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Building the conditions for effective and sustainable technical and vocational education in East London

The East London Vocational Education and Training: Innovation Through Partnership Programme (ELVET) Final Report

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NEWHAM COLLEGE LONDON

NEW CITY COLLEGE Hackney Tower Hamlets

Foreword

Our mission at the JPMorgan Chase Foundation is to enable more people to contribute to and share in the rewards of a growing economy. We believe that reducing inequality and creating widely-shared prosperity requires collaboration of business, government, non-profit and other civic organisations, particularly in the cities and metropolitan regions that power economic growth. For this reason, we have been delighted to support the ELVET Programme. The challenge of the Programme was to address the need for a more effective and inclusive vocational education and training system in the East of London and to meet the increasing and multiple skills needs of the area, in particular in health and social care, creative and digital industries. Thus, there has been a clear focus on developing deeper partnerships between employers and education and training providers to ensure that local communities have greater opportunities to gain access to all levels of the area's economy.

The programme gained a high profile across the further education and skills sector in London with representation from the Education and Training Foundation (ETC), London Councils, Greater London Authority (GLA), British Chamber of Commerce (BCC), National Careers Service, National Union of Students and the Department for Education (DfE) all contributing to and taking a keen interest in the programme.

The sharing of learning and collaboration across the sectors is being disseminated through this and other reports for different audiences and will include videos to support development wider than East London together with related Continuing Professional Development materials. This report and other briefings and related materials can be found at the programme website, which was designed and built by FE students and launched at the JPMorgan offices in Canary Wharf in September 2017. Finally, I would like to thank colleagues at the UCL Institute of Education's Centre for Post-14 Education and Work, AOC London Region, Barking and Dagenham College, New City College and Newham College for all of their work in putting together, building and developing the ELVET programme over the past two years.

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Executive summary

Supported by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, East London Vocational Education and Training: Innovation through Partnership (ELVET) (September 2016 – August 2018) was a major research and development programme aimed at supporting the building of education, training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for adults and young people in East London. Directed by staff from UCL Institute of Education, with project support from the Association of Colleges London, ELVET supported four Innovation Projects led by Barking and Dagenham College (health and social care); New City College: Hackney (digital tech), Newham College (a co-ordinated approach to employer-provider partnership working) and New City College: Tower Hamlets (creative industries). Each college worked in partnership with a range of employers, key stakeholders in education and training as well as other education and training providers. The aims of the programme were to:

1. *Facilitate access to training and employment in the digital, creative and health and social care sectors in East London, particularly for people from low-income backgrounds.*
2. *Develop strategic and sustainable relationships between East London colleges and employers, resulting in more relevant and up-to-date technical and vocational provision aligned with the regional government's skills priorities.*
3. *Improve learning, employment and apprenticeship outcomes and progression pathways into and within work, thereby contributing to the thinking on social ecosystems and the creation of High Progression and Skills Networks in East London and beyond.*

This final ELVET report provides an overview of the context of the programme including the national education and training policy at the time, the social and economic London context and a particular view of London's East and its developments - social, political, economic and spatial. Drawing on social ecosystem thinking and theories of the development of High Progression and Skills Networks, the report provides a means of understanding how a set of relationships between social partners, including colleges and employer organisations, can be designed to transform a locality or sub-region through sustainable economic development. Based on an ecological concept of interdependence it argues that none of the individual social partners can achieve these objectives on their own. Transformation will only take place if the social partners combine their specialist functions to 'co-produce' improved training outcomes that also help to build more expansive developmental environments in both colleges and businesses.

Within this theoretical context and the concept of 'co-production', the report provides the reader with a number of learning points from the development of the Programme over two years. It draws heavily on the experiences and action research activities of all the ELVET colleges and their employer and stakeholder partners. The paper identifies and articulates many of the benefits of working in employer and education and training provider

partnerships for both local and sub-regional skills development. The report identifies key success factors for partnership working as well as some of the lessons arising from the programme. However, it does not shy away from raising some of the issues and concerns raised through the programme as well as identifying some of the limitations of the work at national, local and institutional levels. The potential for the sustainability of the work of the programme in the longer term is also identified.

The final sections of the report reflect on the degree to which the ELVET programme met its aims over time and conclude with recommendation for colleges, employers, national and regional policy makers as well as researchers for taking forward the work and learning from ELVET.

In the appendix each college partner reflects on their own Innovation Project through the provision of a case study. The case studies provide key project findings, issues and achievements prior to making their own recommendations, based on the lessons learnt about employer provider relationships and how to support sustainable and effective partnership activity in the future.

The lessons learnt on the programme include that different sectors require different approaches to partnership working; building effective communication strategies and networking opportunities are key to developing long-term partnerships; involving senior leaders from the start of any project and throughout the programme is important, although curriculum leaders are best equipped to talk directly to employers in their sector when designing new programmes or experiences; and, working with a broader range of local and sub-regional partners helps to promote initiatives and develop innovation.

Recommendations

Recommendations for colleges

1. Recognise that different sectors require different strategies for partnership building
2. Recognise that the right kind of communication in all forms is key.
3. Highlight, on an ongoing basis, the benefits of partnership working for all parties concerned.
4. Build appropriate networks, networking is a vital part of communication and operationalising partnership working – but this requires space and time for staff and the development of expansive learning environments.
5. Make use of intermediaries and intermediary organisations, such as chambers of commerce and employer organisations, when building partnerships.
6. Focus on developing long-term relationships and nurture them.
7. Identify and document the knowledge created from partnership working to maintain quality relationships.

8. Strike a balance between a dedicated central service and opportunities for specialist curriculum areas to work with employers – this will require better communication internally within colleges to ensure information, relationships with employers and the college mission are sustained.
9. Use the opportunities provided by partnerships to ensure effective Careers Education, Information, advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and identify clear progression maps for learners.
10. Work with a broad range of local and sub-regional partners – collaboration is the key.
11. Share good practice within the FE sector thorough organisations such as AoC and AELP - while different parts of the country have different socio-economic and geographical contexts there is still much to learn from one another.
12. Develop new forms of leadership and 'triple professionalism' that focus on collaboration and partnership working.

Recommendations for employers

1. Focus on the company's skills and development needs and communicate these clearly to education provider partners.
2. Focus on building relationships that are flexible and agile to meet your company's needs in a variety of ways – not all support and development needs are met by training, explore alternative means of support with your colleges.
3. Recognise and celebrate the important role that FE and skills providers can play in skills development and the economy more broadly.
4. See partnerships with colleges not simply as a form of social responsibility but also as a source of tangible mutual benefits.
5. Build relationship management and partnership maintenance into job roles in the organisation.
6. Collaborate with other local/regional partners to form High Progression and Skills Networks.

Recommendations for policymakers (national, regional and local)

1. Ensure stability in national FE and skills policy with a willingness to learn and receive feedback from practice on the ground.
2. Provide flexibility in qualifications frameworks that can respond effectively and efficiently to rapid changes in employers' and learners' development needs in a twenty-first century economy.
3. Provide adequate capital and recurrent funding for FE providers to build the high quality TVET system that is desired by all parties.
4. Create the national context for regions and localities to work in a more devolved way that meets the needs of the locality and supports collaborative working.

5. Develop area-based performance measures and place a greater focus on collaboration and partnership working in the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspection framework.
6. At the local and regional level recognise and highlight the importance of the FE sector in economic development and work with colleges and other FE providers to build more effective technical and vocational education systems locally.

Recommendations for researchers

1. Build partnerships with employers, colleges and key stakeholders in the FE and skills system to create opportunities for further research and development.
2. Undertake further research into the most effective structures for colleges to develop to support employer-provider partnerships.
3. Continue developing the Social Ecosystem Model over time in East London and test out its applicability more widely

1. East London Vocational Education and Training: Innovation through Partnership (ELVET)

East London Vocational Education and Training: Innovation through Partnership (ELVET) (September 2016 – August 2018) was a major research and development programme aimed at supporting the building of education, training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for adults and young people in East London. It was designed to contribute to the provision of a qualified workforce for the area's fast-growing digital, creative and social care sectors.

Supported by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, ELVET was launched at a time when the local economy in East London was experiencing huge changes with the influx of new industries and services. At the same time, major national reforms within the further education and skills system were taking place in areas such as apprenticeships, qualifications for adults and young people and institutional organization, such as further education area-based reviews.

The Programme was directed by UCL Institute of Education (IOE), Centre for Poat-14 Education and Work in partnership with the Association of Colleges (AoC) London. ELVET supported four Innovation Projects led by Barking and Dagenham College (health and social care); New City College: Hackney (digital tech), Newham College (a co-ordinated approach to employer-provider partnership working) and New City College: Tower Hamlets (creative industries) in partnership with a range of employers and other education and training providers.

The Programme was underpinned by an approach to research and development based on the IOE's Centre for Post-14 Education and Work's work on social ecosystems. It built on previously successful partnership work with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) and on the Education and Training Foundation's 'Two-Way Street Leadership Exchange' and 'Teach Too' Programmes.

The ELVET Programme produced a range of publications and resources designed to support practitioner, researcher and policy audiences (see the ELVET website). *The Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance at Oxford University* (SKOPE) provided both formative and summative external evaluation of the outcomes and impact of the Programme and has helped to shape its development.

The ELVET Programme, in giving itself an ambitious change agenda, aimed to:

1. *Facilitate access to training and employment in the digital, creative and health and social care sectors in East London, particularly for people from low-income backgrounds.*

2. *Develop strategic and sustainable relationships between East London colleges and employers, resulting in more relevant and up-to-date technical and vocational provision aligned with the regional government's skills priorities.*

3. *Improve learning, employment and apprenticeship outcomes and progression pathways into and within work, thereby contributing to the thinking on social ecosystems and the creation of High Progression and Skills Networks in East London and beyond.*

Detailed descriptions of the four Innovation Projects that were designed to support these aims have already been described in ELVET Research Reports 1 and 2[1]. Short summative case studies are also contained in Appendix 1 to this report.

The aim of this final ELVET Research Report is to draw lessons from the Programme from the case study evidence and the evaluation reports and to examine the extent to which ELVET has met its three original aims. The Report begins by providing a brief national, London and East London context for the ELVET Programme, then summarises key aspects of social ecosystem thinking and High Progression and Skills Networks and concludes with the main findings, reflections on the three aims and recommendations for future development.

[1] Hodgson, A., Spours, K et al. (2016) *Education, skills and employment in East London: an ecosystem analysis.* Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. et al. (2017) *Beyond employer engagement: exploring the nature of partnership working for skills development.* Both available at: https://elvetlondon.co.uk/protected/resources.php

2. The context for the ELVET Programme

2.1 National education and training policy

The ELVET Programme took place at time of great policy changes that often appeared to pull in different directions. Austerity has continued, with severe funding constraints being imposed on post-16 education, reducing education providers' capacities to respond to skills development needs. The Brexit decision in June 2016, on the other hand, has focused policy attention on the need for home-grown skills development. In addition to these broader contextual factors, a set of specific post-16 education and training reforms have also taken place, which have introduced considerable turbulence into the FE and skills system. This has undoubtedly had an impact on the ability of colleges to innovate in the ways anticipated by the ELVET Programme.

In terms of *qualifications and assessment*, substantial reforms of GCSEs, GCE A Levels and vocational qualifications have been introduced, primarily centred around a greater proportion of external examination and less continuous assessment. Arising from the Wolf Report[2] , there has been a major emphasis on post-16 GCSE mathematics and English provision for those failing to reach the required GCSE grade threshold at the age of 16, which has disproportionately affected FE colleges. Further change is underway as a result of the independent Sainsbury Review of Technical Education[3], whose recommendations were accepted in the Government's *Post-16 Skills Plan*[4]. A total of 15 technical routes and associated Level 3 T-Level qualifications, based on new apprenticeship standards, are being developed. T Levels will include a substantial 'industrial placement' and end-point assessment. There will be a 'transition year' or transition offer for those not ready to enter these routes and 'bridging provision' that will allow learners to switch between academic/general and technical options/modes of study and assessment. The policy emphasis has been on making vocational education more 'rigorous' and employment-focused with a greater role for employers in the design of technical education. It is primarily further education colleges that will be affected by this reform and a new funding model has been introduced to reflect the new curriculum and qualification needs.

Apprenticeships too are being reformed. The Government's move from apprenticeship frameworks to apprenticeship standards, with the Apprenticeship Levy to help secure its

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[2] Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of vocational education: the Wolf Report*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180504/DFE-00031-2011.pdf

[3] Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016) *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

[4] DBIS/DfE (20) *The post-16 skills plan*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536043/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf

target of three million apprenticeship starts by 2020[5], can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for FE providers. The challenge arises from the fact that the focus of policy has become the role of large companies designing niche apprenticeship standards at Levels 4 and 5. Traditionally, however, it has been small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), that have worked with FE colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) to access funding and support for apprenticeships at Levels 2 and 3.

During the period 2015-17 *Area-Based Reviews*[6] (ABRs) took place involving England's further education and sixth form colleges. This process was designed primarily to reduce costs in post-16 education which, under the Coalition and current Government, is unprotected in terms of public expenditure. The road to economic stability was identified with creating larger FE institutions or forms of federations that could reduce 'backroom costs' and the duplication of provision. These larger institutional formations were also seen as having the potential to respond more effectively to employer needs on a sub-regional or regional basis and to create higher quality progression routes to employment for young people and adults.

These three sets of reforms could be characterized as a 'vocational turn' in policy, with an increasing emphasis on the higher levels of technical education.

During the lifetime of the ELVET Programme, *devolution policy* was being developed and will impact on FE provision. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016[7] was designed to introduce directly-elected mayors to combined local authorities in England and Wales and to devolve housing, transport, planning and policing powers to them – a process known as 'devo deals'. The London 'devo deal' also includes the devolution of the Adult Education Budget and discretionary support for 19+ learners. In addition, the London boroughs, together with the Greater London Authority (GLA), have put forward a number of plans for sub-regional development within the London Skills Devolution Plan[8] and the Mayor's Skills for Londoners Strategy[9].

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[5] HMG (2015) *English apprenticeships: our 2020 vision*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf

[6] HMG (2015) *Reviewing post-16 education and training institutions*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/446516/BIS-15-433-reviewing-post-16-education-policy.pdf

[7] HMG (2016) *The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act.* Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/1/contents/enacted

[8] London Councils/London Enterprise Panel/Mayor of London (2015) *Skills devolution for London: a proposal to government*. Available at: https://lep.london/sites/default/files/Skills%20Devo.pdf

[9] GLA (2018) *Skills for Londoners: a skills and adult education strategy for London.* Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sfl_strategy_final_june_20186.pdf

While the ABR and devolution processes could be interpreted as a move towards a more planned and collaborative approach to post-16 education and training, the Government has continued to support the development of a marketised system through support for and promotion of a greater range of providers competing for learners in the post-16 arena (e.g. University Technical Colleges (UTCs), Studio Schools, Free Schools, Academies).

