, and work hard on the areas it is not. This improvement plan should of course, still receive regular commentary from providers' link inspectors.

The clear emphasis from these respondents is that Ofsted should work for the sustainable benefit of the FE & Skills sector, but that it currently does not.

> 'I would like to see a radical shift in emphasis from Ofsted: from a judgemental audit where the stakes are very high for colleges (which often suffer from the inconsistencies of inspectors) to a developmental "inspection" from practitioners who are qualified and able to make suggestions for improvement.' (Principal)
>
> 'Ofsted should be abolished and replaced by education improvement agencies staffed by skilled, experienced and knowledgeable practitioners to provide training and support to the weakest providers in each sector, with a system of peer review and support.' (Senior Manager)

13.21 The clear emphasis from these respondents is that Ofsted should work for the sustainable benefit of the FE & Skills sector, but that it currently does not.

Recommendation 5

13.22 To use its considerable data analysis resources to analyse the root causes of sector-wide issues. To make recommendations to the Education

and Training Foundation or its replacement on appropriate research projects, and recommendations to government about policy changes that would enable the resolution of these issues at provider level.

13.23 Only five percent of respondents feel that Ofsted should continue to publish detailed inspection reports.

> 'There should also be acknowledgement of the impact of 7 years of austerity (and counting) instead of expecting the best possible standards on basement-budget funding and what schools are able to achieve with 25% more funding and a much simpler curriculum.' (Principal)
>
> 'Ofsted (should) 'grow a pair' and tell the DfE when they are distorting the sector with ill-informed policy decisions (eg Condition of Funding).' (Principal)

Recommendation 6

13.24 Inspection phrases such as: 'It is too early to judge the impact of this new initiative' appear regularly in reinspection reports. Notwithstanding recommendation 5, Ofsted should continue to recognise and value the often very great endeavour behind these phrases, but work with providers to determine the most appropriate time for reinspection, so that inspection time is not wasted, and impact can be evaluated effectively.

> 'I was astonished at the degree to which inspectors extrapolated from single events, or exaggerated the 'negatives' of what they observed.'

Recommendation 7

13.25 To work with the sector to risk-assess all policy changes for adverse impacts on providers and their learners. It should then use this analysis to influence the design, roll out and support for the new policies. Ofsted should also build in a moratorium so that providers inspected in the immediate aftermath of policy change are not unfairly disadvantaged. Ofsted should work to regain its positive reputation and avoid further comments from sector professionals such as the following:

> 'Ofsted should be abolished. Its overall impact is extremely damaging. Because the stakes are so high, it means that providers have to devote a disproportionate amount of time and effort to being 'Ofsted ready', so that Ofsted becomes the most important client, far above learners and employers. It also encourages gaming, training to meet the CIF and studying Ofsted reports to identify their latest hobby-horses. It is a total distraction from the needs of learners.' (Senior Manager)
>
> 'Our last Ofsted inspection was a fiasco. We got a Good grade overall, but we absolutely do not recognise and refute aspects of the published report which were never even discussed during the inspection. I have been involved in working with inspectorates regularly since 1994 and held them in high regard until about 4 years ago when I saw a marked deterioration in the calibre of HMIs particularly. They have got low credibility with me now.' (Principal)

(See also issues 13 and 14, section 12)

Recommendation 8

13.26 To forcefully restate to its inspectors and the sector that it has no predetermined idea of *how* a teacher should teach a lesson. This should include the explicit directive that, whilst valuable, additional agendas such as training on the Prevent Duty,

the development of English, maths and employability skills, overt equality and diversity promotion, use of information technology, etc. are required to be covered in a scheme of work, but not in every lesson. (See also issue 12, section 12)

> 'I was astonished at the degree to which inspectors extrapolated from single events, or exaggerated the 'negatives' of what they observed.' (Principal)

Further recommendations for Ofsted can be found in section 12.

14 Conclusion: The collaborative FE and Skills system

Contents

14.1 Respondents were asked to evaluate:

- the extent to which 'stakeholders in the FE & Skills sector work together effectively to create the ideal conditions for producing outstanding outcomes for all'.

