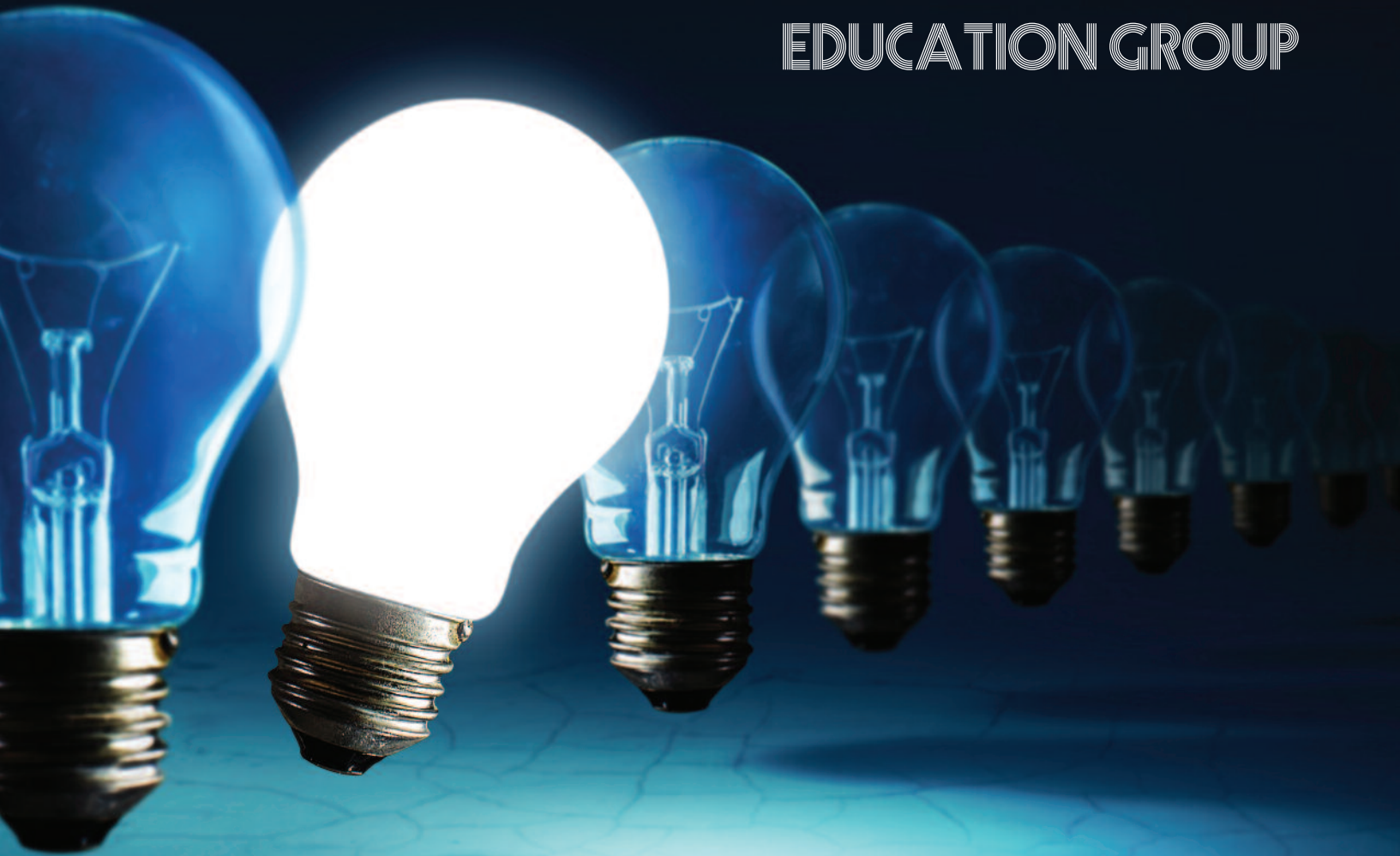


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Our history

1907 – Bexley College opens as ‘Erith Technical Institute’

1921 – Woolwich College of Further Education opens

1959 – Bromley College is founded

1971 – A new campus is built in Belvedere (which will later become Bexley College)

1972 – Orpington College opens, housed in the tallest tower block in Orpington

1993 – The Belvedere college campus becomes Bexley College

1998 – Woolwich College merges with Greenwich Community College to deliver a range of FE and Adult & Community learning courses

2008 – Orpington College tower block undergoes a £26m overhaul

2011 – Orpington College merges with Bromley College

2014 – A new Bexley College campus opens in Erith town centre (Belvedere site closes)

2014 – Bromley College’s Hospitality, Food and Enterprise Career College, plus a student-led restaurant (BR6) opens in Orpington

2014 – Bromley College creates Bromley Educational Trust (a multi-academy trust) to bring together schools on two sites, providing mixed alternative provision for 5-16 year olds

2015 – Bromley Beacon Academy joins the trust bringing special social emotional mental health provision on two sites, serving wider age range of 7-18 year olds

2016 – On 1 August Bexley College and Greenwich Community College merge with Bromley College to become London South East Colleges

2017 – In July the charity Skills for Growth becomes part of London South East Colleges

2017 – In September Bromley Educational Trust is renamed London South East Academies Trust. Horizons, Aspire and Endeavour academies in Bexley join the Trust adding alternative and special social emotional and mental health provision

2018 – London and South East Education Group is established, bringing together Skills for Growth, London South East Colleges and London South East Academies Trust

2019 – Ofsted rates the group as Good with outstanding SEND provision

2019 – In spring, Belmont Academy joins the Trust, bringing a mainstream primary school with specialist facilities for children who are blind or visually impaired

2019 – Woodside Academy joins adding a special academy for 5-19 year olds with learning difficulties including ASD and moderate learning and medical needs

2019 – The Group is honoured with a Queen's Anniversary Prize for its pioneering technical and vocational education

2019 – Autumn sees the group launch its new five year strategy as it transitions to becoming a social enterprise

2020 – Bramley Oak Academy (formerly Wey House, Guildford) a special primary school for boys with social, emotional and mental health needs joins the Trust

Preface

We are living in extraordinary times. The Covid-19 pandemic is impacting educators and students across the globe and never has the sector needed to be so agile, resourceful and flexible.

Since its creation in 2016, London South East Colleges has responded to the many changing economic and social pressures across its region. Covid-19 has challenged the status quo, while establishing the importance of community and social value - and this is exactly what the college is striving to achieve.

This is the story of an organisation that has made the transition from being simply a college to a thriving social enterprise, sitting at the heart of its community.

Acknowledgements

Many people were interviewed in gathering information for this book, including staff, students, governors and friends of the college. In particular, I would like to thank the following for giving their time for conversation and reflection:

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Foreword

Crucial to the success of any business is its ability to adapt and respond to change. This is particularly true of the further education sector which has undergone a huge transformation over the past century.

The creation of London South East Colleges was the result of a pioneering merger of three colleges in 2016 – but its legacy goes back much further, to when Bexley College opened at the beginning of the 20th Century. Woolwich College of Further Education followed in 1921 and Bromley College in 1959. Since then, new campuses have been built across our three boroughs and as a group we now provide education to more than 13,000 people.

With two world wars, a series of economic booms and crashes, the incredibly fast-paced development of digital technology through to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the world never stands still. However, in the case of further education one thing has never changed - its ability and purpose to create opportunity for people.

I went to a further education college, which opened a pathway to university. Many others have done the same, along with those who have trained vocationally, upskilled, re-skilled or were given another chance at learning, leading them to fulfilling and successful careers.

To continue to offer these opportunities, colleges must be responsive not only to customer demand, but to the needs of employers. The economy has changed dramatically over the past century, with automation and technology continually impacting on industry.

The education provision we offer has to reflect this changing picture, to ensure that our students get the very best opportunities to move into great careers. Our excellent relationships with employers and stakeholders are key to this and something we continue to focus on.

The journey of London South East Colleges since its inception in 2016 has been exciting and successful, as documented so succinctly in this book. But it has also been one of discovery and learning. Not everything we have wanted to do over the years has worked out and there will always be times when ideas must be taken back to the drawing board and re-worked.

But our experience reflects how significant challenges can be faced and overcome if the collective will and desire to achieve something is great enough – which it certainly has been in our organisation.

And it is with this positive attitude that we are now dealing with the impact of Covid-19; one of the biggest challenges to face our nation, and indeed the world, for several decades. Never before have we needed to be as agile and flexible as a business – while continuing to support our communities.

The world will undoubtedly change as a result of Covid-19. However, I am confident that our organisation has the tools, expertise and will to move with it – helping people of all ages to make the most of a newly emerging economic and social landscape.

Stephen Howlett CBE, DL, Chair of London & South East Education Group

Introduction

The development of this book has provided me with the opportunity to reflect on the last few years – a hugely busy, productive and inspiring time both personally and for the organisation. When you are undergoing great periods of changes, it can be difficult to take a step back and observe the bigger picture. It's so important to celebrate success and recognise achievement.

This is why I was so keen to take a look back on the journey our organisation has made over the past five years – a journey which has seen us expand from one college to a thriving education group consisting of eight college campuses, eight schools and an apprenticeship provider.

This remarkable transformation has only been made possible with the support of passionate and hardworking colleagues, staff (both past and present), employer partners, governors, supportive local authorities, local schools and great students. The group's community has expanded but also strengthened as we have united in our mission to provide high quality education to people of all ages, abilities and interests across the region.

Over this time period, I have been greatly privileged to receive an OBE for my services to the further education sector – a great personal achievement but, again, one that I have to give thanks to my wonderful colleagues for their ongoing support. I also completed my doctorate on FE policy in 2019, which brought together my many years of learning and experience of the sector. This in-depth study has provided me with additional insight, which I believe will be of great use to our organisation as we move forward into the next decade.

But best of all was the news in late 2019 that the college has been awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize for its pioneering technical and vocational education. This is the highest accolade that can be awarded to an FE or HE institution, bestowed by the Queen. For me, this reflects the remarkable progress we have made as an organisation – quite frankly beating the odds in a difficult climate and demonstrating the great things that truly can be achieved when we have a shared purpose.

I want to thank everyone who has been part of our journey so far, past and present. This journey has already enabled us to respond to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic in robust, creative and caring ways. This book also gives a small insight into that work. I have no doubt we have an exciting future ahead and I look forward to the coming years.

Dr Sam Parrett OBE, CEO and Group Principal

About this book

This book has been written for anyone with an interest in management and practice in education; the further education sector, south east London and the leadership of large learning organisations. It picks out some of the key features of successful growth and identifies some of the characteristics of a dynamic educational institution during challenging times. Many of the lessons are transferable to other institutions and they are shared in this spirit.

The project began in July 2014 with a brief to get to know the college, its staff and students over an extended period of time. The college had already gone through significant positive transformation and growth in the period since the new principal's arrival in 2010 and this growth was set to continue. The book documents and reflects on the changes, helping to mark and celebrate the successes. It recognises the efforts of a hugely skilled and committed team of staff, students and governors.

The further education sector tends to move quickly at the best of times. Add to that the college's propensity to look for opportunities beyond the traditional boundaries of the FE sector and its boundless interest in growth, and you have a recipe for constant change. The main developments which this book reflects on and shares learning from include:

- growth of the outstanding Nido Volans centre of excellence for students with learning difficulties and disabilities

- construction and opening of the Life Centre (sports centre)
- opening of an industry standard hospitality and catering training facility, including the highly regarded BR6 restaurant
- the creation of the London South East Academies Trust, overseeing eight schools and with a specialism in working with challenging pupils
- the opening of a new business school
- the growth of the higher education provision at the college culminating in the award of University Centre status.

Most significant of all, successful mergers with Orpington College (2011) followed by subsequent mergers with Greenwich and Bexley Colleges (2016) to form London South East Colleges, which is now leading 16-18 and adult training and education across south east London. This is an impressive list of achievements, but itself is only partial.

At the same time as these expansions, the core work of the college – the vocational education of 16-18 year olds and adults in work – also grew and student outcomes improved, while the college maintained a strong financial position, no mean feat indeed. The book tells some of the story of these developments and identifies some of the factors that have driven the success.

It is hoped that they will help to stimulate passion and action in others who are managing and leading within similar institutions. What follows is certainly not a how to guide to running a college, it is more a *'this is what we did'*; you might want to use some of our ideas and learn from our experiences'.

The college does not believe that it has got everything right – far from it. There are several examples of developments and initiatives which did not produce the intended outcome or which needed reviewing and improving before they began to deliver the intended results. One positive feature of the college is a common willingness among staff for self-reflection – and this includes a willingness to acknowledge where things haven't worked out as intended and need improving or changing.

The context for growth – doing the right thing, one college approach and a new civic agenda

There are several important factors to be acknowledged from the outset. In July 2015, the government announced its intention to 'move towards fewer, often larger, more resilient and efficient FE providers'. (See: Reviewing post-16 Education and Training Institutions 2015.) This was to be achieved via a series of area reviews, with the expectation that this would enable greater specialisation, creating institutions to be centres of expertise, able to support progression up to a high level in professional and technical disciplines.

The reviews aimed to provide an opportunity for institutions and localities to restructure their provision to ensure it was tailored to the changing context and designed to achieve maximum impact. Bromley College, as it was then, was due to be part of wave three, to be completed by March 2017.

Doing the right thing

The college was, however, well ahead in the drive to align with its neighbouring colleges and recognised that it was about doing the right thing. In early 2015, the FE Commissioner had already identified ongoing quality and financial issues at the former Greenwich Community College, leading to a structure and prospects appraisal. This resulted in Bromley College agreeing to the FE Commissioner's request to take on the failing college – rather than see the community lose its FE provision.

Bringing together Bromley and Greenwich with neighbouring Bexley College, led to the country's first three-way merger. This resulted in the creation of London South East Colleges; a bold, brave and pioneering decision.

Despite being in a sound financial position, could Bromley College really withstand the pressure of taking on a failing college with a £5m deficit? The answer is yes. The philosophy introduced across the new college echoes Alan Clarke's definition in his book *Learning Organisations* (see: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education 2001) – what matters are: shared beliefs and goals, effective team and cross-organisational working, encouragement of calculated risk-taking, the

delegation of responsibility and authority, and the expectation that everyone performs to their maximum ability.

As T.S. Eliot said: *Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far it is possible to go.*

In addition to structural changes, the government has continued to make changes to much of the FE sector's core work. Colleges have had to deal with reforms to apprenticeships and A levels, attempts to improve and simplify the national funding formula for 16-19, the removal of 6,000 'low value' qualifications from performance tables and public funding and the introduction of a requirement for all 16-19 students with grade D or below to retake maths and English GCSEs.

The college has managed these unavoidable changes by focusing on what is right, while at the same time looking for, and taking, many other opportunities.

One-college approach - in times of financial constraint

A period of economic austerity has covered the whole timeframe described in this book, during which FE funding was cut by more than one fifth. Colleges have generally struggled financially with several having to close or be taken over.

A clear benefit of mergers is to bring leadership and services under one umbrella, particularly central services HR, finance and IT. Not only does this bring obvious cost efficiencies, it also supports both a united approach and one culture.

As detailed later, a one-college approach was no easy task. The three colleges had been established for many years and had developed unique and individual identities. A crucial decision was to retain these community identities, while strengthening the reputation and brand of each college under one unifying new name.

Balancing the need for change with the need to keep staff reassured was a priority, together with communicating the benefits of the mergers to staff such as: greater progression opportunities throughout the organisation and additional CPD. The staff benefits supported the one-college approach and staff recognised the college's desire to not only bring three organisations together, but to strengthen each one for staff, students, and their local communities.

The years 2011 to 2020 have seen many FE colleges struggle while the LSEC group largely thrived over its first five years.

The new civic agenda and Covid-19

Before the mergers, each college saw itself as very much part of its community and this became the driving force behind the need to secure FE provision across the three south east London areas. Ensuring people had access to high quality education was vital – but the creation of LSEC led to far more than just a college.

The civic role of colleges across the country has been highlighted during Covid-19 and this is particularly true for LSEC. In the months before the pandemic struck, the college had redefined itself as a social enterprise; an anchoring community institution that focuses on

delivering social value alongside, and with, education. For example, through providing access to education and therefore job opportunities, upskilling and reskilling, it is a major employer and contributes to the local and regional economy with long-term investment.

The College community sprang into action when lockdown began, with staff being mobilised not only to support students, but also to help the local community. From the development of a virtual foodbank for those in need, to colleagues making PPE and delivering blood to hospitals, the role of LSEC developed very much in line with the civic agenda.

In addition to individual staff contributions, the college gave use of its car parks to London Ambulance Service. Its outstanding Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) team, working in partnership with the Group's Multi Academy Trust, was selected to provide online resources to the National Oak Academy, supporting teachers and parents with online teaching materials/lessons for SEND pupils during lockdown.

The College is focused on enhancing opportunities for all learners across the region to progress and maximise their skills. Governors have supported this new direction of travel, understanding that no one should ever be left behind in education as a result of their socio-economic background.

Covid-19 has undoubtedly accelerated the College's social value agenda, rooting the organisation even more firmly in its communities and developing a much greater understanding of the region's needs.

It is hoped that the reflections that follow will be an inspiration for others, sparking ideas, debate and action. The stories and reflections are shared in a spirit of celebration and generosity to the wider sector. Sam Parrett, Principal said:

“We are really good at giving people a chance, good at helping people work towards the job they have always dreamed of. We are the RIGHT choice often for people who succeed here better than they have anywhere.”

1. LEADERSHIP

Culture, strategy, governance



LEADERSHIP

The vision for the group is to *maximise the impact it has as an education provider on the people and places it reaches*. The focus is on striving to change people's lives, creating social value and promoting social mobility in every community it works with. The scope of the vision is broad but the aspiration is clear; each of its students will go on to find employment in the sector of their choice and reach their full potential.

The college is enterprising in its approach, and as an agile, multi-faceted education group, the aim is to enable and empower people of all ages to step up to their next opportunity in life. Education will always be at the core, but for learners and community to thrive, the group recognises that qualifications alone are not enough. The aim is to build strong, sustainable communities that are economically and socially prosperous, and for learners and partners to share the journey as co-producers in achieving the vision.

Like any large learning institution, the group finds ways to remind everyone of its aspirations, its vision for learners, staff and the wider community. The desire to create a culture of excellence can be heard in any conversation with senior leaders. Stephen Howlett, Chair said:

“The vision permeates the fabric of the place, it’s in every building, in the corridors and learning spaces. It’s what you see and hear. We use the vision to actively inform direction, it’s visible and audible.”

The group is looking to achieve this positive impact by widening its current role and positioning itself as a social enterprise using a collaborative approach that adds value to the wider ambitions of partners. The aim is to do this by engaging with, empowering and listening to learners, colleagues and communities. The question that leaders, governors and staff continually ask of each other is ‘how can we improve?’ It is a mantra that translates in a real and practical sense to everyone involved.

The establishment of a coherent vision and the determination to deliver it were early indications of a confidence that the college knew where it wanted to get to and could take people on its growth journey. This is evidenced by successive college corporations (the group’s governing body), the DfE and other government and education funding officials who were all convinced by the college’s commitment to its local area and its clarity of purpose to support a rapid series of mergers. Bromley merged with Orpington, then with Greenwich and Bexley Colleges and, over the same period, the Career College (for catering and hospitality) was approved. There were applications for schools to join the new London South East Academies Trust. The vision has driven and delivered major expansion and impressive improvements for learners.

Empowering and values-based leadership

Underpinning the success of the vision and strategy is the transformational and values-based leadership that has been adopted by the governors and leadership

team. Examples of the people-focused leadership are included throughout the book. Senior leaders have concentrated on the potential in all staff - liberating and empowering people to take on their own leadership roles - which is evident in all areas of the group's work.

The key leadership position at any FE college is the principal. The post has been held by Sam Parrett since 2010. Sam leads a highly valued, expert and diverse leadership team – college leaders who concentrate their effort on maintaining and improving the motivation and commitment of the wider staff team during challenging times. Staff and governors recognise that the growth of the college would not have happened without Sam's leadership, drive and commitment.

Significant college growth has come during a period of national austerity, during which funding for FE has decreased in real terms. Although capacity and resource pressures have been seriously challenging, the leadership team has consistently sought ways to manage and mitigate them, providing staff with the quality resources, development and support required to meet stretching targets. Sam said: *"It's all about engaging openly and keeping positive - good relationships have been vital for me, for the whole staff team and for our success."*

Setting direction and taking the hearts and minds of all with you is a constant challenge for leaders, especially in the FE sector where policy changes can be stark and sudden. There is a genuine desire among leaders to turn national policy objectives into positive opportunities for both students and the college group. The desire is to be

at the forefront of leading change and improvement not "letting it happen to us."

The Strategy Director said: "Resilience is so important – both mental and physical. It's easy to initiate things, more difficult to see them through with quality, to keep going when things are tough or when other priorities threaten to take over. Resilience is not dramatic – just the ability to keep going when things are tough. Many of the people who thrive at this college I think like the left-fieldness of it all. With the right leadership, management and coaching, people grow resilient, we see that here. Change feels more of an opportunity than a threat."

Senior leaders place heavy emphasis on the college values in all conversations and plans. Whether it's a discussion of curriculum issues or the setting of the long-term estate's strategy, the focus remains tightly on providing a positive and lasting experience for all learners. There are more than 10,000 learners at the college now, as Sam Parrett said:

"I believe that we need to be big enough to thrive, small enough to care – all students should have the same positive experience – we strive to be better individually and as a team."

More details on the group's values are included in Chapter 8. Living the values is seen as having a direct impact on student achievement, which has improved year on year.

Culture

Many staff indicate a real sense that they are encouraged to take responsibility for their area of work, with one commenting: *“Sam [Parrett] encourages us to be honest and up front – so long as we keep her and other senior managers up to date and there are no surprises then they are happy. “They know not every change or innovation will necessarily work but they are happy that we try new things within our own areas of expertise.”*

A former deputy principal, in his previous senior role responsible for teaching and learning, described the culture as one where the whole staff group reflects to improve. At the heart of this reflection is a desire to develop individuals whenever possible and give them additional freedom and responsibilities. He said:

“...staff want to move their own areas forward, they are in charge of their own destiny by solving their own challenges – we consistently let people know that they have the authority and leadership skills to do this.”