London's education market and the effects of government reforms pose a distinct set of challenges for FE colleges and their partners and their relationship with local and regional government (Hodgson and Spours, 2017). These include:

- Assuming an economic and skills leadership role by going with the flow of government reforms to help grow specialist high level technical and vocational provision and apprenticeships.
- At the same time, continuing to show a commitment to social inclusion by building ladders of progression from Level 1 upwards so that learners can access the higher levels and by developing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision for London's considerable number of non-English speaking residents.
- Increasing and deepening the level of employer partnership working and acting as development hubs for SMEs.
- Moving to a closer relationship with local government with greater integration into regional and sub-regional strategic plans to assist diverse local communities to become more central to regeneration efforts.
- Helping to improve learner retention and progression by providing effective careers advice and work-related experiences for young people and guiding them to courses in which they are most likely to develop and to make successful transitions to further study or employment.

These challenges were built into the design of the ELVET Programme aims and informed the college-led Innovation Projects.

2.2 The London context

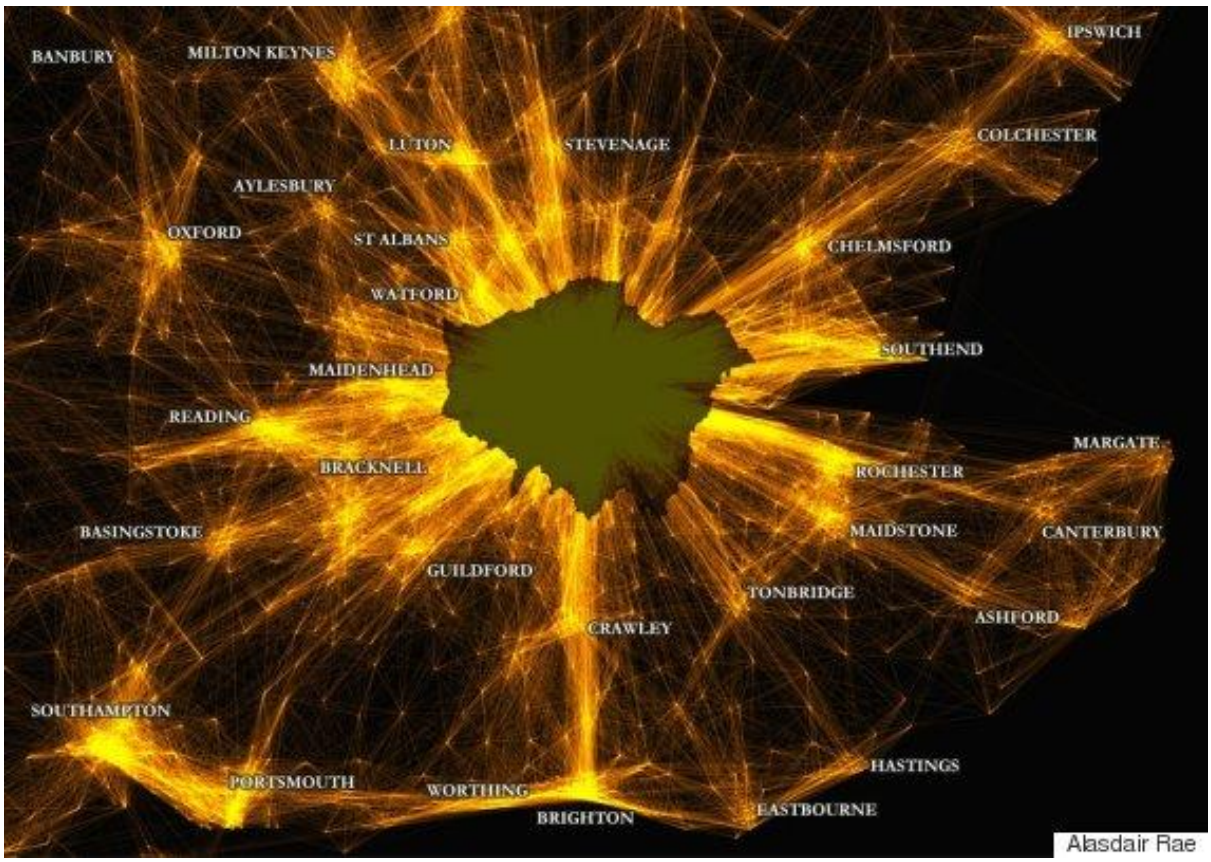
The geographical location of the ELVET Programme was also a powerful shaping factor in its design and implementation.

Supernova London: its features and dynamics

London is the UK's economic powerhouse, specializing in high value business services (e.g. finance and insurance), cultural industries, higher education (HE) and digital tech. Employment opportunities and higher pay in Central London, together with plentiful transport links, mean that employers can attract people from all over Greater London, the wider South East, the rest of the UK and from abroad. At the same time, the cost of living in

London, fueled by a buoyant housing market, has grown substantially, with an increase in mass commuting. This has resulted in the intensification of travel-to-work patterns converging on and radiating from the centre; giving rise to its 'supernova' appearance (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Supernova London



Source: Rae, 2016[10]

Underpinning the supernova dynamic are a number of related economic and social factors.

- A largely monocentric city with a financial district that has extended eastwards (e.g. Docklands) and which is economically dominated by an elite fintech ecosystem.
- A growing labour market characterized by service sector expansion - professional, real estate, scientific and technical services, administrative and support services, accommodation and food services, and information and communication[11].
- Significant skills shortages particularly in the digital and creative sectors at technical and professional higher-level skills (e.g. broadcasting, production management,

[10] Rae, A. (2016) *London: The Supernova City,* Huffpost Tech, 24 June.
[11] Marsden, J. and Hitchens, H. (2016) *Trends in the demand for labour and skills in London and the East Sub Region* Working Paper 79, GLA Economics https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/working_paper_79.pdf Accessed, 12 January, 2017.

production accounting, partnerships management, visual effects, advertising, and animation skills), but also now in the construction sector[12]) and health and social care[13] .

- A dependence on the support of particular public services and public infrastructure (e.g. education, health, transport) to meet the needs of a growing population on the move, sectors that themselves are slipping into crisis because of rising housing costs[14]
- A polarized labour market, in which high level professional jobs are accompanied by proliferation of low-skill and low-level jobs and the hollowing out of intermediate occupations with a relative inability to produce 'youth jobs' or work-based learning opportunities at Levels 3 and 4[15].
- Social polarisation – high levels of wealth concentrated among a small minority, accompanied by high levels of in-work poverty; private renting and people living in temporary accommodation[16].
- Geographically concentrated areas of poverty, focused in London's north and east and constituting an 'arc of deprivation' that runs from Edmonton in Enfield through Harringey to Hackney, Tower Hamlets and out to Barking and Dagenham. Even within this arc of deprivation there are differences, with hotspots of development in Hackney and Tower Hamlets linked to the City and Silicon Roundabout[17]
- Spiralling house prices, high rents and a lack of affordable housing leading to exploitation; overcrowding and tragedy – the Grenfell Fire has become a symbol of the wider housing crisis in London[18].

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[12] Construction, Industry Training Board (CITB) (2016) *Industry Insights: Construction Skills Network Forecasts 2016-2020* http://www.citb.co.uk/documents/research/csn%202016-2020/csn_greater_london_2016.pdf (accessed 12 January 2017)

[13] Thompson, S., Colebrook, C. and Hatfield, I. (2016) *Jobs and skills in London: building a more responsive skills system in the capital* London: Institute of Public Policy Research

[14] Unison (2017) *Rising housing costs forcing public service workers out of London, says UNISON,* 28 November. https://www.unison.org.uk/news/press-release/2017/11/rising-housing-costs-london/ (accessed 31 January, 2018)

[15] Holmes, C. and Mayhew, K. (2012) *The Changing Shape of the UK Job Market and its Implications for the Bottom Half of Earners* London: Resolution Foundation

[16] New Policy Institute (2017) *London's poverty profile 2017* http://www.npi.org.uk/publications/income-and-poverty/londons-poverty-profile-2017/ (accessed 21 January 2018).

[17] Guardian Datablog (2018) *Deprivation and poverty in London: get the data* https://www.theguardian.com/uk/datablog/2012/apr/12/deprivation-poverty-london (accessed 21 January 2018).

[18] O'Sullivan, F. (2017) The Grenfell Tower Fire and London's Public-Housing Crisis *The Atlantic*, 14 June https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/london-fire-grenfell-public-housing/530298/ (accessed, 21 January 2018)

London's polycentric growth centres

At the same time, there are subordinate counter-tendencies emerging that suggest a road to a rebalanced London of the future and a different type of growth future, conceptualized elsewhere as 'inclusive metro-growth' [19].

A polycentric mono-centre

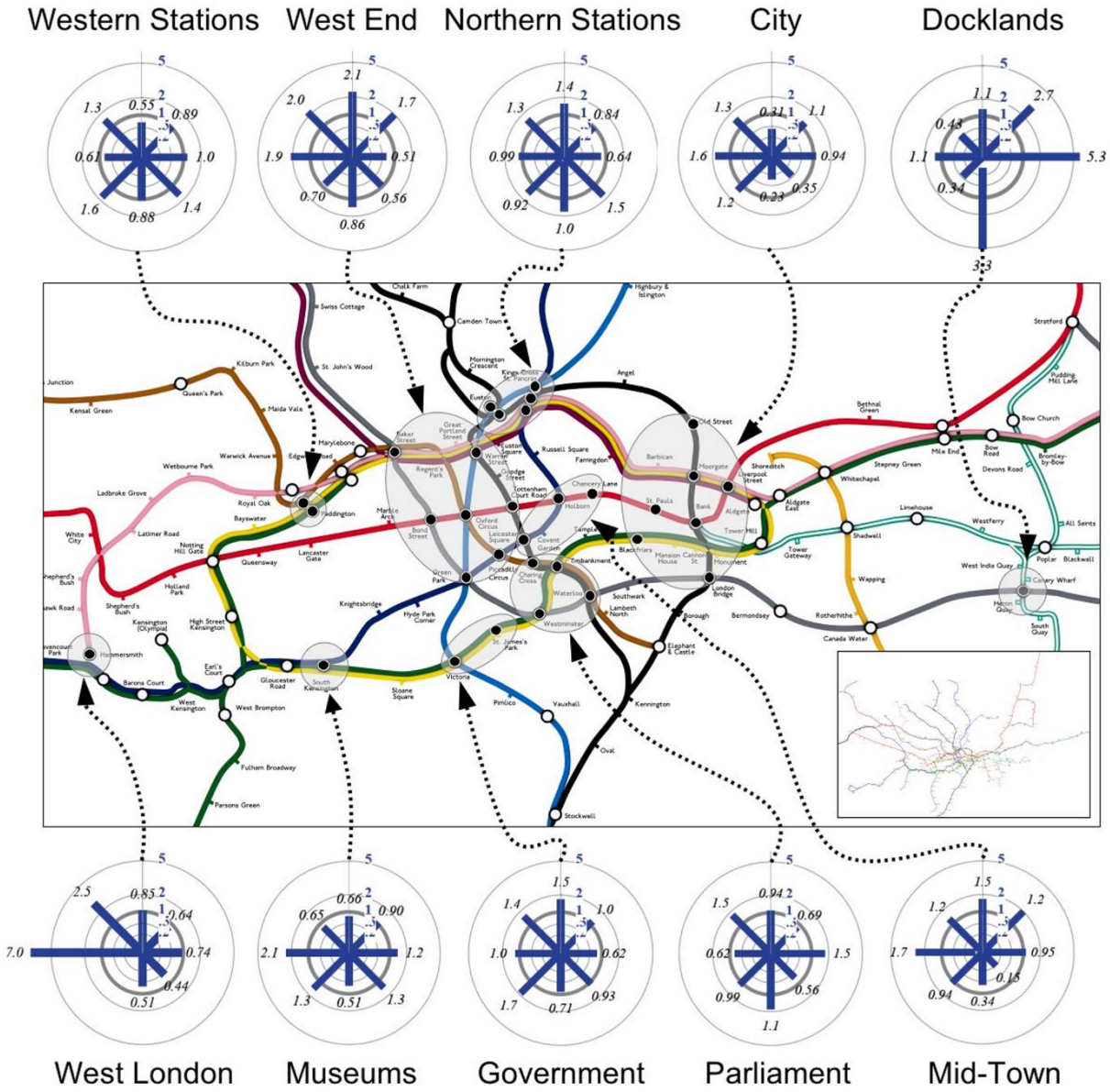
Researchers from UCL's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) analysed millions of Oyster Card journeys undertaken in a single week in order to understand when and where commuters travel within London[20]. The analysis showed that London's mono-centre does not contain a single centre but, instead, comprises around 10 'polycentres' that interlink in complex patterns – see Figure 2.

These polycentres are based on distinct types of economic, cultural and governance activities suggesting that within a mono-centric London particular districts have emerged – Fintech in the City and Docklands and now their hinterlands; retail in the West End; cultural activity along the Thames and Kensington with new growth areas around key stations (Kings Cross Development and Paddington). The challenges facing these inner polycentres arise largely from being the constituent elements of the supernova that prevents the development of inclusionary forms of mixed development with working and living in the same area. The factors include an overheated and exclusionary property market; the residual concentration of pockets of poverty; lack of training opportunities for young people and fewer opportunities for start-ups.

[19] Royal Society of Arts and City Growth Commission (2014) *Unleashing Metro Growth Final Recommendations Of The City Growth Commission* London: RSA.

[20] Roth, C., Kang, SM., Batty, M. and Barthélemy, M. (2011) Structure of Urban Movements: Polycentric Activity and Entangled Hierarchical Flows *PLoS ONE* 6(1): e15923. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0015923.

Figure 2 – London's polycentric mono-centre



Source: Roth *et al.,* 2011

Cities in the East and West

Originating under the previous mayor, Boris Johnson, the concepts of Cities in the East and West have been embraced by the current Mayor, Sadiq Khan. Central to the vision of a 'City in the East' is the idea of 'the regeneration of an entire community…' as a legacy of the Olympic Games[21]. What is emerging is 'East Bank[22]'; a new metropolitan centre for London built around Stratford with its international and national transport links, but also a series of

[21] Mayor of London (2015) *City in the East* https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/opportunity-areas/city-east Accessed 4 January 2017

[22] Previously known as 'Olympicopolis'

developments stretching northwards towards the M25 and the east along the Thames. It has been acknowledged that London is 'moving east' because this is where the greatest growth potential lies. There is similar plan for City in the West with its focus around Heathrow and Kingston, although this is far less ambitious than the City in the East because the West has less space, being already highly developed.

2.3 London's East – the dynamics of differentiation and unity

London is moving eastwards as the economic and technological developments in the City and 'Silicon Roundabout' overheat. Residents are looking for more reasonably priced housing and businesses for cheaper rented space. In addition to these market forces, there has been the government stimulated Stratford Olympic and the Metropolitan travel and retail/mixed hub developments. The eastern boroughs, dubbed the 'Growth Boroughs', are seen as places where London can expand to accommodate population growth of a projected 11 million by 2050[23]. At the same time, London's East (including the eastern fringe of North London) continues to suffer social challenges in terms of relatively high levels of homelessness, low pay, low qualification levels and worklessness, differing in significant ways to London-wide patterns[24] .

Spatial differences within London's East

London's East, however, is not one place but at least three – Near, Middle and Far[25].

