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*What the parties say... (May 2010)*

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## Introduction

1. This paper draws together the main similarities and differences between the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat proposals on economic renewal, public service reform and education. Building on Council members' March discussion on the party policy pledges, it highlights some of the implications of the manifesto commitments for quality and improvement in the learning and skills sector, for sector leaders and LSIS.

## Overview

2. Savings are top of the agenda. Whatever the election result, an emergency budget will introduce further cuts to public spending in 2010-11, though the speed and depth of these may vary. Preparations for the autumn spending review will signal the scale and pace of cuts over the next 3 to 5 years.
3. Securing fairness, re-building the economy, reforming public services and increasing civic engagement in politics are common themes across the manifestos. All parties see the learning and skills sector playing a key role in helping to provide rapid response training for the unemployed while continuing to develop the skills needed for the future. There is a growing emphasis on high level skills and economically and environmentally critical sectors and an increasingly fee-orientated funding system.
4. Overall, however, the educational emphasis in the manifestos is on schools and school reforms. Labour and the Liberal Democrats pledge to maintain or increase school spending; the three main parties support the introduction of a 'pupil premium'; while the Conservatives alone advocate a '*free schools*' policy.

## Economic renewal

### Jobs

5. Plans for new jobs feature prominently in all three manifestos.
6. Labour expects to create one million skilled jobs by 2015 in '*our growing economic areas*'. Investment is planned in low carbon, digital and creative industries, life sciences

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– and professional services in business, healthcare and education. There is also the promise of universal broadband access for all.

7. The Conservatives would encourage private investment in green industries with the aim of creating new jobs and businesses, and would target investment to put in place the broadband infrastructure to enable Britain to become a European hub for hi-tech, digital and creative industries, with the goal of generating 600,000 additional jobs and adding £18 billion to the economy.
8. The Liberal Democrats would start their term of government with a '*one-year economic stimulus and job creation package*' using £3.1 billion of public spending to create 100,000 jobs.

## **Innovation and Enterprise**

- .9. All three parties stress the need for a new economic model for sustainable growth that places less emphasis on the banking and financial services sector, and more on creating a new breed of entrepreneurs.
10. Sir James Dyson has advised the Conservatives, who would encourage the establishment of joint university-business research and development institutes; initiate a multi-year Science and research budget to provide a stable investment climate for research Councils; create a better focus on Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects in schools; and establish a new prize for engineering.
11. The Liberal Democrats would take steps to secure the future of the science and engineering workforce and break the '*vicious cycle*' linking fewer university science, engineering and maths applicants to fewer teachers with specialist qualifications.
12. Labour proposes investment for Technology and Innovation Centres to turn '*research outputs into innovation*'. Support for university research is pledged through a new University Enterprise Capital Fund.

## **Infrastructure for Economic Development**

13. Labour is committed to maintaining Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to promote economic growth, but the RDAs' future would be less certain under both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

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14. Local government is given a central role in the Conservative's plans for economic recovery, with local councils and businesses being given the power to form their own business-led local enterprise partnerships instead of Regional Development Agencies. Where local councils and businesses want to maintain regionally-based enterprise partnerships, they would be able to do so. Under Conservative plans to simplify learning and skills funding structures, the new Further Education Funding Council would require providers to draw up local strategic plans to meet employers' needs.
15. The Liberal Democrats would maintain RDAs – with a role refocused solely on economic development – where there was local support for them, but where there is not support, they would be scrapped and their functions taken over by local authorities.

