

A think piece



**Talking to leaders about spiritual leadership:
seeing it through to the shadows**

157 Group

The 157 Group represents 29 of the most influential colleges in the FE sector. It was formed in 2006 in response to paragraph 157 of Sir Andrew Foster's report on the future of further education colleges, in which he argued that principals of large, successful colleges should play a greater role in policymaking.

The 157 Group offers a UK-wide view of educational practice and policy development. Its member colleges are large, have a range of specialisms, identify their core function as securing and delivering the highest quality of teaching and learning and are strategic leaders in their locality.

The 157 Group exists to serve its members and to be at the leading edge of the sector more widely in terms of thought leadership, practice improvement and policy influence. It focuses on the areas of vocational teaching and learning, strategic influence and economic impact and employer engagement and advocacy.

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Author

Mary Myatt.

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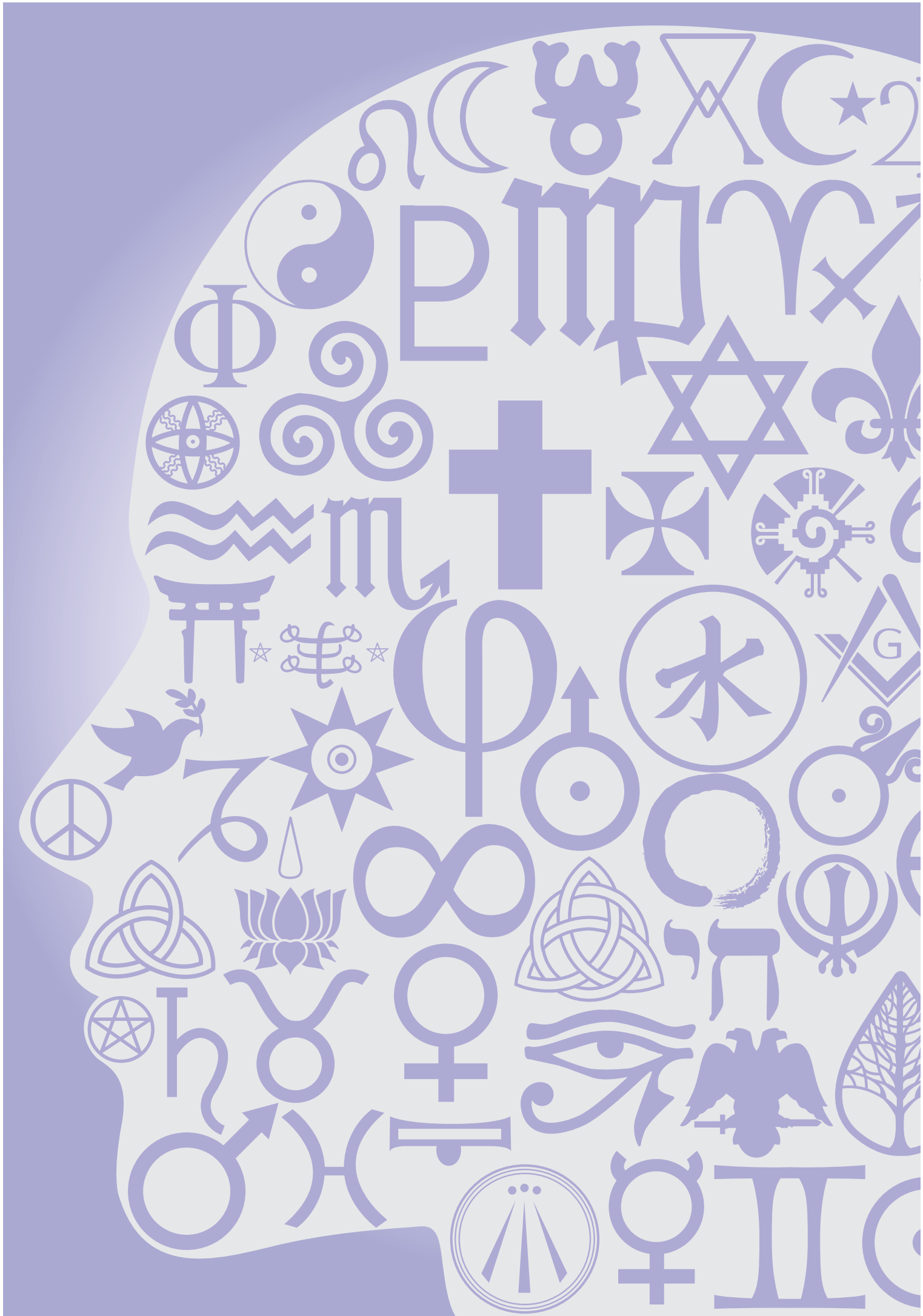
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Foreword

This document builds on various initiatives carried out over many years on values, faith and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) inquiry within the further education sector. It expands the existing debate into the vital realm of leadership and raises questions about the nature, role and prevalence of values, faith and spirituality in FE college leadership.

