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The Valuing Enrichment Project: emerging findings and recommendations

June 2023

Making the Case for Enrichment

I'm delighted to see this interim report reinforcing our appreciation of the role that enrichment has in empowering people with the skills, confidence, self esteem and awareness they need to be lifelong learners and engaged citizens. We embarked on this research because we felt that enrichment had been overlooked for too long, and that the enrichment offer to students had diminished after more than a decade of funding cuts.

We wanted this research to shine a light on enrichment and to help make the case for it to be better funded. By understanding the range of activities colleges offer to their students and the impact they have, I am sure that this research is starting to deliver on our ambitions. But there is a long way to go before we see the resources available to colleges for enrichment to match our ambitions for every college student.

A few years ago, I spent some time looking at websites of some of the most prestigious and expensive private schools in the country, many of them household names. What I discovered was that one of the common ways they differentiated their offer, the way they often sold the benefits of their institutions was by the rich array of enrichment they offered. I see no reason why we should not want that same offer to be available for students in our state-funded colleges.

I look forward to the next stages of this research project and to building a compelling evidence base as well as great case studies of how investment in enrichment can make the world of difference for students from all and every background. That will give us even more ammunition to fight for the investment from government which is sorely needed.



David Hughes

Chief Executive, Association of Colleges



Making the Case for Enrichment

This interim report is an opportunity to reinvigorate the conversation around enrichment and highlight its value in developing social and cultural capital, as well as essential skills, such as listening, problem solving and teamwork.

Bringing enrichment back into focus is particularly important for those from the most disadvantaged, underserved and underrepresented backgrounds. People who, either through their childhood or life circumstances, haven't had the same opportunities to travel, play sport, or go to a local museum.

That's the beauty of enrichment in an educational setting. It can be tailored for each individual and become a great leveler when it comes to finding and experiencing new opportunities – not just for enjoyment, but to build networks, self-confidence, self-awareness and self-efficacy.

Extending student experience beyond their main area of study and preparing them with the skills and experiences to become a valuable part of society has become undervalued and underappreciated. You can have all the knowledge, all the skills, all the qualifications in the world, but the evidence proves that you need more than that to progress in life.

I'm excited to see these emerging findings as we look to fill the evidence gap around the value of enrichment in post-16 education and head towards the final results in 2024.



David Gallagher

Chief Executive, NCFE



Executive Summary

We know that there are many benefits to enrichment in 16-19 education. Enrichment can have a significant positive impact for learners and the academic, economic, personal and social benefits of enrichment can contribute to levelling up and addressing skills gaps. However, learners have very different offers available to them because there is no consistently applied national entitlement and enrichment is not currently a high priority in 16-19 education policy.

We believe that the opportunities and benefits of enrichment should be universally available to all learners, and that we need a coherent national approach to supporting enrichment in post-16 education.

Our Recommendations

For policy-makers and funders:

- Government should work with the post-16 sector to agree the aims and rationale for enrichment.
- Government should develop a national strategy which properly recognises, values and resources enrichment activity and review the 16-19 study programme guidance.
- Government should ensure that there is earmarked dedicated funding for enrichment.
- Resources, guidance and training should be developed for education providers and potential partners to help support enrichment activity and create an infrastructure to embed a full enrichment entitlement more consistently across the country.
- Post-16 providers should be supported to develop their enrichment strategies collaboratively and to set out the scope and scale of enrichment programmes and how they benefit learners.
- Ofsted should agree success measures and evaluation criteria for enrichment and this should include a substantial input from learners themselves.
- Government and other stakeholders should commission further research into the benefits and effectiveness of different types of enrichment and the associated pedagogies.

Context

The Valuing Enrichment Project was jointly initiated by AoC and NCFE in 2020 as a 4-year research project which aims to fill the evidence gap around the value of enrichment in post-16 education.

Association of Colleges

Association of Colleges (AoC) is the national voice for further education, sixth form, tertiary and specialist colleges. 90% of England's colleges are AoC members, educating and training over two million people each year. AoC supports a number of enrichment activities, for example through the work of AoC Sport, the Leadership Academy, the Youth Social Action Apprentices programme, and the Creative Writing Project.

