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## **Moving towards a new definition of professionalism for college leaders**

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**Social Surveys and Social Statistics Research Group**

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### **Introduction**

In 1993, further education colleges in Scotland were removed from the control of local authorities and became independent corporate bodies, funded directly by central government. These changes in the legal and financial status of colleges led to radical developments in governance and management and, 14 years later, the quality of management and leadership of colleges continues to be of public and political interest. A clear example is that four recent high profile financial and legal crises in individual institutions have resulted in interventions by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC 2006a, 2007a)<sup>1</sup> and in hearings before the Audit Committee of the Scottish Parliament (Scottish Parliament 2001, 2006).

The Scottish Executive undertook a ministerial review of governance and accountability in the sector (Scottish Executive 2003a). The Scottish Funding Council, in its Corporate Plan for 2006-09 (SFC 2006b), aims to work towards “world class” organisations. The Scottish Funding Council explicitly recognises that colleges

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFHEFC), commonly known as the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), was established on 1 October 2005. Prior to this date its functions were exercised by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC).

are now major enterprises in their own right that require the highest quality leadership and management. This interest in leadership and management competence in what is recognised as a complex operating environment for colleges represents the latest phase in the turbulent evolution of management practice in Scottish colleges since their incorporation in 1993.

This article reviews the development of college management practice within the context of the political reform of the public services in general. We examine the theoretical conceptions of managerialism and the emergence of a new professional discourse for college leaders. We contend that this raises interesting questions relating to the role of leadership and management in colleges. We conclude by presenting a new and more comprehensive definition of professionalism in leadership and management in further education colleges which moves beyond what can be considered as the now outdated public service ethos and beyond the simplistic rhetoric of managerialism. The theoretical position and the managerial policy recommendations that are suggested are based on the critical reflection of one of the authors who has 18 years senior managerial experience in tertiary education, and are further informed by their empirical doctoral research which was supervised by the other author (see Lowe 2005).

### **Public sector reform**

Further education colleges in Scotland date back to the nineteenth century with the first two being founded in 1892 and 1899. The majority of the current 43 colleges were established during the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, up until the 1980s, the sector enjoyed almost complete political invisibility. Under local authority governance and management colleges quietly provided vocational education and training, primarily for young people. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 formally

imposed a statutory duty on local authorities to secure the adequate provision of further education in their areas, generally outside of the control of national policy. With the election of the Thatcher government in 1979, however, colleges began to be caught up in a national process of reform that began with more generic ideological questioning of the rationale for public services and of the role of the state in the provision of these services. In the context of rising expenditure on social services due to demographic changes in the population and increased unemployment, the provision of public services increasingly began to be seen as financial burden on the economy (Jessop et al 1988). This ideology informed policy objectives to reduce the cost of public services and to improve their quality through improving responsiveness to demand and need. The first stage of this reform involved the privatisation of the industrial sectors of the public services, the contracting out of other services and an emphasis on measuring efficiency and value for money (Ferlie et al 1996). The second stage, led by the Major government of the early 1990s, arguably introduced a less authoritarian face to the reform process by elevating the customer's position, through charters and service standards (Pollitt 1993). Although prepared to invest more heavily in public services, the Blair government tended to maintain the same emphasis on economy, efficiency and customer service (Birch and Holliday 2000). The Blair government and the new Scottish Executive also encouraged a push towards collaboration and "joined-up" government rather than market-driven competition. At the same time they created a new focus on accountability and standards of governance and management (Scottish Executive 1999)

One of the principal policy implementation drivers for this whole continuing process of reform has been a shift in focus towards the organisation (or institution) being the key agent for the delivery of the service rather than the local authority, government agency or individual professional (Hill 1993, Gamble 1994). This centrality of the institution in policy implementation explains the "rise and rise" of education

management as a field in recent years (Simkins 1999). Certainly it has had a profound effect on educational management in general and on colleges in particular. To understand current perspectives on college leadership, it is helpful to analyse its development within this political context. We believe that situating our account within a historical perspective better illuminates the underlying patterns of change and the complex challenges faced by colleges in moving towards a stable and sustainable future.

