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Leading learning and skills

Role of Colleges in Community Cohesion

Rapid Review of Evidence

November 2007

Of interest to everyone involved in improving skills and learning opportunities across England

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

i. The complex issue of social cohesion and FE needs to be perceived in relation to broader topics including social exclusion, equalities and diversity, social capital, and regeneration. However, in general; 'it is clear that, although colleges and Adult Education institutions are primarily focused on individual student achievement and progression, with the appropriate strategies and leadership initiatives they can also play a key role in promoting community cohesion within their towns' (DCLG, 2006 Para. 4.6.77). Indeed the literature shows that they have a proven track record in meeting community needs as well as facilitating partnerships to address issues of participation and inclusion.

ii. Participation in FE is not straightforward and promoting wider participation requires greater understanding of non-participation (Doyle and Cumberford 2003). FE sector has the capacity to help break down barriers to social inclusion for individuals and communities partly through widening participation. Key aspects to encouraging participation in FE include practical strategies, as well as those that bridge cultural and social divides.

iii. Colleges may be viewed as natural microcosms of communities where people from all races, religions, genders and affiliations come together as learners with a common purpose and a common belonging. Students often work together in mixed groups, sitting alongside each other, working in groups and discussing issues and topics together in a discursive environment where it is both acceptable to share and understand differing points of view. Opportunities for promoting interaction can arise in both formal and informal curricular activity.

iv. Preston and Hammond (2002) conclude that although the FE sector prides itself on its diversity, this may be achieved at the expense of integration by spreading resources too thinly to meet too wide a range of needs. Furthermore, Westwood and Jones (2003) argue that the FE sector may be forced into a lesser role as it attracts those whom the school system has failed or those at risk of social exclusion, and Forrest and Kearns (1999) recognise the possibility of people forming negative ties and group exclusions within the FE context. Others have identified patterns existing among FE students who identified themselves as belonging to a particular student community, excluding them from other groups (Hyland and Merrill, 2003), or that meaningful interaction between FE students of different ethnic, faith and cultural backgrounds may be minimal (DCLG 2006).

v. FE colleges promote cohesion and active citizenship through both their curriculum and ex-curricular activities for vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised people; although there is a lack of systematic evidence in the literature connecting social cohesion to learning and skills development through FE. The literature points to a range of areas where this aspect of college activity could be strengthened to facilitate cohesion.

vi. 'Because of their relative independence, Colleges of Further Education are in an excellent position to make an imaginative and innovative contribution to a town's community cohesion strategies. They can do this across all age groups and in a variety of settings, from college sites, employers' premises, to community-based locations'. (DCLG, 2006 Para 4.6.56).

The literature points to FE colleges contributing to society in terms of social cohesion and being engaged in their local communities through:

- being part of the social fabric of the communities they serve
- recruiting from their local communities
- having a role locally as a neutral place for people of all abilities to meet
- providing a resource for local communities
- contributing to the social cohesion agenda of their locality
- training and developing volunteers
- supporting communities in their own regeneration
- helping to improve the skills of community leaders and activists

vii. Colleges are often key partners with other local statutory and voluntary sector agencies and organisations with whom they assist in tackling social exclusion by promoting engagement and participation: 'All colleges are involved with local LSPs and Learning Partnerships, and play a central role in Single Regeneration Budgets (SRB), New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Cohesion Partnerships. By chairing an LSP (say) a college Principal can accentuate a local college's role in reversing area decline' (DCLG, 2006 Para 4.6.63).

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

1. The Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University has been asked by the LSC to conduct a rapid review of the literature associated with FE Colleges and community cohesion. This literature includes policy documents, academic, policy-oriented, and practitioner books, and articles in the academic, policy, and popular press. The review has also included a search for recent and ongoing research projects that are key to the area of FE colleges and social cohesion.

2. This summary outlines the key findings from this literature. It provides an overview of the literature in relation to the role that FE colleges may play in promoting social cohesion. It also provides a summary of the key literature in related areas, in particular access to FE and the participation of groups that face social exclusion. It aims to inform further thinking about the way in which FE colleges can support social cohesion.

Background

3. The last 30 years have seen a profound restructuring of the institutions and opportunities affecting young people's lives in the United Kingdom, with the collapse of an established youth labour market, the rise of part-time casualised labour, and drastic reduction in levels of State financial support to students in further and higher education.

4. Policies to build alternative provision for young people have developed gradually. 'Whatever the final outcomes of this period of change, the social policies involved have combined to extend the period of youth and dependence for young people across the social spectrum, delaying independence and prompting fundamental shifts in the conditions surrounding their preparation for and progress towards adult status. Public awareness of young peoples disempowerment has prompted anxiety, among policy makers and the general public, about the possibility of wide spread marginalization of young people from mainstream society and a general and potentially dangerous alienation among the young (Catan undated).

5. Changes in the labour market and in state benefit provision have also significantly altered the environment for adult and mature workers, with the shift towards a casualised, fragmented labour market affecting people across different age categories. Widening social and economic inequalities have affected the whole population (Catan undated), with implications for the social cohesion agenda which are relevant to people of all ages.

6. FE may have a central role to play in the promotion of social cohesion. Doyle and Cumberford (2003) define the purpose of FE as 'the provision of vocational education and training by encouraging and providing opportunities for lifelong learning and developing programmes which meet the education and training needs of local communities' (p. 32). Evidence is cited by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee (2002) that colleges have a proven track record in meeting these community needs as well as facilitating public private partnerships to address participation and inclusion.

7. FE colleges may provide an ideal venue for the development of social cohesion. Colleges may be viewed as natural microcosms of communities where people from all races, religions, genders and affiliations come together with a common purpose and a common belonging - to be learners. Unlike universities, colleges usually recruit from their local communities and have in important role as a place for people of all abilities to meet each other in a neutral and often local setting. Meeting and interacting with a multitude and range of people may be a normal part of the FE experience. Colleges are part of the social fabric of the communities they serve; they tend to evolve and are shaped by their learners.

8. Colleges provide a resource for local communities, interacting and contributing to the social cohesion agenda of those localities. A working paper for the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (Collinson and Collinson, 2007) recently suggests that in (almost) all their activities FE colleges are 'intensely community-focused ... (making) important, but frequently under-estimated contributions to community cohesion and economic development' (P 6). This is the case in relation to communities within colleges (e.g. regarding students and employees), between colleges and their multiple-partners (e.g. in the local community) and between different colleges (e.g. networks and associations between Principals). Colleges are often key partners with other local statutory and voluntary sector agencies and organisations. These experiences for learners may therefore help individuals play an active role in civic society.

9. One specific aspect of the FE experience that may be particularly important in promoting social cohesion is that people often work together in mixed groups, sitting alongside each other, working in groups and discussing issues and topics together. The focus of such discussions is likely to be less about personal agendas as about sharing perspectives in an environment where discussion is not only promoted but craved, and where it is both acceptable and interesting to share and understand differing points of view.

10. Overall, FE colleges can be seen to contribute to society in terms of social cohesion as well as other issues. Although there are no easy methods to calculate the contribution of colleges to the economy, the Scottish Executive (2006) cautiously estimate that the net economic benefit in Scotland is £1.3bn, a return of £3.20 for every £1 invested. The social value of colleges includes their contribution as a community resource and to promote active citizenship / civil society through provision for vulnerable groups, poverty amelioration and avoidance through qualifications (including debt avoidance), regeneration and health gains, and access to other services. In partnership with other agencies, colleges assist in tackling social exclusion by promoting engagement and participation (see section 5).