The 'Near East', comprising the London Boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, contains parts of the City of London and the Fintech ecosystem of Silicon Roundabout. These areas have experienced rapid demographic change with an overheating property market and do not have significant space for further development unless it goes upwards or displaces residential properties. The major issue in the Near East is helping the local population to access new job opportunities and not to become socially displaced[26].

The 'Middle East' is represented by the London Borough of Newham with its 'East Bank', a new metropolitan centre for London, comprising the Olympic site, the Westfield retail centre, new residences and its international and national transport links. The challenge in Newham is to extend development elsewhere in the borough through an urban strategy known as the 'Arc of Opportunity'[27].

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[23] London Growth Boroughs (2016) http://www.growthboroughs.com Accessed 4 January 2016

[24] New Policy Institute (2017) *London's poverty profile 2017* http://www.npi.org.uk/publications/income-and poverty/londons-poverty-profile-2017/ (accessed 21 January 2018).

[25] Hodgson, A., Spours, K.et al. (2017) *Education, skills and employment in East London: an ecosystem analysis* ELVET Programme Research Briefing 1. Centre for Post-14 Education and Work, UCL Institute of Education

[26] London Borough of Hackney (2008) Hackney's Sustainable Community Strategy (2008-2018) https://www.hackney.gov.uk/plans-strategies Accessed 12 January 2017

[27] London Borough of Newham (2013) *Newham 2027 Newham's Local Plan - The Core Strategy* https://www.newham.gov.uk/documents/environment%20and%20planning/corestrategy2004-13.pdf Accessed 12 January, 2017

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham could be seen as the 'Far East' due to its relative distance from the supernova centre and the new eastern metropolitan hubs. Offering more space for expansion, it presents a relative blank canvas for new models of urban development[28]. It also now contains some of the most deprived populations in London's East.

Polycentric developments - driven from above and below and mediated in the middle

Although each part of London's East has its own dynamics, they are also part of a Greater London and the Mayor's 'spatial masterplan' that aims for large areas to be redeveloped as a whole and within the concept of a rebalanced London[29]. However, beyond the global figures of numbers of new houses and new jobs to be developed by 2036, it will be important that these plans are also driven from below. The dangers lurking within private sector-led polycentric developments is the creation of devolved social apartheid; something that could certainly occur, particularly if promises of affordable housing do not materialize. So, the question, raised by all the borough plans of the councils in the ELVET Programme is, how can these developments be for everyone? All councils maintain that they consult on their regeneration plans, but a key question is the affordance of spaces for existing populations to democratically shape the plans for their areas.

[28] London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (2013) *Barking and Dagenham Growth Strategy 2013-2023* https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Growth-Strategy-2013-2023.pdf accessed 12 January 2017).

[29] Mayor of London (2016) *A City for All Londoners* London: Gov UK

3. Ecosystem thinking and the development of High Progression and Skills Networks

The ELVET Innovation Projects (see Appendix 1) have inevitably been strongly influenced by national policy factors and by the geographical and socio-economic context within which they have operated. The ELVET Programme as a whole has, however, also provided a conceptual framework for reflecting on the dynamics between education institutions (particularly FE colleges), the labour market and the various geographical spaces in East London. More importantly, but also more ambitiously, the ELVET Programme has been seen as a way of developing and concretising the ecosystem thinking that the Centre for Post-14 Education and Work has been working on for the past seven years.[30] ELVET Research Report 3[31] considered this matter at some length and developed ideas related to a Social Ecosystem Model, which centres around the relationship between working, learning and living in localities.

This Report concentrates specifically on the concept of High Progression and Skills Networks since this has been the primary focus of the ELVET Programme to date, but these Networks also constitute an essential element of the Social Ecosystem Model.

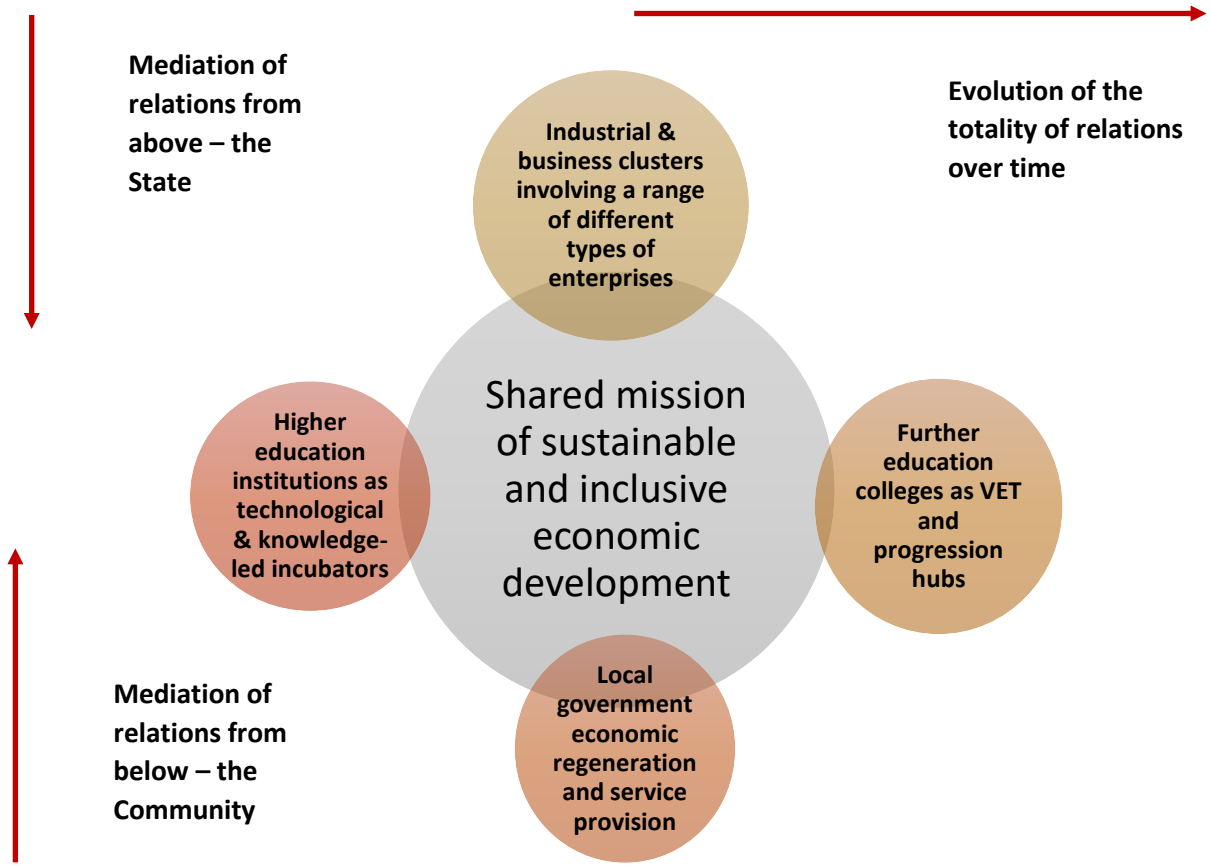
A High Progression and Skills Network might be understood as a set of formalised, dynamic relationships between social partners at the local or sub-regional level designed to transform that locality/sub-region through sustainable economic development. It is based on an ecological concept of interdependence; that none of the individual social partners can achieve this objective alone, but that transformation will only take place if they combine their specialist functions.

Each of the partners has a different, yet complementary, role within the Network and one that might change over time (see Figure 3).

[30] See e.g. Hodgson, A. & Spours, K. (2013) 'Tackling the Crisis Facing Young. People: Building 'High Opportunity Progression Eco-Systems' *Oxford Review of Education*, 39, 2, 211-228; Hodgson, A. & Spours, K. (2015a) 'An ecological analysis of the dynamics of localities: a 14+ low opportunity progression equilibrium in action' *Journal of Education and Work,* 28, 1, 24-43. Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2015b) 'The future for FE colleges in England: the case for a new post-incorporation model' in A. Hodgson (Ed) *The Coming of Age for FE? Reflections on the past and future role of further education colleges in England*. London: IOE Press. Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2016) *The evolution of social ecosystem thinking: its relevance for education, economic development and localities: A stimulus paper*, Centre for Post-14 Education and Work, UCL Institute of Education

[31] Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2018) *A social ecosystem model: conceptualising and connecting working, living and learning in London's New East*. ELVET Research Briefing No. 3, Centre for Post-14 Education and Work, UCL Institute of Education. Available on the ELVET website

Figure 3: High Progression and Skills Networks (HPSNs)



The primary role for local/regional government, for example, is to ensure that infrastructural arrangements (e.g. land-use, housing, transport, health and education services) are conducive for inclusive economic development and regeneration and that a strong social and economic narrative for the area is formulated and clearly communicated to all social partners.

Roles for further education providers, working in partnership with employers and higher education institutions, might include:

- providing the knowledge and skills to support both work and college-based learners to move upwards and along a lattice-work of progression routes and transitions between initial learning, work and more continuous learning;
- developing specialist technical provision at the higher levels closely linked to growth areas of London's economy and services;
- nurturing longer-term collaborative projects between employers (particularly SMEs), local government, higher education and further education and training providers to identify specific skill demands; to co-design relevant learning opportunities; and to develop effective progression routes based on effective assessment;

- stimulating innovation in learning and in work practices to ensure skills utilization and sustainable economic development.

The assumption here is that working in this way will move the skills system away from the static concept of skills supply (i.e. that employers articulate what they want, and colleges provide learners with these skills) to one of employer-provider co-production, which is more likely to lead to innovation and skills utilization.

The nearest we have to an emergent High Progression and Skills Network in London's East is Local London's[32] Sub-Regional Skills and Employment Board - a longer-term outcome of Area-Based Reviews in London. The Board, which was convened in February 2018 with Cllr Darren Rodwell (Leader of Barking and Dagenham Council) as its chair, aims to provide an inclusive core curriculum offer in each local area focused on those groups who do not achieve Level 2 at 16 or those at most risk in a changing labour market; a Level 3 plus offer to respond to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) agenda; the development of particular vocational specialisms in line with the overall mission; the establishment of various types of partnerships involving employers, FE providers and HE institutions; and a sub-regional apprenticeship strategy.

Local London's Skills and Employment Board (SEB) has an ambitious strategy, but the application of the social ecosystem model to this network suggests more extensive paths of development in the near future.

- Expanding its vision beyond that of a life-long learning offer and skills supply to a greater emphasis on co-working between education and skill providers and those involved in regeneration projects and reimagined public services.
- Going beyond a reliance on the mergers arising out of London's area-based review towards the establishment of local partnerships that include all FE colleges, independent learning providers, sixth form colleges and representatives of 11-18 and other schools.
- Moving beyond speculation about future labour market demand by linking colleges and other skills providers with polycentric urban regeneration to create a predictable stream of demand for new skills.

While there is more to be done, this development, which has evolved during the lifetime of the ELVET Programme and has been partially influenced by ELVET ecosystem thinking and experimentation, is cause for optimism that it is possible to create High Progression and

[32] Local London is a grouping of eight London boroughs in the East and North East of London (Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, Enfield, Greenwich, Havering, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest) with a combined resident population of 2.26 million people. See Local London's Strategy Document, Driving growth through devolution, here: https://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/News/DrivingGrowthThroughDevolution.pdf

Skills Networks in the London/East London context. A question still remains over what concrete outcomes this formation will give rise to, how sustainable such a partnership will be over the longer-term and whether its ideas will evolve in a more expansive manner in the future.

4. Key Findings

4.1 Benefits of partnership working

Building on the principles of the CAVTL Report, *'It's about work…",*[33] and lessons learnt from the earlier 'Teach Too' and 'Two Way Street Leadership Exchange' research and development projects[34], the ELVET Programme worked on the assumption that employer-college partnerships needed to be of benefit to both parties.

> *One employer said that they found it easy to contact the person (in the college) who could most help them and the response was swift and positive. What they really liked about the college was that they really care about the people they are working with. They have a 'can do' attitude. What the employer asks for is what is delivered. The team will make suggestions and be realistic, but they always look for a way round obstacles and new ways of doing things. The employer says what they want, they discuss a programme together, the college writes up a proposal, they pick and choose the bits they want to include, with guidance, and then it is delivered. It is a real partnership. The college also really understands their client base and so knows how best to help.*
> **Employer feedback to the internal evaluation**

> *There are the tangible successes of the partnership and they are significant, although there are also all of the things that have enabled them to reach this point. College staff have always been enthusiastic and very willing to explore ideas. They are happy to do things differently to circumvent problems. They will deliver on site or online where necessary as well as offering training at times that suit the staff in a 24/7 industry. They are prepared to try things out to see if they can make them work. It is easy to contact the right person and calls are always returned promptly. The college has always delivered what the employer needed.*
> **Employer feedback to the internal evaluation**

[33] Commission on Vocational Adult Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) It's about work…Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning: the summary report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning. Available at: https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/eg5937, (accessed 1 May 2018)

[34] See: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/featured-research/teach-too and http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/clients-partners/consultancy-services/case-studies/two-way-street-leadership-exchanges, (accessed 1 May 2018)

During the lifetime of the Programme, one or more of the four Innovation Projects demonstrated the following benefits (see Appendix 1. for more detail from the case studies):

Benefits for employers

1. Building strategic long-term workforce development and succession planning to address skills gaps

> *Barking and Dagenham College's work with local care homes in undertaking on-site skills analyses, finding ways to address these and thus meeting a range of urgent professional needs. Newham College's employer membership scheme.*

2. Ensuring an introduction to a wider range of potential recruits over a period of time – the long interview

> *All ELVET colleges are building employer related activities for 16-19-year-old vocational learners that will make them more employable. Examples include NCC Hackney's boot camp activities with a range of employer partners and NCC Tower Hamlets' Creative Careers event.*

3. Developing and delivering tailored programmes to meet employer needs - co-designed and delivered

> *New Digital Tech flexible modules at NCC Hackney and a new Level 3 Design Apprenticeship Programme at NCC Tower Hamlets in conjunction with three employers. Barking and Dagenham's development of a TEC module focused on employer development needs in the social care sector.*

4. Providing information about and access and engagement with government schemes and funding

> *Newham College has set up a thriving Employers' Steering Group where such information can be regularly updated and discussed; NCC Hackney organised an event with UBS to discuss the demands of the new style apprenticeships, the levy and T Levels. During the lifetime of ELVET a Local London partnership of employers and providers, led by Newham College, successfully tendered for £1m grant funding from the Department for Education's Flexible Learning Fund to develop new provision in East London.*

5. Creating opportunities to develop and advertise products through live projects

> *NCC Hackney has used its students to test digital skills products for local tech companies, an opportunity that also gives students a chance to see what is new and to analyse its strengths and weaknesses.*

6. Developing shared project working whereby students and employers collaborate to create something new

> *All ELVET colleges have adopted aspects of the CAVTL report's 'Teach Too' concept encouraging employers and their staff to be involved in supporting vocational learning in the colleges. NCC Tower Hamlets students' designs for 'You-Can-Be' postcards related to a brief designed in collaboration with Hato Press.*

7. Sharing or making available up-to-date equipment and expertise, which is particularly valuable for SMEs

> *NCC Tower Hamlets has invited local creative companies in to use equipment, such as its 3-D printing facilities, to jointly create new products with students and staff.*