### **From Invisibility to Independence**

Prior to 1990 Colleges were an integral part of local government's education service. They were governed and directed by College Councils, which were composed primarily of elected councillors, and overseen by local government officers. Local authorities owned the estates, employed the staff, determined budget allocations, specified student intakes and approved curricula. College Principals were responsible for the deployment of staff, for preparing estimates and bids for funds, for student recruitment and discipline, and for maintaining strong links with employers. A Principal was regarded as a senior teaching professional with additional administrative tasks, and appointments were therefore made on the basis of length of professional service and track record in the field of education.

The Self Governing Schools etc (Scotland) Act 1989, enacted as the process of reform of the public services was underway, began the process of devolution of authority to the institutional level. New College Councils were established, of which at least half the members were employers. Employers were viewed as “consumers” of vocational education and training, and they were being given an important new role in the planning and running of colleges. Local authorities were required to implement schemes of delegation giving the new College Councils additional powers

relating to management and financial control. Principals assumed new responsibilities for responding to the needs of “customers” directly. They were given the authority to design and implement new curricula and to manage and control financial budgets. The impact of this legislation was, however, limited in that, in practice, colleges gained little genuine additional autonomy. The main focus of change in the late 1980s was the national reform of post-16 qualifications, which gave college staff greater ownership over their core curricula. In terms of college governance, however, local authorities retained overall control and Principals faced the difficult task of managing resources without the real power to manage, particularly in respect of lecturing staff who continued to perceive themselves as members of the wider teaching profession employed by the local authority, with terms and conditions of service negotiated nationally.

Full incorporation in April 1993 was accomplished in a remarkably short time, having been announced “for consultation” in May 1991 in *Access and Opportunity - A Strategy for Education and Training* (Scottish Office 1991). Howgego (1993) suggests that, at the time, there was much speculation about the intentions of the conservative-led Scottish Office although the administration appeared to have three clear aims. First, to continue to remove education and training from the control of local authorities (primarily for political reasons). Second, to reduce expenditure on further education by stripping out bureaucratic public sector control systems and creating lean corporations modelled on best private sector financial and administrative practice. Third, to create a market in which colleges would compete to provide services to government and other funders and reduce costs by contracting out services.

Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, Colleges were rapidly given full financial independence, together with full powers to own assets, employ staff, enter

into contracts, and determine the supply of services. College Councils were replaced by Boards of Management whose first members were appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland. It was a statutory requirement that a majority of these new governors were drawn from business, commerce and the professions. The overall motivation was to establish a more business-like approach to governance.

With incorporation came a second significant associated change. The 1992 Act transferred the statutory duty to provide adequate further education from local authorities to the Secretary of State for Scotland. This new direct relationship between the Scottish Office and colleges was key to the government reaping the full benefits of incorporation. The Scottish Office now provided funding directly to individual colleges and was therefore able to introduce specific funding regimes that incentivised efficiency and cost reduction. We will discuss this issue in more detail later in the paper.

A third important change was brought about by College Principals themselves who came to realise that the new task of efficient management required control over the key costs and resources (especially staffing). In the face of intransigent opposition to changes in terms and conditions of service from the teaching staff trade unions (EIS and SFHEA) the colleges withdrew from national bargaining and established local pay bargaining mechanisms, which often attracted the hostility of trade union members. It is arguable that these changes irrevocably altered the relationship between principals and professional lecturing staff.

As a result of all of these developments, the role of College Principal was transformed from a professional academic (usually under benign governance) into chief executive of a quasi-private enterprise in a new and highly competitive market. Some Principals welcomed their new freedom from local authority control. They had

embraced the opportunity for educational innovation offered by the national reform of the post-16 curriculum and were keen to assume the new powers to develop the role of their institutions. Opportunities to borrow funds from banks emerged, as did opportunities to seize new business opportunities by offering services across local authority boundaries. On reflection, the role of Principal was, however, made more challenging since some elements of the workforce in colleges were frequently hostile towards change. Our suspicion is that the exigencies of grappling with their new responsibilities and fighting for financial viability left Principals little scope to reflect upon the impact of the changes on their professional identity. This issue re-emerged some years later. In the meantime, the new experiences of college leaders unfolded within the context of the managerialist ideology within which most of the UK public sector was now beginning to operate.

