

# College Manager

acm

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## Colleges: bringing harmony to communities

### ▲ Carshalton College celebrates and values diversity

In spring 2008, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills invited individuals and organisations to respond to its consultation document *The role of further education providers in promoting cohesion, fostering shared values and preventing violent extremism*. Here is an extract from ACM's response. ►

## Colleges: bringing harmony to communities

◀ The consultation seeks to set an agenda for debate and action with respect to colleges' role in preventing violent extremism and fostering shared values. In addressing this it is important that we actively and clearly distance ourselves from those forces that seek to demonise Muslim communities. Of course, the consultation document does not connive with that view but it is not until an annex that we have the clear statement, 'The vast majority of Muslims in the UK and abroad reject both extremism and violence'. Prior to that, and from an early point in the paper, there are numerous references to violent extremism and Al Qa'ida, including on page 2: 'The Government judges the main terrorist threat to the UK at this time to be from Al Qa'ida influenced terrorism.'

Building on a good deal of collective experience, colleges are working to support, engage and create partnerships with Muslim communities, helping to counter the negativity towards Muslims that is growing in some quarters at present. Muslim communities are comparatively poor, and increasingly feel beleaguered and demonised. We need to resist such demonisation for three reasons.

- 1** In the longer term, Government alone cannot deal effectively with the type of violence at issue in this paper – it will only do so in partnership with communities.
- 2** The process of demonising Muslims which we are witnessing just now, for example through the blizzard of media and internet reports, may push susceptible individuals towards violence.
- 3** In a liberal democracy it is intrinsically ethical to attend to and set the conditions for the flourishing of everyone. The present juncture puts the flourishing of many individuals in Muslim communities in some jeopardy and we have a collective responsibility to address this. Members of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities remain at the bottom of the socio-economic heap. As Sir Trevor Phillips pointed out in his 'sleepwalking into segregation' speech, made after the 7 July bombings, a Pakistani man with identical qualifications to a white man will earn £300,000 less in his lifetime.



### Students benefit from a positive, inclusive atmosphere

It is of paramount importance then that Muslims and Islam are not defined as the problem here. While the paper does not do this, it would be helpful to be more forthright. Violent extremism is a grave problem that threatens all of us – Muslims, Christians, Humanists – irrespective of our belief commitments. The Association entirely supports the determination to identify, root out and deal with violent extremism of whatever origin. It is debatable whether the causes of violent extremism are religious, though it is certainly the case that a small number of angry alienated men sucked into violence by a range of factors, are badging their activities as Islamic.

Let us be forthright then and refute the perception that elides the religion of Islam with a propensity to violence. Many colleges have invested extensive resources and commitment in creating partnerships and provision with these communities. But we need the backing of government policy. The provision of accessible ESOL and learning programmes that take on board the conditions under which individuals are able to engage in learning is central to enabling colleges to create partnerships with minority communities. Government funding and curriculum policies should support colleges in this regard. ●



## Partnership building and the 14–19 Diplomas

With the successful Gateway bids announced in the spring, a new group of 14–19 partnerships will be starting work on the curriculum development needed to get the Diplomas off the ground over the next few years. Those schools and colleges not yet on the Diploma journey may be keeping an eye on developments in the first year to see how the new qualification evolves before seeking to get involved in the next round; assuming, of course, that there is to be a new round of Gateway bids. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has yet to indicate how those who did not get through the first Gateway and who are not successful in the second will be able to get involved in the future.

### Collaborate rather than compete

Any group seeking to become involved in the Diploma will need to focus on the nature and quality of partnership working in their local area. It is clear from discussions about the first two rounds of the Gateway process that the strength of a local partnership is a key criterion in decisions about who can join in the Diploma party. In many respects this is more than welcome. After a long period in which schools and colleges were set up to compete by the Government and by the policies and practices of the DCSF's predecessor, we now have, not just active encouragement to work together, but also a requirement to do so. Many will welcome this change in thinking by ministers who now seem to recognise, some of the time at least, that competition in public services is not always in the interests of the people we aim to serve.