## **Public Spending**

16. Labour's manifesto refers repeatedly to *'tough choices'* on public spending: for the £15 billion efficiency savings in 2010-11; for cuts to government overheads; and for the £11 billion of further operational efficiencies and other cross-cutting savings to be introduced to streamline government by 2012-13. Restrictions on uplifts to public sector pay and *'tough choices'* on public sector pensions lie ahead whichever party is elected, with an emphasis on protecting front-line services.
17. The Conservatives want to cut £6 billion of *'wasteful departmental spending'* in 2010-11. In addition, they would stop paying tax credits to better-off families with incomes over £50,000; and cut government contributions to Child trust funds for all but the poorest third of families, and families with disabled children.
18. The Liberal Democrats have identified £15 billion of savings in public spending per year, against which they have set aside £5 billion of additional spending commitments (£2.5 billion of which is directed at further support towards education, for their 'pupil premium').

## **Welfare**

19. Both the Conservatives and Labour manifestos prioritise support for unemployed young people and articulate a firm line on the long term unemployed being required to take up job placement offers, or having their benefits cut.

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20. The Conservatives plan to create a single Work Programme for everyone who is unemployed, including the 2.6 million people claiming Incapacity Benefit<sup>1</sup>. This programme would be delivered through private and voluntary sector providers, which will be rewarded on a payment by results basis for getting people into sustainable work.
21. The Conservatives would also develop a range of 'service academies'<sup>2</sup> to offer pre-employment training for unemployed people – the first Service academy, for hospitality and leisure, will provide up to 50,000 training places and work placements, in part with a view to preparing people for work linked to the 2012 Olympics.
22. The Liberal Democrats have less to say generally on welfare, though they make 3 related pledges: to set the minimum wage at the same level for all workers over 16 (except for those on apprenticeships); to strengthen the Youth Service by making it a statutory service for local authorities to provide in partnership with young people and the voluntary sector; and to improve access to counselling for people with mental health problems.

## **Flexible Working**

23. All three parties include proposals for improving flexible working.
24. For the Conservatives, the primary driver is to support families: they will initially extend the right to request flexible working to every parent with a child under the age of eighteen, and will extend the right to request flexible working to all those in the public sector, though state that this may need to be done in stages.
25. Liberal Democrats would extend flexible working to all employees to make it easier for grandparents, for example, to take a caring role.

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<sup>1</sup> They would reassess all current claimants of Incapacity Benefit and those found fit for work would be transferred onto the Jobseeker's Allowance. Recipients of Incapacity Benefit who are genuinely disabled will continue to receive the financial support to which they are entitled.

<sup>2</sup> Service Academy approach will offer the longer-term unemployed a two week course, followed by a four-week work placement. The course will earn participants a certificate which '*companies across the sector will recognise as an industry standard for work readiness*'. The top firms involved will aim to offer 20% of participants full-time jobs themselves, but the aim is that other certificated participants will have a head start when looking for jobs right across the sector. The decision to start with the service industries has been based on evidence that, while Britain is now predominantly a service economy, it is no better than average when it comes to service culture and attitudes. The Conservatives see it as an opportunity to spread the soft skills and attitudes necessary for world class service, in time for the Olympics.

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26. Labour offer a different emphasis, based on a key finding from the recent National Equalities Panel report which showed that many people still struggle to find quality part-time jobs that use their skills effectively. They promise to promote the creation of more highly skilled, quality jobs for parents who want to work more flexibly.
27. All three parties are keen to open up opportunities for older people to work for longer. Labour plans to proceed to end the default retirement age at 65; the Conservatives would establish a review to bring forward the date at which the state pension age starts to rise to 66 (although it will not be sooner than 2016 for men and 2020 for women); and the Liberal Democrats manifesto states that they would scrap compulsory retirement ages to enable *'those who wish to continue in work to do so'*.

## Public Service Reform

### Principles of reform

28. Running through the manifestos of the three main parties are clear commitments to developing public services that are more personal to people's needs; with guarantees of standards; the best providers taking over where others don't make the grade; greater trust and responsibility invested in the public sector workforce; new ways of organising public services, including through mutuals and (employee-owned) co-operatives; and the need to secure greater productivity and value for money from public services.

