

The importance of being local

Seminar two – 10 November 2009



Leadership within a local public service coalition

Seminar report

1. This report covers the second seminar in a three-part series on the role of FE and skills providers in local economies and societies. This series attempts to place FE in a new political and administrative context, a world where all parties are devoted to a greater degree of localism and partnership working. It will also explore the role of FE in providing more efficient public services at the local and sub-regional level, an increasingly critical consideration given the state of the public finances.

The story so far – key points from the previous seminar

2. The first seminar¹ was held on October 6th. We heard from senior officials at HM Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) about the central government's view of the new challenges for public services in general and for the learning and skills sector in particular. Major themes at this seminar were about the balance between national determination and local discretion, and the degree of headroom that is needed for providers to make the best contribution, while meeting government priorities.
3. This is part of a national debate about the future settlement between local and national in shaping public services, an issue discussed at previous LSIS seminars² when it was argued that a shift is needed in the balance between vertical accountability to Whitehall and horizontal accountability to the locality.
4. It was clear that although there may be a growing presumption that greater local discretion is needed, the substantive case does need to be proven. So HMT described the need to release creativity and encourage efficiency at the front-line and challenged us to demonstrate the value of doing things in the locality in partnership, showing how this can enable needs to be met better. The Total Place pilots³ were also described as a critical test-bed for the presumption that greater localism can improve services and for identifying barriers. BIS too challenged us to make the case for greater local discretion to shift the default which is broadly that priorities and entitlements should be determined nationally with local discretion applied to *how* services are delivered.

¹ The full report can be found here

<http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Policy/Policyseminar6October2009finalreport.sflb>

² See the report of the series entitled *The learning and skills sector and the economic recession – stepping up to the mark* here http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Policy/LSIS205_LSSandEconomicCrisis.sflb.ashx

³ A Brief Guide to these pilots, led by HMT and Communities and Local Government, is available here http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Policy/Briefguidetototalplace_1.sflb.ashx

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5. We talked about how to meet local demand in a period of financial restraint by working more effectively with partners to address common goals; we discussed the amount of flexibility needed to cohere services around the holistic needs of individuals to really make a difference; and how to ensure those with greatest needs are supported. Running through the discussion were questions about what level of autonomy providers have and when permission is needed; the extent to which systems inhibit actions or whether the solutions are actually in the hands of providers.
6. We discussed the importance of leadership and partnership and the need to shape shared vision and values and common cause around which key local actors can coalesce. There was some concern that learning and skills providers are not always invited to the strategic table but given the significance of the contribution they make to community development and regeneration, sector leaders have a responsibility to take that gift to the table. Moreover, our sector can be the catalyst for developing a coalition of ambition for a community.
7. Concerns however about the future emerged and the dangers of institutional protectionism when the going is really tough and when financial survival may be an issue. Will partnerships be able to manage trade-offs and maintain the range and responsiveness of provision needed?

Aims of this second seminar

8. The second seminar held on November 10th 2009 was able to pick up and develop key themes around leadership. The aims were to:
 - consider how the views of citizens, customers and professionals can shape public services within a locality;
 - hear latest thinking on systems thinking and its implications for leadership and governance in the public sector; and
 - consider the implications for the learning and skills system and for leadership skills, capabilities and development.
9. With **Lord Victor Adebowale** we explored in particular how professionals and citizens working together can influence policy development and shape commissioning and delivery(see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**); with **Emeritus Professor John Benington** we explored thinking about whole systems leadership and action(see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**); and **Nick Brown OBE** provided insight to how a college principal can step into a leadership role in the locality (see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).
10. This report presents:
 - The key themes of discussion, and;
 - A summary of the keynote presentations.