The vast majority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

14.2 Over 40 percent of respondents who added comments said they feel that policy is made 'top down' and that there is no effective consultation to understand either the impact of proposed changes, or for the reality of work in FE and Skills to influence policy making.

'Too many divergent priorities… There is no consultation or discussion.' (Vice Principal)

'Very top down. Government does not take into account other bodies' views.' (Tutor)

'Policies are often conflicting and do the opposite of support each other.' (Tutor)

14.3 A further third of respondents feel that stakeholders work in silos, looking after their own interests rather than what is best for learners.

'All appear to be working in their own silos with little discernible effective interaction in pursuit of common goals.' (Principal)

'It feels like the stakeholders… are more interested in pushing their own agendas and winning headlines than in working together to improve the sector.' (Tutor)

'Government do not want collaboration, they desire education on the cheap only.' (Middle Manager)

14.4 Given these serious and well-articulated concerns, what could a collaborative FE and Skills System look like? To begin to address this challenge, the study asked respondents to consider the most effective quality improvement strategies they had used to enable them to increase positive impact on learning. Collaboration quickly emerged as an important theme, as illustrated by the following comments:

'Creation of a teaching and learning hub in the college.' (Principal)

'Introducing philosophical enquiry as a strategy across the college to give teachers a way to develop their questioning techniques with students.' (Vice Principal)

'A well-run provider forum is very useful.' (Senior Manager)

'I find more from other teaching members of staff in one week than from Ofsted or senior management in a whole year.' (Tutor)

'We learn from people who are active in the sector, not policy writers.' (Middle Manager)

'Subject blogs and conferences are the best places to learn new strategies. There are a lot of talented people out there to learn from.' (Tutor)

14.5 Respondents were also asked to rank a number of statements showing a range of quality improvement strategies. This ranking again shows collaboration to be the most effective approach, with recommendations from Ofsted and the DfE to be the least effective:

Strategies you've been able to learn from colleagues.	1
Strategies you've learnt from people or organisations outside of your own.	2
Strategies for which you have read or heard about improvement evidence.	3
Strategies you've been given or had recommended to you by senior members of your organisation.	4
Recommendations in other providers' Ofsted reports.	5
Recommendations from your Ofsted report.	6
Government strategies	7

14.6 In a further ranking exercise, respondents were asked to identify the most likely impact on the sector of a shared understanding of how to create the conditions for successful learning. From a choice of 10 statements, three quarters of respondents identified the following as their top three:

The sector's ability to produce outstanding outcomes for all learners would increase.	1
There would be higher morale amongst the FE workforce.	2
Decisions would be moderated by knowledge of how they would help or undermine the sector's ability to produce success for all.	3

14.7 The Education and Training Foundation

Contents

Clearly, bodies such as The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) are attempting to be part of the solution proposed above. However, 25 percent of respondents who added a commentary, covering almost all roles from principal to tutor, feel that ETF has had no impact, or is a waste of money.

Negative comments about ETF's work could be at least partly because of a failure of its strategies to promote the new learning it generates.

'ETF's role as pseudo prof body - undemocratic nature, not valued by lecturers.' (Middle Manager)

'The ETF has made no difference to the sector on the ground. Most FE staff do not know it is their professional body unless they have recently done teacher training courses or applied for QTLS.' (Tutor)

14.8 However, almost two-thirds of respondents who added a commentary are supportive of ETF's work. Specifically, they value the project and research work it instigates, the training (particularly around the delivery of English and maths), the sharing of practice, and in helping with staff recruitment.

'Sharing innovative delivery strategies.' (Principal)

'Improved supply of English and maths teachers.' (Principal)

'Closer working with employers and innovation in learning and teaching using the internet.' (Senior Manager)

'Staff involved in action research.' (Senior Manager)

'Providing sensible funding for me to do creative work which had genuine positive impact on students' self-confidence and self-efficacy.' (Middle Manager)

'Colleges working across boundaries and learning from each other. Supporting collaborative training days and other learning for the sector.' (Middle Manager)

14.9 This may suggest that negative comments about ETF's work could be at least partly because of a failure of its strategies to promote the new learning it generates.

