Unlocking the potential of Sixth Form Colleges
The Sixth Form Colleges’ Association (SFCA) has been representing the interests of the sector since Sixth Form Colleges became independent corporations in 1993. The Association has three key roles:

**Representing Sixth Form Colleges:**
particularly in discussions and negotiations with trade unions and officials from government departments.

**Promoting Sixth Form Colleges:**
to a wide range of stakeholders including the media, politicians and potential students.

**Supporting Sixth Form Colleges:**
on a range of issues (including employment issues and industrial relations) through the provision of research, guidance and one to one advice.

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SFCA is grateful to all of the Sixth Form College staff and governors that agreed to provide information and be interviewed for this report.

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1 Executive Summary

Background

Sixth Form Colleges are highly effective and efficient providers of sixth form education. In 2011, the National Audit Office\(^1\) concluded that they "perform best on most measures of learner achievement" when compared to other providers, despite receiving less funding than school sixth forms. In 2012, research from the Sixth Form Colleges' Association (SFCA)\(^2\) showed that Sixth Form Colleges outperform school and academy sixth forms on a range of measures. And at the time of writing, more Sixth Form Colleges are rated as either good or outstanding by Ofsted\(^3\) (79%) than independent schools, maintained schools or sponsored academies.

The ninety-three Sixth Form Colleges in England are strongly committed to continuous improvement and have a long history of collaborating and sharing good practice with each other. Colleges in each of the SFCA’s seven geographic regions meet on a regular basis, as do the fourteen Roman Catholic colleges that also convene as the Association of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges. The Wessex Group\(^4\) of Sixth Form Colleges is a good example of a well-established partnership through which colleges engage in a range of collaborative activities. There are many others, some with a distinct geographic footprint (e.g. the S7 Consortium\(^5\) in Surrey and Sussex, the NorVic Federation of Sixth Form Colleges in the North East, the Solent Colleges Innovation Partnership on the south coast) and some that involve colleges across a wider area (e.g. CENBASE\(^6\) - a peer review group of colleges in Central and Eastern England and the Maple Group partnership of colleges from across England). Colleges also collaborate on specific issues of common interest. For example, in April this year, the Caxton Group of Sixth Form Colleges was established by institutions that have started to develop and deliver higher education qualifications.

This report

While partnership working between Sixth Form Colleges is well established and understood, the extent and nature of collaboration between Sixth Form Colleges and other providers is less well known. The aim of this report is to highlight the work that Sixth Form Colleges are doing to drive up standards in schools, academies and FE colleges in their communities. It will be used to aid collaboration in the Sixth Form

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\(^2\) SFCA, *Sixth Sense - How Sixth Form Colleges help students progress to higher education and beyond*, June 2012: [http://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/sixth%20sense%20report\_0.pdf](http://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/sixth%20sense%20report\_0.pdf)

\(^3\) A breakdown of Ofsted judgements by provider type can be found on the Data View website: [http://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk/](http://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk/)

\(^4\) More information can be found on the Wessex Group website: [http://wessexsfcc.ac.uk/](http://wessexsfcc.ac.uk/)

\(^5\) More information can be found on the S7 website: [http://www.s7colleges.com/](http://www.s7colleges.com/)

\(^6\) More information can be found on the CENBASE website: [http://cenbase.org.uk/](http://cenbase.org.uk/)
College sector and hopefully inspire individual colleges to expand their partnership activities.

The report also conveys an important message to government and policymakers. The message is a simple one - Sixth Form Colleges make a vital contribution to system-wide improvement in the education system and additional investment could unlock the potential of the sector to make an even greater contribution. Earlier this year, Matthew Hancock MP, the Minister with responsibility for Sixth Form Colleges, replied to a letter from a local MP who had expressed concern about the funding of a Sixth Form College in his constituency. In his reply, the Minister wrote:

“Sixth Form Colleges are now classified as private sector institutions, and it is not yet clear how the sector as a whole has taken advantage of these additional freedoms, some of which might provide additional revenue streams. For example, becoming a teaching school, leading clusters of schools without a sixth form, or sponsoring academies or free schools could provide additional funds”.

This report evidences how the sector has taken advantage of its additional freedoms. Fifteen case studies have been assembled of Sixth Form Colleges that are:

- Sponsoring academies
- Leading teaching school alliances
- Driving collaboration in their community
- Supporting underperforming schools and colleges

However, it is important to understand that these activities have not provided “additional revenue streams” for the Sixth Form Colleges involved. Capacity funding was only made available to a minority of the colleges, and even then, it only part-subsidised the collaborative activities that they took forward.

All of the colleges that feature in this report were inspired and motivated to engage in partnership working not by short-term financial considerations, but by a combination of moral purpose and hard-headed pragmatism. For example, sponsoring an academy in a deprived area is an effective way of improving the life chances of the young people in the locality and securing a pipeline of students to the Sixth Form College in the longer term. Leading a teaching school alliance is a powerful way of disseminating effective teaching practice and binding often highly competitive institutions together by working towards a set of shared goals.

Driving collaboration in their community enables Sixth Form Colleges and other providers to play to their strengths in order to enhance the educational offer to local students and avoid the costly duplication of provision that can result from competitive pressures. Supporting underperforming schools and colleges has a huge impact on young people that have been poorly served in the past and can strengthen the progression pathway from one institution to the other.