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Key themes of discussion

Transformation takes time and leadership

11. Transformation of place is a long-term project, yet short-termism is pervasive in the public sector – new initiatives and projects come and go without making much impact; funding for new initiatives often last only one or two years; and leaders, politicians and managers often stay in post only one or two years, inaugurating new projects without seeing them through and failing to establish deep relationships. This can result in rapid changes in emphasis and shifting of priorities for example in order to follow new funding streams or respond to the latest policy idea of the new flavour of the day – trying to respond to them can be *'enormously depressing'*.
12. We heard examples of where significant change has been achieved when leaders have stayed in the same organisation for many years, building relationships and a pervasive and powerful culture and trust with communities and with partners, and often across generations of young people. One person noted that leaders often do their best strategic thinking and leadership during the period between their sixth and eighth years in post. However another suggested that working with the same people for years and years could equally be stifling.
13. The overall pattern in the learning and skills sector is not clear, although there were several examples of very long-serving college principals among seminar participants. Such leaders can have a sense of *belonging-ness* to their communities and they share in its reputation. There are differing experiences across the public sector – the life span of a chief executive in the Health Service was on average 2 years. Should we try to create incentives for people to stay in post longer? Does the system promote high turnover?

The purpose and limits of partnerships

14. Inter-organisational partnership has become the preferred model for delivery it seems, and there are a myriad of partnerships at the local, sub-regional and regional levels, creating confusing layers of accountability. As resources dwindle, tensions between local and national priorities and accountabilities are likely to grow and place greater strain on local partnerships. No single person could effectively contribute to all of them, and judgements are needed about which ones are worthwhile and should be prioritised. When partnerships fail to accomplish their set goals (or to set goals at all), it breeds cynicism about the whole process.
15. It was suggested that the dynamics of partnership are not well understood. Partnerships are a *'means not an end'*. To function well, they must have a clear purpose and goal. Without this, partnerships often become talking shops – people meet periodically, *'talk strategically for a few hours'* and then disperse, without any action resulting. The twin dilemmas for partnerships are first *'strategic direction and steering'* and second *'multiple accountabilities'*.

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16. However it was also noted that partnership is not dependent upon consensus. Allies for a shared purpose need not always agree – indeed, enforcing a consensus can freeze out needed voices and dissent. Relationships should be *'trusting, but open to questioning and debate'*.

Serving citizens and creating our public

17. Our discussions suggested that the active engagement of the citizen and customer is the real catalyst for changing service delivery for the better. It is a means of stretching our influence and legitimacy into civil society. Victor described how trusting and enabling customers to co-design services makes the greatest impact – and *'they don't care if services are delivered by public, private or third sector bodies'*. Victor talked about needing to have citizens and users inside the system not outside – they should be *'a primary voice'*. Delivery of services in the community often needs to engage combinations of public, private and not-for-profit organisations to get the right capabilities. However, we often find it hard to understand each other.
18. How can our sector raise the profile of citizens' voices as well as learners' voices? This point resonated with the acknowledgment in other seminars that legitimacy with the community derives not just from our direct customers but from the impact that we have on the quality of life in the community as a whole. In this seminar we saw that a strong dimension of localism is the creation of a *public*, as distinct from customers – that is, people who have a sense of ownership and responsibility for their community and place, and who personally invest in services as well as using them. We should think of the people who use public services as citizens, not just as customers. Citizens play an active role, contributing collectively to their community, in a way that customers do not in the world of commerce.
19. How can the voices of young people or students best be incorporated into service design and development. One participant described how a *'facilitated dialogue'* approach could be used to enable small groups from multiple constituencies (young people, old people, business and the police, in this case) to meet and discuss contentious issues – overcoming misconceptions, building mutual understanding and respect.
20. Another locus for citizen influence was around measurement of quality and outcomes – *'these must serve the punter rather than government departments'*. Sometimes approaches to measuring things differently are dismissed because they are not perfect even when they might be more meaningful than existing approaches. So although distance-travelled and quality of life indicators are not perfect, they should not be dismissed.

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Policy influence

21. We observed that professions have enormous capability to develop, and in some cases implement, public policy. The campaign against cholera during the 19th century was entirely conceived and led by the medical profession, without the help of the Victorian-era state. Medicine is a *'crusading service'*. We were challenged to consider whether the learning and skills sector exudes this crusading spirit. Does the sector force its way into the halls of government and shape its destiny sufficiently, as professional experts in learning and skills? It was suggested that the crusading dynamic was not sufficiently visible. We were challenged to decide whether this is a Cinderella sector or a crusading sector. We must show what we offer not wait to be invited – we must *'state the case and find a way of making it happen'*. And the sector must ensure it offers guidance to new political administrations as other public services are doing.