Moving from a competitive to a collaborative culture, however, is not always easy. Some partnerships that operate in areas where cooperation has been the norm, or where there have been successful pathfinder projects, will not struggle. Others, where leaders, managers and teachers are used to operating in a fiercely competitive environment, may find that developing a new collaborative culture is quite a challenge.

The first and sometimes the hardest challenge in any partnership development is for participants to set aside their institutional garb. Partners who approach every issue wondering about the possible impact on their own organisation will struggle to develop a successful collaboration. All those involved in a collaborative venture need to start from the proposition that working in partnership is about finding different ways of problem solving in the interests of the wider community and not just the community of interests that our current institution serves. At the same time, there should be no risk to institutional interests or those of current learners in a particular location. This is a difficult balance to achieve.

### Each area has a different priority

It helps if partners agree on what issues or challenges are to be tackled and how addressing them will be approached. The focus is not simply on the Diploma. The Diploma is part of a wider curriculum reform that seeks to enhance opportunities for all in the 14–19 phase. The key challenges will vary from one area to another. In some areas, there is a need to raise participation rates and to reduce the numbers who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). In other areas, the priority might be to close gaps in vocational learning or to improve the quality and independence of advice and guidance for young people. Improving attainment levels at Key stage 4 may be the main issue for other partnerships.

It will be helpful for your partnership to be clear on the baseline data so that the effectiveness of the partnership can be measured as it develops. Data on attainment levels, the numbers of NEETs, curriculum mapping and gaps in provision will be helpful as a starting point and could be used to justify start-up funding for your local partnership. Baseline data is important in making bids for funding as clarity about what is to be addressed will both strengthen the case for funding and provide an evidence base against which progress can be monitored and measured. ►

### ◀ Look for examples of good practice

In developing a partnership there is no need to start from a blank sheet of paper; looking at how other partnerships have solved problems can save hours of research, investigation and debate. In the early stages of the development of the Harrow Collegiate, we looked in detail at the achievements of a number of other 14–19 partnerships, including Wolverhampton, Welwyn and Sunderland, and had clear ideas to start with about how problems such as transport, timetable alignment or the differing conditions of service of staff across sectors might be addressed.

In the development of any new partnership, there is a need to devote some time to producing a memorandum of understanding or partnership agreement. Whilst it is important to have a clear structure, the most effective partnerships will have a brief constitution, sufficient to ensure that governance issues have been addressed but that serves few other purposes. It is by working together that individuals build trust in each other and not through the quality of a constitution or other written document.

Partnerships need to develop on different levels simultaneously. It is fine for the senior leadership team to be meeting to develop strategy but if operational managers and teachers are not also developing a collaborative working relationship there is a risk that what appears to be working well from the helicopter view looks chaotic and ill-considered from the ground. Operational management groups as well as practitioner groups need to have the same freedom to develop a team ethos as do leadership teams. This could make partnership development expensive but most institutions have training days and, with a little careful forward-planning, building one or two common training days into the partnership calendar can deliver real benefits.

### Be realistic about what you can change

It is also worth spending a little time reflecting on the things that a partnership cannot or should not want to change. For individuals within a partnership to try to tackle issues that are beyond the scope of the group might lead to frustration. It is far better to put those things to one side and to get on with managing the changes that partnership groups are able to influence.

Government policy is one of the frustrations that simply needs to be lived with and ignored. Whilst ministers in our two education departments are encouraging collaboration, many policies are in place that get in the way and undermine effective partnership activity. This may be particularly the case in those areas where the muddled thinking of ministers is causing increased competition and duplication of provision, where new academies and presumption schools are opening sixth forms in opposition to existing providers. Similarly, league tables that stimulate competition and funding disparities between sectors each illustrate the kinds of issue that can get in the way. But they are facts of life to be worked around.

