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Autonomy and powerlessness: the gap between policy and practice in English Further Education colleges

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Abstract

The New Labour government placed Further Education (FE) at the centre of delivering its policies on social justice through widening participation in education and on enhancing the vocational skills of the workforce. This has led to increasing scrutiny and control of FE, and consequently a torrent of initiatives that prescribe teachers' training and practice. Although these initiatives appear to reduce academic autonomy, they may not bring about as much change as the government would like, or there may not be the need for so many initiatives. This paper considers one such, the statutory obligation since September 2007 for teachers in FE colleges to undertake and record thirty hours of CPD each year, and argues that it is based upon impoverished and restricted notions of professionalism. However, research evidence suggests that this policy has had little impact on FE teachers' practice, although in an act of performativity the thirty hours may be seen to be carried out in full.

Using the CPD initiative as an example, this paper analyses the gap between policy and practice in FE to analyse the restrictions on teachers' professional and academic freedom. It also questions the government's ability to affect meaningful change in FE when policy often reaches teachers stripped of any justification and reduced to its financial implication.

Introduction

Whatever else you could say about Labour's educational policies there is certainly no shortage of them.

(Ball 2008: 86)

FE in England is a heterogeneous sector with over three million students which has been described as what is not school and not university (Kennedy 1997: 1), though even those boundaries are becoming less defined. It remains the sector where the majority of vocational training and adult education take place, as well as academic study between the ages of 16 and 18. The New Labour government, elected in 1997, identified FE as a means to deliver two central policies in England: social justice through widening participation in education and enhancing national economic competitiveness through improving the workforce's skills. Therefore, while previous governments largely neglected FE (Lucas 2004a: 35), New Labour has increasingly scrutinised and controlled colleges and staff; a process which is apparent in the government's *Workforce Strategy for the Further Education System in England, 2007-2012* (LLUK 2008a). This strategy includes the introduction of a statutory annual period of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in FE colleges. From September 2007 each teacher must carry out and record thirty hours of CPD each year in order to maintain their licence to practice. After examining the context to the government's compulsory CPD reform, this paper will consider its impact after one year to illustrate more general points about the gap between policy and practice in the English FE system.

Finlay *et al.* (2007: 138) describe *policy* as a “loose term” which includes:

value commitments, strategic objectives and operational instruments and structures at national, regional, local and institutional levels.

Such a catholic understanding of policy is necessary within FE where there is a plethora of national and local agencies, bodies, and institutions. As part of their wide-ranging and detailed research into the impact of policy in the learning and skills sector in England Coffield *et al* (2008: 15-17) created an organigram of the sector which they describe as looking:

more like the chart of the internal wiring of an advanced computer than the outline of a ‘streamlined’, coherent sector.

This complexity has arisen partly because of the diversity of the sector and its conflicting constituencies (Coffield *et al* 2007: 735), but also because policy has been laid on policy, and for New Labour that has meant organisation laid upon organisation. So, CPD in FE over the past decade has been under the direction of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) which was replaced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), later split in two and replaced by the Department for Innovation, Skills and Universities and the Department for Children, Families and Schools. In addition, the Further Education Funding Council, replaced by the Learning and Skills Council which currently funds FE, have both been significant; as is Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the body currently responsible for FE in England. The Quality Improvement Agency, now replaced by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service have also both had a role in implementing CPD policy. Besides these is the nominally independent professional body for teaching staff in FE, the Institute for Learning (IfL), whose website (IfL 2008) helpfully contains 250 acronyms used in the sector. Note, though, that IfL “do not expect [this list] to be comprehensive”. Such legislative complexity itself becomes an important factor in the implementation of any policy initiative.

However, policy is about more than documents or agencies. Ball (1993: 10-11) wrote:

The question ‘what is policy?’, should not mislead us into unexamined assumptions about policies as ‘things’; policies are also processes and outcomes.

Policy is never static, even after an initiative has been codified: it is variously interpreted, if occasionally unconsciously, both in its production, and in its reception as with the various responses to compulsory CPD in FE. Using definitions developed by Steer *et al* (2007: 177) policy drivers are the broadly described aims while a policy lever, is:

shorthand for the wide array of functional mechanisms through which government and its agencies seek to implement policies. However, they are

not neutral tools: the choices about which policy levers to use and how they are used is inherently political and not simply rationale administrative responses to pre-existing policy problems. The political character of policy levers means that they can become an end in themselves.

