

Exceptional learning delivered by the City of London's Family of School sixth forms: Shared ideas about what might make a difference

By Dr Jane Overbury OBE

Executive Summary

Evidence would suggest that there is much to do in improving the outcomes at age 16+ for London's young people.

The City of London's family of eight independent and state schools collectively educate almost 2000 sixth form students. The review findings, which are shaped from a bottom-up understanding of the strengths and challenges for each school from the perspective of Head Teachers, Heads of Sixth Form and other colleagues, point to several common themes and issues. The recommendations in this report arise from the following findings:

- There is a deep commitment from all City of London (COL) schools and academies to delivering an outstanding sixth form education.
- There is a variability of outcomes between and within academies.
- Sixth form funding and economic viability poses a significant challenge for academies.
- Financial sustainability is compounded by an almost uniform overlap of the Key Stage 5 curriculum offer, with very small group numbers in some academies placing the viability of their provision at risk
- Student recruitment is resource intensive and the competitive nature of the Key Stage 5 application process brings many uncertainties in terms of student number planning.
- For a range of different reasons academies have difficulties finding, recruiting, training and retaining outstanding Key Stage 5 teachers with appropriate levels of subject knowledge and experience.
- Taken collectively, these challenges impact on delivery of the curriculum, wider learning and on outcomes.
- There are several successful partnerships between the COL independent schools and the COL academies, many of which have developed around individual staff or specific projects. However, logistical barriers to sustaining collaborations can be significant and hinder their long-term effectiveness.
- Specialist associate colleges have much to share with the Family of Schools

The recommendations are to:

1. Develop a clear evidenced-based strategic vision for sixth form provision
2. Establish a central sixth form specific Key Stage 5 teaching and learning collaborative.
3. Establish a central post-16 careers brokerage service
4. Develop systematic, joined-up approaches to student wider skill development
5. Establish or identify a framework where emerging or existing operational sixth form challenges can be explored at a strategic level in a timely way.

Introduction

Evidence would suggest that there is much to do in improving the outcomes at age 16+ for London's young people. A report by the Social Market Foundation (The Next London Challenge, Nov 2019¹) indicates that although disadvantaged young people do exceptionally well in London's education system up until age 16, their performance drops off significantly after strong achievement at GCSEs – with A Level results in Inner London being considerably lower than would be expected. Furthermore, a report from the London Councils (Level Up London, February 2020²) finds that a lack of skills provision matched to young people's diverse needs, strengths, aspirations and learning styles has left almost half of young Londoners without a Level-3 qualification at age 18 and argues that the system needs to deliver an increased variety of vocational and technical courses and learning routes to enable all young Londoners to fulfil their potential. This is underscored by a report from Impetus (The Employment Gap in London, February 2020³) which argues that whilst London now has the smallest employment gap for disadvantaged young people, these headlines mask a complex picture where poverty and exclusion create significant disparities in achievement, opportunities and outcomes for young Londoners. Young people in London, it says, need access to a diverse range of well-supported, effective routes to qualifications, skills and experiences that will enable them to make the most of London's fast-paced labour market. Finally, it is argued that too many young people are not getting the right careers information, advice and guidance, which is vital in helping them navigate options for learning and work.

The City of London (COL) Education Strategy has strong strategic oversight and delivery is focused on impact. It commits to actively encouraging social mobility and seeks to support young people who experience educational disadvantage. The COL Family of Schools collectively delivers sixth form education to just under 2000 students and is an important part of the City Corporation's education offer, which spans all phases from early years to post-16 and beyond. Part of the COL strategic aim is that the Family of Schools are recognised locally, nationally and internationally as outstanding and with their unique mix of state academies and independent schools who can draw on all the City of London has to offer, they are well placed to develop leading edge, innovative and creative approaches that can begin to address the London post 16 challenges.