Spending too much time debating the failure of Government to produce joined-up thinking in these areas might be therapeutic but will simply distract from the job in hand. Also, any partnership will involve, in terms of ethos, a range of diverse institutions. If you work in an institution that has social and educational inclusion as part of its mission, you might struggle with aspects of the ethos of your neighbouring selective sixth form or college. Diversity, however, is important and no member of a partnership should feel that their ethos is being challenged by belonging to a partnership.

You might also be concerned about the capacity of Diplomas to deal with the issues they are intended to address. The vision that informed the Tomlinson proposals for a diploma has been watered down and that is disappointing. The long-term success of the Diploma, however, will not arise from the current design. It will come from the ability of our teachers to work both together and with employers to develop a qualification that is stimulating, interesting and challenging for young people and one which is engaging because it allows learners to address their personal goals.

### Expand the membership

Most partnerships will begin with institutional membership being drawn largely from the education system. It is important to find ways of broadening this so that employers and private training providers are brought to the table. In the development of the Diploma, employers will be particularly important if the new qualification is to be a genuine alternative to current Key stage 4 and post-16 provision.

Working in partnership takes time; in that sense, it can be expensive. But partnerships do make it possible to solve problems that individual institutions cannot tackle alone. If the end product is increased participation and success, and wider opportunities for young people to progress in education or into work, the investment is worthwhile. ●



## AMiE launch less than three months away

Work is continuing towards the formal establishment of the Association of Managers in Education (AMiE), which will launch in September 2008. A new logo for AMiE has been designed, and members will be familiar with the regular e-mail updates and may have attended one of the briefing sessions that have been held around the country. ACM General Secretary Peter Pendle has visited a number of ACM branches to outline the proposals. If you would like him to visit your branch, please telephone the ACM office on 01858 461 110. Changes to the ACM rules were approved at the AGM in May, and advertisements have been placed for the recruitment of a further three regional officers. More information about AMiE can be found on the ACM website ([www.acm.uk.com](http://www.acm.uk.com)).

## Blog breaks 250 barrier

ACM's blog boasts over 250 postings. Updated regularly, it is a source of news and views on matters affecting ACM members. What's more, you can join in by posting your own comments; and you can keep up to date by subscribing to the RSS feed. Find out more by visiting <http://acmblog.wordpress.com>

## Improved access

Did you know that ACM can produce the *College manager* in formats other than the standard A4 newsletter? If the format of this newsletter is difficult for members to access we are very happy to discuss how to meet members' needs. Please telephone ACM on 01858 461 110, fax 01858 461 366 or e-mail [administration@acm.uk.com](mailto:administration@acm.uk.com)

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## Students not learners, please

In 2010, when the gnashing of teeth (or large celebrations) subsides over the demise of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), I would like to make a plea to the bodies taking up the FE reins. Can we please, please, please drop the use of the term 'learner' and go back to calling the people we teach 'students'.

I have never understood why we introduced 'learner' in place of 'student'. I don't remember ever reading about it in an LSC circular. I heard a rumour that the justification was that the term 'student' implied people of a certain age (ie young) and 'learner' was more inclusive for older students. Older students in universities are always referred to as 'students' and they don't seem to mind. Take a look at the Open University – it is full of folk that are older than in traditional universities and seem happy enough to be described as students.



What is so wrong with the word 'student'? It is in such common usage by everyone else. There is a National Union of Students and shops give 'student discounts'. Then we have 'student bank accounts' 'student loans' 'student rail cards' and 'student nights' in clubs and bars across the land. When did you ever hear of a 'learner rail card' or a 'learner discount'? Other than 'Adult Learners' Week' or being a 'learner driver' no one else uses the term learner – except the LSC and we, lemming-like, follow them into this terminological abyss.

If you look up 'student' on a commonly used academic information database (Wikipedia to you and me) you get a full account of the use of the word across the world. It states that the origin of the word student is from the word 'studere' which means 'to direct one's zeal at'. Look up 'learner' and you get re-directed to the page on 'learning'. Even Wikipedia doesn't like the term.