Building trust with communities and partners

22. Our focus on the relationship between colleges and other public services in the locality was not just concerned with partnerships. We were interested in how to position colleges and other providers alongside other players within the community – *'to think about how we stand with others'*. How should we establish the 'right' culture and ethos? Does the term *fellowship* rather than partnership capture the tone needed to work more naturally with other public services?
23. At one point we likened behaviour in effective collaborative partnerships to a jazz band. The band starts with an agreed theme but does not play to a pre-ordained score, but is made up of individuals able to improvise in relation to other players and to the tempo and tone of their signals. Such a relationship needs to be built on trust and understanding – so for example in partnerships we need to be able to trust others to represent our interests.
24. Constancy and generosity in partnerships were also highlighted; and the vital importance of culture – *'if you can get the culture right and create a common sense of mission, the rest will follow.'* Despite all the difficulties we should not forget that small groups with a sound compass can do great things! We also spoke about the need to exercise leadership beyond formal authority in collaborative activities – and there is a repertoire of skills needed to do that successfully.
25. We heard from Kent how through their Gateway, all services were branded together as *'public service'*. Where does this leave the professional knowledge of our sector? Should we subsume our professional expertise within the generic idea of public service? How will our customers and citizens perceive this?

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Networking, collaboration and relationship-building

26. The mechanics of networking and relationship-building greatly interested many of the participants. Many noted that managers and other personnel are often resistant to networking – when leaders take down barriers, managers *'build the walls back up'*.
27. Some argued that this tendency to build silos was a reaction to *'uncertainty'*, a desire to hold onto the more concrete, and more easily understood features of a vertical hierarchy. In some cases, it might also be caused by a need or desire to preserve some institutional heritage or way of working that may itself be of value. It was also noted that not all workers have to feel comfortable working in such open environments – there will still be many areas where a more hierarchical approach is needed, and some people will flourish there.
28. One key role of leaders is to hold a steady vision and direction. A clear sense of professional identity and values helps to maintain that clarity of purpose. We also noted how leaders need to be highly mobile, *'operating on the battlefield and on the balcony'* – both taking a strategic view and engaging in the detail of real delivery.
29. Some participants noted that, although partnership-building is vital for leaders, it wasn't the only, or even the main, requirement of their posts. Leaders can't forget their *'day jobs'* – running their institutions. At the same time, leaders should not delegate networking to lower-level managers, who lack the time to do it effectively.

Overcoming ego

30. A barrier to collaboration working we identified was ego – we need to *'overcome ego'*. For a partnership to work, there must be a level of *'generosity'* and empathy with one's partners, which is not always easy to achieve. To be successful, individuals must be able to imagine themselves in their partner's position – to put themselves in the shoes of a councillor, for example. They must learn from and respect the expertise of other institutions and professions, and cultivate reciprocal relationships.
31. At Warwick University, members of the Leicestershire Leadership in Partnership programme⁴, (middle managers drawn from local government, health service, police service, fire and the voluntary sector) are learning and working together by tackling complex cross-cutting problems collectively, making mistakes collectively, and participating in group exercises some of which were deliberately designed to be fun or silly. This not only breaks the ice between people, but also allows members to develop the kind of trust necessary to share real difficulties and dilemmas as well as success stories

⁴ This refers to a Diploma programme which included 25 participants and enabled a significant dimension of social learning.

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32. It is easier to overcome ego among groups from different services, it was observed – in a small work group within a single institution, where everyone knows and judges one another constantly, it can become harder to let down one's guard or change one's behaviour. Another attendee noted that this problem of overcoming individual ego should be incorporated more fully into leadership development programmes.
33. One delegate noted that innovation comes from practice, not *'from the system, however revamped'*. Thus, learning around real tasks with space for reflection and engaging more people can create more capacity to innovate. While we applauded long-serving leaders, we also noted that we may need to refresh people around the table to get innovation. Innovation is about the *'season's new growth'* – not about new initiatives.