It is generally recognised that Key Stage 5 has had less focus nationally than other education phases and there is a dearth of educational literature that can be drawn on to inform practice. In this context the COL has commissioned a small review of the Family of School's sixth forms, in order to gauge whether there are aspects of provision that might be usefully taken forward in a more systematic way. The aim of the review is to better understand what schools see as the strengths and challenges of their sixth form provision, what the benefits and challenges might be in terms of developing strategically driven partnership approaches and whether there are shared ideas about what make might a real difference.

Approach to the review

The Family of Schools include eight schools who currently offer sixth form provision, and all were visited as part of the review. The schools are an interesting mix of educational type, each contributing its individual ethos and culture to the collective:

- City of London Academy Islington (co-ed, standalone, co-sponsored City, University of London)
- City of London Academy Highbury Grove (co-ed, part of the COL MAT, CoLAT)
- City of London Academy Southwark (co-ed, part of the COL MAT, CoLAT)

- City of London (boys, independent day school)
- City of London Freeman's (co-ed, independent day and boarding school in Surrey)
- City of London Hackney (co-ed, standalone, co-sponsored with KPMG).
- City of London School for Girls (girls, independent day school)
- Newham Collegiate Sixth Form Centre COL Academy (co-ed, part of the COL MAT, CoLAT)

In addition, in order to provide some further context to the review, the following COL associate institutions were visited:

- The ADA College for Digital Skills (co-ed, specialist FE, working closely with the COL)
- The London Screen Academy (co-ed, specialist school, working closely with the COL)
- Emanuel School (co-ed, independent day school, part of the Westminster Grey Coat Foundation, historic links to the COL)

East visit lasted for 1-2 hours and the aim was to learn about the individual contexts for each institution and specifically their sixth form provision, in order to develop a bottom-up understanding of their strengths and challenges from the perspective of Head Teachers, Heads of Sixth Form and other colleagues. The purpose of organising these meetings across the Family of Schools was to gather school specific intelligence from which to discern whether schools faced individually different challenges or whether there were themes that were common across the family schools and if so, to use the findings to inform any subsequent review recommendations.

The meetings were not used to make judgements regarding the quality of sixth form provision in any school and the summary published performance table data is used only to set a high-level context for the report generally:

- A Level programmes are offered in all the COL academy sixth forms. Four academies also offer Applied General courses, with some Tech Level qualifications. Collectively vocational programmes amount to approximately 20% of the sixth form offer in those schools and 11% of the offer in COL academies.
- At Key Stage 4, 35% of all pupils in the four academies achieve a GCSE pass rate at Grade 5 or above for English and Maths, 61% achieve a pass rate at Grade 4 and above and 39% of pupils achieve a pass rate below Grade 4 and above in those subjects
- At Key Stage 5, the 16-19 academy achieves progress, average point scores and average grades for A Level provision which are significantly above national benchmarks. In two academies the progress score is average and in two academies it is below average. One academy achieves average point scores and grades which are at the national average and in three academies these are below the national average.
- For Applied General Courses, two academies achieve average point scores and grades at or above the national average and in two academies they are below. Two academies show average progress and in two academies progress is below average
- In the COL Independent schools two have progress scores above average and one is average. The average grade is A for two schools and A- for one school. The average point score ranges from 47.43 - 51.02. At the time of writing, national independent school comparison data is not available.

Findings

The overall impression is of a deep commitment to delivering an outstanding sixth form education which will enable students to flourish and to achieve the best academic results they can. This was clear

in all the Family of Schools. Without exception responses were measured, balanced and colleagues were open and frank about what worked well and what did not. It was also evident that in every school there is a real appetite for developing ways of working that will ensure all sixth formers benefit from expert teaching, meaningful and well-planned extension activities and exceptional pastoral care.

The discussion focus developed differently in the state and independent schools – in state schools the discussion tended to be focussed on their sixth form provision and in independent schools it was focused on their partnership work. However, there were common themes and ideas that were repeated across all the schools. In order to reflect this the findings are organised by those which were pertinent particularly to the COL academies and those which were pertinent to the whole family of schools.