Aim of the report

11. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of the existing literature about the role of FE colleges in supporting social cohesion, as a resource for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. The report will also identify gaps in the literature. This literature review does not attempt to be exhaustive, but rather provides an indicative overview of the field, focusing on the relationship between social cohesion and further education.

The literature search

12. As the aim of the search strategy was to find documents that described links between further education colleges and local communities with regards to the concepts of cohesion or engagement, the searches were conducted on several online databases. These were the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Social Science Citation Index and several social science databases through Cambridge Scientific Abstracts including ASSIA, ERIC, Sociological Abstracts and Social Services Abstracts. The IDOX Information Service database was also searched. In addition, we did searches of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) websites, and we made use of library catalogues.

13. The first wave of searches used general terms before a second wave which focused on various groups and factors associated with diversity. The general search strings were as follows:
(fe or further education or college) and
(communit or local or neighbourhood or neighborhood or social or economic)* and
(cohesion or inclu or engag* or divers*)*

14. These terms were added later to either narrow down the searches or to investigate specific factors in the role of colleges in community cohesion:
(race or bme or ethnic or minorit* or gender or disab* or sectarian or faith or religion or esol or asylum or refugee or language or age or older or union or politic* or sexualit*)*

15. The ESRC and JRF websites and the library catalogues were searched using the terms 'social cohesion', 'community cohesion', and 'Further Education'. With the exception of searches for key texts and research programmes, the searches were limited to the time period 2002-2007. Around 320 potentially relevant references were selected from the searches and 64 documents were ultimately obtained for the literature review.

16. In undertaking this literature review we were struck by how little general evidence there is concerning social cohesion and Further Education (FE) in England. A large proportion of collected information relates to the United States and has been omitted at this stage because of significant and substantive variations between the nature of FE in England and Colleges in the United States[1]. Some of this information may be of use at a later stage if there is a need to consider alternative delivery models in the UK. The majority of material written on the issue relates to Scotland, and comparatively little in England and surprisingly less in Northern Ireland.

17. In terms of the literature that is available, a great deal of it is related to the role of FE in promoting social cohesion, supported by anecdotal and case study data. While this data is of particular interest and use, it is not elucidated from existing quantitative data about FE's particular contribution and the real value of FE is seen more as a matter of belief than what can be evidenced: 'There has been no large scale systematic investigation or whether the anecdotal wider benefits of FE or those expected by policy makers are observed by practitioners involved in teaching students or running courses' (Preston and Hammond 2002, p.5).

[1] We did include one Australian study which was of particular relevance.

18. This study mostly reflects positive findings from the available evidence, along with the challenges which the FE sector faces, and identified gaps in assumptions between what is believed of the FE sector and what can be demonstrated. The headings under which the literature is considered are inter-related in policy and in practice and ought not to be taken out of their wider context. There are tensions between these different dimensions of the role of FE's in social cohesion, e.g. between policy goals and what provision means in reality. However, the headings serve the useful purpose of demonstrating the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of the relationship between social cohesion and Further Education which requires much greater analysis.

19. In 2007 the LSC commissioned Strathclyde University to undertake a similar assessment of English FE Colleges which found the FE system to be a major economic force in its own right with an output of £6.4 billion and 'knock-on' effects of a further £9.1 billion. It employs large numbers of people in occupations spanning the whole spectrum of skills and qualifications. In addition to this, expenditure by the institutions in their local and regional economies generates substantial additional employment and output in other UK industries.

20. FE Colleges provide over 172,250 FTE jobs directly in further education In England, and institutional expenditure generates a further 107,636 FTE jobs outside the FE colleges, in a wide range of other UK industries.

SOCIAL COHESION

Overview

21. The field of social cohesion has developed considerably over the last few years. Social cohesion has been a key theme for a number of research programmes and projects. These include the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Area Regeneration and Economic and Social Research Council Cities Programmes in the 1990s (Forrest and Kearns 1999), Hudson et al's (2007) Social Cohesion in Diverse Communities, and Haywood and Mac an Ghaill's (2005) Young Bangladeshi people's transition to adulthood, and ESRC projects including the Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education project (Colley et al 2002), and Youth, Citizenship and Social Change (Catan undated).

22. The topic of social cohesion and FE should be looked at in relation to larger topics, such as community governance, social exclusion, equalities and diversity, and regeneration. It is worth noting that wider concepts that are currently popular are of relevance – in particular Robert Putnam's notion of social capital, in which the bonds created by organisations such as community and voluntary groups act as 'glue' creating a more cohesive society: 'Social capital refers to the norms and networks of civil society that lubricate cooperative action among citizens and their institutions. Without adequate supplies of social capital – that is, without civic engagement, healthy community institutions, norms of mutual reciprocity, and trust – social institutions falter' (Putman 1998 cited in Forrest and Kearns, 1999).

23. There have been a range of Government policy initiatives that recognise the need for special approaches to engage learners who are 'hard to reach' and/or who live in disadvantaged communities; e.g. Sure Start, Connexions, Skills for Life and Neighbourhood Renewal. FE colleges have also been seen to play an important role in civil society, providing a space where many different types of people come together in order to learn, allowing association between social groups who might not otherwise come into much everyday contact (see e.g. DCLG, 2006, and Black et al, 2001).

24. There is also a range of literature about young people and transitions which is relevant to the topic of social cohesion and FE. For example, Bowlby at al (2004) note the ways in which school-work trajectories have become longer and more complex over the last 30 years. There is a considerable range of literature about socially excluded youth in depressed urban areas, such as Armstrong (1997), Williamson (1988), Johnston et al (2000) and Forrest and Kearns (1999). There is also literature about other groups, for example, Bowlby et al are reporting on findings from research in Reading and Slough about young people's transitions from school to work, focusing on the issue of racialised gendering[2]. Their study focuses on localities that are relatively well-off, providing a useful contrast to studies which focus on those groups facing the most discrimination.

[2] 'The term refers to the way in which ideas of the characteristics of men and women from different ethnic groups come to be held within and impact on the labour market. Usually several competing versions of racialised gendering are in circulation' (p. 325).

Definitions

25. The issue of social cohesion is a complex one which is defined differently according to perspective. Forrest and Kearns (1999) provide useful working definition of social cohesion, it notes that social cohesion has a number of dimensions including ideas of:
    - A shared feeling of belonging or common purpose
    - Social solidarity across groups
    - Shared values which minimize conflict, enabling social stability
    - 'Active, well-intentioned citizens' (p. 7)
    - 'Dense networks of friends, family or aquaintances' (p 7)
    - A positive sense of attachment to local places and institutions

26. It is important to point out that the development of strong ties between people and groups, and associated social capital, does not necessarily support social cohesion. It could be possible for such negative ties to be fostered within the FE context as well as outside of it. The issue of negative social capital is discussed in some of the literature, for example Forrest and Kearns (1999) outline ongoing debates about the role of residential neighbourhood in maintaining the social glue of urban society as well as noting the downside of social capital, for example gang culture.

FURTHER EDUCATION: KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

27. There have been various policy developments that set the context for looking at the role of FE colleges in promoting social cohesion. Since the 1980s government policies have attempted to increase the participation of young people in education and training, a trend that has been continued by New Labour. There has been an expansion of places in further and higher education, with less than 10% of young people entering the labour market at 16. 'Education, training and integration of young people into the world of work have been central to policies addressing social exclusion and social cohesion with high-profile programmes, such as the New Deal, helping young people combine paid work with education and training (DfEE 2001, cited by Bowlby et al (2004) p 323).

28. The social inclusion aims were raised in the Kennedy Report which argued that 'FE is the key to widening participation' (Kennedy, 1997 p.28) and officially endorsed in the government's response to DfEE (1998). Kennedy argued the need for mechanisms to be put in place to ensure the involvement of FE in providing for local community needs: 'formal arrangements are necessary to ensure that it can respond more effectively to the needs of the wider community. This cannot be left to chance' (p42).