### **Managerialism in the public sector and in colleges**

The ideology of managerialism was located within Conservative government's belief that efficient management within a competitive environment was the key to reforming the public services (Newman and Clarke 1994). Pollitt (1993) argues that two main strands of management thinking inform this perspective. The first is neo-Taylorism which advocates a rational model of management, devoted to the analysis of inputs and outputs, and is committed to maximising productivity through the efficient use of resources (particularly human). Neo-Taylorism provides the means to deliver the political imperative of reducing the cost of the public services. At its crudest it simply means that organisations are expected to achieve more with their resources. Pollitt (1993) further suggests that this form of managerialism can be translated into a set of management techniques which include strict financial management, an emphasis on productivity, the extensive use of quantitative performance indicators, consumerism and the discipline of the market. Central to this environment is the creation of a



disciplined, flexible workforce and the assertion of managers' right to manage. Neo-Taylorism is predicated on a set of values which respect the dominant, controlling role of management and denigrate the role of workers who require to be motivated by means of extrinsic rewards and discipline. Hartley (1990) asserts that Taylorism was born in an industrial context and its application to public services provided by professionals should have been expected to lead to controversy, especially in education.

Another strand of influential management thinking which underpinned managerialism is primarily concerned with culture change in organisations. Newman and Clarke (1994) refer to this as "new managerialism" or "new wave management". In general this model was informed by the thinking of popular American management "gurus", for example Tom Peters and Rosabeth Moss Kanter. This model encompasses an approach which is people-centred and promotes looser systems of control, advocating that management should inspire and empower people who will then strive for quality and excellence through intrinsic motivation. Managers are expected to be visionary leaders and the rhetoric is of teamwork, flexibility, innovation and enterprise. The value base of this strand of thinking is quite distinct from earlier approaches such as Neo-Taylorism. Although it was originally developed in the private sector, at a superficial level it appears to have the potential to be more compatible with some public services, especially education.

By the 1990s, the term New Public Management (NPM) was used to synthesise a number of these strands within management thinking. NPM emphasised service quality and relentlessly insisted that greater attention had to be given to the views of the individual service user (Pollitt 1993). Ferlie et al (1996) attempt to build a typology of four ideal types of NPM (see Table 1).

Table 1 Typology of New Public Management

NPM Model 1: The Efficiency Drive

NPM Model 1 represented early crude attempts to introduce a private sector ethos into the public sector through principles of financial control and efficiency (Neo-Taylorism by another name).

NPM Model 2: Downsizing and Decentralisation

NPM Model 2 is developed from trends observed in large organisations in both the private and public sectors. It is characterised by a move towards a structure based on a strategic core linked to contracted out functions and autonomous business units. In this model, value for money is achieved by creating more elaborate quasi-markets. Management operates by co-ordinating alliances and relationships between networks of organisations contributing to aspects of service provision.

NPM Model 3: In Search of Excellence

NPM Model 3 is associated with a rise in the importance of organisational culture and the management of change and innovation. There is an emphasis on "bottom-up" organisational development or on culture change programmes driven by charismatic forms of top-down leadership.

NPM Model 4: Public Service Orientation

This model represents a fusion of high quality private and public sector management practice derived from transferable good practice in the private sector with a distinct public service mission and context. It includes a strong focus on securing the accountability of services to local users and citizens rather than to customers. It is characterised by a concern with service quality, the reflection of user concerns and values in the management process and a continuing set of distinctive public sector values (Ranson and Stewart 1989).

This typology helps to illustrate the public services' potential responses to the policy of reform and reconstruction. In practice, different areas of the public sector absorbed and adapted managerialism in different ways depending on their circumstances and values and on the extent to which they were subject to direct government intervention (Gamble 1994). We next consider the extent to which the college sector and individual institutional leaders adopted a managerialist ideology, against the framework provided by this typology.

A newspaper description of the chaotic aftermath of incorporation in England suggests that the introduction of private sector business practices into colleges (Ferlie's NPM model 1 and NPM model 2) was controversial. The result was a period of instability and conflict before any benefits could be perceived.