COL Academies

Leaders are very ambitious and there is a clear focus on driving up standards and in improving outcomes. This is underpinned by a strong culture and ethos which is highly developed in some academies and developing in others. Leaders report that there is much good practice from highly committed staff and that they are gaining a deeper understanding of what underperformance looks like at Key Stage 5 and how it can be addressed. Whilst each academy has different ways of working with students, to a greater or lesser extent each has a focus on expectations, routines and rules.

Sixth form funding and economic viability poses a significant challenge for all the COL academies. Most leaders have a good understanding of how the post 16 funding model impacts on academy finances and are clear there should be a cut off point for staffing costs as a percentage of recurrent income. However, it is increasingly difficult to design a curriculum which shows the breakeven point. This is exacerbated in the 11-18 academies where the curriculum needs to be broad enough to attract internal and external students. In turn there is pressure on resourcing for the pastoral, enrichment and extension curriculum.

Student recruitment exercises everyone, requiring much energy and significant resources to be spent on designing, delivering and managing a process which has many uncertainties. Leaders spoke of the need to maximise student numbers, whilst also ensuring the right students are on the right course.

Having a clear curriculum vision at school level and as a COL family of academies is crucial in terms of student number planning and financial viability. Currently there is an almost uniform overlap of offers. Some academies have very small group numbers, and this is an issue in terms of their long-term viability. There is a consensus across the academies that it is important to retain their sixth form provision and that their sixth forms should be a destination of choice. Some academies know that they need to streamline their offer so that the balance between cost effectiveness and attractiveness of offer can be better achieved. However, there did not seem to be a coherent view of what that offer should include and which groups of students the sixth form is for. The prevailing view is that the focus is on A Level provision for high achieving learners whilst the reality in most of the academies is A Levels for students with a range of grades at GCSE and an ad hoc number of different sized BTEC courses. This seems at odds with the MAT (CoLAT) vision that its sixth forms provide an A Level curriculum for the most-able pupils and a small number of BTEC Extended Diploma courses for pupils missing the threshold for A Level.

Structural partnerships work in different ways across the academies, with some being more successful than others. For example, whilst the Islington Sixth Form Consortium is a well-established network which has a clear sense of strategic purpose, at an operational level it is resource hungry and the sum benefits appear negligible.

In all academies there is a sense of clarity about the subject curriculum framework – how it is organised, what time and resources are allocated to it and what the expectations are for staff and for students. However, this is less clear in terms of the pastoral curriculum and there is greater variability across the academies. Skill development (including fusion skills) is high on the list of priorities and there are lots of examples of programmes and initiatives that deliver this, but it is less evident how this is being delivered in a systematic way across the academies.

Finding, recruiting, training and retaining outstanding Key Stage 5 teachers with appropriate levels of subject knowledge and experience is a common challenge across the academies but for a range of different reasons. In some cases, this is a subject specific issue (this could be around hard to recruit and retain subjects such as Computer Science, Chemistry, Economics, Physics and Maths, or A Level only subjects such as Psychology or Sociology). In other cases, it is about the balance of Key Stage 5 teaching alongside teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4, the need to prioritise the raising of standards at Key Stage 4 or the challenges of being a lone subject teacher. There are several strategies in place across the COL academies aimed at tackling inconsistencies in the quality of subject teaching and in delivery of the pastoral curriculum and careers, each with varying degrees of success. Academy leaders identified a need for more forensic detail around the curriculum and the pedagogical practices needed to successfully engage and challenge their sixth form students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Whilst it was acknowledged that sixth form teaching requires approaches, tailored CPD time is limited in most academies.

All academy leaders spoke of the need to do more in terms of skills for work or further study including placements, career advice and post-school support. It was acknowledged that there is limited internal expertise in up to date and relevant careers knowledge but there is very little capacity to address this as single institutions. Similarly, there is a desire to do more in terms of sixth form specific cultural capital and a super-curriculum offer including character education, fusion skills and academic literacy but limited resources prevent this being addressed in a deep, meaningful and sustainable way.