29. Various policy documents discuss the role the FE should play in promoting equality and social cohesion. For example the DfEE policy document (DfEE, 2000a) stated 'Colleges are vital in tackling inequalities within their local communities. They are proving their success in attracting women students and those from ethnic minority backgrounds ... Equality of opportunity must be central to everything colleges do' (para. 66). And, the Scottish Executive launched its six 'Closing the Opportunity Gap' objectives in July 2004 (Scottish Executive, 2007). These included improving the confidence and skills of the most disadvantaged children and young people. The Review of Scotland's colleges focuses on skills but there is also a wider discussion of addressing disadvantage and the role of colleges in working with people from deprived backgrounds, and the barriers these groups face.

30. The Foster Review of Further Education (2005) built on the reform agenda which has been pursued since the election of the first New Labour Government in 1997. At the heart of the reforms lies the belief that education and training can simultaneously develop and sustain employer competitiveness whilst also enhancing citizenship and social cohesion. A key element of Fosters vision is the drive to put the 'user' at the centre of policy and practice through a 'learner focus'. The DfES responded with a White Paper 'Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances' which sets out proposed reforms of the system. These include more choice for customers, tailoring services to meet individuals' needs, encouraging new innovative providers to enter the market and robust action to tackle poor quality combined with more autonomy for the excellent (DfES 2006 p1). December 2006 saw the publication of Lord Leitch's final report (Leitch Review, 2006) considering the UK's long-term skills needs to 2020. It sets out ambitious goals for 2020 which if achieved would make the UK a world leader in skills.

31. As an important provider of learning and training in the UK the FE sector is perceived as a vehicle for achieving the government's twin strategic goals of economic growth and social inclusion. These twin key policy aims were reinforced in the DfEE policy document (DfEE, 2000) on the role envisaged for FE institutions; in it the then Secretary of State, David Blunkett, stated that 'Economic prosperity and social cohesion go hand in hand, and working with partners at local and regional level... I therefore look to further education to work with and support partners in the adult and community and the voluntary sectors; to play a key role in the delivery of information, advice and guidance for adults; and crucially to ensure that it is central to addressing the basic skills needs of adults, a task which is critical to both our economic and social agendas' (DfEE, 2000 para 4).

32. Overall, the FE sector is affected by significant reform but continues to be resilient and flexible, resulting in greater change and sitting at the heart of many social exclusion policies. In fact, it has been said that FE is the only sector that has the capacity to absorb and deliver on policies aimed simultaneously at productivity and social exclusion (Westwood and Jones 2003). Private and independent providers such as the Prince's trust and Groundwork, are only on the scale of a small FE college. There are few – if any – alternatives to the FE model to meet the broad social policy goals expected of the sector. The sector itself is described as the 'Cinderella sector', as an adaptive chameleon, (Westwood and Jones 2003) or, as one report states, 'FE is a system so complex that even those involved were unsure how it all fitted together' RIU (2002).

33. Commentators have noted that the economic arguments always seem to have pride of place with implications for participation and resources for non vocational activities: 'The post-compulsory sector of FE is open to all, yet certain groups may be more dominant than others if colleges choose to target particular groups. Since incorporation colleges have to compete in the market place for the more attractive and lucrative 'customers' in industry' (Hyland and Merrill, 2003 p46). Tuckett (2005) states that funding previously available for community and citizenship education has been squeezed due to financial pressures on FE: 'funding pressures have returned, squeezing provision outside the national qualifications framework, and putting at risk routes into learning for groups currently not engaged, since the framework is too narrowly drawn' (undated). This suggests that provision for learning and training linked to citizenship and civic engagement is not valued as a core purpose of FE despite explicit commitments to lifelong learning in policy statements.

SOCIAL COHESION AND FE

A diverse learner population

34. The extent of student diversity in FE colleges is important to considering the role of FE colleges in terms of social cohesion – both within the colleges themselves and in the wider communities that they are based in. For example, an LSC study published in 2006 showed that sixteen per cent of learners in Further Education colleges were from ethnic minorities. There is a substantial amount of literature about student diversity within FE. 'FE colleges are now characterised by a diverse student population, and are no longer the preserve of largely young, mostly male apprentices and A-level students. Different groups of students - 16-21 year olds, adults, part-time, full-time students – contest for space in colleges' (Hyland and Merrill, 2003 p 46).

35. Much of the research is centred on the fact that the student population of FE colleges varies enormously (e.g. Postlethwaite and Maull, 2003). Preston and Hammond (2002) found there is a notion of FE colleges as a 'melting pot' (as described by practitioners); this term was used to describe the concentration and interaction of students from diverse backgrounds. The FE college as a community in its own right pertains to ideas about a place with a 'social focus' which encourages the exchange of ideas and the early development of lifelong friendships and networks. However, they conclude that although the FE sector prides itself on its diversity of student population, this can be achieved (or imposed through national policy priorities) at the expense of integration by spreading resources too thinly to meet too many needs.

36. Westwood and Jones (2003) note that the FE sector attracts those whom the school system has failed or those at risk of social exclusion, and as such is regarded as an 'everything else' or fault-line sector. This approach Westwood and Jones argue, is covering all the aspects of the population that HE and schools do not do address for the 16+ age group. They also argue that as a result FE is forced into a lesser role. National policy on widening participation and specific targets on young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) means that the group of learners in the FE student body is likely to be younger learners.

37. The literature discusses a wide range of motivations for attending FE; Postlethwaite and Maull (2003) found that three quarters of learners in FE are adults who approach it for enormously different reasons, while the remaining younger student body's motives for participation may too be diverse, or may not be wholly voluntary.

Diversity and social cohesion in FE colleges

38. The literature indicates that some practitioners see FE as a 'melting pot' of diversity which through a combination of civic-oriented education and the opportunity to mix with others contributes to a number of key forms of human and social capital, including self efficacy, mental health, community values, and political involvement (Preston and Hammond 2003).

39. The Commission for Equality describes interaction as a fundamental component of the cohesion / integration agenda, and supported by the work of Field (see Putmen 2000) and others through ideas about social and human capital. In many cases FE provides the 'spaces' for interaction between different communities. Opportunities for promoting interaction can arise in both formal and informal curricular activity (DfES 2002). In their study of the aspects of FE that contribute to potential benefits for students, Preston and Hammond (2002) found that interaction between students was stated by FE practitioners to be the most beneficial aspect of FE, and much more important than other factors such as course content, self-directed learning, etc.

40. Research carried out for the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (2007) into interaction suggested the importance of creating opportunities for interactions between people from different ethnic groups to improve integration. The starting point for this study was the recognition that if interaction between different ethnic communities is to be successfully promoted, some understanding of what motivates or de- motivates people to interact with one another is needed as well as being more aware of which types of interaction to promote, and when, and how. In terms of spheres for interaction the internet was identified as something that enables communication with like-minded people and where ethnicity played an insignificant factor in the virtual interactions.

41. McKinney et al (2006) has explored the notion of a sense of community among college and noted that 'the notion of the classroom as a community has grown out of the larger context of writing and research on the general sense of community in western culture' (p. 281). Through a study of students in a psychology class which was 'exposed to a regimen designed to increase sense community' they sought to measure that sense of community in the classroom and its result on satisfaction and change in performance. The researchers used six variables known to relate to sense of community which are: connection, participation, safety, belonging and empowerment. They concluded that 'the sense of community, as applied generally to a culture, and more recently to neighborhoods, can be applied with equal advantage to the college classroom' (p283).