Bring back 'student'! You know it is the right thing to do. At one time, when everything was right in the world, you found pupils in schools, and students in FE colleges and at university. Pupils at school would aspire to be students. It signalled a graduation from school. You were still in education but you were a student in a college not a pupil in a school. Now that we have relinquished the term 'student' in favour of 'learner', the school sector has seized the opportunity and commandeered the word. Year 10 and 11 school children are called 'students' now. They go from pupil to student in school, and then they become a learner in further education and then a student again at university.

I hope ACM will support this campaign to grab back a perfectly suitable word to describe the people we serve. I for one won't be using the term 'learner' when I mean 'student' again. Will you join me?

**Learner or student? Vote on our website at [www.acm.uk.com](http://www.acm.uk.com)**

## Disciplinary procedure needs improvement

A model disciplinary procedure for senior post-holders, issued by the Association of Colleges (AoC), needs some serious improvement before it can be adopted by college corporations. The warning comes from ACM after areas of weakness were found in an early draft of the AoC's model. However, despite ACM making a raft of recommendations, very few of these were accepted by the AoC.

Among ACM's concerns is a facility that would allow, albeit in rare circumstances, for a dismissal to be made without the need for an investigation or hearing.

ACM is now urging colleges to take on board our proposed changes before the procedure is adopted. General Secretary Peter Pendle said: 'Sadly the procedure is short on good practice in some very important areas. We have written to colleges urging them to negotiate improvements with ACM.'

The dozen or so ACM recommendations include making the right to be accompanied apply at investigatory meetings, reducing from 18 to 12 months the maximum period a disciplinary penalty can remain on an individual's record, and a greater degree of flexibility on re-arranging meetings where an individual's representative is not available.



## Pay negotiations in Wales

Unions representing the majority of employees in FE colleges in Wales formally presented the 2008/09 pay claim to the employers' organisation, fforwm, at a meeting of the Wales National Negotiating Committee. The claim, which had been approved by all of the FE unions in Wales, calls for a 6% pay increase and a minimum increase of £1500, the removal of the bottom point on the management spine, an increase in holidays for managers, and for business support managers to be moved onto the management spine. The claim also seeks nationally agreed core conditions of service.

ACM General Secretary Peter Pendle, who chaired the staff side at the meeting, said: 'We believe that this is a very fair claim and were encouraged by the response of the employers at the meeting. We hope that we will be able to make much quicker progress this year so that the increase is paid to employees at the start of the academic year.'

A response to the claim from fforwm is expected early in June. Also represented at the meeting were ATL and Unison. The UCU declined to attend as a result of the strike being held on the same day.



## Pay negotiations in England

The six FE unions representing 250,000 members in England have rejected the pay offer of 2.5% made by the employers' body, the AoC. The six trade unions – ACM, ATL, GMB, UCU, Unison and Unite – submitted a catch-up pay claim for 6% or £1500, whichever is the greater. This would establish a minimum wage level of £7.38 per hour for employees in the FE sector.

ACM General Secretary Peter Pendle said: 'While we understand the difficult financial situation colleges find themselves in, we reject this offer outright. 2.5% is just not enough. This year, our members have been struggling to cope with huge hikes in the cost of essentials like fuel, food and housing. The least we expect is an offer in line with inflation, and the retail price index currently stands at 3.8%, together with an element of catch up for below-inflation increases in recent years.'

Updates on negotiations can be found on the ACM website or ACM blog.

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## Wise words?

● We trained hard .... but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn late in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization. ●

Anon

Is this fitting comment on the machinery of government changes? Vote on the ACM website at [www.acm.uk.com](http://www.acm.uk.com) or e-mail [memberfeedback@acm.uk.com](mailto:memberfeedback@acm.uk.com)



## The spirit of Tolpuddle

In 1834, under a sycamore tree in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle, six farm workers met to form a trade union. When their bosses found out they had the men arrested, charged with taking an illegal oath. The six men were sentenced to seven years' transportation to Australia. But their plight became a cause for other workers. Mass protests eventually won the men – who won renown as the Tolpuddle Martyrs – a free pardon.