Accountability in a polycentric system

34. We envisaged a system increasingly with multiple nodes of power and influence – local, national, sectoral, etc. Some providers work within a specific industry or economic sector which also has its own culture and sense of identity, and this, too, is a form of place. *'Don't obsess about locality'*.
35. The seminar wondered who held whom accountable in a system which, at least theoretically, had no single *'centre'*, no supreme authority or level. How do you handle quality and accountability in a non-linear system? John noted the example of Wikipedia⁵, where accuracy is maintained by the users and contributors themselves, who collectively edit the encyclopaedia and remove mistakes or outrageous claims. The system operates through *auto-poiesis* – the science of self-regulation. Wikipedia has quality, but not accountability – at least, not to an identifiable stakeholder.
36. Others suggested that accountability itself will be polycentric. A partnership or its individual members may be held accountable by the national government and to its local partners, and to citizens on top of that, all at once. Polycentric systems co-exist with other systems including markets. There would be multiple accountabilities to multiple partners, even if no one body holds the ring at the centre. This can cause conflicts in partnerships – for example attendees identified that the NHS tends to worry more about its responsibilities to its national level of management than to local partners, while the police place more emphasis on the local level and in many areas have established local priorities for which they are accountable.
37. It was also noted that the polycentric networked model still encompasses hierarchies and markets – both of which continue to be useful and important and fit for purpose in particular circumstances.

⁵ The foundation which runs Wikipedia and its sister sites has only seven full-time employees.

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Types of intelligence

38. Discussion about leadership behaviours also led John Benington to reflect on the types of intelligence identified by Aristotle as follows:
- *Technê* - mastery of technical knowledge.
 - *Epistêmê* - conceptual explanations and knowledge to help to make sense of complex problems.
 - *Phronêsis* - practical wisdom and the art of judgment – determining the best possible outcome, and the best way of achieving it.
 - *Sunesis* – the ability to read the currents and go with the flow, and to successfully navigate trends.
 - *Metis* - the agility and cunning of a fox; political intelligence.
39. The deployment of different types of intelligence is part of the art of leadership it was suggested.

Keynote presentations

Lord Victor Adebowale, Chief Executive, Turning Point

Shaping public services in the locality – the role of citizens, customers and professionals

40. Victor started with a brief description of what Turning Point does. It is a not-for-profit organisation which provides personalised counselling and social services in about 250 localities in England and Wales⁶. Its services include substance abuse counselling, employment advice, and specialist care for people with mental health problems or learning disabilities.
41. Victor also noted that in addition to heading Turning Point (and sitting in the House of Lords), he is also a member of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and of the Audit Commission (which oversees local government expenditure).
42. Victor noted that the learning and skills system suffers from a high degree of complexity and a funding system reminiscent of the work of Franz Kafka. Placing FE in the locality will be a major challenge, he said.

⁶ The Turning Point website says 244.

