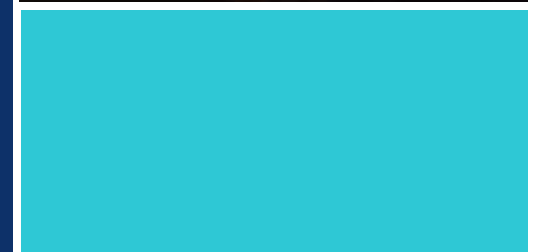




Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

'FREEDOM FROM' and 'FREEDOM TO': A devolved social partnership model of governance

Ken Spours
www.ioe.ac.uk



Context



- Debates about self-regulation in the FE sector
- Machinery of Government agenda
- DCSF/DIUS split and problematical position of the governance of FE Local Authorities taking control of
- Local Authorities taking control of 14-19 and London's city region agenda
- The 'New Localism' and more democratic view about public service reform (Lawson 2005)

Argument

Conditions exist for the FE Sector to shift from a 'marketised model' based on '*freedom from*' to a 'devolved social partnership model' based on '*freedom to*'.

‘Freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’



From Lawrence Pratchett on local autonomy and democracy
(2004)

- ‘Freedom from’ = top-down view; autonomy as *‘primarily about freedom from higher authorities’*
- ‘Freedom to’ = focussed on powers to act collectively to improve outcomes locally and regionally

Self regulation as 'freedom from'

- Greatly simplified regulatory landscape
- Reduced and eventually minimal bureaucracy
- Lighter touch and proportionate monitoring and inspection
- More strategic, rather than operational, roles for the Department and the LSC
- Freedoms from the planning infrastructure for the most effective providers
- Rationalisation of the qualifications system and streamlining administration for all qualifications

Self regulation and 'freedom to'



Some aspects of the 'freedom to' agenda are to be found in the self-regulation agenda, for example, the Sector:

- assumes direct accountability for performance;
- should 'own', communicate and effect change more innovatively and creatively;
- Improvement is based on building institutional capacity: partnership networks, peer support, sharing good practice.

Devolved social partnership & the triple shift



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Realising 'freedom to' means developing a devolved social partnership model

This involves a 'triple shift' to rebalance national, regional and local governance within a framework of democratic innovation and reform

1. New concepts of national policy
2. New forms of collective action within 'local ecologies'
3. Stronger and more integrated city regions

A new approach to national policy



Central government provides the ‘direction of travel’ of policy; a framework for equity and a for for collaboration at regional and local levels (e.g.

- funding stability and proper three-year plans
- movement from policy levers to policy frameworks (Steer *et al.* 2007)
- participative regulatory systems such as credit and qualifications systems, license to practice and local area agreements
- more devolved accountability (lateral and downward as well as upward)
- broader and more bottom-up and collectively developed targets

More ecological local



The concept of a 'local ecology' (Spours *et al.* 2007) recognising that the actions of one provider affects the health of another

Local ecologies are 'scalings' of activities that do not adhere to administrative boundaries (e.g. they may be both bigger and smaller than Local Authority areas)

How is a local ecology managed?

- Role of regional strategic bodies and colleges in relation to sub-regional (mezo) ecologies
- Local authorities and the encouragement of community 'micro' ecologies
- Providing economic and decision-making powers to ecology-based partnerships

Stronger integrated regions



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

- Stronger and more strategic regional bodies with greater powers to plan and integrate horizontally across a city region
- Some providers (e.g. FE colleges) will embrace several ecologies from local, sub-regional and regional
- London may well be a test-bed because of its strengthening city/regional identity and the role of the Mayor and the London Skills and Employment Board

Implications for improvement in the Sector



Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

'FREEDOM FROM'	'FREEDOM TO'
<i>Focus</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous institutions; self assessment and peer review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area-based, recognising the interdependence of local ecologies
<i>Drivers</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer but more focussed standards, targets and key performance indicators; public service reform model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More scope for local areas to develop longer-term improvement strategies that support 'communities of practice'
<i>Conditions</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National standards effective at removing worst provision; but danger of stifling innovation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that diversity of provision and approaches is a healthy basis for innovation

Implications for improvement (cont.)

'FREEDOM FROM'	'FREEDOM TO'
<i>Accountability</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer, streamlined (yet stronger?) top-down accountability between providers, Sector and government; limited area accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual accountability relationships based on devolved social partnership model; greater focus on accountability within areas
<i>Structures</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalised system: regulatory functions transferred from without to within the Sector; emerging importance of regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebalancing of national, regional, sub-regional and local relationships; decision-making much closer to providers

References



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

- Lawson, N. (2005) *Dare more democracy: From steam-age politics to democratic self-government*. Compass
(<http://www.compassonline.org.uk/publications.asp> accessed 2 January 2007)
- Pratchett, L. (2004) 'Local Autonomy, Local Democracy and the 'New Localism'' *Political Studies* 52, 358-375
- Spours, K., Coffield, F. and Gregson, M. (2007) Mediation, translation and local ecologies: understanding the impact of policy levers on FE colleges *Journal of Education and Training*, Vol 59, No 2 (July)
- Steer, R. (2007) *Self regulation as 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' Implications for improvement in the FE sector* Paper for QIA/IoE Seminar, Institute of Education, 2 November
- Steer R., Spours, K., Hodgson, A., Finlay, I., Coffield, F., Edward, S. and Gregson, M. (2007) 'Modernisation' and the Role of Policy Levers in the Learning and Skills Sector', *Journal of Education and Training*, Vol 59, No 2 (July)