The Head of the Career College said, *“I feel that my role is very much a leadership rather than management role. With the calibre of people I am getting in to work at the Career College, if I tried to micro-manage them they would soon get fed up – I let them get on with it whenever I can.”*

A transformational culture underpinned by a clear and purposeful accountability framework has been a necessity for the mergers and other key developments. With transformation comes a risk that staff feel over-worked rather than empowered. Leaders have worked hard to try to avoid this, wanting to maintain the collective pride and find ways to change together.

One strategy has been to create structures that deliberately allow staff from different levels to work together. While the more traditional hierarchy still exists, there have been many change processes which have included a variety of levels of staff, not least through the many active consultations that have occurred over recent years.

Leadership is also distributed to the student body, most clearly in the support and resourcing of the thriving student union and the student council. In recent years, the student union has gone from strength to strength, now with a clear agreed mandate to focus on representing all students, providing social activities and promoting issues of interest and charitable work. Its key role of representing students' views is visible through numerous student voice activities.

Weekly meetings between senior college staff and the union president ensure the union receives timely resource and guidance when needed. Similarly, the active student council, with representatives from all classes, has demonstrated many examples of influencing policy and practice, with an established route for views and opinions being passed from individual students

through to the college senior leadership team. Strong leadership means unlocking the potential of individual staff and the institution.

Investing in governance

Responsibility for the vision and strategy lies ultimately with the corporation and its individual governors. Strong governance is vital to realising vision. Throughout the changes, the college benefitted from a highly committed and relatively stable group of governors, led by Roger Dawe between 2012-2017, and followed by a new chair, Stephen Howlett.

The Ofsted report in 2019 recognised that the governance group has a special mix of members with strong personal interest in, and commitment to, education and to the local area. Their expertise in many aspects of the group's business has been a key factor in delivering change. Stephen's personal history motivated his interest in becoming chair.

"Having not done well at A level at grammar school I spent a year at an FE college and that was transformational for me. It was the foundation for my degree and future career. They wouldn't have happened for me without my FE experience. I have been interested in education ever since. The changing demands on labour, increasing use of IT and the growth of AI all interest me greatly."

The college has made significant investments in governance including the clerking function which allowed the corporation to develop as a coherent body, receiving high quality (and quantity) administrative

support and in early 2019 the creation of a Director of Governance post. The unique governance structure of the wider group – now incorporating the college, the growing Academies Trust and the Skills for Growth Apprenticeship charity – required full time oversight from a senior member of staff. This is a trend now being followed by other larger college groups. Governance structures are continuously reviewed and changed where needed, this supports the group's strategic decision-making role.

Corporation members act strategically, they have a consistent view of their role to set the strategic direction and keep a strong eye on progress but avoid becoming too involved in day to day management or operational issues. Stephen Howlett, Chair said:

"I fly the flag for the group at the strategic level. I think that we were ahead of the curve in our preparation for the expansion of apprenticeships. I make it my business to find out policy direction."

Strategic planning delivers the vision

Senior leaders have an acute awareness of the importance of strategic planning – there have been major investments of time and resource to agree clear aspirations, vision and then to draw up strategies and action plans to achieve them. There are clear links between these and the reality of what happens on the ground day to day.

Over the last eight years, the strategic aims have focused on being distinctive and responsive in the community, being widely recognised as a successful college and promoting a college culture that delivers success in partnership. Success in these aims has come from a number of strong and lasting collaborative local partnerships, including the rapid growth of Bromley Educational Trust growing to the London South East Academies Trust, the establishment of the Career College, full time 14-16 provision and continuing positive relationships with local employers. Sam Parrett said:

“The principle is, wherever possible, our work is about collaboration – not competition – with our neighbours and partners. We’re in it together.”

The college was rated as ‘good with outstanding features’ in both 2013 and 2019, despite years of huge growth. Of the merged colleges, Greenwich was significantly under-performing and had severe financial challenges, making the rating even more impressive. Success rates have been consistently better than the national median and 95% of students under 19 have gone on to further training or employment. The corporation and leadership team continued to set themselves further stretching targets and pursued growth with confidence.

A new post was created at the end of 2015 - Executive Director of Corporate and Strategic Development, in recognition of the importance of strategic planning and the management of external relationships. The creation of the role was partly in response to the government's

Productivity Plan *Fixing the Foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation 2015* earlier that year, highlighting the role that the government felt that the FE sector should have in improving national productivity.

During 2016/17, the senior management team and corporation began to recognise a degree of initiative and change overload. Exponential growth in student numbers over a five-year period had a significant impact both on the management and teaching staff. The group took a conscious strategic decision to consolidate what had been an exceptional period of growth and diversification. The corporation agreed that all developments – any new business or significant change proposed – would be weighed against five key questions:

- **Is this in line with college values?**
- **Does it contribute to our vision/mission?**
- **Do we have the experience, skills, expertise and resource to do it well?**
- **Will this enhance our existing offer?**
- **What are the risks, and can they be mitigated?**

A new development was supported only if the answer to *all* these questions was yes.

When the tests were passed, the portfolio continued to expand. The changes were coupled with a continuing longer term national shift – away from an FE sector which

predominantly covered 16-18 vocational education and some low level adult education, and towards a sector for the 21st Century which delivers education from age 14+ and at all levels.

Subsequent strategic planning cycles continued to guide the college's journey. The importance of engagement and consultation throughout the planning process cannot be overstated. For the newest strategic plan, published in January 2020, governors, staff, students and other stakeholders have co-produced the plan with major input and commitment to the process.

One of the biggest issues was how to position the college strategically and as a brand. The branding and communication challenge, which has followed mergers for all FE colleges, was to clearly communicate the differences between the huge breadth of educational offer across the group while maintaining a consistent and strong brand. Sam Parrett said:

“We’ve worked hard to make sure being part of the college means something positive to everybody, whichever site you are on, whatever age you are and whatever level you are studying at and we’ve invested in that.”

Reflecting on the degree to which financial survival had been the main driver for growth, governors and senior managers acknowledged that diversification had been a necessity for all FE colleges over recent years. It is a fact of life if colleges are to survive financially. Nonetheless,

its success in embedding its new ventures was put down by governors, and recognised by Ofsted, to the common strategic golden thread.

At its heart, the golden thread encompasses common educational values and aims which have underpinned all the college's work. Firstly, the provision of a quality learning experience, entirely driven by a real desire to see all learners improve and succeed, and secondly a focus on localism. Used in this context localism has two elements – firstly, predominantly serving the population geographically close to the college and secondly creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere for learning, distinct from some larger institutions.

For example, there was long deliberation before progressing the development of the multi-academy trust and the London Aerospace and Technology college at Biggin Hill (chapters 5 and 9). It was recognised that there was potential for a large negative hit on the college's reputation if these projects failed. Ultimately, the college made the decision to invest in these areas, providing the resource required to establish the provision and backing the managers' ability to deliver high quality provision which would serve learners well.

Planning for the sub-region

The governors and leadership team had done much early thinking about the sub-regional economy and its educational and training needs. This was done in advance of the government's subsequent national area review policy which gave regions 18 months to rationalise FE provision – stressing a need for fewer and larger

colleges. This meant that when some members of the East London Area Review Group suggested that Bromley might become part of a much larger 'East London' sub-region, the college was already in a strong position to argue for its established position in the smaller sub-regional South East London grouping. This argument was won, based on the persuasive and informed view that there were particular characteristics and needs for the smaller sub-region that meant it should remain separate, a nod to the ability to retain a local focus.

The team had predicted a growth in the need for skilled workers in several sectors as a result of developments such as CrossRail, a proposed cruise liner port for London, housing development at Woolwich Arsenal, expansion of Canary Wharf and other proposals on the horizon. These would require skilled employees in the fields of engineering, construction, hospitality, business and financial services. A confident, coherent and high quality FE provision across Bromley, Greenwich and Bexley was agreed necessary to meet these needs, and merger decisions were made partly on that basis.

At the same time, the corporation was adamant that none of the mergers should cost individual colleges significantly, either financially or in terms of reputation. This stance has been strongly held, despite many occasions when competing pressures placed constraints on this commitment. Governors and senior leaders are rightly proud that they have not put previous gains and financial stability at risk in pursuing short term growth. Raising the wider profile of the group has been done to improve the strategic partnerships with local authorities, schools, HE providers and employers in South East London, as well, of course, to drive recruitment. The

carefully crafted vision and strategic aims have continued to lead decisions on when to raise the college's profile, not the other way around.

Learning and reflections on vision and leadership

- **Concentrate leadership effort on empowering others, maintaining and improving motivation and commitment, especially during periods of rapid growth**
- **Develop structures that promote working together at different levels with clear accountability**
- **Create a culture in which everyone actively reflects to improve**
- **Distribute leadership to the student body; support a thriving student union and student council**
- **Invest in governance; governors who are committed, drive change at a strategic level and are well resourced, can make the difference**
- **Think and plan long-term to meet the strategic needs of communities and the wider sub-region**
- **Pursue a clear civic leadership agenda that is people and place based**



2. INNOVATION

Career College, e-learning



INNOVATION

An ability to innovate is one of the characteristics that shines throughout the college's journey. In many respects, the FE sector has had to innovate and to respond to a frequently changing landscape. Recasting, restyling and remodelling its offer to learners successfully is a key strength.

Innovation for improvement and survival is the approach. Seeing the struggle that many other colleges have had to maintain student numbers and funding, the need to find new markets and create new models to deliver learning has been a reality. At the same time, the college leadership has been clear that innovation should always be within the context of a wider coherent strategy and to suit identified local need. Key strategic decisions have facilitated innovation. One manager noted:

“Following the first merger (with Orpington) it's all been about innovation. One key decision was to drop A levels. It was a challenge but a good decision, as it allowed the Career College to come into being. That's been great.”

This chapter sets out the creation of the Hospitality and Catering Career College, demonstrating innovation in a highly specialised vocational area of learning where senior managers saw a niche in the market. It then looks at e-learning, an area where innovation and investment stands the college in good stead for the future.

Career College

The Orpington site was identified as ideal for a hospitality learning base. The aim of the career College movement, first established in the UK at the end of 2013, is to respond to particular industry needs for specific vocational skills. Career Colleges work with the 14-19 age group, based on a model developed originally in New York. Programmes are designed to incorporate core academic elements with highly practical vocational and technical education.

They equip young people with the skills to directly enter a career in a particular industry. Each career college works closely with employers – both individually and through a board which leads the design of the curriculum to suit the changing needs of the sector and provide direct employment pathways for students. Learners are involved in hands-on industry-based projects with an added focus on enterprise and communication skills, preparing them for work and life. Career College students experience the real work environment from day one.

BR6 restaurant, the centre piece of the Career College, opened in 2015. It includes a high-end training kitchen - which boasts facilities of the standard of many top London establishments and a restaurant (BR6) open to the public. From catering's limited profile within the group, it became the highest profile element on the Orpington site and went from strength to strength.

Phase two of the facilities, the Bakehouse, opened in April 2017. Having secured £1 million capital funding from the Local Enterprise Partnership for London to match further investment from the college, phase two

included a bakery, coffee shop and bistro to sit alongside the restaurant. This has greatly increased the commercial enterprise which students experience alongside their more traditional hospitality training. Initially, staffing was limited to just two lecturers and a stores person. Growth was rapid, however, as year two anticipated 120 students so there was a need to grow the team quickly. The investment in teaching staff was key. Following the mergers with Greenwich and Bexley, there are also around 170 hospitality students studying at levels 1-3 and on apprenticeships – 80 at the Bromley site and 65 at Greenwich.

November 2016 saw another step change, with permission given to recruit 10 new members of staff to cover the extensive student and commercial growth. A significant inclusion here was the recruitment of an experienced front of house manager who had worked as sommelier for the Roux brothers, taken on with a view to moving into teaching once the restaurant opening hours had been extended. During 2019 there were 12 staff across the hospitality and catering department. The merger has seen integration of resources, teachers, enrichment and vocational learning opportunities. A career college manager highlighted the recognition for the department's work:

“The student-led BR6 restaurant was the first college restaurant in London to be awarded a Highly Commended AA Rosette and a People 1st Gold Accreditation. Qualified AA inspectors carried out visits and BR6 impressed with all areas of service.”

In June 2019, the college's hospitality and catering team won the Pearson Teaching Silver Award for FE Team of the Year. The award recognised the team's outstanding achievements – particularly in relation to work being done with employers, helping students to get first class industry experience.

Employer links: a curriculum to suit the real work environment

The Career College embraced the concept of real and lasting employer links from inception and this remains at the heart of the hospitality and catering department. At every stage local and regional businesses have supported the concept and the vision. The Employer Advisory Board was established as soon as the Career College was mooted with high profile members including head chefs and Hyatt, Hilton and Dorchester group hoteliers. TV chef endorsement was provided by Chris and James Tanner who have been celebrity patrons of BR6 since its inception. The brothers hold annual charity dinners at the restaurant, working with, supporting and mentoring the students. Other celebrity visitors have included Michel Roux Jnr and Prue Leith from TV's *Great British Bake Off*.

After four years of the Career College brand, senior managers decided to retain greater flexibility by reverting to its own hospitality and catering department. The ethos remained the same and the employer board was retained with its now embedded links across the region.

A broader number of career opportunities, beyond those in fine dining, have begun to be highlighted to students.

Recruitment of more adult learners has seen a shift towards accrediting existing skills which is attractive to learners, especially women who want to return to work. Asma Khan, the first female chef to appear on Netflix's *Chef's Table* hosted an Indian supper club, particularly inspirational to the female students. Alan Pickett continued to support learners, providing placements at his new London Street hotel.

Industry-based events have continued to be an innovative way to expand the experience of groups of learners. March 2019 saw more than 20 students take over a central London restaurant for the day, designing the menu, running the service and preparing food.

Increasingly close links with suppliers have been an effective way to enhance students' understanding of the sector, discovering the importance of provenance and the 'farm to fork' methodology of modern catering. Students have visited local artisan suppliers, undertaken trips to Billingsgate fish market, Scottish salmon fisheries and distilleries, toured the main vegetable supplier in Kent and worked directly with the local wine supplier. On the hospitality side, visits to hotels and other industry venues have been designed as dynamic, varied, and interactive. The Deputy Head of Career College said:

“Our students come back from visits buzzing now, having talked to so many different employers and seen the range of career options open to them. We also help employers recognise and encourage talent in our students. Employers are approaching us to get involved.”

Local need

Many of the innovations built into the Career College were responses to identified local needs and expectations, the needs and expectations of students, staff, the wider college, the external environment and the local economy.

From a student perspective, the college is consistently responding to a competitive training market. Retention, attendance and success rates indicate that students are happy and there is ongoing intelligence gathering, both informally and formally, about students' career aspirations. If there is a tendency towards wanting a career in front of house, kitchen work or management then the curriculum plan is altered accordingly.

Looking externally, expansion plans were deliberately dovetailed with other growth and regeneration in Orpington – new flats, a new cinema and other local developments were predicted to bring increased footfall to the area and this was borne out from late 2016 onwards. The opening of the Bakehouse coincided with an increase in second and third-year students. As customer numbers grow, the quality and quantity of provision has also grown.

Proof of the pudding: Career College students

One of the early innovative features of the Career College model was the inclusion of full-time vocational provision for 14-16 year olds. The first groups studied level 1 hospitality while also studying a business enterprise qualification and core GCSEs.

By September 2016, the Career College had grown to include two classes at level 1, three at level 2 and one at

level 3. Good progression and referrals from other local institutions which did not offer training above level 2 saw further growth to three level 3 groups. The last few years have seen a move to recruitment of older students. September 2016 saw the first level 3 course begin – studying the new ‘tech bacc’ course in pastry and confectionaries, again with strong links to industry.

Achievement and retention across both sites of the merged college group has been higher than the national average. Lots of students began to find part time jobs related to their study. Following prompting from the Employer Board, a key focus became communication skills and the achievement of quicker qualifications earlier in study programmes. From 2019 all students have been encouraged to take barista qualification, food hygiene certificate and a wines and spirits education trust course, improving their chances of employment and improving motivation through early tangible achievements.

The commitment to real work meant that a new model needed to be developed, whereby students would include a rotation within an external work environment. This was piloted successfully with the Crown Plaza group providing placements and others expressed a keen interest. The college is committed to ensure that the whole environment remains as real as possible. A college tutor noted: “We create and maintain high expectations of students – putting them in positions they would not normally be in at other colleges. Our level 1 students are not asked to make just one portion of a dish, they are part of producing 100 portions which are then sold on site – there is no room for under performance.”

One young 14-16 student achieved second place in the national Future Chef 2016 competition and another quickly secured a job with James Martin on TV’s ‘Saturday Kitchen’ following a speculative visit.

On top of work placements, students are also entitled to apply for paid shifts within the commercial enterprise. Around 20 students have formed a growing pool of paid staff who work various shifts across each week outside of their training hours. This pool will inevitably grow over time, enhancing their experience and earning money to support their years in training.

Some of the innovation has been recognised nationally – for example, the college was part of the Association of Colleges outstanding teaching, learning and assessment Project in 2017. Working with employer partners, the college created an innovative 360-degree learning model focused on the development of technical and employability skills for the hospitality industry. This collaborative approach included teacher and employer skills training, technical master classes and high quality work experience placements.

Innovation in vocational training is continuing with the development of front of house qualifications. There are already links with the tourism department within the college. Their students have begun to have front of house placements within BR6 as part of their courses, having previously struggled sometimes to find appropriate placements – it’s a win-win.

Learning and reflections on innovation in vocational education

- **Start early with employer engagement and respond actively to their recommendations**
- **Open horizons and raise expectations - create a buzz, for example, through industry-based events**
- **Raise students' motivation and success by giving them experience of a real work environment from day one**
- **Focus on what matters to students and employers - achieving qualifications early and accrediting existing skills**
- **Recruit the right staff - blend pedagogy with sector experience**
- **Support staff to innovate and experiment in a learning organisation where it is recognised that failure can drive success**

Innovation in e-learning

While the college demonstrates innovation in countless areas, ongoing developments in e-learning are particularly significant. Back in 2015, the corporation introduced use of e-learning as a key performance indicator, emphasising the importance it placed on this area. Innovations and investments made have been particularly important in enabling the college to respond following coronavirus restrictions.

The leadership team has made e-learning a priority, with the provision of IT and e-learning being a source of pride for the vice principal in charge of all STEM subjects across the group. The engineering department, for example, scored highly in e-learning in all inspection reports. Plumbing, electrical and motor vehicle departments have developed their own systems which have featured on the national excellence gateway. A senior leader said:

“E-learning has always been close to my heart. We have a range of bespoke platforms to enhance skills and knowledge. Investing in e-learning has been critical to our success.”

Student expectations in this area have also increased markedly in recent years, alongside a government policy that colleges develop digital technologies. The FE sector has had variable success at introducing technological innovation on a large scale, so the college made a deliberate strategic decision to allow and encourage teaching staff to have freedom to innovate.

This coincided with an exponential growth in availability of educational apps, such as wamEDU which has revolutionised communications. This is a free internal platform which includes a ‘blast tool’ to provide communications to all students. Historically, the college had used texts and email for regular communications. Internal research indicated that students found these methods either irritating or ineffective. The switch to use of a separate and private tool has proved positive both in terms of reaction and response from students.

Managers wanted to avoid the risk that by setting a minimum standard or minimum expectation for teachers' use of e-learning, the minimum level became the norm. Instead it was decided to raise the bar by proactively and explicitly encouraging innovation in several ways. Investment in key staff who were encouraged to experiment and share new technologies with colleagues has produced demonstrable improvements in the adoption of technology.

The quality and quantity of use of the moodle internal learning environment has also increased over recent years. A significant staff development programme was undertaken to ensure staff had the skills to use the platform and after this use of technology was introduced within the monitoring framework of the regular quality cycle of the college. All staff and departments were rated as gold, silver or bronze in terms of their use of the moodle, with supportive interventions introduced for areas of low performance.

E-learning also became a large part of the hugely popular and successful internal teaching skills academy. The Head of the TSA was also appointed as operational lead for e-learning across the group, another means by which the profile and importance of e-learning was stressed. With the high pace of technological change in the education sector, e-learning was included as a part of the staff induction process – encouraging adoption and use of e-learning – and signalling the move toward a more blended approach to learning across all aspects of education.

Motor vehicle and engineering departments have both been leaders in embracing use of the cloud for learning,

posting whole sets of learning and assessment materials and teaching videos online. As a whole, the college is moving to a position where it can encourage 'bring your own device in to learn', a concept which student consultations showed to be extremely popular across all departments.

The management team acknowledged the continuing need to strategically invest in new technologies. A decision was made to buy no more hardwired PCs for student use. Future investment is intended to be in portable devices and cloud-based solutions.

Digital transformation and the impact of Covid-19

While the full scale of the health and economic impacts of COVID is not currently known, there is evidence that the communities served by the college have been experiencing hardship, increased use of foodbanks, and for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities who are affected disproportionately, this has led to loss of life, fear and widespread anxiety.

The pandemic has presented the college with the opportunity to revitalise the curriculum so that it is more accessible, flexible, and provides the skills that will be needed for a recovery that leaves no-one behind. This is particularly vital as many new jobs are going to require a significant element of digital skills. The World Economic forum estimates that 70% of new value created in the economy over the next decade will be based on digitally enabled platform business models. However, 8% of adults have no digital skills and a further 12% are missing at least one basic digital skill, meaning they struggle to navigate the online world.

Combined with reports that Level 3 and Level 2 graduates are 27% and 37% less likely to find employment over the next three years, it was clear that the college had to make the transition to e-learning and blended delivery in order to have a positive impact on lives and communities, and be a driving force of social mobility.

The response during the lockdown was to fully enable online learning for all vocational courses. This included providing recorded lessons and learning packs for students. Online apprenticeships were also created to offset the national decline due to the pandemic and the college expanded the number of free professional online courses.

The transition to online learning highlighted weaknesses in the current classroom model. For students returning in September 2020, a new curriculum has been designed to blend online study with face-to-face delivery, ensuring as many students as possible are able to return to regular lessons while providing additional skills that students will need for the post-pandemic recovery.

The redesign of the curriculum also presented an opportunity to provide additional support for students, aiming to further improve their grades and chances of employment.