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43. Speaking of the social services system as a whole, Victor stated that the system is currently *'unacceptable'*, and must change. *'If we carry on doing what we've always done, we'll keep getting what we always get,'* and that is far from sufficient – indeed, with public funding diminishing, we're likely to get *'appalling services delivered for very little money'*. He called for a new system of commissioning, which would be underpinned by an understanding of individual and community needs. By defining commissioning in this way, he differentiated it from procurement. He also noted that most of the services Turning Point provides are delivered by a combination of state, private-sector and third-sector funding, and that the distinction between these sources of funding is of little import to the people who use the services (they *'don't give a monkey's'*).
44. Victor's main concern in delivering social services is to focus on the distance between the state and those it serves, between the public service providers and the system's recipients. The Government provides a wide array of education and support in the community, but they are far removed from the day-to-day experience of people from low-income or certain minority backgrounds. They do not understand them and fear them – for example, people from African and Caribbean backgrounds are completely unfamiliar with the mental health system, and avoid it entirely unless *'in extremis'*. On one estate, Turning Point found that three-fifths of the deprived people it spoke to, expressed an interest in working in health or social care, but most had no idea how to obtain training in these professions. They are *'self-excluded'* from education, training, health care and other aid. This is defined as the *'inverse care law'* – if people do not understand what services do, they will avoid them, no matter how much assistance is provided or how many offices are opened. What is the corollary for the learning and skills sector and what are the implications for commissioning and citizen engagement?
45. Turning Point tailors its programmes to help people *'where they are at'* in relation to the system. The charity starts with the specific individual problems to be solved, and builds the service around that. Once that is done, they identify *'repeatable techniques'* which can be applied universally. This is the opposite of the normal Government approach, which is to develop a policy at the centre and then attempt to implement it universally on the ground. Turning Point's approach is focused on the citizen and enlists them in helping to design the delivery of the services they need. Victor called this approach *'connective care'*. One example of this is a centre which provides substance abuse counselling, GP consultations, mental health services and employment advice under a single roof.
46. The implications of the connective care approach are *'profound'* – not least because it produces *'significant and immediate savings'*. However, it is difficult to obtain state support for such an approach. Bureaucrats prefer control to change, and doubt poor people are competent to design the services they use. As a result, it is difficult to get funding for these sorts of bottom-up, integrated schemes. Victor can get *'edge money'* from the margins of local or departmental budgets, surrendered grudgingly by directors, but this money only lasts for perhaps a year, and then the bureaucrats restore the status quo.
47. Victor called for social workers and other staff to be stationed in the communities they serve, in the housing estates. He called on public sector managers to co-ordinate services and not individual workers.

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48. But it is very difficult to change spending patterns and working practices. The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which is used to rate local public services, does include measures of citizen satisfaction, providing an avenue for the people to indirectly influence the services they receive. But bureaucracies are remarkably resilient, and very skilled at perverting measurement and management systems to further their own purposes, or allow them to continue doing what they've always done.
49. Victor finished by saying that you can deliver bespoke services to the poor via a combination of public, private and charitable funding, and save money doing it. The system is the main obstacle. But *'it can be done. You just have to be Machiavellian and brave'*.

Professor John Benington, Institute of Governance and Public Management,
University of Warwick

Whole systems thinking and action – stepping up to the challenge

50. John said his presentation would combine Gramsci's *'pessimism of the intellect'* and *'optimism of the will'*. He noted that, over the past 60 years, there has been a continuous pendulum in public policy, swinging between greater localisation and greater centralisation. The last decade has been a time of centralisation, and the pendulum is on a trajectory back to the local end of the spectrum. But we need to stop oscillating between centralising and decentralising policies. Instead, we need a *'Copernican revolution in our mindsets'* and new paradigms, which see local and national (and indeed supra-national) as inter-connected parts of a *'complex adaptive system'*.
51. What is *'place'*? For most people, the place we define for policy-making purposes is not their chief means of identifying themselves. Most people have some sense of identity with locality and neighbourhood, but also have other important sources of identity (with people who share common interests and values) which cut across locality. We must have a more critical analysis of place as an arena of competing interests and cross-cutting identities
52. John also noted that the Total Place pilots are not the first attempt to search for better co-ordination and more efficiency through local collaboration. In the early 1970s, the Government (then under Ted Heath) ran a Community Development Programme (CDP) very similar to Total Place, the main difference being that it focused on 12 very small narrowly defined neighbourhoods. Total Place focuses on whole local authorities or groups of local authorities, covering hundreds of thousands of people.
53. Between the 1970s and now, there have been many pilots with similar goals. There has been considerable research and evaluation of these programmes but little appears to have been learned from this experience.

