The College and the Vision

With more than 40,000 students and over 1,300 staff, Leeds City College is one of the largest Further Education Colleges in the country. For a college of this size and in such a vibrant region to be successful, it needs a big strategic vision, and this is exactly what Colin Booth has been attempting to drive since his appointment as Principal & Chief Executive in October 2015. Noted by Ofsted as a “programme of culture change to raise standards leading to students’ enjoyment, development and success,” the College has developed a five-year strategic plan which includes the commitment to:

- Inspire students to succeed by providing excellent learning through a personalised student learning journey
- Build effective partnerships enhancing our reputation as a lead deliverer of all vocational and work-based learning
- Provide products and services designed to meet local and regional skills needs
- Apply innovative solutions that seek commercial opportunities to support educational priorities

Serving the Needs of a Dynamic Region

Leeds City Region is undoubtedly one of the most dynamic and fast changing economic environments in the country, and through the devolution deal there is bound to be even more changes in the employment and skills landscape over the coming months and years. Though it already has excellent relationships with employers and businesses across the Leeds City Region, the College recognises the need to significantly up its game if it is to continue to meet local economic and employment demand.
Critical to answering these challenges is the ability of the College to understand both its position in the skills market and the needs of local and regional employers. Why is this critical? Well, without really understanding what the skills needs are and how the College is currently meeting those needs, the claim to be a “provider of products and services designed to meet local and regional skills needs” is bound to sound a little hollow. Whereas with a broad and in-depth knowledge of the local and regional labour market, meeting the needs of local businesses and helping to drive the creation of a better skilled and more productive workforce becomes a real possibility.

Understanding Regional Skills Needs

Wanting to get a better understanding of the skills needs of the local and regional economy is one thing; actually getting a better understanding is another. To answer this need, the College brought in Emsi’s online data tool, Analyst, at the end of 2015. The College was already well acquainted with the tool’s data capabilities, having previously commissioned various consulting reports from Emsi, including a Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) report which was used to support Bid Development activity; an Economic Impact Study; and a Curriculum Audit assessing the College’s curriculum against the demand for jobs and skills in priority sectors.

What marks Analyst out as unique is its ability to delve down to the most granular levels of industry and occupation data, and at the most granular geographic levels. It is this vital level of detail that provides the kinds of solutions the College was looking for in its attempts to better understand and react to the needs of the region.

Rachel Mather, the College’s Research & Bid Development Manager, sees Analyst as a vital part of the College’s efforts of rising to the skills challenges in the region:

“We will be using Analyst to explore the changing economic dynamics within our catchment area, such as industry and occupation growth/decline, and to create a skills offer which is underpinned by a clear evidence base. Analyst data will support the development of a skills portfolio which offers responsive, dynamic and highly relevant training to provide the labour market with suitably skilled individuals to sustain long term economic growth.”

Rachel also sees the tool as playing a critical part in the College’s long-term strategic vision, with its forecast data able to give them a window on the future skills needs in the regional economy:

“Our focus is not only on the present workforce but proactively planning for future industry and sector skills needs. As a result, intelligence generated from Analyst will form a vital crux of our discussions with employers regarding curriculum reform, design and collaboration to devise new skills solutions.”

Since investing in the tool, the College’s Business Development & Employer Engagement Unit has developed a big vision for maximising its use. This includes a comprehensive
action plan to ensure effective cross-College implementation of the tool, so that evidence-based intelligence becomes a fundamental component of all curriculum and strategic planning activities.

Having invested in Analyst, Leeds City College have set out some ambitious plans to maximise its use, both in terms of the College’s outward-facing operations, and also internally. The implementation plan and associated marketing and communications strategy for the tool are impressive, and show that the College sees clearly huge potential in harnessing Analyst’s wealth of data.