42. Hyland and Merrill (2003) found in one study that 'Being part of a group or a 'gang', as one NVQ group described it, and helping each other with studying is important. The NVQ group also talked about the existence of two adult communities in their class - an 'us and them' - between the younger mature students who are in their early 20s and themselves who are in their 30s and 40s' (p 106).

43. However, having a diverse student body is not adequate per se to achieve interaction, and FE colleges must work hard to overcome behavioural patterns which have emerged as a result of complex social factors through both primary and secondary education (DCLG 2006). In practice, meaningful interaction between FE students of different ethnic, faith and cultural backgrounds may be minimal (DCLG 2006).

44. Several writers acknowledge the difficulty in achieving integration within FE settings. Farrelly (2005) describes how in working to overcome sectarian divisions within one local community in Northern Ireland, an FE college had to address community perceptions and concerns about the FE college space itself. The response was to develop better links with advocacy and community

groups, but to do this required community-based interventions in order to develop trust. Gundara (2006) says that inter-cultural relations are not helped by the predominance of (mainly) middle class Asian and African people coming into adult and continuing education to the exclusion of white working class and other minority communities. Citing research from Bristol University about the extent of segregation in British education, he points to the need for 'second chance education' to address poverty cycles linked to ethnicity and exclusion.

45. Another issue is that as Hyland and Merrill (2003) say, 'Community is as much about difference as it is about similarity and identity. It is a relational idea which suggests, for British blacks at least, the idea of antagonism, domination and subordination between one community and another. The word directs analysis to the boundary between these groups. Community can, therefore, be contradictory: both 'cosy' and inclusive and repressive and exclusionary. Our research revealed that such a pattern exists among FE students as they identified themselves as belonging to a particular student community, excluding them from others' (Hyland and Merrill, 2003 p117).

46. Community and social cohesion may actually be impeded by student experiences of FE in some cases. Research by Colley and Tedder (2003) explores FE and the way that learning is a process where newcomers enter more experienced groups or 'communities of practice'; that learning and becoming a member of such a group entails taking on a new identity; and that particular forms of learning may therefore attract people with 'characteristic biographies', from similar backgrounds or with similar dispositions. They carried out research with nursery care students and found out that 'As the year wore on, a number of students became isolated and then excluded from the site in various ways. Early on, successful students identified themselves as 'nice', and those who were eventually excluded as coming from 'rough' backgrounds. 'Rough' students were those perceived as living in the more deprived areas of the city, with less stable family situations, who used obscene language, bullied others, got into fights outside college, and tended to dress in more exotic fashions. They were therefore deemed to be unsuitable, rather than 'the right sort of person for the job'' (p. 3)

47. There are also broader issues about the extent to which colleges are culturally sensitive, which are relevant to the issue of social cohesion. Reports on a survey by Focus Consultancy on faith / religion in FE colleges in England in which more than 75% of students told surveyors that FE colleges should make more provision for people's faith needs while two thirds of FE staff think students should have a legal entitlement to 'social, moral, spiritual and cultural development' (Kingston 2007). However, while many think colleges have a key role to play in promoting community cohesion, less than 2% of FE staff think this can be achieved by working with faith leaders. Wider reviews undertaken by the QIA suggest that what students and staff want is provision (space) for practicing faith, greater respect and tolerance for others, and inclusive, formal opportunities to discuss values and beliefs. The extent to which FE colleges can achieve very much in this regard is questioned. A lack of interaction at college level is likely to be linked to previous patterns of interaction in primary and secondary schools and may not necessarily be an explicit choice of adults not to interact.

Skills linked to 'cohesion' amongst the student population

48. Despite the lack of systematic evidence which connects social cohesion to learning and skills development through FE, many writers describe the value of FE in terms of specific skills gained through the formal curriculum and the informal FE setting, which relate to social cohesion. For example, ETF (2005) states: 'education is seen as a key instrument for promoting social cohesion by endowing people with the necessary skills and knowledge to cope with change and adapt with new conditions' (undated, p.1).

49. Quoting the Leitch Review (2006), the Scottish Executive (2006) states ''there are important links between skills and wider social outcomes, such as health, crime and social cohesion'. This includes enabling people to manage their finances, assist children with their homework, and skilling people to make health-related choices. It even extends to claims that skilled households are more likely to be racially tolerant and greater participation in the political process, although no evidence is cited in support of this claim. More directly, a project commissioned from Ipsos Mori (CRE/Ipsos Mori, 2007) stated that a lack of education (not just FE) was identified as a cause of political extremism.

50. Other authors such as Schuller et al (2001) explored evidence regarding the wider benefits of learning. Grauer and O'Donnell (2004) discuss the potential of further education to empower individuals to become participating citizens rather than passive subjects in the European context. And, the Scottish Executive (2006) found that general benefits are seen to include: building confidence, new experiences, meeting others, widening options, easing transition, increased interpersonal skills, self-esteem, development of social networks, and tolerance of other ethnic groups.

51. Preston and Hammond (2002) found a similar list of benefits. Although their research is rather a poll of 'perceived benefits' as opposed to actual / experienced benefits, those perceived by practitioners range from improved self-esteem, greater control over their lives psychological health benefits, greater trust in others, increased probability of electoral activity and even 'more likely to reflect on spiritual matters' (p.9). These benefits are described as dimensions of identity capital and social capital. Learning also expands social networks by encouraging tolerance (Putnam 2000). Preston and Hammond clustered these benefits in terms of
    - self efficacy,
    - mental health,
    - community,
    - values, and
    - political involvement.

52. Additional qualitative information was gathered from practitioners enabling additional areas to be explored, including the perceived contribution of FE to citizenship. The skills which practitioners stated FE can help to develop include communication, people skills, inter-personal skills, empathy and teamwork. They assessed the association of these benefits with particular aspects of FE and found the perceived benefits varied by subject, qualification, and level of study. Perceived benefits were greatest in humanities and health related subjects and in level 3 courses. However they found no differences in perceived benefits when considered in terms of

student ethnicity and age. Of similar interest is how these similarities remain true in FE and 6th form colleges, where much is made of the comparatively greater pastoral support available in the latter.

53. Students who are perceived to benefit most overall are those most motivated to be in FE, so students who view FE as an extension of school or in order to avoid work are perceived to be less likely to benefit as others. There is an expectation that students from ethnic minority backgrounds are likely to benefit more from FE, having experienced double-discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity and low educational attainment (Reston and Hammond 2002). One study notes that a critical dimension of social cohesion is social acceptance by peers and this is questioned as realistic in terms of disability. The study notes that one of the main advantages of mainstream FE colleges is preparation for the 'real world', in terms of discrimination, prejudice and isolation, by helping disabled people to develop 'survival skills' (Pitt and Curtin 2004).

54. A key skill linked to cohesion for many potential learners is the underlying skill of 'learning to learn', which FE as second and third chance provision can uniquely do. 'There is ample evidence that many adults' learning journeys, whilst purposeful, do not follow straightforward progression routes – they develop confidence and the skills in learning how to learn, skills in reflection on learning gained from experience, and, of course, the skills and knowledge for appropriate roles inside and outside the labour force from a wide variety of certificated and uncertificated provision' (Tuckett, 2005).

55. The Scottish Executive (2006) notes that the impact of FE on learners is mainly articulated through qualifications, as there is little evidence on what happens to students after leaving FE, and many FE students are only enrolled for short programmes. Some research did point to learners' own assessment of the impact of FE, and that it 'developed and changed them' but other views of the benefits of FE are anticipatory rather than experiential.