There is a new platform for ESOL learners with resource packs, translation support and video conferencing to support the development of English skills; important as ESOL students have found the transition to online learning more difficult without the regular support provided in class.

A new online tutorial programme for all students now provides automated personalised tasks centred on additional skills needed for employment. Designed by employers, these include adaptability, emotional intelligence, collaboration and creativity, all vital for the post-pandemic recovery. The programme also supports students to develop digital skills, particularly adult learners who need upskilling in digital technology. Each student will receive a digital badge detailing the skills gained and an employability qualification at the end of the programme.

The work is being overseen by digital champions who are working across the college to support staff through the transition to e-learning, ensuring that it is effective and well-used.

To tackle digital exclusion, which affects an estimated 25% of our 16-19 learners (around 1000), and with the expected second wave of Covid-19, the college has ensured that all students will be able to continue to learn during any further lockdowns by providing laptops and enabling new students to share access to equipment during enrolment.

There has been positive feedback on the support provided, this is evidenced by the *Investors In People* accreditation report July 2020 that notes how well supported and informed learners felt during the pandemic. A learner said:

“I take my hat off to them. We have emails, weekly bulletins etc. I have found the support and comms during Covid to be fantastic.”



Learning and reflections on innovation in e-learning

- Create a climate for innovation through clear strategic leadership and relevant performance indicators
- Integrate e-learning into all aspects of work
- Encourage staff to experiment and support each other to learn and provide support where there are development needs
- Continue to invest in digital transformation

3. ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

**Students with special educational needs
and disabilities**



ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Underpinning growth over the past five or so years has been a relentless focus on high standards; expectations are consistently high. Whilst these have become commonly used phrases at the centre of mission and vision statements of many educational institutions, the college aspires to stand apart from the average - to achieve real, tangible growth and success. It has worked hard to make these ambitions visible across the college, from the role modelling demonstrated by senior managers through to the attention to detail brought to the planning and delivery of all programmes of work and study.

Staff and students share a common understanding that standards and expectations are high; this includes the quality of the physical environment, levels of attendance and behaviour and an anticipation that all students will succeed and progress. Reflecting on the reasons behind the college's recent sustainable growth, the Principal noted:

“We have got to avoid a narrative of failure, avoid the cliché of us being the ‘Cinderella service’ of education – FE finds its place when it demonstrates high standards.”

The main examples selected for this chapter of the book are the Nido Volans Centres based at Bromley and Bexley campuses. The centres provide education and training for students with special educational needs and disabilities. The college has become a regional and national leader in this provision over recent years. Staff and students at the centres provide daily evidence of what is possible with high expectations and high standards.

Nido Volans is a Latin phrase translated as ‘Fly the Nest’. The centres are all about promoting independence; an independence that comes predominantly from an acquisition of education and wider life skills for people who have often previously struggled under their own, or others’, limited expectations of what they might achieve.

The Nido Volans Centres

The first Nido Volans Centre opened in 2013 at Bromley. Bespoke teaching and learning rooms had been converted to be fully accessible, allowing personal care for students with complex learning difficulties and disabilities who previously could not be catered for. The college had previously provided learning for more limited numbers of students with moderate and severe disabilities. Bromley and other local authorities had begun to move away from placing students with specialist providers often at a long distance from home and recognised the potential within their local college. The council supported the college to make the improvements to the site. The centre has since gone from strength to strength and the relationship with the

local authority has blossomed. Borough councillors are frequent visitors to, and, supporters of, the centre.

The fundamental belief of the staff at the centre is that all students are able to progress, whatever starting level and needs. This belief is transferred to the students themselves, their families and friends, creating a virtuous circle of high expectation. The centre is undoubtedly a centre of excellence, continuing to develop new models of delivery and to influence the wider system.

Opening its doors to students with more complex needs, including autism, presented a steep learning curve for the team. Over the following academic year, a significant amount of work went into developing staff skills and knowledge, finessing and improving assessment procedures to ensure the college could meet the needs of the learners who enrolled. Staff development remains a key feature of the centre – early priorities were a focus on behaviours that challenge, dysphasia and manual handling. Other specialist skills are constantly being brought into the team, such as Braille and embossing training which has enhanced provision for visually impaired students.

Following the growth of college, a new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) centre based on the Nido Volans model has been developed at the Bexley site with capital investment allowing the creation of a theatre, workshops, accessible kitchen and other spaces for art and enterprise.

From a SEND perspective the two recent mergers have gone well. The SEND leadership worked with teams in

advance, embedding expectations early and ensuring all staff were fully on board. The Director for SEND and ESOL reflected:

“Historically, SEND students from Bexley did not go out on placements or external experiences, it was considered high risk. Now we positively encourage these experiences whenever possible and the staff are enthused. I love it when a plan comes together!”

Personalised programmes for learners

The centre provided an opportunity for a new curriculum offer. At the same time the government was undertaking a SEND reform programme, which included the introduction of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs). Local authorities in Bromley and Bexley were pathfinders in the transition to adulthood phase of these reforms and Bromley College took part in some pilot work which helped inform the government’s Children and Families Act.

The college’s role involved piloting EHCPs with 10 students during the first year. During this pilot phase interviews were conducted with young people with varying disabilities, asking them about their hopes and aspirations. Their hopes were similar to other young people – focusing on getting a job, securing accommodation within the community and establishing a group of friends. The new programme was designed with these priorities at its heart.

Being part of the pilot allowed the college to move ahead of many other colleges, evidenced by the numbers of other FE staff who have visited the centre over the past few years to see how things are done. A high level of expertise in this area has been developed. Transition plans and annual reviews are completed for all students. This is time consuming but essential. Recruitment of a Transition and Support Coordinator was a key appointment, providing dedicated support to these review processes and bringing expertise in supporting students to transition positively out of the college at the end of their programmes. The cohort grew within two years to around 70 a year, all learners with individually tailored programmes of study, on the Personal Progression Pathway (PPP). These students work predominantly towards independent living, though some have aspirations to work and have gone on work placement as part of their PPP.

The individualisation of the learning programmes is the key development to have allowed the stunning success over recent years. One day is set aside for independent living skills while on other days learners chose two other subjects per day from an extensive list including media, ICT, all about me, art, performing arts, catering, manufacturing and many others - allowing a personalised timetable for all students.

Performing arts is a strong element of the PPP offer at the centres. The Green Goose and Walnut Tree Theatre companies, the theatrical element of the programme, have been consistently oversubscribed. Performances have been enjoyed by full audiences and the programme is an excellent platform for students to develop performance skills.

Other programmes at the centres include: Introduction to Work, Employment Preparation and Vocational Taster programmes including practical skills such as carpentry, horticulture and catering. Taster programmes have been designed to prepare many students to move on to mainstream E3 and Level 1 programmes within the college. An internship programme has also grown, enabling students with complex needs to be placed in bespoke and supported work placements. Students study employability skills for one day each week in college and the rest of the week are supported at a range of tailor made work placements including in logistics, hospitality and retail.

One parent of a prospective student articulated her reasons for preferring the Nido Volans Centre over other options:

“I’d much rather my son comes here, I have no doubt that he will be more challenged and stretched here in the college environment while still being supported by the caring staff.”

Catering is a strong feature of the Nido Volans Centre. The Chef’s Table is a thriving student-run restaurant and training kitchen, again with high expectations to provide food to the standard of any similar private restaurant. Following the merger with Greenwich Community College, this model was repeated on the new site with the establishment of Greenwich Meal Time (GMT) – another food outlet staffed by students with disabilities.

Recently it has welcomed ESOL students as it is an ideal setting for them to practice their English language and work related skills.

Another development is the creation of a forest school on the Bromley campus, a nature trail situated in woodland behind the sports pitches. This is extremely popular with Nido Volans students with opportunities to learn bush crafts, whittling, fencing and other skills. One of the college's GCSE and functional skills lecturers sees great wider potential for the Forestry School:

“It's an inventive and wonderful innovation. The Forestry School is a brilliant pathway for some learners who are harder to get on board – helping to develop sensory language in this setting.”

Horticulture remains a popular option for SEND students. At Bexley SEND students help to manage the kitchen garden at the old library, growing herbs for the café, while others manage the grounds of one of the Academy Trust's primary schools. A flower farm has been introduced at Bromley, growing and selling organic British flowers to florists. This is just one enterprise strand of the Nido Volans, students also help run an onsite shop selling cards, gifts, bird boxes and more.

Getting the people and processes right

The quality of staff within the Nido Volans Centre – in terms of skills, experience and motivation – has been consistently high, despite it being a challenging time to recruit staff. The college has invested heavily in recruitment, taking time to fill posts within the centre.

The Director for SEND and ESOL said:

“Recruitment is a challenge within our sector but I will only appoint if I am confident we have found the right people to take us forward, even if that means advertising for a post several times.”

The appointment of the Transition and Support Coordinator was critical – this person visits local schools, meeting prospective students in years 10 and 11, putting plans in place to help with transition from school to college, liaising with parents and, critically, ensuring students' needs can be met.

This was the start of a partnership with Oxleas NHS that provide language therapists, an occupational therapist and physiotherapist. They support students, undertake assessments, create resources and provide training for staff in managing students with high challenge. Initially, these therapists provided limited support time within the centre but the effectiveness of this input was such that it was significantly increased with the support of NHS providers who saw the impact the centre was having on individuals.

Another early identified need was to bring in specialist work placement expertise through a dedicated job coach. Previously, work placements had been found and monitored by teaching staff. A specific role was created which has enabled links with local employers to become much stronger and placements to be monitored even more carefully.

Investment in staff development means identifying support packages to enhance the offer to learners and developing staff internally to provide them. One such example was the introduction of the TEACCH programme (Teaching and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children) – a teaching and learning methodology particularly successful for students with autism which provides a highly structured set of activities and environment for learners. The programme alleviates difficulties for autistic learners associated with uncertainty and lack of predictability. The consistency supports students to become more confident learners.

Teaching standards at the Bexley campus were quickly brought up to those at Bromley and the focus at Bexley moved to developing the quality of learning support. Progress was marked by Ofsted who rated support and teaching and learning as outstanding.

Staff at the centre are encouraged to make links wherever possible with other expert providers. An 18-month collaborative project, Ambitious About Autism, in partnership with local schools, resulted in some excellent joint working and a book summarising the learning about the ideal support required for transition to college. This project was part funded by the DfE and featured in *FE News*.

Other partnerships in recent years have included a highly successful joint piece of work with Advocacy for All and the local police which looked at the issue of hate crime and resulted in another information guide being published, designed to be used by participating young people.

A further feature identified as critical to the centre's success is its calm and purposeful atmosphere. Staff put this down to well trained and prepared staff, excellent use of resources to meet the needs of complex communications challenges (use of technology, iPads, makaton-based apps etc), careful timetabling and students well matched to their courses. Further evidence of high expectations are visible in the Chef's Table restaurant – one manager noted:

“I expect the same standard of work from our students as I would from any others – nobody wants to eat an ‘entry level’ meal, so we have to keep standards high to keep people coming back to the restaurant.”

Aspirations for students are high across the centre. This is further demonstrated in the desire to support and enhance students' communication skills. The use of specialist apps has allowed non-verbal students to participate, for example interviewing players from Crystal Palace Football Club. As one member of staff noted: “Just because students don't speak does not mean they can't have a voice.” Such innovation has been noted by Ofsted and by winning a Pearson's Shine a Light award for secondary school/college of the year in March 2019, in recognition of work done to improve communications for people with a learning disability. The work was in conjunction with OXLEAS NHS Foundation Trust to ensure all learners within the provision have a voice and can fully access their learning.

A final example of the Nido Volans Centre's success has been in working hard to ensure referrals are appropriate and transitions into the centre are as smooth as possible. The lead at the college attends the SEND boards at several authorities and works closely with individual special schools to improve transition arrangements and work with head teachers to improve local provision. One project in 2019 involved leading a professional exchange group for the Association of Colleges. The group worked to create standard policy and processes by which the college and others could communicate better with local authorities, parents and prospective students – providing clarity on criteria and decision making, resulting in a reduction in the number of challenges to decisions which can be time consuming, costly and disruptive for students and their families.

Real and lasting achievements

Student numbers within the centres have increased year on year, limited only by available capacity and the insistence that quality of the student experience should not suffer from over recruitment. By 2016 the college was over-subscribed across all of its SEND provision – with particular increases in numbers on the Introduction to Work programme. For the PPP programme in 2016, capacity was increased to 70 students and in fact 73 were taken on. By 2019, there were 160 learners at the Bromley campus with Bexley heading towards its capacity of 100. Students attend the centre from the eight closest boroughs to the campuses and several from Kent. The college has become one of the largest FE SEND provisions in the country.

The centre has an exceptional reputation for assisting students into employment, one of its key outcome

measures. Over the past four years an average of 35% of students have moved on to employment, a vastly higher success rate for this group than the national average of below 1% for people with similar needs. The internship programme piloted during 2016 with Bromley Jobmatch saw half of the learners finding paid employment as a result. The target for 2016/17 was raised to 75% finding paid employment compared to a London average of 6%.

Expectations are such that there is a real desire to avoid what has been something of a merry go round for some SEND students in the past, moving from course to course without focus or planned final destination. For the college, the intention is to provide real and lasting change for students through targeted learning on independent living and/or work skills with the intention that students will achieve and move on in their lives.

The blossoming of a very hard to reach autistic student

C spent three years in Greengoose, Nido Volans' performing arts course. She was autistic and only related to one member of staff. She refused to actively engage with the other tutors and nearly all of her peers, saying she would not communicate with anyone who didn't like Michael Jackson. Her first two years saw slow progress, with C doing only the minimum expected and not a lot more. By the third year, with support, patience, tolerance and just a touch of tough love, she finally blossomed. The day she stood alone and sang into a microphone and chatted to her peers and tutors remains my favourite day in the 18 years I have worked in this college.

Standards and expectations across the wider college

While the focus of this chapter has been predominantly on the work of the Nido Volans Centres and other SEND provision, there are many other areas in which the college demonstrates its commitment to high standards and expectations.

The senior management group is constantly looking for areas of improvement. At one visit in November 2014 the college had decided to run a 30-day high profile campaign to improve standards of behaviour and general conduct. In fact, this was not perceived to be a particularly problematic area. Visitors and new members of staff regularly comment on the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of the college. Nevertheless, it was felt to be an area that could benefit from a short term focus, so a specialist consultancy ran an effective campaign to increase staff and student awareness of their responsibility to behave well and be ready to learn. The dual focus on building a community and further improving attitudes to learning was well received.

This commitment continues to be visible in ongoing determination to maintain standards. One senior leader explained the constant need to refresh thinking, to keep dialogue open and move with the times:

“For me it is a state of mind – about a can-do attitude and a shared vision of excellence, working hard and expecting high standards – achieving those standards and being supported as part of a family.”

British values

In 2014, as a response to acts of terrorism, the government introduced a requirement that colleges (and other learning institutions) should ensure that learners have a good understanding of British values. The college strategy was to link British values to the already existing college values and Bromley Advantage, which meant that staff and students were more able to see this new national requirement as a natural development of what the college was already promoting as its culture. A steering group drafted a policy and implementation plan which added the moral and cultural perspective to some of the softer employability skills that were already being promoted.

An enrichment calendar was launched which advertised a range of new events and initiatives in advance, including for example the establishment of the LGBT+ society, open mind society, cultural awareness month, and themed weeks including black history, inter-faith, personal safety. This stimulated other events to be suggested and many followed quickly over the first year, such as a photograph of staff and students in national dress, an international food festival, cultural art festival, sex and relationship awareness (around Valentine’s Day), and many others. The lead officer said:

“We chose to introduce the British values agenda in a fairly simple and subtle way to emphasise to all that ‘this is how we do things at our college.’”

The college defined what it meant by British values, publishing this on the website. Support materials were provided to staff to help them explain and develop these values in each curriculum area. Expectations of students were articulated clearly, alongside exactly what the college would offer in terms of support and teaching. Curriculum leaders were required to check how well values were being integrated into their area. For ESOL, public services and learning for life and work areas, integration was relatively simple and natural. For other specific vocational areas, it was more challenging. Staff were trained in dealing with challenging conversations to help find best ways to introduce some complex issues, not least in the area of radicalisation. The college began to develop some exciting projects for students. One example during 2015 was involvement in an EU funded Erasmus project. The vice principal for student services said:

“‘British values’ is still very much embedded in college life. Tutors have access to all materials and can customise them if they want to and students particularly like the debates we design.”

From 2020 a new software package was to be introduced to see which students and staff are accessing the materials and to gather real time feedback to allow for quick improvements.

Learning and reflections on aspirations and standards

- **Develop staff skills and knowledge through investment. When recruiting, take time to get the right people, even if that means advertising a post several times.**
- **Individualise learning programmes and innovate constantly to allow students to grow and achieve**
- **Make a big difference through strong relationships with partners, especially the local authority**
- **Work hard to ensure referrals are appropriate and transitions into the centre are as smooth as possible, through relationships, systems and procedures**
- **Be ambitious! Great outcomes are achievable. Potential is limitless**

4. FLEXIBILITY TO ADAPT AND GROW

Higher education provision, partnerships



FLEXIBILITY TO ADAPT AND GROW

Fundamental to the college's ongoing growth and success has been its ability to demonstrate flexibility in response to priorities and needs that vary regularly. FE colleges have seen significant changes in education policy, funding regimes, skills needs, frameworks for qualifications and quality control. Dame Ruth Silver, President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership, described the FE sector as "the adaptive layer of the education system" - without the protections of schools and universities it is the "first place to which governments of all colours turn when they have to make quick changes with direct impact."

The College's Director of Quality Assurance, Standards and Performance and interim Dean of HE from 2019 said:

"Change here can be rapid. My job as manager is to make sure the staff keep moving forward. We have to be fleet of foot to take advantage of opportunities – it can all come your way when your brand is strong like ours is."

There are many areas of college provision which could have served as exemplars of flexibility. Here the focus is on higher education (HE) provision.

Higher education provision

There has been a significant expansion of HE provision in recent years. In 2012, the college was awarded its first Higher Education Funding Council HE contract for directly funded HE provision. An ambitious three-year HE development plan was launched, building on the traditions and histories of HE delivery at all college sites. One of the key aims continues to be to meet the needs of its local population – 'offering degrees on your doorstep'.

When Sam Parrett arrived as Principal the college had 90 HE students; by 2014 there were 450 and by 2019 the number had risen to 800 full and part time students, at a time when many colleges' HE provision had declined. Following the merger with Orpington College it was decided to work towards growing the then extremely small contract arrangement with Canterbury Christ Church University.

CCCU itself had many existing contracts and had made a strategic decision to reduce this number. The college was one of only a handful of partnerships it wished to continue. They recognised the long-term vision, clarity of purpose and ability to meet local need as some of the college's strengths which could be built on.

HE level qualifications are also delivered on behalf of a second awarding body, the University of Greenwich. This university had a strong pre-existing relationship with Bexley College (Holly Hill campus) and ran a very successful HNC/HND programme in construction. This enabled more than 100 non-traditional students a year to achieve HNC or HND and many progressed to a full

honours degree in partnership with the University of Greenwich.

The college was granted University Centre status in 2015, having met the criteria both in terms of numbers of students and standard of provision. This was a significant achievement, marking the growth in HE provision. Sam Parrett commented:

“In some respects, the college has always had the feel of a university to me as it excels at widening participation and access to non-traditional and professional part-time working students.”

The Quality Assurance Agency inspection of August 2016 confirmed that the college was running 46 higher education programmes across three faculties. It found that standards and student academic experience met all UK requirements. Along with several other trailblazing FE colleges, the college had found its feet in growing its HE provision. The inspection, which reported positively, took place under the new national framework for HE institutions. It required intense preparation that coincided with the demanding workload to establish the merged colleges as a new institution. The timing was not ideal, but it was a great result.

A further indication of quality was the college's award of British Council accreditation which allows for marketing to international students. Bromley achieved tier 4 status for this accreditation, a hard-won award indicating the quality of experience for all tier 4 students and the capacity of the college to support international learners.

Subject areas and levels of learning

The higher education programmes are delivered across the faculties of Business, Built Environment, Education and STEM on four of the five sites. In 2019, provision included full honours undergraduate degrees, foundation degrees, a Professional Certificate and Professional Graduate Certificate in Education, and Higher National certificates and diplomas.

This portfolio has required high investment of time and improvement measures, responding to changing demands. The first honours degrees were offered from November 2014. An example of improvement is the business provision which, in May 2015, across the college was in 'intensive care' following the previous Ofsted inspection. In late 2016, it had moved to outstanding.

Planning of HE provision is always responsive to identified local need and tied to the London skills agenda. The growth of construction and health and social care provision was a response to research indicating a definite growth of employment options in these areas.

The faculties and courses have a predominantly vocational theme, reflecting the expertise of staff and the needs of the local population. Additional programmes were added, including in teacher training, health and social care, counselling, health sciences, IT, computing, business accountancy. From September 2015, law with business, law with finance, marketing, HR management, LLD, sports science and childhood studies were enhanced.

College leaders believe that while changes will continue to be made, the broad portfolio is about right now. One priority which has been maintained is to ensure opportunities for progression – whenever the college puts on a foundation degree there are always top-up options available to students to work towards Bachelors awards. In many areas the HE provision is aligned with lower level learning to the extent that a student can begin study at level 1 and leave college with a degree. There has also been some deliberate reverse engineering of planning – for example, when the full degree in creative computing was proving popular, the college enhanced recruitment further by putting on an access course which gave a clear pathway for people who didn't have the required prior learning. Curriculum development and career progression for students has been at the heart of all planning. New delivery routes – including degree apprenticeships and accelerated degrees – have been implemented whenever possible.

The development of PGCE courses is a good example of the college's response to a local need. There were originally a handful of teacher training students at the Orpington site which has subsequently grown to more than 20 new students each year. The college recognised its potential for providing teaching practice opportunities within the college itself.

This has made the offer more attractive to many students with several interns and premium graduates now being sponsored to do teaching practice by college. By 2015, the College had 31 trainee teachers across its campus and this number continues to grow. Support for these trainee teachers is very good and the payoff to the

college is a high number of highly motivated teachers developing their skills to the benefit of students across the college.