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54. One important thing to keep in mind is that *'the problems experienced in localities are not caused in those localities'*. The problems of poverty and unemployment in Coventry's Hillfields did not originate in that district, but rather in the decline of the British automotive industry, which underpinned the economy and social structure of the whole region. Similarly Sheffield's economic and unemployment problems were tied to the wider European restructuring of the iron and steel industry. However, recognising that local problems usually have external causes should not paralyse our ability to act – *'think global, but act local'*.
55. John also argued that local collaboration does not magically solve all problems. Not all public services *should* work in unison. Warwick Business School has been studying a project which puts all of the various components of the criminal justice system under one roof – the courts, the crown prosecution service, the probation services, and so on – in order to provide integrated access, and more joined up services. But some users seem to think that *'joined up justice'* might amount to *'stitched up justice'*! Total Place might even carry a risk of *'totalitarianism'* freezing out internal dissent or the participation of minority voices within civil society.
56. The long string of pilot programmes testing local collaboration, stretching back four decades, illustrates another point – pilots don't last long enough to make much difference to the culture of localities. It requires five or 10 years to really make a lasting alteration to the culture of a place.
57. But with that *'pessimism of the intellect'*, you can also have *'optimism of the will'*. A *'whole systems approach'*, like the one advocated in the paper John co-wrote with Jean Hartley, *Whole Systems Go!*⁷ can help public leaders and managers to think clearly and act decisively, even within a context of change, volatility and uncertainty. But thinking and acting in terms of whole systems will require different approaches to leadership and management development.
58. Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils, Leicester City Council and the District Councils have established an innovative approach to unified public leadership development, working across all the local authorities as well as the various PCTs and the Police, fire service and voluntary organisations. They have also set up a joint public services leadership board, comprising elected politicians and senior managers from the council and from the NHS, police, fire services and other agencies, to take corporate strategic responsibility for the leadership of the whole area. They are also looking at ways to pool procurement, and budgets for training – the last item may be a niche FE colleges can fill.
59. The Leicestershire in Partnership programme is being developed in close partnership with Warwick Business School (who link it to a Diploma in Public Leadership and Management) and will continue this programme for at least three years, creating a corps of about 75-100 managers trained in a *'whole-systems'* approach, and capable of working collaboratively with members of other public, private and voluntary services, to tackle the complex problems facing citizens and communities.

⁷ See <http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/downloads/WholeSystemsGoPaper.pdf> and the LSIS Brief Guide at: <http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Policy/briefguidetowholesystemsgofinal.sflb>

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60. To successfully manage complex systems, local leaders have to bring new actors to the table. They have to involve central government, bringing civil servants into the locality to witness problems firsthand and talk with those who actually deliver services⁸. They also have to recruit support from business. For example, to successfully tackle alcohol abuse, one must convince supermarkets to stop selling alcohol so cheaply, and to stop selling it illegally to the underage.
61. We must *'think and act whole systems'*, John said – *'it is a necessity'*. Government can no longer be exercised purely through vertical silos or hierarchical structures. Instead, governance has to be carried out through a tangle of different organisations, lines of authority, funding and accountabilities. In many ways, it is similar to the Internet, a vast interconnected system with no single apex, no supreme authority. This trend away from simple vertical stovepipes and hierarchy and towards a more congested and inter-connected *'polycentric system'* has been ongoing since the 1980s.
62. A *'polycentric system'* has no *'central'* government *per se*. The *'centre'* of government may be on the streets of Leicestershire for some issues. It may be in Brussels for others. It may be in Whitehall for others. We need a much more agile leadership cadre to navigate such a system, one which can work in the local A&E ward and the corridors of Brussels with equal agility. We also need more research into this polycentric architecture, and what it means for leadership development and training, because this model undermines *'all traditional business school thinking'* about the need to separate strategic thinking and operational delivery. Now we need to move continuously between strategy and operations, between the balcony and the battlefield. Traditionally, a leader made strategy from above, as if he were surveying the landscape from a helicopter. Now there's no above, as it were.
63. John then went on to summarise the key propositions from *Whole Systems Go!*⁹ (there are seven, though John did not go through them one by one). He noted that we need new paradigms of how we perceive the distribution of power in the system. *'Citizens and users [of services] are inside the system'* now, and power is dispersed away from the state – there is no single *'centre of power, and government now has to find out how it can influence thinking and behaviour in arenas (eg teenage pregnancy; alcohol and drug misuse) over which it has no direct control'*. For public service leaders, this is a bit like playing in a jazz band: Not only do you have to play your instrument and your part, but you have to react instantly to another band member's improvisations, which occur without warning. This often scares people if they have no conceptual frameworks to help to make sense of what is going on.
64. To negotiate such a system, managers may need to create a *'holding environment'* a chamber or forum where different interests can be helped to find the separate voices and to negotiate a coalition or common purpose. They need not always form a consensus, as current policy suggests, but they do have to recognise, negotiate and reconcile competing interests. Universities and FE colleges can create a *'holding environment'* for these sorts of debates and discussions.