8. Providing employees, including managers, with staff development opportunities through mentoring and training activities

> *NCC Hackney has been training staff from city firms to mentor college students. The ELVET sponsor, JPMorgan, has offered placements in colleges for their staff to work collaboratively with college-based staff.*

9. Utilising the skills of college staff to undertake Training Needs Analyses (TNAs) to support the development of bespoke employer focused skills provision

> *Barking and Dagenham College's extensive TNAs undertaken for local Care Homes in East London.*

Benefits for colleges

1. Providing work experience and industry placements for learners as required for certain qualifications and programmes

> *All of the ELVET colleges are building effective partnerships with employers to offer their students work placements and work experience. Barking and Dagenham College has used its partnership with local care homes to increase opportunities for work experience in a range of curriculum areas, for example business, catering and technician students having work experience in a care home as a workplace setting.*

2. Building greater confidence in the skills system from employers

> *Newham College has built a very effective relationship with a local leisure provider that has increased employer confidence in partnerships working and led to an exploration of more options. Employers in the creative industries who have worked with NCC Tower Hamlets want and are now confident that the College is able to deliver a 'bespoke' programme, which meets their individual business needs and offers support in pastoral care.*

3. Increasing apprenticeship starts and promoting apprenticeships

> *New apprenticeships in the creative industries in NCC Tower Hamlets and in digital tech in NCC Hackney have been developed and there is potential to develop a new trailblazer standard in croupier skills with Newham College support.*

4. Identifying clear progression routes into employment for learners

> *NCC Hackney has developed Careers Materials on routes into Digital Tech employment with progression maps for specific occupations. Barking and Dagenham College's partnership working with care homes in East London has also identified new progression routes for learners and employees.*

5. Building a better understanding of the support systems required to orientate students to industry

> *The introduction of a new curriculum at NCC-Tower Hamlets has enabled students to understand the behaviours and practices within the creative industries, such as how to network at social events.*

6. Creating opportunities to enhance programmes using specialist facilities and technical experts

> *NCC Tower Hamlets has organised visits and workshops in a range of creative companies, including some of national standing (e.g. National Theatre). It has also been able to use professional exhibition space as a result of the ELVET project.*

7. Developing co-designed, up-to-date programmes with staff updated on contemporary technical developments and employment trends

> *Barking and Dagenham College has introduced innovative short-courses on assistive technologies in care settings.*

8. Updating for teaching staff and developing their capacity to work more effectively with employers and learners

> *NCC Tower Hamlets College has focused on work shadowing and the collection of data about the creative industries to enable College staff to become more aware of industry changes and needs linked to the curriculum and career in the sector. The internal evaluation report noted that: 'As the project teams developed their knowledge base, it gave them the confidence to "find their voice" to promote their subject areas far more effectively, both internally and externally.'*

9. Producing menus of activities to motivate students and bring learning alive – live projects, visits, expert talks, competitions etc.

> NCC Tower Hamlets has developed live projects with Grey London and Husk Gallery and through its partnerships with Creative Skillset and D&AD has designed specialist skills workshops facilitated by industry experts.

10. Ensuring networking opportunities across an employment sector

> *The Employers' Forum in Newham College provides an ideal setting for networking; NCC Hackney has opened opportunities for its students and staff to participate in 'meet-ups' organised by digital skills companies.*

11. Responding collaboratively, and in partnership with employers, to access both national and regional funding

> *Newham College has led a response to the GLA's call for Higher Level Digital Skills projects.*

12. Developing a holistic approach to learner development including both technical and employability/soft skills

> *Newham College made a successful collaborative bid to the Flexible Learning Fund designed to provide alternative modes and places of learning for adults both in and into employment.*

13. Building, through research, dynamic innovative programmes and support activities to meet employers needs

> *The internal evaluation report noted that all ELVET colleges were prompted to reflect on the need to develop their own practices by 'learning to unlearn' and to 'become more researching institutions' in order to remain relevant to the needs of their stakeholders.*

In addition to the case studies contained in Appendix 1, examples of some of the materials developed through the ELVET Innovation Projects can be found on the ELVET website.

4.2 Success factors

As a result of reflecting on the nature of employer-college collaborations, it is possible to identify a number of factors that contribute to effective partnership working:

- Employer-provider partnerships are successful when they identify and agree common deliverable goals from which both parties benefit[35].
- Effective employer and provider leaders create the formal climate for high quality professional, technical and vocational education within which more informal and flexible arrangements may exist for curriculum delivery.
- Employer-provider partnerships are more effective and productive when they have a clear local and/or sector-specific focus, based on excellent understanding and knowledge of the locality and/or sector.
- The most productive and sustainable partnerships are based on relationships that are honest and where open face-to-face dialogue about requirements and constraints can take place.
- Partners are clear about who to contact and work with, responses are swift and positive demonstrating a 'can do' attitude.
- Partnerships that have a clear plan of action, transparent lines of communication and realistic expectations of both parties are more likely to succeed.
- Effective collaborative arrangements move beyond a simple 'supply and demand' relationship to joint responsibility for improving technical and vocational education in the locality/sub-region.
- Partnerships benefit when they engage with wider stakeholders such as, employer organisations, local authorities and professional and trade associations.

4.3 Some lessons from ELVET

Different sectors require different approaches - Some sectors and enterprises recruit staff at all levels (e.g. Social Care), while others may see themselves primarily as a graduate profession (e.g. Digital Tech), although this is increasingly being challenged. Similarly, the proportion of SMEs to large enterprises varies across sectors, as does the mode of working (e.g. short-term project-based opportunities as opposed to regular full-time employment). Therefore, the approach to partnership working needs to be tailored to the particular sector: generic messages and approaches by colleges are unlikely to be successful, particularly for creating long-term partnerships.

[35] One employer emphasised that he would trust the college he had worked with regardless of physical location -'It's the singer, not the song!'

> B*oth digital and creative sectors have comparatively high levels of graduate employment and competition for the best jobs is intense, reflecting the over-supply of degree-qualified candidates … Whilst the health care sector contrasts sharply with the aforementioned sectors, it too is not without its challenges. Low margin businesses that rely on a supply of cheap labour predominate.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

It's not just about technical skills: employability skills are also important - Initiatives to enrich the learner experience offer the potential to make a real and lasting impact on the life chances of students. By liaising closely with employers, the project leads developed a heightened appreciation of the need to improve the soft skills of their learners (including employability and interview skills, communication, motivation, reliability, self-confidence and social skills), alongside the technical skills covered by the core curriculum of their programmes.

> *It became clear at an early stage that students on digital and creative courses needed to develop far more than the technical skills covered by their core syllabus to gain employment. Wider exposure to employers built a much deeper appreciation of the dynamics of the sectors and the breadth of opportunities within them. Group visits to employers such as the Capital's museums not only introduced students to the realities of the workplace and the opportunities these major employers offer but also exposed some to Central London for the first time. With proactive planning, these were augmented by attendance at showcase events and exhibitions. Such visits are an essential part of raising aspiration and opening up students to wider employment possibilities, thereby improving their potential for mobility when they subsequently seek employment, which is particularly important for those seeking work in the digital and creative sectors.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

Communication strategies - The evidence from the ELVET case studies, and particularly from the research undertaken by Newham College and NCC: Tower Hamlets, highlights the importance of employers and providers creating the space to listen to one another, to try to understand one another's language and to conduct an honest and open dialogue about opportunities and constraints. The Steering Groups of employers and college staff set up under ELVET provide one important mechanism for this kind of communication, but face-to-face contact, while highly valuable, is not always possible. Colleges having a website that

speaks to employers as well as to students, with a clear point of contact, and using webinars and video-conferencing are all strategies that are likely to be effective. Employers fed back the need for both sides to be patient and to give time to listen to each partners' needs and issues to find solutions.

Networking - constitutes a vital part of both communication strategies and making partnerships work. The ELVET case studies demonstrate the importance of working with a range of employer organisations, alliances, sectoral bodies and professional and trade associations, as well as brokerage organisations and community representatives, such as governors. These networks provide cost- and time-effective ways of colleges gaining access to larger numbers of employers, gathering intelligence about future employment trends and new ways of working and finding advocates and ambassadors. From the employer perspective, particularly where SMEs are concerned, a network might be able to support a menu of joint activities with a college or colleges that a single employer could not. The ELVET innovation projects have also found that networking is a skill that both college staff and students need to practice for their own career development and employment prospects. If networking is so vital, then resources in terms of time and training for college staff will need to be devoted to this area.

> *For colleges, the challenge is to find more time for staff development, including researching and updating knowledge of their areas. The evidence from the projects suggests that this is essential to the development of effective college-business collaboration, enabling the tailoring of provision down to curriculum level.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

Involving senior leaders from the start and throughout – college and employer leaders are crucial in building and maintaining momentum in partnership building. Whilst trust between staff and employees in both organisations is central to success, the 'can do' culture is often generated by the obvious and clear commitment of senior leaders. College leaders and governors are important evaluators of partnership outcomes and in this respect central to partnership maintenance and development.

Long-term partnerships - while all colleges have links with employers, very often these relationships lead to one-off events or activities that offer valuable experiences for students and staff, but do not constitute the strategic approach that is necessary to meet the skills needs of a locality or sub-region, particularly in the context of Brexit. Long-term partnerships are built through mutual trust and the recognition of potential benefits. Although the strategies outlined above should serve to support these aims, there are also a range of other specific actions that the ELVET projects suggested colleges could take to ensure that employers want to remain in the partnership. However, these indicate that

colleges need to provide staff with time to use their employer networks and partners to update their knowledge and skills and those of their students, as well as giving students access to specialist careers education, information, advice and guidance.

New structures - Employer-provider partnership building requires new ways of working for colleges. Internally, they will need to provide a balance between a dedicated central service that provides expertise on employer-provider partnership working with a single portal for employers, and more dispersed sector-specific relationships between curriculum areas and employers. Given the size and dispersed nature of the new multi-site colleges resulting from Area-Based Reviews, attention will also need to be given to how these larger units work to serve the needs of specific sectors but also different local areas. No one model emerged from the ELVET Programme, so further research is needed in this area.

> *The relationships between colleges, employers and students are complex, with many interdependencies and yet colleges have gravitated towards a disaggregation of the functions that serve them, such as subject-specific curriculum development, marketing, careers advice and business development. These often operate independently of each other, to sub-optimal effect.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

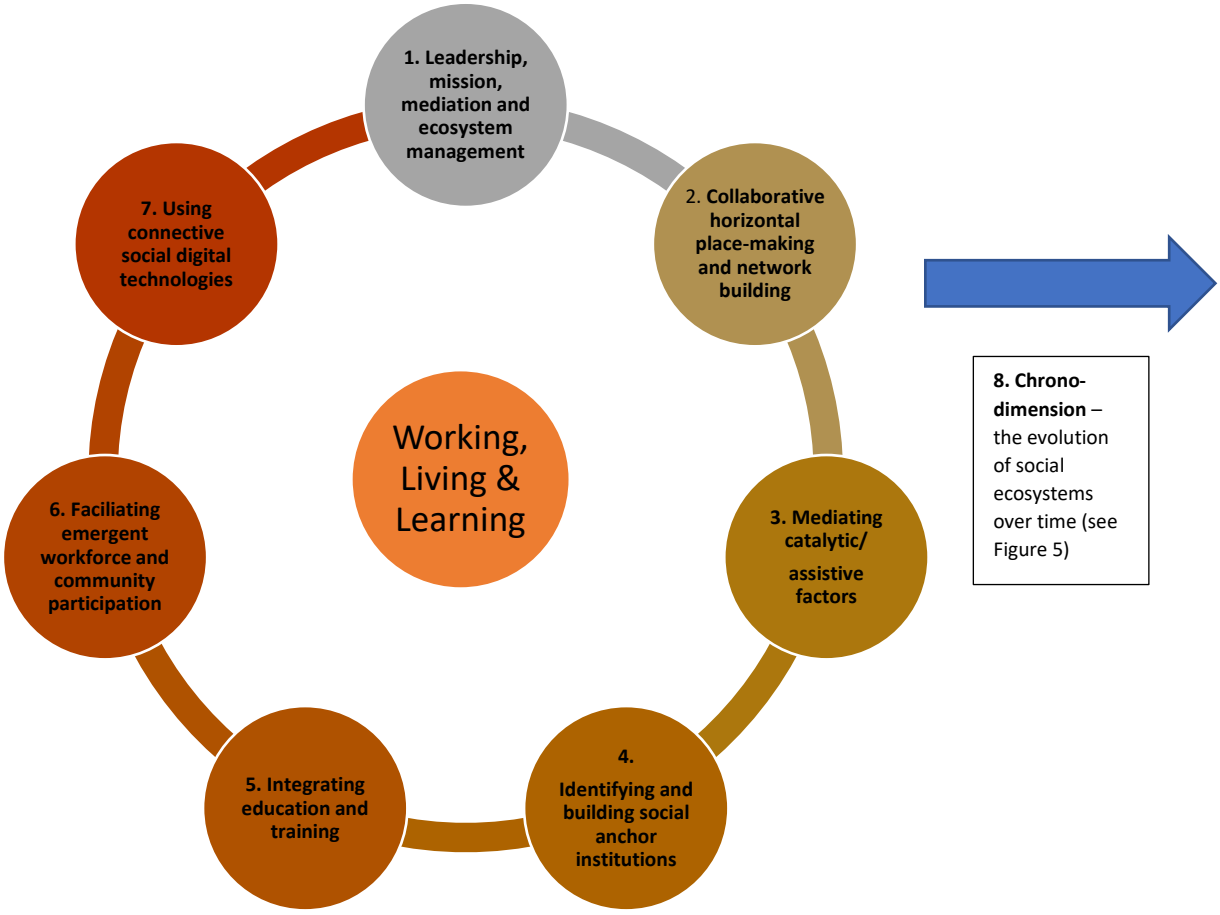
Working with a broader range of local and sub-regional partners - To develop effective and up-to-date vocational education and training hubs, to open up opportunities for local communities to access employment and to contribute to local and sub-regional economic development, employer-college partnerships will need to expand their reach to work with a wide range of external partners (e.g. local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), community groups, other education and training providers, HEIs). Because of their historic and deep-rooted connection with their communities, colleges are ideally placed to act as connectors between these wider partners and to offer a leadership role in relation to technical and vocational education, but this requires a less competitive ethos and a preparedness to operate in a more collaborative way for the benefit of a locality (East London in this case) as a whole.

Promoting initiatives to develop innovation – there is a need for new initiatives and projects to be branded and marketed strongly, both within the college and externally, from the start. Innovative projects can be seen as a rallying point rather than simply another project or someone else's business. Too many good or potential innovations in colleges fail because of inadequate buy-in from key stakeholders.

> *Less obvious are the attitudinal benefits of involving staff in innovative projects that encourage them to be proactive, question current assumptions and to develop better ways of working. The development of such entrepreneurial mindsets is essential to keeping the FE sector modern, responsive and relevant.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

The ecosystem concepts - that provided the theoretical underpinnings of the ELVET Programme have proved a useful starting point for discussion in terms of working with wider partners in a locality. It is also clear, however, that there is still some way to go to build the Social Ecosystem Model described in ELVET Research Briefing 3[36] and illustrated in Figure 4 below. One of the key lessons that the ELVET Programme has highlighted in this regard is the need to develop a steps and stages approach to constructing such a system (see Figure 5). In this sense, it has made a significant contribution to the theoretical social ecosystem work.