14.10 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Contents

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is also applauded for its collaborative approach. A third of respondents who commented positively on its work praise the clarity of its criteria and how this helps providers focus on quality improvement. They value its collegiate approach and its flexibility over scheduling.

'Helps managers to focus on quality assurance & improvement.' (Principal)

'QAA kindly rescheduled the visit *(as)* our Assistant Principal for HE had to have emergency surgery on her back, just before our QAA Institutional Review.' (Vice Principal)

'The QAA's review was excellent.' (Middle Manager)

'More collegiate, nuanced approach to inspection.' (Middle Manager)

Providers clearly have a very different view of their work and relationship with the two inspectorates. Ofsted would do well to examine QAA's practice for any lessons it could learn.

14.11 In conclusion, taking into account the above views and those expressed elsewhere in this study, the sector's vision of a system that would produce systemic success could be articulated as follows.

- Recognise that policy volatility can do more harm than good
- Establish policy around the expert-learning skills learners need to function independently and successfully in the modern working environment
- Establish a cross-party group of political overseers
- Create a non-political body responsible for FE & Skills provision, staffed by education experts and advised by education researchers
- Establish a list of the stakeholders needed to create a successful FE & Skills system
- Establish the contribution each stakeholder will make to the conditions for success
- Set the substantive remit of each stakeholder to be their contribution to the conditions for successful impact on learning
- Require each stakeholder to set out how it will achieve its positive impact
- Require each stakeholder to self assess its impact on creating the conditions for success in line with its remit, to enable refinement of its contributions and the system overall
- Publish apolitical, education-focused, medium and long-term plans

Appendix 1: Survey methodology and profile of respondents

Contents

The Policy Consortium is independent of any funding or policy influence and members have given their time freely to this study. We would like to acknowledge the support of TES, our media partner, and thank them for their assistance with both the promotion of the survey instrument and the dissemination of the study's findings.

Approach

This fourth annual survey was opened for responses on 29 May and closed on 1 July, 2017. Using an on-line tool, the survey was designed to explore views of people with an interest in the FE & Skills sector. It aimed to explore the context in which providers work and discover what was at the root of their ability to provide high-quality learning experiences for all, or what prevented them from doing so. Respondents were offered the chance to write free-text responses throughout the survey, including an opportunity comment on any area they felt had not been covered by our questions.

Respondents

By survey close, 562 responses had been submitted. The spread of respondents, as shown below, mirrors well the makeup of many providers in the FE & Skills sector:

Principal/CEO	7%
Vice Principal or similar	8%
Governor/board member/trustee	2%
Senior manager	10%
Middle manager	19%
Tutor/lecturer	39%
Support/administrator	6%
Inspector	1%
Consultant	3%
Other (please specify)	6%

Respondents' employment status also matched well to expected rates.

Full time	74%
Part time more than 0.5	18%
Part time less than 0.5	4%
Casual hours	2%
Agency	1%
Other (please specify)	2%

Representation from the various remits within the FE & Skills sector was less than ideal, being primarily from general FE colleges, though this is perhaps broadly in line with the distribution of learners throughout the sector.

General FE/Tertiary college	73%
Sixth form college	5%
16-19 academy/school sixth form	1%
University Technical College	1%
Specialist college	6%
Dance and Drama school or college	0%
Private/independent training provider	4%
DWP provider (including New Deal and Workstep provision)	0%
learndirect provider	1%
nextstep provider	0%
Employer provider	0%
Adult and community learning provider	3%
Third sector training provider	1%
Local authority	1%
Prison	1%
Young offender institution	0%
Immigration removal centre	0%
Higher Education Institution	2%
Sector support organisation and/or membership body	2%
Government body/department	1%
None – wholly independent	0%
Other (please specify)	2%

The Policy Consortium would like to take this opportunity to thank all respondents for taking the time to complete this searching study.