In those days working conditions were hard. Bosses were all powerful, hours of work were extreme and pay was low. Today we have laws designed to protect us from over-zealous bosses. For example, discrimination is unlawful, bosses can be fined or even imprisoned for breaking health and safety regulations, and we cannot be unfairly dismissed...or can we?

Despite the presence of some extensive employment laws, often only introduced after the campaigning efforts of trade unions in this country and Europe, the employer still holds all the aces. This is fact because trade unions like ACM witness everyday how employers treat members of their workforce. Each year we receive around 700 new enquiries from members who have a problem at work. For a small professional trade union, that is a staggering number.

So does the spirit of Tolpuddle have any relevance today? The answer must be yes. The education sector is one of the most unionised sectors of society, with over a dozen different organisations competing for members. It is also one of the most regulated sectors and, according to the Health and Safety Executive, one of the most stressful. Not surprising then that many of those working in education recognise the value of a union card.

But despite the high level of unionisation compared with other sectors of the economy, there are still many who choose not to join. Figures published by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (formerly the DTI) put the level of union density in the education sector at 55% (2006 figures). This means there are still plenty of potential union members working in our education system. Some of these will be the non-believers. You know the sort. They don't think they will ever need a union because either 'it won't happen to them' or if it does, their best mate the solicitor will sort it out. My message to such individuals, put politely of course, is 'don't be silly'.

From time to time we receive a call from someone who wants help and says that if they'd have known they would have joined a union earlier. The often unsaid response is *why didn't you?* Instead we politely tell them we do not represent people who come along with a pre-existing problem.

As for using a solicitor, employment law is a specialist field. Our regional officers are experienced professionals and receive regular training and employment law updates. A high street solicitor simply may not have the expertise. Then there is the cost. Just two solicitor's letters would probably cost the same as a whole year of ACM contributions!

The other and larger group of non-members are those who simply haven't been asked to join. This is where members can help. Show your non-ACM colleagues this issue of *College manager*. Remind them just how unstable working in the sector can be. Suggest they give us a call or visit **[www.acm.uk.com](http://www.acm.uk.com)**

## News from Wales

### ACM has responded to three consultation documents in Wales.

In response to *Skills that work for Wales*, ACM Wales takes the position that *Promise and performance* (the Webb review, 2007) presents a sound positional statement for further education in Wales. Our question to the Welsh Assembly Government is whether it has the ability and commitment to fund and implement the proposals in the face of the opposition that is certain to come from the schools' lobby.

By and large we agree with six of the seven fundamental messages contained in the Webb review. We can see the strengths in the arguments put forward in the report on learner entitlement, skills, quality, funding, reconfiguration and governance, although we believe there is still much more work to do. However, we cannot support the recommendations on employer influence, and caution against making the same mistakes made in England in an attempt to encourage employers to train and retrain their workforce. Employers have consistently demonstrated their reluctance to train their workers and we believe the time for compulsion has arrived.

### Conditions of service

We also believe that serious consideration must be given to introducing model conditions of service across Wales for all FE staff (lecturers, business support staff and managers) and we understand and accept that, as a result, job profiles will need to change to meet new demands. Any changes in the structure of further education in Wales should be linked to a job evaluation for all employees in the sector, on a phased basis and with priority given to business support staff. We would, of course, seek guarantees that there should be no compulsory redundancies following implementation of the recommendations. Capacity change should be achieved by natural wastage.

### Funding and mergers

We strongly support the argument for a unified system of funding. We note the suggestion that mergers should take place where colleges have a turnover of less than £15m. ACM Wales believes that persuasive arguments have been put forward to support this suggestion and that there should not be a knee-jerk reaction to reject it out of hand. Coleg Gwent has demonstrated that multi-campus institutions crossing several local authority boundaries can be a success. The argument for a similar arrangement in Cardiff is strong. However, we are not yet convinced that the same applies throughout Wales. Any move towards such mergers must only be taken after comprehensive consultation with the trade unions representing employees in further education and with a clear commitment to avoid any compulsory redundancies. Ultimately, however, the interest of learners must drive any decisions on merger.