Figure 4. Dimensions of the social ecosystem model



[36] Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2018) *A social ecosystem model: conceptualizing and connecting working, living and learning in London's 'New East',* ELVET Programme Research Briefing 3. Centre for Post-14 Education and Work, UCL Institute of Education.

Figure 5. The social ecosystem synergy cycle

4.4 Issues and limitations

Newham College, NCC Hackney, NCC Tower Hamlets and Barking and Dagenham College, supported by their Critical Friends, have worked hard over the lifetime of the ELVET Programme to develop employer-college partnerships designed to provide both skills and employment opportunities for their students and, at the same time, to help develop the skills and innovation base of local employers (mainly SMEs). However, ELVET has highlighted major challenges involved in partnership working, some of which require national as well as regional/local, institutional and enterprise-level solutions.

> *… the ELVET Programme has been just one area of activity among many other challenges and developments which has been competing for relatively scarce managerial attention, time and resources. If ELVET had been undertaken during a period of relative stability, the project team and the partner colleges would have faced a less demanding task.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

National level challenges

Historically, employers in the UK have not played the central role in the design and delivery of technical and vocational education and training that employers have in other parts of Europe, such as German, Switzerland and Austria where legal frameworks and agreements frame apprenticeships and other technical and vocational education and training[37]. UK employer bodies are by no means as strong or cohesive as those in other countries; those sectors that have continued to retain industry training boards, such as the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) and the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), are notable for their exceptionalism. While national government policies in the UK have built and continue to build employers into the design and delivery of technical and vocational education and training, the latest examples being apprenticeship standards and T Levels[38], the approach has been primarily through exhortation, moral appeal and financial incentives rather than through legal frameworks. In this voluntarist environment, it is not surprising that employer-college partnership building remains challenging and something that has to be built up piecemeal at the grassroots level.

Moreover, there are very good reasons why employers might find it hard to play the part that government has assigned to them. There is often a lack of understanding of the combined effects of the multiplicity of demands that are placed on employers - work experience for 16-19-year olds as part of study programmes, extended work placements for the new T Levels, apprenticeships, and work-related 'Release on Temporary Licence' (ROTL) for offenders[39] - to name but a few. Meeting the demands of this plethora of activities, which can appear to be incompatible with the running of a viable enterprise and increasing productivity, is difficult for large companies but well-nigh impossible for the SMEs that make up the largest proportion of UK businesses. In addition, policies in this area are constantly changing, making it difficult for employers to understand and keep up with the latest trends and funding streams. Many too have little or no training capacity in terms of time or expertise.

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[37] Clarke, L. and and Winch, C. (2007) (eds) *Vocational education: international approaches, developments and systems.* London: Routledge

[38] See: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/search-for-apprenticeship-standards; and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650969/T_level_Action_Plan.pdf, Accessed 2 May 2018

[39] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-and-employment-strategy-2018

Colleges face similar difficulties with constant policy change and inadequate capital and recurrent funding to meet the needs of employers and the demands of their local communities, which sometimes pull in different directions. Partnership-working can be both expensive and time-consuming and may result in the development of new provision that requires both additional skilled teachers and the technical resources and facilities that give employers the confidence to keep the relationship going.

For both employers and providers there is much general uncertainty in terms of the intended direction of technical and vocational education as a result of developing national policy. Apprenticeship standards are available for some occupations but not yet for others, at some levels but not others and end point assessment and the appointment of End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) is still in development in several sectors. Added to this, the Apprenticeship Levy has been both poorly understood and unpopular among many employers, leading to a fall in apprenticeship start numbers [40]. T Levels, with their demands for 45 days of industry placement, are very much on the agenda of colleges, although as yet their design has not been revealed, making planning for implementation very difficult. Furthermore, the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA), now to become the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), which has responsibility for overseeing these new programmes, has only just been formed. While these initiatives may lead to stronger and more effective technical and vocational education in the long run, this has not been a climate conducive to developing partnership working between employers and colleges.

Local and institutional level challenges

Both employers and colleges, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, experience Low Skill Equilibrium (LSE) factors at the organisational level. The Innovation Projects demonstrate that SMEs often lack the capacity for innovation or have to focus on the short-term just to keep their business going. Colleges, on the other hand, are often subjected to funding constraints and have to seek growth in ways not always central to employers' needs. These LSE factors can contribute towards a lack of mutual understanding. Employers complain that colleges are sometimes difficult to work with, both in terms of making initial contact (who to contact, when and how) and at the stage of discussing training needs (lack of clarity and flexibility about provision). They can also appear bureaucratic organisations and overly focused on qualification outcomes and performance. Colleges, on the other hand, often feel that employers do not understand the demands they face or the constraints they work under, have no idea of the range of provision they offer and are only prepared to work with them on short-term initiatives or projects rather than to see them as long-term partners.

[40] Richmond, T. (2018) *The great training robbery: assessing the first year of the apprenticeship levy*. Available at: http://www.reform.uk/publication/the-great-training-robbery-assessing-the-first-year-of-the-apprenticeship-levy/, accessed 2 May 2018

The powerful policy levers that drive college behaviour (e.g. funding, inspection and performance tables) often encourage competition rather than the collaboration that is needed to build the local High Progression and Skills Networks that form the core of Social Ecosystems. While the mergers between colleges resulting from the London ABR process, such as the New City College group that was part of the ELVET Programme, have somewhat reduced the competition between the constituent parts of the new organisation, competition has not been removed between these larger providers and their local education provider neighbours. Moreover, the disruption and uncertainty caused by mergers and reorganisation have undoubtedly had a negative impact on ELVET's collaborative agenda in the short -term because they have focused managers and staff on internal college issues rather than the wider ecosystem. When staff are having to reapply for their posts or are in danger of being made redundant or moved to a new site, there is little time and energy for forward-focused project work. Whether the newly merged organisations will be more effective in the longer term is yet to be seen.

Clearly these considerable contextual challenges and issues have impacted on the ELVET Programme, making consistent and successful project development difficult to achieve and lengthening timescales for delivery. Nevertheless, more and deeper partnership working has been developed, new co-designed provision has been initiated and there is a strong basis on which to build beyond the lifetime of the ELVET Programme.

4.5 Beyond ELVET – sustainability in the longer term

Apart from the substantial number of new and more sustainable employer-college partnerships developed by the colleges involved in the Innovation Projects, the ELVET Programme has led to a number of important collaborations with a wider range of social partners in East London and the capital more broadly. Most of these are in their early stages but even at this point it is clear that they go well beyond the confines of the ELVET Programme.

- The social and high skill ecosystem concepts and language have been applied in relation to evaluating the long-term skills requirements for an expanding Heathrow Airport in a report to the Heathrow Skills Task Force chaired by Lord David Blunkett.
- The ELVET Programme and its partnership-based social ecosystem thinking has inspired the formation of an Intellectual Partnership between Barking and Dagenham Council and UCL Institute of Education that will explore the challenges of rapidly changing conditions for working, living and learning in London's New East.
- These concepts are also being developed within the T20 Argentina Global Solutions initiative through seminars and papers derived from ELVET.
- As a direct result of ELVET and the initial considerations of the college's CEOs to develop collaborative digital skills provision at Levels 4 and 5, a consortium of

colleges, wider than the original ELVET colleges, is working to develop a GLA funded programme with the aims of:

  - Reviewing current higher level digital skills training available against the needs of start-ups and SMEs to identify gaps in provision that are required to address digital skills gaps in London's digital economy and labour market
  - Developing or improving higher-level digital skills training modules that are designed to meet the needs of start-ups and SMEs
  - Providing work placement opportunities and project work with start-ups and SMEs for London's higher level digital skills students, enabling start-ups and SMEs to access higher level digital skills, also helping students gain relevant skills and experience.
  - Building capacity in start-ups and SMEs to provide project work and work placement opportunities for students–to support both business growth and student development.

- The ELVET Programme, its thinking and partnerships underpinned the successful bid of a wider Local London partnership to the Department for Education's (DfE) Flexible Learning Fund. Using a grant of £1m the project will develop and test a scalable, replicable model of employer-provider partnerships for improving the job prospects and outcomes for low-paid or unemployed adults, with a focus initially on the health and social care sector.

What these longer-term developments demonstrate is that while the ELVET Programme primarily focused on four East London Boroughs and their colleges, its methodology and ideas have applicability to East London in its totality and to London as a whole.

5. In summary: to what extent has the ELVET Programme met its aims

This section takes the opportunity to critically reflect upon the original aims of the project and the extent to which they have been met over the period of the programme.

1. Facilitate access to training and employment in the digital, creative and health and social care sectors in East London, particularly for people from low-income backgrounds.

No research and development project could expect to transform access to training and employment for people from low-income backgrounds in East London in two years, particularly given the constraints highlighted in the previous section and the nature of the three sectors chosen. The evaluation reports provided by Oxford University make this abundantly clear. However, what the ELVET Programme has managed to do is to provide a strong baseline from which to operate in the future by creating innovative and motivational learning experiences for college staff and students and highlighting a number of very practical ways in which colleges and employers can work together with other partners in the sub-region and region to facilitate access to training and employment. As the examples provided in Section 4 and discussed in more depth in Appendix 1 demonstrate, colleges have created vital new networks with employers and other social partners, increased the depth and breadth of their understanding about how the digital tech, creative and health and social care sectors operate and tested out ideas of how they might partner with employers to move learning and working practices on for the benefit of students and employers. The trust that has been generated between the partners, the discussion and creative thinking that has taken place as a result of this collaborative work and the practical changes that have been made to the college curriculum in the three sectors cannot be underestimated in terms of achieving this first aim.

2. Develop strategic and sustainable relationships between East London colleges and employers, resulting in more relevant and up-to-date technical and vocational provision aligned with the regional government's skills priorities.

Clearly this second aim relates strongly to the first, but also stresses the importance of engagement with regional skills priorities. Through the support of its high powered Advisory Panel, comprising key national, regional and sectoral representatives, the ELVET Programme was able to keep abreast of a fast-moving regional policy agenda and to ensure that its activities complemented and, in some cases, as we have seen in Section 4, led the way in this area. Alongside the practical partnership work that took place within each of the college Innovation Projects, the relationships forged between the individual colleges and employers in a particular sector were informed by significant research into employer-provider partnerships undertaken by the colleges themselves; key inputs by the expert

evaluators; and the underpinning theoretical work on ecosystem thinking and high progression and skills networks led by UCL IOE's Centre for Post-14 Education and Work. Section 4 has also provided powerful examples of how these partnerships might be sustained in the future. Perhaps one of the major achievements in this regard was to move thinking on beyond the idea of 'skills supply' – i.e. colleges supplying the skills that employers want – to the concept of 'co-construction' of technical and vocational education, which suggests joint responsibility for skills development. However, as Section 4.4. points out, ELVET also identified considerable barriers to this type of working in the current national and local contexts.

3. Improve learning, employment and apprenticeship outcomes and progression pathways into and within work, thereby contributing to the thinking on social ecosystems and the creation of High Progression and Skills Networks in East London and beyond.

While ecosystem thinking contributed to the development work of the ELVET Programme, the reverse was also true – that is that the ELVET Programme contributed significantly to the development of ecosystem thinking. Prior to the ELVET Programme, the focus of this theoretical work had been primarily on the relationship between employers and education institutions and the role of education and training in economic development. It became clear during the ELVET Programme, however, that if High Progression and Skills Networks were to benefit all within a locality then ecosystem thinking needed to expand its scope to consider the relationship between *living,* learning and work. This was particularly true in the London context where, as Section 2 of the report discusses, the development of High Progression and Skills Networks could lead to further polarization within the populations of East London if they merely fed 'supernova' London rather than becoming part of a more balanced polycentric London that considered other aspects of urban living, such as housing and transport. This sparked further thinking about the key role of regional and local authorities in building social ecosystems because of their potential to develop the infrastructure of a more balanced and inclusive polycentric London. Reflection on the ELVET Programme also underlined the need to differentiate between 'elite' and 'social' ecosystem models and emphasized the importance of further education colleges, because of their inclusive nature, acting as anchor institutions within the social ecosystem.

In summary, the ELVET Programme progressed a long way towards meeting its aims despite the level of ambition; the shortness of the timescales; and the impact of national constraints. In particular the programme has introduced new ways of thinking about skills development, specifically related to the demanding practices of co-production. It has also left a strong legacy of partnership working between colleges and between education providers and employers, thus laying the foundations for further work in this area. Finally, it has identified a vital local and sub-regional context for the development of new ways of conceptualising the relationship between skills development and inclusive economic and

social growth through its concept of social development ecosystem thinking. These ideas are now impacting across London's 'New East' and more broadly both nationally and internationally.

> *The ELVET Programme has yielded some critically important findings that should now inform the future development of vocational education and training across East London. Fundamentally, it provided the opportunity to re-engage with both students and employers in demonstrably more focused and meaningful ways. This would not have been possible without the time and space the Programme afforded. Just as importantly, the action research process driven forward by the ELVET Executive Group provided the impetus and reflection that drove changes. The planned end of project communications has much to draw upon and should provide a deserved boost to the prestige and perceived capability of East London's further education colleges.*
> **Internal Evaluation Report**

6. Recommendations

In this final section of the report, we suggest further actions or ideas for ways forward for the four key actors, colleges, employers, policy makers and researchers, involved in the delivery of the ELVET Programme.

Recommendations for colleges

1. Recognise that different sectors require different strategies for partnership building
2. Recognise that the right kind of communication in all forms is key.
3. Highlight, on an ongoing basis, the benefits of partnership working for all parties concerned.
4. Build appropriate networks, networking is a vital part of communication and operationalising partnership working – but this requires space and time for staff and the development of expansive learning environments.
5. Make use of intermediaries and intermediary organisations, such as chambers of commerce and employer organisations, when building partnerships.
6. Focus on developing long-term relationships and nurture them.
7. Identify and document the knowledge created from partnership working to maintain quality relationships.
8. Strike a balance between a dedicated central service and opportunities for specialist curriculum areas to work with employers – this will require better communication internally within colleges to ensure information, relationships with employers and the college mission are sustained.
9. Use the opportunities provided by partnerships to ensure effective Careers Education, Information, advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and identify clear progression maps for learners.
10. Work with a broad range of local and sub-regional partners – collaboration is the key.
11. Share good practice within the FE sector thorough organisations such as AoC and AELP - while different parts of the country have different socio-economic and geographical contexts there is still much to learn from one another.
12. Develop new forms of leadership and 'triple professionalism' that focus on collaboration and partnership working.

Recommendations for employers

1. Focus on the company's skills and development needs and communicate these clearly to education provider partners.
2. Focus on building relationships that are flexible and agile to meet your company's needs in a variety of ways – not all support and development needs are met by training, explore alternative means of support with your colleges.

3. Recognise and celebrate the important role that FE and skills providers can play in skills development and the economy more broadly.
4. See partnerships with colleges not simply as a form of social responsibility but also as a source of tangible mutual benefits.
5. Build relationship management and partnership maintenance into job roles in the organisation.
6. Collaborate with other local/regional partners to form High Progression and Skills Networks.