NCFE

NCFE is an educational charity and leader in vocational and technical learning with a core purpose to promote and advance learning. NCFE believes that through shaping smarter learning, it can help to build a fairer society, create opportunities to progress, and ensure no learner is left behind, regardless of their status or background. This means helping more individuals to realise their true potential – in turn, establishing more sustainable communities.

The University of Derby

The University of Derby was selected to lead the research, gather evidence and report on the nature of enrichment in colleges, the indicators of success and the short and longer term impact on learners. The University of Derby is widely recognised for its many ongoing contributions to technical education and skills development, including research, capacity-building and teacher education for the sector.

At its halfway stage, the project has collected data from 109 providers from all regions in England and Wales, including General Further Education, Sixth Form and specialist colleges. Of these participants, 9 case study providers were chosen to represent the range of different educational contexts where further data collection was carried out in the form of interviews with staff and learners.

Enrichment often has to compete for resources with other parts of the 16-19 study programme due to a lack of specific funding and direction from central government. There is no consensus about the purpose of enrichment programmes or the expectations of funders and regulators. NCFE and AoC wanted to use this research activity to highlight the benefits and impact that good enrichment programmes can have on learners, with the aim of increasing the focus on this important area of the post-16 education system.



Defining Enrichment

Our current working definition of enrichment, drawing from the research, can be summed up as:

Provider-supported activities which enhance and complement learners' study programmes and which promote learners' personal and social development.

Any description of enrichment must do justice to its role in broadening, stretching, and deepening students' experience and promoting student choice, agency and exploration and the benefits of making available a range of different options. Alternative terms used to describe enrichment include additionality, co-curricular, complementary, and extended studies. A diverse, high-quality enrichment programme is particularly important for the most disadvantaged learners who might not otherwise have the same access to the range of experiences and opportunities as their more advantaged peers.

The Purpose of Enrichment

The researchers at the University of Derby asked providers to rank their reasons for offering enrichment and the responses fell broadly into two categories:

Progression and employment

"As a specific means of developing progression or to develop work-related skills, including 'soft' skills such as teamwork and communication widely associated with progression."

Personal development

"To develop the 'whole person' both as a contributing member of society and as somebody better able to fully embrace their community and wider society."

The research identified varying patterns of how enrichment was organised and delivered, thus contributing to an understanding of its purpose.

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Through enrichment, colleges provide an extensive catalogue of opportunities and additional learning, visits and visiting speakers, mental and physical challenges.

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The range of activities is clearly linked to the different aims that colleges and their students have for enrichment but also to resources, the human and physical means to provide a programme of activity. This of course requires choices about what will be prioritised, so the strategies of senior managers are important here.

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Official Recognition of Enrichment

There is official acknowledgement of the value of enrichment in the DfE requirements for 'non-qualification activity' in 16-19 study programmes as well as in the description of Personal Development in Ofsted's Education Inspection framework

The DfE 16-19 Study Programme guidance:

"Other non-qualification activity to develop students' character, broader skills, attitudes and confidence, and support progression.

All students are expected to take part in other meaningful non-qualification activity ... This should take account of their needs and career plans, as well as preparation for adult life more generally.

For example:

Activities to develop confidence, character and resilience, group work to develop team working, communications skills, leadership and problem solving – skills that employers often say are lacking in school and college leavers, tutorials and seminars, including careers education, and life skills, such as travelling independently, cooking and eating healthily, staying safe, making sustainable choices, managing personal finances, and preparing for adult or university life."

The Ofsted Education Inspection Framework

The Ofsted Education Inspection Framework outlines how judgements will be made on "the extent to which:

- the curriculum extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational, provides for learners' broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents
- the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy
- the provider prepares learners for future success in their next steps
- the provider prepares learners for life in modern Britain by: equipping them to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society; developing their understanding of fundamental British values; developing their understanding and appreciation of diversity; celebrating what we have in common and promoting respect for the different protected characteristics as defined in law."