Identifying challenges and responding

Providing HE level learning in an institution that has been historically focused on lower level learning brings particular challenges for any FE institutions. The level of course fees is one such area. The college continues to work towards both making its fees competitive and improving the HE offer, in particular to meet the expectations of often older and local students. A smaller institution is unlikely to be able to offer the full range of facilities that a large university can, such as a greater choice of accommodation, larger campus experience and potential for wider extra-curricular activity and support, but through targeted improvements the HE student experience has been continually enriched over time.

Additionally, the college pinpointed early on that HE students benefit from having their own identity within the larger institution. To meet HE students' needs, the college created separate work and study areas, an HE student union, lanyards and ID, branding and support structures – all introduced to improve the identity and enhance the HE culture.

Provision is highly student centred and inclusive. Smaller lecture sizes mean a more personalised approach to teaching and learning. Tutors are able to form close relationships with individuals, following up any absences and understanding where personal circumstances may get in the way of progress. As one tutor noted:

“We never give up on our HE students here, never let them drop off without going the extra mile to support them and find solutions to challenges which may be in their personal lives.”

Partnership

Partnership working with other institutions and businesses has been a hallmark of the success of HE provision. The college's higher education provision relies on mutually beneficial arrangements, with qualifications delivered on behalf of two awarding bodies, Canterbury Christ Church University and the University of Greenwich, and one awarding organisation, Pearson Education.

The college grew the previously small Canterbury portfolio following merger with Orpington, grasping the chance to grow a partnership with a second HEI. The first year 3 degree cohort began in 2015 and was another good example of responding to need. Canterbury was withdrawing its third year top-up provision at the time which meant no progression for some students, but it was happy for Bromley to take this on following early success with other courses. By September 2016, there were six new level 6 pathways in place.

Links with University of Greenwich continue to develop well with the highly successful HE science portfolio. Pharmaceutical and biomedical science provision was strong and nutrition courses were subsequently added. By 2015, 68 applications were received in these areas. The complex array of contracts – franchise, other HEI courses and direct contract with funding body – needs careful management to ensure recruitment is maintained and increased in most areas.

Another strong area of partnership which has enhanced the college's ability to respond to changing need in its HE provision has been work to ensure all plans are employer led wherever possible. The college is undoubtedly a leader in the field of providing educational provision which suits the needs of a changing employment market. In common with other areas of college provision, this has been achieved by consistent and real engagement with employers who identify what skills and abilities the future workforce will need.

The employer panel model was developed to enhance and provide structure to business links. The employer panel has a good membership mix, including members of the local Chamber of Commerce, accountant practitioners, manager of the Orpington Centre, NHS trusts and others.

One of the results of this engagement with local employers led to the focus on providing additionality to all degree programmes. The Professional and Graduate Employability and Skills ('PAGES') programme was developed to provide all HE students with a framework for key employability skills. The programme took the best from the existing college wide Career Advantage (formerly 'Bromley Advantage', as discussed in chapter 7), again showing the college's ability to demonstrate flexibility – taking an existing strength and developing it for a different audience. A further employer link has been the decision to engage Programme Patrons from business to act as patrons for each area of degree study.

These links often started small, moving to formal involvement, such as giving a guest lecture prior to establishing the on-going patron position. Satish Mathur, a local businessman reflected:

“I did my A levels at the college 40 years ago, I took the vocational route to success like lots of current students. I am involved in the business school advisory panel and I chair the Dragon’s Den project which is fantastic... I always feel proud going into the college.”

There is a desire to grow vocational courses and a need to meet robust market demand, not least to ensure courses are financially sustainable. For example, HE provision in social care at Bexley had good numbers of students enrolling. Strong links with local employers, both in care homes and in the wider social work sector, confirmed a continuing and growing need for the course which has since had investment and seen growth. Similarly, the push towards permission to deliver accelerated business degrees was based on evidence from several local employers.

Strengths of HE provision

In September 2017, a new college HE strategy targeted the training of local adults in work looking for accelerated degrees. The college chose to prioritise the expansion of higher apprenticeships and progression routes that are clear and attractive. The college set itself a target that at least 25% of HE enrolments should be

from existing college students – a target which has been met and improved upon. Success rates and retention at HE consistently compare well with the wider sector, and the number of first class degrees awarded to college HE students has been pro-rata higher than at other partner HE institutions for the past few years. One area of specialism has been an offer of additional support, coaching students through higher level learning who might not have achieved so well otherwise.

Use of buildings and other resources needs imagination with competing demands from other areas of the college. Over 50% of HE students are part time, meaning building use for HE is heavy in the evening and at weekends. Indeed, the college has more of a feel of an HE institution in the evening, with smaller class sizes and a professional purposeful atmosphere allowing many students to be fast tracked where possible, in many cases completing part time degrees within three years.

In some cases, teaching times have been moved to evenings in order to meet the needs of particular learner groups. Contact time is higher than at many comparative institutions, a feature that has been shown to encourage enrolments from students with the right prior learning but lower levels of confidence. Flexible teaching arrangements have also given greater efficiencies, though the college is careful to ensure this is not at the expense of quality.

Another area of strength worthy of mention is the clear commitment to incorporating technology into HE learning at the college. For example, two members of staff won awards for the creation of second life apps.

These apps – developed in computing/software development and in law – allow students to set up an avatar who can visit a virtual space which supports learning through online activities. These apps were acknowledged as highly innovative and well received by both students and other HE staff both internally and at external conference settings. Staff had responded to the challenge to respond to a need to develop bespoke online learning opportunities. More generally, the college realised it needed to keep pace with other technological innovation – moving one of its PGCE teacher training courses to entirely distance learning in response to student need.

Several college directors interviewed about HE provision have stressed that the biggest strength of the department has been staff quality. Teaching staff all have extensive experience in their field of teaching and bring real commitment and enthusiasm to all their interactions with students, backed up by student consultations and surveys of the past few years – in 2017/18, 90% of students felt that their HE teaching was of a high standard.

Future planning in HE

While the current provision is performing well, college managers are aware that the ever-changing policy and economic context will require more flexibility in response. A shift in focus on the quality of curriculum rather than simply on outcomes has been welcomed. The increasing customer focus of students expecting value for money from their personal investment adds to this. Better marketing of the apprenticeship degree pathway is planned to promote more cost-effective learning for students.

The college aims to continue to attract the commuter customer – adult learners who study while working, who want a local HE provider with a local employment focus. Both Canterbury and Greenwich partners have supported the college's early work to develop HE courses responsive to need – including fast track degrees for those who want them. The traditional linear way of studying for a degree is changing and the college is at the forefront of this change.

The desire to meet local need means there is commitment to maintaining HE provision at a number of sites. At the Bexley campus, construction and education provision is flourishing, while the Greenwich campus developments have seen degree level learning in the creative sector. Work has continued to launch online degree level training in partnership with Pearson education.

Opportunities, mutual support and personal growth

“This Foundation Degree group of students came together two years ago, offering many the opportunity to return to learning and achieve a BA degree in the third year in social work. This is my fifth year of teaching on the course and every cohort has its own uniqueness, however I have been particularly struck by how this group has come together, supported each other through rough times, celebrated their successes and had the most incredible laughs. There are many individual stories to tell but the whole group should be acknowledged.

“In a lesson a short while ago they were asked to think about life events that had helped to shape them and affected their behaviour or actions. I was immensely struck by the hurdles all of them had coped with...and as a social worker, I have heard some stories!

“Every one of them can identify how they have travelled on this specific course and the impact it has had – not only on their development, but also their approach to life and planning for their future.”

HE tutor, 2019

Children’s university

An example of the college’s commitment to lifelong learning and its flexibility in service provision is demonstrated in its decision to deliver a children’s university for the South East London area. The project was resurrected nationally during 2014 and fitted well with the college’s desire to be a leader in education for its locality. Children at local primary schools record their experiences of ‘non-academic learning’ onto a passport – for example through visits to local museums, libraries and other accredited venues. The passports are designed to encourage learning beyond the classroom and are an effective way for young children to see how a CV or prior learning portfolio can be developed. Points are awarded allowing children to move through five levels, finishing at doctorate level.

Children are granted their awards at celebratory graduation ceremonies, replicating those of universities. By March 2015, 12 local primary schools had signed up to the scheme and there were more than 30 accredited learning destinations in the borough. This project has a good fit with the college’s strategy, to the extent that it was happy to partially subsidise the initiative until a larger cohort of schools signed up. In 2018, the programme was extended to Bexley and by 2019 more than 700 local children were involved.



Learning and reflections on higher education

- Develop a small number of key relationships with university providers and seek external accreditation to grow
- Improve identity and enhance the HE culture creating separate work and study areas, ID, branding, support structures and an HE student union, it all helps
- Growing and deepening relationships with employers is key
- Be flexible, move teaching times to meet the needs of particular learner groups and increase personal support and contact time
- Develop HE courses responsive to need - including fast track degrees for those who want them and non-linear learning
- Build an internal progression strategy from levels 1-6 to complement direct entry to HE level courses
- Develop flexible delivery and blended learning options particularly for adult part-time students

5. CONFIDENT AND RESPONSIVE

Multi-academy trust, wider links



CONFIDENT AND RESPONSIVE

During 2014 the college established a Multi-Academy trust (MAT.) This hugely significant and bold decision was the result of an approach from Bromley Council and the DfE, asking the college to take on responsibility for alternative and special provision across the borough. This brief story of the trust shows how it is responding to the needs of several local authorities, some existing struggling schools and some already thriving. Most importantly it now provides a high standard of education to over 800 of the most vulnerable and excluded young people in South East London. The executive head teachers are clear about the special focus:

“As a leadership group we have always been attuned to the needs of the more challenging and disaffected young people”.

As with all the major developments outlined in this book, the corporation and senior management team assessed potential risk and benefits and decided to go ahead. It fitted well with their vision and purpose and the decision proved to be right. Six years later, the trust had become a highly successful MAT operating across the south east of England. It comprises eight academies offering special and alternative provision at primary and secondary level, together with a large mainstream primary school. Other colleges across the UK have tried but failed to successfully establish themselves as academy sponsors, so it is worth reflecting on some of the characteristics that have seen the trust thrive.

The chapter also looks at examples of responsiveness in the wider college, highlighting external links through sporting organisations and high-profile visitors.

London South East Academies Trust

While the trust is an entity in its own right, separate from the college group, the college is its main sponsor, providing strategic governance, management and ongoing support. The aim was for the college to grow a specialism in supporting and educating the most challenging young people. The growth has been gradual, a response both to the needs of an expanding trust and the local needs of children with special educational needs.

The growth of the trust

The trust began with the creation of Bromley Trust Academy (BTA) in September 2014 (taking on the sites of the former Kingswood and Grovelands schools). BTA is split across two campuses, one primary and one secondary, providing education for the most vulnerable 5-18 year olds in the borough – those for whom mainstream schooling has failed, are at risk of exclusion and who need alternative provision. In March 2019 BTA Blenheim was added to this group. This is a small school for eighteen 7-11 year olds with significant mental health conditions who are unable to access mainstream provision.

The second group, the Bromley Beacon Academy, was formed in late 2015 when the former Burwood School came into the trust after a protracted and difficult transfer from local authority responsibility. It had had

seven temporary head teachers over the previous year, had just 32 children on its roll, a dilapidated building unfit for purpose and a disillusioned staff team. The school was re-designated as Bromley Beacon Academy (BBA) and became co-educational. It works with students who have education health and care plans and with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

BBA has since expanded with a second £3.5 million purpose-built site in Bromley catering for years 9-13. The new building includes capacity to teach motor mechanics, food tech, sport, IT, construction, decorating, music technology and other vocational subjects alongside core classroom teaching. More recently the original Burwood School site has undergone a £4.1 million transformation, completed in spring 2019. This doubled the area of the old school, incorporating a new classroom and new sports centre. This has been transformational for student experience in what was an extremely dilapidated building.

The trust expanded again in 2017, incorporating the three schools within the existing New Horizons Federation – Horizons, Aspire and Endeavour Academies located in the London Borough of Bexley – again a mix of provision for children with special needs and/or at risk of exclusion. The executive head teacher for these schools played a crucial role in advising the college on the establishment of the original trust so had a good background knowledge of its aims. She also had a history of taking over failing pupil referral units and transforming them to outstanding, most recently managing the alternative provision in Kent, one of only a few such services rated as outstanding nationally at that

time. This growth effectively meant that the trust became responsible for the SEMH and alternative provision for a second London Borough, Bexley.

The trust expanded further with the addition of Woodside School and Belmont Primary Academy during 2019. Woodside is a special academy, offering provision for 5 to 19 year olds with a wide range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), and moderate learning and medical needs. All pupils with autism are taught in purpose-built accommodation and specialist vocational pathways for 14 to 19 year olds are offered.

Woodside School had already been working with Belmont Academy, a unique partnership in that it connected a special school with a mainstream primary school with a research-based provision. This enabled meaningful links between the two educational environments, enriching the provision offered to the children. In October 2019 the Regional Schools Commissioner requested that Wey House School in Guildford join the trust. This marked the start of another new phase and represented the trust's ambition to continue its growth to a medium-sized MAT.

The trust's strategic growth plan is to develop clusters of similar-type schools to promote the sharing of best practice, CPD, training and support mechanisms. School improvement and managing change are key areas of strength within the trust – supported by extremely effective management and leadership, as recognised and commended by Ofsted.

There followed a period of significant work – stabilising the provision at each school over the first year, establishing new policies and procedures which had been lacking. The structure is stable now, with a staff team with the capacity to take on the challenge of continual improvement. Each curriculum was changed to include more vocationally based qualifications and the introduction of a syllabus more relevant to the young people’s lives, for example including financial skills and other practical life skills.

Having gone through the new build journey, BBA had a visit from Ofsted in January 2019. For the first time in the school’s history it was rated as good. This was down to a massive team effort and much deserved. Leadership and management were rated outstanding and the inspection acknowledged the transformation of teaching and learning over the previous five years. In the report, inspectors noted that:

“The executive headteacher is a modest but aspirational leader. He is very well supported by other senior leaders, including trustees and governors.”

Successes and strengths

Reflecting on the strengths that precipitated the trust’s stunning transformation of provision, one critical success was that after the first full year of operation the culture had changed – high expectations, better behaviour and a learning focus had become the norm. Senior staff had been given firm timelines to complete changes in policy, procedure and teaching quality and these expectations

had been passed to all staff. Holding staff to account has worked well with the introduction of performance management, half-termly data collections and reports on what is going well all contributing to a more professional and positive culture.

At the same time there was a decision to adopt a far more therapeutic approach across the schools. Clear behavioural boundaries and expectations were put in place, but the focus on therapeutic support for pupils struck many staff as the most impactful. By November 2016, each of the schools in the trust had employed a qualified therapist with a full case load, supporting individual pupils and supervising staff. This is a significant investment but justifiable as it impacts on behaviour and thus on learning for the hardest to reach. Consequently, attendance moved from 65% to 85% in a few months, referral numbers increased hugely, and the stronger financial position allowed for a drive toward more permanent staff recruitment. By March 2016, there was only one member of staff employed through an agency, where previously there had been several.

The trust schools had quickly established a strong reputation within the local borough and wider local community. Visitors to the schools were very impressed by the more purposeful atmosphere and high expectations. While most students are from the borough of Bromley, around 20% of students are also from Southwark, Croydon, Lewisham, Kent and Greenwich, an indication that the reputation of the trust’s work is good. Partner organisations – including local head teachers, the police, SEN practitioners – agreed to form a stakeholder board to provide advice and consultation.

There is good support from trustees (several of whom are members of the sponsor college corporation) and senior managers. The chair of the college corporation decided not to sit on the trust board to avoid any future conflicts of interest when it came to critical decisions over, for example, funding commitments. There is an ambition to develop the relationship between the individual academies, the trust and the wider college. The chair of the wider college board has been instrumental in ensuring that college governors have a good knowledge of the work and development of all the academies.

The benefit of an academy trust sponsored by a larger learning institution has been felt in the various ways the wider college has supported the schools. From the start the college was able to provide expertise on vocational education and strategic planning skills. Back office functions such as HR, estates management, communications, ICT support and health and safety have all been provided by the college. The strong back office support was a factor in the three Bexley schools joining the trust.

Following the first year of consolidation, trust schools have been increasingly encouraged to work together and this has borne fruit. By November 2016, there were half-termly subject-themed strategy and practice sharing meetings, subject staff were making contact across the trust for mutual support and the first senior leadership two-day conference had taken place. Another cross-trust event was the first ever awards evening in September 2016, a resounding success attended by more than 100 parents and pupils. The potential impact of these kinds of events on pupils who have not previously been able to celebrate any kind of success cannot be over-estimated.

Responding to challenges

The progress which the college-sponsored trust schools have made did not come without significant challenge. Pupils had extremely low expectations of themselves and their experience of education. When the new Executive Head Teacher arrived, he described the situation: "I remember saying to pupils when I arrived, we'll arrange some work experience for you this year. They said, 'no you won't, that's what all the teachers say but they never do it for us.' A few months later they had been out on work experience and had their first inter-school football fixture and then the start of things like off-road motorcycle trips for the motor vehicle students. These things are vital..."

"...We have to follow up what we say we will do and help raise these young people's expectations. They know that we mean what we say now."

The early days for the trust were tough. There were poor support and discipline systems with young people showing very low self-confidence and self-esteem. Staff had to develop the resilience required to effect change across each of the schools. The Head reflected: "It often took 20 minutes to get most groups into the classroom to start the lesson. We have stuck with it, shown resilience, implemented boundaries and increased support. Now behaviour is greatly improved, I can't remember the last time a window was broken, and pupils generally go straight to lessons. It's all down to the resilience of my teams to see it through."

This reflects the culture of the trust in terms of responding to the needs of its vulnerable young people; providing a safe and structured school setting. Another senior manager said: “We are NOT an alternative to school; we don’t run an alternative curriculum. We run schools which provide all the opportunities which young people deserve. We have the expertise to do that and to manage very challenging young people. Other specialist support is available from other agencies, but our focus is on education and whenever possible helping our young people to return to mainstream schools.”

The trust has responded to the differing demands, cultures and histories of its supporting authorities by maintaining flexibility in provision across its schools. Bromley’s local authority has commissioned the trust schools in its area to provide an outreach service to local primary schools, working with children at risk of exclusion and providing behavioural support. In the year following April 2018, there were no permanent exclusions in primary schools across the borough.

In contrast the three Bexley schools were already high performing when they joined the trust, something that brings challenges of its own. Transformed over the three years prior to joining in 2017, they had already created a large outreach service to improve the safeguarding, transition and inclusion for young people especially in the some of the highly deprived areas of Bexley.

Working with staff, parents and pupils within mainstream schools, running workshops, other programmes (for example on knife crime or risky behaviours) the team grew from two to ten in a couple of years, reflecting the popularity of the programme.

Staffing was a big challenge for the new trust. SEMH and disaffected pupils often have attachment issues which become more severe when they experience temporary staff or staff not suited to this specialist teaching role. The trust has invested heavily in new staff with a focus on permanency for each team. Over twenty staff were recruited for one school during a five-month period. Many were from mainstream schools, with the anticipation that they bring mainstream expectations. While some needed a lot of early support to manage the challenging pupils, retention has been very high.

Investment in teaching and learning helped staff satisfaction and performance, with all lessons rated as good or better by 2018. The trust invested in a teaching and learning package (OLEVI) which provides a common teaching and learning structure across the trust. Programmes include ‘improving teaching’, ‘outstanding teaching’, and ‘outstanding teaching assistants.’ More generally there has been a focus on providing formal qualifications for staff to reflect their development, with a number of staff moving from unqualified to qualified teaching status. These are examples of ways in which the trust has responded to the need to retain high quality staff. One manager recalled that:

“The Ofsted inspector said they had never heard such positive staff feedback – a great reflection of how we treat our staff.”

The establishment of the Multi Academy Trust brought some financial risk. There were long and difficult negotiations regarding transfer of staff, pension

responsibility etc from the local authority to the college. Indeed, the college corporation learned lessons from the first school transfer which was delayed by insufficient and incomplete data regarding staffing levels. The key mutual benefit for the trust and college is through sharing of some back-office costs and certainly some of these had begun to be realised during the second year of operation. The trust grew to the extent that in 2019 it was able to employ its own central staff for payroll, HR and finance. This team still sat under the wider college group management but were working entirely on trust business.

The future for the trust

The trust has begun to show its potential for future development. Having moved into work in a second borough there is interest in looking for opportunities to take on additional schools. One continuing aim is to become a renowned hub for working with young people with SEMH and other complex needs – to work directly with young people and to provide information, advice and guidance to mainstream schools.

From the college's perspective a longer-term aim is for young people, including those from trust schools, to be able to progress onto higher level courses within the wider college, a natural progression route which has already been taken up by a small number of students. This reinforces the college's passionate ambition to be the centre of vocational education excellence for the South East London region, catering to all student needs however complex.

The trust's learning philosophy extends throughout all its schools – a golden thread linking high expectations, excellent teaching and learning, clear lines of accountability, respect and achievement. The group's unique structure aids and enables progression, giving young people and their families support, hope and aspiration.

Learning and reflection on responsiveness

- **Build schools that provide all the opportunities young people deserve. Adopting a therapeutic approach struck staff as being most impactful**
- **Senior leaders who excel at managing change build resilience in staff**
- **Valuing and supporting staff helps build a passionate workforce**
- **Having high expectations matters**
- **To raise expectations, build confidence and self-esteem, staff must follow through on what they say**
- **Investment in buildings can have a transformational impact on students and staff**
- **Changing the curriculum to include more vocationally based qualifications and creating a syllabus more relevant to the young people's lives makes a significant difference**
- **Connecting the trust to the college supports progression**

Responsiveness – wider college external Links

The college has a rich history of strong links and partnership with local employers and other organisations. This has continued in recent times with managers understanding the importance of individual students experiencing real work, and the need to show local employers the calibre of students available for their future workforce.

Some recent initiatives demonstrate this response. The college has developed a strategic relationship with Crystal Palace Football Club after identifying a need to set up a football academy at the college. Palace for Life offers a sport BTEC in levels 1-3. Year one saw 48 students, year two grew to 68. Students are able to wear the Premier League badge on their uniforms which is highly motivating. The college team won their league on its debut season and the students are progressing well in their academic studies. Students' dreams of becoming professional footballers are nurtured alongside a focus on academic study, opening their eyes to alternative career paths. The partnership was showcased by Barclays Bank as an exemplar of such a link.