To complement our primary research evidence-base, the study team also referred to the following recent publications, speeches and blogs:

- House of Commons Select Committee of Public Accounts (December 2015) *Overseeing financial sustainability in the further education sector*. England: Crown
- Sainsbury (April 2016) *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*. England, Crown.
- Birkinshaw, A (23 September 2017) *Government 'starving' post-16 education, says AoC president*. England, TES
- Norris, E & Adam, R (2017) *All Change: Why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention, and what can be done about it*. England, Institute for Government
- Michael Gove (11 June 2013) *Oral statement to Parliament on education reform*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/oral-statement-on-education-reform
- Ofsted (2017) *Sussex Downs College inspection report*. England: Ofsted
- Ofsted (2016) *Short inspection of Leeds College of Art*. England: Ofsted
- HM Government (2015) *Reviewing post-16 Education and Training Institutions*. England: Crown
- FE Commissioner letter (October 2016) *Area reviews and reshaping the college sector: FE Commissioner letter* . England: Crown.
- Playfair, E (1 January 2017) *Sixth form resolutions for 2017*. England, Blog.
- Ofsted (2014) *How do Ofsted inspectors evaluate teaching in the further education and skills sector?* England: Ofsted.
- Ofsted (2015) *The Common Inspection Framework*. England: Ofsted.
- Ofsted (2015) *Further education and skills inspection handbook*. England: Ofsted.

Appendix 2: FE and Skills Stakeholders

Contents

As this study was primarily looking at stakeholders with responsibility for setting policy, the list of organisations consulted on was necessarily limited.

- Government departments
    - Department for Education
    - Department for Work & Pensions
- Funding bodies
    - Education & Skills Funding Agency
    - Department for Work & Pensions
- Quality improvement bodies
    - Education & Training Foundation
- Regulatory bodies
    - Ofsted
    - Ofqual
    - QAA

For a more detailed list of FE and Skills Stakeholders, please visit the following wiki, and feel free to add any organisations you feel are missing.

Appendix 3: Secretaries of State responsible for Learning and Skills provision

Contents

	Secretary of State or equivalent	Date from	Term	Party
37	Damian Hinds	10 January 2018	New	Con
36	Justine Greening	14 July 2016	1y6m	Con
35	Nicky Morgan	15 July 2014	2y	Con
34	Michael Gove	11 May 2010	4y2m	Con
33	Ed Balls	5 June 2009	0y11m	Lab
32	John Denham	28 June 2007	2y	Lab
31	Alan Johnson	5 May 2006	1y1m	Lab
30	Ruth Kelly	15 December 2004	1y5m	Lab
29	Charles Clarke	24 October 2002	2y2m	Lab
28	Estelle Morris	8 June 2001	1y4m	Lab
27	David Blunkett	2 May 1997	4y1m	Lab
26	Gillian Shephard	20 July 1994	2y10m	Con
25	John Patten	10 April 1992	2y3m	Con
24	Kenneth Clarke	2 November 1990	1y5m	Con
23	John MacGregor	24 July 1989	1y4m	Con
22	Kenneth Baker	21 May 1986	3y2m	Con
21	Sir Keith Joseph	14 September 1981	4y8m	Con
20	Mark Carlisle	5 May 1979	2y4m	Con
19	Shirley Williams	10 September 1976	2y8m	Lab
18	Fred Mulley	10 June 1975	1y3m	Lab
17	Reginald Prentice	5 March 1974	1y3m	Lab
16	Margaret Thatcher	20 June 1970	3y9m	Con
15	Edward Short	6 April 1968	2y2m	Lab
14	Patrick Gordon Walker	29 August 1967	0y8m	Lab
13	Anthony Crosland	22 January 1965	2y7m	Lab
12	Michael Stewart	18 October 1964	0y3m	Lab
11	Quintin Hogg	1 April 1964	0y6m	Con
10	Sir Edward Boyle, Bt	13 July 1962	1y9m	Con
9	David Eccles	14 October 1962	0y9m	Con
8	Geoffrey Lloyd	17 September 1957	5y1m	Con
7	The Viscount Hailsham (Quintin Hogg)	13 January 1957	0y8m	Con
6	David Eccles	18 October 1954	2y3m	Con
5	Florence Horsbrugh	2 November 1951	2y11m	Con
4	George Tomlinson	10 February 1947	4y9m	Lab
3	Ellen Wilkinson	3 August 1945	1y6m	Lab
2	Richard Law	25 May 1945	0y3m	Con
1	Rab Butler	3 August 1941	3y9m	Con

From 1941 to 2018 (73 years) there have been 37 Secretaries of State responsible for Learning and Skills provision (excluding Hogg's second term). An average of two years.