The Independent report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities in 2021

The report includes a recommendation on enrichment in education:

13. Promote Fairness – Build social and cultural capital – enrichment for all, including a proposal "to provide pupils with the opportunity to engage in physical and cultural activities that enrich lives and build social and cultural capital."



Great Enrichment

Drawing on the research, it appears that the best examples of enrichment extend and/or complement the learning outcomes specified by study programmes and enable learners to prepare for their next steps. The evidence suggests that there are significant benefits of good enrichment programmes to learners and providers.

Benefits to learners

- Equips learners with essential social skills & attributes, such as confidence, teamwork, resilience, risk taking, creativity and innovation, which aid progression.
- Gives access to opportunities and resources which learners might not have previously had.
- Facilitates the development of social communities outside of course or curriculum area.
- Enables learners to experience citizenship and be part of collective networks through engagement within local community projects.
- Supports the development of new skills which sit outside their chosen vocational area.
- Provides opportunities for learners to be able to express themselves within a safe space.
- Allows learners to showcase development within progression applications.
- Motivates learners to stay at college which in turn improves levels of engagement and attendance across their study programme.
- Increases learners' enjoyment as they actively engage in new and challenging experiences.

Benefits to providers

- Opportunities to collaborate with stakeholders, employers and partners in devising purposeful and real-life experiences which go beyond the classroom.
- Enables the development of local and national networks and ability to share common resources.
- Increases visibility with local community projects, which in turn can elevate the provider's reputation and boost recruitment.
- Creates opportunities to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Creates opportunities for partnership work and additional funding streams.
- A collegiate approach to enrichment and recognition of its value, reinforces a sense of community which has greater impact on both results and student engagement.
- Positive effects on student motivation and effort.
- Positive impact on attendance, retention, and attainment across the study programme.

The Diversity of Enrichment

The University of Derby research has developed an emerging typology of enrichment that shows the diversity of enrichment purposes, organisation and evaluation. This is a useful starting point to understand the variety of enrichment activities that are made available to learners in an institution as well as define individual activities in terms of their intent, implementation and impact.



This typology could inform a national framework for enrichment. Further research is required on the range of approaches needed across each of these themes that a high-quality enrichment programme should address and how this is shaped by the context of the provider and their learner community.

Evaluating Enrichment

The research highlights that **“the diversity of enrichment activities can be defined as successful by educational criteria, by broader societal considerations or in terms of student approval”**. One of the themes to emerge from the report is the absence of clear expectations about what enrichment should provide and what constitutes ‘good’ enrichment.

There is a clear need for a strategic approach to enrichment, both nationally and locally, which can promote flexibility, choice and success. This needs to be supported by a framework of evaluative measures.

Any evaluation of the impact of enrichment needs to be based on clear success criteria which could include:

- clear aims that strengthen and/or complement those of study programmes;
- the extent of learner participation and engagement;
- learner feedback about the impact on their skills and attributes;
- feedback from employers/stakeholders/external partners;
- Evidence of outcomes, including: events, performances, reports, artifacts, a record of achievement mapping learner engagement and its contribution to their development.



Next Steps

Enrichment has a long history and is recognised as beneficial in the DfE study programme guidance and the Ofsted inspection framework. This project describes how the various possibilities of enrichment are being taken up in colleges. It has drawn attention to excellent practice, as well as challenges, and shows how the best examples could be built on in various ways. It has also shown the vital role enrichment has often played in supporting learners over the last three years, in the face of the pandemic and the challenges of recovery.

The research project is engaging further with providers to learn from, support and share the best of their practice, as well as contributing to a deeper understanding of the scope, dimensions and potential of enrichment activity. Many colleges are now looking to rebuild their enrichment offer after the pandemic with a new awareness of the possibilities.

The government and sector bodies should now take the opportunity to support these developments with guidance, resources and capacity development to help provide a richer and more meaningful educational experience for all post-16 learners.

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