The case studies in this report highlight the impact that Sixth Form Colleges have had in driving up standards and improving outcomes for learners in partner
institutions. Whether it is improving GCSE results, increasing progression rates to further and higher education, enhancing the quality of teaching, or improving Ofsted grades, the impact of Sixth Form College-driven collaboration is clear to see.

The future

Unfortunately, as the case studies also testify, the future for this sort of partnership working in the Sixth Form College sector looks bleak. The huge reduction in Sixth Form College funding will make most partnership activities (that are already loss-leaders in purely financial terms) simply unviable. The introduction of the new 16-19 funding regime in September 2013 will see Sixth Form Colleges lose a greater proportion of their income than any other type of sixth form provider. Some of the Sixth Form Colleges featured in this report stand to lose as much as 15% of their annual funding - and this comes on top of the 10% reduction in programme funding announced in 2010. As 16-19 specialists, Sixth Form Colleges cannot cross subsidise from more generous pre-16 funding streams (as schools and academies do) or from significant adult and employer-based funding (as Further Education colleges do).

Sixth Form Colleges have always been extremely lean and efficient institutions with less management capacity than those in the school or FE sectors. The SFCA’s 2012 Funding Impact Survey showed that 78% of colleges had been forced to make staffing reductions as a result of the funding cuts and this figure is likely to rise in 2013. This will make it even more difficult for Sixth Form Colleges to release staff from their teaching and/or management duties to drive forward partnership working. As the case studies highlight, this is one of the most significant barriers to expanding the collaborative work of colleges. The sharp reduction in Sixth Form College funding will seriously inhibit the ability of the sector to act in an entrepreneurial way. Some college governors already question the investment being made in supporting other (better funded) institutions to improve, and the pressure to retrench in order to focus on ‘core business’ will only grow as the funding cuts take hold.

There is a huge amount of collaborative potential in the Sixth Form College sector. A targeted injection of funding would help to unlock it. The examples featured in this report show how colleges would maintain and expand their activities and the benefits this would bring. Sixth Form Colleges are at the vanguard of developing what one influential commentator has described as “the kind of collaborative environment, within a competitive marketplace, that schools need to flourish.”

The necessary investment could be made through the introduction of a VAT refund scheme for Sixth Form Colleges. At present, Sixth Form Colleges are required to pay VAT on their purchases, but unlike schools and academies they are not reimbursed for these costs. This is a historic anomaly that the Department for Education

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7 More information can be found in the SFCA’s Sixth Form College Funding Summary: http://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/12_12%20sixth%20form%20college%20funding%20summary%20final.pdf

estimates would cost £20 million per year to rectify. As this report highlights, the return on the government’s investment would be significant. In addition, it would help to rescue strategically important, but less popular courses, such as modern foreign languages and further maths, which colleges are being forced to drop as their funding reduces.

As a VAT refund would directly benefit individual colleges, it would also avoid the waste and bureaucracy usually associated with public bodies that are charged with overseeing improvement activities. Sixth Form Colleges are best placed to design, deliver and drive improvement activities and can do so in an extremely cost effective way. In short, this investment would unlock the potential of Sixth Form Colleges to act as leaders of excellence in the education system, a role that - as this report highlights - they are more than capable of fulfilling.

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9 More information can be found in the SFCA’s Briefing on VAT and Sixth Form Colleges: http://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/0913%20SFCA%20VAT%20briefing.pdf
2 Sixth Form Colleges as academy sponsors

Increasing numbers of Sixth Form Colleges are acting as sponsors or co-sponsors of academies. In this chapter we highlight four examples of colleges that have become sponsors. While the extent and nature of their involvement has differed, the colleges have all had a tangible impact on the quality of provision and outcomes for learners.

Prior Pursglove College

Background

Prior Pursglove is a Sixth Form College based in Guisborough, in the North East of England. The college is a co-sponsor of the Freebrough Academy in East Cleveland. It is also a community partner of Trust 4 Learning, a collaborative partnership of five 11-16 schools, a special school, and several primary schools in the local area.

Activities

The college Principal chairs the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Governance Committee of Freebrough Academy and plays a key role in its strategic planning. Through this forum the college has a specific role in the monitoring of standards and the quality of teaching and learning. The college has also provided strategic and operational support for the establishment of post-16 provision at the academy. This sort of practical engagement helps to ensure there is not an unhelpful duplication of provision in the local area and different providers of sixth form education can play to their respective strengths. The college has provided advice and support for the development of Business and Enterprise (the academy specialism) and is involved in the joint delivery of courses such as A level maths.

As a community partner of Trust 4 Learning, staff and students from the college also share their expertise to benefit pre-16 pupils and their teachers. For example, the college recently hosted a finance workshop for pupils in Years 5, 6 and 7 led by college students. This helped to develop the confidence of the primary school pupils and the expertise of the Sixth Form College students. The objectives of the Trust are to raise aspirations and standards, increase progression to further and higher education, and contribute to community regeneration and growth through access to employment opportunities. In order to support these objectives the college is involved in a range of transition activities to help pupils in Years 9 and 11 to make informed and appropriate choices about the next stage of their education.