In another area, the college was awarded a European Social Fund Contract by the Greater London Authority – Getting Back on Track – designed to address the high number of students not progressing beyond level 2 in London. Developed by the Group Executive Director, the programme is a perfect example of the added value that can be achieved by working cross sector. The project has had great positive exposure being run in partnership with

Morgan Hunt recruitment and the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust who provide world class athletes to help deliver core life and work skills for students, alongside digital training and social action projects across four London boroughs. Reflecting on the success of the programme, one director said: “Getting Back on Track exemplifies the innovation that colleges need to demonstrate to be able to respond to the needs of learners and their wider communities. By maximising the expert skills of the voluntary and business sectors we are able to offer these learners a unique learning experience to kick start their careers, and help solve a national issue of too many young people dropping out of education.”

The chair of governors has noticed an increase in the number of exciting external links to motivate staff and students.

“Our local impact is everywhere. I recently took my car for a service locally. The apprentice was wearing his college t-shirt. His mentor at the garage had been at the college and was very positive about his experience...”

“I can sense the drive and energy when I go into the different campuses. We have had some powerful and influential people coming into the college from different worlds, sport, business, and government.”

The landmark lecture series established since 2017 has seen some very high profile visitors, including, for example, Matthew Trainer, CEO of Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, Dame Inga Beale DBE, former CEO of Lloyds of London, Cressida Dick, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and Dany Cotton, London Fire Commissioner, two inspirational and successful women who talked to theatres packed with students and staff. In September 2018, Julius Weinberg and Amanda Spielman, chair and HM Chief Inspector of Schools at Ofsted, visited the college to talk about the changing context of inspections. These were part of a series of high-profile visitors who have stimulated and motivated staff and students.

Work experience has become compulsory on all long-term study programmes, 36 days at level 1 and 72 days for level 2. This is delivered bespoke for each student, depending on their needs. The growing business development team organises these opportunities, co-ordinating and maintaining the huge number of employer links. As part of the pilot for the new T level qualification, the college developed some longer-term construction and engineering placements. Many more of these are now community based, linking to the new group strategy, through which the college is now positioned as a social enterprise.

By embedding the creation of social value at the heart of the curriculum, within the delivery of academic qualifications the college is ensuring that its learners have the best possible start not just in their careers but also in their wider role as citizens. Examples of this include community projects like The Prince’s Trust team

completing a painting project at Crystal Palace FC, and construction students helping renovate a Bromley theatre. These ongoing projects allow for roll-on and roll-off of students who can be part of a large scale project for real work experience. As well as developing technical skills, they are developing the essential life skills they will need to thrive in society.



6. BOLD DECISION MAKING

Mergers, Skills for Growth, 14-16 education



BOLD DECISION MAKING

This chapter spotlights the college's willingness to take risks in pursuit of its vision and mission. All of the large scale transformational work which has gone on at the college in recent years has been carefully scrutinised by the senior leadership team and then by the corporation – assessing the potential for financial, reputational, operational or educational problems prior to signing off new work. This lies at the heart of the governance responsibilities of these groups.

Nonetheless, in an environment that is ever changing – both within the FE sector and the wider economy – even the most thorough options appraisal is rarely foolproof. Factors which remain relatively unpredictable include recruitment of students and staff, medium to long-term financial projections, local employment needs and many others.

Growth and development on the scale of this college requires a level of risk taking which some individuals and institutions find difficult to live with. Over recent years the college has seen most development decisions pay off. However, these have rarely been without risk. Three examples have been selected. The first relates to the most recent merger, the second the acquisition of the Skills for Growth training provider and the third covers 14-16 education at the college.

Mergers

The merger of Bromley College first with Orpington (2012) and then with Greenwich (2016) and Bexley (2017) are certainly the most significant developments of recent years. One danger with taking a major strategic decision is a delay due to feelings of uncertainty and tendency toward risk aversion. This had happened when the Bromley and Orpington merger had first been mooted. The corporation and leadership team were keen that it did not happen again. As the Principal explained: "If we hadn't taken on Bexley then the area review process would likely have matched us up with another college elsewhere as government is keen to reduce the number of colleges.

"It made absolute geographical sense, so we thought better to be pro-active than be forced to merge elsewhere later down the line. We could see the potential despite the risks but, once agreed, we did not delay from that point."

It was known that several South London colleges were struggling financially or operationally, and Bromley college was one of a few holding its own. That was not to say that the college's recipe would work elsewhere. The corporation required the senior leadership team to make a coherent case for both mergers.

In the case of Greenwich there were key strengths which swung the decision by the Further Education Commissioner to approve Greenwich Community

College during a Structure and Prospects Appraisal (SPA) to merge with Bromley College. While many departments were severely struggling with low student numbers, ESOL and community provision were doing well – graded at 2. The regeneration of Woolwich with 26,000 new homes proposed and the work associated with the building of Crossrail train link meant there were predictions of imminent increases in employment opportunities in construction, hospitality and catering, all existing areas of strength for Bromley. The intention was to capitalise on these and for the new college to prepare employees for these growing sectors. Additionally, the strong support from the Greenwich Council gave added confidence and encouragement – it had sent several letters of support and indicated financial support with a college re-build programme in the future.

For Bexley, the strategic decision was about the geography and knowledge of existing good performance in several areas. Bromley acted quickly in moving forward with the proposals.

The merger process overall went well. The decision to go for a type B merger – in which the existing legal entities of the individual colleges are dissolved and a new single entity created – was the right one. It enabled clear governance from the outset, a more rapid move to a single culture, swifter intervention where necessary and speedy rebranding for the whole new college group. One manager reflected: “It hasn’t been easy – Greenwich was bruised and struggling while many staff at Bexley were unsure of the need to merge – but it has gone well.

“We were able to explain our journey to OFSTED – moving to one college, then to one culture and finally to one future. Ofsted said that this was the most successful example of a merger they had seen.”

Get the right people

A major factor in mitigating against the risks associated with merger was to identify and recruit the right people to take complex transformation forward. Bromley certainly did not get all appointments right first time. The chair admitted: “We have had to be brave with people – we have brought in a number of senior leaders to assist the process, not all of them have worked out and some have had to go. When we have found the right people then we make sure we keep them.”

The college quickly established a merger strategy group with membership from all three colleges. Action plans were drawn up and the scale of the project became clear. Complex negotiations with unions, convergence of policy and practice had to happen alongside the due diligence, corporate and legal work. A key learning point was to give capacity to the merger strategy group, to avoid people being over-stretched to the extent that existing services suffered.

The importance of merging the corporations was also identified early. Relationships were established between the existing chairs of the three corporations. As soon as the merger was approved to go forward a joint strategy day was held including the seven governors who were

transferring from Greenwich and Bexley to the new college corporation.

The senior leader for integration of estates, exams, ICT and MIS systems emphasised the importance of getting the data structure right and integrating the IT systems. Impressively this was achieved in two years along with the seamless management of 45 IT projects.

“I think we have done pretty well and reduced central costs by £1 million. We consolidated most group services and introduced a single service desk for HR, IT and MIS.”

In 2017, the Director of Quality introduced a new quality standards system and helping to articulate good practice across the group. She reflected: “The speed with which the new infrastructure spread across the group impressed me and we have managed to maintain a rise in performance year on year which many merged colleges don’t. Transformation is a constant theme here but I am enjoying being here in such challenging times.”

Risks of merger - reputational, operational, and financial

The core risks associated with merger relate to potential damage to reputation, operations, or finance. Greenwich College’s success rates were in the bottom five of all colleges across the country. Their deficit in the year prior to merger was £5 million from a turnover of only £11 million. On the surface the risks were great. Nonetheless, Bromley had had a good experience of merging with Orpington, during which, against all expectations,

achievement rates had risen. Having identified the potential at Greenwich and having been clear that the merger could not go ahead without absolute clarity on the financial cost, the corporation was happy to move forward.

The chair said: “Yes, you definitely do have to be brave to merge and go in with eyes open. For example, with Greenwich the DfE didn’t offer us the grant we wanted to mitigate the risk, only a loan, despite the big deficit from GCC. The potential sale of land was projected to help, so on balance we felt we could move forward positively. We took great heart from our experience with Orpington. It’s tough for staff, yes, but it’s the learner who is at the centre of what we are about.”

Effective communications

A further significant challenge inherent in the mergers was internal communications. As soon as staff from Greenwich and Bexley were made aware of the proposed mergers, an internal communications plan was introduced to ensure clarity of message. Experience from Orpington had shown the effort required to avoid the merger being seen as a takeover by the larger institution. While the remaining Greenwich staff were predominantly already aware of the likelihood of a merger, at Bexley it was more of a shock.

The college invested in communications, providing specialist training for managers to help them support their teams through the process, and running many workshops to keep staff up to date on progress and timescales. However, it was also important to recognise the inevitable grief and mourning that staff would go

through. The Deputy Principal at that time said: “Actually it was a very short time between the decision to go ahead and the mergers.

“We did an awful lot of communications but I’m not sure anything else would have made a big difference to people’s feelings. Some staff see the positive potential; others think ‘this change isn’t for me.’ The churn has not been as high as we thought it would be.”

Action to support change

The Ofsted visit to Greenwich in January 2016, while challenging, also gave Bromley a strong mandate for immediate change. It confirmed that students were being failed. This gave the leadership team traction to accelerate the pace of change pre-merger and to give staff deadlines for improvement alongside development support.

In the period prior to the mergers, a lot of people put in major groundwork alongside the more formal legal processes. Relationships were forged between teams, best practice shared, and early plans made for how the new structures might best operate.

Many department managers spent several months shuttling between the sites, finding out how things were done, informally bringing plans together. Much of this was self-directed time with managers given autonomy to make plans prior to the new structure and processes being finalised.

The former senior team at Greenwich were all temporary appointments so Bromley stepped in and appointed a new corporate director. The intended new college group culture and values were communicated promptly, and expectations set.

Greenwich campus post-merger

New curriculum areas have lifted the campus, particularly the performing arts and other creative subjects. Student growth, for example in the popular technical theatre course, allowed investment in a new theatre with state of the art LED lighting opening in 2019, and a creative courtyard bringing outdoor space to life. Adult community learning was a previous strength at Greenwich and continues to thrive.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a supportive partner, for example funding a project that retrains adults who have been in prison, and a construction project to provide real work opportunities for long term unemployed. Other construction students are increasingly involved in community-based projects, including helping to renovate a summer house at Charlton House, a heritage site. Students have completely renovated a youth club in the relatively deprived area of Abbey Wood.

Bexley campus post-merger

Two main parts of the Bexley campus, the relatively new Erith building and the older Holly Hill, remain. The Erith building is of high quality but rather soulless, corporate, and not motivational. Early changes included creation of #platform - with echoes to the railway station next door - a friendly, comfortable digital learning space

created from what had previously been offices. The learning spaces are now all reflective of the modern workplace and are highly visible, creating an obvious culture of learning. The then head of Bexley campus explained: “#platform was just one way for us to be a real stepping stone into industry.

“I am driven by a desire to show our students that they can achieve without having to know the right people to get a job and to see college as a positive choice. We have moved away from the traditional classroom where possible to inspire.”

The curriculum was revamped following conversations with the local authority and other stakeholders who understood the local need for higher level qualifications and a more entrepreneurial approach. The ‘#weworkwith’ brand showcases partnership with major local employers and employment destinations of recent students. All corridors and landing areas were branded with images about local employment opportunities, and students were asked to state their aspirations under the banner ‘#iwanttobe’, with photos accompanying their long-term plans and displayed around the college. The whole atmosphere in the building shifted towards one of aspiration and outward facing.

Successes have included changing qualifications frameworks in preparation of early adoption of the new T-levels, improved links with, for example, Lloyds Bank, leading to valuable apprenticeship placements, and construction students helping to renovate the Exchange

building. In an unconventional flip, one recent project saw the college’s business students acting as the Dragon’s Den panel while senior children’s services managers pitched their ideas for service development.

The Holly Hill site for construction training also saw some early transformation focused on updating the curriculum and improving external reputation, especially by focusing on enhanced work experience and more real work briefs for students. The college is one of only seven London providers to be selected as a hub for the Mayor of London’s Construction Academy (MCA) initiative, which the strategic development team pursued to position the college strongly for future investment in construction skills.

The MCA project consisted of three stages. In Stage 1, providers applied to receive a certified Quality Mark which would allow them to progress. In Stage 2, the GLA set aside £3 million to support providers becoming MCA Hub Leaders, co-ordinating construction provision in a set area. Stage 3 set aside additional funding for quality-marked providers to invest in hub expansions.

After receiving the Quality Mark in June 2018, the college applied for MCA Hub status which was granted in January 2019. The college is working with construction developers Knight Dragon, MACE and Berkeley Homes to support multiple South East London developments, including a £1bn regeneration and house building project in Kidbrooke and a further £1bn regeneration of Thamesmead town centre. In May 2019, the college was successfully awarded stage 3. It is the only London college to have received all three levels of MCA funding,

which reflects the high quality of provision and commitment to the future of the capital's construction industry.

Innovation at Bexley campus

"What has changed is that our teaching and learning is much more innovative. We have more live briefs that students work towards – staff work with industry experts now to write the briefs. So, for business and photography students, Orbit housing approached us as they were redesigning an area of Bexley. They had done historical research on what it used to be, architects were planning what it is going to be, what they wanted was photographs of how it is now.

"We said yes but for it to be meaningful it needs to be a real process. So, they came in and presented a brief, photography students did the job and it became a real assignment. At the end there was an exhibition of photos and it was judged by Orbit with prizes. We also did some work with Peabody and Thamesmead – we always ensure students get to pitch ideas then industry people pick their preferred option. The employees then continue with project, very much how you would bid for some work in the real world of work.

"We've done loads – it's great to remember how much we've done!"

Manager, Bexley campus

Skills for growth

In July 2017 it was announced that the college was to grow again, with the Bexley-based charity Skills for Growth (SfG) joining the wider group. SfG is a training and apprenticeship provider. It has a track record of more than 30 years supporting young people, particularly those facing the most significant barriers to progression into or within employment. The charity aims to help young people to progress, focusing on those with low prior attainment, those not engaged in education employment or training (NEET), young people leaving care and young offenders.

With changes to the apprenticeship market and the levy funding regime adding pressure to smaller providers, SfG was aware that it was going to struggle to maintain itself as a standalone entity so its trustees identified the college as an opportunity for stability. At the same time, other colleges moves to take over or merge with different training entities have not always gone well. Nonetheless the group trustees felt that welcoming SfG was a risk worth taking.

Having a single executive team and a single strategic plan across the group has promoted effective integration, bringing coherence and allowing staff to see themselves as part of a larger group. This is where strong strategic leadership came in. SfG was struggling financially; "The college was not just picking at a ripe apple" – as one senior leader put it. Instead the due diligence showed that there was a real strategic fit with the aims of the college. SfG brought a good name and strong track record of reaching into markets the group

wanted to expand into, especially support and education for young people who are NEET. The core areas of delivery for SfG were initially refocused on health and social care, hairdressing, business, and some teacher assistant training.

SfG, now rebranded as London Skills for Growth, is already in a stronger position. By 2019, the charity had received a good Ofsted rating. It was more sustainable and moving towards financial sustainability. A decline in numbers of apprentices and trainees was stabilised, despite a challenging market. Through 2017/18 the charity worked with 1,100 apprentices and supported 130 young people on traineeships, linking with around 900 employers: 70% of apprentices continued to work with the same employer after completing their apprenticeship.

The corporation of the college group became corporate sponsor of London SfG, which remains a separate charitable entity but effectively singly owned by the college group. The college's chief financial officer took on the role of CEO leading the small management team. As with other mergers, core business support services – IT, HR and financial systems passed to the central college team.

Reflecting on early progress the CEO said: "We haven't done anything too ingenious. We instituted a much greater and relentless focus on targets and performance, cutting posts where not required, cutting out consultancy costs. There was spare capacity in one building, so we have sub-let that.

"We worked hard to implement integration and again as with other mergers focused on improving teaching and learning. Financially we are not where we need to be, but we are getting there."

14-16 Education at the college

The third area which shows the college's capacity for risk taking has been experience of delivering 14-16 education at the college. In 2012, the government introduced changes to legislation which allowed FE colleges to take full responsibility for delivery of 14-16 education. The local head teachers' forum had encouraged the college to consider a pilot. Bromley College at that point was one of only seven colleges nationally which took part in the pilot.

The broad aim of the changes was to provide an alternative key stage four to young people who wanted to study high quality vocational qualifications. It was hoped that the programme would attract young people who had a clear view of the vocational area they wanted to study and could get a head start in this area while still taking core GCSE subjects.

The college had a history of providing part time vocational education for this age group – pupils attending college for one or two days per week. This new programme was however a step change. Pupils were to be on roll full time with the college and all statutory responsibilities of a secondary school would be taken on.

Early referrals from schools were largely inappropriate so it was decided to delay the launch of the pilot by a year, to September 2014, to ensure that systems and resources were in place and that the first student cohort was a good fit.

This decision again reflects well on Bromley's willingness to take risks – having been given approval to go ahead with the pilot, the college managers were confident enough in their judgement to go back to DfE and ask for a 12-month delay. After becoming established, this 14-16 provision was branded as the 14-16 Technical Academy.

After a challenging beginning, the headteacher said: "We had to do a lot in a short space of time. The pupils were confused as to whether they were at a college or school – they needed clarity. We immediately stopped them calling teachers by their first names, introduced a zero tolerance for uniform infractions, ensured pupils were always accompanied within the college, and had a blitz on lateness. Within days we had thank you emails from a number of parents who said they were glad some stronger boundaries had been introduced."

By September 2016, the Technical Academy had around 170 pupils on roll and needed to expand. While other FE college 14-16 provision has been struggling to maintain numbers, the college had gone from strength to strength.

Key features which had helped the college to buck the national trend were identified as clear and positive relationships with parents and local schools, a broad curriculum offer incorporating vocational qualifications and core subjects taught in relevant ways and a

supportive local authority and headteachers. The academy was larger than any other similar provision nationally.

The early successes of the Technical Academy were also put down to a willingness to take risks even within the relatively controlled and regulated area of 14-16 provision. As one senior teacher at the academy put it: "There was some initial concern that the academy would mean something of a 'dumbing down' of learning but that has absolutely not been the case.

"We have been good at trialling and experimenting – finding what works for these young people. We are self-critical and reflective, definitely NOT cautious. We took government policy and made of it what we could for our young people."

Progression routes into post-16 learning were good. All year 11s at the academy were offered automatic entry to the wider college and many took this up.

Sadly, in February 2018 government policy changed and the college made the decision to close the 14-16 Technical Academy. The government's new progress measures for the academy were extremely low and deemed too much of a reputational risk for the wider group.

The college board had demonstrated its willingness to take risks and the ability to stop and reverse its decision

when circumstances demanded. Nonetheless, the Principal expressed understandable frustration. “Rather than being able to celebrate success, our board had to take the decision to close our 14-to-16 provision. Even though these young people make up less than one per cent of our total student community, the effect of these league tables on the reputation of our wider college is a risk we can’t afford to take.

“Every single student in our own year 11 cohort (61 in total) progressed successfully into employment, further education, or training: 99% achieved an English qualification and 97% got a maths qualification. Is this really what underperforming looks like?

The group remains committed to finding ways to provide alternate pathways for young people who have not thrived in the more traditional classroom environment. A new iteration of 14-16 provision was launched from September 2019 in partnership between local authorities and LSEC. A one day per week alternative vocational offer is being managed by the trust. In this case the young people stay on their existing school roll.

Learning and reflections on bold decision-making during mergers

- **Be clear about the strengths and risks**
- **Sometimes the strategic fit outweighs the financial risk, do the right thing**
- **Once agreed, don’t delay, act with determination**
- **Give capacity to the merger strategy group, to avoid people being overstretched and existing services suffering**
- **Put resources into merging governance**
- **Give managers autonomy to make their plans prior to the new structure and processes being finalised**
- **Have a full communications plan but remember people react differently to change**
- **Bold decision-making sometimes means stopping provision where the risks are too high**



7. IMPROVING PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT

**Career advantage, Teaching and Learning Academy,
English and Maths, safeguarding**



**VOCATIONAL COURSES
APPRENTICESHIPS
PROFESSIONAL COURSES
DEGREES**

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT

The college mergers represent huge growth, a rise in turnover from £30 million a year for Bromley/Orpington up to around £50 million for the new group, and from two campuses to five. When learning institutions merge there is often a drop in performance and attainment as focus inevitably shifts to bringing staff, processes, and cultures together. The new college group was determined that this should not happen. There were no dips in overall performance among the merged partners. Indeed, achievement rates and other indicators have continued to rise; there has been an ongoing improvement curve, which is to be celebrated.

The college has maintained a relentless focus on core activity. This chapter reflects on areas and actions which have helped to maintain and improve standards across the college's core performance measures: Career Advantage, the quality cycle within the college, improvements to teaching and learning, concentration on English and maths provision, high quality safeguarding for students and staff and student behaviour. The previous college chair noted:

“The governors always need to know if there are any serious performance issues. When we are making big decisions about future growth, we need to be confident that the business is running smoothly.”

Career Advantage

As in many areas Bromley College was ahead of the curve when the new Common Inspection Framework (CIF) was launched in 2015. The new CIF indicated that FE colleges would need to demonstrate the development of students' personal, social and employability skills. The college had already been working extremely hard on for some time.

The college offers all full-time students the opportunity to work towards a Career Advantage programme, alongside their main course. This provides them with the crucial skills required by employers and universities to give them that all-important competitive edge. The programme focuses students' attention on building social, employability, entrepreneurial, digital and IT skills. Throughout the year, the students work towards a portfolio of achievements in these areas and can achieve bronze, silver and gold awards.

The scheme had its origins in the Bromley Advantage, introduced in 2014, and available to all students. Teaching staff were committed to encouraging and supporting its take up. It codified, summarised and rewarded everything that a student had done to develop themselves personally during their time at college. Central to the concept was the idea that the awards would acknowledge achievement against four core clusters of skills: social, digital, employability and enterprise, all targeted as likely to increase their chances of becoming more employable. The framework runs alongside the wider college values.