Recommendations for policymakers (national, regional and local)

1. Ensure stability in national FE and skills policy with a willingness to learn and receive feedback from practice on the ground.
2. Provide flexibility in qualifications frameworks that can respond effectively and efficiently to rapid changes in employers' and learners' development needs in a twenty-first century economy.
3. Provide adequate capital and recurrent funding for FE providers to build the high quality TVET system that is desired by all parties.
4. Create the national context for regions and localities to work in a more devolved way that meets the needs of the locality and supports collaborative working.
5. Develop area-based performance measures and place a greater focus on collaboration and partnership working in the Ofsted inspection framework.
6. At the local and regional level recognise and highlight the importance of the FE sector in economic development and work with colleges and other FE providers to build more effective technical and vocational education systems locally.

Recommendations for researchers

1. Build partnerships with employers, colleges and key stakeholders in the FE and skills system to create opportunities for further research and development.
2. Undertake further research into the most effective structures for colleges to develop to support employer-provider partnerships.
3. Continue developing the Social Ecosystem Model over time in East London and test out its applicability more widely

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Appendix 1 The ELVET Innovation Project Case Studies

Newham College: developing effective models of employer-provider partnership working in East London

Beverly Cook and Julia Bollam

Introduction to the College

Newham College is a large general Further Education (FE) college in the London Borough of Newham with two main campuses at East Ham and Stratford. A further network of local learning centres and partnerships constitutes the Newham College Group including:

- **NewTEC**, offering early years vocational training and registered day care nursery facilities;
- **Digital Skills Solutions Ltd**, providing courses to the digital industry, supporting students to gain employment and employees to upskill, works closely with the Samsung Digital Academy collaborating with Samsung Electronics UK.
- **The Fashion and Textile Museum** providing bespoke provision in the fashion industry in partnership with Zandra Rhodes.

These subsidiaries reflect three out of five college specialisms: health and social care, digital, and fashion and tailoring. Expanding specialisms are engineering and hospitality. The college also has an extensive language school delivering vocational English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes and is the largest provider of apprenticeships in Greater London.

The college has approximately 13,000 students and 600 staff. Reflecting the Borough as a whole, 71% of students are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

The Area Based Review concluded that Newham College remain as a stand-alone organisation yet supported by local and regional strategic alliances and partnerships.

Introduction to employment needs in East London

A recent study by Oxford Economics[41] for the Mayor of London, concluded that '*East London is the fastest growing part of the capital as the "Olympic effect" continues to attract jobs and investment*'. The Mayor said the data showed that '*the capital's centre of gravity was moving east*'. The report indicated that 50,000 jobs have been created in Tower Hamlets since 2012 while Newham and Hackney have seen growth five times larger than expected, with the pace of growth in the east significantly faster than for London as a whole. Whilst

[41] *London Host Boroughs Employment Forecasts*, Oxford Economics, July 2017

Hackney and Newham had the strongest GDP growth of all London Boroughs in 2016 there are skills shortages in digital, creative and construction sectors[42].

The top three enterprise sectors in Hackney in 2017[43] were professional, scientific & technical; information and communication; arts, entertainment, recreation & other services. The main sectors where employment has been created in Newham[44] are distribution, retail, business services and the public sector. The largest growth potential is in construction and engineering, digital and creative, health and social care, retail, and hospitality. In Tower Hamlets[45] more than 75% of employment is concentrated in Canary Wharf and The City Fringe where employment is strongly concentrated in finance, professional services, information and communication and business support. In Barking and Dagenham[46], the transport, business services and hospitality sectors are anticipated to contribute the most to employment growth between now and 2032. The real estate, administration support, social care and IT sectors are expected to grow but at a slower rate.

Key Findings of the Innovation Project

The Newham 'One Place' project explored models of working for effective employer-provider partnerships in East London. Multiple interviews and meetings with employers and providers in the four Boroughs were augmented by desk research. Initial work identified five potential East London models.

(a) A single broker agency working with all providers
(b) A Group Training Association (GTA)
(c) Providers working independently with local employers
(d) Colleges merging to form an East London college
(e) Collaboration in sectors/areas where there is little competition or where all colleges would benefit through a 'hub and spoke' model.

Four of the models (a, b, c and e) were explored and strengths and weaknesses identified.

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[42] *London Labour Market Projects*, GLA Economics, 2017
[43] *Understanding Hackney's economy – A focus on business and enterprise*, Hackney Council, summer 2017
[44] *Labour Market Profile – Newham 2016*
Https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157255/report.aspx
[45] *Tower Hamlets Local Economic Assessment, Data refresh for 2015-2016*, Tower Hamlets Council, January 2016
[46] *Final Report of the Barking and Dagenham Growth Commission Part 2,* London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, February 2016

Success factors already identified were affirmed

Key success factors for partnerships identified in the desk research were confirmed with some exceptions. For example, "taking the relationship beyond a simple 'supply and demand' to joint responsibility for improving TVET". Many employers said they simply did not have time to get fully involved in the curriculum, although they expected their needs to be considered. Most employers interviewed did not engage with wider stakeholders. More than 90% of businesses in the four Boroughs are Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and many had not heard of stakeholders such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and felt they did not have the time for such engagement.

There remains a gap in language and understanding between many employers and providers

Whilst, according to employers, colleges use jargon and do not appreciate their time and financial constraints or business imperatives, colleges felt they were as open and clear as possible and adapted their practice to meet business needs.

There remains a reliance on personalities and personal drive

Successful partnerships often rely on personalities and their willingness to be involved. The system doesn't work independently of its human protagonists.

Sector approaches and needs are not constant and models not always sustainable

Some sectors are evolving rapidly, and the needs of all parties are changing. For example, when Westfield Stratford City (WSC) was built there was a partnership need for Newham College, the Local Authority, the retailers and the WSC company to work together to recruit and train staff quickly. Now that WSC is embedded, that partnership is less needed. Unsustainable models of partnership working will need to evolve.

There is an appetite for a 'One Place' approach although competition between providers is unhelpful

Providers and brokers were more enthusiastic about the idea of a 'One Place' approach to partnership working than were employers who tending to focus more on specific and immediate needs than on structures. Employers were keen to have easy and fast access to information, advice and follow up but also wanted to work with people who understood their business. There was no consensus around models and their leadership. Employers do not generally understand demarcations between colleges and want to work with whoever can help them most. A funding system that pushes colleges into competition does not necessarily raise standards but does inhibit partnership working between colleges.

Focus on needs

Partnerships seemed to work best when employers had defined needs or when engaging in activities was of obvious immediate benefit. The challenge was to keep the employer involved.

In summary

Providers need to focus on all success factors for partnership working and to use and adapt these to inform and grow their partnerships. Models of partnership may not always need to be sustainable, but it is important to retain a relationship with employers that can evolve. It

is also important to recognise that colleges are constrained by political and financial decisions and the ideal of employers and providers being equally interested in sustaining partnerships may be confounded by the business imperatives of both parties.

Innovation Project Achievements

Some achievements of the project have included all of the ELVET partner colleges and others have benefited Newham College particularly. Overall, the project has achieved its aims of exploring effective models for employer-provider partnership working in the growth sectors identified by the programme (digital tech, health and social care, creative industries) and will be cascading its findings for others to consider in their partnership development and working.

ELVET has encouraged better collaboration between the East London colleges and UCL which has resulted in new funding for joint initiatives, for example a Local London Flexible Learning Fund initiative. Each college has benefited from closer liaison with a number of their local and regional employers.

Newham College has embraced the ELVET principles in progressing its employer partnership strategy and acting on the research findings as they have arisen. The formation of the One Place Steering Group has led to closer relationships between the College, regional bodies (such as the Greater London Authority), broker agencies and employers, and partners genuinely and openly sharing thoughts, opinions and information. This is a relationship and format that many of the Steering Group members would like to continue beyond the ELVET Programme. Newham College has also benefited by developing bespoke apprenticeships through closer partnerships with some employers that have been triggered by ELVET.

Issues identified by the Innovation Project

Some of the issues encountered by the project are common to all colleges, not least those in response to national policy developments and which have had a direct impact on the project. The Area Based Reviews did not specifically focus on employer partnerships but primarily on securing financially sustainable organisations[47] diverted the attention of college leaders and governors elsewhere. The mergers that have taken place have also changed the dynamics between colleges as they work out their strategies and plans for working with employers. Changes to apprenticeships, the replacement of Frameworks by Standards, and the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy have been a double-edged sword, the complexity of the funding and the introduction costs to small employers causing some difficulties whilst the opportunity for working in partnership and more closely with more

[47] Spours, K., Hodgson, A., Grainger, P., and Smith, D., *Post-16 Area-Based Reviews in London: An FE college sector transitioning between competition and collaboration? Research Report 3*, UCL Institute of Education, 2018

levy paying employers has created new opportunities. Changes to funding, especially the devolution of the Adult Education Budget, are still causing some uncertainty.

The Further Education system remains competitive, sometimes preventing effective and productive cooperation between colleges. While funding is partly dependent on student numbers and course offers, colleges will remain protective of their employers who will often be able to supply the students and apprentices needed by the colleges. This in turn can lead to a more complicated and perhaps lower quality offer to employers.

Communication between colleges could be better. All the factors above have contributed to colleges seeming to be more inward facing and sometimes reluctant to share ideas, practices and innovations. Similarly, communications within colleges could support more employer focused activities. Whilst central business development units can make initial employer contacts and may have skills in costing and pricing provision, it is normally the staff members of programme teams who speak the cultural and technical languages of their sectors.

The final issue relates to the complexity of qualifications and routes faced by employers and learners alike. One of the reasons for exploring the 'One Place' option was to make it easier for employers to navigate the FE and skills system. Routes are being streamlined but at the moment many employers, not just the smaller ones, do not know what is available, what is most suitable for their employees and how to access it. These issues are being addressed locally to some extent and the project has contributed to that, but this may well be a London-wide if not a national issue.

Recommendations from the Innovation Project including sustainability and lessons learnt on employer-provider relationships

The major lesson from the project has been that partnerships cannot be pigeon-holed, they take many forms and build on differing relationships. The project suggested and explored five possible models for partnership working although found that these 'ideal types' often missed key features for success that could be found in the myriad of actual successful, fit for purpose models. The prevailing conditions, current needs and personalities shaped the models into something individual in each case. However, many of the success factors already identified in the literature were evident in some form in the partnerships. Five recommendations are made below.

1. Various models of successful employer-provider partnerships can be built providing consideration is given to the constraints on all parties in terms of resources and commercial imperatives. Sectors and geographical areas vary widely and there are significant variations between individual employers. General, although not specific, guidance could be developed

to assist college leaders and staff when considering developing and working in employer-provider partnerships.

2. Colleges own internal structures should facilitate joint working between general and centralised business development units and programme teams, who speak the language of the employers in their sectors.

3. It is important to recognise that partnerships are not constant and that particular models of partnership working may not be sustainable. They may come and go according to circumstances, but there are ways to encourage consistent engagement of providers and employers which may be explored further (e.g. the developing Newham College Employer Membership Scheme).

4. Locally, work needs to be done to help employers understand the training and skills development available to them and their staff and its value to business development and productivity. Furthermore, accessing appropriate training also needs to be made easier. This would be less challenging if it were backed up through national initiatives.

5. Colleges need to be able to work in open partnership with each other to develop programmes, courses and structures that create a better offer for students and employers and are not in more destructive competition with each other. An example of where this works well is when funding opportunities clearly specify that successful bidders (i.e. providers) will work in collaboration across a specific geographical region and in partnership with stakeholders and employers. The successful bids to the Flexible Learning Fund and Digital Skills Programme run by the GLA demonstrates that FE colleges in East London can work together for a common goal.

New City College Hackney: supporting students with their progression towards apprenticeship, higher education and employment in the digital sector in East London

Tayebeh Kazempour

Introduction to the College

New City College is east London's largest college formed through the merger between Tower Hamlets and Hackney Community College in 2016 and then with Redbridge College in 2017. The organisation supports over 20,000 students, trainees and apprentices each year. The College provides education and training to young people aged 14-19 years and to adult learners. This includes a large offering of 100+ courses, with GCE A Levels and vocational qualifications in a range of subjects such as business, IT, graphic design, games design, social sciences, mathematics and science, health and social care, construction skills, hospitality and catering, as well as pre-university courses such as Access to Higher education, HNDs and Foundation Degrees. The New City College group offers each of its local campuses a robust structure and strong quality standards that enable bold and flexible campus innovation to meet local and regional skills and employment needs.

Introduction to the employment sector

The Government's UK Digital Strategy identified that many jobs have a digital element and it is predicted that within 20 years, 90 per cent of all jobs will require some element of digital skills. Digital Tech is a fast-growing sector which supports many other sectors, such as creative, finance, IT, health and engineering, all offering strong employment opportunities (1.64 million in 2017).

London is at the forefront of the digital revolution. Data analysis, machine learning and artificial intelligence are all expected to have a huge influence on how we work, the demand for certain skills and the potential automation of some tasks. Transport, retail and social care have all been identified as areas which are likely to undergo significant change as technology transforms these industries[48]. The sector's business turnover for London was £56 billion supporting 318,480 jobs in digital tech. London has become the second most connected tech system in the world, following Silicon Valley[49].
In 83 percent of the Tech Clusters spread across the UK, the tech community cited access to talent as their biggest challenge. Fifty-eight per cent of London start-ups say that the lack of supply of highly-skilled workers is their main challenge[50]. For the last five years, the most commonly cited needs for IT specialists in the Greater London area have been for

[48] Deloitte (2016) *Transformers: how machines are changing every sector of the UK economy* https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-uk-transformers-2016.pdf
[49] Tech Nation Report (2017) *Tech City/NESTA 2017* https://technation.io/insights/report-2018/)
[50] op. cit.

developers, analysts, IT consultants and IT project managers. At the same time, a number of more specialist roles have been increasing in demand, notably in areas such as full stack software solutions, data analytics/big data, cloud specialists and cyber security roles[51].

Key findings of the Project

Young people will require effective and impartial careers advice to make informed decisions about their future career choices

The ELVET Innovation Project at Hackney focused on supporting students with their development journey for progression to apprenticeships, higher education and employment. In the first year of the Project, research was conducted to develop knowledge of the sector, identify skills gaps, establish potential education and training opportunities to meet employers' needs whilst identifying the barriers to effective partnership to achieve this. Crucially, the research found that careers advice in schools frequently did not lead to apprenticeships and did not provide enough information about the opportunities for working in the creative and digital tech sectors. In the second year of the Project, the College planned and implemented a development journey for learners with employers.

The digital tech sector offers huge employment opportunities for highly skilled people but there are considerable skills gaps

As a fast-growing sector, digital tech requires a highly skilled workforce which can keep up with the pace of change in technology. Big corporate organisations often recruit their workforce from national and international markets but SMEs struggle with resourcing their required talent to survive and grow in this sector. FE colleges, universities and independent training providers offer a range of programmes including apprenticeships to train local people with higher levels of skills, but these fall short of meeting the growing needs of the industry. The Project gave the college digital team the opportunity to begin to address some of these issues. The College staff worked intensively with learners on Level 2 and Level 3 vocational programmes to prepare them for progression to employment, apprenticeships and higher education programmes. Through ELVET, College staff and employers worked in partnership to overcome some of the challenges around learners' lower levels of prior attainment, lack of awareness about careers paths and low levels of social and cultural capital. To achieve this, the College's careers team conducted research on the wide range of occupations available in the digital tech sector and created new progression maps for learners and their parents to raise awareness around career opportunities linked to apprenticeships in this area.

