Integrating Diversity in Leadership in Further Education

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The Research Team

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Executive Summary

This report presents research into how leaders with a wide range of characteristics can be integrated productively into the leadership of the further education sector; that is in a way which cherishes rather than deletes difference, fully utilises the potential benefits of a more diverse leadership and allows all to contribute to leadership and value the process.

Diversity is a central concept in this work, defined as encompassing the full range of characteristics found in further education staff.

The research constructed five cases using interviews with individual leaders in numerous roles, and observation of leadership groups at work in meetings.

The research found that:

● There is a gap between the publicly stated commitment to equality and inclusion and the experience of individual leaders. There is also a gulf between the progress which senior leaders hope has been made and how others assess it.
● Both formal and informal hierarchies open or close pathways to leadership and lend or deny power to those in leadership roles. The informal hierarchy is created by the complex judgment staff make about the status of an individual based on the interplay of their identities. Some aspects of identity, such as gender or ethnicity, may be assessed in such a way as to result in considerable disadvantage.
● Formal procedures in group meetings, largely dominated by the chair, are intended to increase efficiency. A secondary effect is to create barriers to inclusion.
● How people are heard within meetings and decision making is influenced by their place in the formal and informal hierarchy.
● There is some wariness and inhibition in discussing issues of diversity and equality.
● Individual staff have complex and multiple identities which they adjust to gain access to and to survive or thrive in leadership. This may involve spotlighting or suppressing aspects of their identity.

The report makes a number of recommendations for changes in policy and practice at national and organisational level.

At national level:

● Accountability pressures are squeezing leadership to become less inclusive. Increasing the autonomy of the sector and loosening audit pressures would make it easier to achieve inclusive leadership.

At college level:

● Raise the priority of diversity issues and embed related goals more widely.
● Recognise the importance of multiple identities, considering other sources of disadvantage in addition to the current focus on ethnicity.
● Reconfigure meetings to support inclusive discussion and decision making.
● Encourage discussion of diversity, addressing the anxiety which some currently feel in engaging with this issue.
● Consider broadening diversity and equality training to allow staff time to understand each other and their roles more fully.
● Support diversity and equality staff who may feel marginalised and isolated.
Introduction

Context

‘A powerful commitment to equality and diversity’ DfES (2006, para.28) is viewed by many as integral to progressing further education’s strategic mission. The sector has long been committed to such values, historically focused on an inclusive approach to education and training. As a consequence, colleges have been active in identifying various means to address diversity and equality issues, at the individual college level and at sector level, such as the work of the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (CBSFE, 2002) and embedding equality in the work of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL). Diverse leadership is increasingly suggested to be key both to achieving effectiveness and also to modelling values of equity for learners and the wider community (DfES, 2006).

However, previous research suggests that achieving diversity and equality will present very great challenges. The ‘Leading Learning’ project, commissioned by the Learning and Skills Research Centre, concluded that numerous issues face the sector in relation to developing an inclusive and effective leadership (Lumby et al, 2005). It raised questions about a number of assumptions; that there is a shared understanding of what is implied by the term ‘diversity’, that there is widespread support for seeking a more diverse and inclusive leadership and that the latter would, of itself, lead to more effective leadership.

Building on this earlier work, the project reported here was commissioned by CEL to contribute to the sector’s understanding of how a diverse leadership could work productively; that is integrating leaders with a wide range of characteristics in a way which cherishes rather than deletes difference, and fully utilises the potential benefits of a more heterogeneous leadership, ‘the lovely diversity of human beings’ (Griffiths, 2003, p.10).

Diversity is understood inclusively as encompassing the full and rich range of characteristics found in further education staff, including gender, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, national origin, education, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, social class and economic status (Norton & Fox, 1997) while recognising the differential degree of disadvantage with which some characteristics are met. It also encompasses the nature and presence of an ethical orientation to people, or lack of such an orientation. Similarly, leadership is defined inclusively, recognising its construction by very many people. Leadership is of course a highly contested concept (Collinson & Collinson, 2005). We take it to be ‘the conduct of emotions, thought, and actions which are designed to influence others in a chosen direction. Leadership is evident when the influence is effective to the extent of being discernible by others’ (Lumby with Coleman, 2007, p. 2). The premises of the research reported here are therefore:

- Equality and diversity are crucial and powerful elements in raising the quality of leadership of the sector and thereby its performance;
- Diversity is understood to encompass the very many characteristics which differentiate leaders;
- Leadership is assumed to be relevant to many staff and not just those with formally designated leadership roles;
- Diverse leadership has the potential to perform more effectively but only if there is integration;
- Understanding the nature of integration and discovering the mechanism(s) by which integration can be achieved is a critical task for research in the sector.
Aims

The purpose of the research was therefore to understand better the mechanisms by which current and potential diverse leaders are included or excluded from working with others to contribute to leadership.

The project investigated diverse leadership groups at a variety of levels within colleges. The aim was to understand how individuals assess their inclusion in leadership, and how this impacts on their engagement and the perceived effectiveness of leadership. The research recognised that leadership is an intellectual, ethical and emotional activity and explored the impact from these perspectives of:

1. How people perceive their group membership identity;
2. How they participate in group interaction;
3. Explicit or implicit rules of working in leadership groups and how these have been agreed or have evolved;
4. The extent to which individual group members feel able to communicate as they intend.

To explore these areas, five case studies were constructed through interviews with individuals and observation of groups at work.

Working in the area of diversity demands trust. As is reported widely, people are sometimes fearful of engaging with diversity issues for fear of offending or being thought ‘politically incorrect’ (Van Boven, 2000). In agreeing to participate, the case colleges evidenced a high degree of commitment to diversity and equality issues and to learning how they might develop their practice and, more widely, that of the sector. The report details the findings and consequent recommendations for changes in practice, some of which relate to practice at sector or organisation level, and some to national policy.

Few would argue that inequality and exclusion have been eradicated in the leadership of further education. The purpose of the report is to make more visible the processes at work, both positive and negative, and in so doing, to offer an opportunity to reflect on how individual and organisational practice could develop to continue to build diversity and equality.
Research Framework

The Parameters of ‘Diversity’

The term diversity is used ubiquitously in policy documents at national and organisational levels, yet it is a shorthand phrase concealing highly contested understandings. The White Paper (DfES, 2006) appears to link diversity with issues of ethnicity, as is increasingly the case in public sector policy documents. Research on the Learning and Skills Sector suggests that while leaders understand diversity in many different ways, ethnicity is the most common connotation in peoples’ minds (Lumby et al, 2005). Alternatively, some catalogue a variety of characteristics which they believe are encompassed by ‘diversity’. Such distinctions can be seen as broad and narrow definitions of the dimensions of difference (Wentling et al, 2000). Broad definitions incorporate a wide range of criteria, including age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, national origin, education, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, social class and economic status (Norton & Fox, 1997). Generic leadership research has also highlighted that leadership is influenced not only by detectable attributes such as ethnicity and gender but also by less detectable differences in skills and experience involving characteristics such as function, length of service and style of leadership (Simons and Pelled, 1999; You-Ta et al, 2004). Narrower definitions are not narrow in the pejorative sense, but rather focus on the observable (Simons and Pelled, 1999) or ‘readily detectable’ (You-Ta et al, 2004, p. 26) characteristics which are most likely to receive a response which results in disadvantage.