Appendix 4: Comparison of school and FE resit results for GCSE English and maths

Contents

From almost the beginning of his term as Ofsted's chief inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, repeatedly berated the FE & Skills sector for its lack of GCSE English and/or maths success when compared to pupils in the school system.

> "The FE sector is in a mess. It's not very good; our view at Ofsted [is] that youngsters who don't do well at 16 often don't do well two years later, particularly in English and maths where results are pretty poor."[31]

Unfortunately for both Sir Michael and the FE & Skills sector, his comparative data showed an arguably wilful flaw in his evidence base. The consequences of this flaw have reverberated through inspections in which poor GCSE English and maths resit results have played a significant part in providers' public humiliation as they are labelled Ofsted failures.

Wilshaw often quotes his own Mossbourne Academy results of around 80 percent as a backdrop for deriding FE & Skills rates of around 30 percent.

However, it only takes a moment's investigation to see that the comparison between schools and FE & Skills should not be between first-time sitting and resitting, respectively, but resit results alone.

In November 2016, the resit results for entrants from all provider types were just:

> 36% for English (22,153 entrants), and
> 27% for Maths (15,376 entrants).

In November, 2017, the picture was very similar:

> 33% for English (26,315), and
> 31% for Maths (30,908).

Of the exam boards analysed (OCR, AQA and Pearson) only Pearson provide disaggregated data by provider type. Data for English show the relative number of entrants from schools and FE to be 79% and 21%, and relative achievement rates of 39% and 29%.
For maths, the relative number of entrants are 72% and 28%, with achievement rates of 29% and 23% for schools and FE respectively.

Whatever the detail, it is absolutely clear that the challenges faced by resit learners are present in both settings, and there is little difference in their success in meeting them. The root-cause issues of underperformance lies elsewhere.

[31] Sir Michael Wilshaw (2016) *Presentation to the Education Select Committee*. England: TES (2 March, 2016).

		Nov-16			Nov-17		
			No. of candidates			No. of candidates	
		C or above	Total	C or above	4 or above	Total	4 or above
OCR	English	28.04%	428	120			
	English Language	48.91%	1053	515			
AQA	English	26.10%	2801	731			
	English Language	36.50%	14248	5201	33.50%	22389	7500
Pearsons	English Language	37.09%	3623	1344	33.20%	3926	1303
			22153	**7911**		**26315**	**8804**
				36%			33%

OCR	Mathematics B (majority)	26.71%	5047	1348			
AQA	Mathematics 4365 (majority)	25.80%	10230	2639	32%	9224	2952
Pearsons	Mathematics A (majority)	27.67%	36536	10110	30.40%	21684	6592
			51813	**14097**		**30908**	**9544**
				27%			31%

Data references:

OCR GCSE results November 2016 (published 15 March 2017)
AQA Exam results statistics – November 2016 (published 12 January 2017)
AQA Exam results statistics – November 2017 (published 11 January 2018)
Pearson GCSE Full Course Specifications (codes starting with 1) – November 2016
Pearson GCSE Full Course Specifications (codes starting with 2) – November 2016
Pearson GCSE Full Course Specifications (codes starting with 1) – November 2017

Appendix 5: The Policy Consortium

Contents

The Policy Consortium is a group of experienced sector professionals with strong and varied track records in UK further education and skills. We work together and individually. Our clients include providers of education and training, sector organisations, and government agencies. The Consortium formed in 2006, though members had been working independently on similar work for some time. Consortium members have a very wide range of expertise and experience, as teachers, managers, journalists, researchers, evaluators, mentors, policy and strategy advisors and inspectors.

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