COL Family of Schools

All the COL academies and the COL independent schools spoke of the importance and value of partnership work. Existing collaborative work includes academy staff and students participating in independent school opportunities such as specialist workshops, guest speakers, careers and higher education programmes, specialist subject tuition, revision courses and CPD. Examples of current successful partnership work includes the student to student mentoring programme run in collaboration with the COL Girls School (CLGS), the virtual school programme run in collaboration with the COL School and the residential revision programme run in collaboration with Freeman's. The success of these individual programmes is attributed to there being a targeted need, a simplicity of vision and an operational workability.

Many partnerships are shaped up around individual staff and these can be ad hoc, not joined-up and there is a need to learn more about how to build on what grows organically in a more systematic way. All three independent schools view partnership work as a key strategic priority. A new partnership strategy has been agreed between the CLSG and COL School. Its aim is to be pioneering in its approach, learning from and building on the work they have individually undertaken to date and using this to shape a clear path and strategy starting in September 2020. Working together the two schools have appointed a Director of Partnerships, who will have a central role in delivering the strategy aims and objectives. In May 2020 Freeman's is launching a Developing Leadership through Partnership project and all COL academies are invited to participate. Given its location in Ashted Surrey, Freeman's also

places a high priority on serving its local community and is engaged in several local partnership projects.

Leaders identified partnerships around CPD and student-centred activities as being potentially of great value. It was acknowledged that there are many staff and students from across the family of schools who would welcome the opportunities this would afford but getting the right people together at the right time would be of crucial importance. The framing of this type of work is important in this regard, ensuring mutually beneficial ways of working and avoiding any model of patronage.

The whole family of schools have benefitted from opportunities provided or brokered by the COL – these include the summer careers festival and a number of other employers, educational, cultural and arts related events. Leaders from all family of schools spoke highly of the excellent range of opportunities these provided. Engagement of schools in planning the activities was felt to be important so targeted needs are met and so that the logistics are organised around what is practicably possible in terms of the school day.

Whilst there are examples of successful partnership practices, the logistical barriers to sustainable collaborations were acknowledged by leaders to be not insignificant: for schools offering the opportunities it's important to know if the offer is wanted and valued – if it is being asked for and what its impact is. For those schools receiving the opportunities, the offer can sometimes become burdensome – this can be because they arrive in ad hoc ways, are practically difficult to accommodate or there are not the in-school resources necessary to properly access them. In addition, the day-to-day challenges are also not inconsiderable: schools work on different rhythms and timetables, teachers are extraordinarily busy, and the logistics are difficult and time consuming.

However, there was general agreement that difficulties of operation can be overcome if there is a clear strategic priority which is signalled and led at a senior level in each school and across the family of schools. Leaders were clear that there should be mutual benefits to partnership work which should also be meaningful and achievable, with any innovations being drivable, reliable and sustainable for the longer term and that everyone involved in partnership work must see how it relates and applies to them.

COL Associate Institutions

The ADA National College for Digital Skills and the London Screen Academy are two specialist colleges each offering contextualised tailored curriculum pathways which include vocational and academic elements for young people aged 16-19, with routes into higher education, higher degrees and into the industries they serve. They both benefit from extensive and strong links with industry and as well as serving the students they educate, they aim to innovate their respective industries by providing a diverse, talented supply of young people.

The colleges draw students from a wide area across London with most students being self-selecting. However, in general parents and pupils struggle to understand this type of post-16 offer and have a limited understanding of the best routes into these industries at 18. In addition, many schools are newly getting to grips with the higher and degree apprenticeship system and some fail to promote it well.

Whilst specialist links are important, strong teaching and learning and sound pedagogical approaches are seen as key in ensuring student success. Both colleges recognise the need to ensure good transition from Key Stage 4 and to engender a strong focus on disciplined study with academic approaches to learning.