The programme was given a high profile and long-term commitment which allowed local employers and higher education providers to become familiar with it and begin to understand how the awards indicated good levels of personal development. This marked a fundamental change to how the college provided for students. It recognised the added value and crucially required staff to provide a range of opportunities to secure that added value.

The programme, further developed and called Career Advantage, is on all curriculum frameworks and an integral part of the e-tracker, following students' progress. The Progression and Awards Boards scrutinise the student recommendations which are made by heads of academies, giving the awards more rigour and independent scrutiny.

The college has been strong on focusing on employability skills, good at harnessing existing enthusiasm of its young people, giving them opportunities in areas of interest. A percentage of 16-18 learners at any FE college will have struggled to achieve their full potential at school, so this was designed as another way to mark non-academic progress.

Employers were encouraged to visit the college to look at student work and add criteria to the framework which were directly related to their own areas of business. Indeed, each of the subject specific criteria are endorsed by individual local employers. Some tangible benefits have started to appear now that Career Advantage is better known. Entrepreneurialism has been given higher priority and is encouraged to be included in all curriculum areas. One senior leader said: "The plan is for

the college to become a semi-permeable layer between student and employers. Our role is to listen to what employers need and develop students who want to meet these needs through local employment.

"A number of local employers have agreed that any college student with a gold award who meets the minimum requirements for a job vacancy will be guaranteed an interview."

While business links were becoming stronger the college recognised the need to co-ordinate and manage such a growing and critical area of activity. Client contact and records management became key to managing cross-college relationships with a huge number of employers, so enabling the college to know quickly which businesses were doing what and which staff were asking for support, meeting the need to "know exactly what our top employers are doing for us across the college." A new central management system was introduced to monitor communications and ensure that contacts are planned and coherent.

Career Advantage has been one of several ways in which student destinations have improved – helping students see a real pathway to a future career has been highly motivational for many. A former vice principal reflected on recent changes at the Bexley campus: "Our progression from level 3 courses has improved recently – students moving to HE and onto apprenticeships – we have great partnerships developing with Ravensbourne and Kings universities, we also have much better tracking of learners, they all know they are reviewed regularly.

“Every six weeks we put on workshops to ensure all students get a half hour one-to-one review, looking at where they are going. It’s all about raising aspirations, letting students believe they will achieve and find work.”

The college believes that improving life chances means supporting achievement and aspirations in parallel. The Ofsted inspection noted that the college takes a holistic view of learners, providing a rounded support package. Career Advantage is one of its USPs.

Commitment to a quality cycle

The college’s annual review of 2017/18 showed that achievement rates were good. Success rates for all key age groups were above national average and rising: 82.9% for 16-18-year olds, 85% for HE students, 87.3% for over 19-year olds and 69.5% for apprenticeships. The college corporation and senior management team have been determined not to let achievement fall during and following merger. In November 2016, benchmarking across all three colleges (Bromley, Greenwich and Bexley) showed that all had made even better progress than hoped. Achievement rates at Greenwich had been in the bottom 5% of all FE colleges nationally prior to merger but in less than a year were up to the national average.

A significant contributor to these improvements was the ongoing commitment to a full quality improvement plan and quality cycle across the college.

Half-termly monitoring of targets (MOT) meetings are well established, with managers reporting on a student by student basis where necessary and tracking progress against target. Additionally, the college undertakes quality area reviews (QAR) which look at more than the data of an MOT, digging deeper into the performance of a curriculum area, looking at wider aspects of performance. QARs will sometimes make use of external inspectors (almost a ‘mini-Ofsted’, as one manager described the process). By November 2014, there were eleven curriculum areas which were under notice to improve. Two years later it had dropped to three. A former director of quality, who was appointed in 2015, explained: “QARs are working well now. A small team goes in and reviews a whole area, identifying those that need support. We use those alongside observations and staff reviews to identify areas for concern.

“All areas will have a review every three years minimum – as people get used to the system, they like it more. Managers see that they get the chance to talk through issues and begin to find solutions.”

Increasing governors’ attendance at MOTs and QARs led to better informed governors, more able to understand issues faced by individual departments. It has provided a further layer of scrutiny in areas of concern and governors are more equipped to provide support and challenge to senior leadership.

There is a relentless focus on detail with heads of academy, confirmed through numerous interviews. Teaching staff are encouraged to know each individual student, understand and own their data and deliver outstanding teaching and learning. Heads of academy are responsible for asking tough questions on a regular basis: Who has dropped out and why? Who is not performing well and why? What do we need to do differently? Some tweaks to the use of data threw up unanticipated consequences. After starting to look at individual teaching staff target data, directors saw differences compared with data, and that data presented by some managers. Discrepancies were challenged and were ultimately helpful in identifying some previous accuracy deficits between target and achievement figures. Another critical area of quality improvement is student attendance. Data is looked at weekly and shared with staff.

What the college does well – English lecturer

"I teach an evening GCSE class every year of about 20 students. The vast majority stay and see it through, many enduring considerable barriers – often low confidence, some are carers or have physical or emotional needs, many are working full time, others are immigrants, often highly qualified professionals in their country but in need of English qualifications. My main aim is to avoid the old fashioned chalk and talk teaching, making it engaging, interesting and motivating. Our results have been great.

"The seismic shift in policy has meant it has been a challenge for staff to stay buoyant. The approach has changed each year, so we must race to keep abreast of it all. We are a strong team who look after each other. Many of us have a real love and passion for our teaching – a clear vocational purpose and desire to support social mobility. Also, there is a sense of community helping teachers' resilience. If I encounter a problem, there is always someone trustworthy to help and support.

"I have a real interest in teaching quality and assessment. The introduction of the Learning Philosophy has helped and the encouragement for staff to take on action research to improve pedagogy – it stimulates me. We have to think about how we can make the teaching of English different, set it apart from what happens at secondary schools.

"I've been working on my own research for two years. In the last six months I have developed a close reading and creative writing strategy for the college which has been exciting. Close reading means helping people to read a text and exam paper well and be able to analyse it. We really drill down into language and imagery. With creative writing we are providing better writing frames and word banks for students to get them over the threshold they need to reach."

Beyond the formal review meetings, the college has developed ongoing monitoring processes, in particular using lesson observations and learning walks. Themed learning walks are used to identify good practice for dissemination or pinpointing weak areas in need of improvement. Paperwork for reporting learning walks was improved and streamlined and training for observers enhanced, all with a view to speeding up the identification of specific improvement actions. One example was a departmental learning walk that identified unequal support from learning support assistants between areas. A review of all LSA work was commissioned which led to a more equitable system of support across departments.

One senior leader said: “We recognise that improvement does not follow just because you measure something regularly. In January 2019, we invested in a new post - Head of Teacher Development, improvement, and innovation.

“We continue to put financial resources where they are needed and where they will impact most on students. The quality systems are good at focusing in on individual learner level – if someone is struggling and getting behind, there is intervention and support to help them do as well as they can.”

Teaching and Learning Academy and college-wide strategy

The day to day business of the college, its core work, relies on the passion and expertise of its staff. When a teaching development need is identified, the college has always been committed to providing support for improvement, helping them be the best they can in a very practical way.

In 2015, the college created a Teaching and Learning Academy. Individuals can refer themselves or be referred for support. If, for example, a lesson observation was graded at level 3 or 4 then the teacher could be referred to the academy for some intensive support, followed by a re-observation.

The academy is valued by staff across the college, providing expert advice, consultancy, teaching skills resources and more for any teaching member of staff.

By 2019, the academy was led by the teaching and learning manager alongside two coaches. The academy had also recruited a group of 'TSA fellows', who are outstanding teachers wanting to support others and spread good practice. At times it is so well used that there is a waiting list for staff wanting support. One teacher explained:

"The academy is popular because it is run by tutors for tutors. It's really taken off. I know if I want some stuff on behaviour management then I just need to go there. It's comprehensive"

Academy staff are well known across the group and are regularly approached by tutors who want to improve and want some suggestions for strategies to try out. One manager reflected: "I get staff approaching me saying they want to improve, want to talk to me about how. I'll pop in to do an observation or better still identify another colleague who might help peer to peer. At the CPD in July two teams shared how they operate – hearing from people on the ground who are doing it works well. My coaches will often tell staff: 'Go and watch X doing their teaching, they are good in the area you want to improve'".

The college's capacity for leadership and support to impact on teaching and learning was most clearly demonstrated at Greenwich campus. Immediately after Bromley took on formal responsibility for Greenwich through a federation prior to merger, Ofsted announced a full inspection. Managers were aware that standards of teaching and learning at Greenwich were generally extremely low. Bromley's leadership team had already instigated an intensive care programme at Greenwich before Ofsted arrived. This bespoke programme, created by the highly motivated leadership and teaching team at Bromley, had a real and measurable positive impact on teaching and learning within a matter of weeks.

Common teacher development processes have been established, working towards consistency and a group wide approach. The focus is not just on making teachers good enough but moving all towards outstanding. A six-week process begins with an individual conversation, unpacking where the teacher has needs and target setting. The teacher then receives observations and

feedback, encouraging the practice of specific teaching strategies. Over 85% of teachers improve their teaching within the six-week period. In 2018/19, more than 50 staff were individually supported in this way.

Innovation practice also supports whole teams. This involves a teaching team agreeing a focus for observation carried out by a peer. A structured conversation supports reflective practice and improvement opportunities rather than relying on a grading. Hair and beauty and SEND departments were early adopters of this approach which is being taken up by others. A more recent pilot of a Practitioner of Excellence programme leads to a bespoke training programme for a team. Learning walks and shorter observations are used to track progress.

Since 2018, the college has sought to embed a learning philosophy that was singled out by Ofsted: "...as a result, teachers have high expectations of themselves, and learners enjoy good teaching, learning and assessment. Staff were involved in agreeing the culture and philosophy for learning. One teacher reflected: "When you come to work at this college you quickly find out what the culture is, what the teaching philosophy is. The curriculum is industry-focused and we are all about developing students as rounded individuals."

Action research for staff is encouraged. Thirty members of staff of STEM subjects, for example, in 2019 were going back into industry, a fantastic opportunity to update their industry knowledge. These staff shared their learning at a whole staff CPD day at the end of the year.

The college is also keen to invest in and trial innovative equipment, for example swivel cameras. They support intimate reflection as the teacher watches and assesses their own practice, being self-critical in the presence of a supportive coach. One teacher reflected: "The experience has really moved my teaching on – if I hadn't seen it for myself I would have taught the lesson in the same way again but now I know exactly how I can improve it to include all students at the right level of learning."

"We are trying to build a culture of reflection where staff want to be a part of and own their own development."

Helping vulnerable students to return to education and succeed

"For 16-18-year-old learners who have fallen through the net in mainstream education, FE can offer a new safe haven and a real bridge back into education. Our students have often dropped out as a result of the impact of bullying, emotional, psychological, or physical or mental health disorders due to complex learning needs such as ADHD, Asperger's, autism, dyslexia or epilepsy. Many of our learners at the college come to us having faced these issues and for them FE may offer the second chance that they desperately need."

"I have recently been a small part of teaching a group of seven such learners. They all arrived at college deeply anxious, uncertain, and suffering poor levels of confidence and self-esteem. Over the course of a year each one of them – through the hard work, skill, care, resilience, understanding, kindness, empathy and compassion of their teachers and their learning support staff – were able to make the successful transition back into mainstream education. Each one has grown in confidence, both socially, emotionally, academically, and professionally. Each progressed well in their main vocational programme and achieved phenomenally well in their maths and English.

"FE can offer such home schooled and vulnerable learners a safe harbour and for such learners should never be underestimated. They may otherwise have floundered at home, alone and isolated. The college has offered them an open door and a new threshold onto career pathways in which they feel valued, secure, and successful. FE furnished for them the very real opportunities where they could and can make positive contributions in their communities and colleges. It is with learners like these that FE can make the greatest impact and can continue to turn around the life chances of our most vulnerable.

"It is difficult to match the image of these confident, well rounded, happy, and empathetic students with those suffering poor self-esteem and low confidence at their inception to the college. Their stories are the college's success stories and these stories are the success of every single member of our college

community who contributes to their experiences when they walk through our doors at the beginning of each academic year.

"I think FE is unique in offering learners with such diverse needs a safe haven and should be protected for this groundbreaking support it can provide to vulnerable young people!"

GCSE tutor

English and maths

From August 2015, a new national policy on English and maths was introduced. All 16-18 year old students with a GCSE grade D or lower had to study and re-sit the GCSE, rather than complete a functional skills qualification at level two as had previously been the case. This new policy brought significant challenges to all FE colleges. Bromley College embraced the policy, focusing on the potential gains for students.

The key challenges were two-fold: the substantial increase in capacity required to teach GCSE to large numbers of students, and the challenge to motivate students, many of whom had already sat the exams multiple times and had often poor experiences. Confidence in many students was low as many expected to leave behind academic subjects when they enrolled at the college, but now found English and maths at the heart of their study programmes. The college set about these challenges with determination.

In 2012, 576 of the college's overall entries for GCSEs were in maths and english. By 2015 4,500 out of 12,000 qualifications were in these two subjects. By 2019 there were around 6,000 qualifications in English and maths GCSEs and functional skills, 35% of the total number of exam entries. Inevitably this has changed the educational character of the institution. As one director explained:

"It's like running 10 or more good sized secondary schools within our curriculum but without the additional infrastructure. Yes, it's a challenge for staff but we need to remember that it can be harder for the learners and that is why we are here."

The greatest logistical challenge has been recruiting enough high-quality teaching staff. There was already a real shortage in secondary schools in many areas, even though they could pay higher salaries than FE colleges. In 2015, 350 maths teachers were required within a 30 mile radius of the college.

The college developed creative recruitment and retention processes including: targeting newly qualified graduates, a talent management programme, accelerated promotion opportunities, one-off financial incentives, rolling adverts looking for experienced teachers looking for a change, recruitment fairs showcasing the wider college and a task and finish group to revitalise staff induction. One senior leader said: *"The staffing of this area is what keeps me awake at night – we*

need to avoid a race to the highest salary, think differently."

The college's model included recruiting separate specialist heads for English and maths, growing a core team (leaving vocational specialists where they were). For additional student support, 'guru' teachers were brought in for large group teaching, alongside improvement walks by Ofsted inspectors, drop-in hubs were opened for targeted support at any time of day and some evenings and weekends. Work began to embed English and maths within all vocational schemes of work. Physically setting the college up for this number of exams was like a military operation, requiring a cross collegiate team approach.

With the massive increase in learners who had previously struggled, it came as no surprise that national GCSE rates suffered (a drop of 6-8%) and indeed the college was disappointed to achieve results around the national average for GCSEs. As it has done with other areas, the college promptly made changes, targeting improved results the following year. Specialist managers were appointed, including a new Vice Principal for English and maths and there were internal secondments. The priority became to improve teaching styles to suit these students better. A manager described some of the lessons learned: *"We have learned that we need better management information to help make decisions during the year, use a better work scrutiny process to find out where students are struggling, not just try to teach the whole curriculum in less than one year – there are topics which these students are already good at, they don't need to go over them again."*

“To get this right we needed individualisation, detail and rigour. That’s what I am stressing through lots of learning walks.”

The teaching team is encouraged to avoid the temptation to cover the full curriculum for all learners, rather to identify gaps in learning and provide more individualized learning. The impact on both the performance and motivation of students is clear. So whilst national policy has had massive impact on management and teaching capacity, the college has been determined to rise to the challenge. Improving results year on year for the past three years is a great testament to this effort.

Adult learners – retraining for public service

“Matt is an adult learner enrolled for both GCSE English and maths. He is also employed full time as a teaching assistant in a primary school working with learners with severe special needs. But that is not Matt’s only job or concern – he is also a full time carer too, to both his mother and for his adult brother who has severe learning needs.

“Matt is a typical example of the type and range of adults who come to the college to return to the classroom, to learning and to FE, to gain the qualifications they need to progress in their careers.

“During his time at the college, despite all the burden of responsibilities placed upon his shoulders, Matt soldiered on and never missed a single English or maths lesson. Matt copes with his life with a constant smile. He works extremely hard, and despite returning to the classroom after a long time out of school he has coped with all the pressures of additional study admirably. In addition, he has been a real joy to teach in the classroom because of his positive and jovial outlook on life.

“Matt has a heart of gold and wants to progress from his role as a teaching assistant on to a teaching PGCE and eventually into a SENCO role. It is our hope that he will stay the course, achieve and realise his dreams with the college. The education sector needs adults like Matt who have the capacity and empathy to see the struggles of those with learning needs from their perspective and from their family’s perspectives and to support these learners to realise their full potential.

“If there was ever a time to nurture and cultivate exceptional Special Needs staff in the UK, that time is now!”

Adult learning tutor

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a vital area that requires continuous attention and improvement. In 2014, the college increased the number of senior managers on the safeguarding rota, thereby increasing the experience and seniority of the staff responsible for incidents day to day. By 2016, the college responded to growing national concern about mental health issues for young people and launched internal promotional campaigns encouraging students to seek support. Partnership with the local Oxleas NHS trust set up effective pathways whereby students with mental health challenges could be referred to specialist services more quickly. Additionally, several college staff have been trained in mental health first aid.

A case is defined as any voluntary disclosure or discovered event which is perceived as posing a risk to the wellbeing of a member of the college, students or staff. There were 94 recorded safeguarding cases investigated by the college in 2012/13, by 2017/18 there were more than 800. A key reason for the rise was an increase in facilities for disclosure, making reporting more user-friendly for students. Other factors have been the reduction in external support because of government austerity measures, an increasing awareness among students that they do not need to manage difficulties alone, and a greater awareness of safeguarding issues in society. The college has created a dedicated team in response to increasing need and the larger size of the college group. Senior managers and governors demonstrate serious commitment to the issue.

Identified strengths within the team include high quality training and briefing to other staff to raise awareness, a good understanding of the campuses, the demographics of student groups and issues for London as a whole and a strategic plan to deliver themed campaigns to educate the larger student population about safeguarding. The recent Ofsted inspection reported that it was impressed with the data and the knowledge and understanding of what is happening across the wider student group regarding safeguarding.

Reflecting on some of the changes, a member of staff said: "Increased complexity of cases means more follow-up work now, meetings with parents and external services. There has been a large increase in recorded cases of anxiety, depression, eating disorders within the student population and many come to the attention of our team. At the same time, we have seen a growth in knife crime, child exploitation and other serious offences which touch our students in various ways.

"We have had to massively increase the quality of our liaison with external services. At the same time the government's austerity cuts have reduced the numbers of agencies able to offer support."

The government's Prevent Strategy, compulsory from November 2015, places a duty on FE colleges to prevent radicalisation. An implementation plan with more than 50 actions was drawn up, monitored regularly by governors.

A safeguarding officer was quickly trained to deliver Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) training, after the police had run the training for senior managers. Within a year more than half of college staff had received this training and up to 90% by May 2016, in less than two years. Prevent is also highlighted in college safeguarding bulletins.

The college has a clear pathway to the local channel process, allowing concerns over potential radicalisation to be raised for investigation by the local multiagency cross-borough board. Around four cases a year have been escalated in this way.

Improving student behaviour and safety

The college continues to work hard to improve standards of student behaviour, recognising it as a core value for the group. The development of Gold Command during 2018/19 was just one of many initiatives and innovations to maintain standards. The Vice Principal (Bromley and Orpington campuses) led this initiative: "We had a few serious incidents in relation to student behaviour – violence or threats of violence. We noted that staff needed support with de-escalating some incidents, so we introduced a Gold Command strategy. All staff had training in de-escalation techniques – effectively resolution by talking down. We introduced an intense intervention team who appeared at hot spots for problems.

"We positioned management at trigger points across campuses to get to know individual students better and observe their behaviour. If there is a potential incident several people are around very quickly. It had a massive impact."

"We also changed the security role into campus support, softening the image of these staff. I got advice from the local police about the strategy and it has had a massively positive impact. As an aside I think there has also been a big improvement in staff morale."

Similar teams were established at all the campuses with a focus on restorative justice and all with the aim of maintaining high expectations of behaviour.

Through the college's LIVE (Student Engagement) team, students registered for one of nine activity options including music production, dance, yoga, football, gym sessions, non-contact boxing, singing and song /lyric writing. Each session was delivered by a qualified coach or practitioner, trained to engage with young people. Students responded extremely positively to the initiative which has continued into the 2019/20 academic year.

The primary purpose of these clubs was to provide a safe environment for students by extending the college day and improving general health and wellbeing. Mytime Active worked in partnership with Boxing4Schools, You're Only Young Once, Cray Wanderers Community Scheme and Peabody Trust.

A partnership agreement with the St Giles Trust – working to tackle gangs and serious youth violence – has seen a full-time member of staff employed on an ‘SOS’ project. This brings people who have had lived experience of gangs and violence into college to talk to students, bringing the credibility to de-glamourise violence, explaining the impact on family and friends and talking about alternative routes.

Twilight College

A November 2018 report from Queen Mary University of London found that children and young people may be more vulnerable to become a victim of knife crime on their way home from school. This was based on data on 1,824 people aged 25 and under which showed that there was "significant peak in frequency" of incidents between 4pm and 6pm. In 2018/19, serious youth violence across England and Wales generated a total economic and social cost of £1.3bn.

The Twilight College was designed to keep students safe while at the same time addressing concerns about physical activity and the risk to mental health. Providing extra-curricular activities after college hours is vital to supporting safety and wellbeing. More 16-19 year olds are educated or undergo training in one of 336 of England’s colleges than in schools, or employment. They include a greater proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds, deprived areas or with disabilities. These students are less likely to have access to extra-curricular activities and benefit greatly from having access to the Twilight College.

The college commissioned Mytime Active to devise and deliver extra-curricular activities across its Bromley, Bexley, Orpington, and Greenwich campuses from February to July 2019. The primary purpose of the activities was to provide a safe and nurturing environment through extending the college day, whilst also improving students’ wellbeing. Students were incredibly positive about their experiences, 88% of students reported that they had increased confidence, made new friendships, felt happier, more relaxed, and healthier. An additional survey in February 2020 found that over 80% agreed that they felt safer travelling home after Twilight College and that it gave them somewhere safe to go in the evening.

According to the Youth Violence Commission 2020, following increases in unemployment and poverty during the coronavirus pandemic, a rise in youth violence over the next few years is probable. The types of activity provided by the Twilight College will be more important than ever as the country recovers from the pandemic.