"It costs the taxpayer more than £2.5 billion a year, it provides work for more than 100,000 people and has two and a half million clients. The workers are revolting, the customers are complaining, the police are investigating and 100 of its chief executives have suffered votes of no confidence. It is a big business in trouble but no-one seems to care. Last week it was rocked by strikes and hardly anyone noticed" (The Observer 12 March 1995 quoted in Ainley and Bailey, 1997, vii).

In Scotland the reform of colleges was similarly characterised by a punishing drive towards efficiency, through incentivising individual institutions to compete for government funding and to secure other funds by finding new markets (Gallacher 2003). The methodology that the Scottish Office devised for allocating resources rewarded above average growth in levels of student activity during a period when the amount available for distribution was being reduced in real terms. Colleges competed aggressively for above average growth, consigning those who achieved

average or below average growth to cuts or "efficiency gains" (McTavish 2003). The sector as a whole delivered "efficiency gains" of around 30% in cash terms in less than four years, which placed immense pressure on financial and resource management. The Scottish Office's declared objectives for the period 1997-98 to 1999-2000 were to maintain a cost-effective further education sector and to increase the output of students with non-advanced further education qualifications (National Audit Office 1998).

During the same period, colleges were also expected to demonstrate a commitment to quality through HMI Inspections, acquisition of kitemarks such as ISO9001, Investors in People and SQMS and quality improvement strategies linked to performance indicators for retention and achievement. In one extreme example, a college underwent a full HMI quality inspection whilst negotiating a recovery package with a bank which had refused to extend overdraft facilities with the result that staff could not be paid.

Many Principals and senior managers lost any sense of themselves as professional teachers or indeed as professional public servants. In particular they lost professional commonality with lecturing staff who labelled them as "management". Randle and Brady (1997) contrast a "professional paradigm" with a "managerial paradigm" attributing the former to lecturers and the latter to the colleges' senior management. Elliot and Crossley (1996) similarly identified a dichotomy between a pervasive market ideology, implemented by senior managers who seemed to embrace a managerialist culture, and a competing ideology, sustained by lecturing staff, which arguably was underpinned by a commitment to a more orthodox academic and pedagogic culture.

Randle and Brady (1997) argue that the "deprofessionalisation" and "protelarianisation" of the lecturing professions were consequences of government strategies which included increased student numbers, competence-based qualifications, use of information technologies, consumerism, performance management and league tables. Although recognising that this reform agenda was centrally driven, Randle and Brady (1997) empathise with a lecturing profession who tended to blame management, and to condone industrial action as an appropriate response. College managers were cast in a stereotypical managerialist role as scapegoats for government policy and there was little recognition of a more complex relationship between policy formulation and its implementation. This polarised attitude on the part of some lecturing staff may partially have helped to create the context for college leaders to redefine their own professionalism.

Ainley and Bailey (1997) paint a more complex picture. In a case study of two English colleges, they interviewed managers, lecturing staff and students. Using Ferlie's typology, the college managers in the case study colleges appeared to experience external pressure to adopt practices equivalent to NPM model 1 and NPM model 2. Both College Principals, however, understood that the kind of transformational change needed to create a stable future also required the kind of managerial ethos typified by NPM model 3 or NPM model 4. Ainley and Bailey comment that "Principals and their SMTs hoped that, by astute management, they could reconcile running the corporate college more efficiently and the values of the service ethic they and their staffs espoused" (p74). The Principals themselves are quoted as saying:

"There has to be something charismatic about leadership for it to be bought into" (p36).

And,

"My mission is largely based on those old public sector values of equity, justice, identifying and seeking to meet the community's needs.... I have just done my analysis for the next three years ... and I know that half a million is going to have to come out of our expenditure over the next three years" (p38).