As part of the Westminster Greycoat Foundation, Emmanuel School has good partnerships with the foundation's family of schools with some embedded joint practices and brokered ad hoc CPD for single department teachers and in shadowing for stepping up roles. The school also has extensive partnerships with local primary schools which are driven strategically and supported by year 12 students. These collaborative activities and independent state school partnerships work at their best when they are driven from the top with an understanding that relationships on the ground matter and when they are focussed and mutually beneficial.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop a clear evidenced based strategic vision for sixth form provision

There is a consistent view amongst leaders that there should be a high-quality curriculum offer in the COL family of schools sixth forms, delivered by expert teachers, supported by strong CPD, utilising external partnerships to ensure extensive pastoral, careers and super-curriculum support. However, there are varying views amongst leaders, both in terms of vision and operationally, what that curriculum should include: the subjects and number of courses, the balance of academic and general vocational provision, the levels of learning and the student needs it should meet.

In this context it is recommended that a strategic vision and rationale for sixth form provision is shaped and articulated in each of the COL academies. This vision should be developed in the context of the COL Education Strategy, the whole school vision and align, where applicable, with vision of the COL Academy Trust:

- The vision should be informed by evidence and data. For example, when considering the balance and level of the academic and vocational provision the current numbers need to be evaluated and a rationale developed. Currently there is a combined number of just under 400 students in the current Year 12 across the 4 COL school academy sixth forms. On the supply side the combined number of Key Stage 4 pupils from the 4 COL academy schools is 715. If the number of students who scored Grade 5 or above in English and Maths is used as a proxy for entry to study A Levels, 250 pupils would meet this criteria, and if Grade 4 English and Maths is used as proxy for Advanced Level BTEC courses approximately 186 pupils would meet this criteria. Lastly if no Level 2 or 1 provision is offered, 279 pupils are required to progress elsewhere. Furthermore, just over 300 Year 12 students study at the post 16 NCS, meaning that to stand still 700 sixth form places need to be filled in COL academies and NCS for September 2020. All the school sixth forms aim to grow their sixth form numbers so to achieve targets this overall number needs to grow. If this is looked at in a wider way, across the three London Boroughs in which the COL academies and the NCS are located, collectively some 5,580 young people completed Key Stage 4 with approximately 2,550 pupils achieving Grade 5 and above in English and Maths. However, the biggest competitive market in these boroughs is around selective post-16 A Level provision with many institutions trying to entice the same students. The vision should set out realistic expectations about how many of these students can be realistically attracted to COL academies. Alongside this the vision should explain how strong progression for all Year 11 pupils will be fulfilled.
- The vision should be informed by clear financial planning, whilst balancing the tangible benefits of a sixth form offer. Financial planning should include a costed curriculum plan, with projected student numbers and an indication of the student numbers needed to break even for each subject and overall. When student numbers do not break even, a plan should be developed showing how this is to be remedied with timescales. If it is expected that student numbers in a particular subject will not reach target, there should be an explanation of why it should remain on the curriculum.

Help with establishing the basis for cost effectiveness across the schools may be needed to support this exercise.

- Consideration should be given to the possible benefits of COL Highbury Grove and COL Highgate combining their sixth forms. This has the potential to ensure the viability of sixth form provision in both schools. The sixth form provision could be consolidated on one site, with leadership and staff teaching being drawn from both schools so that better of economies of scale are achieved and a more rounded experience for students is provided. Alongside this there should be a strategic review of the impact and efficiency of the Islington Sixth Form Consortium with a view to either withdrawing from the group or to remaining involved and strengthening its work.
- The sixth form vision should provide the foundation for all other sixth form related initiatives and as such it needs to be strategically driven and agreed at the highest level by senior school and trust leaders as well as the relative governing bodies. The COL could support and facilitate this exercise by helping to establish a common framework and agreed timescales by when schools might reasonably expect to conclude this piece of work.