We wanted to know whether spiritual issues were important to college principals personally, and if so, whether they influenced their strategic leadership and behaviours. We also wanted to know whether principals believed their values, faith or spirituality actually made a difference to the success of their organisations, and if so, how?

Following some informal discussions, it became clear that there was interest in this topic and so we commissioned the interviews contained in this think piece on behalf of the 157 Group and the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education (fbfe).

There exists a legacy of work and research¹ in the FE sector, which argues that learners, lecturers and leaders thrive where all have a voice; where their work is connected to a higher purpose; and when they work in environments that honour their beliefs and values. The recent *Schools with Soul* publication by the RSA has brought such issues to attention in the schools sector.

The interviews in this paper are organised into 15 themes articulated by our 11 leaders, to whom we are deeply grateful for the depth of their honesty, openness, sincerity and wisdom. The interviews were carried out by Mary Myatt, a highly experienced consultant in the arena of faith and spirituality, with remarkable sensitivity and intellectual rigour, for which we are grateful.

We hope other sector leaders find these interviews interesting and stimulating and that this paper opens a new discourse within FE on values, faith and spirituality and their relationship to high performance and student success.

Dr Lynne Sedgmore CBE
Executive Director
157 Group

Dr John Wise
Chief Executive
fbfe

1 See References.



Introduction

Spiritual leadership is not normally top of the agenda. So this project set out to provide a space for FE leaders to articulate the values that underpin their ways of working. All those interviewed lead good and outstanding colleges serving up to 30,000 students. Interviews were carried out with 11 leaders from colleges across the country.

The interviews set out to find out whether spiritual values underpin their leadership and if so, how these might be visible in their settings. Principals were asked questions about personal beliefs and values and how these are expressed. We asked them to describe not just their personal ways of working but also to consider the formal structures and the extent to which paying attention to spirituality might add value to student experiences and outcomes.

What emerged as a strong feature of all those interviewed was a clear line of purpose, which starts with the individual leader, feeding into the processes and structures, influencing others working with them and feeding into every aspect of college life. Several were very clear that clarity of personal values, translated into practice, were absolutely fundamental to moving their settings from requiring improvement to becoming good or outstanding. What was evident in discussion with these leaders was that their commitment and moral purpose, while crucial to bringing about improvements, was expressed in terms of humility and service rather than as an ego-boosting exercise. It was evident that these leaders spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on relationships and place a high premium on high-quality communication. They value colleagues and students as whole people and are constantly asking themselves what they need to do to empower colleagues to deliver on values.

There are a number of significant themes that emerge from these interviews: all are absolutely clear that outcomes for students are a top priority and these are non-negotiable. Linked to this is that accountability measures cannot be compromised because substantial public funds are being deployed to make a difference to the lives and prospects of learners. They look at every opportunity to maximise added value: results matter. It could be argued that these would be named as priorities for all leading large public sector settings. However, these leaders placed these priorities in a very personal mission, which is informed by their beliefs and values, and as a result they believe that talking about values is important.

Senior leaders and their teams promote vision, values and ethos through their leadership. And what follows from this is that there is a focus on the development of the whole person for all engaged in college work. These FE leaders express a strong sense of service and believe it is a privilege to be working and leading in the FE sector. They know they are not perfect, but say that their values help them to rebalance. These leaders are clear that spiritual values in their widest sense translate into college structures and processes, and they have a clear view about the space of spirituality, faith or belief issues in their colleges. Many emphasise the role of chaplaincy and college pastors in their settings. They ensure that their colleges promote opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development for their students. And most interestingly, these leaders make the link between their values and the success of their colleges. Above all, they believe actions speak louder than words.

There were strong parallels between the principles articulated by these leaders and those of the 'triple bottom line', which are framed around people, planet and profit. While this exercise did not explore questions of sustainability, there were strong links with the balance of people and profit. In other words, while the 'profit' or accountability aspects were top of the agenda, these were balanced equally with the commitment to making sure their organisations are vibrant communities that honour the needs of all who work there. And what was clear was that all those interviewed were clear that it was the balance of people and accountability that made them good and outstanding settings.