Learning and reflections on improving performance through change

- Demonstrate serious commitment to safeguarding
- Take an holistic view of student's development and provide a rounded, inspiring support package
- Formally mark personal development and non-academic achievements
- Ask tough questions: Who has dropped out and why? Who is not performing well and why? How can we create a culture of improvement?
- Put financial resources where they are needed and with most impact on students
- Build the right ethos and provide structures and facilities so that staff can support each other to improve and reflect on their own teaching
- Provide holistic support such as the Twilight College and Career Advantage

8. INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PLACE

Engagement, student union, finance, Life Centre



INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PLACE

A college stands or falls on its people and facilities. That students are more likely to succeed when they benefit from high quality teaching and learning environments is clear, and the college has responded to this with quality investments and initiatives. This chapter illustrates the commitment to its people and place that shines through and provides practical examples of the college living out its commitment to these vital assets.

The chapter firstly reflects on staff development and consultation models, then it looks at how the college kept people and cultural change at the centre in the recent mergers. It moves on to the college's interest in student engagement and considers some of the investments in the estates in recent years. Finally, at the end of the chapter, are the set of values that underpin the college's culture and vision.

Staff development

A former deputy principal with responsibility for teaching and learning reflected on the reality of government's austerity policies over recent years: "Developing and maintaining the motivation and skills of our staff is key. Resources have always been tight in FE but the danger now following austerity is staff feeling that it's become 'we've got to do even more for even less'. As senior leaders we need to find ways of developing, motivating and recognising staff in tough times."

One of the principles of much staff development in recent years has been empowerment, bringing in deliberate strategies and structures to empower all staff, particularly those with middle management responsibilities. Senior leaders recognised that the college had become top heavy. The principal said:

"We need to give people freedom to act and take responsibility for their areas. I have become fond of saying to people, 'you should be running this college in your area, make decisions when you need to.'"

The counterpoint was to ensure that people were not left to fail – if a strategy in the classroom or a management decision does not work then the key is to recognise this and make change. There is a huge and ongoing staff development function within the college which maintains and enhances the skill and knowledge levels of the various staff teams. Two areas of staff development have been selected below for further reflection. The first is a project run to obtain high quality and meaningful feedback from staff, the second is the methodology, strategies and tools used to support the recent college mergers.

Feedback and engagement

The college involves staff in genuine consultative processes. The staff consultation phase which informed the drafting of the college's previous strategic plan included running a Wisdom Council and learning circles, both made up of various members of staff. These

processes showed that there were some barriers to change within the college. For positive change to be delivered, the college had to find out what and where the operational and cultural bottlenecks were in the organisation.

The PRAISE initiative was presented to all staff as the framework for investigating barriers. A group of 20 staff volunteered, a good mix of teaching and non-teaching staff, managerial and non-managerial. In the first phase, four workshops were held to explore themes with the potential to limit progress for the whole organisation. The workshops maintained a positive outlook, using an appreciative enquiry tool called SOAR (looking at strengths, opportunities, aspirations and recommendations). Staff were encouraged to be as open and honest as possible, identifying the issues and making recommendations for change, including some quick wins.

The project split the themes into four groupings:

PR – Professionalism and empowerment/Resources and work loading

AI – Administrative systems and processes/Information systems and communications

S – Student and staff voice

E – Enterprise, innovation and engagement

The project identified a large amount of goodwill across the college, clear commitment, professionalism, cohesion, and a desire to collaborate among many staff.

It resulted in a report that identified themes: a need to improve internal communications, give staff freedom to be creative without fear, allow for flexibility (one size does not fit all), trust that staff will do their best for college objectives, control levels of workload, increase visibility of senior managers around the college and avoid running too many new initiatives together.

Contributing staff were positive, one remarking: “We really felt that we were getting somewhere, beginning to feel as a group that change was possible.” Trading places was a suggestion to bring senior managers back into the classroom, observing and taking classes more often, and being more visible around the college. Another crucial recommendation was to develop initiatives that continued to support staff through change, highly relevant bearing in mind the mergers.

An action plan was rolled out over the following months. RAISE cards were sent to staff in recognition of going the extra mile and put on individual’s files; internal communications improved (introduction of The Week That Was staff e-newsletter was appreciated), senior managers became more visible, there was greater understanding from staff of the external pressures faced by senior managers, and there was recognition for staff via an extra day’s leave and financial bonus. A senior leader said:

“Having a simple mechanism by which managers can publicly recognise colleagues living the college values through awarding a RAISE card is really effective, especially during major change. It gets noticed.”

Staff development, HR, and changes in culture

The mergers posed significant challenges for HR colleagues. Key to bringing the institutions together was understanding the three different cultures. The principal agreed a strategy to develop existing managers, supporting them to manage the changes ahead. A lot of time was spent with the new senior management team.

A personality-based assessment tool was used to give people an insight into the ways they worked individually and with others. Some social time was built in to allow personal relationships to develop. The method was then cascaded down to other teams. Resilience training was delivered to support managers to take their teams through the merger and after. A senior HR colleague explained: “The Principal told me from day one that we would find a solution to any issue so long as we kept a clear vision in our minds.

“There is often a danger that the whole focus is on the date of merger when the real transformation only starts then. We agreed that the whole first year after merger would be entirely about embedding the new culture, the hard work starts then.”

An organisational development strategy was drafted during late 2016, setting out expectations and behaviours expected of managers and staff. A staff charter specified these expectations and the Employment Advantage set out what staff could expect from the college, it included practical elements like car parking and annual leave, what links staff should expect with employers and what career development

opportunities would be available. A talent development plan was also agreed, giving staff clarity on the development they would receive over time. The first year of the plan focused on providing training for managers in a consistent coaching approach to managing their teams.

The college’s senior leaders are very keen on personal reflection – individuals being self-aware, knowing their own strengths and weaknesses – and they encourage managers to avoid a culture of blame. One colleague commented: “The Principal and other senior leaders are fine if things don’t always work out as anticipated – so long as there is good communication – they will support creativity and if something doesn’t work will simply look for an alternative solution to get the best for our students.”

Staff transfer activity, through TUPE, over the summer of 2015 was an intense period. Greenwich had no senior leadership team, so Bromley’s managers had to lead TUPE for both parties. The college avoided any compulsory redundancies. Only around 60 out of 1,200 staff were given voluntary redundancy, and criteria meant that the best performing staff were all retained. The restructuring was completed quickly, including the challenge of gaining trade union agreement, so the period of anxiety for staff was kept to a minimum.

Having largely completed the staff restructure, the college did not rest on its laurels. A three-college all staff survey about culture was undertaken. Although the results at different sites had different emphases, there was absolute unanimity on the headlines – a greater focus on innovation and creativity, developing a

supportive college, less market-driven and more in tune with individual student needs. New staff forums have been created at each campus which feed into the college-wide forum, giving staff a voice direct to the principal and directors.

Ongoing consultations with staff indicated concerns about some practical day to day issues. However, there were very few comments about the wider merger, new structure, or strategic direction of the college. This reflects well on the job that the HR and management teams did in merging three large institutions, bringing together 1,200 staff and reducing the risk of managers appearing remote and distant in a much larger and geographically spread organisation.

"I have stayed here 20 years because I love it. My job has constantly changed, always for the better but never too much of a leap, always a smooth transition. I became head of technology of the college in 2010. I was encouraged to become an additional inspector for Ofsted in engineering and construction which gave me good experience and exposure to good practice in other colleges.

"In 2015 I was invited to join the quality team, head of transformation and innovation across the wider college. I then had chance to become Assistant Principal for quality – managing lesson observations, quality improvement and self-assessment, generally improving teaching and learning in all curriculum areas.

"In February 2018, some improvement needs in STEM subjects were identified and I grabbed the chance. I think we made some quick impacts. I already knew the staff team and curriculum. In the quality area, people often talk about having to 'weigh and measure the pig' – well, I am now feeding the pig and helping to make real positive and direct impact on student learning! I've now also been given the exciting task of overseeing the college development at Biggin Hill – I worked there many years ago as an apprentice so full circle in many respects, though I'm back there as Vice Principal now.

There's never been a bad time for me here – hard work, yes, but I look forward to work every day."

Errol Ince

The staff have a sense of real and varied development opportunities for career development across the new larger group – it's seen as a tough but exciting environment to work in. One manager noted:

“I was talking to some union reps today about what does and could keep people here. It was really positive with most saying they think it's a really supportive culture. Also, lots of staff are local people so it matters more to them.”

The need to recruit and retain high quality staff continues to be important but growing the colleges' own staff, supporting motivated and experienced learning support staff to go onto teacher training makes a big contribution. For example, the SEND department at Bexley had previously employed a large number of agency staff to cover the growing teaching requirements, but a new focus on staff support and training had reduced these agency requirements to close to zero by 2019.

Cross-site communications have also been critical in establishing a sense of togetherness and shared experience across the group. The college supports a higher number of all staff events than most other colleges and 'The Week That Was' staff weekly e-newsletter is well read and viewed as an important way to see and share what colleagues are doing.

Despite the wider geographical area of the college group there are many staff whose roles take them across

all the campuses, enhancing the collegiate atmosphere at numerous cross-college planning and review meetings. Campus support managers spend planned time at all the sites, getting to know each area, taking good practice from one to another.

One team manager reflected: “It's exciting to be part of such a big college. Our people are our best resource – team meetings are more productive for me if only because I can tap into a larger number of ideas and turn to more people for help.”

Enhancing cohesion through well-managed communication and support

“Initially I thought the mergers might be unmanageable but in fact I have more hope for the future and feel proud to be part of the team.”

“The HR support was incredible - facilitating changes and matching our contract to the required standard without causing loss of earnings or delay. There is a fluent and respectful relationship with the unions where discussions always end up peacefully. The Teaching Skills Academy looks at teacher development and helps us to reflect to improve.”

“I am always ready with my teaching plans, but when we had an official visit from Ofsted, the constant reassurance through emails from the Principal refuelled my strength, as she reminded us about

things like our institution's values. This boosted my confidence and reassured me that I would be able to demonstrate what we do well. There is equality for learners and staff; a learning culture and success is our ultimate goal, our teaching and learning is responsive to students' needs and learners are offered the vocational and academic skills to enjoy life and respond to their social and economic issues."

Maths Lecturer

Student engagement

A feature of any high performing college is the ability to listen directly to the views of learners and to enable them to make their own changes to their college experience. The college has been proactive through its support for the student union and its growth of the student ambassador initiative. The model of the union was developed to have eight voluntary part time officers, each taking responsibility for one area: marketing, enrichment, women, ethnic minorities, LGBT, disabilities, welfare, adult learner, and HE. Each officer was asked to give five hours each week, including attending weekly team meetings.

The priorities for the union were redefined and approved to focus on providing representation for all students, leading the development of social and other activities, and promoting awareness of issues and charitable work.

All students interviewed confirmed that the college leaders have been incredibly supportive of the union. The president sits on the college corporation, able to directly influence college strategy and development.

Officers have made student voice count and were supported by the welfare, marketing, and student services departments. Students reported that in previous years the union had lost momentum and profile after the first term but that the recent officers, with support from some key staff members, had managed to maintain a much higher profile throughout the year.

During 2015, a new LGBT+ group and an open mind inter-faith group were established and the first major student social events for some time (attracting more than 200 students) were held. Weekly meetings with senior managers allowed for regular dialogue. A union office was established in the common room and several pop-up themed events were sponsored and organised, raising awareness of issues of interest to the student population, including on autism and allergies. A student focus group reflecting on strengths of the college referred to the student council as highly effective. One student gave an example of asking the class rep to take a desire for more practical lessons to the student council and staff. "It was changed really quickly, and the class were really happy."

Vice president roles were created for Greenwich and Bexley sites and the college corporation supported the move to fund a full-time sabbatical role for the student union president. This major financial investment by the college was further evidence of the college's commitment to the importance of the student union and student voice. A student liaison officer now works for a week at a time at each campus, supporting various campaigns raised by the students. These have included, for example, a drive to reduce food prices at the canteens which was successful.

A vital member of the student support team is the college Chaplain, whose role has been to bring multi-faith and diversity expertise and a faith perspective to the group. The chaplaincy offers counselling and advice, as well as the promotion of health and wellbeing programs. The Chaplain is an integral part of the college staff and undertakes teaching, administrative and other duties from time to time.

From policy to projects, the role has been an essential, innovate and creative position which has played a pivotal part in the holistic cohesion, development of the creation of new college identity and celebrating an inclusive, holistic and visible set of values, principles and practices.

The Chaplain is passionate about the work, explaining:

“Our work is to inspire and empower both staff and students by providing opportunities, forums and outlets for spiritual acknowledgment, understanding, dialogue and respect for our shared human diversity.”

Student ambassadors

Student ambassadors are volunteers who are willing to give around five hours a week to provide assistance, predominantly to the student welfare department. Ambassadors are a further example of the college’s support for students. This voluntary role includes helping in the common room, library, at open days and other such events, acting as the face of the student body when

needed. Benefits to the ambassadors come through personal development, social life, and enhancement to their CV/career advantage accreditation.

The focus group which gave feedback to inform some of the themes for this book showed enthusiasm for the student services available outside the classroom, including the ambassador programme. One student reflected:

“There is always someone there if you have a problem or issue – not just staff, students too, always someone to help or give guidance in the college.”

Financial survival

In an article for the Times Educational Supplement, the principal talked about ‘survival of the fittest’ in relation to FE College finances. She went on: “Times are tough in further education. Budgets have been consistently slashed because of reduced government funding in recent years and there are many colleges facing increasing financial difficulty and uncertainty. Unlike schools, colleges are required to finance much of their own capital development, and many have been forced to make high borrowings. Yet while many colleges struggle, others are indeed flourishing with excellent Ofsted results and sound financial health. For me, diversification has and continues to be key.

“Extending and developing a college’s offer to reach the widest possible audience is essential. I also feel that a very proactive approach must be taken to risk management. . . but there are times when risks must be taken. I have had to trust my instinct and judgement at times.”

With 50% of FE colleges in financial difficulties, the college’s great achievement has been to remain financially strong over a period of turbulence, growth, and a determined journey towards ‘outstanding’. The group chief financial officer for the college and the finance team meet monthly to review the ongoing position. They develop strategies to increase income and respond to constant pressure to control costs while maintaining quality of provision. Reflecting on the past few years they concluded: “It has been tough. In-year budget cuts from central government funding haven’t helped and the austerity period has felt brutal for FE.”

Bromley’s reputation for good financial management has helped mitigate some pressures. For example, in summer 2015 when strong recruitment could have left some oversubscribed courses running with no income for extra students, the college successfully negotiated with the DfE for additional funding. At the same time, low adult apprentice contract numbers threatened income levels but again permission was given to divert some funding to adult learners, at the time an unusual agreement with the DfE.

By July 2016, the college had done well on securing its annual income, with a £250,000 increase on the youth funded contract being the highlight. However, confusion over the introduction of the apprenticeship levy hit apprenticeship recruitment. While it brought benefits for higher level apprenticeships it reduced lower level apprenticeship opportunities for people at entry level with fewer jobs created. In the same year, the removal of the cap for recruitment into universities meant that HE numbers were below target. The previous chair said:

“Any investment requires confidence in solid financial backing. The chair of our audit committee is deliberately highly challenging, we made sure we got to the bottom of the financial position before we agreed to move forward.”

There were numerous factors requiring resolution prior to going ahead with the mergers. Strong long-term relationships with their banks are essential if colleges want to continue to fund new investments that benefit students. The college had managed to create surplus over many years and its good reputation had been hard won. The governors were clear that the mergers could not cost the college financially and that financial support for future developments could not be put at risk. Greenwich had pension deficits which needed dealing with prior to sign-off. Greenwich’s deficit was offset to some degree by a proposal to sell some land and property in coming years. Greenwich Council has been highly supportive and encouraging, reflecting well on the positive approach and determination to see the newly merged college succeed.

Taking the first schools under the umbrella of the new academy trust was similarly a steep learning curve. Lack of clarity about existing teachers' employment contracts led to several delays. The corporation learned useful lessons in the first transfers of schools and was determined to avoid the same issues in the future.

The college has been successful in attracting grants for additional capital funding, including funding from the local economic partnership to support the Career College. Another grant was secured alongside the college's own investment for the new sports centre.

More recently, since the mergers, financial pressures on the FE sector have tightened. One of the biggest changes has been to manage a lack of increase or improvement in funding formulae alongside greater teaching requirements for study programmes so timetabling and delivery of teaching has constantly had to be reviewed and changed.

The college budget for 2019/20 has been more challenging than ever with the devolution of adult education budget to the GLA; a portion has been held back for devolved management meaning a projected reduction of around £1 million. The apprenticeship levy spend has also been reduced for small and medium sized companies, some of the college's biggest customers, and in-year savings of £3million were required simply to stand still.

The mergers themselves provided immediate financial challenges which have required hard work and innovation. The college inherited an operating deficit of about £5.5million from the mergers but reduced by it

£2.5million in the first year. For the second year, before pension costs, a surplus of around £900,000 was achieved and even with the pension deficit this made a further £1million improvement on the previous year.

Staff costs are another ongoing challenge for colleges, especially with a new insolvency regime. The regime places more pressure on colleges to maintain financial stability to avoid the FE commissioner taking direct action. FE colleges can now be allowed to fail financially and this has happened in several high profile cases.

The FE commissioner requires colleges to have a staff ratio below 65%, whereas the college's sat at around 75%. The college sought to reduce the ratio while at the same time trying to reward staff with deservedly competitive salaries and reasonable pay awards. The chief financial officer said: "We try to avoid departments feeling understaffed and over worked but it's hard – a constant conversation. We do have to look at what is essential and how we can make things leaner. In some areas we have had to have fewer but better paid staff. The strong Grade 2 Ofsted result means we are in a good position, but certainly not complacent.

"Overall, we coame in on budget for 2018/19 which was a fantastic achievement having had to turn around the deficit inherited on merger, having turned several of the schools around financially within the trust and made a massive deficit reduction in the London Skills for Growth company."

On capital, the college has secured funding for major projects, most significantly a proposed rebuild of the main Greenwich campus and the Biggin Hill campus discussed in the next chapter. One short term issue is the need to progress these projects and spend heavily prior to planning permissions being finally agreed. The college demonstrates the capacity and ability to take strategic risks which it anticipates will pay off in the longer term, while in the short term the group must remain solvent.

Financial governance in the college is strong. The CFO explained: "I spend a lot of my time writing reports for our three boards. They are challenging groups and ask me tough questions all the time. This is how it should be. I have good relationships with them, and we have some good new members with financial expertise." The chair of trustees agreed: "Finances for the college are tight. So, finding the most cost-effective ways to deliver for learners while not compromising on quality is a day-to-day challenge. We work hard together on this."

The Life Centre

Until 2014, Bromley College had a 1950s-built sports hall, the size of 1.5 badminton courts. There were some sports courses being delivered but limited numbers and low-key provision. The governors agreed to prioritise the investment in a new sports hall and a successful funding bid was made. Planning permission was approved around 2012 and the one-year build process began. The then chair confirmed that the decision-making process was a rigorous one:

"We took three governors' meetings to go over the detail and agree the financing and strategic plan for the sports hall rebuild. We invested £8million of our reserves into our estates, including the sports hall. These were one-off investments, so we needed to be confident they were right."

The build process went relatively smoothly, and the formal opening took place only slightly later than originally planned in November 2014. The new sports centre, since rebranded as the Life Centre, is a hugely impressive structure and set of facilities. The hall itself is large enough for four badminton courts plus run offs. A senior manager said: "We didn't fully appreciate what we were missing until we got the new building. I am certain the college has invested well."

The Life Centre is a three-tiered building. The top floor is a gallery overlooking the hall which can also be used for events. The first floor houses the large sports hall and store, while underneath are the changing rooms, toilets, and a large lecture theatre with retractable seating for 160 people. On the lower floor is a high spec fitness suite and sports science laboratory. The sports lab has high-end equipment at least at the level of most university departments, including hardware and software for blood-flow measuring and a VO2 max breath-by-breath monitor.

The sports department quickly increased numbers to around 100 full time students, studying level 2 and 3 sports and exercise science courses. Students were then

able to take the CYQ level 2 qualification needed for gym instructors or YMBA personal trainer award, the real skills for the world of employment. The Life Centre also devoted several hours each week to provide opportunities for students with complex needs from the Nido Volans Centre.

Within a year the staff were delivering the college's new sports strategy, working beyond full capacity, providing teaching, and learning while also building up the commercial use of the Life Centre. The college brought in specialist consultants to work with Sport England and the existing team to develop a sustainable plan for expanded use of the Life Centre in future years.

The intention was always to ultimately run the Life Centre as a commercial venture, becoming a sports and exercise hub for both the local population and some more elite sports provision. Early external users included Bromley and England handball club events, athletics training for the local Blackheath Harriers, Bromley hockey club and British cycling. The manager explained: "Year one was really very much a test year to get used to our magnificent new facilities. We could immediately have filled it with bookings for football but we don't just want to go for the highest bidder, we wanted to develop some specialisms and more variety to meet other local need including some niche sports."

The Life Centre has seen a huge increase in sports activities available to the wider college population and through student enrichment. Cricket, fencing, short tennis, and archery became quite popular quickly, while more than 600 staff and students took up free membership of the gym.

On the elite side the college began to deliver the BTEC courses for both Millwall and Charlton FC under 18 academy players and the first ACE (elite sports) apprenticeships were based at the college.

Students at the Life Centre have been given increasing opportunities to work as technicians and centre staff during their non-teaching time. The manager confirmed:

"When they leave, our students should have their BTEC or other qualification, a professional qualification to go with it, real work experience and their Career Advantage award. That helps our already good employment destinations for all students."

The college is determined to continue to maximise the use of this outstanding new facility, making it a major hub for local sport for the South East London region. Student focus groups praise the positive impact the facilities have had on their experience. A typical comment from one student was: "I think the best thing about the college is its facilities – especially the gym and sports areas. I used to just hang out in the common room but now I use all the new facilities regularly – it's a great place generally."

Organisational values and behaviour

Building on its investment in people and place, and as part of the new college strategy in 2019, the college has revisited its values. The desire was to develop a culture where employees know the values and what they stand for. They would be understood and modelled in staff behaviour every day at work and form the bedrock of the approach to leadership. The college had to choose values that can be lived and are instantly recognisable at every level of the organisation. The values also needed to work across all parts of the college and make sense for all employees.

