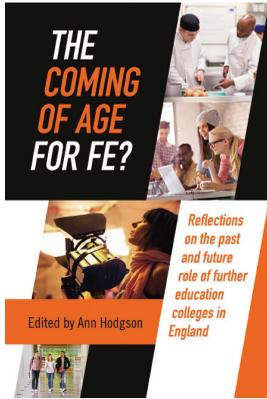


Why pulling the 'levers of power' seldom has the desired results in FE



The Coming of Age for FE? Reflections on the past and future role of further education colleges in the UK

Edited by Ann Hodgson
IoE Press: paperback
978-1-7827-7123-4

This is a collection of extended essays by some of the most experienced and thoughtful commentators on English further education.

It shows just how complex, dynamic and turbulent the sector has been since the incorporation of colleges in 1993. The book provides a well-documented resource for anyone who wishes to comprehend the dilemmas of trying to build an FE system adequate to meet the education and training needs of millions of English citizens.

The chapter that captures

rescue with helpful solutions chapters. Beadle is an arch-communicator whose linguistic dexterity means this book isn't just informative but pretty good fun too.

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Excerpt: *The Coming of Age for FE?*

chapter 8, p142

The way in which policy levers have been used in FE has proved to be an effective method of ensuring compliance with government instructions and of delivering a rapid response to changes in policy. The outcomes for users of FE, however, have seldom been as planned or expected and occasionally were resoundingly negative. Furthermore, one clear consequence of a nationally managed system is that when problems emerge they are usually widespread. Ubiquity of problems leads, in a perverse way, to greater pressure for central intervention and an ever-repeating cycle.

the perennial turbulence of the sector, 'Levers of power', is meticulously evidenced, clearly articulated and concludes that, while England's nationally planned FE system may be highly responsive to policy change, the outcomes for learners are not always planned and are sometimes resoundingly negative.

Successive initiatives have attempted to give freedom and autonomy to colleges by paradoxically imposing central command and control.

Even before incorporation in 1993 – the starting point for these essays – the deVillie report of 1985 proposed a clearing of the "jungle" of further education. Since then successive governments have hacked away at the jungle, overlooking the fact that its denizens know their way about.

And the end result of decades of hacking? The

criticisms of our vocational education system are about the same as they were before.

There are gaps in the analysis. For example, although employers spend more money on private training providers than in general FE colleges, there is almost no attention to the growth, ownership, culture and practice of private trainers.

As the final chapter on the future of FE in England shows, turbulence has not ended and so it is right that the title ends in a question mark. Whatever coming of age may mean, GFES are far from grown up yet.

This chapter looks to what the future may hold and proposes a radical re-thinking and re-organisation of English FE along the lines of the Scottish system. That most insightful commentator on English FE, the Berkeley professor Norton Grubb (sadly,

who died this year) wrote that American community colleges are honoured but invisible and thought that the same is true of English FEC. He observed that continual government interference in English FE is based on 'vulgar pragmatism' and political expedience rather than thoughtful reform proposed by reports such as Tomlinson.

Dr Joe Harkin was reader in education – and remains a fellow – at Oxford Brookes University

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Learning with 'e's. Educational theory and practice in the digital age

Generated by Steve Wheeler. Crown House Publishing: paperback
978-1-8459-0939-0

This is arguably a book that needs its sub-title to avoid any misunderstandings, but the subject matter is absolutely of the moment. The author, Steve Wheeler, who is based at the

University of Plymouth, explores the importance of harnessing the power of new technology and technology-influenced behaviours for the benefit of teaching and learning – a subject that will resonate with teachers and trainers across education and training. The book is challenging and ambitious in its depth and breadth, yet Wheeler's easy-going and clear style renders what might be arcane subject

matter for many teachers eminently accessible and practicable. Overall, this is a well-researched, informative and inspiring read for all teachers.

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