However, Ainley and Bailey (1997) also documented a growing chasm between management and lecturing staff. Despite widespread restructurings designed to create flatter, less bureaucratic organisations borrowing from private sector models, management was perceived as detached from the workforce, as a new and distinct occupational group. Lecturing staff in their study perceived incorporation as an attack on the service and on themselves as a profession and appeared unable (or possibly unwilling) to recognise that benefits had been achieved for students. Many main grade lecturers disagreed with management's estimation that quality had been improved or at least maintained. On the other hand, Ainley and Bailey report that incorporation had bestowed many benefits for students, including improved facilities, extended and flexible curricula, and more student-centred services.

During the turbulent transition of colleges to independent corporations, Principals and their colleagues had to learn "on the job" how to work within an externally imposed managerialist ideology and how to deal with the often conflicting expectations of government and of their professional staff. We contend that they had little option but to respond individually depending upon their personal skills, experience and values. We suggest that all of Ferlie's four ideal types and many variations could have been observed in Scottish Colleges at the time. Arguably this was a climate in which considerable experiential personal development took place and there were many positive experiences for those who relished the challenge of a more competitive market environment and the opportunity to import the best of private sector practice

into their organisations. The sector became more heterogeneous and colleges developed different missions and strategies (McTavish 2006). Perhaps the most significant legacy of this early managerialism was to cause college leaders to perceive their professional development, at this time, primarily in terms of the acquisition of the generic management skills necessary to run an organisation.

### **Developments post 1997**

The policy of the incoming Labour government in 1997 and the new Scottish Executive in 1999 towards the public sector in general and towards education in particular reflected both continuity and change. There was continuity in respect of expectations of efficiency, value for money and quality of service. To this was added a new emphasis on partnership within the public services as a whole and on ethical standards in public life (Scottish Executive 1999). Levels of investment in public services generally increased (Scottish Executive 2006).

In Scotland, the further education sector benefited from significant increases in resources. The Comprehensive Spending Review in Scotland delivered additional funding of 50% over the life of the first Scottish Parliament, (Scottish Executive 2001). By 2007-08, total investment, including capital investment, in the college sector will be almost £620m. Overall, this is an increase of almost £200m (45% in cash terms) since 2003-04 (Scottish Executive 2007). Although control of public expenditure remains in place and there continues to be a culture of setting targets and measuring outputs, the financial climate is considerably more favourable. The further education sector has gained greater visibility and influence and it has been recognised as a significant contributor to the new policy agenda of lifelong learning, skills training and social inclusion. The Scottish Executive's major policy statement on lifelong learning gave colleges a key role in government policy to tackle youth

unemployment, social inclusion, adult literacy and skills for a modern economy (Scottish Executive 2003b). This role is confirmed in the incoming SNP government's first policy statement on tertiary education (Scottish Government 2007). There is an expectation that colleges will provide high quality, flexible, student-responsive and community-responsive services, and the emergence of colleges as providers of higher education is recognised (Lowe 2005). Colleges are now explicitly encouraged to collaborate with each other and with universities to improve services and to secure greater value for money. The encouragement to collaborate, rather than to compete, has resulted in a proliferation of joint projects often incentivised by funding from the SFC. By 2007 there were also three full-scale college mergers. Many colleges, however, have learned to compete successfully in new markets for overseas students, for higher education and for commercial contracts which add significant value to the portfolio of the institution. A mixed economy of collaborative publicly funded lifelong learning and more competitive market-driven activity has therefore developed and is likely to continue, offering the opportunity to develop a range of positive leadership and management practices.

Following incorporation there has been a significant turnover of staff in senior management positions in colleges. Ainley and Bailey (1997) report that, by 1997, in England and Wales only one third of Principals who were in post in 1993 were still in their offices. Our own analysis suggests that by early 2007, in Scotland, less than 15% of principals had over 14 years service (and this figure will be further reduced by imminent staff changes). The majority of the Principals that are now in post began managing colleges after incorporation and did not experience the transition as leaders. As a consequence they may be better able to begin to define their professional identity within a generally positive political and financial context. Fourteen years after the upheaval of incorporation we observe that college leaders have begun, both individually and collectively through the Association for Scottish



Colleges, to reflect on their role within a modernised public sector and a policy environment dominated by an ideological commitment to the importance of lifelong learning so that they can engage actively with policy implementation as professionals rather than simply reacting to its impact. The managerialist critique had the negative effect of polarising and simplifying the debate on the management of the college sector (Lumby and Tomlinson 2000). We argue that the initial phase of emphasis on the narrow, practical, managerial aspects of incorporation is complete for most colleges, given that, by 2005-06, all but two had met the SFC's criteria for financial stability.<sup>2</sup> There is now evidence of a shift towards a broader focus on the quality of leadership of independent colleges and therefore towards a broader conception of professionalism. This raises the interesting question of how professionalism in college management should now be defined.