**Curriculum Planning**

One of the more obvious applications of Analyst is in curriculum planning, not least because the tool has a dedicated curriculum planning function. In the context of future potential cuts in the Adult Skills Budget, the College intends to use the data to analyse their current curriculum offer against jobs, openings and projected changes, in order to evidence where there is alignment, where there are gaps, and therefore where the College should focus and grow the curriculum to better align with current and future market demand for skills. This is not just a theoretical exercise, however, and since bringing the tool into the College at the end of 2015, it has already been used to underpin a gap analysis of the College’s 19+ curriculum offer.
Business Planning & Bid Development

Curriculum planning is perhaps one of the more readily apparent uses of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) in colleges, but Leeds have also seen huge potential in business planning and bid development. The data is being used to gain a high-level overview of the regional economy in terms of jobs, earnings, population, imports and exports, with this information being used to help in business planning activities. In addition to this, the College also sees big potential for using data on labour market demand and future skills needs to underpin key funding bids. As with curriculum planning, this is not just a “nice idea” furthermore Leeds City College has specifically used Analyst to gather significant intelligence to support bid development.

Employer Engagement

Although the College already has good links with local businesses, it recognises the need to do more to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) achieve their growth ambitions, to sustain strong collaborative links with the network of micro businesses across the city region, and to add value to existing relationships with large employers. Analyst is seen as a vital part of this, with a number of applications:

1. Identifying employers that align with the College’s targeted engagement activities (i.e. growth industries & occupations).
2. Providing intelligence regarding the skills profile and claimant counts at industry or occupation level, in order to give the College opportunities to help employers better understand the skills profile of their recruitment area and the potential future workforce.
3. Examining projected industry and occupation change will put the College in a stronger position to support and inform mid-long term business and recruitment strategies by enabling greater alignment with labour market and industry projections.

Apprenticeships

The traditional method colleges have taken to increase their apprenticeship provision has tended to be somewhat of a scattergun approach, with many admitting that their procedures have involved simply picking up a business phone book and ringing through it. However, in the light of the Government’s ambitious plans to deliver three million apprenticeships across the country by 2020, this kind of procedure is just not going to deliver the goods.

Recognising the need to get smarter, the Business Development & Employer Engagement team have implemented a strategy which they believe will enable them to liaise closely with the College’s supply chain and broker new relationships with businesses to develop a pipeline of employers that they can support with apprenticeships. By deriving intelligence on occupations and industries that are set to grow, and then identifying the key employers in these growth sectors, the team is in a much better position to initiate discussions with businesses regarding...
the skills and qualities apprentices can contribute towards their growth ambitions.

**Marketing and Recruitment**
The applications above are all really focused on enhancing the College’s contribution to growth and productivity in the region, yet although they are all undoubtedly crucial, the College is aware that real success depends not just on having better-aligned courses, or better employer engagement, but on attracting people onto those better aligned courses. If demand data can be used to establish that the College needs to put on courses in a particular area, it can also be used to attract people onto those courses by showing them, from the demand, that it is likely to lead them into a sustainable career, and the College is currently setting out plans to use data on job demand, job forecasts and wages to market its courses.

**LMI Hub**
The Business Development & Employer Engagement team have created an online data hub, which is intended to lead the curation of emerging national, regional and local intelligence relating to the supply of skills, employment, devolution, policy, and priority sectors. The hub is accessible by all staff throughout the College and is updated daily by the Research & Bid Coordinator. All College directors also receive a monthly e-shot providing a brief account of the reports and publications that have been uploaded to the portal over the preceding month.

**Key LMI Leads**
Members of the College’s Business Development & Employer Engagement team have been appointed as key Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) leads and assigned to work with different departments throughout the College. Their role is
to help faculty directors identify how LMI can support and enhance their specific operational and strategic planning activities. For instance, the Key LMI leads provide directors with:

• Continuous 1-1 support, advice and information regarding what Market Intelligence (MI)Analyst can provide, with a view to embedding MI across curriculum and service areas.

• A quarterly 1-1 discussion to fill any knowledge gaps and identify emerging trends or developments, in order to put in place effective strategies and underpin future curriculum planning and programme design.

• Quarterly e-updates regarding how other internal stakeholders and FE Colleges are using Analyst to share best practice and instigate additional internal use.

