

The importance of being local - reframing the role of learning and skills in the strategic development of place

Seminar one – 6 October 2009



Seminar report

Public services, learning and skills – fit for place

Background

1. This report covers the first seminar in a three-part series¹ on the role of learning and skills providers in local communities.
2. Over recent years, we have seen the increasing focus in government policy on locality and the need for public services to respond flexibly to their service users, personalising services to meet particular needs of individuals and communities. There has also been a growing recognition of the importance of local public services working together in the locality to address priorities which require multi-service responses, and the creation of Local Strategic Partnership, Local and Multi-Area Agreements have provided mechanisms for enacting this cross-public sector collaboration.
3. Learning and skills sector providers have a key role to play in delivering local priorities since education and skills are often central to strategies to address social and economic priorities – whether community cohesion, rough-sleeping, unemployment, or social mobility. For colleges, this critical role is being formalised in the new duty to promote economic and social well-being due to be enacted in early 2010. However, with the current recession, it is imperative for *all* learning and skills providers maximise their contribution to delivery of local strategic priorities.
4. There is a new opportunity therefore for the learning and skills sector to step into a fresh relationship with their localities and to contribute to public service coalitions in pursuit of shared objectives. This shift towards greater 'localism', as it tends to be described, implies a new settlement between powers at the centre and in the locality. These seminars aim to provide an opportunity for sector leaders to explore and to shape this new balance for the learning and skills sector and to think through the implications.

¹ See the background brief for the seminars for the full rationale and aims of the series <http://www.lsis.org.uk/PolicyServices/Discussion/SeminarSeries/ImportanceofBeingLocal.aspx>

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5. The aims of this first seminar were to:
 - Offer high-level perspectives from Treasury and BIS on the new challenges for public services in general and for the learning and skills sector in particular, with particular regard to responsiveness to the locality;
 - Examine approaches to improving efficiency in public services, including through greater cross-public sector collaboration;
 - Stimulate discussion on the role the public sector – and the learning and skills sector in particular - in promoting economic recovery; and
 - Consider the leadership challenges involved in improving responsiveness to and accountability for local, regional and national priorities.
6. This report presents a summary of:
 - the keynote presentations; and,
 - the discussion.

Keynote presentations

Helen Bailey, Director, Public Services, HM Treasury

7. Helen began by saying that, although she found the seminar ‘a rather daunting group of people to talk to’, she was optimistic about the localism agenda, and was eager to show us how learning and skills could play a role in Whitehall’s localism agenda.
8. She began by explaining her own role at the Treasury. ‘Public services’, in the context of her work, covers health, education, local government, housing, the devolved governments² and public service reform³, the last item including the reform of central government targets. Prior to working for the Treasury, Helen was the chief executive of the London Borough of Islington, where she sat on a Local Strategic Partnership with City and Islington College, among others.

² Which typically receive block grants.

³ For those of you wondering how much funding that is, *The Guardian* estimates that, in 2008-09, the two education departments had a budget of £86.2 billion; the Department of Health expended £109.4 billion; the Department for Communities and Local Government (which also handles housing) spent £36.8 billion; and the devolved government grants came to £64.3 billion. All told, that is £196.7 billion, or roughly 31.7 percent of total expenditure for the year (I say approximate due to rounding).