Coffield *et al* (2008: 39) identified five policy levers within the sector covering FE: planning; funding; inspection; initiatives; and, targets. In order to demonstrate how policy levers become detached from the changes they are meant to force, I focus on targets related to the CPD reform. This initiative demonstrates three aspects of the government's approach to FE; efforts to closely direct the sector have had the effect of reducing professional autonomy and trust by increasing centralised accountability. Secondly, the means to measure the initiative's success have become a divergence from the intended change in colleges as systems to record the achievement of targets are introduced and prioritised. Finally, despite its ostensible success through achievement of targets, the initiative has changed little in practice.

This paper draws on existing literature, policy documentation as well as qualitative data to demonstrate how a symbiosis of performativity has evolved from government reforms perpetuating the gap between policy and practice. The original data comes from questionnaires submitted to forty-two Human Resources managers, teacher-trainers and others who identified themselves as having responsibility for staff development and CPD at FE organisations in the North of England. Twenty-nine completed questionnaires were returned from staff at twenty-one organisations, which provide a snapshot picture of the early trajectory of this reform.

Further Education Policy under New Labour

Tomlinson (2001: 112) stressed the "continuities and similarities" between the approaches to post-16 education of the Conservative and New Labour governments, but the new government recognised the need for reform in the 1999 White Paper, *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning* thus:

There is too much duplication, confusion and bureaucracy in the current system. Too little money actually reaches learners and employers, too much is tied up in bureaucracy. There is an absence of effective co-ordination or strategic planning. The system has insufficient focus on skill and employer needs at national, regional and local levels.

(DfEE 1999: 21)

FE, it would seem, was broken and needed fixing before it could carry New Labour's policies, which has led to the current government spending more time and effort on the sector than any previous one. In 2004 Lucas (2004a: 35) wrote:

It is probably true that in the last five years or so there has been more regulation and government policy concerned with raising the standards of teaching in further education than ever before.

The same statement could be made about the five years that followed and the reasons for this activity lie at the heart of the New Labour project. Hall (2003: 6) accused New Labour of speaking “with forked tongue” by rhetorically combining economic neo-liberalism with their more social-democratic strand. However, for New Labour the connections between education and training, economic growth and social justice are simply unquestionable. These links, considered more fully below, are positioned to be unassailable and so broach no argument nor require any evidence because there is, apparently, no alternative. Smith (1994: 37 in Avis 2003: 317) describes the process of hegemony, which can be related to educational policy in this area.

A hegemonic project does not dominate political subjects: it does not reduce political subjects to pure obedience and it does not even require their unequivocal support for its specific demands. It pursues, instead, a far more subtle goal, namely the vision of the social order as the social order itself.

To describe a political project as hegemonic, then, is not to say that a majority of the electorate explicitly supports its policies, but to say that there appears to be no other alternative to this projects vision of society.

The orthodoxy that makes education an aspect of economic policy is part of what Ball (1999: 204 original italics) has called a “powerful, coherent *policyscape*” where social justice is aligned with economic competitiveness, as apparent in New Labour’s statements. David Blunkett, the first New Labour Secretary of State for Education, wrote in the forward to the government Green Paper in 1998:

Learning is the key to prosperity - for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition.

(DfEE 1998:1)

Seven years later in 2005 Bill Rammell, then British minister of state for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning claimed (LSC 2005: 1), “Further Education is the engine room for skills and social justice in this country”, and he was amongst ministers who welcomed the Leitch Review of Skills published in 2006 which asserted, “where skills were once **a** key driver of prosperity and fairness, they are now **the** key driver” (Leitch 2006: 46, original emphases). That same year Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote in the forward to a Government White Paper:

Our economic future depends on our productivity as a nation. That requires a labour force with skills to match the best in the world. [...] The colleges and training providers that make up the Further Education sector are central to achieving that ambition. [...] But at present, Further Education is not achieving its full potential as the powerhouse of a high skills economy.

(DfES 2006)

This extract illustrates the continued importance to the government of the economic role of FE, though exactly what “high skills” are is not specified, and that ministers still considered FE not to be working properly. Consequently, the perceived failure of FE to achieve “its full potential” has led to increasing the centralised accountability of FE teachers, which Morris (2001: 26) celebrated in relation to school-teachers in a speech made while she was Minister of Education.

We do now have an accountable profession. Performance tables, the inspection system, performance management, examination and assessment arrangements, procedures for tackling school weaknesses, all contribute to the effective accountability of teachers and headteachers.