To achieve the new vision, the college knew it needed a talented, resilient and energised workforce – people are central to turning the vision into a reality and it needed a united workforce with common values. The values define the culture of the college and guide decision making. They motivate attitudes, actions, decisions and relationships with learners, partners and each other. The values chosen are designed to help develop a workforce and culture that stands out from the crowd and the aim is to recruit and develop STAR performers delivering high quality service every day. The values were agreed in October 2019 and are set out here.

Our values

STAND OUT: We will STAND OUT. We are a GOOD education group with OUTSTANDING features. Keen to innovate, we create Social Value and push the boundaries to achieve more.

TEAMWORK: We are a team. Together we get the job done. Together we achieve our goals. It's everyone's job to step in and help.

ACCOUNTABLE: We own our actions. We take responsibility. We are accountable for the decisions we make and how these affect others. We own this.

RESPECTFUL: We respect everyone. Full stop. Diversity is valued and we maximise this as a talent and strength.

STRIVE: Every day we strive to be better. To achieve more. To continuously improve, in all that we do. Individually, and as a group.

The group has begun to undertake regular benchmarking against the Great Place to Work benchmarking scheme, which has already shown a positive response to the college's corporate social responsibility. The intention during 2019/20 was to offer all staff the opportunity to take an extra five days leave during the year, to be used exclusively to take part in community or social value work. This significant investment from the college is a brave step to raise the profile of the new strategy.

Learning and reflection on investments in people and place

- If a strategy in the classroom or a management decision does not work, recognise it and make the change
- Engage and involve staff throughout the change, simple mechanisms to ensure they are fully heard make a big impact
- The whole first year after merger should be entirely about embedding the new culture; that's where the hard work starts
- Welcome financial challenge from governors, it tests decisions and builds trust in relationships
- Live the values



9. A STRATEGY FIT FOR THE FUTURE

Ofsted, property strategy, social enterprise, values



A STRATEGY FIT FOR THE FUTURE

This final chapter reflects on the Ofsted inspection in 2019, marking a line in the sand with the creation of the new college group. It concludes with the college's capacity to spot opportunities and make good decisions about which to pursue. These include the property developments and the launch of a new college strategy focusing on social enterprise.

As part of the strategy the college leadership continues to scan the horizon for policy shifts and changes in the local economy – these are waves that the college has been so adept at riding. The desire to disseminate and spread good practice continues stronger than ever to meet the needs of the college's larger catchment area.

Ofsted inspection

In March 2019, ten Ofsted inspectors visited London South East Colleges for a full inspection carried out over four days. Their final judgement on overall effectiveness was 'good'. All areas were judged as 'good' except provision for learners with high needs which was rated 'outstanding' and apprenticeship provision rated as 'requiring improvement'. Director of Quality, echoing many staff, said:

“It is an amazing story to get this good outcome for the much larger new college group. We have been under intense pressure in many ways, had funding cuts and we are really proud of this achievement.”

For the Greenwich campus and its staff, the result was particularly gratifying as their college had previously been widely reported as one of the most under performing in the country. In a couple of short years, provision had been transformed. One manager noted: “The Greenwich campus has re-invented itself in many ways, culminating in a grade 2 Ofsted inspection. Many staff here were in tears when it was announced. It was moving and personal for many who have been on a real journey. Now some have said they want to stay until we are judged outstanding!”

Factors driving this achievement have been identified throughout this book and include:

- tremendous determination amongst staff to work hard for students and the college
- people learning from each other through share practice across the larger group
- an infrastructure that brings people together
- a powerful over-arching culture that places respect for difference at its core
- commitment to staff development as an essential, continuing investment

The lead senior manager for the inspection said: “Because we knew an inspection had to happen within three years of merger we had to avoid a perpetual state of waiting for the phone call, though by year three that was difficult!

"I am pleased with the outcome, especially the comments about the cultural values of the college and how we have created a single college. Inspectors specifically said that other mergers have seen back offices brought together while the public and student facing bits of the merged colleges stay very much as they were. We wanted to avoid that. I recognised our college in the report and feedback. They acknowledged that our culture is about doing the right things for every learner."

The areas identified by Ofsted as requiring improvements were no big surprise for senior leaders, including improving the experience of some apprentices and finding ways to improve maths and English attainment for the college's 16-19 year old learners. These improvements are underway and form part of the foundation for the future.

Highlights from the Ofsted report include:

"Senior leaders and governors have managed the merger of the former Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich colleges successfully, and raised standards across the college"

"Leaders and managers make very good use of their employer and community links to help shape the curriculum and benefit learners"

"Teachers benefit from a very good range of continuing professional development and training initiatives to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is good"

"Learners on study programmes and apprenticeships and those for whom the college receive high-needs funding develop good mathematical skills in their vocational subjects"

"Programmes for learners in receipt of high needs funding are outstanding. Learners achieve their qualifications and develop a very good range of skills that prepare them extremely well for employment and independent living."

Property strategy

With a large portfolio of property to manage, the governors and senior leaders have been developing a property strategy to ensure decisions are made in a coherent way across the group. The principal said: "We have restored the reputation of our various campuses, culminating in our Ofsted inspection. We are going to make all our buildings fit for purpose, especially reflecting the digital age. We are really going to invest in place – it will be challenging and turbulent of course but we will continue to focus on the things we do well."

The highest profile new development which sparked the thinking about this strategy was Biggin Hill.

Conversations between senior college leaders, Biggin Hill airfield and its associated businesses to explore the possibility of FE college provision on the site had been ongoing for a number of years. In 2016, London Biggin Hill Airport, in conjunction with the college, announced agreement in principle for a shared ambition to establish a leading aviation college at the airport over the next decade, to be known as the London Aerospace and Technology College (LATC). There remained many

complexities to overcome, including with English Heritage as the site has listed buildings used during World War II. Landowners indicated that an appropriate parcel of land could be released for educational development.

Recognising the current global shortage of aero-engineers and the wider skills needs of the aviation industry, the new college site will train mechanical, electronic and service engineers and technicians. Entry level provision is already available and students progress well to specialised courses co-designed with key industry partners, including business aircraft manufacturers. Students can then take degree and higher-level apprenticeships at the LATC. The project is part of Biggin Hill's LoCATE strategy to create 2,300 new jobs at the airport over the next 20 years. The new college will supply more than 500 engineers, technicians and ground crew professionals into the industry each year.

The London Borough of Bromley is a key partner, supporting the plan as it coincides with its own wider master planning for industrial and educational developments for the borough. The scale of vision was explained by a senior Council manager:

“It will be real beacon, a sub-regional centre; we are talking to international industry partners and we want to incorporate motor vehicle and hybrid technologies. It’s exciting.”

Capital funding has been secured for the proposal. The GLA is investing nearly £7million into the £11 million

project with the airport contribution of £3 million partly in the form of land. Planning approval has been granted.

Two further capital projects received approval and funding from the GLA during 2019. A £10 million grant to support the redevelopment of the Greenwich campus site at Plumstead, one of the largest capital FE grants in London. Part of the site will be sold for housing development, including 50% social housing managed by a large housing association for educational buildings and facilities. A further large grant was awarded through the London Mayor's construction academy scheme. The college was awarded hub status and will deliver pop-up skills bases across five London boroughs. Adults and younger learners will work and train on site, learning on the job particularly at housing developments.

These capital projects, totalling around £40 million, demonstrate the capacity to work strategically at scale with local partners and to develop projects which solve a range of educational, training, employment and social issues. In three years the college secured over £18million of capital investment.

Historically, a higher proportion of funding available in London was allocated to more centrally located colleges. More recently, the GLA and other regional bodies recognise that colleges can deliver on the region's strategic priorities, responsive to both the Mayor's office and local borough councils. The college has been successful in revenue-based projects such as the GLA funded *Getting Back on Track*, and the DfE/Education and Training Foundation Taking Teaching Further and Teach Too.

A strategy for the future

The underpinning aim of the college's strategy up to 2024 will be the desire to make an even more significant positive impact on the lives of local learners and on the local communities in which the college group is situated.

The college intends to become what it calls a social enterprise group in the coming years with the ambition to create social value. Social value is defined as '...how what is proposed to be procured or delivered might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area'. This non-prescriptive language allows organisations an opportunity to inject more innovative thinking into public sector commissioning, procurement and service delivery in order to inspire proactive solutions.

As one of the largest employers in the three geographical areas in which it is based and with significant resource available to it, the leadership believes that the group has a moral imperative to play a strong role in tackling local issues: educational, economic and social. They will assess all activity and planning through the lens of social enterprise, enhancing and delivering increased social value through all that it does.

Examples of the types of activity with partners are: increasing the numbers of local people achieving qualifications at HE level, providing state of the art facilities at the London Aerospace Technology Academy for local learners, providing 250 new affordable homes through the redevelopment of the Greenwich site and involving construction students in work experience to improve local assets.

The strategy is a shift in the college's focus. Achievement and attendance will remain business critical, but they will sit alongside targets for local impact. The strategy has been evolving since the mergers. The distinct feel and culture to each of the main campuses will benefit from the overarching theme that each campus can develop and run with.

Ultimately, the aim will be to capture and support what many people increasingly value, enhancing their lives by making a positive difference to their own community and to help vulnerable groups. For staff, the strategy will seek to harness the passion and motivations that brought people to work in the education sector in the first place - to make a real difference.

For students, while motivation will be more aligned to improving their own skills and life chances, many are inspired by the opportunity to make a difference to their locality. This might involve fundraising for a local cause or by targeted work experience in a social setting. The strategy intends to ensure that all these opportunities also help individuals with their CVs and learning objectives and essential skills such as resilience, social skills, teamwork and communications.

The chair has been instrumental in designing the new strategy: "Social enterprise is my background. When I worked in social housing, I worked closely with two of our three nearest London boroughs.

"We took over Thamesmead – a 'failed' new town – and we worked with local community groups to transform it into a modern and thriving estate."

“We know we can do more. We want to move away from being just a college and become an even bigger player within our communities, to support thriving places.”

The strategy fits with other developments, demonstrating the ability to be ahead of the policy curve. One director said: “The education inspection framework will have a new focus on enrichment and the additional things that we provide for students. There’s already lots going on, but we need to do more – especially as we will now be measured against it. We are looking at the AoC’s guidelines on student engagement and drafting a post-16 personal and social curriculum.”

Strategic framework – themes, outcomes, and measures

Managers have developed annual operating plans for the college, the Multi Academy Trust and for London Skills for Growth. Much debate focused on having a strategic framework that enables every part of the business to contribute towards the strategic goals, while recognising the context of each setting whether school, college or apprenticeship training provider.

The development process focused on how the plans demonstrate a golden thread linking back to the overall college goals, so that every part of the group is able to see how their work contributes to the achievement of strategic ambition.

In recent years, many universities have restructured the way they connect with their community, focusing on the benefits they bring to their cities and local residents. With all aspects of teaching, research and social mission, universities have started to become anchor institutions within their communities. Same mindset has sat at the heart of the college for many years with vocational training improving the prospects of local people, often from hard to reach communities. The college has also supported local businesses to access a skilled and reliable workforce and local economies have grown. Responding to the changing needs of the local economy and wider community signals colleges as part of a civic enterprise movement. The colleges’ mission, to change people’s lives, creating social value and promoting social mobility in every community it works with, confirms this.

The college is working alongside the Social Value Portal (SVP) and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). The SVP National TOMS (Themes Outcomes and Measures) Framework was developed in response to the Public Value Act 2012, it is used by local authorities to measure the value they generate. The Framework includes a series of measures with a monetary value assigned to each. Based on TOMS, the college has designed its own adapted framework that will be used annually to measure the social value that each part of the college group generates. Results will give a clear indication of which parts of the group are increasing social value and where there is room for improvement.

The college is working with CLES to expand community outreach and generate more social value. Evaluation of this work will support the group maximise social impact

and better coordinate programmes, whether that is working with local organisations to create skills pipelines for greater progression routes for students or more opportunities for students to volunteer in the local community. The approach will target areas for improvement, and bring together staff, community and stakeholders to design new programmes and opportunities for students.

The college has taken strides to generate social value during the Covid-19 crisis. In June 2020, the Food Standards Agency estimated that 1 in 10 people are reliant on foodbanks. Knowing that there was already a shortage before the pandemic, the college joined the FE Foodbank Friday Initiative. To date, over 32 colleges across the UK have signed up, raising over £43,000 collectively for local foodbanks. The re-opening of college sites will see the launch of food collection points at all campuses. These projects are set to continue as the college expands on its social mission, working with more community organisations to address a wider range of issues facing our local boroughs.

More than just a college, we are a community asset – the LSEC UNICEF Peace Parks Project

“The partnership between the college, Friends of Norman Park, Ide Verde landscaping, Bromley Council and Mencap demonstrates how community engagement and user involvement can be developed.

“This project was initiated by the chaplaincy department as part of the college’s desire to create tangible, lasting evidence of the UNICEF values that underpin its work. This project is very much part of the pastoral outreac, to help to enhance the opportunities for student volunteering as well as wellbeing opportunities for students, staff and the wider community. Bromley Council and Ide Verde provided support including some funding for new plants and garden design and a seating area that will help to create a stunning asset for the local community.

“The college is an outward looking institution connected to its wider community and this project has allowed it to become part of a legacy partnership that will both protect the space for generations to come and will also foster new and dynamic intergenerational relationships. The project has provided new members for the Friends of Norman Park, adding to their outstanding work. It has also provided learners with numerous avenues for public service and community engagement through volunteering.

“Located just outside the Mencap building in Norman Park, the garden is an outside space for performances and community gathering. The project also highlights the importance of sustainability and environmental issues, creating a local resource that all can enjoy. The college is proud to be the generator of this project. Managing these stakeholder groups has enhanced our external reputation and provided real and lasting opportunities that we hope will provide collective endeavour for years to come. We have seen in a real sense how we can gain so much more through the partnership with other local service providers.”

College Chaplain

Black lives matter and Covid-19

Nearly a year into the group’s new strategy, unforeseen events would lead to a significant shift in its approach to improving equality and diversity. The Covid-19 pandemic and death of George Floyd brought international attention to the inequalities facing BAME communities across the globe.

Several key studies highlighted how the BAME community was disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and were more likely to be unemployed and experiencing poverty than their white counterparts.

As the group is fundamentally dedicated to changing people’s lives, the leadership decided that it should play a leading role in promoting social mobility for all within South East London. It is a core belief that all students

and staff should be valued and respected for their individuality and failing to do so would be contrary to the organisation’s core mission, vision and values.

The group will work to achieve this via a 10-year grants programme. This is open to all staff and students to design and run their own projects aimed at reducing discrimination.

In order to fully understand the extent of the issues, staff consultations (via Zoom) were held and attended by 360 members of staff over two days. Key to these discussions were the group’s values of accountability and teamwork. The sessions allowed all staff to engage in the difficult conversations necessary to move forward and make the cultural changes needed to better promote equality and inclusion.

The new grants programme has a steering group where staff decide which programmes would be taken forward. The steering group was open to all and is being led by the Vice Principal for Engineering and Construction, and the group Chief People Officer.

It was important for staff to have control over the grant process, so that the projects would be designed to solve issues they face personally and the activities are focused on practical improvements in people’s lives. With the full support from staff, the college hopes to make a considerable contribution to reducing inequality within the organisation and the local communities. Over time, it is hoped to see a larger number of our BAME staff progress to management and leadership roles, as well as a reduction in instances of discrimination in the workplace and community.



LESSONS LEARNED

In the years of gathering, analysing and collating the material and opinions contained in this book the college has been transformed, more than doubling in size. It is difficult to be definitive about exactly which characteristics of the college and its people have contributed to it flourishing, while some other colleges under similar conditions have struggled. However, the themes highlighted here go some way to identifying the most powerful drivers of the college's success.

In concluding, there are three features worth emphasising that have given the college the confidence to look inside and outside itself and take the firm but well-considered decisions required to develop and grow for the continuing benefit of the students.

Firstly, it's about people. The college has appointed key personnel who each demonstrated a clear capacity for strategic thinking - these individuals (not always senior managers) have been encouraged to bring ideas forward for discussion. One reflected:

“Our staff always come up with the best ideas, whether it be improving the way we do things or setting up something new. We haven't often turned down a development idea without at least considering its value, because we know we have good people here.”

Leaders at all levels have shown immense personal and collective drive to see the college succeed, which they share across the organisation. The governors are encouraging and supportive, having confidence in the staff and leadership team.

Second is a consistent focus on providing positive outcomes for students. Throughout a period of intense change, the college has been unflinching in its commitment to maximising the employability of its students. In recent years this has involved more contact with employers, helping to articulate what they need from their future employees and working to provide it. By sustaining links with those companies who will ultimately employ its students, the college's decision making continues to be sound. A new meeting structure for the college, drafted while this book was being finished, is dramatically more outward facing than previously, embracing continued engagement with the wider region.

One of the governors remarked:

“We are a big player in the South East London region now, so we need to be acting like it – I am sure we will.”

Third, it is about seeking to not only respond to policy but rather to influence it. Influence is gained through demonstrating success and good practice which encourages others to follow; by building strong relationships with local stakeholders; and deliberate, confident and direct lobbying at a national level. The

college aims to capitalise on its strength by utilising each of these influences in coming years.

At least twice each year, councillors and MPs from local boroughs are invited to the college campuses, as part of the college's strategic engagement with political stakeholders. During 2018/19, three MPs and a government minister and the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of London made extended visits to see what the college does and to hear about its future vision. This deliberate strategy gets the college noticed for the right reasons at the right time.

There has been extremely positive feedback on the college's progress from local council leaders at Greenwich, Bexley and Bromley. Directors of children's services reported positive and constructive relationships and a strong desire to continue to work closely with the college. One manager reflected:

“Local politics is important. We have the right relationships in place. We have put down our roots, we know what we do well. We don't compete with schools and other providers so much as work with them.”

For the Greenwich campus the transformation has been most dramatic. It is sited in a royal borough and the opportunities are huge. Students will increasingly undertake work experience at Greenwich maritime and the new theatre being built. An international dance group from Cuba wants to have links to the new creative

centre at the college. Along the Thames corridor from Dartford there are creative centres popping up which are all well placed for the students to engage with.

Finally, it is about seeing the bigger picture early on. The college recognised that the traditional FE sector does not really exist anymore. It has been at the forefront in growing its HE provision, establishing the multi-academy trust and by being well-prepared for the government's area reviews prior to the mergers. All are evidence of capacity to see beyond the present landscape and look to the future.

FE remains a self-improving system, often seemingly ignored financially and in policy terms by government with its public focus on schools and universities. Time will tell whether the recommendations of the Augar report into post-18 education of 2019 make an impact. As it stands, FE students are funded at less than half the rate of HE students. The report noted that the FE sector is in a perfect position to deliver what it has always been intended to deliver; high quality education with a technical or vocational focus for anyone over the age of 16. The report suggests that the sector requires £3 billion uplift to bring parity with HE, £1 billion capital investment and more funding to allow adults to move onto levels 2 and 3.

The college has a great story to tell: the successful coming together of three colleges, the creation and development of the multi-academy trust, collaborations with the college's training partners, productive relationships with its communities.

The college principal is aware of her responsibility to let people get on with their jobs as educators despite the constantly changing landscape: “Many academics acknowledge that the FE sector has been the most tinkered with of all the education sectors. Instability has been high, but we try to protect our staff from that.

“We feel that we’ve been on our own journey in spite of the external forces, not because of them. It’s been a productive and inspiring time.”

Postscript

When I reflect on my role over the last few years, it is clear to me that leading an organisation through change requires the ability to listen to others as well as having confidence in your own judgement and decision-making. A shared vision, which others are fully invested in, is needed to achieve real change.

Our organisation is undoubtedly a wholly different place to what it was before the merger – and continues to adapt as the world changes around us. And, as a leader, I have challenged myself to develop a deeper understanding of the sector, learning from others and completing a PHD in FE Policy, giving me additional insight into the world I have immersed myself in.

The forward-thinking, dynamic culture at LSEC has been brought about by hard work and willingness to achieve what many once believed to be ‘the impossible’. There have been times when I have been less than optimistic, struggling with certain decisions and having to accept when a vision did not quite match reality. Yet this book has helped me to reflect on the fact that no journey is ever completely smooth or free of mistakes – it’s how you deal with them and use negative experiences to strengthen your future plans. It is also about surrounding yourself with others who share an exciting vision.

Over the years, FE has been poorly understood and frequently destabilised by changing policy regimes, ongoing periods of reform, unrealistic expectations and inadequate funding. While those of us working within the sector understand its true value, the need for recognition of its often life-changing impact is rarely acknowledged.

Yet ironically, an international health pandemic has thrust our work into the spotlight and is placing FE colleges at the forefront of post-Covid 19 economic recovery. The value of skills training and development – together with the vital civic role that colleges play within their communities – is at last being recognised by government and policy makers.

Seeing how our college and staff mobilised themselves to help the wider community during the lockdown periods was inspiring. This was happening at other colleges too, all around the country, and this stunning commitment must not be forgotten when day to day business returns, and the Covid-19 pandemic becomes a distant memory.

My heartfelt thanks go to the colleagues who have supported me, the college and our students on this remarkable journey – many of whom are mentioned in this book, and many who are not. You continue to demonstrate commitment to communities across south east London, way beyond what is expected of you.

I am most excited to see what the next chapter of our story will bring in the coming years and look forward to sharing it.

Dr Sam Parrett OBE, CEO and Group Principal

Leading change, inspiring learners

LONDON & SOUTH EAST EDUCATION GROUP

This book charts a compelling leadership journey in further education, the expansion from one college to a thriving education group with eight college campuses, eight schools and an apprenticeship provider. The story shares learning and reflections; these are lessons that show how positive and resilient leadership can continue to make an impact on learners and communities in challenging times.

“This remarkable transformation has only been made possible with the support of passionate and hardworking colleagues, staff – past and present, employer partners, governors, the DfE, supportive local authorities and government agencies, local schools and great students. In difficult circumstances, our progress demonstrates the truly great things that can be achieved when we have a shared common purpose.”

Dr Sam Parrett OBE, Principal