“ We ask ourselves: ‘If this were your child, your brother or sister, what would you want the college to do about it? How would you want them to be treated?’ ”

Themes highlighted

1. Outcomes for students are top priority

All those interviewed expressed their values clearly. Whether from a faith perspective or not, these were all underpinned by the notion of fairness, justice and the 'golden rule'.²

What was also made very clear was that these values did not water down these leaders' robust commitment to standards. So, for instance, underperformance is tackled head-on; challenging conversations are held with those who need to be held to account. But what appears to be a distinctive feature of these conversations is that leaders strive to leave the integrity of the individual intact. They focus on the performance and behaviour of what needs to improve, rather than the person. And when redundancies and contracts need to be ended, they do not avoid difficult conversations, but take care that these are done sensitively. The overarching principle is that difficult decisions need to be taken in order to maintain or improve standards.



We are one team and have one goal – to be of service to learners. Senior leaders are role models for the values and when it doesn't happen they are challenged. The college has moved away from a 'command and control' ethos to one that is inclusive and models values from the top. We have moved away from a staff-centric culture to one focused on the students. We ask ourselves: 'If this were your child, your brother or sister, what would you want the college to do about it? How would you want them to be treated?'"



It is what motivates me in making decisions, designing a vision for whatever the learner needs, changing lives for the better. When I take it back to theology, it is about doing the very best so that my judgements result in actions that mean others can flourish. I always talk about the importance of considering the impact of whatever we do on others. Transformation comes from transforming the lives of individuals. I am in the job for a purpose and to change lives. While I am grateful for the remuneration, I feel privileged to work with many who are disadvantaged in society. This reflects the Christian focus on meeting the needs of the poorest in society and this is a motivating factor in shaping my leadership."



As the principal I am held to account and this is one way to ensure values embedded. The executive is also held to account through four elements: students, people, processes and resources, finances."



We articulate that we are here to make students' experience as exceptional as possible. As a result, strategic planning is based on what is necessary for their success, not ours. Our primary focus is to unlock the talents of students."



Students are at centre of everything, they were involved in designing new building, entrepreneurial skills encouraged, logo, see materials visible. They have opportunities for shaping the college, both in terms of the physical environment and in terms of procedures. Students' success is visible."



I recognise that we have a large number of students and staff, some of whom have a particular faith, some have no faith and some are anti-faith. I have to understand how to form relationships, to have an enquiring mind and to understand and respect what shapes them. All these qualities should be part of leadership – respect, tolerance and listening are all leadership qualities and I work to spread these across the college. Our last Ofsted report said that there were high levels of harmony, tangible evidence of the way things are done here."

2 The golden rule or ethic of reciprocity is a maxim, ethical code or morality that essentially states that one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself, or that one should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated.

2. Accountability measures cannot be compromised

All leaders were crystal clear that they are public servants and that their job is to ensure that their colleges are well run; to create the conditions for their learners to succeed; to meet financial targets; and to meet all statutory requirements.

They know that the quality of what they do is held to account by external agencies and is scrutinised by Ofsted. What they articulate is an elegant alignment of spiritual values and hard-nosed pursuit of high-quality outcomes. What appears to characterise their way of working is that spiritual values underpin how they achieve their goals.



These values shape my approach to college strategic leadership hugely. It is not about money or just statistics, it is as much about what we do to ensure that the college experience is positive, that cultural and faith values are expressed and shared.”



My Christian values mean that I work to treat people fairly, to be inclusive and to value individuals. This does not mean that I avoid problems. We also have to run a business and sometimes people are in the wrong place, but it is essential to deal with them fairly.”



I focus on personal accountability and responsibility and believe in the importance of communicating effectively about what can be done to improve. This is done through student discussion groups and student associations. I operate an open-door policy and have regular drop-in sessions. I believe that values should come from the bottom up.”



Where there are difficult issues such as restructuring, competency or other grey areas, then I try to do the right thing based on my principles.”



People, not strategies, make things happen. My values are framed around fairness, innovation, enterprise and creativity. It feeds into the climate in the college and into the quality of relationships. How we behave feeds into what we do – this is through fostering excellence, modelling values and working together to deliver high-quality results.”



Our beliefs permeate our vision and we make sure our discussions about our vision across the college are informal. It is not purely symbolic – we have changed our leadership roles and now have organisational development instead of HR. This is an attempt to signify that we are a learning organisation. We are the custodians of public funds for the community. If we don't change, then we are likely to be an island. We are asking ourselves how we recruit for the future and how we encourage some of our students to become teachers to reflect the communities we serve.”