In response to the proposed Framework for Intervention in FE institutions, whilst the Association acknowledges that the Further Education and Training Act 2007 places a statutory requirement that Welsh Ministers prepare a statement of their intervention policy, as a matter of principle we oppose the need for intervention powers or a policy. ACM will continue to campaign vigorously for the repeal of this part of the legislation generally and against the use of the powers in Wales.

There certainly is a need to clarify which employees are authorised to direct a governing body to commence procedures for the consideration of a case for dismissal. Our view is that the powers should only extend to senior post-holders as defined and designated in the Instruments and Articles of Governance. If a more general interpretation of senior staff is taken then a very clear definition of which posts are covered should be included in the policy.

ACM has also submitted a response to the *Proposals for a learning and skills measure*. Copies of the full response to all three consultations are available on the ACM website at [www.acm.uk.com](http://www.acm.uk.com)



## White Paper proposals shun what is best for learners

So the powers that be have decided that it is time for yet another shake up in the way that the FE sector is managed. Not content with creating two government departments that colleges are ultimately accountable to, they have now decided that wholesale reorganisation is required, setting out their proposals in the White Paper *Raising expectations: enabling the system to deliver*.

Although there is much sense in locating service responsibility for children and young people in one place this does not appear to be what the White Paper is proposing. The Association of Colleges has produced two charts illustrating funding and regulation in 2010, and it would be difficult to come up with a more complicated infrastructure. While many in the sector support the direction of travel, I have yet to speak to a single senior college manager who supports the transfer of the provision for young learners back to local authorities or the split between arrangements for pre- and post-19 provision. The most common response is that maybe the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) wasn't that bad after all!

When criticising such proposals the standard response is that the FE sector is full of moaners, but what colleges want are as few points of contact nationally as possible. (This seems to be a model that works well in Wales with the Welsh Assembly Government, as well as in higher education in England with the HEFCE.) Nevertheless, the argument goes that the infrastructure is not designed around what might be most convenient for providers: it should focus on what is best for learners. Yet, in an era when Foster and others have criticised the number of national agencies, the 'galaxy of stars', these proposals seem to suggest the creation of at least another six new agencies! How does that benefit the learner?

Since the 1990s colleges have been encouraged to follow various different strategies. Under local authorities, colleges were encouraged to cooperate with neighbouring colleges and schools. Under the FEFC it was all about the cut and thrust of competition. Remember the heady days of franchising? Then, under the Learning and Skills Council, we slowly moved into a world of central planning and control. So how does the White Paper propose to simplify this? By introducing two systems: planning and control for 14–19 provision and market forces for 19+ provision: no longer competition or collaboration but competition **and** collaboration!

The fear, of course, is that there is a hidden agenda behind all of this. Despite the rhetoric about parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes, current government policy seems to be moving in the opposite direction, with a return to small school sixth forms and a split between sixth form colleges and traditional general education colleges. While this may offer opportunities to both sixth form and general FE colleges I just do not accept that it is in the best interest of the majority of learners.

Recent election results indicate that the life of the current Government is coming to an end. However, those in the know think that a new Tory Government will follow the policies of the existing Government for the first couple of years following its election, probably in 2010. So the message is clear: if you think that the proposals outlined in the White Paper are ill-considered and over-complicated then do something about it. Write to your MP. After all, there is an election on the horizon!

### Quote of the issue

● Learning is not compulsory but neither is survival. ●

WE Deming, *Out of the crisis*, 2000.

Know a good saying about leadership that applies to work in colleges?

Send it to [nadinecartner@acm.uk.com](mailto:nadinecartner@acm.uk.com)