### Use of Data

29. Underpinning these reform proposals is a commitment to using data transparently to improve services and empower citizens to play an active part in securing more personal services, including making use of new technologies.
30. The Conservatives in particular refer to the lessons from behavioural economics to guide their approach to public service reform. In addition to giving people more information about and power over how public services are run, they promise more *'people power'*. This is based on a belief that *'the more responsibility you give people, the more responsibly they behave.'* Instead of using rules and regulations, they pledge

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to *'go with the grain of human nature, creating new incentives and market signals which reward people for doing the right thing'*<sup>3</sup>.

## Principles in action

31. The Labour and Conservative manifestos, in particular, focus on describing how their reforms would apply particularly to health and policing. But it is likely that the principles they espouse will come to apply across the public services more generally, including for education.
32. Take for example the following five pledges from the Conservative manifesto for the health service. By replacing 'doctors and nurses' with 'lecturers and tutors', 'patients' with 'learners', 'care' with 'education' and 'the NHS' with 'colleges', it is possible to glimpse possible future opportunities and challenges for the publicly supported learning and skills sector:
  - [lecturers and tutors] being able to use their professional judgement about what is right for [learners], instead of being forced to follow bureaucratic processes;
  - [college] staff being accountable to [learners] for their performance, removing the need for *'layers of bureaucracy'* to oversee [colleges and providers];
  - putting [learners] in charge of making decisions about their [education], including control of their [education] records;
  - giving [learners] the opportunity to rate [colleges] and [lecturers] according to the quality of [education] they receive;
  - publishing information online about the results that [education] providers are achieving.
33. Or try this from the Labour manifesto: 'Labour plans to expand [learner] choice, empowering [learners] with information, and giving individuals the right to determine the time and place of [education]. Some of these principles are already applied to learning and skills within Labour's manifesto: these are discussed later in this paper.'

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on how behaviour economics is informing thinking about public services, see the Cabinet Office's recent report [MindSpace – Influencing behaviour through public policy](#)

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34. And to illustrate the role of technology will play in future, from the Liberal Democrats: 'give every [learner] the right to register with the [college] they want.... and the right to access their [tutor] by email'.

## **Devolving Power**

35. All three parties place strong emphasis on local devolution, flexibility and responsiveness (though whether the realities of tight public spending will cause a retrenchment to central control remains to be seen).
36. Labour is committed to pursuing the agenda of 'Total Place' with greater local accountability, public services scrutinised by democratically elected local councils, clear rights of redress for citizens, and a drive towards efficiency and effectiveness in expenditure through pooled budgets, greater freedoms and flexibilities, greater emphasis on early interventions and less ring-fenced budgets and central targets.
37. The Conservatives propose giving democratically accountable local government '*much greater power to improve their citizens' lives*' including by: giving local councils a '*general power of competence*', so that they have explicit authority to do what is necessary to improve their communities. They pledge to legislate to give people greater information on, and control over, what is being spent by each government agency in their area. And they would abolish the Government Office for London as part of their plan to devolve more power downwards to the London boroughs and the mayor of London.
38. Specifically on health, the Conservatives plan to turn the Department of Health into a Department for Public Health so that the '*promotion of good health and prevention of illness get the attention they need*'. They would separate public health funding to local communities, making them accountable for – and paid according to – how successful they were in improving their residents' health.
39. The Liberal Democrats would give people a say on the NHS in their area through Local Health Boards and on policing, through the direct election of police authorities. Local

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authorities would be responsible for funding education and training up to age 18<sup>4</sup>. They would scrap the Government Offices for all the regions and the regional ministers.