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9. Helen noted that local government was once suffocated under enormously detailed targets which absorbed the vast amount of its working time. At one point, local government was required to report on about 1,500 targets, many of which included their own sub-targets. Worse yet, these targets often failed to produce the outcomes that the central government wanted in the first place – one could meet the target while *'missing the point'* of the thing.
10. The idea of *'place'* first became fashionable with the Lyons Review, which was published in March 2007. This placed a new emphasis on local agencies working together in partnership, which, though *'time consuming and difficult'*, is *'the right thing to do'*, as all local public services serve the same people.
11. As the recession sets in, the concept of *'place-shaping'* has been modified, or accompanied, by the idea of *'place-shielding'*, which aims to preserve the economic and social well-being of a local community from the ravages of the downturn.
12. There is an increasing concern about what outcomes are achieved through the expenditure of public money – the efficacy and efficiency of public expenditure. The Total Place pilots are part of this, in that they create a single map of what a local area (either a local authority or a sub-region) spends and how they spend it, allowing policy-makers to see where spending is replicated or redundant, and to determine what is actually being accomplished with the expenditure.
13. The Government is also pressing for greater efficiency in its internal operations, through the sharing of back-office operations, IT systems and other support functions (as presaged by the Operational Efficiency programme published in the spring). Whitehall is also eager for local authorities to make similar savings in this area.
14. A key challenge is how to release creativity and encourage efficiency at the front line. Cities are, and always have been, engines of economic growth under ideal circumstances. A new city regions pilots programme will examine how decision-making and financing impede cities' ability to support regional economic growth.
15. Helen then turned to the role of learning and skills. Firstly, she said, the new localism will allow the sector new opportunities to explain their view of the local economy and its skills needs to other local leaders. This wouldn't necessarily be easy, and Helen in fact called the process *'a bit rocky - a bit jagged'*, as local authorities are not necessarily receptive to outside views. The centre makes constant demands on public services in a locality - focus on increasing skills levels; stop social exclusion;; reduce teenage pregnancy – making it hard to maintain strategic clarity. The game is to *'demonstrate the value of doing things locally'* in partnership, showing how this can meet local public service goals better than central government can.

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16. The localism agenda will not obviate the need to control spending. Helen noted that the Treasury had announced a pay freeze for many public sector workers that very day. Place-shaping, however, is as much about devising a more efficient and effective use of money as it is about the specific control of public spending. If there were less money, but you had more freedom to spend it – more potential for accountability to the locality - how would you argue that you can spend it better than Whitehall? That's the prize. Whitehall needs learning and skills providers, among other local players, to help present the local case.
17. What's next? Helen said this was both a *'good time and a bad time'* for her presentation. The Pre-Budget Report (PBR), which foreshadows spending for the next year, is due out soon, along with the interim results of the Total Place pilots and public spending plans. The details of the PBR are still being negotiated behind closed doors, but the Government seems through its public utterances to remain committed to high levels of education spending – in that sense, education is in a stronger position than many other public services. All parties seem to remain committed to increasing skills levels.
18. How do we measure outcomes locally? The current system, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) aims to assess *'what it feels like to live here'*. As well as outcomes it includes some *'subjective assessments'*, such as *'public satisfaction'* and *'perception'*. This begs the question: What do people expect of learning and skills providers? What do they expect young people will learn in learning and skills institutions? What skills do they expect the sector to provide? Are they satisfied with the service they are now getting? If you were given the opportunity to construct a more decentralised model with more autonomy, would you be ready to include a greater focus on satisfaction and perceptions? Is that an opportunity you are ready to grasp? Do you feel empowered to do so?

Stephen Marston, Director General, Universities and Skills Group, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

19. Stephen explored *'activism'* and its local implications. He affirmed that there should be common ground between local and national agendas in this area, but that the respective responsibilities and powers of the two spheres need to be defined, and a balance struck between national goals and local autonomy.
20. *'Activism'*, both in industry and in skills, has been led by Lord Peter Mandelson, the business secretary since the autumn of 2008. (FE, skills and HE were added to his remit in June 2009.) Lord Mandelson has argued that people have lost confidence in the ability of the state to positively shape the economy for the benefit of the nation, and that we should attempt to rebuild that confidence.