### **An Occupation or a Profession?**

Traditional claims to professionalism have been based on autonomy, status, public esteem and specialist knowledge. Freidson (1994) argues that the two basic elements of professional work are a commitment to practising a body of knowledge and skill of special value and a fiduciary relationship with clients. Esland (1980) similarly summarises the traditional characteristics of professionals as altruism, confidentiality in dealing with clients, ownership of codes of practice and registration

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<sup>2</sup> We are aware of Mackie and Williamson's recent article on New Public Management (Mackie and Williamson 2007). However, we have concerns regarding their account of Scottish Further Education since the late 1990s. We suspect that their account may misrepresent current management perspectives in colleges. Therefore it is potentially misinformative and we consider that it does not helpfully contribute to this present work on professionalism and college leadership.

with a professional body. Esland (1980) adds that professional activity is based on specialist knowledge, acquired over a long period of education, to which access is restricted by the profession. These traditional criteria are potentially unhelpful to newer occupational groups, in that they are based on self-definition by the established professions. In particular, they presuppose a client/professional relationship which managers, by definition, engaged in only indirectly. Many other emerging professions in the science, engineering and technology fields could similarly challenge this specific criterion and seek to define professionalism in more broadly inclusive ways.

A second notable theoretical view is “professionalisation”. Accounts of professionalisation consider the circumstances in which claims for professional status are made. Central to this position is the conception that the expansion of professionalism is the result of the growth of occupational group-consciousness. Johnson (1972) describes the historical sequence of events through which professionalising occupations pass, including the establishment of a training school, the founding of a professional association, action to secure protection by law and adoption of a formal code. This is informative although we note that this sequence has been subjected to critique on the basis that historical analysis demonstrates widely differing patterns of professionalisation at different times and in different cultural contexts. There is, however, some evidence of a professionalisation process taking place both in public sector management generally and within management in the further education sector.

Within the public sector in Scotland, for example, the Scottish Executive led the establishment of the Scottish Leadership Foundation (SLF 2004) which serves as focus for bringing together leaders from the civil service, health service, enterprise networks, education, local government and housing bodies to debate standards and

values in public life and to develop and underpin cross-sectoral initiatives for the professional development of world class leadership. Within the college sector in Scotland the formation of the Principals' Forum within the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) provides a regular opportunity for senior managers to meet to discuss collective responses to policy directives. The forum also serves as an informal professional association. The Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) has introduced a competence specification for Principals and launched a series of Development Centres designed to prepare aspirants for the role of Principal. These developments have been followed by the design, jointly by ASC and SFEU, of a programme of continuing professional development exclusively for Principals badged as "Leading & Learning", which is part-funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC 2006b). These steps reflect developments within the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, a series of ERSC funded seminars in 1996-97 was designed to facilitate a redefinition of the field of education management and leadership in the light of the major changes in practice that have taken place since the 1980s. One of the objectives of these seminars was "to develop a forum for the exchange of views of leading academics, policy-makers and practitioners about the discipline of educational management in the changing policy climate of the late 1990s" (Ribbins 1999 p229). The reform of the college sector in England, which has been gathering pace in recent years, includes the introduction of a compulsory leadership qualification for College Principals (DfES 2006).

On balance, we would argue that these initiatives do not represent an attempt to establish traditional professional status for public sector managers. Professionalisation, in Johnson's (1972) terms, was primarily driven by an occupational group's desire for recognition and protection, and ultimately to gain control of entry to the profession and to have power over the practice of the occupation. We argue that College Principals were not driven by these motives. For

College Principals professionalisation was an initially unacknowledged consequence of the new role of management in organisations tasked with delivering education in a modern public service environment.