Recommendation 2: Establish a central sixth form specific Key Stage 5 teaching and learning collaborative.

Every school spoke of the need to have strong Key Stage 5 teachers and leaders who are well supported by targeted, relevant and high-quality CPD. Discussions also highlighted the wealth of good practice that exists across the family of schools.

Much has been written about self-improving school systems and when working well they can be particularly effective in delivering bespoke CPD, transferring professional knowledge, building expertise and leadership capacity, distributing innovation and delivering efficiencies in the use of resources. In this context, it is recommended that a central sixth form specific Key Stage 5 teaching and learning collaborative is established.

- The collaborative should have a clear set of aims and a framework of guiding principles that would ensure activities are driven by the needs of the schools, bring tangible benefits, are practical to deliver and are cost effective.
- The collaborative should develop ways to establish and promote Key Stage 5 specific pedagogical delivery models and subject specific best practice. This should also focus on some specific areas identified by schools such as the sharing of subject specialisms, resources and extension activities, sharing of good practice in terms of A* & A teaching and learning, moderation of work, providing exemplar materials and responses and the sharing of examiner knowledge. In addition, the collaborative should consider what can be learnt from each other in terms of establishing scholarly approaches to learning in the classroom and working with staff who might struggle to meet expectations.
- The collaborative should explore ways to share mutually beneficial strategies with a focussed group of staff, such as heads of sixth or tutors, looking at pastorally focussed areas identified by schools such as fusion skills, study skills, character education, working with underperforming students, effective tutoring, effective PHSE provision, intransigent poor attendance and mental health, including how to staff and resource these areas more efficiently.
- The collaborative should consider ideas around research and whether this might provide ways of unifying sixth form specific CPD across schools so that teachers own their own professional scholarship and development. This could include investigating how current models of school professional research practice can be shared or become founding ideas. For example, the CLGS

collaborative enquiry groups, which are rooted in academic research, could have the potential to form the basis of teacher groups drawn from across the family of schools who investigate, research, observe and feedback on an agreed and mutually beneficial theme.

- The collaborative should aim to develop deep collaboration through innovative and pioneering practices. As such it should seek to go beyond the usual twilight meeting model and develop sustainable practices through coaching, peer support, teacher partnerships, exchanges and sequenced conferences. This also might include, for example, developing the capacity of subject or leadership specialists to share best practice, or creating capacity to share hard to recruit subject specialists.
- Once established the collaborative should be self-sustaining but will need to be driven by senior leaders from each school at its inception. The specialist associate colleges could contribute to and benefit from being part of this enterprise. Given that the COL Boys and CLGS partnership strategy is to be launched for September 2020 it is recommended that strategic discussions take place to explore the contribution they might make in facilitating the establishment of this collaborative.

Recommendation 3: Establish a central post-16 careers brokerage service

Most schools spoke of the need to do more to strengthen specialist Higher Education and Higher and Degree Level Apprenticeships advice and to better prepare students so that they make well considered high quality applications. There is a plethora of opportunities available to schools through their location in London and through the COL and the COL independent schools and for these opportunities to have most impact they need to fit into a coherent progression planning programme.

In this context it is recommended that a central post-16 careers brokerage service is established. The brokerage should provide the specialist up to date expertise and knowledge needed to help students navigate their way through decision making and application processes so that they make well-informed, well-judged and sound progression plans.

- The service should have a clear set of aims and a framework of guiding principles that would ensure activities are driven by the needs of the schools and students, bring tangible benefits, are practical to deliver and are cost effective.
- The service should provide an expert end-to-end service to schools including clear, current planning data and detailed progression information regarding Oxbridge, Russell Group universities, Ivy League universities, specialist universities, city and other employer schemes, higher and degree level apprenticeships. The service should draw on the expertise of the specialist associate colleges.
- The service should provide on the ground support to leaders, staff and students as well as brokering opportunities for students to access specialist preparation and help such as LNAT and BMAT preparation so that activities are planned, systematic and timely.
- The service should draw on the City of London to broker sustainable meaningful work-related learning and work experience that schools can rely on. As part of this work the service should provide guidance and training for schools, students and employers so that each knows what is expected of them and how to make the experience mutually beneficial. In addition, the service should build on and further develop alumni links so that these are used to model those expectations.