⁸ One of *Whole Systems Go's* recommendations is that Whitehall civil servants be required to spend three months working at the front line outside of London.

⁹ The LSIS Brief Guide mentioned above provides the complete list.

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65. Nor does leadership rest solely on formal authority. A local alliance can't legally stop a supermarket offering discounted alcohol. It can, however, exercise its influence to persuade it to stop, or threaten to *'name and shame'* them if they do not. Often, local leaders will find themselves operating in the spaces between various actors – between the central and local levels of government, between the state and the people, and so on. These are *'stressful spaces'*
66. All of this requires more in-depth research and new conceptual frameworks – experience alone will not create a new, coherent philosophy of whole-systems management. It requires new types of distributed and collaborative leadership, and not just *'charismatic, heroic'* figures. In this system, relatively junior personnel may sometimes lead, and even have to break the rules while doing so. This will also require new methods of leadership and management development, which can transmit knowledge not just to individuals and institutions, but throughout the whole system. Leaders should sometimes be trained in workplace teams rather than as individuals, solving complex problems in real time. In addition to the *Whole Systems Go!* report, John recommended Ron Heifetz's book *Leadership Without Easy Answers* as a guide to this kind of thinking and practice.

Nick Brown OBE, Principal, Oldham Sixth Form College

67. Nick started with his first experiences as a principal. He took his post in 1990, and recalled a saying from a speaker at his first FE conference: *'a buccaneer is the loser's definition of a winner'*. He thought that this macho and self-aggrandising mind-set was very negative for the sector, which through collaboration and partnership can serve communities far better than a type of local imperialism.
68. Nick said he had learned in these past 19 years how much FE can contribute to the community, how strong our communities are, and that the learning and skills sector is not especially good at exercising policy influence. Nick has been seeking to use FE to improve his community, while simultaneously extending the sector's influence in the making and implementation of local policy. His contribution focused on how to create a local coalition around the FE mission.
69. Noting that the areas with high unemployment in this recession are the same as those from the last two recessions, Nick stated that the system can't be working if it keeps failing the same people. What use have all the innovations been – they come and go, and are often the pet projects of civil servants, politicians or leaders trying to make their marks in jobs they don't plan on holding for very long. These waves of innovations create the opportunity costs of constantly adjusting to change, and waste time and resources. It also creates a burgeoning, ever-growing bureaucracy, without actually engaging with deprived communities.
70. How do we effect change? To make any progress, we must first identify a specific need. We need to engage people with public services that are often detached from the person on the streets. And we need to have people in the same positions over the long term – we need the same people who start a programme to be in post, available to be held accountable, at the end.