Beneath the common, unreflective usage of the term, there lies the belief that people can be categorised into identifiable groups. Litvin (1997 p. 202) challenges such categorisation, suggesting that the process of classification has its roots in scientific taxonomies but that ‘the categories constructed through the discourse of workforce diversity as natural and obvious are hard pressed to accommodate the complexity of real people’. A focus on particular single characteristics may capture something of the experience of individuals and the advantage or detriment that follows. However it also risks what Sen (2006, p. xvi) describes as ‘the appalling effects of the miniaturisation of people’, ignoring both the uniqueness of each person and their fluid and shifting identities. He argues this is a source of much conflict. Increasingly therefore, the multiple and shifting identities and choices of individuals are suggested to be an appropriate focus for issues related to diversity.

Diversity as defined in this research therefore implies attention both to the full range of characteristics and attributes which differentiate current and potential leaders, and to the socially constructed advantage and disadvantage which attach to the interplay of such characteristics.

Equality in the Sector Leadership

Studies of equality in the sector’s workforce and specifically its leadership are relatively rare compared to the number of studies related to business and industry, higher education or schools. A few studies of the staff of the sector address specific characteristics, such as the research undertaken by the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (CIBSFE, 2002) or the gender focus of Shain (1999). That which specifically targets leadership and/or management is sparse, and primarily again addresses single characteristics such as gender (Leonard, 1998; Stott & Lawson, 1997; Whitehead, 2001) and ethnicity (Mackay & Etienne, 2006) or particular groups such as governors (Hunt, nd). The impact of disability, sexual orientation, faith, and socio-economic class on current or potential leaders is a blind spot in research terms. Research which addresses multiple characteristics is also rare (Lumby et al, 2005). Overall, the sector has very little empirical research on which to base development of practice.
Turning to research on the public sector and business/industry, there is a body of research which suggests that diversity in leadership raises far more complex issues than is generally acknowledged or implied by the relentlessly upbeat policy rhetoric. The most comprehensive review of the impact of diversity on individual and group outcomes (Milliken & Martins, 1996) suggests that diversity can have both positive and negative effects on group functioning and that the nature of the diversity (the characteristics involved) and the extent of diversity (the number of people with minority characteristics within the group) will be important factors in whether the outcome of diversity is positive or negative in terms of a group’s effectiveness. Maznevski (1994, p. 9) proposes that ‘other things being equal, the greater the diversity in a group, the larger the differences in initial views of reality and norms for communication, and the less successful the group will be at fulfilling the preconditions of shared social reality, negotiating norms, and attributing difficulties appropriately’.

An extensive critical literature suggests that rather than being prized, ‘difference’ is habitually conceived as a means of maintaining or increasing power at the cost of other individuals and groups, and that consequently there are profound psychological and social barriers to accepting diversity and working with it fruitfully (Gudykunst, 1995; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Lumby with Coleman, 2007; Stone & Colella, 1996). This is not to suggest that diversity in itself is a potential negative. On the contrary, there is evidence that diversity in leadership can raise performance levels, particularly when creativity is required (DiTomaso & Hooijberg, 1996; Maznevski, 1994). Rather it is to suggest that the response to diverse others is often such that renders diversity a negative, rather than capitalising on the potential positives, and that simplistic endorsements of ‘celebrating difference’ seriously underestimate the effort that will be required to integrate diversity, that is to establish ways of working which allow leader groups to identify and meet challenging organisational objectives by a process in which all group members engage, persist in engagement, and value the process. As a consequence there are many organisations (including well resourced multinationals), which work hard at addressing diversity issues and are commonly disappointed by the views of employees who perceive that inequality and unfair practice persist (Maxwell et al, 2001).

Drawing on Maznevski’s (1994) review, a number of key points emerge:

- Traditional leadership skills established in relation to a homogeneous leadership may not work in diverse organisations;
- Diverse groups can outperform homogeneous groups but often do not achieve their potential;
- The integration of diversity is crucial to performance;
- Integration involves establishing inclusive group interaction processes including, critically, good communication, and agreed rules for working, where difference can be cherished.

Building on previous research, this study therefore concluded that a more diverse leadership has the potential to raise the performance of the sector to the benefit of learners, staff and the business community, but only if there is integration (as defined earlier). It explored with college leaders how they conceive diversity, how they see themselves working in leadership groups and what practice they believe is inclusive or exclusive.
Research Methods

Research Approach

Using a case study approach, data was gathered in relation to leadership groups, which included senior management, faculty, programme area and business support leaders. The rationale for selecting an exploratory case study approach was that cases are a powerful means of understanding complexity; sharing knowledge about processes, practices and outcomes and understanding the relevance of local context (Bassey, 2000). The approach provided an effective means of capturing diverse experiences and perceptions.

Sampling

The nature of diversity within the groups studied is problematic to specify. All groups are likely to exhibit diversity on one or more dimensions. For example there may be a variety in function, educational/professional background or gender. You-Ta et al (2004, p. 26) describe a distinction between ‘readily detectable or underlying’ characteristics. ‘Readily detectable attributes are those that can be determined quickly and with a high degree of consistency by others. Only brief exposure or interaction is required. Readily detectable attributes include age, race, sex, and organisational tenure… Underlying attributes are not so easily or quickly determined by others, such as skills, abilities, knowledge, attitudes and values.’ The impact on group interaction of both readily detectable and underlying characteristics such as those listed, but also others such as sexuality and religion, was of interest. An important focus of the study was the integration of those with attributes which may be considered different to an unstated norm or majority. Given the reluctance of some staff to openly acknowledge characteristics such as sexuality and disability, a quota sampling strategy which attempted to assure the inclusion within groups to be studied of a number of people with particular characteristics was not realistic and raised ethical issues such as the risk of embedding further notions of ‘difference’.

Consequently the research approach was based on selecting purposively five cases. Using the most recent staff individual record data available, colleges which employ over 250 full time permanent staff and display diversity across age (an atypical distribution), minority ethnicity and disability (higher percentage than the national population) provided a long list. The characteristics are a very limited selection of the full range of attributes which are of interest, but they stand as proxy for the wider range. Though there was no certainty, the likelihood was that such colleges will employ staff which exhibit diverse characteristics along a range of other dimensions, such as educational/professional background, religion, sexual orientation as well as gender. The shortlist reflected two further selection criteria: range of location and to include both general further education and sixth form colleges.

The final selection of case organisations included four further education and one sixth form college. They were located in the Greater London, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside and West Midlands regions, in metropolitan and urban areas. They ranged in size from under to considerably over the median size of student numbers for college type. The colleges were in areas of average, high and very high deprivation. Anonymity requirements preclude providing a detailed description of each individual college.
Case Construction

The range of data gathered included:

- observation of meetings of three leadership groups at differing levels of seniority;
- individual interviews with members of staff from the groups observed;
- individual interviews with further staff who are in a minority within their leadership groups in terms of their gender, age, disability, religion, ethnicity, function, educational/professional background.

Though no formal quota approach was adopted, the intention was to include as wide a range of diverse characteristics within those interviewed as was feasible within practical constraints. The colleges were asked to select the staff to be interviewed. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to explore with respondents their perceptions of:

- Characterisation of their group membership and how this relates to their identity;
- Their motivation and engagement with the group;
- The group interaction and how this relates to power flows;
- Their own and others' preferred ways of working and how this is experienced in the language and structure of interaction;
- The effectiveness of the group in identifying and meeting challenging organisational objectives;
- The cognitive and affective impact of the group on the individual's leadership;
- The impact of diversity on the group's function and outcomes.

Observation of group meetings generated three kinds of data. Firstly a recording of the meeting allowed analysis of the use of language. Secondly, a structured record of patterns of interaction allowed analysis of the inclusion or otherwise of group members. Thirdly post hoc notes by the observer noted the provenance of goals/objectives, and agreement/disagreement/conflict. While the observer may have inevitably affected the interaction and there will be limitations on the degree to which analysis and interpretation can be supported by comprehension of the social and historic context of the meeting, nevertheless the data provided insights into ways of working and also triangulation with individual perceptions resulting from the interviews. A summary of those interviewed and observed is included as appendices A and B.

Working within sensitive areas, issues of anonymity are important. The team have made every effort to protect the anonymity of colleges and individual respondents. Consequently, data is not presented as cases, as to do so might identify individual colleges. Equally quotations have been used on such a way as to ensure anonymity, indicating only the role of the speaker.
Research Findings

The analysis of data highlighted a range of perspectives by which the sector might understand better how all are potentially included in leadership or not: the relationship of aspiration and achievement, how people conceive their identities, the impact of formal and informal hierarchies, and finally, communication. The findings in each of these areas is outlined and discussed.

Mind the Gap: The difference between policy espoused, policy enacted and policy experienced

Within each organisation there is a range of subcultures; groupings of staff occupy a variety of ‘habitus’ with different forms of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1994). In the colleges sampled the familiar categories and demarcations of diversity such as class, gender, ethnicity, shaped these cultural spaces. Other layers were also discernible, such as subject specialism, age, experience, time served, academic and professional services.

The work of Argyris and Schon (1978, p. 11) on organisational learning provides one useful framework for the findings in this study. They identify ‘theory espoused’ as representing the approach people publicly give allegiance to, the view a person communicates to others when asked. In the case colleges, the theory espoused relating to diversity was one of integration, inclusion and accepting difference; valuing the contribution of ‘all’ in shaping decision making and taking the organisation forward:

‘People can do the same things differently, we have a common purpose’. (Middle leader)

‘Everyone can contribute to the ultimate goal of the college’. (Middle leader)

‘Inclusiveness, being able to accept and utilise skills from a wide range of people from different backgrounds - opportunities for all’. (Middle leader)

However, in complex organisations management can be more akin to a process of osmosis, a slow filtering through rather than direct control. The ebb, flow and to some extent dilution of ideas, knowledge and influences, can create gaps between aspiration and effect. The ‘theory espoused’ needs to be distinguished from what Argyris and Schon (1978, p. 18) referred to as ‘theory-in-use’. Evans (2003) has developed this typology further as a multi-layered approach for comparative analysis in post-compulsory education. Critically Evans’s approach extends the analysis to gain the ‘view from the inside’ (Evans 2003, p. 419). This approach considers ‘policy espoused’ and ‘policy enacted’ together with the impact on individuals’ and groups’ lives as ‘policy experienced’.

Differences in policy espoused, enacted and experienced were evident in the study. There was a significant gap between the aspirations of senior managers and others’ perception of their experience. The aim of opening up colleges to engage with diversity was clearly evident. People also expressed an openness to learn from engagement with diverse others. In practice, there was a tendency to retreat to more familiar territory, evident in the use of space, the conduct of communication and meetings and the acceptance of decision making by the few.

The use of space and location in the college, for example, locating together the executive, who are commonly less diverse than other leadership groups, reinforces hierarchy, the tight knittedness of the leader group, and concentrates leadership at the least diverse level, serving to distance those seen as
outside the circle. Similarly, in meetings there is relative safety in exclusive modes of participation; passively receiving information for some, or the maintenance of control through the didactic transmission of information for others. Each of these modes differentiates ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ and accentuates differences in power and prestige.

There are numerous theories which attempt to account for the creation and effect of in-groups and out-groups and for the consequent inequitable position of employees. For example, leader member exchange theory explores the tendency of leaders to favour some more than others, and particularly those like themselves. The resulting variance in task allocation and social relationships between leaders and subordinates leads to differential job satisfaction and promotion. The theory provides one framework for probing perceived justice or injustice at work (Bhal & Ansari, 2006). Social identity theory explores the way our identity is crucially created by alliance with a group; members of the group are then likely to assess themselves positively and other groups less so (McGarty et al. 1994). Inter-group conflict (IGC) theory predicts that ‘the mere act of categorizing individuals into groups’ (Alexander & Levin, 1998, p. 630) leads to conflict. Colleges have formal groups, such as the senior management team, faculties and programme teams, and informal groups where people categorise themselves or are categorised by others into groups which then vie for resource, status and prestige (Jackson, 1993). IGC suggest that assessment of one’s own and other groups is likely to be highly biased. There is insufficient space in this report to explore fully the insights which each theory might offer in relation to how diversity is integrated in leadership or otherwise. However what the theories hold in common is a prediction that work environments will be characterised by the creation of in-groups and out-groups and that this process impacts negatively on equity and particularly those likely to be characterised as ‘out-group’; that is those outside the dominant groups. Such inequities, though they may have not been deliberately created, were evident in our data.

Despite the public commitment to diversity and equality, there was discernable nervousness about engaging with relevant issues:

‘I think people are quite - I don't know- worried that they are going to say the wrong thing because it is a touchy issue isn't it?’. (Senior leader)

‘I think people do have concerns about saying the right thing. I think it's a scary sort of area to work in and they are not comfortable even in this day and age and even in FE which has been a beacon in equality and diversity ...I think it is an inhibitor this people feeling they can say something which is terribly wrong’. (Senior leader)

As Bauman (1995, p. 45) points out the risk of treading on someone’s toes in the wider community produces a tendency whereby people retreat to the shelter of a more comfortable place and close the door. Engaging with diversity and difference is seen by some as a high risk and time consuming strategy. The result was evident in leaders who espouse working for inclusion but in practice see this as dependant on action from someone else.

By contrast, there was evidence of colleges directly seeking to address diversity issues and negotiating a plan of action. One college, in consultation with staff organisations and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, provided staff training for black members of staff. This had resulted in individual members
of staff attending the training since finding promotion. This appeared to be a real milestone for the college. It produced a positive outcome for a group of under-represented staff and would appear to be an example of good practice in diversity and leadership; one that has been positively endorsed by CEL. While there was little negative reaction in this college, in another case college there was some adverse reaction to a similar initiative from other groups of staff not yet included in the training, who felt that they were being disadvantaged i.e. had fewer opportunities for professional development:

‘Training is open to all but a training course for ‘new black managers’, although very valid, for someone who is a new white working class person who wants to be a professional, they may feel there is not enough help for them. If you have a degree / middle class, in terms of what you read and how you promote yourself, you are already ‘self made’... But if you don’t come from that class then you might feel quite stuck. In terms of diversity I think we need to be careful.’ (Middle leader)

This example illustrates how staff representatives have worked with management to address their concerns and together negotiated a path that recognises the different needs of one group of staff. There was also an awareness of a need to extend such initiatives to other staff groups. It also highlights the sensitivity of such initiatives and the advantage of adopting a comprehensive approach which considers the needs of different groups of staff, and does not, in seeking to address one source of potential disadvantage, become blind to others.

The focus on ethnicity rather than socio-economic class, gender, class, disability, age or any other characteristic is typical of the case colleges. Though the talk is of diversity, the focus is primarily on ethnicity. This is a further gap between espoused theory and theory-in-action.

A further key gap between policy espoused and policy experienced is created by the pressure of the external policy environment. There was acceptance by staff that college managers were constrained to take necessary decisions in order to align the colleges with the agenda and policy of external agencies and that room for manoeuvre was limited by the macro environment and policy framework in which colleges are obliged to operate. Staff were often extremely sceptical about the value of some developments, but willing to comply with the requirements and support whatever was seen as in the best interests of the college and their students. The consequent feelings of alienation were not always conducive to a positive engagement in leadership. This was reflected in what could be termed a weary compliance with policy espoused and policy as enacted. If some decisions are in effect taken from the college and made by external agencies, the leadership of the organisation is constrained. As leadership parameters contract, those engaged in leadership also reduce as leadership becomes concentrated on the few who are to enforce compliance. Those with alternative perspectives to the dominant group are the most likely to be marginalised. Our study suggests that one of the strongest forces excluding diversity is externally created accountability and financial pressures.
Diversity and Identities

For respondents in this study the issue of identities was complex. Individuals spoke of single identities such as race/ethnicity, gender, class, age, expertise, length of service and disability or they spoke of multiple identities such as being a black, working class woman. This section of the report considers the findings on how leaders perceived their own identity and that of others and how this impacts on their leadership.

Readily Detectable Identities

A number of those interviewed who fell outside the majority leader profile of white, middle class and male were aware of their difference to the majority. Within this group a single identity could be a source of both power and inclusion. For example the gender of a senior woman leader was seen as empowering both to herself and to other women:

‘My immediate line manager is female and I welcome that. The respect feels more of a two way process’. (Middle leader)

For others, the experience differed and the single identity seemed problematic and was sometimes suppressed or ‘disappeared’ often unconsciously:

‘It’s strange really. I have never felt that staff see me as [minority ethnic group], I’m just another member of staff really’. (Middle leader)

The same phenomenon was evident in relation to gender where a woman functioning in a male dominated area became viewed as ‘one of them’. Identity is not static and a characteristic which is foregrounded in one context may be overshadowed by another over time or in a different setting (Gaganakis, 2006). For example, the ethnic origin which disappeared in some contexts could in another become an important and defining characteristic, for instance when real or assumed specialist cultural knowledge was of value. There is insufficient data to reach definitive conclusions but the evidence suggests that minority characteristics are more likely to be suppressed when entry is desired to prized positions. In other words if staff wish to be a leader, then their minority characteristic(s) are likely to disappear in their own view and in the view of others. Where valued positions are not in question, such identities re-emerge.

This is not an exact and consistent equation. What emerges is the complex interplay of power and minority identities. Stone & Coletta’s investigation of the response to disability found similar complex interrelations, where disability was often perceived negatively, but in the powerful became irrelevant in their engagement with other workers.
Some staff resisted the disappearance or complete disappearance of elements of their identity:

‘There is an element of where perhaps you conform to what is seen as being the norm to be seen to be acceptable. If you brought your true diverse self – if you felt that really I could be myself, then it does not fit that norm. ...So I suppose that is something that sticks in my mind, can you bring your diverse self to work? I’d say no you can’t.’ (Middle leader)

Colleagues were sometimes acutely aware of minority identities, and some staff were at times perceived negatively or inaccurately. As a consequence, they had to work hard to rectify such views in order to fulfil their leadership role. For example, although women are able to reach senior positions, how they are perceived by other members of staff and how their performance is judged is influenced by gender. Some women still feel that their performance is judged more harshly than that of men; that they have to continually exert more effort to produce a higher level of performance in order to justify their leadership role to others, particularly if they are working in a predominantly male area:

‘It can be very frustrating at times. ...you give 110 per cent or 150 per cent instead of a 100 because you know that to an extent you have to prove yourself ...as many times as you think I should not have to prove myself’. (Middle leader)

Equally, being black influenced the ways in which individuals were seen and the way they are expected to function. None of those interviewed saw the identity of a white man as problematic in the way those of women or minority ethnic leaders were. Gender and ethnicity still influence and constrain how leaders are perceived and how they are enabled to perform.

Other identities also impacted on leadership. There were ambivalent attitudes to age. It was noted that experience and age brought with it insight into organisational management and leadership, but equally there was an emphasis on an assumed reduced capacity to respond to new changes and ideas:

‘There is an old guard about this place. Age can be important; they often talk of the kindergarten part of the staff room where young staff sit... Age is very significant’. (Middle leader)

In the same way that gender and ethnicity provoked complex responses, age too might both support and inhibit inclusion in leadership through stereotypical rather than objective assessments.

Disability does not fully fit into the category of readily detectable, in that some disabilities are not evident. However, disabilities that seemed of most interest to staff were physical disabilities such as mobility difficulties, hearing or sight impairment. Stone and Colella (1996, p. 362) analyse the difference in reaction to people with disabilities. They suggest that the reaction will vary along a number of dimensions:
a) aesthetic qualities,
b) origin,
c) course,
d) concealability,
e) disruptiveness, and
f) danger.

The more unattractive, self-induced, disruptive and dangerous a disability is perceived to be, the more negative the reaction. College staff seemed more comfortable with a narrow spectrum of disabilities, which did not challenge (in Stone and Colella’s terms). They were more comfortable discussing disability than say sexual orientation, which seemed largely taboo. However, generally, there was a lack of interest amongst staff about disabilities issues, some lack of expertise and understanding to pursue the disabilities agenda and an absence of disabilities as a priority concern for senior management.

‘The college is behind the times and knows little about disabilities’. (Middle leader)

Those with disabilities sometimes experienced the same manipulation of their identity by others as minority ethnic staff. Where specialist expertise was valuable, for example in relation to the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act, disability was foregrounded by others. Where inclusion within leadership was the issue, disability might become an irrelevance or a disadvantage.

Single identities, such as gender, ethnicity, age and disability matter in relation to inclusion or exclusion from leadership. One might conceive of identities as a pack of cards where each element holds a value. In the power play of leadership, some cards trump others. Our data suggests that such calculations, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, are the warp and woof of inclusion or exclusion from leadership. Like a hall of mirrors, identities are distorted, exaggerated, appear and disappear. The relevance to leadership is the degree to which the perception of identity leads to assumptions of fitness for leadership and the appropriateness of performance.

Non Observable and Multiple Identities

While the evidence suggests that each of the single characteristics embedded in equality legislation remains a source of potential disadvantage and exclusion from leadership, few people defined themselves in terms of a single characteristic and identity. For example for one black woman, it is her class rather than ethnicity which she believes excludes her:

‘I am a black woman who is new to my post and so find it hard to say things. There is a middle class ethos in the group where there is expected behaviour that I am not part of. There are lots of white, middle class men and women and so I don’t say anything because I think I may be judged’. (Middle leader)
An informal hierarchy has at least as much impact on the inclusion or exclusion of staff from leadership as their formal role in the hierarchy. While not intended and not always equally apparent to staff, judgments are made about the value and influence of staff based on an intricate interplay of factors which include non-observable dimensions of difference, such as expertise, length of service, personal relationships, status of their area of curriculum/responsibility.

The factors were not simply cumulative, but interacted. Visible characteristics both reflected and reinforced the status of particular programme areas. For example, the leadership of women working in Adult Education or minority ethnic staff in English as a Second Language might experience considerable difficulties in achieving a voice. Personal qualities, such as volume of voice or physical size were refracted through stereotypical assumptions. An individual’s inclusion or exclusion from leadership related to a unique and multifaceted persona which was perceived to lend differing degrees of power and influence to undertake leadership.

Bauman (2000, p. 126) has suggested that the task before individuals in the 21st century is not to choose an identity and persuade others to see this identity as desired, but the necessity to navigate multiple and changing identities to best effect:

> The task is to pick the least risky turn at the nearest crossroads, to change direction before the road ahead gets impassable, before the road-scheme has been redesigned, or before the coveted destination has been moved elsewhere or lost its glitter. In other words, the quandary tormenting men and women at the turn of the century is not so much how to obtain the identities of their choice and how to have them recognised by others, but which identity to choose.

Our study shows staff in further education undertaking such navigation as a means of entry or attempted entry to and persistence in leadership. At one level colleges are deeply committed to celebrating difference. Underneath this lies a kaleidoscope of assigned values to identities which colour how people see themselves and are seen by others as leaders, their ability to have a voice in leadership and the way their leadership performance is judged. The implication for colleges is that individual staff require support to become much more self-aware of how they navigate their identities and the impact on their leadership role. Corporately colleges need to address the habitual valuing or devaluing of particular characteristics in much more sophisticated and determined ways.
Diversity and Organisational Structure

This section of the report reviews the nature of formal and informal hierarchies within colleges and the extent to which these hierarchies are perceived by staff as facilitating or impeding inclusive decision making.

Organisational Structures

Organisational structures within colleges in the FE sector represent a combination of formal and informal systems through which individuals and groups make and execute decisions on behalf of their institutions. A crucial element in such decision making processes is the extent to which the structures are perceived by staff as facilitating or impeding inclusive or participative decisions (Sutcliffe & McNamara 2001). With increasingly diverse staff and student bodies on college campuses in the sector, the importance of ensuring equitable engagement with key decision making structures has never been greater. Consequently, the structural organisation for college decision making is a key element in any attempt to integrate diversity into the leadership and management of the sector.

Formal Hierarchies

The diversity of leaders decreases through the pyramid of seniority. The most senior staff are generally less diverse than the more junior. Consequently, if leadership is to be inclusive, a concentration of power and decision-making at the apex will work against inclusion. All the case colleges exhibited a strongly demarcated separation of three key levels of leadership. At the top was a senior leadership group, sometimes referred to as the ‘executive’ which had little variation across the colleges in terms of composition. This group (of about five) tended to comprise the principal and vice or assistant principals and was associated with college strategic decisions. The second level comprises senior staff at faculty/service level leading a range of staff in subject or business support groupings. Grassroots leadership is offered by a wider variety of staff with operational responsibilities in specific programme areas and support units.

There is a notable attempt in some colleges to present the formal college hierarchy as a flat structure (Katzenbach & Smith 1993; Jassawalla & Sashittal 2000; Politis 2005). However, the formal hierarchies were generally perceived as powerful gate keepers, controlling both access and status within the colleges. While most were perceived as formally operating ‘open door’ policies, some were seen as in practice restricting peoples’ potential to influence decision making:

‘People do not always have equal influence… this is because there is a hierarchical nature to the organisation where access, direct access I mean, to people can be limited by the position occupied in the hierarchy’. (Middle leader)

The place of diversity and equality within the hierarchy of priorities was not generally high, indicated by the fact that persons with core responsibilities for equality and diversity operate mainly at first-line operational levels, and/or those to whom they report are responsible for equality and diversity issues as one among many senior responsibilities.

Important variables relating to formal hierarchies and the extent to which they were perceived to facilitate diversity integration therefore included:
• size of decision making groups; smaller decision making groups were more efficient and informal while larger groups tended to be more bureaucratic and less democratic (Scott 1992);

• emotional energy of decision making groups; decision making spaces involving SMT were often described as ‘high pressure, high stress and interrogative’ while lower leadership groups tended to be ‘more casual, accepting and collaborative’. The chances that people feel drawn more to passivity rather than activity appears greater in highly pressurised decision making environments (Barbalet 1998);

• stress on accountability; when individuals were held strongly accountable interchanges within leader groups tended to be one-to-one and the predicted advantage of diversity in offering a wider range of ideas and creativity could not function.

**Informal Hierarchies**

Informal hierarchies exert powerful hidden messages across the institutions which contribute in a very significant way towards the organisational decision making climate. Several factors were identified as constituting such informal hierarchies in the colleges.

Leaders influence others and are in turn influenced by those they perceive to be ‘experts, highly skilled, very experienced and highly educated’. When these qualities are perceived to be absent in people, there was a fairly widespread view that the propensity of others to listen was diminished. Given that these qualities are perceived to be found in people high up in the leadership rungs of colleges, and who are members of a majority, there is a sense in which staff at the periphery feel alienated through what was sometimes described as the ‘unresponsive culture of educational institutions’. On the other hand, the opinions of leaders perceived as experts could go unchallenged, with the possibility of creating ‘monolithic decision making cultures’ (Eichen, 2006).

The existence of ‘small close-knit groups’ of institutional leaders ‘cut from the same cloth’ constituting ‘an old boys network’ who make crucial decisions outside the formal network of institutional structures is widely perceived as pervasive. Such networks are not necessarily exclusively male. The tendency to feel excluded and alienated from such decision making environments appears to be fairly widespread especially, but not exclusively, among the junior staff within the colleges.

The performativity environment which stresses a tough stance towards performance is increasing the hierarchical divisions evident in colleges. There is interplay between the formal hierarchy structure and the informal hierarchy created by underlying assumptions of competence/incompetence related to readily detectable characteristics such as gender, disability, ethnicity, and not readily detectable characteristics such as socio-economic background, experience, function. Some senior leaders have attempted to overcome the resulting exclusion by moving diverse staff into a position of influence or supporting them personally. However, this is in relation to very small numbers. A leadership inclusive of all will require attention to how the formal hierarchy is structured as well as attacking any unjustified assumptions which underlie the informal hierarchy.
Diversity and Communication

Context

In the wider leadership field, there is general acknowledgement that effective communication is a hallmark of successful leadership. The ability of leaders to convey meaning to others, to be effective listeners and talkers, and to act on the outcomes of many inter-actions are core components. A ‘test’ of effective leadership for productive diversity, therefore, is the extent to which meanings and actions that promote equality and diversity are developed and sustained by effective communication networks, and whether these are perceived as equally successful or important or both by those who work and study within those organisations. This section considers the findings on whether communication is supporting diversity and equality in three sections: Openness/closeness of communication; Comfort/discomfort of communication; Discussing equality and diversity.

Openness/closeness of Communications

There is an almost unanimous perception among senior leaders that open and inclusive communications are key to successful strategic and operational organisational activities. This is seen as central to their colleges’ mission and evident in the formal structures put in place to encourage effective communication. Whilst there is not complacency, there is a marked tendency to locate difficulties in communicating effectively outside the senior management team; deficiencies were most frequently noted at middle and first-line manager levels, in terms of the latter’s narrow range of interests, limited leadership expertise or experience, lack of confidence, or a combination of these. A senior leader, for example, refers to a ‘large, dynamic organisation’ in which ‘it is easy for some people to hide’. Sometimes open communications are viewed positively in comparison with previous historical and structural conditions; importantly, open communications are seen by senior leaders as a conscious act or style of management, in which ‘giving a voice’ and having an ‘open door’ are seen as core constituents.

Being listened to and having a voice are valued by all research participants. However ‘having a voice’ was defined by middle and first line leaders as not just the act of listening, but also following up: action consequent from the listening. In the cases researched, principals were considered to model the style of effective communicators. Senior leaders’ confidence in the inclusivity of communication structures, however, is not unanimously shared by those at lower levels. A respondent felt that though formally ‘listening’ happened: ‘Things that are not prioritised by SMT don’t happen’ (Middle leader).

Whilst many staff value attempts to foster horizontal and lateral communications, the predominance of the downward information transmission mode features in all the case study data, with fewer opportunities for upward communication. This tendency was more marked in some case studies than others. There is also a view that communication allows for more discussion about operational issues than strategic issues, a view reinforced, it is considered, by a relative absence of information on core strategic issues that would enable those in less senior leadership positions to have informed discussion and contribute to decisions.

Being listened to, then, does not necessarily equate with having a voice, having influence. In several case studies, communication is considered to be easier or more welcomed in less senior leadership meetings. Overwhelmingly, the view persists that college agendas and follow-up actions are dominated by senior leaders’ intentions and directions, and not infrequently through informal groupings of senior staff, likened to close-knit families of like-minded people:
‘Everyone has the chance to have their say…Everyone is taken into account but it may be that not everyone is able to influence things’. (Middle leader)

‘It’s 70-80% reporting down, and 20-30% reporting up’. (Middle leader)

‘Most decisions are made for you…you just have to implement them’. (First-line leader)

There is evidence of senior leaders’ attempts to improve the openness of communications; however, these can be negatively affected by the historical legacy of previous, less inclusive practice. This has the potential to foster self-fulfilling practices; when informants do not believe that their engagement in leadership groups affects decision-making, there is a reported reluctance to engage with opportunities to contribute towards and shape strategic direction.

‘There is a hierarchy [at meetings] because some people are listened to more than others’. (First-line leader)

Respondents value senior leaders’ attempts to introduce consultation forums to widen the basis of communication and debate, but they are valued by those who are not senior leaders more as a means of staff bonding rather than for their effectiveness in influencing decision-making and therefore the corporate leadership of the college.

**Comfort/discomfort of Communication**

Various reasons are given for people feeling more or less confident or willing to contribute to meetings and communicate with others. These relate to the perceived characteristics of those involved, the nature of the communication channels, and individuals’ influence upon decision-making. There appear to be vulnerable members of staff and areas of the organisation where the espoused inclusive intentions of senior staff do not seem to reach:

‘Ways have to be found to blur the divisions between the two [sites]; one is seen as the source of key leadership whilst the other seems destined to follow behind’. (First-line leader)

The pervasive view is that senior leaders are still predominantly male, white and middle class. This can affect the willingness among those who do not share those characteristics to communicate by expressing an opinion or contributing to decision-making, as in one college where a respondent comments about senior leaders:

‘Everyone is White British, everybody is from a similar background, and everybody has a similar education. Everybody does the same thing at weekends. There is very little diversity’. (Middle leader)
Even in those organisations where ‘having a voice’ and ‘being listened to’ are welcomed, doing so frequently runs the risk of being labelled negatively, at worst with perceived consequences for career promotion. According to one respondent, this breeds ‘simmering resentment’.

Two others note:

‘Some lack confidence. There are people who think a hell of a lot but don’t have the gumption to say it because they feel others are more articulate.’ (Middle leader)

One ethnic minority respondent explained:

‘I find myself in meetings just listening. I don’t want to put my foot in it…if I do, I feel as though, you know, they might push me to one side because I have found it difficult to move up the ladder.’ (First-line leader)

Such a reaction is not universal. Respondents who feel they have little to lose are more prepared to take risks in their style and manner of communicating with others.

A black respondent comments:

‘I have been brought up in the culture where you’re (seen as) the black awkward chip on the shoulder…I have been brought up that the majority of people aren’t going to like me so … that’s what I’m expecting. So the risk for me to say something is not great.’ (Senior leader)

The tenor of meetings was sometimes exclusive, pressurising and constraining staff. In two case studies some leadership meetings were described as ‘the joint bollocking meeting’, ‘like an interview’, situations when ‘you feel grilled in a pressure cooker’ and where, as a form of survival, ‘you have to be matter of fact about whatever you report’. The size of group tended to increase as seniority decreased and this impacted on inclusion:

‘It’s a big meeting, we have about 34 people…If you are new it can be daunting to say something and put your point of view forward’. (Senior Leader)

There is also a sense in which the culture of the ‘close-knit family’ of core decision-makers operates according to norms that privilege masculine cultures of jokes and sports talk, which female entrants, for example, report that they have to learn. For several respondent observers, the implications are plain:

‘Male members ask all the questions, and make all the decisions…and sometimes the women in the team make it clear they don’t understand what is going on…it’s a shame’. (Middle leader)
Finally, communication, mostly informal, is seen as a way in which a relatively small group of core decision-makers, frequently long-serving and loyal members of the college, retain power and influence. In the following extract, an ethnic minority respondent reflects on how this is considered to operate:

“You need to be connected socially. A lot of people have said to me “the reason you’re not a manager is because of racism”. I personally don’t believe this...I believe the case is relationships. If I had worked with you for years and years and built a relationship and a job was to come up, it’s a high possibility you would look after my interests. Now that can be done intelligently and subtly because legally it’s not allowed, but what’s stopping you from coming to my house, having a glass of wine, we chat over the job, and your profile “we’ll ask about your qualifications”, and you’re in’. (First-line leader)

Communication, both formal and informal, largely sustains existing power structures.

**Discussing Equality and Diversity**

The data illustrate various degrees of comfort and discomfort in discussing issues of equality and diversity, which, despite major changes and initiatives, including training and professional development, are still often viewed as stand-alone issues that are discussed with wariness and/or sensitivity, or avoided altogether:

‘Staff are fairly comfortable talking about disability...start talking about race, a little less comfortable...and then start talking about race and sexuality and oh my god...’. (First-line leader)

Reasons given for persistent discomfort vary: fear of giving and taking offence, concerns about political correctness, insecurity about legal compliance, perceptions that equality and diversity are non-issues.

At one level, reticence to talk about equality and diversity can inhibit improvements to practice. Elsewhere, deference is a reported feature of communications and there is a belief among men and women (except for women in the most senior positions) that the perspectives of men are more likely to be taken on board:

‘They have more authoritative voices and they speak more...They dominate time because they are louder and have more presence regardless of what the issue might be...they are indulged more’. (Middle leader)
In summary, the case studies of this project reveal structures which enable vertical, horizontal, and some integrated communication among a variety of groups and individuals. As described, vertical communication predominates, and perceptions are that such communication is more information giving than shared ownership of change. At grassroots level, perceptions are that communication is more open, providing wider fora for debate and discussion, but fewer opportunities to influence strategic direction. All respondents consider communication networks to be vital and value positive changes in making decision-making more open and responsive. However, it is felt that more needs to be done to strengthen the capacity of organisational communication to become more inclusive, especially in relation to vulnerable members of staff and to features of diversity which some respondents feel reluctant to consider. The idea of diversity integration is moving centre-stage; for this to become a reality there needs to be a closer match between the self-promotion by colleges as listening, communicating organisations, and the practices of leadership that are responsive to difference. For participants in this research, failure to communicate or implement the outcomes of communication suggests resistance to changing the status quo. In such environments, the threat is to staff motivation, especially among those at the lower levels of the organisation.
Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn about the diversity and equality of leadership in the sector in relation to the project aims:

**How people perceive their group membership identity**

The identities of leaders are multiple and complex. Single characteristics such as ethnicity or gender can disadvantage people in their leadership role, but not universally and inevitably. For example, status may trump gender for a very senior woman, counteracting the assumptions of incompetence that more junior female staff still encounter. Individuals make complex calculations based on the interaction of both observable and non-observable characteristics in order to assess the status, power and influence of others. The calculation determines willingness to listen and to follow. The result of such calculation, and varying assumptions and inaccuracies in perception, is that some staff feel that they cannot bring their full identity to their leadership role.

**How leaders participate in group interaction**

The formal hierarchy concentrates leadership in the top echelons where there is the least diversity. Informal hierarchies replicate and underscore this effect, generally prizing those who exhibit majority characteristics. Entry to leadership is therefore constrained. Interaction in leadership groups is often formal and on a one to chair basis, fuelled by accountability pressures. More inclusive discussion, which would capitalise on the potential creativity of diverse perspectives, is less frequent.

**Explicit or implicit rules of working in leadership groups and how these have been agreed or have evolved**

Formal procedures with an agenda strictly controlled by the chair is the norm. However, unspoken rules which have evolved over time result in complex calculations to accord individuals priority not in speaking, which usually all are enabled to do, but in influencing others, which is the critical act of leadership.

**The extent to which individual group members feel able to communicate as they intend**

Communication has in the main become more open, reflecting efforts to be more inclusive of all staff. Some staff who have minority characteristics feel constraint in contributing, as the response to their communication is more complicated and more problematic than that to majority leaders. There is generally uneasiness and fear of discussing diversity issues.

**Intention and effect**

All the case colleges had given attention to issues of diversity and equality, though the priority assigned varied. All of the principals were committed to making progress, though such commitment did not necessarily permeate throughout the organisation. However, the findings suggest that the impact of initiatives to date is generally less than hoped.

In summary, as much previous research in business and industry suggests, leaders in the sector are making considerable effort to increase diversity and equality, but progress is slow and less than hoped. The ‘yawning gap’ between intention and result persists (Gagnon & Cornelius, 2000, p. 3).
Numerous frameworks might help understand why this is so. Dass and Parker (1999) undertook research within corporations in the USA and categorised the approaches evident as episodic, where ‘managers view diversity as a marginal issue. The diversity initiatives of these managers tend to be isolated, disjointed, and separate from core organisational activities.’; freestanding, where ‘multiple freestanding programs and projects are introduced serially, diversity may be viewed as serving political expediency more than organisational plans’ and systemic ‘linking initiatives with existing systems and core activities’ (Dass & Parker, 1999, pp. 72-73). The case colleges were working towards achieving a systemic approach, but many leaders did not view diversity in this light; rather they saw it as an important issue but not high priority for them personally. As in the USA corporations studied, theory-in-practice evidenced diversity as a ‘non issue’ if judged by action rather than words (Dass & Parker, 1999, p. 68). However, some staff were working to the utmost to embed diversity and equality in leadership.

Maznevski (1994, p. 8) suggests that explicit agreement of how discussion will take place and how differences will be resolved may be helpful in diverse teams. No such discussion was recorded. Rather small tightly knit senior teams implicitly built norms of behaviour which resulted in working together effectively and with satisfaction. Larger groups of less senior leaders depended on formal processes, largely controlled by the chair, in which discussion of differences were edged out by a full agenda and a prevalence of reporting rather than discussion. Celebrating difference seemed to work most successfully where a powerful member of leadership lent power through personally supporting the work of individual outsiders, but this was only practicable in relation to very small numbers.

Gurin and Nagda (2006) distinguish a number of strategies by which the alienation of outsider groups might be reduced. Decategorisation strives to encourage seeing people as individuals rather than as members of a group, thereby avoiding group stereotypes. Recategorisation draws out-groupers into the in-group, through common tasks and symbols of identity. Difference is sidestepped to emphasise one single group rather than an in-group and out-groups. Intragroup solidarity attempts to empower out-group members by facilitating support groups, such as black managers groups. All three strategies were evident in the case colleges, but the first two were predominant. Despite the emphasis on celebrating difference, often difference was deleted or minimised in order to incorporate out-groupers into leadership. It is indicated that colleges generally have yet to find ways of valuing difference while encouraging involvement in leadership.

Finally, the evidence suggests that while specific micro initiatives to address diversity or aspects of diversity within colleges are valuable, equality and inclusion of all in leadership may also depend on the adjustment of systems at a macro level. If leadership is dispersed and less concentrated in small senior groups, the greater diversity lower down the system would have an entry to contribute to the collective leadership of each college. While expectations of external funders and quality audit systems are for a tightly controlled performance culture, this kind of building of shared understanding of communication processes and preferred outcomes will continue to be squeezed out. Critical theory suggests that dominant groups will find ways of transforming mechanisms of exclusion and camouflaging their existence (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). While the current accountability environment may be predicated on raising the performance of the sector for the benefit of learners, its effect is to sustain a culture in which celebration of difference and an inclusive approach to leadership appears very difficult to achieve.
Recommendations

In order to continue to make progress, the following recommendations are based on the evidence in this study:

At national level:

1. **Loosen accountability pressures:** Accountability pressures are intended to bring benefits to learners and some may argue that they have done so. An unintended consequence is squeezing leadership to become less inclusive. There are many reasons why increasing the autonomy of the sector and loosening audit pressures may be helpful; amongst them is the likelihood of making it easier to achieve inclusion of more diverse people in leadership.

At college level:

1. **Raise the priority of diversity issues:** Diversity is currently a low priority for many staff. Identify and embed targets related to diversity and equality in leadership as high priorities in the key responsibilities of a wider group of leaders than those with an explicit equality and diversity role. Targets might include increasing the diversity of staff in leadership roles at all levels, encouraging and monitoring attendance at leadership meetings, challenging and monitoring change in the culture of male dominated areas of the college. This not to suggest the imposition of numeric targets which are then monitored punitively. On the contrary we have argued for lessening such pressures. Rather we suggest a negotiated process of agreeing goals with all leaders might move diversity issues up the priority list.

2. **Recognise the importance of multiple identities:** Currently colleges seem focused primarily on ethnicity issues. This has brought some notable progress. However, minority ethnic leaders and others experience advantage/disadvantage or inclusion/exclusion as a result of a range of characteristics. Strategy needs to address the multiple sources of exclusion and adopt a systemic approach to addressing the needs of all those who may feel marginalised. This recommendation is about adding to the current focus not substituting one for another.

3. **Reconfigure meetings:** Reconsider the role of meetings, their size, duration and functioning. Periodic explicit discussion of how communication is to function and how differences are to be surfaced and used constructively would be helpful.

4. **Encourage discussion of diversity issues:** Explicit discussion of the fear some feel in discussing diversity issues and encouragement of a no blame environment might support more to participate.

5. **Consider broadening diversity and equality training:** Legislative requirements may require diversity training to be undertaken by all staff. However, training which is not explicitly focused on diversity, but allows staff with leadership roles in teaching and learning and business support to spend time together to understand each other and their roles better may be equally effective in breaking down the inaccurate perceptions which underpin exclusion.

6. **Supporting diversity and equality staff:** Some staff whose role is explicitly to support diversity and equality feel marginalised by the level of their post and by the indifference of many staff, whatever the publicly stated commitment. More senior appointments and greater resource would signal serious determination to make progress.
This study defined the integration of diversity in leadership as evident when leader groups identify and meet challenging organisational objectives by a process in which all group members engage, persist in engagement, and value the process. Our evidence suggests that diversity is not yet embedded in colleges’ leadership in this way. There is no doubt that many staff in the sector are deeply committed to increasing diversity and equality in leadership as much as in other aspects of activity, and to achieving integration as defined here. For others, if college performance is good or better, then addressing diversity is not a critical focus. This study suggests that even for the former group there is a belief that aspiration and episodic activity will be sufficient to bring about substantial change. Much more will be needed, including a more explicit and detailed strategy to attack the multiple disadvantage created by internal and external perceptions and pressures. Whatever the context of a college and its community, a strategy for systemic and prolonged action viewed as critical to progress will be needed if change is to be more than peripheral. Such a stance would be entirely appropriate to the historic commitment of the sector to modelling inclusion.
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Appendix A: Demographic Summary of Interviews

**All Colleges**

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**Ethnicity as self-reported**

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NB: In some cases complete information was not available for all participants. Numbers therefore may not tally.
Appendix B: Demographic Summary of Observations

**All Colleges**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching or training staff</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-teaching or administrative staff</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time teaching staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time teaching staff</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time non-teaching or administrative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time non-teaching or administrative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
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**Gender**

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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**Age Group**

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-30 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>31-40 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-50 yrs</td>
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**Ethnicity as self-reported**

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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>White English</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>White Scottish</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other British</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Irish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black British Caribbean</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Black British African</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other black background</td>
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**Disabled**

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

NB In some cases complete information was not available for all participants. Numbers therefore may not tally.
Further Information and Contact Details

This is one of a series of research reports carried out for the Centre for Excellence in Leadership. If you have any enquiries regarding this report, please contact:

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Email: j lumby@soton.ac.uk

We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

If you would like to receive further information on the Research Programme, please contact:

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www.centreforexcellence.org.uk
www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel
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