Recommendation 4: Develop systematic, joined-up approaches to student wider skill development

Leaders spoke of the benefits of a coordinated approach to student enrichment and extension activities across the family of schools. Rich and meaningful opportunities in which the focus is to develop wider skills are often to be found where a programme is expertly facilitated and where there is a critical mass of participants who together provide a range of learning opportunities. Habits, opportunities, exemplars and standards are all important in wider skills development particularly when delivered regularly and often.

In this context, it is recommended that consideration be given to how student-centred wider skill development activities and resources can be developed and planned in a more systematic, targeted and sustainable way. For the purposes of this recommendation, wider skill development refers to the skills and understandings that help students to flourish in a range of settings and through which they are also able to develop cultural capital. This includes fusion skills and character development, as well as skills that facilitate good social and working relationships and skills that underpin educational success.

- Suggestions from schools regarding specific opportunities where economies of scale and better learning opportunities could be achieved across the family of schools included subject specific contextualised learning through local, national and international field trips, attending joint cultural lectures and excursions, themed conferences and workshops, programmes to support private study and independent learning, emerging talent programmes, coordinated programmes of revision sessions and organised programmes such as the Higher Level Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- These joined up approaches could be facilitated through the teaching and learning collaborative or through the central careers brokerage. The COL Boys and CLGS partnership strategy has a focus on establishing mutually beneficial learning opportunities and so this might be a useful avenue to strategically explore.

Recommendation 5: Establish or identify a framework where emerging or existing operational sixth form challenges can be explored at a strategic level in a timely way.

Leaders themselves recognised that for initiatives to be successful and sustainable there must be a strategic imperative signalled from the highest level. Often barriers to strong partnership work are in the detail of delivery but those difficulties of operation are more likely to be overcome when the issue in question is a priority. One of the challenges of partnership work is establishing what might be a strategic priority for everyone in the partnership and given the lower profile of Key Stage 5 internally and externally, this focus on the sixth form has the potential to be problematic. Another challenge both operationally and strategically is how the culture, ethos and standards of a school play out when bringing people together.

In this context it is recommended that an existing strategic framework is identified or a new one established where sixth form specific priorities can be routinely discussed and tested collectively by school leaders.

- An area for consideration could be the development of good, robust databases across the trust to speed up and improve the sharing of information and good practice. This could include the rationalising of data requests, linked up systems to avoid duplication, and more joined-up approaches across COL academies in terms of ICT based monitoring systems.
- Similarly, the possibility of establishing a centralised staffing recruitment process particularly for hard to recruit sixth form subject teachers may have some merit

The framework should be lean, responsive and be able to make judgements quickly. It should ensure a ruthless analysis of possible time invested versus impact, so that ideas that do not bring tangible benefits to the whole enterprise are not commissioned and so that what does not work is stopped.

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Biography

Jane retired as Executive Principal of Christ the King Sixth Form College in 2017 having had a long career in London inner city institutions spanning the school, FE and sixth form sectors. Christ the King is a family of three sixth forms located in Sidcup, Brockley and Lewisham, educating some 2,500 students. Jane studied for her doctorate at the Institute of Education 2001-2007. In 2010 she was awarded an OBE for services to education.

¹ Kathryn Petrie, *The Next London Challenge, Converting strong educational performance into great jobs for disadvantaged Londoners*, The Social Market Foundation (November 2019)

² London Councils *Level Up London, Fixing the skills and employment system for Londoners*, (February 2020)

³ Impetus, *Research Briefing 8: The Employment Gap in London* (February 2020)