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71. Our systems are becoming more complicated, forcing us to ask what leadership is, and where it is located. We have to juggle our responsibilities to our individual institution with a need to collaborate across an increasingly impoverished public sector. Institutions can no longer stand on their own – they must form mutually beneficial, mutually protective coalitions.
72. To do this, partnership leaders need clear strategic thinking on the most pressing needs of the community they serve and also an operational assessment of what can be speedily delivered. For FE colleges this should be particularly easy as we can influence a variety of other partners' missions and aid them with delivery. We are therefore initially seen as givers and not as takers and we can unlock the solution to some of the communities' problems. In this way our capability becomes understood, our mission appreciated and the potential of the locality to work through us grows. We are also a semi-permanent form of solution as our mission tends to be fixed in some of the more immutable needs of the people we serve. In other words we have a history of tackling long-term inequality and deprivation. In Oldham's case the needs are community cohesion and economic regeneration. In both of these cases the one solution on which everyone agrees is the up-skilling in a sympathetic mixed race environment of young people, particularly those who have historically under-achieved.
73. Oldham is a poor borough, Nick said, with historically low proportions of people who progress into higher education. Its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) focuses on correcting this. That LSP won a European award for the best such local partnership in Europe, from among 300 applicants, and also won positive comments from the Audit Commission.
74. This success is in part due to a commonality of mission and focus among the various partners. This is so pronounced that Oldham College (the FE College, not Nick's sixth form College) has hired a former local council executive as its next principal, who understands the more complex systems FE works in. There is a '*common stream of interest*' in the borough.
75. The Oldham LSP has three corporate objectives, which have also been adopted by the council itself. The main objective is to make Oldham a '*university town*', with a university-run science centre which will supply science graduates to the Greater Manchester area. This is the borough's strategic niche within the sub-regional market. This science centre will draw on many sources of funding, and give Oldham a pool of skilled students.
76. The partnership collectively determines commissioning priorities, and this allows it to shape provision. For example, the partnership or its members might not commission a small sixth form college if doing so would hurt the broader goal of increasing overall HE progression (which might be better served by commissioning a larger provider).
77. If we do shift the paradigm about community work, the sector can become hugely influential at the local level.

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The importance of being local

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Seminar participants

Seminar chair:

Lucy de Groot CBE, independent chair and former chief executive, Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

Keynote speakers:

Lord Victor Adebawale, Chief Executive, Turning Point

Emeritus Professor John Benington, Institute of Governance and Public Management, Warwick Business School

Nick Brown OBE, Principal, Oldham Sixth Form College

Participant	Job title	Organisation
Matt Atkinson	Principal and Chief Executive	City of Bath College
Kate Champion	Operational Director for Regions	National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children's Services
Richard Chambers	Principal	Lambeth College
Garth Clucas HMI	Strategy Directorate	Ofsted
Dr David Collins CBE	Chief Executive	LSIS
Christina Conroy OBE	Principal and CEO	Richmond Adult Community College
Lee Davies	Deputy Chief Executive	Institute for Learning
Peter Davies	Principal	City Lit
Nicky de Beer	General Manager	Leadership Centre for Local Government
Martin Doel OBE	Chief Executive	Association of Colleges
Nick Foster	Total Place Adviser	Association of Colleges
Angela Hands	Director	National Audit Office
Mary Heslop	Vice Principal, Strategy	Warwickshire College
Kate Holt	Council member	Association of School and College Leaders
David Howe	Head of Further Education	Make Your Mark
Susie Knight	Head of Executive and Governance Development	LSIS

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Joan Lawrence	Chair of Governors	Craven College
Fiona Mackay	Programme Director	LSIS
Caroline Mager	Executive Director, Policy, Research and Strategic Intelligence	LSIS
Ben Margulies	Policy Research Officer	LSIS
Stella Mbubaegbu CBE	Principal	Highbury College
Tom Milligan	Manager	Deloitte
Chris Minter	Head of Adult Skills and Learning	Leicester City Council
Graham Morley	Chief Executive and Principal	South Staffordshire College
Helen Pettifor	Executive Director, Sector Development	LSIS
Mark Ravenhall	Director, Places and Structures	NIACE
Aidan Relf	Policy and Communications Adviser	Association of Learning Providers
Maxine Room	Principal	Lewisham College
Nick Rousseau	Team Leader, FE Policy Team	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Lynne Sedgmore CBE	Executive Director	157 Group
Dame Ruth Silver DBE	Chair	LSIS
Jane Spurgin	Director of Development	Kent Association for Further Education Colleges
Bob Walding	YPLA Transition Director	LSC
Elizabeth Whatmore	Head of Local Analysis and Delivery Unit	Department for Communities and Local Government
Dr. Ann Williams	Principal	West Suffolk College
Andy Wilson	Principal	Westminster Kingsway College
Vickie Wood	Policy Lead: FE Governance and Infrastructure	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills