Valuing Enrichment
Final Report

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Bill Esmond

Balwant Kaur

Margaret Wood

Hannah Blake

Liz Atkins

AoC Valuing Enrichment

I am delighted to introduce this final report of our 'Valuing Enrichment' research project, an important collaboration between AoC, NCFE and the University of Derby on a vital part of the education of every young person and adult.

This research describes the many benefits of a strong enrichment offer - supporting and empowering students with skills, confidence, self-esteem and awareness to support their development as lifelong learners, active citizens and engaged workers. It provides the evidence we need to press for a stronger and properly resourced post-16 enrichment offer to students in the coming years. The report is timely, with a general election on the near horizon and an increased focus on the tertiary system, including through our recent '100% Opportunity' report which calls for, amongst other things, a young person's guarantee with enrichment at its heart.

The range of activities currently offered in colleges is very impressive despite the lack of funding, but we have a long way to go before they match our ambitions for every student. Since the interim report in 2023, the government has published plans for the 16-18 curriculum which make the case for more contact time and a broader and more coherent offer for all students in this age group. That's an important step forwards in recognising that we are short-changing young people in England compared to their counterparts in other countries, but the proposals were light on enrichment and personal and social development and did not recommend additional investment in these areas. We need to use this research to change that, to ensure the next government recognises that enrichment is not a 'nice to have' but instead is a vital component of every student's programme, helping them to grow and develop the life and work skills, confidence and resilience that will support them in adulthood.

In commissioning this research, we wanted to shine a light on the benefits of college enrichment, particularly for those students who don't have access to the wider opportunities available to the most privileged. We also wanted to help make the case for enrichment to be better funded, having been under-resourced and under-researched for too long. Please help us to use the findings to promote and secure better investment.

I welcome this report and would urge all post-16 stakeholders to act on its recommendations.

David Hughes

Chief Executive, Association of Colleges

The Case for Enrichment

This report is a compelling and timely reminder of the significant role enrichment plays for learners and colleges, but also highlights that it lacks a clear definition, equality of provision, and adequate resources.

In most cases, we can see that enrichment is not a separate activity. Instead, it extends and complements course content, no matter what the subject area, topic, or qualification learners are studying.

As one learner in the report puts it, enrichment is "what we need to know but isn't part of the course". It's the idea of learning not solely for knowledge and competencies, but also developing the life skills that enable us to make good decisions and positive contributions in every aspect of our lives. Skills such as health and fitness, essential skills, including confidence, creativity and critical thinking, and developing a social purpose.

Enrichment is particularly important for those from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds. People who, either through their childhood or circumstances, haven't had the same opportunities to travel, play sport, or go to a local museum, for example. It can be tailored for each individual and become a great leveler for finding and making the most of new opportunities. It creates deep human connections and can play a crucial role in building bridges across social and cultural divides – things we know are crucial for thriving and vibrant communities.

If we're serious about 'levelling up' society then the recommendations in this report must be taken seriously, and we need to see a policy shift towards ensuring enrichment, and all that it offers, starts to receive the recognition, attention and resources it both needs and deserves.

David Gallagher
Chief Executive, NCFE

Executive Summary

Enrichment is taking on new significance across colleges. Alongside curricula based on taught courses and qualifications, enrichment activities attract study programme funding and receive Ofsted judgements. Yet there is no clear agreement on their purposes and scope: access to enrichment's benefits is uneven; it lacks clearly identified resources.

The Valuing Enrichment study, funded by NCFE, has investigated the scope of these activities, how students and staff see their benefits and how enrichment is organised. Analysis of national surveys, interviews and case studies of colleges enrichment across England and Wales has provided new evidence of its role in the learner journey and the future lives of post-16 students. This final report begins with its key recommendations before setting out the case for their support.

We then present nine models of enrichment and discuss their value for learners' progression to further study, employment and adulthood. These nine case studies illustrate the range of enrichment activities and their contribution to students' personal and social development (ESFA 2022, 34) as well as to preparing them for working life. Our examples show how enrichment contributes to student's personal development and progression, including to higher education as well as to employment. But enrichment is not only for the future: it helps students remain on their programme: learners value its social and support networks, cutting across the isolation and mental health issues that can end in withdrawal and social exclusion.

We show how colleges design and organise their own enrichment programme: usually through learner support functions; although curriculum staff can be involved. Students can also play active roles, especially through student-led clubs and societies. The balance of these roles also relates to college missions, taught qualifications and student bodies.

We then place these findings in the context of long-term discussion of enrichment. Whilst earlier commentaries have suggested that enrichment is unrelated to teaching leading to qualifications, we conclude that the two are inextricably linked. Our findings lead us to define enrichment as: **'the college-based activities through which staff and students extend and complement learning acquired during study for approved qualifications.'** In the same section, we explain the methodology that led us to these conclusions.

Finally, and looking to the future of enrichment, we discuss its dependence on resources that cannot be taken for granted, including the energies of engaged individuals inside and beyond colleges. Its differences and difficulties reflect resource issues and inequalities that feature elsewhere in education. On this basis we recommend urgent stakeholder action:

- **Clear recognition of the value of enrichment through a national guarantee**
- **Equality of access to enrichment for all learners: enrichment that extends and complements study programmes**
- **Opportunities for student participation and agency**
- **National and local criteria for the success of enrichment**
- **Resourcing that extends beyond current funding for employability, enrichment, and pastoral (EEP) activities**

Recommendations

We begin the report with five key recommendations. The case for these is firmly based on the study described in the later stages of this report, which explain the contribution of enrichment to young people's lives and learning journeys. This section summarises the case for each of the five recommendations.

1. Clear recognition of the value of enrichment through a national guarantee

Enrichment activities play multiple essential roles in the college curriculum. They have achieved some recognition as 'non-qualification activity', essential to develop students' 'broader skills, attitudes and confidence' (ESFA 2022). Such attributes are widely understood to contribute to learners' ability to gain employment and progress, including successfully into higher education. However, this kind of definition describes enrichment as having a role distinct from the mainstream teaching that leads directly to learners' main qualifications. As we show in this report, enrichment in colleges also contributes to learners' continuation and successful completion of their courses, providing opportunities for students' own interests and agency, or simply providing social networks that sustain learners during their time at college. Moreover, enrichment can supplement the taught curriculum with practical activities that lie outside teaching for learning outcomes or course specifications. Corresponding activities for technical and vocational students could in turn enrich the work experience/ placements currently expected in study programmes. The broad definition of enrichment in policy documents has enabled some colleges, tutors and students to develop their own innovative activities to extend students' learning. However, it has also left others unclear how they can best provide enrichment. Whilst the findings of our project provide ideas and examples, a clear and expansive definition at national policy level will help raise awareness and support practical activity across colleges.

2. Equality of access to enrichment for all learners: enrichment that extends and complements all areas of study

Equality of access has been a central concern of research and informed commentary on enrichment practices. In relation to schools, these concerns reflect the extensive support that elite schools offer their pupils, securing and enhancing the long-term advantages of the most affluent families. This study illustrated concerns in relation to colleges, which have more disadvantaged learners, whose need for a more diverse range of activity is correspondingly greater. Within colleges, we found some with a clear vision for their enrichment activities, whilst in others enrichment had less priority, or was focused on activities for a specific group. Those with a clear vision differed in the way they approached the organisation and content of their enrichment programmes but shared an approach to how these programmes related to the taught, qualification-based curriculum. This suggests that curriculum staff can play an important role in the design and provision of enrichment, although learner support specialists, partner organisations and of course students themselves can play important, and in many cases leading, roles. We conclude that enrichment is most effective where it

is consciously used both to complement and to supplement the taught curriculum across the institution: both to enrich the perspectives of learners and to extend their learning and its applications. This understanding appears to be firmly embedded in some sixth form and general education provision, where enrichment can provide practical applications of a more theoretical curriculum. In some technical and vocational provision, questions of how enrichment can extend these curricula remain. This suggests that colleges should consider at the highest level how enrichment can not only supplement taught subjects but extend them in ways that will enrich the learner's experience and perspectives.

3. Opportunities for student participation and agency

Colleges are responsible for their own enrichment offer and make their own decisions about what resources will be available for this: accommodation, teachers, external providers or support. They differ in the extent to which enrichment is driven by student choice, and in the extent to which enrichment provides opportunities for students to assume greater personal responsibility. This student agency is supported through the organisation of individual activities and long-running programmes for groups, clubs and societies. These can have important roles in personal development and networking but can also provide an important link between colleges and their wider communities. These groups can suffer from a lack of continuity, with each new cohort of students needing to learn principles of organisation over again. Even where these have been organised at the highest level, there can be a lack of clarity about what students can achieve through this type of enrichment. However, in addition to the pursuit of personal interests, learners can find opportunities for self-organisation and advocacy that form an important aspect of enrichment, requiring appropriate support from institutions.

4. National and local criteria for the success of enrichment

The diversity of college enrichment is a central finding of this study. This diversity makes it difficult for activities to be defined as successful, in the terms that so much college activity can be measured. By contrast with well-known measures of retention and achievement, the success of enrichment is variously defined, for example by student participation or approval; or in terms of broader personal and societal considerations that are much harder to measure. This diversity is one of the strengths of enrichment: it can grow organically out of the interests of staff, student volunteers and partner organisations. One of the themes to emerge from our data is the absence of clear expectations about what enrichment should provide, and what constitutes 'good' enrichment. This does not mean adding to the many targets and standards already required of the sector. Criteria need to be broad enough to accommodate the range of institutions and the priorities of their enrichment and should leave institutions with the freedom to make their own decisions about what works best for their diverse student bodies. However, indicators of success can provide support for those colleges unclear about how to proceed.

5. Resourcing that extends beyond current EEP allowances and pastoral support

Colleges recognise enrichment as important provision that helps to meet funding requirements. Yet in almost all institutions we encountered a strong sense of resource constraints, which appeared in some cases to limit the scope of enrichment activity. This may reflect the status of enrichment as the least clearly defined activity within study programmes, against a background of falling resources for the sector in general. Funding for enrichment has been included within 'EEP' funding, which was expected to cover not only additions to the curriculum but pastoral time and provision of 'employability' skills. The levels of funding for EEP hours have not been extended. This suggests that any growth in enrichment within any college is likely to be met with a reduction in activities such as tutorial or pastoral support, unless colleges can access additional, external funding. Our evidence suggests that colleges need to be adequately resourced and have enough flexibility to be free to invest in enrichment in ways that are appropriate to their students' needs and that funding clearly designated for these purposes could enable enrichment to flourish without competing with the funding required for mainstream teaching or tutorial time.

1. Introduction

Introduction

The benefits of extending education beyond subjects taught for qualifications are increasingly widely accepted. Recognition that extra-curricular activities help young people at elite schools reinforce their advantages has led to enrichment being seen as an important opportunity for all students. Ofsted's (2023) Education Inspection Framework includes reference to: 'personal development… opportunities for learners to develop their talents and interests.' As an earlier schools White Paper noted, 'There is much of value that children need to learn and experience which sits outside subject disciplines' (Department for Education, 2010, p. 42). Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, demands for this to be available to all pupils have mounted: influential reports for the Social Mobility Commission and more recently for the Education Policy Institute (Donelly et al., 2019; Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Robinson, 2024) have made the case that enrichment can provide benefits which should be available across the school sector.

The study reported here, titled **Valuing enrichment**, examined how these benefits are provided in the college sector, as well as how these can be extended. Access to enrichment is at least as important in institutions where many learners have less of the personal and family resources that advantage more privileged students in the labour market and in life. Ofsted (2023) begins its definition of 'Quality of education' with reference to curricula 'designed to give all learners [our emphasis] … the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.' Whilst interest in the curriculum and qualifications available in colleges has grown in recent years, the value of activities beyond teaching the skills of occupational practice has also been increasingly recognised. These concerns are now recognised as conditions of study programme funding (ESFA, 2022).

Colleges have long aimed to provide wider activities that help young people apply successfully for jobs or to higher education, contribute more widely to society and develop into adults. This suggests a breadth that technical programmes cannot achieve alone. The notion that students in further education should have access beyond technical curricula has been accepted since the 1950s, when the Crowther Report and following White Paper (Ministry of Education, 1959, 1961) led to 'general studies' or 'liberal studies' classes. From the 1970s, these activities began to be integrated into mainstream curricula. More recently, activities outside main qualifications have focused more directly on supporting entry into employment, such as functional skills in maths and English (Bailey & Unwin, 2008). More diverse activities, defined under such headings as 'additionality' or 'enrichment', have continued as small-scale attempts to broaden the curriculum.

Enrichment is organised in accordance with different aims and understandings across the sector, reflecting the diverse objectives of colleges. This reflects variations among the missions, provision, and student bodies of different institutions. It also reflects the priority for the attention and resources of colleges of certified study programmes. With all activities requiring such resources as staffing and suitable locations, colleges have different approaches to leveraging resources to support enrichment, with 'Enrichment, employability and pastoral' or 'EEP' funding answering multiple purposes and remaining largely static.

The Valuing Enrichment Project

Our project was therefore designed to improve understanding of enrichment practices in colleges and their benefits. Our intention was to provide greater insight for colleges, their staff and the policy community about how enrichment might be supported and the choices available. Funded by NCFE and in collaboration with the Association of Colleges (AoC), a project team from the University of Derby investigated the college strategies for enrichment, how staff and students develop enrichment in practice and how it affects the lives of young people during and after their studies.

The initial definition of enrichment used for the project was taken from a historical Further Education Funding Council (1996) review of enrichment. Its breadth reflects the different understandings of enrichment that have been current across colleges at various times. For this study, and drawing on the available literature (see below), enrichment was initially described as:

> **"**
> Extra-curricular activities of interest to the student which promote the acquisition of 'soft' skills such as communication and self-confidence and which involve learning that is not linked directly to the formal curriculum. Enrichment is likely to involve activities which are focussed around work-related learning, personal development, and community involvement (FEFC, 1996). **"**

This definition suggests a body of activity that stands largely outside and independent of the taught curriculum leading to qualifications. The study's objectives reflected this understanding of enrichment and the wider concerns discussed above. The project aimed to:

- Generate more definition and clarity on enrichment
- Identify potential differences in soft and hard skill acquisition
- Identify examples of effective institutional enrichment programmes
- Evidence the positive impact of enrichment on a diverse range of learners
- Determine the extent to which enrichment activity has a potential economic value

The project design reflected these objectives, with a longitudinal research design intended to capture a range of approaches to enrichment and their benefits to learners over time. The intention was to examine enrichment activities that take place within colleges through observation and in discussion with students and staff across England and Wales. In contrast to schools-based studies that have explored the outcomes of enrichment statistically, our intention was to discover its role in the lived experience of students and the day-to-day life of colleges, through surveys, interviews and field visits. Our study began with a painstaking exploration of what kinds of enrichment colleges offer. Whilst the study experienced early disruption, when COVID-19 made field visits and long-term relationships difficult, we were able to observe considerable changes in the pattern of enrichment in colleges over time.

Our study investigated the ways in which students participate in, and at times initiate, enrichment activity, for example through student-led activities; and how this affects their lives as they enter the workforce or progress to further educational experiences. We have captured and analysed data over time about the impact of enrichment on the ways that students believe enrichment impacts on their lives as students, including its contribution to their progression. We have also drawn conclusions about the importance that colleges place on enrichment, including how they see this as complementing the rest of the college offer, which in turn influences the diverse ways in which different types of college organise their enrichment programmes.

This analysis led us to define enrichment differently: as **'the college-based activities through which staff and students extend and complement learning acquired during study for approved qualifications.'** This definition is in one sense broad, because the range of activities in colleges is extensive and varied. However, by contrast with our initial, more diffuse characterisation of enrichment as 'not linked directly to the formal curriculum', we came to understand that enrichment constitutes an integrated and essential component of the learner journey that is shaped to varying degrees by taught qualifications.

In this final report, we set out the findings of our four-year project. We continue in the next section by presenting a series of models of enrichment: the breadth of college enrichment demonstrated here is an essential foundation for the report. Throughout this discussion we return to the fundamental question: what do learners gain from this activity? The report continues with a discussion of college aims for enrichment and methods of organisation. We then return in greater detail to the contextual questions discussed here, reviewing other publications in this field and the issues they raise. We provide an account of the methodology we have used to design and carry out this research project. Finally, we discuss the future of enrichment, including the resources on which enrichment depends, presenting five final recommendations for policymakers and the sector.

2. The enrichment landscape

Models of enrichment and their benefits

The enrichment landscape: Models of enrichment and their benefits

In this section we set out a range of enrichment types that we studied during our four years of research into college enrichment. We present these studies at this early stage (for example, before explaining the context, or how we carried out the study, or how colleges organise) because this helps us to define enrichment. Our study began with a definition that presented it as an addition to the mainstream curriculum; these examples illustrate the different ways in which enrichment complements those curricula. We present these examples and their benefits to learners here, returning later to explain important questions of organisation and resourcing, and their significance.

We do not present these findings as idealised models or templates; they simply illustrate the range of possibilities. Whilst colleges might use this material to help devise their own programmes, our main aim is to capture the range of activity and its benefits. Nor is this a complete and unchanging picture of college enrichment: in many senses, this is a study of change. Enrichment had become a marginal activity for many colleges at the time our study began, mainly because of a lack of resources. The pandemic added to its problems: the impact of COVID was reported at all institutions we visited or spoke to, leading to the cancellation of face-to-face activities and a movement to online provision. Some of our participants noted that this was particularly detrimental for the most disadvantaged students, who may not have access to IT, and who were unable to take up new opportunities face-to-face. Conversely, enrichment played an important role in sustaining student communities through the pandemic, notwithstanding the disruption that many activities experienced. Some colleges used enrichment to keep in touch and provide social networks to students who might otherwise have been isolated. As the impact of the pandemic recedes, colleges are seeking new opportunities to enrich the lives of their learners, who in turn are looking for new ways to take part in a richer learning environment. These examples provide possibilities, whilst noting some challenges and limitations.

It is hardly possible to list in a single report the activities that contribute to college enrichment. Through enrichment colleges provide an extensive catalogue of opportunities and additional learning, visits and visiting speakers, mental and physical challenges. More complex events take place annually and are planned over a full academic year; others are more spontaneous or responsive. Enrichment can also enable students to organise and express themselves through groups, clubs and societies. This section is constructed from our surveys, follow-up interviews, meetings with individual college staff and students, and lengthier visits to college sites, as well as multiple Teams calls to follow up on all these events. Through hundreds of research encounters, including college visits, online meetings, face-to-face interviews and observations, a richer picture of the motivations, practices and impact of enrichment has emerged. The most immediately visible picture to emerge from our study has been this range and diversity of provision and its value to those taking part. Later, we provide the background to this diversity.

1. Enrichment for health and fitness

Sports activities have provided a foundation for enrichment over many years, and these are still a core enrichment activity in many colleges. These activities enabled many learners to take part in organised sport, including national and international competitions. These had an important role in broadening learners' outlook: we spoke to students who had travelled to the Baltic states as part of college sport teams and described eye-opening experiences of different modes of life; others had played in the Carribean. Sport activities at colleges we visited were often run by former professionals or current elite athletes who provided valuable role models for learners.

In the difficult times at the start of our study, some colleges reported that their enrichment programme had effectively been reduced by COVID-19 to sport and a small number of self-funded trips. For some colleges, Sport England funding had provided a lifeline and their enrichment survived as a programme in partnership with Sport England. We met college organisers who had started as sport teachers and had become involved in providing sports activities open to all learners. During the pandemic they became responsible for the whole enrichment programme in the college, energetically organising visits, events and societies across colleges in response to other learner interests alongside those for sport.

As enrichment programmes have expanded following the end of the pandemic, and in response to changes to the inspection framework, sport activities have provided a foundation for a diversification of enrichment across colleges. One enrichment organiser described a successful sport academy that became a model for the college. This extended to 'our health and social care and public services [with] a "999 Academy"' and beyond to business and animal activities.

The pandemic drew attention to the benefits of sport not only for physical but for mental health. Given concerns about mental health that were mentioned at every college we visited after the pandemic, sport was seen as an essential way to enable learners to focus on something other than pandemic-related and other anxieties (see, for example, Morgan, Bowles & Bush, 2023). As enrichment expanded, specialists from sport backgrounds became more attentive to these issues. They had taken on wider responsibility as enrichment expanded and were required to address a range of social issues beyond competitive sport. As one organiser explained early in the study:

> **"** We're kind of looking back at kind of the last year, what's going on with Black Lives Matter movement, what's going on within the LGBTQ+ community, promoting more inclusive behaviour. They're all going to go into society... when they go into their workplace, they're going to come across that sort of stuff as well. And that was where we we've pitched it is, in five years down the line, we're proud of how you are integrating with society. ... So that's probably the the big bits that that might come from my sport background. (Enrichment Organiser, 2021.) **"**

The is reference to sport backgrounds reminds us of the social aspects of the sport curriculum. These were not isolated comments: forms of community-based activity were frequently referenced as additionalities to the sport curriculum. A sport lead pointed out:

> " My whole passion in the role is to break down the barriers that are to allow people to participate in sports and the enrichment activities. So as an aside to what I do, I also set up a collection recycling project. And so that's for students who can't afford their own sports get a huge barrier, especially for women. (Sports Organiser, 2023.) "

The ability of sport to appeal to learners who might be less engaged with learning otherwise was referenced at several colleges. Learners reported not only their experiences of the physical and mental benefits of team participation but of social insights they gained from participation in activities and competitions. These social aspects became more prominent as the effects of the pandemic became more clearly understood. However, staff were conscious of the difficulties for some students to access sports because of equipment and other costs. Additional funding proved helpful in this area: financial discounts on some of the activities offered as part of enrichment which helps to overcome barriers to participation for some learners, allowing access to new skills or interests. This seemed particularly important where college intakes include high levels of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example:

> " A lot of the students we have, do have disadvantaged backgrounds, so they wouldn't have these opportunities outside of college, so we're giving them these opportunities to carry out enrichment activities, they're getting taste for it, they want to join in with it. They're getting lots of discounts out there, like the gym is now discounted to the students, so they're taking advantage of that, and so it's giving them those life experiences that they wouldn't necessarily get if they didn't come the college (enrichment organiser, 2022). "

These activities were not welcomed by all learners: it was argued that sports activities were gendered and offered more benefits to students from sport-based courses. We spoke to colleges who were seeking to move beyond sport as the sole basis for enrichment. Yet sport activities undoubtedly engage many learners who are less motivated about academic work and offers them opportunities to overcome barriers. We interviewed one specialist whose college has an exceptional record of success in elite sport for athletes with disabilities, with other learners benefitting from the use of their facilities. In this core enrichment activity, we found extensive evidence of benefits to learners during their time in college and beyond.

2. Subject enrichment – general education curriculum

By contrast with the cross-college programmes described above, a minority of enrichment is specifically linked to the curriculum. We found strong examples of this in the general education curriculum, including in sixth-form colleges (SFCs), which tend to be organised around a smaller number of general education subjects. General further education colleges also reported similar approaches where there are separate campuses or organised provision for students on A-level or similar courses.

In one SFC, the college had taken a strategic decision to position enrichment at the heart of the college offer. At this SFC, staff were allocated a small amount of time to develop activities around their subject area. Some of these flowed logically from their subjects: the English teacher's student magazine, intended to complement 'rigorous exam style writing and formulaic ways of creating an argument'; the science teacher whose students build a 'green car'. For one teacher 'only the enrichment matters: the rest is passing exams'. For another:

> **"** I've got a student group … looking at the origins of Black influenced music over the years… they're going to this forum completely outside of their course and then they bring that stuff into the class and not only teach their peers but teach me. Then they build an entire final module (SFC teacher, 2022). **"**

For students at this college, enrichment activities occupied a central place in the life of the institution, with one interviewee claiming to commute the college specifically to take part in its enrichment. In some of these cases, enrichment can reinforce the familial advantages that young people in the former settings already bring to education and later take to the labour market. Yet we found strong enrichment programmes at SFCs and in general education in disadvantaged areas too. An inner-city SFC had aligned the aims of its enrichment programme with the personal attributes identified by a prestigious university so that its students qualified for favourable consideration at admission.

Although this is described here as 'subject enrichment' it nevertheless enables cross- college participation. In our first sixth-form college study, we found that regardless of subject backgrounds, students could attend subjects outside of their discipline combinations. For instance, one chemistry student engaged with Global Politics whilst an art student took part in a maths club.

An important point for this kind of enrichment is that it is not inherently 'academic'. Students are learning here about the practical and technical aspects of their subject. Students whose courses took place substantially through abstract or conceptual discussion were extending their understanding of the application of course concepts. In turn, these activities were seen as supporting both their progression into higher education and into the labour market. The science students who built a green car with their tutor, for example, developed new forms of social or cultural capital that could be demonstrated at interview However, no question of disparaging these was ever raised in many hours of interviews and discussions with either students or staff.

On the contrary, students were able to identify the benefits of this kind of enrichment: 'what we need to know but isn't part of the course,' as one student expressed it. The context that enrichment supplied provided students with a deeper understanding of the purpose of their subject. In focus groups and individual interviews, A-level and access learners repeatedly referenced the value of these activities for admissions interviews. Other students and college staff pointed to their value in the 'personal statements' that can provide critical evidence of deeper understanding in higher education applications. This kind of enrichment can be seen as one form of the 'cultural capital' that continues to be of value to some students throughout their education and graduate lives (Ingram et al., 2023)

However, these benefits go beyond immediate goals of this type. They provide vital opportunities for personal growth and the development of students as adults. The long-term consequences of this development can hardly be quantified, yet they are widely understood to contribute to the formation of these students as men and women. We argue that these courses extend the learning of students on general education courses. Although they do not provide additional elements of curriculum that will be examined, they provide learners with a richer understanding of their subject through practical activities. These do not only provide an additional context for understandings of the subject by engaging with its application in practice, but in turn provide a richer understanding of the subject's original, more theoretical context. In these contexts, the term 'enrichment' accurately describes what happens to the student's learning in these subject areas.

3. Subject enrichment: technical and vocational

For students on technical and vocational programmes, specific subject-based enrichment appeared less frequently in our data. Since these courses aim to provide learners with routes into employment, and usually have a practical application within the course, enrichment is unlikely to provide alternative spaces for learners to engage with relevant practice. Where this does take place, it may not achieve the same impact as the activities reported above.

For some colleges, enrichment for these students is a matter of providing 'soft skills': the kind of preparation for working live that is integrated into many courses and features in preparation for work placements. Such activities often brief learners on the importance of punctuality, good behaviour, appropriate clothing and other norms of working life. This development of 'soft skills' on top of the technical skills of their course does not provide the same authentic alternative opportunity to understand their subject in deeper and more extensive ways. Social dimensions and societal considerations are already present in many vocational courses. Most post-16 learners already have experience of work.

A key difficulty is that learners cannot always distinguish this kind of 'soft skills' provision as distinctive from their course. Thus, at one college with an extensive enrichment programme, tailored to the different courses and interest of students across four campuses, the students interviewed were unable to remember any activity that they considered as 'enrichment' or 'additional to' their normal course, although these students had been chosen to be interviewed because of their interest as course representatives. This may suggest that the energy and enthusiasm in evidence at the college has not yet achieved its full potential, possibly because enrichment programmes sometimes lack prominence in the consciousness of students. One example was provided by the college enrichment staff organising a Road Traffic Accident simulation that provided engaging practical activity with the support of

blue-light services. This provided a memorable alternative to the routine of 'public services' courses. Yet this might not be understood as an additional activity to the learners' regular course; and indeed, this is an activity that curriculum staff might organise at other colleges.

On these courses, students and staff are not always able to identify how enrichment can be fundamentally different from their course and yet provide a helpful addition or extension to their learning. Many of the students on these courses were more attracted to sports and social activities that cut across subjects, providing a relief from their technical studies. For these students, enrichment did not provide an extension to their courses, although it could be argued that these activities complement technical and vocational subjects. Despite their employment-focused study programmes, young people learning in colleges, or vocational programmes in schools, often turn out to be less competitive in labour markets. These differences may reflect earlier weaknesses in their general education; they are also attributed to a prior lack of 'social' or 'cultural capital' compared to students in general education. Any attempt to 'level up' the inequalities among students entering the labour market therefore needs to address these difficult questions.

Yet several colleges we studied attempted to provide broader perspectives on the industries for which their students were being prepared, even if these were not always well understood by their students. These included visits to exhibitions where industry products were on display or new equipment was exhibited. Other enrichment specialists engaged learners in discussion of social or environmental issues relevant to their industries. One teaching staff member described enrichment's significance for transitions to employment:

> **"** With our apprentices, certain types of employers … it's my job to make sure that whether it's students or providers, they have the confidence to challenge what's being said if it isn't right. **"**

This approach seems distinctive from more common notions of employability but has the benefit of extending enrichment from the normal expectations of curriculum.

Whilst learners sometimes expressed preferences for study directly linked to workplace practice, these activities opened possibilities to understand in greater depth the industries they hoped to enter.

For students on many of these courses, enrichment lacks the relationship to curriculum that we describe in relation to sixth-form colleges and other A-level provision. Its purposes are less clearly delineated from the main curriculum. Yet there are still significant benefits for students, especially in those areas where organisers approach enrichment with greater imagination. This can be a valuable area for development in the sector.

4. Enrichment in creative fields: technical skills and socialisation

A notable exception to the difficulties of enrichment in vocational subjects present itself in a specialist music and media college. Here staff organise opportunities for exposure and networking for students' future career prospects through events, live gigs and working with independent music companies. In one sense, this enrichment offer relates to opportunities to work in creative industries. One student explained that:

> **"**
> Doing gigs in venues outside college, gives us the exposure we need but also gets us into that role of the musician while we're students who are still handing in assignments and getting to know more about ourselves. Without college, I don't think I would have got a paid gig and the support to get my name on it. It's getting me established while I'm here (media student, 2021). **"**

Yet this access to the sphere of practice went beyond learning industry practices. It contributed to a sense of community among learners with similar cultural interests but different backgrounds. As one member of staff described it:

> **"**
> Regardless of their level of study or background, they could find something they could go to which brought them all together and I think it's those types of events that allow people to meet new people and belong to something and understand that we're all students of the same place (media staff, 2021). **"**

This case contrasts with larger colleges that struggled to extend the curriculum of technical subjects through enrichment. The relatively specialist curriculum compared to general FE colleges with hundreds of subjects enables the development of enrichment with a clearer focus. Yet this was a different model from the design of practical activities we found in sixth-form colleges or for other A-level students. It contributed to students' artistic development, building on an arts tradition of live projects that cross the boundaries of college and the workplace (Esmond 2018; Esmond & Atkins 2020, 2022). This reflects a different understanding of industry and workplace in this area, although these fields have their own power relations, boundaries and hierarchies.

One of the questions our study was asked to address related to the kinds of skill that students might acquire through enrichment: should these be 'soft skills' that provided interpersonal abilities in the way suggested by Ofsted, or would students develop technical or practical skills? These boundaries are a little artificial and, in this case, did not appear to present the same meanings or provide major difficulties. In this case the boundaries between an essentially vocational curriculum and its practice-based enrichment appeared to be negotiable; and yet learning across these two spheres provided demonstrable benefits for learners.

5. Holistic enrichment as central to the curriculum for learners with SEND or studying at Level 1 or below

Several colleges and participants emphasised the importance of enrichment for the most disadvantaged students alongside learning for communication and independence. This encompasses, for example, providing additional activities for some learners with SEND or studying at Level 1 or below, delivering skills for independence (e.g. ironing, on a 1-1 basis) during break and lunch times, as well as emphasising development of cultural capital via an enrichment offer which provides experiences and opportunities normally denied to disadvantaged young people. This is particularly evident in general further education colleges as opposed to sixth-form colleges which can have slightly more advantaged intakes:

> First of all, 60-70% of our students will be on free school meals ... there are real pockets of disadvantage in [our catchment]. Our students definitely experience that disadvantage and additionally, the students have got the lowest entry point for the Maths and English for any college in London and nationally. Again, that tells you something. What our students don't lack is ability and that's why enrichment is so important because it offers them opportunities beyond what they may not have a chance to experience had they not come to college (London Enrichment Organiser).

In a SEND residential college, enrichment – or the Wellbeing Programme as it was known - was centred as an integral part of the curriculum:

> Wellbeing is a massive part of college life. Although our students are not technically funded for it, it encompasses everything we do. It helps promote their independence. It helps give opportunities to stay fit and healthy. It helps students engage and make positive use of their time, and hopefully we can create good habits through this program for life. Students can learn new skills during this time that they can take away from college and hopefully we can prepare students for the future (SEND college staff).

The emphasis on a holistic approach was rooted in a recognition that students' wellbeing and confidence was a source of empowerment in the immediate and long term. The commitment and enthusiasm of staff for enrichment and their belief in its value, common to college enrichment settings, appeared to be a factor in engaging students in this kind of provision:

> We're just incredibly proud of the offer that we've got.... We offer so many different sorts of activities just to engage the students. It's just great to see the confidence and the pride that the students take from achieving things in these (SEND college staff).

In these settings we found strong evidence of a commitment to enrichment as a means of levelling up the disadvantages that these learners encounter.

6. Enrichment for societal participation

Many GFE colleges outlined enrichment activities taking on a pastoral role with a focus on civic responsibility and societal participation. Many colleges were connected to a sense of social purpose. Socially engaged enrichment meant in some cases that students took their learnt skills outside of college and actively participated in their local community.

> **"** We are very aware that we are developing emotional intelligence in young people and we are developing a sense of caring for your community and an awareness of issues locally, nationally and globally. **"**

Another college had a strong focus on volunteering:

> **"** Whilst it gives students the plethora of knowledge and skills that they can take into the workplace, it also helps them understand how vitally important volunteering is from a social and cultural perspective. **"**

Students reported charity fund-raising activities and taking their services (hair and beauty, for example) into local communities. Students from another college were involved with working with local businesses on the impact of litter on the streets.

In other cases, students learnt about societal concerns in the classroom. In these cases, enrichment was designed to promote awareness of topics ranging from British Values, knife and gang crime, safeguarding, sexual health and money management. One college dedicated a full week off timetable for this. In other cases, the students had a more proactive role, exemplified by an early morning protest by Sixth Form College students at their local railway station.

Both SFCs we studied and some GFE colleges offered personal development projects and initiatives. These included the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the National Citizen Service and the Extended Project Qualification. However, these opportunities were notably taken up by students who were going onto higher education study, where they were seen as strengthening applications.

The benefits of this type of enrichment extend beyond the individual student and the broadening of experience it conveys. It provides real benefits for individuals and communities whose lives are improved by these activities. Whilst these are difficult to separate out from other contributing factors, they are likely to be enduring benefits.

7. Enrichment for mental health

Students' mental health post-pandemic emerged as a prominent theme throughout many conversations. Consequently, colleges had been responsive to curating enrichment programmes that explicitly acknowledged the effects of the pandemic on student life. For some there was a distinct relationship between mental and physical health and how sports and fitness routes could address this. Other colleges commented on the role of creativity through either organised or drop-in activities. At one college, the enrichment programme was specifically described as 'trauma aware' in recognition of some of the mental health (MH) issues emerging in addition to the existing complexities of students' lived experiences. This approach was part of the development of 'trauma aware' and 'restorative practice' for one college.

Another college had a dedicated 'Wellness Hub' as a designated quiet space. Egg-shaped, noise-cancelling pods were available for students to retreat into in a dimly lit large room.

Whilst this was an important valued space, one student acknowledged that:

> **"** You can't stay in the eggshell forever. It's about getting the balance and you do need to get out of the safety in order to grow and develop. (Health & social care student). **"**

Other colleges also claimed a vital role for their enrichment programmes in combatting MH problems among students. Some students commented on how different perspectives afforded by forums to discuss and explore their identities, alleviated their mental load.

8. Student-led enrichment: clubs and societies

Whilst much enrichment is provided through staff activity, the colleges we interviewed also provide some element of student-led activity. Some saw enrichment as the means of supporting student interests, enabling them to set up their own clubs and societies; others saw opportunities for active engagement and advocacy, readying young people for taking part in a broader society. Student representatives and student unions are heavily involved in the provision of enrichment in several colleges where we interviewed representatives. This provides opportunities for student agency in terms of engaging with opportunities related to personal interests.

In one sixth-form college, an extensive range of clubs and societies was organised through a university-style 'freshers' week and continued with support and guidance about organisation from the student union. Students in other colleges also described enrichment as a space where they felt better able to express themselves, either as individuals or in advocacy roles. The effects of the pandemic effects were to some degree mitigated, especially for students who would otherwise be isolated in their colleges. In this, those colleges with enrichment activities led by students, including those from marginalised groups, identified these as essential spaces. This way of thinking about enrichment was not acknowledged by every college, since this differs from the model of staff-organised activity. In our study, we found that this can take the form of clubs and societies that bring learners from a variety of courses and backgrounds together. One student commented that:

> " If I didn't come to college, there is no way I would have come to a LGBTQ group. Here you know it's safe and I've made friends who I can trust and will have my back (Student, 2021). "

Student-led activity enabled the experience and witnessing of more diverse interactions. At one GFE college, students outlined the benefits of a self-organised LGBTQ groups:

> " You'd just feel so isolated if you just came and did your course. It's about experiences really and this group has meant we've met people from other courses and completely different lives.
>
> The point of having this group now is that it sets the precedent for future students so we can voice what needs to happen. We can change things that might not necessarily impact us but will impact students coming in (Student club members, 2021). "

Whilst clubs and societies were widely noted for providing these opportunities and networks, they sometimes appeared uneven and fragmented. One college highlighted the impact of historical college mergers and how this made organising an inclusive and accessible enrichment programme problematic. Like many colleges that have sites that span across a town or city, the subject specialist nature of each campus meant that many students did not meet peers from different courses. A student governor from one college had developed a podcast series that sought to 'break territorial barriers'.

Here too we found evidence of differences between the way enrichment was conceptualised for general education and technical or vocational students. In conversation with college staff, clubs were often associated with the 'university' social experience for which colleges sought to prepare them, whilst activities for vocational students were harder to define. The following extract from a discussion about organising enrichment conveys this difference:

> ... a lot of enrichment that happens locally. So it might be that the A-level team, for instance, has a debating club or a chess club, if there is that interest, so different curriculum areas will have their own bespoke enrichment as well, if you like (Enrichment organiser, 2021).

Debating societies and chess clubs are easily associated with A-levels here, and yet societies specific to the hairdressing and beauty therapy areas mentioned a moment earlier did not come so easily to mind.

The social benefits of this type of enrichment are easily enumerated. Opportunities to develop personal interests, network with others who share them, validate extend one's personal taste are all important in the formation of adults. The development of organisational and advocacy skills provides important foundations for multiple aspects of life and work. Yet these require extension across curriculum areas in order for these benefits to flow to all college students. In our final section, we examine those social networks that sought to provide these opportunities.

9. Extending perspectives: connectedness, advocacy and civic engagement

If the examples above provide learners with social networks and personal interests, we can distinguish an additional category of clubs and societies. These are those that extend learners' interests, and indeed their perspectives and participation in civil society. Some of our interviewees expressed the view that enrichment should not be seen simply as students 'finding themselves' (an expression one student interviewee group used ironically) but should have real significance for their ability to forge meaningful lives alongside others in their journeys to adulthood.

This sometimes appeared in the sense of 'belonging' to a college community. The idea of 'connectedness' was reflected in data from staff, where participation in enrichment activities with other students from across the college was seen to foster this sense of belonging and connection.

> Students have come in and have chosen a pathway and they're human beings and young individuals who mostly come from school into a new environment and I think part of the enrichment process welcomes them in a new home and hopefully enables them to integrate and meet new people, find new relationships and discover stuff they would not normally have gone for (enrichment organiser, 2022).

> **"** Enrichment is probably one of the main things that everyone can get involved in and it doesn't matter what ability or what level students are on, there is no barrier to them taking part, like there might be with curriculum. So, you can have vulnerable students, students with disabilities all accessing the same enrichment activity (media staff, 2021). **"**

Much of this data addresses concerns that go beyond the individual's future progression or immediate situation, such as how they can continue their course. They raise additional questions about how learners can remain and become more connected to one another, through enrichment activities that transgress subject boundaries. They also extend to wider activities through which learners engage with communities and issues beyond the bounds of the college. Here too we found strong examples in sixth form colleges, where societies were engaged with policy issues and questions in the public domain. One college had its own United Nations organisation: we heard from a student who had agreed represent a Latin American country to improve her Spanish and had then been staggered to learn the extent of its economic and social difficulties. Such activities demonstrably foster interests in public life and civil society that are not always prominent among young people's interests.

Across this range of enrichment activity, it is evident that the benefits of enrichment vary. This is difficult to capture through quantitative measurement, since intangible benefits are not easily quantified. Nevertheless, these illustrations of different enrichment types serve to illustrate a range of different benefits for learners, both during their studies and in their future lives.

These benefits go beyond those envisaged in the original design of our research project, and indeed beyond the ambitions of some colleges that responded to our first, pre-pandemic survey In the following sections, we explore the aims and intentions responsible for these activities and explore the issues they raise in greater detail.

3. College aims and planning

College enrichment aims

In this section, we explore how the models of enrichment described in the previous section come into being. Here too we are concerned with the benefits of enrichment for learners: the design of enrichment practices depends on how colleges understand its purposes and benefits for learners. We therefore begin where our data collection began: exploring the aims that colleges identify for enrichment.

Our initial survey of colleges included the aims that colleges identify for their enrichment provision, as well as how this is organised and the level of participation. A key aim of the survey was to understand and classify the way colleges conceptualise enrichment. We asked respondents (usually the senior manager responsible for enrichment) to rank 11 reasons for organising enrichment, set out in Table 1 below. These aims were suggested by the literature and earlier AoC survey.

We selected the three highest-ranked responses from each college and allocated these responses to three categories, which we summarised as those that are focused on employability and those that are focused on broader human development, with a third category focusing on progression. The suggested aims and the three categories are shown in the table below (Table 5). These categories can be further defined as aiming:

1. To develop the 'whole person' as an autonomous, contributing member of society, better able to take a full part in the life of their community and society.

2. To develop employability, or to develop work-related skills, including 'soft' skills such as team-working and communication widely associated with employability.

3. To facilitate progression, either by enabling the student better to complete their own course or additionally to progress to further or higher education.

The first two categories attracted the strongest response, with personal development and employability aims ranked highest. Nearly all responses included two from categories 1 and one from category 2 in their first three choices, or the reverse. Conversely, academic progression was reported as far less important, and a significant majority of respondents listed progression to higher education among their least important objectives: of 84 respondents, 42 ranked progression to higher education as 11th out of the 11 options and 18 at 10th out of 11.

Suggested Aims	Categories
• Broadening the education of your students • Broadening their awareness of the world • Supporting students' personal development • Developing students' persistence and resilience	Personal Development
• Encouraging attendance and participation • Developing professional skills that support employability • Developing behaviour and attributes that support employability • Supporting the development of social skills, teamwork etc • Helping guide their career development	Employability skills
• Supporting their success in the core curriculum • Supporting their progression into higher education	Skills for academic progression

Table 1: Categorising aims for enrichment

We summarised these results as showing that colleges seek to balance their interests between employability and personal development priorities, with little mention of its benefits for success on the core curriculum or progression to higher education. Enrichment was seen by the senior managers responding to the survey as additional to the mainstream curriculum providing qualifications. In this respect, enrichment could be seen in the terms of the FEFC's (1996) definition. Its focus was external to college, helping students develop as adults, or to achieve progression to work rather than supporting their academic success.

However, these categories can simplify as well as explain. We also provided opportunities in the survey for respondents to provide qualitative answers. Two responses to a survey question illustrate these differences in meaning. The first sees enrichment as providing experiences to cite in support of advantageous progressions into the labour market or into higher education. The second expresses a more passive approach, with enrichment producing employees who will fit more easily into working life.

"
Many students have had positive destination outcomes due to enrichment activities as they are able to cite these extra-curricular commitments on CV's, application forms and UCAS profiles. We have seen a number of students taking a more active role in enrichment in order to improve their own profiles and understand the positive nature of enrichment on broader outcomes, skills and behaviours.

Students who engage with the college enrichment offer generally find that it helps to develop some of the softer employability skills. (Survey responses 2023.)
"

The first of these responses suggests a dynamic approach, aiming to enhance the progression of students to new destinations. The second is equally focused on student destinations but perhaps in a more passive way. This relationship between enrichment and different ideas about the possibilities of student futures emerged frequently through the study.

Later, when we engaged with colleges directly, we discovered a much more varied understanding of the purposes and value of enrichment. Respondents observed that these aims overlap: the same activities that provide long-term benefits, such as progression to employment, can support students or improve their motivation during courses focused on vocational aims. Nor are personal and economic outcomes entirely distinct: as one enrichment lead pointed out in a follow-up interview:

> **"** Employability is at its heart but of course my team are fully aware that you **"**
> can't really be employable if you're not being personally developed or personally
> effective (Enrichment Organiser, London).

In this way we were able to go beyond our statistical analysis, to construct an overview of the organisation of enrichment in each college, its aims, the breadth of the offer and the response of students to the offer, although later data collection added to our understanding in these areas considerably.

Thus, a different view of the aims of enrichment emerged when we spoke directly to college staff and students: for staff, specifically educational aims appeared to acquire greater significance; for students, enrichment was seen to play an important role in motivating learners to continue at college and progress to higher levels of study. Our participants articulated the aims of enrichment less as a long-term vision and more on the immediate purpose of getting students through their studies, motivating them by providing additional interest or social networks. These different but overlapping understandings of enrichment emerged more widely as the study progressed.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic, which started almost simultaneously with the enrichment study, appeared to affect enrichment disproportionately. During the periods of disruption that followed the initial 'lockdown', some colleges reported not only the suspension of outside trips and visits but the cancellation of many college-based activities. Enrichment events that did continue provided important support to learners who might otherwise be isolated. Following the pandemic, as colleges worked to get their programmes back into action, many found themselves re-evaluating and re-centring the purpose and scope of their enrichment provision. The mental health effects of isolation had affected many students and enrichment became an important focus.

This discussion of aims links directly to the question of how important enrichment is to colleges and therefore how they set about organising enrichment. We deal with these questions, which were also a key concern of our surveys, next.

Organising enrichment

From the beginning of the study, we wanted to understand how important strategy was to colleges and their senior managers. In our opening survey, we asked about enrichment's significance to the college. In this survey, 62 colleges (78.3%) reported that they had objectives for enrichment; 42 (50%) had a written strategy or policy for enrichment. We asked about whether enrichment featured in college strategic plans.

We asked:

Does enrichment feature in the College strategic plan?

Response	Number of Responses (N=84)	Percentage of Whole
Yes	70	83%
No	13	15%
Incomplete	1	1%

Table 2: survey responses on college organisation

We also asked about responsibilities for enrichment and in 58 cases, the enrichment lead was the Principal, Vice Principal, Deputy Principal or Assistant Principal, and in one case the governors. These senior managers appeared to have overarching responsibilities for the college and/or curriculum, with the highest responsibility for enrichment allocated to these most senior managers. Only around a quarter of respondents designated this as a learner support role. These responses demonstrate the importance of enrichment within colleges and as the study progressed, we met Principals and Vice Principals who clearly articulated the significance of enrichment in the strategies of their college. We repeatedly encountered this question of organisational focus: the most successful enrichment programmes, in terms of the student acclaim and significance in the life of the college that we have already discussed, benefitted from strategic decisions by senior managers.

Our data suggested that the most successful programmes had clear ideas about how enrichment could complement their core offer: they were supported by college leaders and able to draw on allocated resources. The role of college leadership was reported as an important concern at one GFE college, where an enrichment professional reported that:

> "...our biggest supporter is the Principal of this College... if I was giving anybody advice about enrichment or personal development, you need to get the backing of the people in the Principalship. It's really important (Enrichment organiser, SW)."

This represented a firm commitment by senior managers to enrichment but, since the success of these strategies relies on active support by staff and students, we also sought to understand how enrichment is organised throughout colleges.

Beyond senior managers leading enrichment, we found responsibilities for enrichment across colleges provided by staff in multiple roles. For some this was part of specific learner support roles. Elsewhere enrichment was an additional function of teaching responsibilities. In our first survey, we asked specifically about these core roles:

Who else has responsibility for enrichment?

Response	Number of Responses (N=84)	Percentage of (N=84)
Heads of department	74	88%
Programme area managers	55	65%
Programme leaders	55	65%
Teachers/tutors	69	82%
Incomplete	1	1%

Table 3: Enrichment responsibilities

This data suggests that staff in core roles, with curriculum responsibilities, are directly concerned with how enrichment works in practice and how it impacts on students' lives. This direct engagement by curriculum staff indicated its importance for curriculum teachers, suggesting its importance across institutions. During interviews and field visits, we were able to inquire more deeply into this pattern of activity in our direct engagement with colleges. Here we learnt that much of the day-to-day activity was organised by specialists, including learner support managers, who also had some responsibilities for specialist activities in specific subject areas.

As we explained in the case studies above, the spaces where core curriculum staff played the leading role in enrichment appear to be colleges and areas within colleges that are dominated by A-level teaching and other general education provision, rather than in technical and vocational subjects. These areas are to the forefront of organising opportunities to take part in subject-based activities beyond course specifications. Here enrichment could attract exceptional levels of resource because of it was seen as central to the curriculum, with teaching hours allocated to support activity around subjects and specialist interests. This created a virtuous circle, attracting students from other subject areas, who in turn sought to develop their own enrichment activities. These forms of engagement with enrichment have not developed to the same degree in technical and vocational subject areas, leading to an inequality in the experience of enrichment.

Finally, in this regard, we should mention the role of partnerships. Some college enrichment programmes include work with a major partner, such as Sport England, who may also bring other funding to bear. Others work with a wide range of contractual partners, whilst elsewhere enrichment makes limited use of informal networks.

Resources

Finally in this section, we cannot discuss how colleges organise enrichment without discussing the resources available to provide it. The resourcing of enrichment was an important issue for every college where we collected data. The primary question was staffing: whilst many colleges expected mainstream curriculum teaching staff to have some form of involvement in enrichment, most allocated the responsibility to learner support staff and others in similar roles. In some instances, enrichment activities were organised by a single member of staff, who organised the whole programme under the direction of a senior manager, usually with responsibility for learner support or a related area. At other colleges, teaching staff took responsibility for the programme and contributed to specialist activities that built on the mainstream curriculum, exploring dimensions that could not be accommodated during regular teaching hours. At specialist colleges for SEND and music, and at sixth form colleges and other general education settings, enrichment activities occupied a central place in the life of the college and benefitted from the direct engagement of curriculum staff who were funded for a modest amount of activity to extend the curriculum.

In the follow-up interviews, these differences were widely linked to resource issues in a way that had not clearly emerged from the survey. Whilst colleges had responded to the survey positively about the idea of enrichment, we were repeatedly told that levels of activity had generally declined during recent years, linked to a decline in available funding. Enrichment organisers in several colleges reported a lack of access to spaces and facilities: whilst staff and students requested specific resources and rooms to be allocated to enrichment, the scale of activity did not justify this.

This led to a search for external funding: several colleges, including two of our designated case studies, had benefitted from Sport England funding. This supported a relatively narrow range of activities and at some colleges with a single organiser or a small group leading enrichment, the whole programme was the province of sports staff. In some cases, this approach was complemented by the work of learning support groups and individuals, working with outside speakers and organisations. This provided opportunities for engagement with local communities. It enabled teaching staff to focus on core activities and to rely on enrichment teams for the organisation of specialist events.

Funding is seen as the greatest barrier to provision of a broad enrichment programme. Thus, many colleges provide enrichment under the umbrella of funded aspects of the curriculum (e.g., careers, tutorial) and via free speakers and activities offered by voluntary groups. Arguably this can result in more compliance or 'employability' activities, as opposed to activities which might develop the whole person (such as, for example, the Outward Bound activities, team building and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme observed in some institutions). We found some evidence that take-up of extra-curricular activities tends to be lower where these are offered via this model. Conversely, take-up tends to be higher in contexts where enrichment is culturally embedded and receives central funding from the organisation (e.g. for staffing and/or equipment). In one Midlands college, participation in extra-curricular enrichment is now mandated via the student contract.

Evaluation

Perhaps inevitably, enrichment activities lack the recognised forms of monitoring and evaluation to which main programmes are subject. Colleges use various measures that cannot be compared across institutions. In one sense, this is appropriate to such a broad range of activity. Yet, as our report demonstrates, one consequence is that enrichment is in some ways 'squeezed' by the attention that mainstream programmes and their performance receive.

We asked at the outset how colleges knew their enrichment provision was successful. The nature of enrichment makes standard measures of success difficult, but most colleges have some measurement in place.

We asked:

Are there any measurements or targets for participation in enrichment?

Response	Number of Responses (N=84)	Percentage of Whole
Yes	53	63%
No	30	36%
Incomplete	1	1%

Table 4: Participation targets

Among the 53 positive respondents, answers ranged from immediate targets for participation in enrichment to measures of its impact, such as destination data. Other measurements were put forward:

> "
> Engagement and skills assessments that allow us to monitor distance travelled
>
> Use of an in-house development, 'Skills Passport,' to gauge participation in topics for tutorial and for other activities such as 'Uniready.' (Survey responses, 2021)

As the project developed, we learnt that colleges with cross-college enrichment programmes used participation as a measure of enrichment success. Those with curriculum-based enrichment had less systematic data collection. On balance, we do not believe that a standardised method to collect data would be helpful in this regard, since the variation in programmes would render comparison between institutions meaningless. In the same way, responses to our questions on participation levels were uneven. In our opening survey we asked for numbers participating but the responses varied according to the collection methods more than the success of the programmes appeared on further investigation. However, it would be possible to collect data and measure participation levels year-on-year within colleges.

In summary, enrichment is not subject to any agreed formula, nor standard expectations. The lack of any standard definition, the enthusiast-led nature of much activity and the perceived scarcity of resources are to some degree complementary. In the absence of detailed expectations, staff and students can take initiatives that might not otherwise fit in with, for example, study programme requirements. But this voluntarism can also mean that provision is uneven and unequally resourced, whilst lacking clear criteria for success. In this report, for example, we have alluded to 'successful' or 'effective' instances of enrichment. This description has been applied where the research team have noticed a purposeful and holistic implementation of enrichment activity to the curriculum, to developing personal breadth and to supporting dispositions for future employment. Specifically, this has been translated from staff or student comments which have suggested an activity or programme to have been successful or effective. However, these judgments are nevertheless based on subjective, evaluative comments.

Having extensively reviewed the range of activities and the methods used to organise these, we move on to place these in a more substantive context. We review published literature about, or related to, enrichment in colleges and describe the methodology that enabled this study to contribute to understanding this field.

4. Context

Literature and methodology

Background: Literature review

Notions of enrichment have long been applied to curricula for young people across secondary education. Understandings have been subject to change over time in response to differing government priorities, and, at different times, enrichment initiatives have had a significant profile and financial investment. Whilst enrichment has attracted much recent attention, the need to extend education beyond core qualifications has long been accepted in colleges, although its form has been subject to extensive debate and change. In this section, based on a literature review that explored how various interpretations of enrichment have informed upper secondary curricula, we summarise the main issues and developments over time.

Early studies in relation to colleges included the Further Education Unit's (FEU, 1986) report on 'extra-curricular activities' as part of its evaluation of the Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) pilot. A decade later, the Further Education Funding Council (1996) described the 'scope' of enrichment' as:

> " ... sport, music, drama, cultural and practical activities, work experience and work shadowing, residential visits and study tours, foreign exchanges, health education, personal and social education, religious education, languages, information technology, group projects, outdoor pursuits, clubs and societies, and leisure interests (FEFC 1996, p.2). "

This broad range includes activities such as work experience that are now required components of study programmes. More recent and critical work has raised concerns about young peoples' lack of access to a broad curriculum (e.g., Winch 2005, Wheelahan and Moodie 2011). As these concerns have become influential in policy circles, they appear to be reflected in contemporary quality requirements. Other interpretations and understandings have linked enrichment activities to a variety of objectives, often promoting notions of employability (e.g. Foster et al. 2017; LSIS, 2010, 2).

Despite this longstanding interest and concern, there is a paucity of literature and evidence addressing both the current and historic state of enrichment provision in further education. This literature review addresses a wide range of activities related to enrichment, including employability, careers, extra-curricular activities, personal and social development, and citizenship. The review necessarily includes some discussion of issues around the funding of further education, which have implications for the provision of enrichment activities.

Historical Context

Enrichment, as noted above, has not hitherto been the subject of any widely agreed definition, nor occupied a widely recognised role in the college curriculum. Nevertheless, the extent of curriculum has been a longstanding concern both in technical/vocational and in general education. The Crowther Report (Ministry of Education 1959) noted the need for 'minority time' when technical students could 'attend to the balance' of their education. Within schools during the 1960's, many local initiatives emerged as teachers considered the challenges of educating all young people, irrespective of ability, in the context of curricula regarded as too narrowly academic (Pring 1995). The Youth Award Scheme: the scheme, developed in the early 1980's by Roger White and David Brockington, offered curriculum enrichment at a series of four progressive levels. In 1995, 80,000 young people were registered for it nationally through their schools and colleges (Pring 1995).

Further education drew on a longer tradition of liberal or general studies, which following Crowther and an ensuing White Paper (Ministry of Education, 1959, 1961) led to general studies or liberal studies classes complementing the technical qualifications studied by apprentices and other day release students. They were regarded as separate from work-related curricula but an essential element of post-school education at a time when most FE students had left school at 15 (Bailey & Unwin, 2008). Associated with democracy and citizenship, they were broadly interpreted by teachers and encompassed subjects as diverse as art, film studies, and political education.

During the late 1970s and early 1980's, as curricula developed in response to the mass youth unemployment of the time, these elements were supposedly integrated into the core of the BEC and TEC curriculum (Bailey & Unwin, 2008). Writing in 1998, Richardson drew attention to the way in which the structure and implementation of NVQs had led to a situation in which occupational competence was regarded as the 'sole purpose and requirement of work-based learning at the age of 16–25' (Richardson, 1998, p.236) and where, following Dearing (1996) the curriculum 'breadth' for the GNVQ qualification was associated with Key Skills rather than broader forms of enrichment. A series of national reports around the NVQ/GNVQ curriculum (e.g., Beaumont, 1996; Dearing, 1996) led to the introduction of Core and later Key Skills.

In the more recent past, enrichment has been understood as a broad description of ways that further education students are provided with 'motivating and engaging' opportunities beyond their main learning programmes (LSIS, 2010). Whilst this concept is generally agreed upon (and in this reflects earlier liberal/general studies programmes) the purposes and content of this provision have varied from college to college, with different interpretations and understandings resulting in the ways in which enrichment activities are undertaken ranging across the UK. Whilst much of this provision has been concerned with broadening personal development and notions of citizenship, activities promoting employability have also been described as enrichment. The introduction of study programmes in 2013 led to the addition of specific work experience activity and, in the current funding advice, 'non-qualification activity to develop students' character, broader skills, attitudes and confidence, and support progression' is designated as the fourth distinctive strand of activity (ESFA 2022). However, 'enrichment' is only referred to specifically here in relation to the T Level transition programme.

For most enrichment activities there is no form of certification, although some colleges offer activities which boast accredited certificates, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award or AQA's Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), on the grounds that this can act as a motivating factor for student engagement in enrichment activities, encouraging learners to take part in something new and purposeful. Winch (2005) suggests that those young people who have taken the initiative and steps towards organising their own civic engagement activities need to be recognised 'through some kind of award' (p.5). Broadening educational experience through enrichment and building 'valuable links with the local community' had previously been argued not only to promote colleges within the local community but also to 'foster a sense of community and cohesion within the college' (FEFC 1996).

In some instances, further education settings have made a move to adopt an institutional approach to enrichment. An example of this is Buxton and Leek College who for the 2019/20 academic year themed enrichment around environmental issues. By doing this the college has worked with students to incorporate enrichment activities as part of the students' learning programmes and initiatives and projects have been undertaken which have focussed around new and innovative ways to look after the environment including recycling schemes. This example demonstrates the varied ways in which different institutions approach extra-curricular activities and enrichment and shows how activities can be undertaken in line with curriculum learning.

By ensuring students are provided with activities such as those found in enrichment programmes, schools and colleges may offer opportunities that may not be available outside of the educational setting. Winch (2005, p.5) argues that 'there is an issue concerning what is available for young people outside the hours of schools and work', emphasising the point of why it is important to have enrichment activities incorporated into the ethos of schools and colleges. Winch also suggests that young people are more likely to take up part time employment than they are civic responsibilities, arguing that:

> " a shortage of attractive provision of opportunities exacerbates the issue, while a deregulated labour market and a service sector dependent on disposable unskilled labour makes the gravitational pull toward part time employment and away from greater civic engagement too strong (Winch, 2005, p.5). "

It may be argued that this situation persists, more than a decade after Winch published his work. Foster et al. (2020) found that amongst post-16 students non-qualification hours were often taken up by part-time employment and learning to drive.

Alongside current emphasis on subject curricula, Ofsted (2023) now emphasise the importance of extra-curricular, or enrichment, activities as part of their inspection guidance, stating that children and young people at all levels of learning should be given the opportunity to build their skills, knowledge, understanding and personal development. It is hoped that the provision of these enrichment activities can act as a catalyst in enabling young people to 'develop and discover their interests and talents' in a way that they have perhaps been unable to do previously (Ofsted, 2023, 11).

Personal and Social Development, and Citizenship

Ofsted (2019, p.11) state that 'the curriculum [should] extend beyond the academic, technical, or vocational. It provides for learners' broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents' and also emphasise how through a combination of the taught curriculum and enrichment activities 'learners develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence' whilst also ensuring that they know how to keep mentally and physically healthy. Through each enrichment activity offered by schools and colleges there is generally involvement in group work, networking and working with individuals who students would not normally encounter. Through these types of activities students can experience personal and social development through improving their soft skills such as confidence, communication, and teamwork, and they have become a core aspect of some baccalaureate awards.

Citizenship education emerged during the early 2000's, in the context of policy formation which highlighted the need for young people leaving education to be 'equipped to be an informed, responsible, active citizen. In an ever more complex, interdependent world, where an engaged population is crucial to the health of our society, we continue to put citizenship at its heart too.' (14–19 White Paper, DfES, February 2005). Over time (see AQA, 2010) much of this curriculum, mandated at the time, was delivered through the medium of prescribed enrichment activities. Thus, it might be argued that irrespective of whether enrichment activities form part of a formal qualification (as with the Baccalaureate) or a curriculum (such as for Citizenship or Personal, Social, and Health Education) this necessarily constrains the activities on offer. In these contexts, rather than being activities undertaken for 'fun' or out of interest, they are undertaken to enhance and enrich social and personal development. In terms of citizenship education, activities such as volunteering, engaging in community projects and political societies have been identified as appropriate forms of enrichment (QIA, 2007, AQA, 2010). The QIA (2007) report suggests that through enrichment opportunities students can learn more effectively about citizenship in a practical manner which in turn can build upon existing knowledge. Other literature from the time also suggests that learning through citizenship and taking part in citizenship activities can develop the soft skills that are desired by future employers (DfES, 2006).

An and Western (2019 p. 194) argue that participation in extra-curricular activities has 'been found to be associated with a wide range of outcomes, including higher educational aspirations, greater academic achievement, less delinquency, and higher earnings and political engagement in adult life'. For Atkins et al. (2023), enrichment has been broadly conceived as any leisure, social or learning activity beyond the student's programme: it has formed part of a broad, project-based curriculum designed for low-attaining and marginalised youth. In this context, it has contributed to positive outcomes for the young people concerned, in terms of quantifiable improvements in attendance, achievement, progression, and a reduction in numbers becoming NEET (Atkins et al., 2023).

Employability Skills

A significant body of literature connects enrichment with broader employability skills and careers. Numerous types of enrichment activity have been associated with employability skills, including projects, sports, volunteering or music, associated with soft skills such as communication, confidence, time management, teamwork and creative thinking. The 2016 Education and Skills Survey (CBI, 2016) reported 'a gap between education and the preparation people need for their future, as well as the gap between the skills needed and those people have'. The evidence reported here implies that enrichment, or extra-curricular, activities can be used to enhance young people's employability skills whilst also encouraging them to be well-rounded individuals. Research for the Department for Education by Foster et al. (2017) identified the hours spent on building skills and employability in the examined and non-examined curriculum, including, for example, work-experience placements and revision sessions, as well as more typical enrichment activities such as sports or volunteering. Improvements in attainment associated with enrichment activities have also been noted by the EEF. Whilst focussing on schools, evidence from the EEF also suggests that 'enriching education has intrinsic benefits' and further implies that 'enrichment approaches can directly improve pupils' attainment' (EEF, 2020 https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/school-themes/enrichment/). This is further supported by Education and Employers (2014) whose research indicates that those students who undertake a minimum of two engagement activities are 20% less likely to be NEET.

Research by Bathmaker (2013) suggests that education providers are regarded as being responsible for developing employability amongst its learners, extending beyond the taught curriculum. This attitude has perhaps developed from pressure by businesses for young people to emerge from their time in education somehow better prepared for the world of work. Research by the Confederation of British Industry (2011) found that 70% of employers wanted employability skills made a priority within schools and colleges, with over half (55%) of the employers surveyed stating that they had experienced weaknesses in self-management skills, and two thirds (69%) believed that there was an inadequate business and customer awareness. These findings suggest the reliance businesses have on educational settings to ensure young people are 'work-ready' when they leave school or college and as such have led to changes in policy to ensure that young people are developing these employability skills whilst still in education. However, in the context of this report, and others, 'employability' remains an ill-defined concept, albeit one which relates broadly to skills in communication, teamwork and ability to work independently.

Cultural capital

Enrichment may engage and introduce students to a range of different activities that may have previously been out of reach for many individuals. There is considerable evidence demonstrating that further education sector is mediated by class, gender, and ethnicity (Colley, 2006; Avis, 2016; Avis and Atkins, 2017) and that those young people from lower class fractions have more limited access to valorised capitals (Atkins, 2017). The acquisition of such capitals are essential for success in education and the workplace, a point recognised by Hanson et al. (2017) whose work suggests that access to employers through enrichment activities can help students to build social networks and cultural capital, which in turn can improve chances of successful employment following completion of education. This is important, because access to such activities – and thus the capitals they generate - is often predicated on the cultural and economic capitals available to a family. In broad terms, many activities and experiences which would support the acquisition of valorised capitals are unavailable to young people who come from families with more limited material resources. Such families are also more likely to have more limited social networks that might eventually advantage a young person as they progress into the world of work. Enrichment thus offers the potential opportunity for disadvantaged youth to engage with activities which were previously unattainable, and more importantly, to acquire skills and capitals that were similarly unattainable. Recognising this, Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (2022) now states that leaders are required to

> take on or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or high needs, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.

However, it is important to note here that access to different forms of capital for disadvantaged students is influenced by factors beyond access to the right connections and networks. It is also influenced by the possible imperative for disadvantaged youth to work alongside their studies to contribute to the household income – or to engage in caring and domesticity within the home – thus 'missing out' on extra-curricular opportunities (e.g. see Atkins, 2009).

Funding

Funding mechanisms have contributed to the variability of enrichment provision across England and Wales. Despite a consensus that enrichment is beneficial to young people, mechanisms for funding this have come under repeated pressures. Whilst ESFA-funded education for 16–19-year-olds is provided through study programmes that combine enrichment with qualifications, the latter compete with other claims on funding for activities beyond the core qualification. Collectively described until recently as EEP funding, this has been required to cover tutorial time and a range of objectives external to the core programme.

In addition to the costs of staffing and accommodating this provision, colleges pressured by funding cuts have in the past sought to find savings in this area, with Foster et al. (2020) reporting cuts in non-qualification hours, Ofsted (2014, p.16). Whilst many colleges have more recently provided an increase in centrally provided enrichment activities, it is unclear whether this is enabling a reduction in pastoral support or tutorial time as a response to reductions in the funding allocation. Funding for this activity remains constrained and funding increases remain uncertain, even under the new ABS proposal.

Conclusion

Our literature review concluded that there have been varying understandings of the purposes of enrichment. Nevertheless, it highlighted some of the different roles that enrichment has played, and has to play, in today's colleges. If the literature fails to agree on a common definition for enrichment, it also suggests the breadth of activity we have already noted, and a blurring of lines between enrichment and the taught curriculum. These findings have been substantially confirmed by our own surveys and case studies.

The longstanding and contemporary concerns discussed above were the issues we explored with colleges during the Valuing Enrichment project. Having earlier presented the models of practice we discovered, and the problems of organising enrichment, we next report the methodology used to collect this data. Later sections will explain how this data justifies our summary findings and the recommendations of our report.

Research methodology and scope

The Valuing Enrichment project was designed to meet the aims of the study as comprehensively as possible. These were to:

- Generate more definition and clarity on enrichment

- Identify potential differences in soft and hard skill acquisition

- Identify examples of effective institutional enrichment programmes

- Evidence the positive impact of enrichment on a diverse range of learners

- Determine the extent to which enrichment activity has a potential economic value

Having noted the multiple roles and expectations of enrichment, the project design sought to engage actively with students, staff and enrichment practices in colleges through surveys and field studies, in order to be able to build on a foundational understanding of this practice. This contrasts with other, schools-based studies that have compared narrow definitions of enrichment, such as participation in sports clubs, in order to examine statistical associations with, for example, employment outcomes. These cannot show direct causality, although they contribute to other evidence of the benefits of participation (Baker, 2024, 29). Our study, by contrast, sought to examine the multiple roles of enrichment through a mixed methods study.

Our research design aimed to investigate enrichment through a mixed methods study designed to capture the scale and scope of enrichment activity as well as enabling the engagement of stakeholders and capturing the perceptions of participants (Symonds & Gorard, 2010; Dahler-Larsen 2022).This approach enabled the study to provide a broad overview of the nature of enrichment in colleges across England and Wales, along with detailed qualitative understandings of practice in settings where provision appeared to be successful and well-subscribed. The project was designed as a longitudinal study, beginning with a survey of all colleges affiliated to AoC and designed to continue with follow-up interviews and case studies at a selection of colleges. Each phase would make use of a purposive sampling technique.

The study was organised over three major phases and multiple data collection points. Following a literature review providing contextual understandings of enrichment, the study's empirical methods were:

- Surveys at multiple points of all AoC affiliates;

- Follow-up interviews at selected colleges;

- Case studies of enrichment at exemplar colleges.

Activity	Indicative Timeframe
Phase 1	
• Define enrichment for purpose of study	March 2020
• Literature review	April – June 2020
• Historical data analysis	June – August 2020
• Survey development	August 2020
• Phase 1 Report (Literature Review and historical data analysis)	August 2020
Phase 2	
• Large scale survey distribution, data collection and analysis	September – December 2020
• Data Analysis and qualitative research instrument development informed by this. Identification of case study sample organisations	January/March 2021
• In-depth research with case study providers' students and staff (interviews, documentary data)	April – June 2021
• Phase 2 research report	July 2021
Phase 3	
• Review of research, revision of research instruments as appropriate	August/September 2021
• Repeated large scale survey distribution, data collection and analysis	November 2021 – February 2022
• Track and re-interview Phase 2 students' post-transition	January 2022 – June 2022
• Follow up in-depth research with case study providers' students and staff (interviews, documentary data)	June 2023 – August 2023
• Data Analysis	September – October 2023
• Track and re-interview Phase 3 students' post-transition	November – December 2023
• Final Analysis, writing up	January – March 2024
Final Report	**March 2024**

Table 5: Project Plan

Survey methods

Our empirical work began with an extensive survey distributed to all GFE, specialist and sixth form colleges by the AoC. The survey included questions about the aims of college enrichment, methods of organisation, the range of activities, levels of student participation and an invitation to participate further as a case study institution. The survey was distributed to all member colleges of AoC. Respondents were the principal or a senior manager responsible for enrichment.

The survey used 46 questions and options that built on the literature and an earlier survey by the AoC. In analysing the survey data, we examined:

- the strategic approach of institutions and their orientation to enrichment
- the aims of their enrichment programmes and their relationship to students' transitions and development
- levels of participation and the student response
- the breadth of their enrichment

This process enabled us to identify initial findings about the shape of enrichment and patterns across FE and sixth form Colleges but also to refine our approach to the next round of data analysis. We carried out a detailed analysis of each institution's response, whilst recognising that these could not provide a full picture of how the strategic priority given to enrichment translates into action, until we were able to complement this data with qualitative data collected from field sites.

84 colleges responded to the survey and the responses were analysed to identify patterns in the way that colleges understood and organised for enrichment. Whilst the responses, in terms of geographical spread (see Table 2), represented a substantial sample within each region they were less representative of college types (Table 3). Nearly half of all General Further Education (GFE) colleges responded (46%) but only 12% of Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs) and 4% of specialist colleges. These results appear to indicate a high level of interest in GFE colleges, although it may simply be the case that they have greater recognition of the AoC as a representative body.

Region	Number of responses	Number of colleges in region	Percent within region
Eastern region	9	23	39%
East Midlands	5	13	38%
Greater London	12	34	35%
North East	6	14	43%
North West	9	42	21%
South East	11	37	30%
South West	11	23	48%
West Midlands	8	24	33%
Yorkshire and the Humber	11	27	41%
Total England Excludes Academy (SFC conversion) and Channel Islands	**82**	**237**	**35%**

Table 6: Survey responses by region

Type	Number of responses	Number of colleges in England	Percent within type
General further education college	75	164	46%
Sixth form college	6	49	12%
Specialist college	1	24	4%
Total England Excludes Academy (SFC conversion) and Channel Islands	**82**	**237**	**35%**
Other Academy (SFC conversion) and Channel Islands	2		

Table 7: College types responding to the survey

The analysis of this initial survey, carried out between January and March 2021, enabled us to analyse the aims that colleges identified for their enrichment programmes, how it was organised and the level of participation. In this survey we explored the way that colleges viewed enrichment, using 46 questions and options that built on the literature and an earlier survey by the AoC.

Our second survey, three years into the study, was more focused. By this stage we had a more detailed understanding of enrichment and could use the survey to probe specific questions about the development of enrichment during and since the pandemic. Our questions were grouped around three major categories. On this occasion we collected 109 responses, reflecting the greater interest of colleges in enrichment over time. This survey also enabled us to identify areas for further qualitative data collection.

