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Be careful what you wish for in 2009

**AMiE is
a partnership
between
ACM and ATL**

There is arguably one wish that has united managers across the college sector for over a decade: for the sector to be the respected and trusted partner of government.

Is there another sector that has so significantly played to Labour's dream of a demand-driven public service, hit every target, served local communities, tackled social injustice and contributed to economic prosperity? Our college sector is characterised by autonomous, responsive institutions delivering high-quality provision. ►

Review by
Bob Vesey,
Director of Learner
Services at Harrow
College. He is
a member of
AMiE's National
Council and Chair
of the Education
Committee.

The Hands-On Guide to Post-16 Funding

By Nick Linford
Pearson Longman for Edexcel, 2008
ISBN 9781846903908

Since further education funding was centralised, first with the Further Education Funding Council and later with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the sector has been used to an annual change in the approach to funding, with the regular publication of fresh guidance. Stability has not been a feature of the funding landscape.

Frequent change requires those with a brief to manage provision to keep abreast of sets of guidance and rules that are not always to be found in one place or easy to follow. While some documents are updated annually, others remain current (in full or in part) for more than one year. Currently, any college manager wanting to stay on top of the funding guidance and its relationship to government targets, LSC priorities, curriculum changes and the sector's quality framework might find themselves meandering through a large set of documents or browsing in a labyrinth of departmental and agency websites.

In this practical guide, Linford (Director of Planning and Performance at Lewisham College and a member of the LSC Funding Advisory Group) offers an alternative, in the process saving readers a significant amount of research time. This is a thorough overview of the funding landscape, located in the context of government targets, the economic need for improved employability skills and greater international competitiveness, and the qualifications framework with which the sector works.

In the recent past, the LSC has moved the funding system from one that was supporting five different funding streams that separated school and college-based funding but that also funded three different employment or skills-related qualification routes: Apprenticeships; Train to Gain; and Entry to Employment. It is possible to suggest that these five streams had their origin in the fact that there is no coherent overview of post-compulsory learning in England in Whitehall departments.

Although the responsibility for post-16 education was, until recently, in one government department, different sections of that department led on academic or vocational learning. In effect, those sections perpetuated the historic divide in English education thinking between academic learning and vocational education or training. The result was that shifts in education policy designed to tackle one particular issue led to the introduction of new qualifications, each with their own separate funding streams. The most recent examples of this include Entry to Employment and the Diplomas.

The LSC has now moved funding from those five streams to three funding models: 16–18; adult learner responsive; and employer responsive. The three models work alongside a funding formula that includes a radically different way of measuring the cost or value of each learner: the Standard Learner Number (SLN). It could be argued that in shifting from these five streams to three funding models, with a funding formula that retains much of the complexity of the previous system, the LSC has missed a trick in failing to achieve greater simplification in the system. However, Linford skilfully shows that there is a trade-off between simplification and accuracy or fairness in the allocation process.

The three models effectively separate the funding streams led by the two new education departments, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Science. In so doing, with just one funding model covering 16–18 learners, we have the potential to create a level playing field in terms of both allocations and performance measurement across the 16–18 phase of learning. If the government realises that potential, the new system might be worth the complexity that it entails.

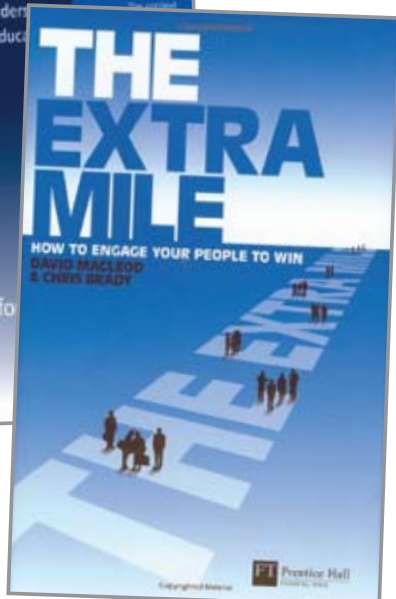
Linford also gives a succinct overview of provision, including skills for life, academic, occupational and vocational provision. Further sections on BTEC, Train to Gain and Apprenticeships provide a comprehensive account of most areas of provision. An additional section on the developing Foundation Learning Tier could have added value to this section of the guide. ►

The hands-on guide to post-16 funding

for school sixth forms, training providers and further education colleges



Nick Linford



Review by
Reg Chapman,
AMiE/ACM
Council Member

The Extra Mile: How to Engage Your People to Win

By David Macleod and Chris Brady
Prentice Hall, Financial Times, 2008
ISBN 9780273703945

From the title, the authors sound like American management gurus evangelising about how to create a great company and earn loads of money – often through aggressive ‘winning’ ways. Many such books are now, thankfully, well and truly crunched by the world economic crisis.

In fact, the authors are British, with a strong interest in public as well as private sector performance and in promoting values and ideas that ACM/AMiE would endorse. Based on extensive research on employee attitudes and performance, they produce a clear guide to the biggest challenge facing every ACM member: how to get the best out of my team. The key is ‘engagement’, defined as the ‘employee’s willingness to put discretionary effort into their work in the form of time, brainpower and energy, above and beyond what is considered adequate’.

They offer ‘Seven Pillars of Engagement’ in a series of straightforward chapters containing telling quotes from interviews with business and public sector leaders, plus compelling research evidence of what works. They conclude each chapter with a ‘Do on Monday’ list of tips. The tips are sometimes rather cheesy or overambitious, but there are also plenty of good ideas. Some of the chapter titles forecast the main messages with regard to inspiring and getting the best out of staff: ‘Get to the front line’ (close to students and teaching), ‘Loudhailers to conversations’ (listening, getting feedback), ‘Reservoir of wellbeing’ (recognising and rewarding staff).

For managers under pressure to hit targets and respond to a growing number of initiatives, the book is a welcome corrective to an obsessive focus on ‘task’. It reasserts the message that the education professionals who create excellence are far more likely to go the extra mile when they are motivated, respected, valued and energised by their managers. Visions, strategies and plans are OK – but in the end, people work for people and the best managers always remember this. ●

For each type of provision, Linford gives worked examples to show the relationship between provision, elements of the formula and the value of each qualification in terms of learner funding. He also provides a section of helpful hints and tips on the steps that could be taken to ensure that the funding system is working effectively for any organisation. Here, Linford provides a sensible note of caution in relation to ‘funding optimisation’, when he suggests that: ‘the aim should always be to ensure sufficient funding is generated to deliver a high-quality service, rather than simply raising the average level of funding per learner’. Recognising the potential conflict between funding optimisation and the spirit of the LSC’s funding principles, Linford emphasises, rightly, that: ‘funding should not heavily outweigh cost’.

The guide includes a very helpful glossary of abbreviations and a detailed list of LSC, government and other agencies’ web resources. These two lists very neatly illustrate the complexity of the FE environment. As the machinery of government introduces new funding agencies and structures to the sector, many people will need to acquire an understanding of that complexity.

As well as being a valuable resource for anyone already working in FE, Linford’s guide should be regarded as essential reading for any staff in the new agencies or local authorities now becoming involved in the sector. ●

Share your
recommended reads
on leadership and
learning, preferably
with a summary sentence
or two. Email the editor at
nadinecartner@
amie.uk.com