## **Citizen Engagement/Responsibility**

40. All three parties emphasise the importance of a new contract between the individual and the state, within a strong notion of society.
41. Labour wants to promote greater citizen and civic engagement as a route to securing both democratic and public sector reform, with a particular emphasis on encouraging young people to get involved. Their manifesto states that they are committed to the case for reducing the voting age to 16, but believe that prior to this happening, further improvements are needed to citizenship education in schools so that young people are better prepared for their democratic responsibilities.
42. The Conservatives emphasise the importance of '*social responsibility*'. They plan to use the latest insights from behavioural economics to encourage people to make volunteering and community participation something they do on a regular basis, celebrated annually through a 'Big Society Day', and they propose to develop a measure of well-being '*that encapsulates the social value of state action*'. They would introduce National Citizen Service, initially for 16 year olds '*to give them a chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, mix with people from different backgrounds, and start getting involved in their communities*'.
43. The Liberal Democrats see culture, sport and heritage as a '*central part of civic and community life*'. They are committed to giving the right to vote from age 16.

## **Learning and Skills**

44. The parties' commitments for the economy and public services provide context and underpinning themes for their proposals for education. This section outlines the main similarities and differences between their approaches to post-14 learning, skills and higher education.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the structural reforms proposed to the learning and skills sector see paragraphs 32-34 below.

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## **14–19 Learning Entitlements**

45. Labour is committed to raising the participation age from 16 to 18 by 2015, and to maintaining Educational Maintenance Allowances for 16–18 year olds.
46. The Lib Dems say they would scrap this plan, introducing instead an entitlement for 2 more years of education to be taken at any time, and would end the system of EMA bonus payments. They would also introduce a new pupil right to move from school to college or work-related learning at age 14 and are committed to close the funding gap between pupils in school sixth forms and Further Education Colleges, as resources allow.
47. The Conservatives do not mention the participation age explicitly but are committed to providing additional college places over two years so unemployed young people can improve their skills and are also in favour of providing opportunities for young people to attend full-time further education from the age of 14. They also propose a pupil premium for five to 19-year-olds attending state schools<sup>5</sup>.

## **Provision for 16–24 year olds**

48. All three parties prioritise support for young people affected by the recession. In different ways, their proposals reflect the trend for young people to take longer to settle into adult careers by offering additional entitlements to initial learning and support up to age 24<sup>6</sup>.
49. Labour would maintain the Young Person's Guarantee (which is already in place) of a job, training or work experience for all 18-24 year olds after 6 months claiming Jobseekers Allowance<sup>7</sup>.
50. The Conservatives have identified a £100 million NEETs fund aimed at young people. They would also create a single Work Programme for everyone who is unemployed, including the 2.6 million people claiming Incapacity Benefit. This would offer people

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<sup>5</sup> The pupil premium is also a key plank of the Liberal Democrat's schools policy. It would be available to students studying at school or college up to the age of 19.

<sup>6</sup> These entitlements have been in place for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities for some time but are now being extended to cover other groups.

<sup>7</sup> Benefits would be cut at ten months if they refuse a place; and anyone unemployed for more than two years guaranteed work, but no option of a life on benefits.

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targeted, personalised help sooner – straight away for those with serious barriers to work and at six months for those aged under 25.

51. The Liberal Democrats propose a work placement scheme with up to 800,000 places to enable young people to gain skills, qualifications and work experience even if they can't find a job. Young people would be paid £55 a week for up to three months. The Liberal Democrats would also increase the Adult Learning Grant from £30 to £45 a week, but just for 18–24 year olds in further education.

## **Apprenticeships**

52. All three parties are committed to increasing apprenticeship opportunities.
53. For the Conservatives, apprenticeships form part of a new approach to skills training. They plan to scrap the Train to Gain programme and divert funding for 200,000 apprenticeship places over 2 years, 100,000 additional training places at colleges and 100,000 work pairing arrangements<sup>8</sup>. £775 million is pledged in support of this approach, to be delivered through new Lifelong Learning Accounts. In addition, a £2,000 bonus would be paid for every apprentice hired by an SME.
54. Labour would fund an additional 20,000 young apprenticeships and double the advanced apprenticeships programme with an additional 35,000 places as part of the overall ambition that three-quarters of young people will enter university or complete an advanced apprenticeship by age 30.
55. The Liberal Democrats plan to give more young people access to vocational training in the workplace and improve their skills, and pledge to fully meet the up-front costs of adult apprenticeships.