Further sampling and interview data

The second stage of our research design was intended to clarify the data produced by the surveys, whilst helping to produce a sample of case studies. Our initial design had included case studies selected on a regional basis, and, on this basis four colleges were selected in each region for follow-up contact and online interviews. These interviews provided opportunities to clarify ambiguities in the survey data and probe causation; whilst enabling us to request the possibility of more sustained research activities in the form of site visits and case studies.

Our geographically dispersed sample, based on the nine socio-economic regions of England, was planned to provide a detailed understanding of national variations in enrichment provision. We initially aimed to include two general further education colleges, one training provider or specialist institution and one sixth-form college. However, since the great majority of respondents in each region were general further education colleges, this proved impossible, and we compensated for this imbalance by prioritising any specialist institutions who were prepared to take part in further activity. Following initial telephone and online (mainly MS Teams) meetings, we identified one potential case study institution from each region, whilst including different types of post-16 provision. Each of these case study

organisations was to be visited in order to collect further data from meetings with staff and students, which would be followed up with interviews after these students had left the college and could report how their enrichment experiences had shaped their progression.

In the event, this plan experienced some disruption as the impact of COVID-19 made it difficult to arrange field visits during the spring of 2021 and these difficulties continued into the following academic year. We therefore introduced an intermediary stage of focus group interviews carried out online with sample groups of staff and students at selected colleges. These activities planned for the earlier part of the programme were completed during the 2021-22 academic year. In-depth interviews, usually conducted via Teams, took place with staff at each college with specific responsibility for enrichment were carried out during 2021. These interactions enabled us to draw early conclusions about the significance of enrichment for the sector and the importance that colleges place on enrichment. This begins with the allocation of management responsibilities, the role of specialist staff with enrichment and related roles, and the ways in which they support staff in mounting their enrichment offer. This in turn shapes the ways in which students participate in, and at times initiate, enrichment activity, for example through student-led activities.

Site visits, engaging face-to-face with teaching staff and students to deepen our investigation, began more systematically during 2022. These visits continued to be organised with attention to geographical diversity: we visited institutions in all regions, as well as a Welsh and a Channel Islands college to examine whether different inspection regimes led to different approaches. Data collection during these visits was able to build on the themes established during online interviews and enabled us to begin the construction of comprehensive case studies.

Case studies

The third and final stage was planned to deepen the study through the construction of multiple case studies, providing both an overarching case and opportunities for comparison (Stake, 1995; Smelser, 2013). Methods within each case study included documentary analysis, observation and data collection among staff and students at their campus. As we negotiated access to colleges in order to carry out these case studies, we worked with providers to understand how we could best research the way enrichment affects students' lives as part of the whole curriculum. Participatory research is about researching with rather than on participants (Atkins, 2013). Its purpose is to develop a more co-created methodology where meaning is co-constructed (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2017). As patterns began to emerge in the data, further visits to our sites enabled the testing of initial analyses. We sought to collect data and seek insights that could connect the relationship between curriculum, the college culture and the materiality/locale of the educational setting. This included the use of walking interviews, led by students around the campus, aiming to understand what is meaningful in their experience of the college. Walking interviews have been used in place-making research to explore the insights offered by an embodied relationship to the space (O'Neill, 2017; Springgay and Truman, 2018). In doing so, there is a deliberate attempt to shift the power relations from researcher to participant, giving students a sense of autonomy and the chance to impart their lived experiences through a more mobilised and embodied way, identifying where they have other lessons, frequent with friends, or engage in enrichment-related activities.

This stage included a modification to the case study sample, which was initially designed

to provide a national picture that covered all socio-economic regions. As data collection progressed, it became clear that the key differences in enrichment at each college related not to geographical location but to the curriculum each college offered. In discussion with NCFE, we therefore refocused our selection of case studies on institutional types, in order better to understand how enrichment directly shapes the student experience in different educational settings. A second change related to the longitudinal aspects of the study, based on the intention to capture data over time about the impact of enrichment on learners' lives as they progress either within or beyond education. It became clear during qualitative data collection that we could collect and analyse data about the ways that students believe enrichment impacts on their lives during their time as students, as well as finding out about its contribution to their progression. Against the background of COVID-19 disruption, it also became clear that monitoring the lives of individuals over course of the project would be more problematic as learners' relations with both enrichment and education more generally became more irregular. We remained committed to collecting data about progression but recognised this the core of our data would come from current students.

Mixed methods data analysis

These methods together produced a wealth of data that enabled us to understand the extensive and diverse provision of enrichment across multiple dimensions. Our surveys elicited responses from 109 institutions, a 74.7% response rate. We conducted nine case studies that triangulated documentary, observational and interview data, including through mobile methodologies. Our site visits extended to every region and to a Welsh and a Channel Islands college, examining whether different legal frameworks, devolved policies and inspection regimes led to different approaches (although this did not produce significant findings). In addition, we formally interviewed staff and/or students at an additional 42 colleges, as well as engaging with hundreds of other college representatives and students at events where we presented interim findings.

The survey data enabled the compilation of descriptive statistics that outline the 'size and shape' of enrichment provision across colleges. This data is discussed in the following section and provided in a complete set of data tables in Appendix 1 to this report. Not all data, however, was directly comparable. For example, data on student participation was in some cases compiled from student surveys and in others based on assumptions that students attended freely available activities. The survey data included responses on organisational approaches which enabled us to draw tentative conclusions about the approaches of different colleges; but these had to be confirmed in follow-up interviews and site visits.

Our qualitative data, accumulated over three years of site visits and online interviews provided a detailed picture of the range of enrichment activity, as well as the lives and trajectories of those who took part in and organised it. Interviews were taped and supplemented with notetaking. This data was transcribed using automated transcription software, reviewing and editing the transcripts for accuracy. Interview data was triangulated with observational notes, documentary and photographic evidence. The team used thematic analysis to determine its significance, using the constant comparison method (Glaser, 1965; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) rather than prior or emergent coding techniques. This allowed us to continually refine our understandings in regular team meetings reviewing site visits and interviews over time.

Our findings, dealing in turn with key aspects of enrichment, have been set out in the foregoing sections. We follow these with an overview of how the study has met its aims.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Findings: Meeting project aims

At the conclusion of our study, we can identify our progress against the research aims the study identified at the outset. We summarise these in the table below:

Research Aim:	Generate more definition and clarity on enrichment.

Emerging conclusions

Our project began with a literature review that identified the difficulties of a single definition of enrichment and offered a diverse definition that marked enrichment as separate from the curriculum taught for qualifications. Our data illustrates multiple ways in which enrichment relates specifically to the core curriculum. Many of our examples, both in the case studies above and the findings that follow, are testimonies to the possibilities of enrichment. They extend the curriculum by providing opportunities to understand its practical application; they complement it by providing personal development that enables learners to engage with the curriculum in greater depth. We capture this relationship in our final definition: 'the college-based activities through which staff and students extend and complement learning acquired during study for approved qualifications.' We also note that this relationship appears to be better understood in some curriculum areas than others. For some learners, especially those on more technical and vocational courses, further work appears necessary to develop enrichment that extends the technical curriculum in new ways, for example through projects that extend learning in these areas.

Research Aim:	Identify potential differences in soft and hard skill acquisition.

Emerging conclusions

These broad terms describe forms of learning that often interact. The earlier FEFC (1996) definition, as well as recent Ofsted and ESFA descriptions, appear to favour social or 'soft' skills, described as additional dimensions of human formation. Yet, as our case studies illustrate, enrichment can also include the development of technical abilities through practical activities that extend the general education curriculum.

Where students have an active role, enrichment can quickly develop 'soft' skills, such as communication, teamwork etc., to a high level, especially in advocacy roles. Local community projects allow students to experience citizenship and be part of more collective networks. Such activities can play an important role in motivating students in technical subjects, as well as providing them with opportunities to apply technical skills in practice. Practical opportunities for students to develop new skills and to meet peers from outside of their subject areas can help them develop divergent approaches and broader understandings of their own field as well as new knowledge.

| **Research Aim:** | **Identify examples of effective institutional enrichment programmes.** |

Emerging conclusions

Effective enrichment programmes were found at all kinds of college. We found striking examples at general further education colleges and specialist institutions, including sixth form colleges. At centres where enrichment provided an additional dimension of learning that motivated student participation, this appeared to energise the whole institution. The allocation of resources plays a critical role. General further education colleges, with broader ranges of provision, sometimes offer multiple models within the institution, with enrichment taking different forms across their provision. In all cases, a critical question seems to be how the enrichment programme relates to the rest of the curriculum offer.

| **Research Aim:** | **Evidence the positive impact of enrichment on a diverse range of learners.** |

Emerging conclusions

The positive effects of enrichment on a diverse range of learners during their time at college has been demonstrated conclusively. Participating colleges are already able to point to examples of learners who have benefitted from the programmes. The most visible effects on learners were in motivating their persistence and effort during their college studies. These effects were visible for diverse groups of learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds who spoke positively about the enabling possibilities of enrichment spaces. Enrichment activities aim to prepare students for adulthood and working life but these positive effects during their studies are also important. Colleges also provided examples of former students who attested to the power of enrichment activities.

| **Research Aim:** | **Determine the extent to which enrichment activity has a potential economic value.** |

Emerging conclusions

The project has provided compelling evidence of the economic value of enrichment. This value has primarily been demonstrated in this study through the role of enrichment in sustaining students through courses that provide personal economic benefits and have significant long-term impact on the economy. Evidence of its benefits in the long-term careers of college students has proved difficult for statistical studies to separate out from the general benefits of post-16 education. In this mixed-methods study, these benefits are demonstrated through qualitative data reflecting the understandings of students and staff about its personal and economic consequences. This adds to the body of evidence for the benefits of enrichment. It also confirms the expectation that learners who have access to enrichment will prove more successful than those who lack these opportunities for broader personal development.

Conclusions and recommendations

Four years after the start of the project, we have not only mapped the many faces of college enrichment but have traced their changes over that time. We have extended understanding of its many benefits, whilst explaining that these lack secure resources and are not equally available to all learners.

These findings have enabled us to identify areas for attention and action at policy and institutional level. These were introduced at the opening of this report and we restate them here:

- Clear recognition of the value of enrichment through a national guarantee
- Equality of access to enrichment for all learners: enrichment that extends and complements all areas of study
- Opportunities for student participation and agency
- National and local criteria for the success of enrichment
- Resourcing that extends beyond current EEP allowances and pastoral support

We do not claim that this report provides a comprehensive account of the role that enrichment plays in every learner's transition to adulthood, work and further study. These journeys vary. Nor does the study provide a comprehensive map for colleges of how to organise. Nevertheless, it provides a clear guide to the benefits learners and staff identify, which begin during the learner's journey through college and continue to future destinations. It is these accounts that justify these recommendations and the call for colleges to provide, and their students to access, benefits that correspond to those enjoyed in more privileged sectors.

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