

On the Roles and Relations of Further Education Colleges in England

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For an international audience

1. an introductory outline
2. some history
3. an argument
4. some illustration
5. a word on research



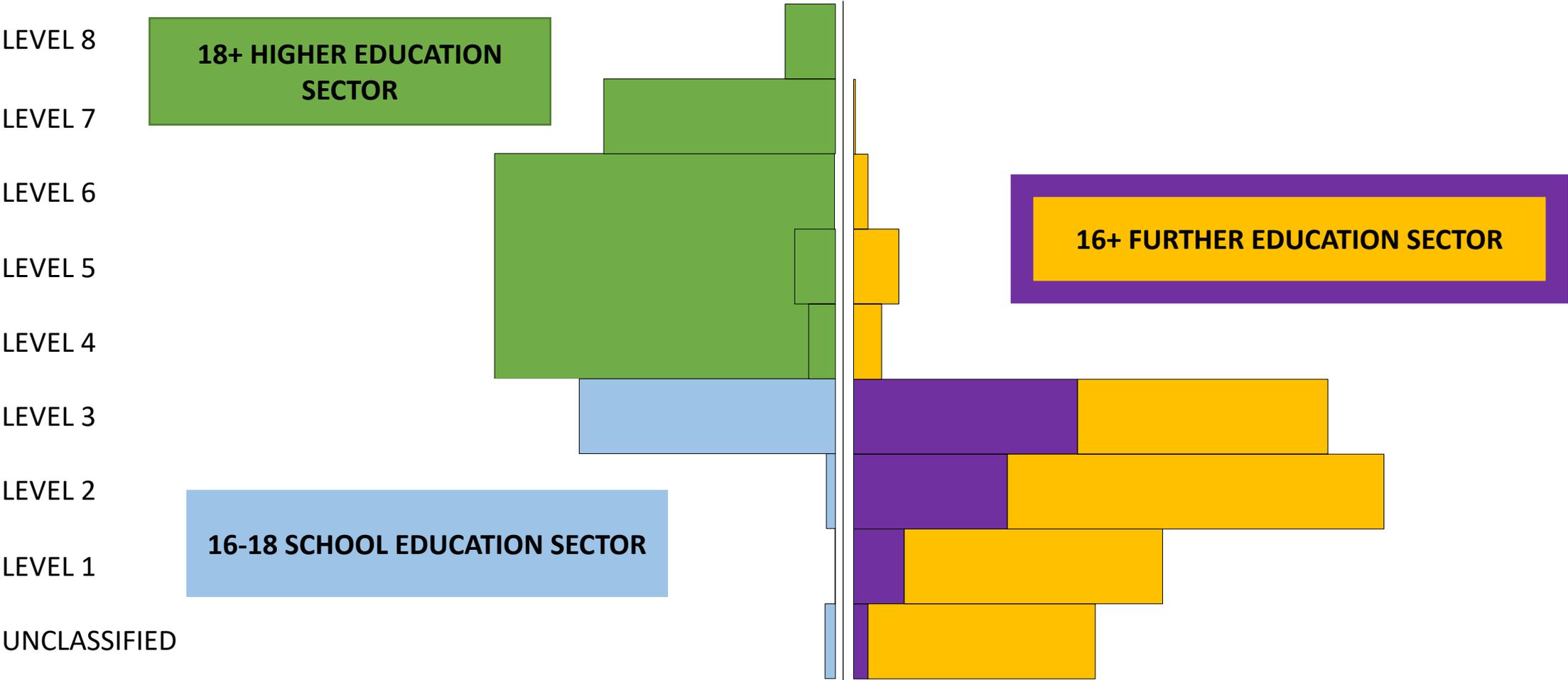
England and its present-day colleges

- colleges = not schools, universities, training organisations
- three college types in a further education sector:
 1. general further education colleges/college groups [161]
 - multi-purpose, multi-level, mixed-mode, all-age
 - larger than schools, smaller than universities
 - disproportionate share of disadvantaged + second chance students**
 - lower level of public funding + generally lower standing
 - social, community, economic roles
 2. sixth form colleges [74]
 3. specialist and designated institutions [23]
- formally independent, centrally regulated

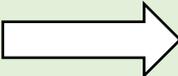
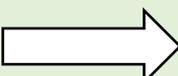
Colleges: qualification levels and types

- 8 Doctorate
- 7 Master's degree
- 6 Bachelor's degree + degree apprenticeship
- 5 HND, FD + higher apprenticeship
- 4 HNC + higher apprenticeship
- 3 A level, applied general, T level, access + advanced apprenticeship
- 2 GCSE, functional skills, ESOL + intermediate apprenticeship
- 1 First certificate, essential skills, ESOL
- E Skills for life

England: A public three-sector post-16 system



Further education: from a system to a sector

	Pre-1980s		Post-1990s
Mission	<i>vocational</i>		<i>plural</i>
Governance	<i>municipal</i>		<i>independent</i>
Organisation	<i>stratified</i>		<i>segmented</i>
Policy	<i>coordination</i>		<i>competition</i>
Credo	<i>alternative</i>		<i>responsive</i>

An argument (of sorts)

Two contentions:

[1] colleges/college groups = now less a different or distinctive education, more a delivery organisation

[2] colleges/college groups = now less an alternative route, more a provider of last resort

Boundary overlaps: with schools

Competition with school sixth forms for:

- 'academic' (A level) qualifications
- 'applied general' (BTEC) qualifications
- progression of young people to higher education

Remediation role for colleges:

- school-leavers with weak or fail grades in qualifications
- 14-16 compulsory age ('high needs') students

Boundary overlaps: with universities

Competition with (modern) universities:

- sub-bachelor qualifications + 'top-up' degrees
- preparatory programmes ('foundation years')

Joint current involvement in 'institutes of technology'

Dependent role for colleges: validation + sub-contracting

Degree awarding powers for handful of colleges

Boundary overlaps: with private providers

Competition with for-profit providers for:

- apprenticeship training
- bespoke education + training
- undergraduate qualifications (mostly in London)
- professional qualifications

Boundary overlaps: with community providers

Allocation of funds from adult education budget (devolved in mayoral authorities) between:

- colleges
- local authorities
- charities

Wide range of areas, from employability skills to learning for leisure

Halving of funding since 2010 = 50% fall in numbers at L2, 33% at L3

Return of the alternative route [1]

A government skills plan (2016) for the creation of a two-type post-16 system:

‘academic’ track = A level to undergraduate degree

‘technical’ (alternative) route = T level to higher technical education by way of ‘college-based’ courses + apprenticeships

Return of the alternative route [2]

An economic (human capital) case for reform, with a social ('one nation') + regional ('levelling up') imperative:

'the chance of a lifetime of sustained and skilled employment'

- criticism of forms taken by mass higher education
- dismissal of general vocational qualifications
- acknowledgement (*sotto voce*) of policy failures
- rehabilitation of further education colleges

Researching the college contribution

Where to go for individual, social, community and economic impacts?

- official statistics (participation, performance, progression)
- social mobility (birth cohort) studies
- labour market (linked administrative data) studies
- wider benefits of learning (qualitative and quantitative) studies
- college ethnographies + case studies

But where to find and judge the collective contribution of colleges?

Acknowledgements

Carl Flint

Julian Gravatt, Association of Colleges

Geeta Halai, Association of Colleges