College staff also worked with employers to design and deliver a '*bootcamp'* with a range of activities to support the development of learners' soft and technical skills. These included

[51] Greater London Authority (GLA) (2018) *A skills and adult education strategy for London* https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/skills-and-training/skills-londoners-strategy-2018

staff taking the students to attend workshops, technology meet-ups (e.g. on website development, Agile, Coding) and seminars at employer organisations. Meet-ups were helpful in motivating students and widening their horizons by networking with professionals from industry. Staff used meet-ups as a valuable mechanism for updating their industry skills as well as widening their connections with industry experts.

Employers require support and training to engage with the new apprenticeship standards

As part of delivering the skills agenda and putting employers at the heart of the skills system, the government revised its approach to apprenticeships. It introduced an apprenticeship levy and replaced apprenticeship frameworks with new apprenticeship standards. The standards were designed and piloted mostly with large employers with limited involvement from SMEs. While this initially led to a decline in apprenticeship starts both nationally and locally, during the lifetime of the Project, it has created the opportunity for College staff to have useful discussions and engagement with the employer organisations. College staff delivered training to employers around the new standards, assessment requirements and how to mentor learners. In line with the government policies, New City College also revised its approach towards the delivery of apprenticeship programmes by consolidating its offer and engagement strategy with employers across its three sites. The programmes moved to specialist curriculum hubs providing more opportunities for teaching staff to engage with apprenticeship programmes and to improve their quality. The employers enjoyed having professional discussions with staff with the relevant industry background as opposed to more generalist sales teams.

Developing sustainable partnerships with employers requires a whole-college approach

Developing effective partnerships with employers requires clear understanding of their needs and expectations. To enable learners on Level 2 and Level 3 programmes in Business, IT and Media to gain access to those industries, the College worked with East London Business Alliance (ELBA) members and local SMEs to develop a skills matrix and a '*bootcamp*' to develop students' soft and hard (technical) skills. ELBA organised an activity with the financial services company UBS to run a workshop for 20 College managers to work with volunteers from UBS with different specialisms to develop a range of strategies to support learners with developing their soft skills, understanding the culture of the City and gaining work experience. This helped College managers from different faculties to develop joint strategies on how best to support learners. The College also partnered with EdSpace, a co-working and small business incubator based on the College campus which provides wide-ranging support for tech start-ups in education, to develop a set of activities to improve learners' employability skills. These included BETA testing, work experience, apprenticeships, industry training for staff and students, live project briefs, work shadowing and seminars led by professionals from industry.

Testimony from Anjulie Turong (Managing Director of EdSpace March 2017-March 2018)

> *"The ELVET initiative has been a fantastic demonstration of how SME business and colleges can be brought closer together. It has shown that by collaborating we can ensure that college leavers are given a better chance of professional success as they move from education into the workplace. With colleges and businesses sharing and learning from each other the hope is that we create a more harmonious and aligned process for the individual.*
>
> *It's imperative that the initiative does not end when the programme does, and there is still progress to be made. Colleges should be making better use of local businesses in their nearby vicinity, bringing them into events and networking with SME companies.*
>
> *For businesses, it means they have access to a talent pool they may have previously not considered. For colleges, they must support the needs of business by ensuring digital skill development, alongside a focus on softer skills such as effective communication and resilience, which will better equip the individual as they transition into the workplace.*
>
> *Social media now makes it far more accessible for college to support their teaching staff to grow their professional network. LinkedIn and Facebook offer forums and groups that can connect individuals, and Meetup and Eventbrite facilitate thousands of free events each year. Wider awareness of talent in colleges, alongside a concerted effort in training on skills that SME businesses require will better align both entities, and ultimately widen and sustain participation."*

Achievements

Through ELVET the College carried out in-depth research trying to gain an understanding of the size, operation, hubs and skills' requirements of the sector. This helped with informing New City College's strategy, policies and practices on vocational specialism and apprenticeship planning, recruitment and delivery in digital tech.

The work with sector skills bodies, such as Tech Partnership, Creative Skillset, and employer organisations, such as British Interactive Media Association (BIMA), ELBA (Corporate members) and EdSpace (SMEs members), helped with establishing, progression maps for apprenticeships, the skills matrix and '*bootcamp*' activities that prepare learners for progression to HE programmes including higher/degree apprenticeships and employment using digital skills. The College was able to raise the awareness of young people and parents around apprenticeship programmes in the tech sector. Twenty learners on computing programmes were supported with their applications and interviews for the degree

apprenticeship programmes with companies such as IBM, Deloitte, Accenture, Capgemini, Goldman Sacs, Santander, Ford and CGI.

Through ELVET involvement Hackney learners were successful in winning the contract to design the ELVET website; new delivery models for apprenticeship programmes using the new standards were built; additional curriculum modules to support apprentices were developed; and new CPD opportunities to prepare staff and employers to support apprentices were created.

The range of CPD activities offered to staff helped with updating staff industry skills, led to raising standards in teaching and learning, embedding the activities of the '*bootcamp*' into curriculum planning, designing appropriate delivery models for new apprenticeship programmes while also providing a better understanding of T-Levels.

Issues

The tech sector requires a workforce with high level technical skills and a strong knowledge of the sector, as well as high levels of independent learning to be able to keep up with the fast-changing pace of technological change. Research into skills requirements and discussions with employers and recruitment agencies indicated that the current jobs in the industry are mostly at degree or higher levels and require professional experience. Hackney's young learners not only require training in soft and technical skills, but they also need to gain experience of the work environment. The College struggles with getting appropriate and relevant work placement opportunities for students. Through the Project the College managed to engage with SMEs to get a number of work shadowing opportunities and some placements. However, the majority of SMEs lack the resources to offer any longer placement opportunities. Finding work-based opportunities is highly competitive as there are many colleges, schools, universities and international training providers looking for placement opportunities in the same space.

Government changes to the apprenticeship system and the introduction of the apprenticeship levy slowed progress in planned activities with employers around the recruitment and delivery of apprenticeships programmes. This was particularly evident with SMEs who formed one of the College's main markets for apprenticeship recruitment. The College's vocational learners also find it difficult to compete with academic students with high GCSE grades for higher/degree apprenticeships opportunities.

Working with employers and maintaining the continuity of support for activities at times can be difficult. New innovative ways of establishing partnerships with employers to support learners will continue to be sought.

While the Project staff always enjoyed the endorsement and support of the College's senior management team, the changing landscape of FE at times introduced challenges.

Recommendations

1. Provide effective careers advice for all learners and parents of young learners

Ensure that all careers and teaching staff in the college are knowledgeable about academic and vocational careers routes, including apprenticeship programmes and the opportunities these can offer so they can provide effective and balanced advice to learners, empowering them to make informed decisions about their future careers and education.

2. Set up clear systems and processes for effective partnership with employers

- Have a robust apprenticeship sales and delivery team who can engage effectively with employers to ensure that all parties have a clear understanding of the programme (including the new standards) and its recruitment, delivery and assessment requirements.
- Engage curriculum staff who have a vocational specialism in discussions with employers in recruiting apprentices.
- Allocate dedicated resources to increase work experience and internship opportunities for learners.
- Engage students and staff with industry networking events and meet-ups to increase their knowledge of industry and to develop learners' social skills.

3. Develop learners' soft and technical skills to access employment opportunities

Work in partnership with employers to plan engaging sets of activities (visits, work shadowing, industry-based projects, workshops, specialist lectures, mentoring, joint curriculum development and others) prior to the start of the academic year to focus on modelling and establishing professional behaviours for all learners from induction.

4. Maintain sustainable 'two-way street' partnerships between employers and education providers.

Re-phrase and re-shape the traditional concept of 'employer engagement' to a 'two-way street' employer and education partnership approach.

New City College Tower Hamlets: orientating students towards employment and higher education in the creative and cultural industries in East London

Denise Clendenning

Introduction to the college

New City College is east London's largest college formed by the merger between Tower Hamlets and Hackney Community College in 2016 and Redbridge College in 2017. The organisation supports over 15,000 students, trainees and apprentices each year. We provide education and training to young people aged from 14-18 years and to adult learners. This includes a large offering of 100+ courses at A Level to vocational in a range of subjects including business, IT, performing arts, graphic design, games design, social sciences, mathematics and science, health and social care, construction skills and hospitality and catering, as well as pre-university entry courses such as Access to Higher Education and Higher National Certificates. The college's aim is to establish a secure financial basis through innovative partnerships to help us to provide long-term education and training facilities and provision for young people and our local communities.

Introduction to the employment sector

Historically there has been a concentration of creative industries in the east of London. This includes: advertising, film and TV, publishing, design, art, museums, galleries and fashion. Tower Hamlets is a distinct locality in which a range of small to medium-sized creative and entertainment businesses operate, specifically around Shoreditch, Commercial Street and City Fringe. Creative Clusters (artist studios) are located primarily at Fish Island, Hackney Wick and Bromley by Bow and are traditionally located in 'end of life' spaces awaiting regeneration. These creative clusters have already been displaced from areas such as Hoxton and Shoreditch due to regeneration and the subsequent rapid rise in rents.

The creative sector in Tower Hamlets has grown by 80% over the last five years[52] and is predicted to grow even further as the Culture Enterprise Zones are established. At Fish Island and Hackney Wick, importance has been placed on protecting the rents and use of buildings for artists and creative enterprise. There are emerging opportunities for innovative creative industries around the old London Hospital in Whitechapel, which is to be re-developed into a new civic and retail centre with a cutting edge 'Life Science campus' at Queen Mary University and Royal London Hospital to be known as London's Med City. The area stretching from the east of London to the coastline of Essex in the future will be known

[52] We Made That and Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy (2018*) LLDC Combined Economy Study Part B: Creative and Cultural Opportunities Assessment. London: London Legacy Development Corporation.*

as the Thames Estuary Production Corridor; it has been identified in the GLA's Draft Culture Paper[53] as providing a catalyst for growth and innovation for local creative industries.

Key Findings of the Project

The NCC – Tower Hamlets project focused on providing students, who live in the borough of Tower Hamlets, with greater access to higher education and employment. In year one interviews were conducted with a wide range of employers in east London to explore the contemporary expertise required within the creative industries and the barriers to their collaboration with the college. In the second year, the staff and students worked with companies to complete joint projects and developed larger networks with organisations such as the Frieze, Creative Skill Set and Design and Art Direction (D&AD) to identify access points for students into apprenticeships and employment. Arrangements were also made for teaching staff to work shadow within large and medium sized companies in order to develop their knowledge of contemporary practices and to rejuvenate the college curriculum.

Data needs to be used more extensively by curriculum and college staff to identify opportunities for collaboration and student progression

We discovered that it is a full-time job trying to keep abreast of the wide range of events, workshops and opportunities offered by creative business and organizations throughout London. However, gathering this data has enabled the staff to update their knowledge of careers opportunities, to gain a greater insight into the emerging skills required by the creative industries and to identify the issues that prevent small or medium-sized creative business from accepting a design apprentice and / or work placement for our students. We have seen the value of having a clear and informed voice, which uses local market data and cultural strategies, to inform others of our successes and emerging opportunities.

Creating collaborative partnerships with employers requires a multifaceted approach

In order to create greater access for our students into the creative industries we consulted with a wide range of creative organisations and lead creative advisory bodies. Collaborative partnerships were created by promoting the art and design 'brand' of NCC –Tower Hamlets; industry-led career events and specialist skills workshops for creative businesses, college staff and students; developing relationships with companies through visits and discussions; instigating networking opportunities at the Royal Institute of British Architects and D&AD; and an increase in live projects from business. The profile of the art and design department has been raised as a direct and very positive byproduct of these activities and enabled the College to showcase our highly prized facilities and examples of outstanding student work. In return for this valued support and guidance from creative businesses, we have been able

[53] Greater London Authority (2018) *Skills for Londoners: A Skills and Adult Education Strategy for London.* Available at: *https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sfl_strategy_final_june_20186.pdf*, accessed 25 June 2018

to provide digital and traditional 'making' workshops for their staff CPD sessions. Businesses have reciprocated with offers to host flexible periods of work shadowing for our staff in their creative agencies. Working jointly with creative businesses and gaining information through workshops, youth programmes, forthcoming exhibitions and events have enabled the college to devise adventurous routes into apprenticeships and work placements.

The need to demystify educational language for employers

We found that most of the creative businesses we contacted in east London have a limited understanding of modern day apprenticeships. Many of those who have investigated apprenticeships have not found a model which supports their specific business needs. Using a joint approach between our NCC-Tower Hamlets business development department and the creative curriculum staff we have found a joint language to 'speak' with creative businesses in order to demystify such overwhelming topics as levy payments and compliance rules. This has enabled the curriculum staff and the business development department to plan a tailored training programme to suit their individual business needs.

Programmes need to foster the behaviours, attitudes and effective communication skills of students to enter the creative industries

The students involved in the ELVET project provided information about the challenges they faced entering apprenticeships and employment. They reported that one of their main barriers was a lack of confidence and awareness to access opportunities and information. The project identified the need for the college to include social skills orientated towards the creative industries. Examples include the ability to network with other practitioners and organisations, identifying and travelling to cultural events and ways to approach creative businesses. Interviews with a range of creative employers, focused on how to better prepare students for employment, suggested that we encourage students to learn how to network, explore, find opportunities and gain experiences, wherever they can.

College systems need to be integrated

In order to engage in partnership working within the creative industries we found the need for closer working arrangements between the art and design curriculum staff and business and enterprise staff in the college. Working together enabled more detailed discussion with businesses about 'bespoke' programmes that meet the skills needs of employers.

Achievements

Many of our achievements have come from networking and making connections with similar minds who also seek to support and foster new talent for creative industries. These include Creative Skillset, D&AD and the Whitechapel Art Gallery educational team, to name but a few. We have found our voice to implement a bespoke CPD programme for our teaching staff. Employers have allowed teaching staff to observe both traditional making practice and contemporary problem-solving skills through work shadowing at the Roundhouse, Sadler's Wells and the National Theatre. Staff have also observed the level of digital, idea generation and problem-solving skills required in the marketing, fashion and

graphic industries at employers such as Lyle and Scott, Hato Press and Debenhams. We are now working to incorporate this knowledge into the curriculum.

To support the social and cultural development of our students, the staff within the art and design department have produced an innovative interactive teaching and learning resource with Hato Digital. Attending open house visits to production and film studios facilitated by Creative Skillset, the Welcome Collection and House of Illustration led to the development of an interactive cultural map of London.

Alongside the increase in our apprenticeship schemes a UCAS statement writing and progression workshop for all students on Level 3 programmes has been supported by Ravensbourne University, Central St Martins and Frieze. This has resulted in a 100% success rate for students who applied for a degree placement. The Young Enterprise Company Programme has supported, for a second year, our hugely successful learning company 'League of Badges' who have won Best Team Award 2018 and Company of the Year 2018 in the east London Final. They also provide CV and interview technique workshops which are now run across a range of curriculum areas at all NCC campuses.