The Workforce Strategy for the Further Education System in England, 2007-2012, which includes mandatory annual CPD can be understood within this context of perceived failure leading to increased accountability. One important element of this strategy is the *New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning centre* which contain 190 statements of the “skills, knowledge and attributes” (LLUK 2006: ii) required by those who work in the sector, including (p4) a commitment to: “[u]sing a range of learning resources to support learners”; and (p5) the requirement to “[s]tructure and present information clearly and effectively”. The length of these standards and their banal specification of practice contrast unfavourably with the equivalent documents covering the schools and HE sectors which briefly set out broad professional values and do not attempt to prescribe classroom activities. The content and tenor of the documents that relate to FE suggest what Avis (2003: 315) has termed “a truncated model of trust”. Why do policy-makers treat FE in such a manner? Certainly this most heterogeneous sector is important to the government, as I have argued, yet Coffield *et al* (2008: 4) suggest that those with authority fail to understand the sector because, “with a few exceptions, neither they nor their children have ever passed through it.” For the same reason the FE sector does not have the lobbying strength of schools and universities and so is more susceptible to the activities of new ministers wishing to make their own mark. Nonetheless, while legislation has rained down upon FE there is a gap between what may be planned by government reform and what it achieves in practice as one initiative demands another to achieve what the former failed to. This pattern results from the government’s ideological investment in the causal links between education and training, social justice and economic competitiveness.

Despite its hegemony in mainstream British politics, this conjoining of educational, economic and social policy has been subject to excoriating criticism from, amongst others, Coffield (1999), Rikowski (2001) and Avis (2007), who have found that the orthodoxy has no foundation in evidence. Reporting on a recent major research project into education, globalisation and the knowledge economy, Brown *et al* (2008: 17) found that:

While the skills of the workforce remain important, they are not a source of decisive competitive advantage.

Moreover, they found that the expansion of access to Higher Education (HE) in the UK “has failed to narrow income inequalities even amongst university graduates”. Therefore, it would seem that the government is subjecting FE to ever-greater scrutiny and accountability for what cannot be accomplished through education and training alone; there is a fundamental discrepancy between the government's intention for FE and what FE can achieve, no matter how efficient the sector is. The White Paper in which Blair wrote the forward quoted above was also the document that first introduced compulsory CPD for all staff in FE; another means to fix sector that isn't working.

CPD and workforce strategy

The shift from voluntary to compulsory CPD in FE is only the most prominent aspect of *The Workforce Strategy*.

This further education sector workforce strategy, the first of its kind, is intended to help shape the further education workforce of the future in England. By providing a national framework, it is intended to support all colleges and learning providers implement their own local workforce plans to support the delivery of excellent provision for young people, adults and employers.

(LLUK 2008a: 6)

The government minister Bill Rammell (LLUK 2008a: 4) praised the progress of staff in FE in his forward to the initiative before warning that given current and future developments: “All those who lead and work in the sector will need to move up a gear.” In the tone of an end-of-year school report, David Hunter, chief executive of LLUK wrote in his forward (LLUK 2008a: 5):

There is already much success to celebrate and the Further Education Sector workforce can be rightly proud of its achievements to date. But more still is necessary.

Part of this ‘gear change’ or ‘necessary more’ is the annual thirty hours of CPD. I certainly do not seek to undermine meaningful CPD, but like democracy and the pursuit of happiness, professional development is universally celebrated as something good, with little analysis of what it entails. Trorey makes the distinction between “*institutional development*” aimed at improving a whole organisation, often described as “*staff development*” and the more individual “*professional development*” involving “pedagogic knowledge and subject expertise” (2002: 2; her emphasis). Though there may be overlap between the two sets of activities implied by these terms, there is a clear difference in their primary instigation: staff development from the organisation; CPD, by definition, is primarily under the control of the professional.

The voluminous *National Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Further Education in England and Wales* were published by FENTO in 1999 as a statutory

basis for teacher training qualifications in England and they included a commitment to “engage in continuing professional development” (FENTO 1999: 23). Although significant within the initial training of teachers in FE, the so-called FENTO standards had little influence on practice (Nasta 2007). Three years later in 2002 the government published *Success For All: Reforming Further Education and Training—our vision for the future* which sought to put “teaching, training and learning at the heart of what we do” (DfES 2002: 5). This highlighted CPD as a priority area because, in an astonishingly candid admission (DfES 2002: 4), “insufficient attention [had] been given to improving teaching, training and learning”. It was therefore the aim of the government to:

address under-investment in professionalism and to reward and recognise the importance of the further education and training workforce. (p5)

Under the banner of the *Success For All* programme the Department for Education and Skills published *Equipping Our Teachers for the Future* (2004) making this specific commitment to CPD:

We need to recognise that a teacher’s training is not complete when initial training ends. We want all teachers to commit to lifelong professional development, so that their skills are always up-to-date as the needs of learners change.