Impact

The academy has benefited hugely from the closer relationship with the college. Since the academy opened in 2010 there has been a three year upward trend in exam results. The number of students securing five GCSEs at grades A*-C has increased.

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10 Other community partners include Redcar and Cleveland College, Teesside University, Coast & Country, Sage Gateshead, Darlington Building Society and the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI).
increased from 50.6% to 91.6%, five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths from 30.7% to 44.5% and three levels of progress in English (KS2-4) from 26.2% to 53.2%. In 2012, Freebrough Academy was the fastest improving school in the borough of Redcar and Cleveland. Although Trust 4 Learning is a more recent development, there are already signs that individual students are beginning to benefit from the contacts with employers. All providers involved in Trust 4 Learning now have a much closer relationship. This has led to a reduction in tensions and competitive pressures and there is a far greater degree of trust between the partners. There is a shared commitment to embedding a collaborative approach to delivery, where all partners use their individual expertise to benefit students and help to raise their aspirations for their future.

The future

As the scale of collaboration and partnership working increases, more college staff need to be released from their teaching and/or leadership roles to drive activities forward. But the reduction in the college’s funding has led to a reduction in staff numbers and this is a major barrier to growing collaborative activity. Capacity funding could be used to release more staff from the college to share their expertise with teaching staff in schools and academies. For example, Freebrough Academy recently asked the college for teachers to help raise standards in GCSE maths. The college could not afford to release a member of staff without payment and had recently been forced to make a highly competent maths teacher redundant. If capacity funding had been available, it would have been possible to come to an agreement that benefited the college, the academy, the teachers and most importantly, the students.

Winstanley College

Background

Winstanley College in Wigan sponsors the Abraham Guest Academy, a former National Challenge school, in nearby Orrell. This 11-16 academy opened its doors in January 2012 and enrols pupils from some of the most deprived areas in the borough – many with little or no academic aspirations. The college has a very strong brand locally and the academy has used this to help raise the aspirations of its students. The college Principal is the academy’s strategic director and college staff and students work closely with staff and students from the academy.

Activities

Winstanley staff are seconded into the academy to deliver specific projects in and out of the classroom. Senior leaders have spent a lot of time advising, coaching and mentoring colleagues at the academy which has helped to tackle underperformance and drive up teaching standards. Interventions have also been targeted at specific areas such as the underperformance of boys. Winstanley students act as mentors to academy pupils. Applied A level health and social care students received formal training to mentor the most vulnerable pupils at the academy. Many more students
are paired with pupils at the academy to act as literacy mentors and travel to the academy to fulfil this role during free periods.

Winstanley have also partnered with a neighbouring Sixth Form College, St. John Rigby, to deliver Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services to seven partner secondary schools. Both colleges employ staff to deliver the service that the schools purchase using funds previously set aside for careers advice provided by the local authority. This innovative and entrepreneurial model of IAG delivery also helps schools to meet the new requirement to provide independent and impartial advice to pupils from expert and external sources. The service also benefits students across both colleges.

**Impact**

Mentoring and development activities have already led to tangible improvements in the quality of teaching at the academy. Work between students and pupils has also increased the aspirations of pupils and the expertise of students. The academy now achieves high numbers of first preferences and is recruiting to capacity, and the proportion of academy students applying to the college has increased from 17% to 22%.

**The future**

The college is firmly committed to its sponsorship role with the academy. However, as the funding cuts to the 16-19 budget begin to bite, the number of interventions that the college can make will inevitably reduce. As headcount falls and the resources of the college leadership team become more stretched, it is unlikely that the college will be able to take forward other (much needed) collaborative projects in the local area. Existing funding (such as the modest Sponsor Capacity Grant) does not help a Sixth Form College with limited management capacity to scope out and seriously explore new sponsorship opportunities. Even Winstanley, with outstanding financial health, could not contemplate the risks associated with making another significant investment in time and resources that may not bear fruit.

**Birkenhead and Wyke Sixth Form Colleges**

Birkenhead Sixth Form College co-sponsors the University Academy Birkenhead. Despite receiving no funding for its sponsorship activities, the college has spent a lot of time helping the academy to develop. For example, the college has worked closely with the academy to refine its HR function and has used its expertise in maths to improve the academy’s GCSE performance. The college’s Deputy Principal sits on the academy’s governing body and this has helped to cement a closer relationship between the two institutions. More generally, co-sponsorship has strengthened the relationship between the college and the other sponsors – two local universities and the neighbouring FE college. A range of co-ordinated progression pathways are now available to pupils at the academy when they leave at 16, and progression to higher education is now a realistic prospect for many of its pupils. The academy has seen an improvement in its exam results at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 – this year there was a 9% increase in the number of pupils securing
five GCSEs at A*-C including maths and English. In common with their counterparts at Prior Pursglove and Winstanley, the college’s capacity to extend and develop their sponsorship activities is likely to decline as the latest cuts in Sixth Form College funding begin to take hold.