Physical structure/investment

56. A small portion of the literature addresses 'place, space and inter-cultural interaction' (DCLG 2006), emphasising the physical space occupied by FE colleges as spatial locations, with design and management considerations. Farrelly (2005) notes the importance of community-based venues for locally based FE to achieve confidence, reduce cost and provide child care. Specific funding following identified strengths in promoting cultural diversity which also targeted the capacity of professional and voluntary bodies to contribute to building trust and awareness. Similarly the Scottish Executive (2007a) states that 'Colleges are emerging at the centre of community hubs where a range of facilities and public services are available under one roof. Developments such as this are more than just cost effective, they can transform communities and offer a new, vibrant and relevant type of civic centre, sometimes in areas where no such centre previously existed' (p 13). They recommend that colleges undertake this activity in partnership with others such as the local authority and the NHS.

57. National policy documents (e.g. DfES, 2007) link better learning environments to improved education performance by promoting access and engagement, but also suggest examples to illustrate the need to design-in space for interaction which is also flexible for subject-driven sub-division. Even

considering the use of materials in building design can have an effect. For example, the use of glass is stated to deter bad behaviour as well as other forms of anti-social behaviour such as vandalism and graffiti (DfES 2007). Innovate space is also being tested through dispersed subject-based learning clusters which congregate for social and dining purposes as well as using commonly-utilised infrastructure (IT). Other examples illustrate the need to design-in space for interaction which is also flexible for subject-driven sub-division.

58. Social cohesion may be affected by the fact that not all colleges have good facilities. The LSC was involved in an audit of facilities (in 2002) which helped with planning to meet local needs to facilitate and encourage access. DCMS (2000) notes that FE colleges were not (at the time of publication) able to apply for Sport England funding as schools could. FE has no compulsory provision of sport and local provision is supported through local funding / choice but the report emphasises enrichment activities (arts and sports) as ways to promote social interaction and curriculum development (e.g. qualifications in sport). The lack of any requirement on FE to provide sport facilities, etc. is regarded as a lost opportunity to promote interaction within colleges as well as within and between local communities. DCMS (2000) emphasises enrichment activities (such as arts and sports) as ways to promote social interaction and curriculum development (e.g. qualifications in sport) and suggests this could be linked to proposals for Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVEs).

Programmes and strategies within colleges

59. Programmes and strategies within FE colleges are key to the role that FE plays in supporting social cohesion. There is some literature of relevance to this issue. Collinson and Collinson (2007) reports that FE colleges operate within a highly complex community environment, using strong leadership skills to operate within and resolve ambiguity within the community concept. The diversity of course types and structures creates an internal community environment which is nested in turn within its own spatial community, as most FE students live at home within close proximity to colleges (e.g. Scottish Executive 2007). However there is a growing body of international students and overseas partner colleges which contribute to an even greater diversity within the sector. Despite this, a unifying principle is the notion of the FE college as ‘a learning community’ emancipated through engagement in formal and informal education (Collinson and Collinson).

60. An example of where this works well is Armagh College, which has organisational policies, procedures and training on building good relations and inclusive working practices based on values of multiculturalism and diversity. Along with a formal course in citizenship, the college mainstreams diversity and citizenship through professional practice, inclusiveness, accessibility and formal teaching. Farrelly (2005) discuss the college's cultural diversity pilot project, which has helped the college to embed the ideals of mutual respect, tolerance and the celebration of cultural diversity in every aspect of provision. Essential to this is the perception of the FE college as a ‘neutral place’.

61. The literature shows that good practice does not of course happen on its own accord. For example in responding to the consultation Commission on Integration and Cohesion, the union NASUWT reported that ‘Schools and

colleges can be the site for positive and empowering work on tackling inequality and integrating communities. Celebrating diversity and difference, and challenging discrimination, prejudice and bigotry is fundamental to the work of the NASUWT's members who act in their capacities as trade unionists and teachers to create a fair, just, cohesive and integrated society'.

62. The extent to which social cohesion is supported within the FE sector may be linked with support levels for individual students. Doyle and Cumberford (2003) state that inclusion is not just about increasing numbers but also emphasises progression and support which requires reassessment of structures and processes of FE, matching the learning environment to learning needs. Tuckett (2005) argues that although adults make up the vast majority of FE students there is very little of the curriculum which addresses their individual needs. The report considers the separation of FE provision for adult and younger learners but concludes that the ethos of FE which contributes to wider participation is a product of this heterogeneity and should be protected. Tuckett expresses a concern about the loss of this incentive to participate which arises from the irony that by widening participation to achieve diversity results in reduced choice.

63. Gundara (2006) discusses challenges of multiculturalism, and how further education can contribute to 'strengthen civil society engagements as well as shared public cultures' (p. 43). The author notes how the centrism of FE curricula do not consider inclusive knowledge extending beyond the immediate context from which formative values are drawn, or at best extending to major knowledge systems of Western (and not Eastern or Southern) Europe. Gundara (2006) also suggests that in the case of women students and other adult learners from minority communities, students may have to overcome domestically enacted cultural expectations about their role, some of which are perpetuated in the college environment itself. This may require FE colleges to be more proactive in addressing these as issues for treatment within their environments.

64. There are many good examples of colleges operating effective cohesion plans, one of which is Tower Hamlets College (LSC, 2007). This is a medium-sized general further education college with distinctive expertise in its sixth form, with adults and with employers. It operates in the heart of the East End of London with centres in Poplar, Stepney and Bethnal Green. The college serves a community that is diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity thus its ethos is to achieve social cohesion through education. The College also develops members of the local community to become tutors and trainers on its programmes. It uses dedicated staff with youth and community education backgrounds to build learning provision and develop trainees to become 'trainers of the future'. At its most recent Ofsted inspection in February 2005 the college was judged to have outstanding support for students, outstanding educational and social inclusion which successfully widens participation and excellent educational, business and community partnerships.

Contributing to cohesion within the wider community

65. FE colleges can be seen to play an important role in promoting social cohesion within the wider community. FE colleges are regarded as rich resources for their towns and help to maintain links with local communities (DCMS 2000). They also have a role to play in training and developing

volunteers, a key goal of the government's active citizenship programme which is also embedded as a key indicator of ‘safer, stronger communities' within Local Area Agreements.

66. The DfES stated In the White Paper (2006),: ‘Opportunities to undertake volunteering activities can enrich the learning experience in FE and promote active citizenship. Volunteering can enable students to develop the soft skills required by employers, strengthen providers’ engagement with their local communities and help foster an inclusive ethos’' (para 3.14). The Scottish Executive (2007a) in its review of the role of Scotland's colleges has also identified colleges as having a role in the promotion of volunteering.

67. Hyland and Merrill (2003) believe that FE colleges have the potential to become ‘focal points in local communities in ways which engage with the realities and needs of local people rather than being merely service providers. Colleges, for example, have resources that could be shared with local organisations and community groups – something which community groups asked for in the FEDA project. Such groups viewed an FE college as being part of its local community and, therefore, they felt that they had the right to access and feel ownership of its resources and facilities’ (p122). Hyland and Merrill (2003) discuss a community approach to education, advocated since the 1970s, aims at breaking down traditional relationships both inside and outside an educational institution: ‘A community approach to the curriculum encourages a democratic style of learning and teaching. It breaks down the ‘us’ and ‘them’ situation produced by traditional methods, replacing them with more egalitarian and participatory relationships between students and tutors’ (Hyland and Merrill, 2003 p121),

68. South Birmingham College is an example of an FE college with a community approach. It has established a dedicated Community Development Unit able to draw in relevant local expertise and skills and combine these with the college’s own specialist expertise including curriculum and programme development. The college runs a Parent Partnership Project in conjunction with the LEA which recruits local women/mothers to work in local schools to identify the learning needs of parents (Taylor, 2003).