(DfES 2004: 4)

This spawned the statutory period of CPD which came into force in 2007 marking a move from general encouragement to a specific obligation to participate in CPD; from less to more control and scrutiny. Crucially, teachers in FE now need to record their annual CPD in order to achieve and maintain their status of “Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills” (QTLS), which is their licence to practice.

The workforce reforms were positioned to be of indisputable good: the statutory instrument by which it was introduced stated the purpose of the period of CPD as: “updating knowledge of the subject taught and developing teaching skills” of the individual teacher (DIUS 2007: 1). However, LLUK’s (2008b: 14) research on CPD in the sector found a discrepancy in views between teachers and managers which suggests this stress on the individual teacher may entail responsibility without control. Their data indicated 59% of teachers strongly agreed that lack of time was a barrier to “accessing CPD opportunities”, against only 25% of senior managers; 33% of teachers strongly agreed that cost was a barrier, against 11% of senior managers; and 10% of teachers strongly agreed that personal motivation was a barrier, against 23% of senior managers. These different perceptions suggest that managers may be placing blame on individual staff for lack of professional development and ignoring other structural obstacles. Moreover, the same research found that even what influence teachers have over their CPD can weaken:

it was managers who predominantly said that organisational needs were important [in CPD]; this view was expressed by managers from a variety of organisations and across all regions. (p15)

The research further indicated (p10) that CPD is eliding into staff development instigated by the organisation and found that:

senior managers were of the opinion that one of the ways in which [college strategic plans] were put into action was by “*identifying staff whose role supports aspects of the college plan*” and then allocating funds to this CPD development. However, there was little discussion on how they formulated or gathered the data for strategic planning.

Institutional control of CPD is further encouraged by one of the anticipated outcomes in the government’s *Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan* (LLUK 2008e: 10):

A culture of CPD is established within the Further Education sector focused on meeting learner needs at provider and individual level. Colleges and learning providers approach their own staff development in similar and flexible ways, as they would for a learner, employer or client. The confidence and capacity of the workforce in understanding and using technology to transform education and training will be a key element of this culture.

Here, CPD and staff development become interchangeable, predominantly about the needs of the organisation and beyond the control of the individual. Moreover, in the guidance to staff entering FE from other education sectors quoted above, LLUK explicitly recommends CPD as a means of coping with FE’s vicissitudes.

If you previously taught in the schools sector, you might have assumed you had chosen a lifetime’s career. For teachers in FE, the fluidity, complexity and rapidly changing priorities mean that continuity is much more uncertain. One crucial way that practitioners in FE can deal with this uncertainty is to be proactive about their professional development.

(2008c: 6)

This is some distance from the stated purpose of “updating knowledge of the subject taught and developing teaching skills”. Moreover, mandatory professional development suffers from being yet another initiative, and even the government recognises the sheer amount of policy as an impediment to achieving progress in FE. The DIUS business plan for 2008-2009 includes eight strategic messages; fifteen “key policy deliverables”; two public service agreements; and six Departmental Strategy Objectives. Little wonder then, that one of the department’s “top seven corporate risks” is:

Sector instability and Reform Overload in FE – that the key delivery partners become distracted from delivering “business as usual” due to uncertainty over the future organisational shape of the sector, or as a result of the sheer scale

of change

(DIUS 2008: 6)

So, by the government's own admission the quantity of reforms makes reforms less likely to succeed; so as anticipated above, the government needs more reforms. This dubious logic is a feature of the gap between policy and practice.

What impact has compulsory CPD had?

The workforce strategy is a crucial element in the government's plan for improving FE and there has been considerable investment of time and money in consultation meetings, dissemination events, websites and documents. Arguably, the workforce strategy's nominalisation as a coherent government *initiative* with a rationale, set boundaries and its own name necessitates its being seen to succeed. To this end, the implementation plan (LLUK 2008e: 5) for the workforce strategy states that "milestones and outcomes should be measurable" and yet LLUK (2008b: 4) are aware of the difficulty of assessing what effect CPD has had on the sector:

A significant finding from the research concerns the problems associated with the measurement of impact of CPD upon the beneficiaries: institutions, individual teachers and trainers, and learners. Many managers are aware that impact measurement is a vital component of the effective use of resources, but there is an urgent need to develop more precise instruments for impact management.