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21. This is not the same thing as central planning. Markets should have full play wherever they can provide for public and consumer needs, but they will not always give the best solution. The government will assess where and when markets are working, and how best to intervene in the national interest where they are not.
22. The key document in the activism agenda is *New industry, new jobs*⁴, which was published in April 2009. It sets out Government's intention to examine its role in the economy, which it plays through its spending, legislation, procurement policy, investment and other activities, and to look at how that can support wealth creation and economic gain through the active, coherent use of those levers. It also calls for specific support for certain areas of the economy that are predicted to be major growth sectors in future⁵.
23. When he was skills secretary (June 2007-June 2009), John Denham was a strong proponent of a complementary policy called '*skills activism*'. Skills are critical to the economy and informed and empowered customers clearly articulating demand should be able to obtain them through market mechanisms. But there are clear areas of skills need which are not securing a sufficient market response, often arising when the demand side is not giving clear enough signals to the supply side to encourage investment in new products. For example, this is likely to happen in relation to the skills needs of emerging businesses or new sectors of the economy. Employers complain that long-term or prospective demands aren't being translated into supply.
24. Thus, the Government steps in to fund these skills. '*Markets where markets can*', Stephen said, but Government involvement where they cannot. Skills activism has developed to meet a number of market failures in the provision of skills – supplying the skills that markets are not eliciting from suppliers. Further thinking on this will be provided in a skills strategy to be published within the next few weeks, which will set out the '*national context*' on the subject.
25. The most local relationship is between the service user and provider - in the skills world, between a consumer and the learning and skills provider. This relationship should be as free of encumbrance as possible. What does this mean for learning and skills providers? First, '*colleges must be local institutions*'. They are responsible to and at the service of their local communities, and are community assets. Their contribution to their communities must be recognised and celebrated. However, colleges also have wider regional, sectoral and national responsibilities – they are not bounded solely by the local context - and those roles need to be recognised as well.

⁴ See the LSIS Brief Guide at: <http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Policy/BriefGuidetoneindustry.sflb>

⁵ BIS has published follow-up documents on key sectors of the economy that *New industry* singled out for special support – for example, low-carbon technology, advanced manufacturing and bio-sciences.

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26. We must ask what activities are best delivered in a way that varies depending on local priority, and which are best delivered consistently and on a standard basis across the country. Stephen listed some things that would best be delivered nationally. Some skills outcomes will likely need to be the same across the country, and we should have a consistent national set of skills outcomes: the skills to be a good plumber do not vary from place to place, so it helps a flexible national labour market to have a single set of defined skill outcomes that drive qualification design across the country. There should also be uniform standards for achievement, so that employers, learners and the public can have confidence in the level of attainment that a given qualification represents – a Level 2 qualification should conform to the same standards no matter where it is taught.
27. Stephen asked if the learner entitlement should be set nationally. Entitlements are legally binding obligations the public service has to citizens, and arguably should be universal. Basic skills entitlements, for example, are universal, as are the entitlements to Level 2 qualifications and (for young people), Level 3 qualifications. If entitlements are set locally, do we risk creating a postcode lottery?
28. Stephen wondered if the sector's service to employers should also be a uniform national entitlement. Businesses are frustrated by the varying levels of service they receive in different parts of the country. Train to Gain has the potential to be a consistent, national service for employers.
29. At the local level, policies should be implemented to meet local needs, in the manner best suited to the local context. However, there is a '*very crowded field*' of agencies (local authorities, local strategic partnerships, Regional Development Agencies, Employment and Skills Boards, etc) all of which could claim a role in defining needs, and which could impede the provider-consumer relationship that is the backbone of the sector. How do providers intervene effectively and efficiently in this crowded arena? Is it clear how needs are ultimately agreed between the different agencies involved and how discrepancies are reconciled?
30. Lastly, Stephen addressed the question of colleges and providers working together. '*Intermediary*' agencies – ie, the bureaucracy – have long taken the key role in determining skills supply. Learning and skills providers, in the meantime, have become both more subject to central control and more competitive. This is not good. When government tries to encourage local learning and skills partnerships to determine local priorities, colleges and providers have been wary. How should colleges and providers come together to influence? Can colleges and providers work collectively to define local need, and do so without forming an '*anti-competitive cartel*'?

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The discussion

31. This section is grouped around the salient themes that emerged during the seminars. Because discussion focused substantially on relationships between local authorities and public services in the locality, it refers often to colleges as part of the public service family. However, it is clear that all learning and skills providers have a contribution to make to achieving public sector priorities in the locality.

Balancing national and local determination

32. We were challenged to consider how to divide decision-making between national and local levels. There is a growing consensus that greater local determination is needed to allow public services to respond more effectively to their citizens. However, there is not yet a consensus about the distribution of responsibilities for the learning and skills sector. What level of discretion could be devolved to the local level? How can powers be distributed so as not to hamper responsiveness and partnerships close to delivery?
33. There was a prevailing view that national determinations inevitably undermine local discretion, flexibilities and planning. Academies funded from the centre complicate accountability lines, collaboration and planning in the locality. However, it was noted that sometimes national policies intended to empower one set of local bodies, can have unintended consequences on others. Thus the 'sixth form presumption', intended to empower schools with the ability to act where they saw an opportunity or need, was perceived by seminar participants as hampering rational local authority planning, cutting across partnerships and creating tensions at the local level. The Government's skills activism could also create local-national tensions it was suggested by cutting across local priorities. How should these tensions be resolved?

Beware the quest for simple or structural solutions

34. The search for a simple solution is probably futile – a really simple model would probably be one designed in Whitehall which would be unsympathetic to the local context and idiosyncrasies. Running the education system is complex, and any workable system must reflect this.
35. We also noted that a natural inclination is to look for structural changes. However there was also caution about this. We could '*spend a lifetime trying to create the perfect structures*'. Sometimes structures can be used as an excuse for inaction – *we need to make what's there already work well*. In the end it is the people who can make things work in the locality and they need to use their own agency and power to do so.

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National or local entitlements

36. Entitlement was initially thought to be best determined nationally. However, a distinction was drawn between the national and universal entitlement that applies to 16-19 year olds and the approach in the adult arena. Here there are priorities for funding rather than actual 'entitlements', so if demand is very high, there is no guarantee of provision. For example, it was argued that although ESOL is a priority, provision in many areas has to be rationed because the demand is so high. This was identified as an example of where funding needs to reflect more closely local conditions and demand.
37. Thus rationing counteracts the common understanding of an entitlement – a legal right to something for free – and may make it hard to deliver. Equally, more people may demand the entitlement than the budget can support, as occurred in the HE grants systems in late 2008.
38. A different issue relates to people who are unaware of their entitlements and who would benefit from education and skills. Here local action can help empower individuals to take up education, provided that funding is available. This signals the danger that increasing limitations of funds could make it increasingly difficult to maintain a focus on the most vulnerable and those most in need of support. Unless there is local discretion in use of funding, this focus is more difficult to sustain. Responsiveness and *listening locally* are vital to ensure scarce resources are used effectively.
39. It was noted that Train to Gain is not, technically speaking, an entitlement, as it is not free by right – rather it is a service to employers. Skills Accounts are not entitlements, either – they list how much individuals are entitled to in terms of state-funded education and training, but do not provide funding themselves. Apprenticeships *are* an entitlement, but only for those aged 16 to 18. Most entitlements, relate to specific age groups or programmes.
40. One future option suggested was that in future, targets might be replaced by a '*statement of entitlement*', with local authorities and services held to account for how well they deliver these entitlements. This was summarised as *outcomes national – operations local*. A view was expressed that trouble happens when national decisions impinge on operations.
41. This was also described as '*local responsibility within national frameworks*'. In essence, this would mean that basic standards and entitlements would be set nationally, but local partnerships would have control of implementation without excessive central interference. Crucially it was argued that the national framework should specify broad outcomes – *a broader perspective* - rather than inputs and the means of achieving them.

Funding questions

42. As in every part of the public sector, the recession coupled with reductions in public funding will require innovative and concerted effort to meet increasing needs.

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43. Some argued that the recession could spur innovation and that we could gain a more rational and strategic approach as a result of straitened financial times. We could take the lack of public funding as an opportunity to invent new, more efficient ways of working, creating savings and benefits all around (including for learners). For example, it was suggested that it may be easier to challenge existing assumptions such as the cost-effectiveness of small sixth forms. The financial climate could provide the urgency needed to look critically at the totality of provision and spend in a locality – which would be expected to raise questions about the viability of some small sixth forms. The potential of increasing shared services between providers was also mentioned. There is growing urgency for providers as well as local authorities to move in this direction and a sense that early voluntary action would be advisable.
44. Structural changes and new funding bodies add uncertainties to the prospect of cuts. Some asked whether monies will still *'follow the learner'*, as they do under current plans. It's expected that funding will continue to follow the learner, especially 16-19. Post-19 where there is not such a clear entitlement and where funding is more restricted there is likely to be greater national intervention. It was unclear therefore the extent to which learner-directed could usefully describe such highly-targeted and rationed provision.
45. The one certain thing is that funding will be reduced, especially for learners aged 19 and over. It was argued that growth in demand for 16-19 provides an easier context for managing cuts in the unit of resource. Post-19 there is both a reduction in the unit of resource and the volume of provision, creating a more difficult context. On the down-side for 16-19, there was a concern that local authorities are likely to want to keep their 16-19 learners within their own boundaries, which would distract from the principle of funding following the learner.
46. An additional challenge identified was that most head teachers in schools have never presided over a period of spending cuts, and will be hard pressed to adjust to the new spending environment. It may be difficult to persuade them to stick to a partnership's priorities or to contribute resource to a common goal in this circumstance.

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47. There is a continuing problem of multiple budgets – money for education, skills and training is still sliced across many different programmes, and it is hard to knit these funds together. Not all of these funds are labelled ‘training’, which means that melding them together often creates complexity in achieving the required outcomes for accountability purposes⁶. However, another view was that it was ever thus and the role of leaders is to bend resources to meet actual needs, despite silos⁷. And in similar vein it was argued that space for innovation is found where government policy doesn’t join up!

Partnership working

48. The potential of local partnerships and consortia of providers was touched on several times. It was argued that local partnerships can indeed offer more efficient budgeting and rationing of resources to ensure the stable delivery of entitlements to those most in need. They can develop a shared definition of need and establish a community of providers working together, signed up to a local strategy, competing on quality. Through local deliberation and discussion, they can also develop greater accountability to the community and local priorities, establishing a degree of democratic and community legitimacy – which might also be used to develop consensus on how to manage rationing.
49. However, can local partnerships resist the strains of competition in more stringent economic times? Are they capable of being highly-tuned and accountable to the locality? Can they really guarantee coverage of provision and manage trade-offs between members? Are these reasonable expectations? In addition we were asked how effective consortia could be in seeking out *customers that we don’t yet have or businesses that have not yet been established*. It is not sufficient to *deal with what comes through the door*. How can local coalitions develop this strategic capacity and what level of local discretion would they need to do so?
50. It was universally acknowledged that partnership working is not simple. We heard from a number of colleges that local authorities are not always open to partnership working with other agencies. When confronted with differences of opinion, they tend to fall back on their democratic mandate to close down debate - even though that mandate is often based on a low voter turnout. Local authorities may lead local partnerships on a variety of matters (including 14-19 commissioning), but colleges provide an *‘institutional backbone’* to support delivery capacity that should not be ignored.

⁶ The practicalities of pooling budgets is being explored through the Total Place pilots, and for example, Lewisham and Luton and Bedfordshire are looking at worklessness; Coventry and Worcestershire are addressing NEETs.

⁷ In the summer seminar series we referred to importance of *creative and agile knitters* in this regard. See the seminar reports here

<http://www.lsis.org.uk/PolicyServices/Discussion/SeminarSeries/LSSandtheEconomicCrisis.aspx>

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51. It was also recognised that college leaders have their limitations in partnership working. When the financial and economic environment is poor, principals sometimes focus first on protecting their own institutions – helping out the wider community may seem distinctly less important.
52. However, other attendees stressed that learning and skills sector participation in these partnerships is vital. In many partnerships, the police authorities and the NHS dominate, because they tend to have a single leader (a chief constable or a manager), and local authorities may face internal political dissent. This means that local strategic partnerships focus a lot on security and health care, but not much on economic development. College leaders are a vital means of bringing the economic and skills agenda to the forefront. They have a key responsibility in playing their part as public service leaders in this regard.
53. There was also a hint at times in the discussion that colleges expect to be invited to the table or expect others - such as local or central government - to advocate their involvement. However the prevailing view was that providers and colleges in particular should make the case themselves for their place at such strategic tables on the basis of the contribution they have to make. They have a compelling argument to make.

From localism to Total Place to total person...

54. There was some debate as to the goals of the localism agenda. One view is that the localism agenda *'is about creating positive places where people can realise their ambitions'*. Another was that the dialogue about localism has become *'impoverished'*, focused on protectionism rather than on *'building a better place'*. Another felt localism was a *'staging post'* towards the development of personalised service.
55. Hence discussion explored the benefits of cohering services around the needs of an individual – an approach that could complement integration of services in the locality. Individual learners often have an array of needs⁸ that keep them from realising their full economic and social potential – transport, health, money difficulties, etc. By focusing funding on the individual and planning around his or her needs, the public services can deal with them holistically and coherently, rather than duplicating efforts across multiple agencies, and they stand a better chance of making a lasting impact. This suggested a total person approach to supporting citizens. As described, this moved beyond personalisation within one public service and perhaps is a key future shift needed in delivery of services.

⁸ This was also discussed at the seminar on Learning and skills and the recession held in July. See paragraphs 14-15 <http://www.isis.org.uk/Libraries/Policy/LSSsectorandtheeconomiccrisisseminarthreefinalreport.sflb>

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56. This highlighted the limitations of spending and policy that focuses on the locality alone, and not on the individual learner and/or citizen as well. While Total Place is examining how resources can best be deployed within a geographical area, this could be described as a *staging post* towards a focus on services personalised around the individual too. Comprehensive Area Assessment which looks at more coherent service delivery should also examine how services join up at the level of the individual it was argued.

Implications for leadership

57. The creation of a powerful force for change depends upon a sense of the vision around which the partners are coalescing – a *'common vision'* or *'common purpose'*, a *'shared definition of need'*, a *'coming together to make your community better'*. Without this clarity of shared purpose, *'rivalry and dissent between partners'* is common. Given what they bring to local partnerships, the leaders of colleges and providers, are well placed to lead in shaping a common purpose, and can also help to promote the vital importance of the skills agenda in the locality. Indeed it was suggested that they should positively assert their responsibility to take a seat at the strategic tables in their localities.
58. The reality is that partnerships are unlikely to thrive around one dominant leader determining a direction through diktat, but must be based on a coalition of ambition – *'collectiveship'*, it was suggested, captures this better than leadership with its connotations of individual action. Thus leadership development activities should not focus exclusively on training people to lead and protect their individual institutions or even their particular sector. They need to be re-oriented towards a leadership role within a public service coalition. Such leaders need capacity to communicate across public sector boundaries, to shape and influence definitions of common cause and shared ambition as the basis for collective action.
59. Some participants gave examples of localities which had successfully developed unified systems of service provision. In these areas, all agencies are in the business of *'public service'*. There was also the example of the Kent Gateway⁹ approach where all local services are housed under a common roof and a common brand.

⁹ For more information, see the joint publication between Kent County Council and Public Guardian <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Society/documents/2009/08/28/Kent-Gateway-screenready.pdf>

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60. Another set of consequences apply to the governance of partners within local coalitions. In order to be able to sit at the partnership table, individual actors need authority to act, endorsed through their governance arrangements. These are highly varied – volunteers on college boards, paid in some cases, appointed by secretary of state in the case of PCTs, elected in the case of local authority councillors. Joint activity will be based on the reality of the local community, but what level of detail is needed by a college Board for example to sign-up to shared priorities and to give authority to a principal to act effectively?

Public perception and satisfaction

61. New accountability systems such as the Comprehensive Area Assessment pay greater attention to the public's feelings of satisfaction – whether they perceive their local services to be effective, or whether they are satisfied with the service they receive. This should help to shape how services are delivered so they can be as effective as possible for the locality. However there is some concern about our capacity to consult effectively. For example, one obstacle to collecting such data is the excessively technical language that is often used to ask citizens about their views – for example by inspectors carrying out Comprehensive Area Assessments - *'It feels like you need a PhD in public administration to navigate local government'*, and it should be simpler.
62. This may bias citizens against their local councils, making them appear worse than they actually are. Engagement just at the evaluation stage is clearly inadequate – citizen engagement needs to be improved up-stream in defining priorities and shaping services. Another difficulty in making public perception a major dimension of quality assessment was the fact that citizens tend to have very low expectations of local authority services.
63. The discussion also raised questions about the extent to which satisfaction could be the key measure of the effectiveness of learning and skills providers given their services to individuals and to the economy. How should a balance be struck between the satisfaction of individuals with their learning experience, and the satisfaction of employers who are customers for the workforce capacities developed by the learning and skills sector?

Community identity – what is it?

64. A community is normally defined as a physical space, often congruent with a local authority. However, people do not always identify with their local council, especially where borders cover several towns and neighbourhoods, or where they live in multi-borough city regions. People may in fact identify with a smaller community or neighbourhood, or with a larger sub-region or region (Teesside, or Merseyside, for example). Total Place pilots do take on some diffuseness of local identity. Several of the pilots cover more than one local authority (the Greater Manchester one covers 10, while several others cover two or three).

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65. Local community is especially complicated for large FE colleges, which usually take learners from a number of local authority areas. This means that they are in several 'places' and communities at once, and this complicates partnership working, particularly with local authorities and their structures. The string of college mergers in recent years has created a still larger number of colleges with geographically expansive catchment areas – a model that may extend in leaner financial times given the economies of scale it provides.
66. Furthermore, people may define their community in an entirely non-geographic way – they may be much more aware and engaged with communities of interest (young mothers, other people with a specific health condition, local historians, people with disabilities, musicians, sports fans etc). Some communities are based on common affinities or interests, and are connected via specialist, national or local organisations or the Internet (Facebook groups for example). This may constitute another *'concept of community'*, which should not be ignored. Another delegate pointed out that learners themselves choose or create their own sense of place through the course choices they make which create their learning cohort – something for which it is impossible to plan.

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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:

Helen Bailey, Director, Public Services, HM Treasury

Stephen Marston, Director General, Universities and Skills Group, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Participant	Job title	Organisation
Yvette Adams	Executive Director, Human Resources, Culture and Equalities	LSIS
Jennifer Adshead	Director of Education and Training	Women's Institute
Ian Ashman	Principal	Community College Hackney
Jev Bhalla	Vice Principal	Walsall College
Caroline Bostock	Business Development Director	Local Government a4e
Keith Brooker	Director, City & Guilds of London Institute	LSIS Board member
Nick Brown OBE	Principal	Oldham Sixth Form College
Dr David Collins CBE	Chief Executive	LSIS
Mark Dawe	Principal	Oaklands College
Stuart Edwards	Deputy Director	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Maggie Galliers CBE	Principal	Leicester College
Peter Grigg	Head of Policy and Research	Make Your Mark Campaign

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Stephen Grix	Principal	MidKent College
Max Hamps	Apprenticeships Director	Construction Skills
Kate Holt	Representative	Association of School and College Leaders
Alison Kaye	Director	Work Based Learning Alliance
Joan Lawrence	Vice-Chair of Governors	Craven College
Caroline Mager	Executive Director, Policy, Research and Strategic Intelligence	LSIS
Beth Maloney	Director of Research and Strategy	Oaklands College
Ben Margulies	Policy Research Officer	LSIS
Tom Milligan	Manager	Deloitte
Chris Minter	Service Director, Stronger and Safer Communities	Leicester City Council
Graham Moore OBE	Principal	Stoke-on-Trent College
Peter Munday	Head of Consultancy and Coaching Services	LSIS
Helen Pettifor	Executive Director, Sector Development	LSIS
Mark Ravenhall	Associate Director	NIACE
Maxine Room	Principal	Lewisham College
Nick Rousseau	Team Leader, FE Policy Team	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Dame Ruth Silver DBE	Chair	LSIS
Jane Spurgin	Director of Development	Kent Association of Further Education Colleges
Dr. Ann Williams	Principal	West Suffolk College

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Jane Williams	Executive Director for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration	BECTA
Andy Wilson	Principal	Westminster Kingsway College
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Rob Wye	Acting Chief Executive	Young People's Learning Agency