69. FE colleges operate within a much broader context, in terms of social cohesion. ‘FE colleges can be described as post-modern institutions with pluralistic, fragmented and diverse interests. Further education not only serves the interests of students but also local communities, employers, stake-holders, its governing body, regional agencies and the government. … Each college has been shaped and defined by its own history and the influence of local education authorities, its governing bodies and local communities and employers. As Ainley and Bailey point out, 'there is no such thing as a typical college' ‘ (1997,p.9). (Hyland and Merrill, 2003 p47),

70. DCLG (2006) research into the different ways in which diversity is approached in different localities looked at the different role FE Colleges play in promoting community cohesion. Oldham College was cited as an example of one college which had well developed Equal Opportunities and inclusion policies which contributed to a calm environment within the College during the Oldham riots in 2001. ‘Management takes the view that this ‘ethos of mutual respect’ resulted in the College being seen as a ‘haven’ during the disturbances of 2001. There was no graffiti, agitation or unrest on College sites’ (para 4.6.76).

71. Farrelly (2005) describes the role of Armagh College's lifelong learning initiative in bridging sectarian division among educationally disadvantaged in a post-conflict context and widening participation and promoting peace building. The College actively sought to build links with specific communities who had traditionally felt / been excluded from mainstream provision as well as groups in greatest need. Groups included BME communities, lone parents, asylum seekers, people with learning difficulties and ex-prisoners. They worked through VCS partnerships and networks and involved taking provision into the community. Farrelly (2005) note the explicit link between community education and community relations and how FE colleges can assist reconciliation by enabling interaction between communities, promoting understanding and advocacy.

72. FE colleges can also play an important role in equipping individuals and groups to take an active part in the regeneration of their community. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) programme was established to develop community-based solutions in five key problem areas: housing, health, educational attainment, unemployment and crime. Part of this strategy is a programme to promote the development of the skills and knowledge required by residents, regeneration practitioners, public service professionals and civil servants for neighbourhood renewal (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2002b). The Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) have also emphasised the importance of developing and supporting community leaders as well as improving the skills of professionals to deliver core services (Social Exclusion Unit 2000). Based on the characteristics refined in their fieldwork, Taylor and Doyle (2003). concluded that good practice in responding to the neighbourhood renewal learning agenda is likely to be shown in four main areas or dimensions of practice (para 32):
    - offering effective learning provision for neighbourhood renewal
    - engaging the community in planning and developing learning provision for neighbourhood renewal
    - working with partnerships to promote learning for neighbourhood renewal
    - using resources that are conducive to good practice.

73. A good example of a college involving itself in neighbourhood renewal is North Warwickshire and Hinckley College which runs a foundation degree in 'Community Development and Enterprise' in association with Warwick University. Learners on the course are active in the community (Taylor, 2003).

74. Billett and Seddon (2004) discuss the role of vocational education and training in building communities in an Australian context although with international relevance. They argue that 'new' social partnerships developed to deliver this go beyond the traditional goals of training provision. Disadvantaged individuals feel vulnerabilities most keenly, making them most at risk of social exclusion therefore, learning can be a way for people to deal with change and uncertainty. The 'new' social partnerships are potentially enabling social relations to be reconfigured and their paper looks at the prospects of social partnerships to contribute to community building. Social partnerships can be seen as a strategy for building social capital including relationships, networks etc., as well as sustain trust and tolerance; and enhanced learning also enables individuals and communities to innovate. Billett and Seddon (2004) discuss notion of civic capacity: 'a more political, democratic and emancipatory conception of capability and capacity-building is

evident in the literature on developing 'civic capacity' as a way of addressing urban educational renewal by acknowledging and accommodating the different interests of ethnic minorities and other educational stakeholders…This recognition of pluralism means that capacity building refers to processes of developing individual and organisational potential for active decision-making, and development in the context of multiple, different, and often conflicting interests'(p. 60).

Outreach Work

75. Much research points to the importance of moving FE out into the community in order to overcome traditional social, cultural and physical barriers. Many projects investigate ways of targeting hard to reach groups through outreach activities which can help to build a sense of community. Similarly, FE provision is often flexible enough to enable community-based delivery such as ESOL courses using IT and reach students who would normally not access FE (Wilson 2003). DCLG highlighted that not all integration issues could be resolved in the traditional FE setting: 'It is important to remember that ethnically mixed classrooms or lecture theatres, though desirable, are not the complete solution to the sort of inter-ethnic tensions that threaten social cohesion. Research evidence suggests that students from different ethnic groups formed exclusive peer groups, exhibited different patterns of subject choice and used the public space represented by local colleges in different ways. What was lacking therefore, was meaningful social interaction' (2006, para 5.7.3)

76. Much of the evidence related to the role of FE contributing to cohesion in the community relates to the ways in which FE can strategically position itself to engage communities through outreach initiatives which in themselves bring the wider benefits of interaction with them. This approach to informal learning opportunities in homes or local communities, may be seen as "the key to motivating those of all ages to learn, especially disaffected young people parents and other adults who do not feel comfortable in more traditional places of learning such as schools or colleges" (National Literacy Trust, 2007). The literature shows a developing evidence base related to how and why community approaches are successful in engaging people in FE activity including the use of community venues, information technology, sports and the arts to enthuse people, working with volunteers and voluntary and community groups.

77. In some instances such initiatives may be the only or one of few opportunities for people who live in isolated (mainly rural) communities to interact (Smith 2003). Such initiatives are not long term and rely on development funding for their existence (such as ESF). One such method for community engagement is in making IT resources accessible to communities in community settings, especially targeting groups of people who have traditionally not accessed FE. One identified group which benefits from this is ESOL students although there is no evidence identified in this literature review which concerns linkages to particular benefits (e.g. onward progression routes into traditional FE).

78. One of the key strengths of FE provision in relation to community-focused basic skills provision is that it should be able to respond more easily to issues and aspirations of local people. Research from NIACE (Thompson, 2002) related to community education and Neighbourhood renewal however, recognises that there are challenges in terms of empowering the local

community, such as the suspicion of many local people of top-down solutions and the way projects are implemented often preventing involvement of women through a lack of affordable childcare, poor play facilities, inadequate transport and fears about personal safety. She also found additional problems for black and minority ethnic women of racism, isolation and difficulties in accessing health and social care.

79. One example of FE support for a local initiative is The LA Raiders Soccer Academy This organisation focuses on reengaging young unemployed people with a programme of educational and vocational training balanced with sports studies and work experience; many have problems with reading and writing. The majority (80%) are either black or from minority groups. The Academy works in partnership with Waltham Forest College, Connexions and local schools and it runs a range of programmes in the local community (LA Raiders, undated). LA Raiders, (undated). http://www.laraiders.co.uk/communitycoaching.asp

80. Community Education Development Centre (CEDC) has produced a guide to those who want to set up a project aimed at hard-to-reach groups in the community. Their recommendations are:
    - People can 'do it' for themselves
    - Make sure people want to come to the venue you have chosen
    - Work in partnership wherever possible
    - Sometimes small ideas can have a big impact
    - Recognise achievements
    - Work with activists in the community
    - One size does not fit all
    - If people won't come to you, go to them
      (CEDC, 2001)

81. The Scottish Executive (2006) point out that community-based learning is an additional feature of Scottish provision which ensures greater access and flexibility. A good example of this is the Next Steps programme in Scotland (Lochaber) which is funded through ESF (Smith 2003). The role of the college is in taking formal and informal access courses out to the community. Through flexibility and funding to run such programmes, they have been able to help build a sense of community in remote rural areas and which are experiencing economic decline. Confidence-building is a key aspect of the scheme which has also been involved in the creation of a community garden.

82. It is worth pointing out that not all of the literature supports the view that FE colleges contribute to social cohesion. FE colleges have not adopted a holistic approach to community education, although in some colleges there are pockets of community development type work and links with disadvantaged community groups. Hyland and Merrill (2003) point out that ‘there are some colleges which have struggled to maintain a community focus in their philosophy and practice. Two of the nine colleges in the FEDA study see themselves as having a strong community mission. Colleges located in areas of urban social deprivation in the Scottish study tended to have a closer relationship with their local communities and the socially excluded’ (p 50). They point out that ‘in the post-1992 era colleges may be more likely to respond pragmatically to those groups such as employers who have the most voice and the most money, rather than powerless local voluntary and community groups’ (p 122).

PARTICIPATION, ACCESS, AND BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Widening participation in FE – overview

83. The widening participation agenda is an important one in relation to FE and social cohesion, because if people from diverse backgrounds are not able to access FE or succeed in their training and education, then the role that FE plays in promoting social cohesion will be limited It is even possible (as noted above) that FE colleges could play a negative role in terms of social cohesion, by perpetuating inequalities. There is a large body of literature about widening participation, only some of which will be included in the rapid review. The review also includes some of the literature on equality and diversity in FE, as equality is also relevant to the social cohesion agenda.

84. There is literature available about the role of FE colleges in serving those students who are more likely to face social exclusion. Wilson (2003) reports that many people / groups do not access ESOL provision through traditional routes and FE colleges are flexible and well positioned to identify and access these groups as well as deploy resources to assist in the development of community groups. The LSC in Bedfordshire & Luton are collecting information to help understand the effect of migrant workers on current and future provision. As part of this programme they are working with the colleges and FE providers to understand more about current ESOL provision in relation to migrant workers (LSC, 2007). There is also literature concerning the factors that underpin inequalities of access and participation in FE. Westwood and Jones (2003) argue that FE must be about breaking down barriers to social inclusion for individuals and communities. Doyle and Cumberford (2003) note that a Scottish Office goal is to promote social justice through targeted educational support and refer to the Beattie report, 'Implementing inclusiveness realising potential' which placed social inclusion firmly on the Scottish political agenda.

85. In response to the Foster Review (Foster, 2005), NIACE and others expressed concerns that the Review stressed skills acquisition in the FE sector at the expense of social inclusion as an explicit goal on top of skills development. Flint et al (2006) argue that FE colleges must also pursue the promotion of social inclusion as an explicit goal on top of skills development, as engaging the more disadvantaged / disaffected students cannot solely be achieved through better teaching.

86. Information on the performance of FE colleges in the literature regarding legal compliance and equalities is mixed. There is a difference between the explicit 'mission' statements and commitments made by colleges to equality and diversity, and their actual compliance with the equality legislation. Commitments to equality and diversity are important factors in addressing barriers to participation and access, and there are several examples of how FE Colleges have contributed to greater interaction within college environments and local communities through efforts to use Equal Opportunities policies and other similar strategies to promote equality and diversity (DCLG 2006). However, this is an uneven picture and several reports indicate many FE Colleges are not fully compliant with equality laws.

87. Overall, participation itself is not straightforward and promoting wider participation requires greater understanding of non-participation in FE (Doyle and Cumberford 2003). Sargent (1997) suggested three general reasons why people choose not to participate:
    - those who are alienated from any form of education,
    - those who are unaware of opportunities to participate, and
    - those who are unable to participate because of social, financial or other barriers.

Barriers to participation

88. The literature highlights some key barriers to participation in FE, which are centrally important to the social cohesion agenda. These are based around the deep economic and social inequalities that underpin British society today, and may manifest in terms of ethnic, cultural, faith-based, class, and age 'fault-lines'. For example, Doyle and Cumberford (2003) describe the dynamic nature of social exclusion and the continued influence of social class, especially in HE. The literature addresses a number of factors, including structural barriers (such as a lack of transport) and social and cultural barriers.

89. Some of the literature addresses factors affecting participation at the level of the individual learner or the immediate community. One review (EdComs / DfES 2007) assessing the attitudes, motivations, aspirations, and behaviours underpinning barriers to post-16 participation in light of the DfES policy goal of 90% of post-16s in education by 2015, suggests that although attainment is the best predictor of post-16 participation, other factors such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic group also determine choices. Many young people with lower ability drop out because the curriculum, qualifications and teaching style do not suit their ability level, and their withdrawal is connected to growing social disaffection.

90. Hansson et al (2002) undertook two case studies of FE colleges selected because they had relatively large numbers of ESOL (English as a Second Language to Overseas Learners) students. The study underlined the diversity amongst students in these colleges in terms of educational background, age, nationality etc. They found that barriers to successful provision included irregular attendance due to work demands and childcare demands even though there were some adaptations made to e.g. timetable to support students. The study found that the colleges provided a range of ESOL classes, however, provision of ESOL has to compete with other demands on the FE colleges and insufficient provision being highlighted as an issue: 'The provision of English Language courses has to compete with a wider range of other demands on the physical and human resources of FE colleges. This clearly creates strains of various kinds and means that colleges are not able to meet all demands and students experience frustrations' (p.63).

91. Barriers to participation can be social and cultural, for example Haywood and Mac An Ghaill (2005) did research with members of the Bangladeshi community, and found that aspirations were different to those found elsewhere. In particular, many people wanted to work within their own community. The authors reveal the picture that is not shown in official descriptions of young people themselves who demonstrate diverse patterns of participation in further education. Bangladeshi women were much more likely to describe themselves as being in education in comparison to

Bangladeshi men - or, indeed white women and men. Also, both male and female Bangladeshis reported that they combined being registered for further education courses alongside long hours of domestic work or jobs in family businesses.

92. Some authors focus on the structural factors (those that are part of the way society is structured) affecting participation. Hyland and Merrill (2003) note that disadvantaged and community groups may find themselves marginalised from learning not only because colleges have to compete for the more lucrative 'customers' in industry but because of their lack of economic power in an era of marketisation, ‘particularly as 'efficiency' comes to replace 'social responsibility' in the FE mission’ (Hyland and Merrill, 2003 p 46). They argue that ‘marginalised groups continue to be largely excluded from lifelong learning as work-based learning and skills-based VET become central within FE and accorded more value than courses to attract non-participants and those without qualifications’ (p50). In an analysis of recent research, Hyland and Merrill noted that the voluntary and community sector was critical of FE for ignoring them and, as a consequence, were not serving the needs of certain groups in society such as the disabled and those with mental health problems. Castells (1996) points out that in the information society new social inequalities have emerged based on those with and without knowledge creating a dualisation of society characterised by 'a sharp divide between valuable and non-valuable people' (Castells, 1996, p. 161). Bauman (1998) refers to those without knowledge as the new poor.

93. It appears that structural inequalities concerning ‘race’ and ethnicity may still be prevalent within FE. For example, there are indications of barriers and difficulties faced by asylum seekers and refugees in accessing employment and training including racism and harassment (Charlaff et al, 2004) although the findings are applied more generally than just to FE.

94. NIACE research into community education found that although poverty can affect those of all backgrounds, black people living in poverty can also additionally experience racism, prejudice and discrimination (White, 2002). Also, that against a backdrop of under-achievement, they found that there is a view among black people that education beyond school is irrelevant and alien.

95. Structural barriers are present in terms of access for students with disabilities. Pitt and Curtin (2004) undertook research into the reasons why disabled students opt to move into specialist college provision over mainstream provision and discuss how FE colleges fail to provide adequate support for disabled students in terms of: lack of physical access to facilities; lack of specialised therapy and pastoral support; inadequate or inappropriate extra-curricular / social activities; low professional awareness of needs among staff; bullying, etc.