Wyke Sixth Form College in Hull is a co-sponsor of the local Thomas Ferens Academy that opened in September 2012. The college is represented on the academy’s governing body and plays a key role in its strategic development. Staff from Wyke’s maths department have been working closely with the top performing maths pupils at the academy. This has involved a series of revision sessions and masterclasses during the holidays and in the evenings. College staff are also working with pupils who have been identified as borderline C/D candidates in English GCSE to ensure they make the necessary progress in their exams next year. The college also plans to reward and incentivise pupils whose attendance exceeds 95% with a series of educational awards. These activities could be expanded to other subjects if additional capacity funding was available.
3 Sixth Form Colleges leading teaching school alliances

This chapter highlights the experience of two Sixth Form Colleges that play a leading role in a teaching school alliance – an initiative overseen by the National College for Teaching and Leadership that: “give outstanding schools a leading role in the training and professional development of teachers, support staff and headteachers, as well as contributing to the raising of standards through school-to-school support”.\textsuperscript{11} Departmental wrangling over the eligibility of Sixth Form Colleges to become teaching schools has only recently been resolved, but it is hoped that applications from more Sixth Form Colleges will be approved in the near future. As the following two case studies illustrate, teaching school alliances can have a swift and significant impact. The Blackpool Sixth Form College leads the Fylde Coast Teaching School Alliance and The Sixth Form College, Colchester plays a leading role in the North East Essex Teaching School Alliance.

The Blackpool Sixth Form College

Background

The Blackpool Sixth Form College was awarded teaching school status in partnership with Hodgson Academy in 2011. It was the first Sixth Form College to become a teaching school and has since helped many other Sixth Form Colleges to develop their collaborative activities. Both institutions are the driving force behind the Fylde Coast Teaching School Alliance which helps to shape and deliver the training and professional development of teachers in the area. There are nine other institutions in the Alliance including secondary schools, academies, primary schools, a special school and the University of Cumbria. The Blackpool Sixth Form College is a lead teaching school for maths and sixth form studies and also sponsors two local academies.

Activities

As with all teaching school alliances, the Fylde Coast partnership takes forward the following six activities:

- leading the development of a school-led initial teacher training (ITT) system, either through School Direct or by securing accreditation as an ITT provider
- leading peer-to-peer professional and leadership development (continuing professional development)
- identifying and developing leadership potential (succession planning and talent management)
- providing support for other schools

\textsuperscript{11} More information on teaching schools can be found on the National College website: http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/index/support-for-schools/teachingschools.htm
designating and brokering specialist leaders of education (SLEs)
engaging in research and development activity

The Fylde Coast Teaching School Alliance has three specific aims:

to generate and maintain momentum in educational innovation to secure outstanding practice in all phases of learning
to develop professional relationships based on trust, transparency and high aspirations
to ensure a sustainable educational model by developing teachers and leaders of the future

Impact

The college and other institutions in the partnership have identified a range of benefits from their involvement in the teaching school alliance. The extent and impact of staff CPD has increased dramatically and there is a much sharper focus on teaching and leadership in the partnership. The research and development projects have seen an increase in innovative teaching practice with practical applications across all phases. Interestingly, secondary and sixth form teaching staff have learnt much from primary school practitioners and vice versa. Links between the secondary schools and the college have improved which in turn has led to smoother transitions for students at the age of 16. A closer working relationship in English and maths has led to a greater number of students studying these subjects at the college, which it is hoped will lead to improved outcomes for learners in 2014. Some twenty-eight teachers have been appointed as specialist leaders of education - outstanding middle or senior leaders with a first class knowledge in a particular field of expertise. These individuals are driving improvement in the partnership through coaching, mentoring and establishing new and innovative working practices.

The future

The teaching school alliance may expand to include additional members in the future, although all partners are keen to ensure the alliance remains rooted in its local community. There are a range of additional activities that the college would like to take forward that would be hugely beneficial to the partnership, but funding remains a significant barrier. Even though there are significant non-financial benefits to the partnership, involvement in the teaching school alliance is already a loss leader in financial terms for the college.

The college would use additional resources to get several research and development projects off the ground. For example, they are keen to emulate the Chinese model where research and development forms a key part of teacher practice. There is pressing need to explore how the performance of white, working-class boys in the local area can be improved. There is also a particular need to expand the numbers of specialist leaders of education, but under the current funding model, the college cannot afford to meet the costs of releasing eligible teaching staff.
The Sixth Form College, Colchester

Background

The Sixth Form College, Colchester was the lead institution in the successful bid for North East Essex Teaching School Alliance that was approved by the National College for Teaching and Leadership to begin from 1st April 2013. The alliance consists of all twenty-five secondary institutions in North East Essex including two grammar schools, six special schools and behavioural units and seventeen schools/academies – as well as the college. It is the biggest alliance of its kind in the country and its partner members educate more than thirty thousand young people. As virtually all providers of secondary education in the area are academies and therefore receive very little support from the County Council, it was important to find a way of working with peers to help drive up standards. As the only specialist 16-19 provider in the partnership, and one with an outstanding reputation, the college has a key role to play.

Activities

The North East Essex Teaching School Alliance takes forward the six activities outlined in the previous case study. The alliance also subsumed two existing school-centred initial teaching training providers.

Impact

Although the alliance has only been operating since 1st April 2013, there have already been a number of positive developments:

- the two school-centred initial teaching training providers have received more allocated training places than in previous years (now from Schools Direct). Applications for places have increased for 2013-14 and an increased number of applicants (100 in total) will commence training in September 2013. Plans are in place for further expansion including the addition of Primary School sector ITT provision from 2014/15
- there has been a significant increase in locally based CPD (including training) activity
- a series of Action Research Projects started in Summer 2013
- a Leadership and Management Programme has been developed and formally commenced in September 2013
- links with local Higher Education Institutions have been greatly strengthened – particularly the University of Essex and the University of Cambridge. Both universities are supporting aspects of the teaching school activity in 2013-14 and their involvement will increase in future years
The future

The teaching school alliance is intended to be a long-term project, although the national funding support is only available for three years. The core funding available to partnerships is the same irrespective of its size, even though much more leadership and administrative capacity is required to develop a partnership with twenty-five institutions than one with (say) five institutions.

A particular issue for the Sixth Form College is that it already receives less funding per learner than all of the other institutions in the partnership and is set to face a much deeper cut in its funding. With teachers already teaching larger class sizes, it will be increasingly difficult to release staff to get involved in collaborative activities. As the only specialist 16-19 provider in the partnership, the effectiveness of the alliance will be diminished if the college cannot invest the time to help drive up standards in other institutions.
4 Sixth Form Colleges driving collaboration in their community

In this chapter we highlight the wide range of collaborative activities that four Sixth Form Colleges are involved in at a local level. These case studies show that rather than simply being passive members of a partnership group, Sixth Form Colleges can be the driving force behind collaborative activities in their community.

City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College

Background

The City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College is a leading player in the Stoke Association of Secondary, College and Academy Leaders (SASCAL) 11-19 Partnership. The partnership comprises twenty-six members including FE colleges, schools, special schools, studio schools and academies. Membership of the partnership is voluntary and open to all state funded providers in Stoke-on-Trent with students aged 11-19. The aim of the partnership is to provide a greater breadth of opportunity for all young people in Stoke-on-Trent and to drive educational improvement in the area. It has a specific focus on raising levels of attainment; improving the rate of progression to education and employment; and reducing the rate of exclusions and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The partnership also aims to raise the quality of teaching and learning, and leadership and management (including governance) to outstanding in every institution.

Activities

The partnership aims to achieve its goals through data sharing, peer review, sharing of good practice and providing cross-school/college support at a variety of levels. The partnership has also developed a joint commissioning framework for the procurement of CPD activities and successfully operated four key projects in 2012/13 that focused on: improving middle leadership, improving the quality of maths teaching, peer reviewing senior leaders and planning the joint commissioning of alternative provision. Alongside these key projects, partnership sub-groups are sharing approaches in many areas that are driving forward quality improvement whilst increasing cost efficiency. For example, the partnership has disseminated practice in using cost-effective cloud-based technologies to track Learning Walks. The college has demonstrated the use of SharePoint to manage formal lesson observations and many partners have now developed strategies for tracking quality improvement plans at a departmental level. The college has pioneered the systematic use of data to highlight and track the young people at the greatest risk of underachieving. For example, attainment at Key Stage 4, particularly in English and maths, has proved to be a reliable indicator of drop out and non-progression at Key Stage 5.
Impact

The partnership has developed seven key indicators to measure the impact of its activities. After the first year of its operation, all but one was rated as green or amber based on externally moderated feedback. The systematic use of data by the partnership has also helped to highlight improvements in the educational outcomes and life chances of young people in the city. Tangible improvements are being seen in the quality of teaching and leadership across the partnership.

The future

While the college is committed to playing a leading role in the partnership next year and beyond, funding reductions mean that it will only be able to maintain, rather than expand its role. The college has the potential to lead many more activities. For example, it is keen to spearhead a project to help address the effectiveness of governance in partner institutions, particularly in schools. It would also like to develop a communication and literacy project aimed at improving the teaching and learning of literacy skills across the partnership. One fundamental tension to partnership working is the disparity in funding rates and associated conditions of funding for individual members. For example, developing a common approach to the improvement of maths GCSE pass rates across institutions with different levels of affordability of staffing and resources is a challenge. There is a specific VAT issue when attempting to procure partnership services as Sixth Form Colleges are liable for VAT whilst schools and academies can recover their VAT costs. Even maintaining the current levels of ‘in-kind’ contribution will be challenging.

Leyton Sixth Form College

Background

The Waltham Forest Post-16 Partnership has been in operation since 2012 and consists of two Sixth Form Colleges, two 11-18 schools and one Further Education college. A representative of the local authority is also a member of the executive committee together with the Heads and Principals of the member schools and colleges. The aim of the partnership is to improve quality of provision and foster common approaches to the challenges faced across all partner institutions. Members pay an annual fee to support the work of the partnership and to cover half of the salary of the Director (who maintains his ‘day job’ as Principal of Leyton Sixth Form College).

Activities

Most partnership activity to date has focused on staff development as a vehicle for institutional and collective improvement – most notably on improvements in teaching and learning in the area. It does this through inter-institution lesson observation, mentoring programmes, workshops and training for staff. The partnership also has a relationship with the College of Teachers which operates a postgraduate teaching and learning course. During the 2012-13 academic year an aspiring senior leaders programme allowed some twenty colleagues from all five institutions to share
knowledge and experiences and to carry out research into aspects of managerial culture and policy whilst a number of ‘teaching squares’ prompted participation from forty members of staff. Finance staff from the five partners have met to discuss approaches to various funding issues whilst another group has focused on the role of the library/learning resource area as a contributor to curriculum development.

**Impact**

While the partnership has only been in operation since September 2012, it is already making an impact in certain areas, for example:

- some teaching staff have been emboldened and inspired – as a direct result of participation in partnership projects – to apply for, and in some cases secure, new positions and/or to modify classroom and classroom-related practice in ways they might not otherwise have done
- an appreciable impact on relations between the member institutions is apparent in a growing readiness to see the partnership as the first port of call for any requests for help or support over a given issue
- the sharing of good practice on everything from the grading of lesson observations to the organisation of enrichment activities, from course entry criteria to departmental examination results

**The future**

The partnership activities to date have undoubtedly created an appetite for further collaboration between the institutions. The schools and colleges all agree that meaningful partnership activity requires an organisational infrastructure. In the Waltham Forest model this has been self-funded from existing resources but this may not be sustainable, or sufficient to expand their collaborative activities further. There is clearly huge potential in the partnership and additional funding could be used to support a series of new initiatives including the mentoring and coaching of staff and the use of students to review areas of each institution’s provision. The partnership would also like to:

- increase external inputs (e.g. reviews of student/parental opinion in the borough as to the availability and perceived quality of post-16 programmes which might inform policy priorities)
- improve cross-institutional services (e.g. extra-curricular and work experience coordination, careers advice, access to counselling) which individual providers are struggling to pay for
- evaluate its activities and disseminate good practice to the widest possible audience
Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

Background

Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College is involved in over a dozen collaborative projects with schools and colleges in the local community and is a co-sponsor of a local academy. The college is a key player in the Furness Education Consortium (FEC) which includes all the local schools and colleges in the area, as well as representatives from primary school networks. Three specific initiatives include:

- hosting the Furness Inclusion Team that aims to reintegrate hard to place pupils into mainstream education
- Cumbria Aspires – a group of schools on the west coast of Cumbria that focus on raising aspiration and ‘growing your own’ for the local high tech industry
- a planned partnership with Beaumont College in Lancaster (run by the disability charity Scope) and two local special schools to educate post-19 Special Educational Needs students at the Sixth Form College

Activities

The consortium helps to ensure that the provision of education in the area is developed in a coherent way and that strategic links are maintained with the local authority. Heads and deputies meet regularly and key contacts from other agencies are invited to meetings. For example, the college will represent FEC schools on the Schools Forum next year. Through the subject consortia of the FEC, teachers meet in subject groups to share good practice and cross moderate. This is especially useful for transition in core subjects such as mathematics, English and sciences. It has also prompted a need for a focus on modern foreign languages from primary through to post-16 and a need to focus on mathematics across the secondary schools. A shared scheme has also been devised to ensure that key information about students is not lost at points of transition. FEC schools are linked with local industry through the FESP (Furness Education and Skills Partnership). This has led to many tangible benefits including professional CAD software and training being made available free of charge to all schools and colleges by Siemens.

Impact

The work of the FEC has helped to ensure that providers in the local area can play to their strengths and competitive pressures do not fragment and diminish the educational offer available to young people. For example, Furness College does not offer A level provision as this is already on offer (and delivered to a very high standard) at the Sixth Form College. No local secondary school has yet opened a sixth form as high quality post-16 provision is already available at the FE and Sixth Form College. This close partnership working has helped to ensure that young people in the area enjoy a smooth transition from school to college and fewer students are put at risk of becoming NEET at age 17 or 18. The FEC also has a School Direct programme that is recruiting very effectively.
The future

Members of the FEC now have to pay for the administrative support that underpins the work of the consortium. Whilst this is understandable given the scope and nature of the work, it is placing an added financial burden on the college in particular. The main barrier to expanding the work of the FEC is a lack of capacity funding. To release staff from teaching means providing supply cover which is difficult in the current financial climate. There are many talented and enthusiastic people in the local education community who could make a real difference if funding was made available to facilitate this.

Portsmouth College

Background

Portsmouth College is the hub for collaborative and partnership activities in the Portsmouth area. The college made a strategic decision in 2005 to move from being a marginal city college to a highly proactive partner at the heart of the 14-19 strategic educational landscape. Its goal was to help the aspirations and achievements of all of the city’s learners through effective school/college and other strategic partnerships. As a result, they are now involved in a very wide range of partnership activities at a local, national and even international level.

Activities

The college and seven local schools are engaged in a close partnership aimed at raising the aspiration, achievement, participation and progression of young people in the city. This involves joint governance; pooled budgets for shared staffing resources; joint accountability for achieving ambitious targets; and the appointment of a cross partnership Executive Head of maths to drive up success rates, quality of maths teaching and leadership of maths learning. The college is involved in a range of other collaborative activities including:

- **Aiming for Academic Excellence programme** – in September 2010 the college launched a city-wide able and talented scheme aimed at raising the aspirations of the most academically able Year 10 and 11 students in the city’s schools. This is a national pilot for the Russell Group of universities

- **Urban Leadership Trainee Head Teacher Hosting Programme** – the college hosts this programme that focuses on strategic and leadership skills of aspiring leaders. It is aimed at partner school deputies as part of a ‘Grown Our Own Future Leaders’ succession planning partnership. It also offers the opportunity for members of the college SMT to do a reverse placement for a better understanding of key 11-16 issues

- **SEASTEAMIC** – the development of a primary science centre for the Solent region to support the learning of two hundred primary students. This will inspire more young children to stay engaged in STEAM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Applied Creativity and Maths
Impact

The activities outlined above are part of a comprehensive package of fourteen initiatives that have contributed to significant improvements in post-16 participation, attendance and progression, and a four-year improvement in success rates for both 16-18 year old students and adult students at the college. Portsmouth is one of the most improved local authorities in the UK in terms of exam results, for example there has been a 14% improvement in the proportion of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A-C including English and maths over the last three years.

The partnership’s aims are closely aligned with those of the city; to improve GCSE results and the post-16 staying-on rate, and to reduce the percentage of young people not in education, training or employment. The college has met these aims extremely well by sharing best practice and raising standards. It has already shared this work with its five local Sixth Form College partners and created a Shared Services Network to replicate these benefits.

The future

Even a college as committed to partnership working as Portsmouth will have to scale back its collaborative activities in light of the funding cuts. Capacity could be the key issue – there will be less time available for senior leaders in the college to drive collaborative activities forward. Alongside this, competition is increasing with new academies opening sixth forms that are less inclined to engage in partnership working. Additional funding would allow Portsmouth College to expand its collaborative activities further. For example, there is a need for a college student mentoring programme, where students go into partner schools to act as mentors. A co-ordinator could help to facilitate this and expand the activities of the SEASTEAMIC programme. There is also a particular need to increase partnership working with local employers to further support the college’s Enterprise and Employability strategy.
5 Sixth Form Colleges supporting underperforming schools and colleges

In this final chapter we outline five very different examples of Sixth Form Colleges that are supporting underperforming schools and colleges. The first and last case study show collaboration at its most extreme – a formal takeover. In the case of Christ the King, the college has not once, but twice taken over an underperforming school. Reigate College is the very first example of a Sixth Form College that has entered into a hard federation with another Sixth Form College with a view to a formal merger. In between, there are examples of colleges that are committed to improving the educational experience of young people in their locality. In all cases, the current and planned reductions to Sixth Form College funding will make similar interventions much less likely in the future.

Christ the King Sixth Form College

Christ the King Sixth Form College is based in the London Borough of Lewisham. In 2009 the college was approached to help St. Luke’s College, a struggling (deficit budget, poor student outcomes, declining student numbers) 16-19 school in Sidcup. In 2013 the college was asked to support another struggling 16-19 school - Crossways Sixth Form in Telegraph Hill, Lewisham. In both cases, the schools were closed and reopened as part of Christ the King Sixth Form College.

When St. Luke’s was taken over, the senior leadership team was extended to cover both sites, with the Associate Principal moving across to become Head of Centre. The college established services that operated across both sites including finance, personnel, IT, accommodation services, catering, cleaning and security. Governors received reports from each college (such as exam results, retention, progression, quality reviews etc.) as well as summaries for the overall college. The budget reports were broken down by site and there was a consolidated account. When Crossways was taken over, more leadership capacity was required and so the college established a Centre Leadership Team at each site.

The college has established the notion of ‘one college, three sites’ to ensure consistency in its values and processes. The college is funded as a single institution with aggregated outcome data and a single governing body and senior leadership team. However, each site has been able to adapt to meet the needs of its students and develop an identity that reflects the needs of its local community. Both St. Luke’s and Crossways had struggled to find efficient ways of using school-based systems and processes in a purely 16-19 setting. It was clear that the Sixth Form College model would be much more effective, which proved to be the case. All teaching and support staff were also successfully transferred to Sixth Form College terms and conditions of service.

In three years, the former St. Luke’s site has been transformed. Numbers have risen from 300 students to 850. The college is now oversubscribed (over one thousand applications this year) and operating at full capacity, overall success rates are above benchmark, pass rates are above the national average and they are no longer
running a deficit budget. Overall, the takeover has allowed the college to develop and extend its work, widen opportunities for its staff, provide greater choice for prospective students and to take forward a range of quality improvement activities.

**Wilberforce Sixth Form College**

Wilberforce Sixth Form College in Hull is firmly rooted in its local community. When it was announced that a struggling local secondary school was due to close in 2011, the college stepped in to ensure that a group of GCSE students could continue their studies with minimal disruption. They pioneered the idea of a ‘school within a college’ and enrolled forty-seven pupils from the school. The pupils were primarily based in their own purpose built section of the building and still wore a uniform, but they did mix with college students. The experiment was a great success. The Year 10 students benefited from learning in a more adult environment – their behaviour improved and they matured rapidly. Exam performance was also greatly improved: 70% of the students secured five A*-C in their GCSEs and 88% of the cohort enrolled at the college in 2013 to continue their studies at a higher level. The remaining students have all gone into apprenticeships. Every one of the forty-seven students has secured a positive progression outcome.

**Franklin College**

Over the past five years, Franklin College in Grimsby has developed strong links with local schools and academies to support school improvement strategies and enhance progression pathways. Initially working with the local authority (and now increasingly with individual academies and multi-academy trusts), Franklin has been able to create bespoke intervention strategies to support school improvement (principally in English and maths at Key Stage 4), using experienced staff under the direction of the college’s Deputy Principal. These staff are embedded within each school structure and take the lead on teaching and learning strategies, and on curriculum development. The college has helped to improve performance at Key Stage 4 (using its staff to deliver specialist GCSE and vocational subjects at 14-16), and work with individual schools to enhance their curriculum to broaden the progression opportunities available to young people at 16. To date, the college has worked in this way with seven secondary schools, most of which were rated as inadequate or satisfactory when the college first became involved. Of the seven, only one remains under scrutiny by Ofsted. All have become academies in the last three years, and have retained Franklin as a school improvement partner afterwards. Franklin College students continue to mentor pupils in the academies and Franklin staff are members of five academy governing bodies.

**St. Charles Catholic Sixth Form College**

St. Charles Catholic Sixth Form College was the lead partner in the National Challenge improvement process for Newman Catholic College (an 11-18 school) that ran from 2010 until 2011. The Principal of St. Charles remained as a Governor of the school after the National Challenge plan was signed off, and was then asked by the governing body to become Chair from September 2012. Since that time, the college has continued to offer a range of support services to the school on a pro bono basis.
For example, the college provides twilight workshop support to students in six areas of the school’s post-16 provision. The college has also conducted an extensive round of focus group consultations with school staff and students to inform the recruitment of a new management team and the development of its strategic plan. It has even commissioned a premises and maintenance survey to assist with the development of the school estate. The impact of the college’s involvement with the school is already being felt – there has been a change of leadership in the past year and two new members of the Senior Leadership Team have been recruited. The number of pupils receiving five A*-C grades at GCSE has increased from 35% to 48%, and enrolments have increased by almost 10%.

**Reigate College**

In 2013, Coulsdon College in Croydon was graded as inadequate by Ofsted for a second time. Reigate College, an outstanding Sixth Form College based eight miles away agreed to enter into a partnership arrangement with Coulsdon to help revive its fortunes. A ‘hard federation’ was created between the two institutions where Reigate provides strategic leadership and governance of Coulsdon. Between March and July 2013, Coulsdon was re-created as a ‘new’ college with revised aims, strategic objectives, structures, policies, a new curriculum as well as new leadership. A new governing body of twelve members has been established, nine of whom must be appointed by Reigate College Corporation. The Chair is the Vice Chair at Reigate and the Principal at Reigate is the Executive Principal at Coulsdon. Shared services have been introduced across the two colleges in finance, estates, IT, reprography, marketing, MIS and in the teaching of languages and geography. While much has already been achieved at Coulsdon, the Ofsted inspection and exam results in 2013/14 will help to quantify the progress being made. This is a good example of a sector-led solution to a sector-based problem. Reigate College’s desire to help was driven by its belief that outstanding practice is transferrable between institutions and that Coulsdon students would receive a better education under the leadership and management of another Sixth Form College than an alternative provider.
6 Conclusion

As we noted at the beginning of this report, Sixth Form Colleges are highly effective and highly efficient institutions. They consistently deliver excellent outcomes for learners whilst providing extraordinary value for money. The sector is firmly committed to continuous improvement and has a collaborative ethos and infrastructure that has developed over a period of forty years. This report has evidenced the vital, but little known, role that Sixth Form Colleges play in driving up standards in other sectors. By working in partnership with schools, academies and FE colleges, they are helping to improve the life chances of many more young people than the 150,000 students that are currently enrolled at a Sixth Form College.

As well-established, effective and efficient institutions rooted in their local communities, Sixth Form Colleges are ideally placed to help the government meet its objectives for 16-19 education. But as we also noted earlier, Sixth Form Colleges will be disproportionately affected by planned reductions to 16-19 funding. A recurring theme that emerged in the interviews for this report was that of retrenchment - of Sixth Form Colleges being forced to turn inwards and focus solely on the education of their own students. For some colleges, even this focus on ‘core business’ will be difficult to maintain in the new funding climate.

At the same time, the government is actively encouraging the creation of new sixth form providers, particularly 16-19 free schools and academies. More free school sixth form colleges were opened in September 2013\(^\text{12}\), than official Sixth Form Colleges in the past ten years. Some of these new providers have been created near to high performing Sixth Form Colleges rated as outstanding by Ofsted, and all are reimbursed for their VAT costs, while Sixth Form Colleges are not. This is not an argument against the introduction of market forces in 16-19 education, but it is an argument for the creation of a market environment where providers can compete fairly on the basis of their educational offer, and not be disadvantaged based on the funding they receive.

As this report has shown, the government would see a significant return on the modest investment that is required to equalise the VAT treatment of Sixth Form Colleges. It would help colleges to avoid compromising the quality of their ‘core business’ and continue to develop their collaborative activities to benefit learners in the wider community. The fifteen case studies in this report evidence the impact of partnership working driven by Sixth Form Colleges. This is just a small sample – there are a further seventy-eight colleges in the sector that are willing and able to broaden and deepen their relationships with other providers.

At present, funding in Sixth Form Colleges is redirected away from the front line education of students to pay VAT, in a way that it is not in schools, academies or free schools. The government now has the opportunity to address this inequality and at the same time, unlock the potential of Sixth Form Colleges to act as leaders of excellence in the education system.

\(^{12}\) A list of all free schools that opened in September 2013 can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-school-year-sees-number-of-free-schools-double