**Customised Faculty LMI Reports**

Part of the role of the key LMI leads is to partner with faculty directors to inform the production of a quarterly curriculum/business report. The directors lead the discussions regarding their planning activities, with the Key LMI leads providing answers and information on how Analyst data can be used to underpin curriculum or business planning. As the process evolves, the quarterly 1:1 discussions will be used to assess impact, return on investment, lessons learned, successes and achievements, and this in turn will inform PR and evaluation activities.

**Emerging Trends Reports**

The Business Development & Employer Engagement team are intending to issue bi-monthly emerging trends reports, which will include an overview of key developments within the Leeds City Region labour market. Utilising key LMI from Analyst and other intelligence gathered by the Business Development & Employer Engagement Unit, the reports will cover areas such as inward investment, business growth, mergers and acquisitions, infrastructure plans and key developments concerning major employers, and priority sectors with links to recently published reports looking at skills, training and emerging workforce needs.

According to the College’s Research and Bid Development Manager, Rachel Mather:

“The hope is that faculty directors will use this information to aid their understanding of the local labour market and shape future provision accordingly to meet projected and forecast needs.”

**Annual Report**

In addition to the customised faculty reports and emerging trends reports, the Business Development & Employer Engagement team are also intending to produce an annual LMI report for the whole College. The aim of the report will be to aid understanding of how the College is responding to the needs of the local labour market and will include:

• An analysis of labour market demand in the Leeds City Region compared to the output of students.
• A curriculum audit/gap analysis comparing course-related sectors with occupations in the region.
• Key recommendations.

**Careers Guidance**

The uses of Analyst above are all geared towards supporting staff, yet there is also recognition in the College of the huge potential for supporting students with data. Through the Student Services team, the College aims to provide its students with key intelligence on a range of careers, including skills and competency requirements, projected earnings, and annual openings. Data from Analyst is set to inform discussions with students to ensure that significant career decisions are centred on tangible evidence and projected market demands.

We mentioned the huge potential Leeds City College has identified for using Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) in its funding bids. The idea behind this is twofold: using data to identify areas of growth where the College might bid for funds, and secondly using the data in the proposal itself in order to lend a more scientific and credible foundation to the application.

The College took this approach earlier this year as part of a transnational bid for funding from Erasmus+ for KA1 Mobility for VET Learners & Staff. The project aims to provide transnational placements for Leeds City College staff and students, and incorporates a number of curriculum areas, the majority of which either fall within the Leeds City Region priority growth sectors or are some of the largest employment sectors in Leeds City Region. In April, the College was pleased to hear that their application had been accepted, with a total of €650,000 in funding secured (approximately £500,000).

According to Rachel Mather, the College’s Research and Bid
Development Manager, data from the tool was used to demonstrate how the College links EU placement opportunities with UK national and regional market demand, in order to develop both the employability skills and in-demand skills of students to prepare them for relevant employment opportunities. She comments:

“This helps our students gain an advantage in the UK labour market, as they will have not only the relevant qualifications, but also appropriate knowledge and customer care skills to enable them to work constructively across growth vocational areas.”

The bid also referenced Analyst data in response to a question on how the project would impact the participants, participating organisations and target groups. This commitment to demonstrating impact with good, solid evidence appears to have impressed the bid assessors who commented:

“The application provides strong contextual evidence for the need for the project and how it fits within an established set of processes and procedures ... the external impact at all levels has been comprehensively explained.”

More specifically, Analyst data was used in the bid to show how aligning opportunities with growth sectors gives the College the ability to:

- Give students a competitive advantage through skills acquisition to support high growth industries and in-demand occupations.
- Support localised and regional economic growth through supplying suitably skilled candidates with relevant industry and occupation work experience.
- Work with EU partners to ensure the curriculum and work experience offer meets the demand across participating countries.

EMSI have stated that through out its work with Leeds City College it has seen some of the most innovative and effective uses of LMI in the FE sector. For the College’s Business Development & Employer Engagement Unit, local and regional data is not so much a necessity as it is an opportunity: an opportunity to improve both internal and external operations; an opportunity to open up and explore new avenues; and ultimately an opportunity to provide a more holistic and more joined up service for the thousands of students, employers and other stakeholders in this dynamic region.