96. The barriers to participation can be linked to the wider constraints faced by the FE sector generally. Westwood and Jones (2003) point out that FE sector may have weaknesses in achieving goals, including internal factors such as poor pay and temporary / short term staff, low morale, etc. Although results (attainment figures) are improving, there is a hit and miss pattern to them and they are still not high enough. Government policy still favors traditional academic routes and FE is undervalued. Resources can be a barrier to this activity, the Scottish Executive (2007a) notes that funds are often insufficient

given the complexities colleges encounter in working with the most deprived sections of the community.

Factors encouraging participation

97. The literature reveals a number of key aspects to encouraging participation in FE amongst disadvantaged people[3]. These include practical strategies, as well as those that bridge cultural and social divides. There appears to be an ethos of inclusion amongst FE providers, according to Preston and Hammond (2002) who found that FE practitioners stressed equality of access and outcome of their colleges, representing something that the local community can be proud of.

98. A large proportion of the initiatives described in the literature report various activities undertaken by FE colleges which address barriers (e.g. Penwarden 2002, Scottish Executive 2006, DCLG 2006). These are reported as examples of good practice or as case studies of specific programmes, and there are only a few examples where these reports are synthesised. One area which is relatively well developed is 'race' and ethnicity. For example various reports from Ofsted looking at race and education in schools and further education colleges in 2005 highlighted that the majority of colleges inspected are meeting their responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; 'nationally success rates for Black and minority ethnic learners in FE colleges have improved at an above average rate, with half of the colleges surveyed saying that they had noticed improvements across all racial groups'. Also there may be indications that learners are equally satisfied with their overall experience and with the quality of teaching they receive there.

99. In terms of practical aspects of provision, an important finding of the EdComs / DfES report (2007) is that a higher proportion of adults than younger people leave FE without completing their studies. While this may be to do with adults' other commitments (work, family, etc.) it is indicative of a need for greater learner support in FE through access to learning resources at weekends and evenings, as well as particular needs of disabled students and those with learning difficulties. Location and the base of colleges is another important aspect of accessibility. The Scottish Executive (2006) notes that the ration of provision (90% of the population live within 30 minutes of a college) makes access easier.

100. In terms of the social aspects of provision, these involve building trust with potential students in the most disadvantaged areas. Tuckett (2005) states: 'The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Skills Policy Action Team audit highlighted there is little or no post-school participation in the poorest communities. [It] suggested it would take twenty years of patient investment to transform participation'. Farrelly (2005) has looks at how Armagh College has developed trusting relationships with a large number of groups within the community, including the local Orange order, ex-prisoners and victims groups.

[3] Whilst encouraging the participation of these groups is one part of supporting social cohesion, it is important to point out that the factors that inhibit social cohesion may be found mostly amongst more privileged social groups (for example, strategies that privileged groups use to maintain their educational and economic position).

101. A number of authors discuss specific strategies used by FE colleges to support social inclusion and participation. Doyle and Cumberland (2003) emphasise progression which requires reassessment of structures and processes of FE, matching the learning environment to learning needs. This, they suggest, means that that successful social inclusion requires colleges to provide support before, during, and after the student leaves the institution. This requires support mechanisms that recognise individual and group needs, including:

- effective communication on the types of provision available;
- family involvement;
- non-standard entry (which is already an FE strength);
- bridging courses;
- re-engagement provision especially for those 'forced' back into education (e.g. New Deal-type provision);
- flexible learning opportunities;
- study skills programming;
- pastoral care and specialist tutors (e.g. disability);
- disability awareness training;
- additional funding for low-income families;
- childcare support; and
- post provision advice / support.

102. Doyle and Cumberford (2003) cite one model with extensive support mechanisms (Reid Kerr College in Scotland) which include examples such as a Guidance Guru, a one-stop shop facility using IT to widen access. They also give examples of partnerships to tackle barriers to inclusion such as providing taster training programmes.

103. Smith and Armstrong (2005) explore how to promote an 'inclusive learning' environment that caters for all learners and their individual needs, within the post-compulsory learning and skills sector. They perceive 'inclusive learning' in terms of 'a learning place' within the dimensions of diversity, access, and equality. The report contains a number of examples of good practice rather than empirical evidence on issues such as access, equality of outcomes for ethnic minority groups (community based access) and women, participation and inclusion. They consider the strategic direction, community involvement and practicalities of inclusive learning.

104. EdComs / DfES (2007) notes that flexible pathways into FE colleges is linked to increased participation where 14-16 provision connects to vocational or work-based qualifications at school or college (e.g. through the Increased Flexibility Programme / Young Apprentices). The report notes the importance of FE college visits and external visitors to schools as a way to improve awareness of FE provision to those most likely to become excluded (and eventually fall into the NEET category). The report suggests that such provision needs to be sophistically aligned with the timing of young people's career choices to avoid 'drifting' from progressional paths.

105. There are a number of discussions in the literature about ways to help facilitate participation of specific groups. For example Hansson et al (2002) found that some students prefer designated venues for ESOL provision which some colleges provide. They also found indications of a preference for learning within the community (e.g. at a Chinese community centre) and that some students find the FE environment threatening.

106. In the case of women students / adult learners, as has been noted above Gundara (2006) argues that some may have to overcome domestically enacted cultural expectations about their role, some of which may also be perpetuated in the college environment. This may require colleges to be more proactive in realising these as issues for treatment in the college environment. The article concludes on the need for adult and continuing education to play a greater role in pursuing / securing equality of access and outcomes. Gundara highlights the need for academic institutions to formally and informally bridge the issue of 'cultural distance' This distance is increased by the issue of social class as much as ethnicity, but educational institutional practices, etc. may actually contribute to increasing that distance What is needed he argues, are arrangements and policies to ensure diversity of the workforce. The Race Relations Act (as Amended) 2000 has not yet proved successful. Such diversity can contribute to open door policies and ethos of colleges for those who come from other places and who lack awareness of institutional norms and structures, as well as more inclusive learning techniques.

107. Specific initiatives to support participation of marginalized groups discussed in the literature include Wilson's (2003) description of how an IT-resource can be deployed into a community setting by a FE college to attract new learners and interaction skills. The WebActive Forth Valley project is a community-based project for minority ethnic learners, supported by BBC Factual and Learning, Falkirk College and Scottish Enterprise. It focuses on participants and their language learning needs. The WebActive approach acknowledges the linguistic and life experiences of ethnic minorities and encourages beginning writers to develop texts and images which are highly relevant to their lives.

108. As a prime example of an accessible FE college, Penwarden (2002) gives an informative overview of an FE provision at Truro College and how it engages with its communities based on a report undertaken by Ofsted, the Adult Learning Inspectorate and the LSC involving observation of lectures, interviews with staff, students, and analysis of data on achievement. The college was given an outstanding award (the highest grade) which the writer claims is based on a number of things. The building infrastructure is well facilitated with full disabled access. It has a gym but is also located close to other sports sites which students are encouraged to use. The sports curriculum is developed and use is made of access to the sea and aqua sports. The curriculum is balanced (academic and vocational courses) with provision for special needs students. The needs of local employers are considered in respect of all provision although students are encouraged to participate in other studies, e.g. practical learning (driving skills), sign language. The college offers the International Baccalaureate which is linked to wider travel which many students have taken up, as well as some HE options. Other courses include recreational classes, etc. which fit to public need in terms of timing, etc. and promoted through open learning centres, social and arts-oriented venues. One issue which is mentioned as a last point but which might be significant is the size of the college. Being relatively small, Truro College claims to provide a friendly atmosphere which may be a different challenge in larger colleges.

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