## **A new technician class**

56. Both Labour and Conservatives have plans to support the creation of a new 'technician' class of young skilled professionals qualified to Level 3.

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<sup>8</sup> Work pairings will be aimed at young unemployed people to provide them with meaningful work experience and mentoring from sole traders

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57. Labour has announced plans to establish University Technical Colleges and new Studio Schools offering practical learning and paid work.
58. The Conservatives would establish 12 new technical academies in each of the biggest cities in England, with the long-term ambition to have one in every area of the country. They view Diplomas as an alternative to the academic route of GCSEs and A Levels and therefore would withdraw the science, language and humanities Diplomas, whilst establishing a clearer pathway from vocational routes into further and higher education.

## **Social mobility**

59. Social mobility has been a key theme in the run up to the election. The phrase appears only twice in the Conservative's manifesto but they pledge to improve the way that universities are funded so that students get a fair deal and, disadvantaged young people don't miss out. Education is seen as a key plank of the Conservative's plans for reducing poverty and inequality. Labour is committed to opening up opportunities for people from low income groups to professions like law and media by setting up a 'Golden Hello' scholarship scheme to support progression into higher education and expanding paid internships for students.

## **Careers Advice**

60. In this area the policies of the Labour and Conservative parties show clear differences.
61. Labour is committed to an all-age careers advice strategy, delivered through different structures for young people and adults. For adults, the goal is an integrated employment and careers service.
62. The Conservatives pledge an additional £100 million to create a new all-age careers advice service, plus £180 million to fund a careers adviser in every secondary school and college in the country. Whatever the model, all three parties emphasise the need for improved information on learning and job opportunities to underpin plans for moving (to different degrees) towards more empowering learning account systems.
63. The Liberal democrats see careers advice as part of the new role for local government. Local authorities would be responsible for commissioning independent careers advice

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for young people. But it is only referred to under headings related to under 19s, distinguishing it from the two other parties' all-age proposals.

## **Adult Learning**

64. Adult responsive and non-priority provision took the biggest cut in the unit of resource in the 2010/11 budget settlement, with an increasing emphasis on providers generating fee income from adults who can afford to pay. The Conservatives would establish a £100 million community learning fund to help people restart their careers. The Liberal Democrats say they would re-direct resources from the employer-led Train to Gain programme into Adult Education, Adult FE and Adult Apprenticeships and cover the full fee costs for first level 3 qualifications for all adults (including those over 25). All three parties are committed to developing some form of learning account, though they differ in the levels of prescription the accounts would carry.

## **Employer training and strategic growth sectors**

65. There are clear differences between Labour and Conservative approaches in this area. Labour is committed to targeting investment (through a £750 million Strategic Investment Fund) to stimulate growth, jobs and skills in key strategic sectors – low carbon, digital and creative industries, life sciences – and professional services in business education and healthcare. The Conservatives have pledged to re-direct Train to Gain funds and invest £775 million (see paragraph 26 above) in Lifelong Learning Accounts which will follow the choices of students. The Liberal Democrats would also redirect resources away from Train to Gain to support learners' choices. In particular, they plan to save £325 million a year by ending support for large companies.

## **Machinery of Government**

66. The three parties each have a different model for funding the sector in England.
67. The ink is still drying on Labour's new arrangements for a Young Person's Learning Agency (YPLA) and local authority-led commissioning of pre-19 learning, and a Skills Funding Agency for post-19 provision.
68. The Conservatives have repeatedly said they would move quickly to replace these arrangements with a single agency for pre and post-19 learning - the Further Education

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Funding Council (FEFC). The Conservative's new funding council would be responsible for a streamlined funding model in which government funding follows the learner via learning accounts, and new providers would be encouraged to enter the sector. The Conservatives have also pledged to free further education colleges from '*unnecessary bureaucracy*' and to scrap any unnecessary quangos.