Issues

Working in the creative and cultural industries is a graduate profession. Interview feedback confirmed that there is a shortfall of workplace opportunities for young people studying programmes at levels 1-3 who have the appropriate attitude and commitment. Small businesses also have a limited mentoring capability and large-scale organizations are simply overwhelmed with requests. Some of our apprentices have struggled and find the workplace challenging owing to the level of their skill in comparison with graduate trainees.

There has been a 30% drop since 2010 of young people undertaking GCSE creative subjects[54], a statistic, which highlights an alarming shortfall of creative talent entering the industry. We at NCC–Tower Hamlets have managed to maintain our student numbers in our creative provision. We have done this through steady marketing at our open day events to ensure parents' perceptions of career opportunities within the industry are not clouded by the value they place on vocational qualifications and their own awareness of career opportunities in creative sectors. Educational establishments and creative organisations need to rethink how to market themselves to a wider audience showcasing the contribution

[54] Greater London Authority (2018) *Skills for Londoners: A Skills and Adult Education Strategy for London.* Available at: *https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sfl_strategy_final_june_20186.pdf*, accessed 25 June 2018

of £92 billion to the UK economy[55] and that in London 1 in 6 jobs are held within the creative economy[56].

Sustaining the momentum of ELVET given the resource restraints may be difficult. However, the learning networks we have established with creative businesses and organizations in east London are essential to students' learning and our programmes of study. We need to be optimistic as structural changes are embedded, as a consequence of area-based reviews, and while new working practices emerge in managing apprenticeship compliancy rules and the implementation of T Levels. We need to be pro-active in all areas and to be continually innovative and develop non-obvious solutions.

Recommendations

Recent research which predicts the skills needed for the future[57] identifies that originality and fluency of ideas will be highly sought after by all industries and these need to be the foundations of teaching in a creative curriculum. The future demand for creative and technical skills is echoed by the Creative Industries Federation which provides a strong voice highlighting the relevance and value of the creative subjects both to young people, parents and those who question the value of creative subjects in education today. The ELVET project thus recommends:

1. The use of data to inform curriculum content and skills development

Research on the skills trends for 2030 identifies changing and evolving careers within the creative industries. There is a need to continually redefine curriculum content to ensure that it is aligned with new developments in the industry and to reflect future job predictions.

2. Integrate college systems and communication

To support student progression into employment and higher education the internal systems within colleges need to foster a community of sharing and the exchange of information and skills between central college departments and curriculum areas.

3. Work collaboratively to maintain connections with networks and intermediaries to rejuvenate the curriculum

Collaborative projects, events and skills up-dating provide the means and focus to sustain employer-provider partnerships.

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[55] Department for Digital, Cultural Media and Sport (July 2017*) DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates 2016: Gross Value Added*
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/creative-industries-record-contribution-to-uk-economy Accessed 15th June, 2018

[56] Greater London Authority (2018) *Skills for Londoners: A Skills and Adult Education Strategy for London.* Available at: *https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sfl_strategy_final_june_20186.pdf*, accessed 25 June 2018

[57] Bakhshi, H., Dowling, J., Osborne, M. and Schneider, P. (2017) *The Future of Skills: Employment 2030. London: Pearson and Nesta.*

4. Focus on the behaviours, attitudes and communication skills required by students to enter the creative industries

The curriculum needs to place attention not only on the skills required for the creative industries but also the development of students behaviours, attitudes and communication skills through social events related to the creative industries, engagement with employers and cultural activities.

Barking and Dagenham College: upskilling the workforce in the health and social care sector

Samantha French

Introduction to the College

Barking & Dagenham College (BDC) is situated within the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD), delivering high quality education and training, with a strong emphasis on employment-focused vocational courses. It has a proven 30-year track record in successful delivery, awarded 'Good' by Ofsted, thus maintaining the rating from its previous inspection.

BDC offers courses from Entry Level to Level 5 Higher Education courses and trains 860 apprentices annually, making it one of the largest apprenticeship providers in London. Almost 90 per cent of students' progress to higher education, apprenticeships and employment.

The College's Business Innovation & Enterprise (BIE) team works with local employers of all sizes - undertaking Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and devising training programmes, enabling organisational change and business growth including: vocational courses; traineeships; apprenticeships; regulatory and legislative short courses; and bespoke programmes.

BDC has a strong commitment to social inclusion - building ladders of progression from Entry Level upwards, improving lives in the local community and contributing to the local economy. The Employability Team partners with the local authority, Jobcentre Plus and employers to motivate and upskill individuals currently out of work, moving participants into positive and sustainable outcomes and meeting the recruitment needs of employers.

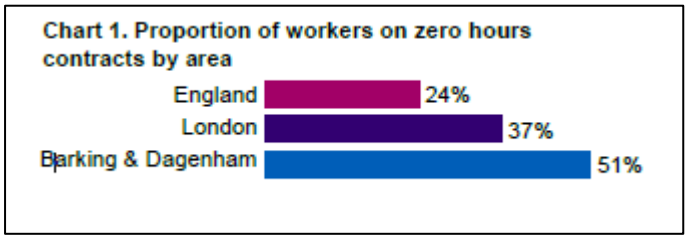
Introduction to the health and social care employment and skills landscape

In 2016/17 in LBBD there were an estimated 6,100 jobs in adult social care split between local authorities (5%), independent sector providers (71%) and jobs for direct payment recipients (24%). The adult social care workforce in England is growing - increasing by 19 per cent since 2009, and in London, by 10 per cent since 2012 and is projected to grow further by 27 per cent (from 215,000 to 275,000 jobs) by 2030.

A 2018 *Skills for Care* report[58] found that adult social care has an experienced 'core' of workers. Workers in LBBD had on average 5.9 years of experience in the sector and 66 per

[58] Skills for Care, March 2018, 'The sector in Barking & Dagenham' https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/NMDS-SC-intelligence/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Local-authority-area-summary-reports.aspx accessed 23 May 2018

cent of the workforce had been working in the sector for at least three years. *Skills for Care* estimates that in LBBD, 16.7 per cent of roles in adult social care were vacant, twice the vacancy rate of the region average. Over half (51%) of the workforce in LBBD were on zero-hours contracts. Under half (44%) worked on a full-time basis, 30 per cent were part-time and the remaining 25 per cent had no fixed hours.



(Skills for Care, 2018)

The project objective was to understand how to best work with employers to stimulate and encourage interest in upskilling within a sector that is struggling with basic skills gaps and trying to attract applicants for long-unfilled vacancies.

Key findings of the Innovation Project

The project team worked closely with 27 employers in the health and social care sector to support long-term employer-provider partnership building. All employers welcomed an initial visit with an explanation of what the project could offer. These were subsequently followed up by more intensive longer-term support visits. Alongside the visits, a bespoke TNA was undertaken to identify both strategic and operational issues and potential solutions in terms of developing bespoke training, short courses, regulatory courses, and recruitment practice solutions.

The 'hook' to engage with many employers initially was an employer's desire to understand more about the benefits and use of Assistive Technologies (AT/TEC). However, once the employer understood the offer, it was often found that upskilling in AT/TEC was an aspiration rather than a realistic opportunity at that moment in time. Issues raised by employers included:

- Recruitment and retention issues – employment in the care sector is often seen as a 'stopgap' for those looking for immediate work or having come back to the workforce after a career break or caring responsibilities.
- Staff sickness levels – providing cover for staff often precludes a focus on the longer term or taking a more strategic approach to running a care business.
- Employees' basic level skills levels (English, Mathematics, Basic IT) often required urgent attention before AT/TEC could be considered.

- Meeting bespoke training needs were priorities - tailored solutions such as 'Report Writing for Care Handovers' are popular and gave employers activities to help build stronger relationships.
- Employers securing funding for training - a significant issue, therefore regulatory and specialist vocational courses such as Food Hygiene, Dementia Care and End of Life Care are a priority.

College staff skills have been built through the project. Working in partnership with external specialist partners, undertaking joint visits to employers and coordinating joint events has upskilled and built the capacity of the BDC Business, Innovation and Enterprise (BIE) team. Curriculum teams now understand and engage more effectively with care employers. This has resulted in a 'care specialist' network within the college.

In addition to the 27 employers engaged through TNAs, a Technology Enhanced Care (TEC) learning programme has been developed following a structured, 'deep dive' consultation exercise which was undertaken in collaboration with the college's partners at Care City and engaging with 20 additional strategic care organisations. This work indicated that:

- Many care employers commission 'traditional' forms of TEC training such as the use of pressure mats, basic alarm systems, fall sensors. Although at least one employer uses more advanced AT/TEC such as 'Tap In/Tap Out' carer monitoring systems, and Near Field Communication (NFC) 'tags' on furniture.
- The awareness and use of TEC is variable, although once explored with an employer, care home staff often recognise that they do use some forms of TEC and would welcome further training or support with development.
- There were high levels of interest expressed in learning about other forms of TEC, particularly that which is SMART or tailored. These include, 'smart' tech (Alexa, Google Home); tech to support service users' everyday living and promote independence; and reminiscing programme tools for service users living with dementia.
- Employers would welcome structured and targeted training, for example meeting the differentiated needs of social workers, community staff, district nurses, voluntary sector and care workers
- Topics employers would like to see reflected in TEC unit included:

    - Basic IT skills needs
    - Use of tech – safety and legislative requirements
    - Examples of best practice
    - Patient – centred topics (dignity, mental capacity)
    - TEC to enhance not replace human interaction

- Cost implications were a common concern, both of the learning programme and the adoption of TEC in the workplace.
- AT/TEC solutions were seen as an added 'burden' to existing heavy workloads.
- Hesitance to engage with TEC is not so much related to the inability to use it; rather the sector is not aware of the benefits. Therefore, this is a key message in the promotion and delivery of the TEC module.

Innovation Project achievements

The college has developed a TEC module for use with care employers and has established a Project Board. The Board includes BDC, Skills for Care, Technical Skills Academy (TSA) specialists in TEC and Care City. An ELVET legacy is a partnership between BDC and Skills for Care, both planning joint events well into the future. Other collaboration built through ELVET includes work with Havering College; Newham College; the Disablement Association Barking & Dagenham (DABD); and the Barking & Dagenham Skills and Employment Operational Partnership.

Skills for Care disseminated and promoted the TEC module as an innovation to the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) in England. In addition, the extensive consultation was used as a basis for the building of the TEC module and will be offered to employers as part of an enhanced college offer to care employers.

Through collaborating with employers, sharing of data, coordination of campaigns and events, BDC employer-facing teams have improved their ability to work effectively with care employers, to understand and meet their needs. There is now a dedicated 'care specialist' at BDC who is an 'I Care…Ambassador', a Skills for Care initiative to encourage care employers to engage with the talent of the future.

Issues identified by the Innovation Project

Key issues that have necessitated a flexible and adaptive approach over the course of the project include:

- *Time for college staff* - Building trust-based relationships with employers has taken several visits and communications and the challenge is to sustain these through the conventional qualifications funding model.
- *Time for stretched care employers* – events can be poorly attended, particularly when sickness absence affects the covering of shifts. Planning course delivery, even on an employer's site, is subject to the same barriers.
- *Highly variable levels of knowledge surrounding AT/TEC*, although this could be turned into an opportunity for the future promotion of the college's TEC module.
- *Changes in staff and staff roles of key project partners* has meant delays in the delivery of some outputs of the project (e.g. the creation of the TEC module

itself), resulting in the module being unable to be embedded into curriculum provision before the end of the academic year.

- *The introduction of upskilling in new technology has highlighted the need for extensive groundwork* - the common requirements for basic skills development has caused a 're-set' of the original project activity and timetable, and yet delivered a deeper understanding of, and stronger links with employers.
- *Co-production and collaboration has highlighted a need for flexibility*. Examples include:
    - Intellectual property rights where a new and potentially valuable resource has been created.
    - Competition between colleges. ELVET/TEC-based employer events would have been enhanced by the attendance of our project partner Havering College's students and curriculum staff. However, if a Havering student, as a result of meeting a BDC employer at the event, commenced an apprenticeship with that employer, the resultant apprenticeship funding could flow through that college (rather than BDC), depending on employer choice. The current funding system therefore poses a barrier to certain types of collaborative behaviours.

Recommendations from the Innovation Project including sustainability and lessons learnt on employer-provider relationships

A significant legacy benefit from the project has been the building of strong and sustainable relationships with external partners, evidenced by an ongoing plan for joint activity. Creating effective employer-provider partnerships is challenging for both colleges and employers. The main lessons emerging from the BDC element of the ELVET Project have led to the following recommendations.

1. The importance of a lead specialist to mediate relations with employers

A more 'horizontal' approach, where the college works closely with other skills and / or community groups aiming to improve lives and livelihoods and acts as a trusted 'informed broker' or advisor to employers, has contributed to the delivery of a flexible and responsive solutions-based offer. The Project highlighted the importance of the appointment of a dedicated college lead specialist in the health and social care sector to provide a streamlined, sustainable approach and ongoing connections to continuously improve engagement with employers in the sector. This can be evidenced by the words of one of the ELVET project employers: "*The most important thing is for colleges to understand the product, the client base so they can help to work out solutions to training issues. It is important to understand the pressures on the employer, time, resources, legislation, etc., so you can find solutions together that work. Flexibility is vital and having someone … [at the college] … who is available and will drive things forward.*"

2. Building in realistic time-scales for employer partnership building

Co-production with employers has yielded innovative and sustainable solutions (e.g. the creation of a 'Report Writing' course). However, the rollout of other co-production innovations, (e.g. the Care Plan App produced in conjunction with BUPA Chase Farm), has been hindered due to staff changes at the employer's organisation. Therefore, college resilience must be built to support the long timescales required to sustain these types of high quality, yet potentially unstable, employer relationships.

3. Colleges need to develop their own internal collaboration

Enhancement and development of new and existing internal cross-departmental college relationships can help form a robust and resilient internal network that in turn informs curriculum development. Care homes in the area could see the benefit of different types of collaborative relationships involving not only those training to be care specialists, but also students on sport/leisure; catering; horticulture and design courses. This creates a 'virtuous circle' of a more collaborative college, facilitating enhanced future employer engagement.

4. Collaboration between colleges is important because it can deliver additional benefits for education/employer partnership building

Despite competition between colleges for employers, the Project has been successful in establishing synergies between colleges working in a cross-disciplinary way. For example, BDC and Havering College worked together through the wider strategic LBBD Skills and Employment Operational Partnership. A key recommendation, therefore, is that FE colleges should 'exploit' and develop existing strategic connections with other providers.

5. It is important to service the 'actual' and 'immediate' needs of employers before progressing to higher level demands

The original vision and project proposal – to work with employers to stimulate and provide for higher skills needs has remained as a core focus of the project. The enduring AT/TEC emphasis has been valuable in providing a high-level focus coalescing the partnerships and approach to employers. However, servicing the actual needs of employers 'on the ground' requires a significant level of engagement and resource to deliver the basic skills required before the higher-level needs can be addressed.

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