### **Professionalism rather than professionalism**

Newman and Clarke (1994) describe management as a contested domain because of its "hollowness". They assert that both in the private and the public sector management has no superordinate goals or values of its own. Its values and ideology, whether for profit, efficiency, or customer satisfaction, are defined by other stakeholders. Management therefore finds itself open to contestation by different interest groups, both within, and external to, the organisation. We suggest that that this has some resonance and partially describes the climate during the transition of colleges to corporate status.

We argue that the acquisition of specific skills, competences and leadership capability, although essential to the successful management of colleges, has only partially resolved the dilemma of defining professionalism for college leaders. We envisage that in time the role of modern College Principals will be better defined and more widely understood. We argue that central to the development of a clearer professional definition is the creation of a new framework of professional values. In particular these values will need to incorporate appropriate networks of professional interaction with stakeholders and other professional groups.

Incorporation and independence have not only affected the functions of management, this change in legal status has also led to irrevocable changes in the relationships that senior managers have with government, with staff, with students and with other clients and funders. We argue that these changed relationships are

key to defining a new professional identity for managers. For senior managers in further education, a purely public service ethic, whilst applaudable, can now be regarded as incongruous in the current financial climate, in which colleges receive only 62% of their funding (on average) as a recurrent grant from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC 2007b). The new challenge for management is to recognise and balance the very diverse requirements and expectations of stakeholder groups and individuals. The approach advanced by Nixon et al (1997) is therefore helpful in providing a new framework for professionalism for college managers. Although the work is primarily directed towards school-level teaching, the framework is applicable to college management. Nixon et al (1997) advocate a move away from 'professionalism' as the ideology of service and specialist expertise and away from 'professionalisation' where the status of the occupation is at stake, towards what may be termed as 'professionality'. Professionality focuses on the quality of practice in situations where power and authority have become more complex and where organisational culture and values have replaced traditional organisational constructs based on hierarchy and bureaucracy. The approach advocated by Nixon et al (1997) is based first on a theory of "difference", defined as the way in which social or professional groups distinguish themselves through their values, perspectives and vested interests; and second, on "agreement", which is defined as a process of accommodating and integrating these different perspectives to achieve organisational or professional goals in new ways. In this model, management becomes part of a process through which different groups of staff sustain and develop their own professional values through developing new ways to respond to the conflicting and changing demands of students, clients and stakeholders.

We now turn our attention to what this approach could mean for colleges, which have become significant and complex organisations offering a range of public and commercial services with many different income streams. Unlike schools and

universities, which have relatively homogeneous student bodies, colleges now provide lifelong learning for a heterogeneous mix of people studying at many different levels and for many different purposes. In addition to the usual younger student group pursuing vocational course (e.g. apprenticeships), colleges are now required to provide education and training for broad spectrum of learners ranging from under-achieving school pupils through to career professionals. The educational needs and expectations of these varied groups are diverse and may even conflict. To provide appropriate learning opportunities colleges employ staff with a similarly diverse range of skills and experience. In addition to traditional permanent lecturing staff colleges employ specialist experts (in 2004-05 32% of teaching staff were employed on temporary contracts, many to teach specific subjects (SFC 2006c)). Traditional teaching staff have been joined by many new groups of support staff from different occupational and professional groups who have found careers in colleges since independence (e.g. accountants, web designers and estate managers). The role of colleges at the heart of local communities also brings them into contact with a diverse range of stakeholders from employers to local authorities and government agencies, all with their own agendas and priorities.

In Nixon et al's (1997) model, the professional role of management would be one of negotiation, collaboration and brokerage amongst all these interest groups and the creation of a value framework which places students at the centre of the decision-making process. It is this shift in focus from managing an institution to managing a learning environment which is crucial to a new definition of the profession of college management. One clear example which illustrates these concepts is the new requirement for colleges to provide vocational learning for 14-16 years old pupils who are at risk of under-achievement in schools. Managerialism might mean calculating the costs, devising an efficient delivery model and instructing reluctant staff, which we suspect is not likely to result in an optimum learning experience. Success

depends, instead, on college managers being able to negotiate with local authority managers, to co-operate with school staff, and to support lecturers and other staff to develop a new professional response for a difficult and demanding client group who may not be welcomed by other students.