69. The Liberal Democrats would replace the Skills Funding Agency and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) with a single Council for Adult Skills and Higher Education (CASHE), while routing 16–19 funding for education and training, including apprenticeships via local authorities.

## Measurement and Regulation

70. Labour announced in their Skills for Growth strategy last autumn that they would develop for 2010 and beyond a national scorecard to record progress against such measures as productivity, wage returns and qualification levels. Their manifesto states that 'students will be given clearer information on the quality of courses on offer, with a 'traffic-light'<sup>9</sup> grading system for all courses and colleges.
71. The Conservatives have pledged to simplify the planning and funding system around one funding body, one improvement body, and one audit regime.
72. For the Liberal Democrats the priority is to establish a '*fully independent*' Education Standards Authority to oversee exams, inspection and the curriculum, replacing the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA), Ofqual and Ofsted.

## Higher Education

73. The Browne review of higher education funding will report after the election with potentially significant implications for the balance of public and private funding invested in higher education in future.
74. Only the Liberal Democrats are committed to scrapping tuition fees for first Higher Education degree qualifications for full and part-time students, over an extended 6 year period.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that currently the terminology avoids use of 'traffic lights'

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75. The Conservatives have said they will consider the Browne review carefully, but in advance of it have already committed to providing 10,000 additional places for 2010/11 paid for by a scheme *‘to give graduates a discount for repaying loans ahead of schedule [which] will give thousands more young people the opportunity to go to university’*. They are also committed to providing people with *‘much better information’* about the true costs and benefits of going to university and help people to choose the course and institution which are right for them<sup>10</sup>.
76. Labour too is committed to an additional 20,000 places as part of their ambition to further extend and widen participation in higher education. Priority would be given to Foundation Degrees and part-time study, and to science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees, as well as applied study in key economic growth sectors. A Labour Government would pursue the recommendation in the Milburn report for more *‘higher education in further education’*.
77. The Liberal Democrats would fund 10,000 more university places and 50,000 more college-based Foundation Degree places this year. They propose a credit-based framework for learning across the further and higher education sectors, using a modular system with funding following the student.

## **Sports, Art, Culture and Citizenship**

78. With the Olympics just over two years away, all three parties state their commitment to ensuring a successful games and a legacy for Britain.
79. The Liberal Democrats would maintain free entry to national museums and galleries, and open the Government Art Collection for greater public use.
80. The Conservatives would use part of the community sports budget of the National Lottery to deliver an Olympic legacy, including the promotion of competitive sports through a national Olympic-style school competition.
81. Labour makes the clearest link between culture, citizenship and curriculum, reaffirming its belief that every child and young person should be entitled to five hours of art, music

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<sup>10</sup> The website ‘Bestcourse4me’ is already in place. Visit it at <http://www.bestcourse4me.com/>

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and culture a week and proposing to strengthen citizenship education as a precursor to reducing the voting age to 16.

## Implications for the Sector

82. While there is a broad consensus between the main parties about the role of the learning and skills sector in helping to provide rapid response training for the unemployed while continuing to develop the skills needed for the future, there are significant points of divergence in their proposals to achieve this. Take, for example, the three different models for funding the sector. With a hung parliament becoming a realistic prospect, it is not yet clear, however, whether learning and skills will become an area for collaboration or deal-making.
83. That said, the economic, demographic and social challenges we face, together with the broad direction of public service reform point to a common set of implications and issues for providers whatever the election outcome.

### **Priority customers and curriculum**

84. With all parties prioritising young people, NEETs, apprenticeships, unemployed adults, vocational and technical provision, higher level technical skills and skills for emerging and developing sectors including STEM subjects, sector leaders may want to consider:
- reviewing their key markets and the fit between their programmes and those of other local providers; and
  - reviewing their curriculum development and design capacity to provide responsive opportunities, especially for workless people.