The ambiguity of "impact measurement" is apparent in anticipated outcome 3.2 (LLUK 2008e: 10) in the implementation plan for the FE workforce strategy.

A workforce that provides the impetus for its own learning needs by taking action towards individual skills development. This outcome will be demonstrated by the enthusiasm of staff about the new CPD opportunities available and their keenness to adopt new technologies and engage in the latest training.

Yet, quantifying enthusiasm or keenness is difficult and so quantitative targets take precedence; employers had to ensure that each teacher in FE was registered with IfL by September 2008 and that he or she records thirty hours of CPD each year (LLUK 2008e: 6). Though these targets were designed as a lever for policy and to assess the change that policy had made, the small-scale exploratory research carried out for this paper suggests that they have already, to quote Steer *et al* (2007: 177) again, "become an end in themselves". The data collected demonstrates how policy can achieve little of what it was designed for, in this case increased participation in CPD, but still be seen to succeed.

Although respondents to the research acknowledged that the CPD initiative was still relatively new, none indicated that it had made a significant difference to practice in institutions over twelve months after its introduction, though it had been experienced

in managerialist accountability. However, the limitations of managerialism are also apparent in this data. One respondent to the research reflected this by writing about the “*ethos of counting hours rather than IMPACT*” (original capitalisation), another identified the problem as being:

that the actual purpose of CPD seems to be lost and the amount of CPD completed is the most important issue i.e. ‘tick box mentality’

Several others used this motif of “ticking boxes” to describe the effect of compulsory CPD in organisations, while another described how CPD is viewed as “jumping through hoops” because of the need to maintain QTLS. Nevertheless, the government’s goal of a culture of CPD was widely supported, as a result of its unassailable positioning, though the perceived barriers to achieving this were mainly structural, above all, time pressures on already full workloads. Moreover, thirteen identified what might be summarised as obstacles relating to the existing culture in colleges which had not hitherto promoted CPD: one respondent used the term “entrenched attitudes”. Nonetheless, there were many instances of organisations genuinely attempting to develop the professional practice of their staff. For example, one college had produced pamphlets on good practice for teachers; one had produced guides to teaching resources; and another had increased the number of staff supported on HE qualifications. Furthermore, organisations were running mandatory training days to make up the thirty hours, or some proportion of them, and producing on-line CPD materials. However, the instigation for these activities came largely from the organisation rather than the individual, and almost all had been in place prior to the new CPD initiative. One respondent described the situation at an FE college:

Still very much a staff development approach with compulsory sessions that ensure staff can use college systems and are familiar of (sic) policies, rather than meaningful CPD.

Similarly, a college elsewhere had issued all staff with a substantial portfolio to facilitate reflection on and recording of CPD prior to the introduction of mandatory CPD, but had provided “*no introduction, no guidelines, no follow up*” (original emphases).

Yet, also apparent was the high level of management preparation to ensure recording of the thirty hours of CPD and membership of IfL. Respondents from all but two of the twenty-one organisations could describe the systems in place to achieve the government’s “headline actions” (LLUK 2008e). One college had a “master spreadsheet”; others used databases; and others had “frameworks” in place. What respondents described were mechanisms of compliance to verify achievement of targets systematically and quantitatively, even where there had been little new engagement in CPD. This is not deception; the targets have been achieved because college managers have become adept at creating systems to “evidence” target achievement. This is an example of what Stronach *et al* (2002: 109) termed the “economy of performance” which they described as a manifestation of the audit

culture where 'quality', 'effectiveness' and 'outcomes' can be normatively assessed and then made public (p132). In their discussion of professionalism Stronach *et al* (p109) describe "ecologies of practice" as "professional dispositions and commitments individually and collectively engendered", and while they are careful to dispel the notion of a "morally coded encounter between 'economy' (bad; audit culture; deprofessionalizing; impositional, etc.) and 'ecology' (good; professional; solidary; voluntarist, etc.)", they nevertheless argue that developing a new professionalism would "involve re-negotiating an economy of performance from *within* professional ecologies of practice" (p131; original emphasis). However, the symbiotic nature of the relationship between targets and systems indicates how performativity perpetuates itself entirely separate from professional practice and the data collected here suggests that performativity too has a mutually dependent ecology of performance indicators and systems to indicate performance.