We note Nixon's et al (1997) use of Williams's (1977) helpful distinction between "residual", "dominant" and "emergent" cultural elements within organisations. Furthermore, we suggest that in terms of college management, the "residual" culture is the public service ethic which no longer fully resonates within the complex public/private markets in which colleges now operate, although we are keen to suggest that this residual culture still has value as an underlying educational ethos. The "dominant" culture is the quasi-market model of supply and demand with tension between the professional expectations of teaching staff and the exigencies of a "customer-driven" and financially sustainable service. The "emergent" culture is the recognition of the primary importance of learners and of the quality of the learning experience within the institutional context, requiring a new network of relationships amongst managers and other professional groups and with external stakeholders. In this culture, the professional role of senior college managers is one of contributing to effective learning environments by promoting a student-centred value framework whilst also recognising the values and priorities of all staff groups and stakeholders. This is particularly relevant in the case of adult learners, who perceive themselves as stakeholders and who need an institutional culture and ethos that is conducive to integration and achievement (West 1996). We are not simply suggesting a soft form of managerialism. Our model represents a balance between respect for traditional educational values and recognition of the new political context which requires colleges to manage difficult choices and accommodate new constituencies of learners. In the field of education, professionalism is often taken to mean a primary commitment to learning and teaching. We agree with Lumby and Tomlinson (2000)

that, in the modern college, no single staff group should be able to claim a monopoly of professionalism and that underpinning values of commitment to students can be held by all groups, including management.

## **Conclusion**

Our review has painted a picture of a complex and continuous process of structural and political change that has revolutionised the role of college leaders. Similarly the proliferation of new constituencies of learners as diverse as under-achieving school pupils and mature degree level students presents new challenges for management and leadership. Each change has introduced tensions into the community of staff and students in a college and has created new and sometimes problematic relationships with external stakeholders. Equally these developments have created immense opportunities for colleges to emerge fully from their 'Cinderella' image and take centre stage as both as providers of lifelong learning and as businesses in their own right.

Public and political interest in moving towards "world class" institutions creates a context for a new definition of professionalism for college principals and senior managers. Our review of the development of management and leadership practice within the historical context of public sector reform and aspects of the theory of professionalism leads us to propose that professionalism in further education management should, in future, be defined in terms of four distinct, but inter-related, dimensions. First, following incorporation, managers certainly need competence in the functional skills and disciplines appropriate for a complex organisation operating in both the public and private domains. Business skills such as financial control, estates management and public relations are now routine tools of the trade, not indicators of a negative managerialist ideology and, despite the few high profile



crises mentioned in our introduction, evidence suggests that the majority of colleges are competently managed (see SFC 2006b). Second, Principals need transformational leadership skills and the capacity to develop their organisations as complex systems able to adapt to an external context of change and opportunity. Third, the central role of colleges in lifelong learning means that senior managers must be able to play an explicit and informed role in both influencing and implementing educational policy, which recognises political realities and other vested interests but retains a community-centred value base. This requires both individual and collective effort and an ability to balance sectoral advantage with institutional diversity. To date these three dimensions have clearly influenced the professional development agenda taken forward by the Scottish Further Education Unit and the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC 2003, 2007, SFEU 2007).

Fourth, we suggest that the concept of professionalism should be embraced. This particularly emphasises the ability to create a value base and an institutional culture which locates management, not above and in isolation from other staff, but as part of a network of professional expertise. We envisage that at its core should be a focus upon the complexity of the needs, values and expectations of lifelong learners.

The comprehensive redefinition that we have presented above represents a considerable and sharp contrast with the older public service ethic and with the simple rhetoric of managerialism. Various initiatives are likely to ensure that management development continues to be available for the college sector to promote progress towards “world class” leadership and management of institutions. An equally pressing challenge is for college leaders to develop a deeper understanding of their professional practice in terms of the values that sustain their institutions, and a sophisticated capacity to forge new relationships amongst other professional

groups and stakeholders to enhance a collective ability to provide effective lifelong learning.

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