### **Operational efficiency**

85. With all parties prioritising public service reform, greater value for money, and improved operational efficiency, there are key issues for the sector to consider in terms of:
- reviewing mission in light of business viability;
  - considering structural/organisational options – merger, strategic alliances, etc to establish economic viability;

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- determining strategic priorities;
- developing HR strategies, including review of organisational culture, risk appetite and capacity for innovation;
- maintaining stability and strategic purpose; and
- reviewing strategic partnerships and relationships within the locality and sub-regions.

## **Customer empowerment and public accountability**

86. This is a key theme for all three main parties. It points to the need for sector leaders to:

- develop customer and learner engagement strategies and culture;
- consider the CPD implications of changing learner/teacher relationships;
- consider approaches to establishing accountability, raising accountability and legitimacy with local community/ies;
- review quality systems to engage customers in quality assurance systems; and
- determine organisational strategy to course labelling and opening data to the public.

## **Devolution and localism**

87. The emphasis on local devolution within all three manifestos has implications for how colleges and providers:

- pursue their strategic partnerships and relationships especially with local authorities;
- secure curriculum development and design capacity; and
- develop forms of local accountability.

## **Longer term implications and opportunities**

88. In addition, there are a number of longer term issues that may or may not gain salience depending on the priorities of the new government:

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## **Fees for adult learning**

89. The increasing emphasis on prioritising support for young people, up to 25 or 30, will have implications for providers with substantial programmes for older workers and adults. With reduced public funding available for older learners (over 30), will individuals and/or employers be willing to pay more for their learning? What balance should providers strike between prioritising work with young people, for whom some public funding will be available; and promoting opportunities for adult learners and employers who can afford to and are prepared to pay for learning?

## **Equality and social mobility**

90. Learning and skills clearly play a vital role in enabling social mobility. But this is a complex area. Recent research shows that it is general inequality that causes educational inequality, not the other way round: a sobering result for educationalists.<sup>11</sup> The challenge will be to demonstrate the critical contribution that learning can make to reducing inequality and improving social mobility without placing the entire responsibility at the door of the further education sector: one to watch if the Conservative's proposals for 'payment by results' are introduced. Gathering professional evidence of the impact of learning on social mobility across the sector would help to make an intelligent case for the contribution of learning to wider social and economic priorities.

## **Higher Education**

91. The clear emphasis on improving social mobility through widening access to higher education offers opportunities to colleges and other providers to support non-traditional progression pathways. Together with the focus on Foundation Degrees, part-time programmes, and the priority being given to the need for a '*new technological class*' and higher level skills in science, engineering and maths, colleges are well placed to develop a new range of higher education opportunities. There are opportunities to influence the future arrangement for funding higher education through both the Browne

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<sup>11</sup> Schuller T. Watson D., *Learning through life: Inquiry into the future for lifelong learning*, (2009), Leicester: NIACE, p. 40 and Wilkinson R. Pickett K., *The Spirit level: why equality is better for everyone*, (2010), London: Penguin

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Review, and the HEFCE review of the future methodology for funding teaching in higher education<sup>12</sup>.

## **Opening up informal learning opportunities**

92. Despite the cuts in adult learning budgets, there is likely to be a renewed emphasis on the importance of engagement in sport, culture, community activity and citizenship education. Securing continuing opportunities for informal learning in future is likely to involve a range of different approaches: opening up colleges and other providers' facilities to community groups; working in partnership with voluntary organisations and social enterprises; maximising the use of online learning resources for self-study; and developing new models of support that blend the role of the professional tutor with that of learning champions – both in the community and the workplace. These approaches will help colleges and providers to demonstrate their contribution to promoting economic and social wellbeing in their localities, but will inevitably require strategic choices about priorities, partners and resourcing models.

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<sup>12</sup> For more information, see <http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/call-for-proposals/> and [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10\\_10/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_10/)

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