Looking at the effects of the transformation of governance in English FE in the 1990s Gleeson and Shain (1999: 482) described 'strategic compliance' as "a form of artful pragmatism which reconciles professional and managerial interests", which they identified amongst lower level FE managers and teachers in FE. Strategic compliers retained a commitment to traditional professional and educational values but at least partially agreed to changes in line with senior college management in order to create space for manoeuvre and so defend what they valued in their practice. Strategic compliers "did not comply for the 'sake of their own skins'" (p460) but made decisions to conform or not based upon the needs of their learners. It is moot whether such space exists in FE today, but in any case this does not explain the institutional response to the CPD initiative because the compliance is more expedient than strategic. In other words, evidence of compliance through systems in order to defend the college is more apparent than any strategy of creating space to defend educational values.

In a recent paper Rawolle & Lingard (2008) have applied some of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' to conceptualise the construction and implementation of education policy. Bourdieu (1990a: 50) sought to understand practice:

in the relationship between external constraints which leave a very variable margin for choice, and dispositions which are the product of economic and social processes that are more or less completely reducible to these constraints, as defined at a particular moment.

From this perspective it may be possible to see the possibilities and impossibilities both within the objective context of the FE sector, the field, and within the set of subjective dispositions (Bourdieu 1990a: 290) or habitus of the FE managers who create the mechanisms to indicate achievement. The field is "the crucial mediating context where external factors are brought to bear on individual and institutional practice" (Jenkins 1992: 85) as the field's structures are internalised by those operating there. They become complicit with its structures, processes and values, thus forming their habitus (Bourdieu 1989: 18). Therefore, Rawolle & Lingard raise the potential to "talk about a policy habitus, implying the sets of dispositions that

dispose agents to produce practices related to policies". The notion of habitus does not preclude conscious decision-making (Bourdieu 1977: 72), nor coercion and the policy response mechanisms created in colleges may involve both, but the responses open to college managers, their dispositions, relate to and are restricted by the field within which they are operating. Moreover, Rawolle & Lingard identify how "the state applies the universal as part of its legitimate right to exercise symbolic violence", and this conceptualisation brings us some way in understanding policy in FE, but the main function of symbolic violence is to create the illusion that the forms in which economic capital cloaks itself have an intrinsic, rather than a purely cultural value. So, behind the recourse to the universal or intrinsic the economic relationship between the government and the FE sector fundamentally distorts social relations.

Bourdieu's concepts may show how a performative culture can be internalized, but more significant is what has created that culture; the orthodoxy that 'there is no alternative' to the market has been expressed in policies that mean colleges must compete for centrally awarded resources. Colleges have had to contend for government funding since their incorporation as independent institutions in 1993 so managers must be seen to achieve targets because their institution depends on finance directly related to those targets. The internal logic of this artificial market, where financial messages alone are credible, creates a democratic deficit where those affected by policy have little influence over it. Since college managers have little influence on policy, and since the government's goals may be unachievable, they will tell the government the 'truth', targets have been achieved; but not the whole 'truth', those targets do not reflect changed practice.

The picture of the early implementation of the CPD initiative illustrates the limitations of top-down, outcomes-led policymaking. It demonstrates how an initiative can appear successful without achieving the intended change in practice because colleges can report performance indicators have been met, even where few staff even know about the reform. So, while the government's policy levers become apparently more numerous and rigorous, they are not as powerful as the government's rhetoric might suggest. The gap between policy and practice maintains.

Conclusion

New Labour has invested more in FE in England than any previous government because they identified the sector as a vehicle to deliver their core policies of global competitiveness through a high-skills workforce and social justice through widening participation in education. The causal connections between national economic competitiveness, social justice and education are currently hegemonic and central to New Labour orthodoxy, but they remain unfounded. Consequently, I argue that FE can only fail to achieve the government's central goals. Returning to Ball's (1993: 10-11) advice to consider policies as "processes and outcomes" this failure has led to closer scrutiny and control of the sector; and has led to so many policy initiatives that "reform overload" is a risk even recognised by the government. The paradox, though, is that those initiatives may be reported as successful, even where little has changed. The trajectory of policy for CPD from voluntarism to statutory compulsion uncovers

one instance of this process in action. In a symbiotic response to the government's requirement to measure impact through numerical targets, college managers have pragmatically constructed systems to report achievement of the numerical targets attached to CPD, even when there has been little significant change. This symbiotic response derives from the unequal and undemocratic relationship between colleges and the government; a situation that can only be ameliorated when those working and studying in colleges have more control over setting their own collective priorities in a rational rather than performative manner.

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