3. Talking about values is important

All expressed spiritual values in terms that reflect their deepest-held beliefs. Whether these are religious, or not, these values are personalised and expressed as foundations for conducting the business of running a large enterprise.

What was clear was that these leaders had reworked and reframed their values into highly personal perspectives. Many talked about how their values have been shaped by their upbringing and outlook on life and they made it clear that these were organic rather than static. One common thread was that whether these leaders had a personal faith or not, they stripped it down to the core essence and it was this that informed their ways of working.

All those interviewed were happy to be asked about their spiritual values. While some identified their values with their religious beliefs, others talked about the fact that while they no longer identified with the faith of their upbringing they nevertheless drew on the underlying principles of justice, fairness and seeking the potential in people. Others identified their values without referring to traditional religious beliefs. What we might draw from these responses is that these leaders understand 'spiritual' in its widest sense. This is aligned with the way that 'spiritual' is interpreted by Ofsted, namely the "beliefs, religious or otherwise which inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's feelings and values". While the Ofsted definition relates to learners, it is not unreasonable to extend this definition of spirituality to leaders.



I am agnostic, but my personal beliefs are critical and I regard my career as one of public service. This is one of the best sectors to deliver equality and to inspire learners: public service can be the glue for communities."



There is a residue of moral fibre that shapes my values, even though I do not accept all the teachings of my faith."



Spiritual values are very important to me, as a framework for life. It is a privilege to lead the college and I believe I have a duty to make a difference."



My values are informed by my Jewish faith and although I am no longer observant, my beliefs are still informed by Jewish values in terms of how I treat other people."



I am a practising churchgoer and faith is important to me personally. But I believe it is important to use it wisely. It is one thing for me to have a strong belief, but many students and colleagues come to the college with different faith backgrounds and I recognise and respect this. My attitude to my work flows from my faith."



Spiritual values are personally very significant. I have been a practising Christian for as long as I can remember. Everyone knows this, but I am careful not to bombard other people. My faith provides calm and strength through the day."



Spiritual values are not explicit, but I draw on them to inform my practice."



I am agnostic, but my personal beliefs inform my view that it is critical to get the values right. These are based on right or wrong, good or bad, and underpin my career is public service. I believe this is one of the best sectors to deliver and inspire learners."



It is an important part of who I am and affects every part of my work. It is a critical part of my Christian calling."



I don't have a personal faith, but I believe in spirituality in the biggest sense of the word – as human beings connected to one another. As such, we have a responsibility for one another's growth. Not everything is tangible and intuition and empathy are important.”



There is a residue of moral fibre from my upbringing and I still believe in something that shapes strong values.”



I don't describe myself as overtly religious, but for some time I have been thinking about what it is that makes my college a good one and what it is that underpins the values we have. People have a lot of faith and trust in me and know that I am committed to doing the right thing and following through. I am genuinely interested in exploring what makes a good college. As I started to talk this through, I realised that there were a lot of values in my upbringing and thinking that are based around Christian values and beliefs. I don't go to church: I have faith that I will make the right decisions and will be guided. As a result, I joined fbfe because I was interested in finding out about more about this. I am on a journey personally.”

4. **There is a focus on the development of the whole person for all engaged in college work**

All those interviewed made it clear that while students' achievement matters, they are equally determined to create the conditions for developing the whole person.

This was often expressed as students and staff having the opportunity to shape policies and to have opportunities to make a contribution both to the college and its community.



People matter, students matter. A mission without people in it is abstract and won't work. I believe everyone deserves a second chance and that everyone can improve. Our community deserves nothing less than being outstanding.”



I encourage contributions from all involved in college life. I want them to have influence, to share ideas and to have a sense of personal agency.”



People, not strategies, make things happen. Our thinking is framed around fairness, innovation, enterprise and creativity and feeds into the climate in the college and into relationships.”



I try to articulate that we are here to make students' experience as exceptional as possible. As a result, our strategic governing document and objectives set out what is necessary for their success, not ours. This is backed up with a set of values that are all-encompassing. We are here to unlock the talents of students.”



We are aiming for a rounded education and believe it is important that our students acquire skills in a competitive market. They need to be able to contribute to society as employees and as future leaders in the community and in business.”





Learner services brings different groups together and the feedback we get is that students feel that the college belongs to them. Human interaction is absolutely critical and must go beyond technology. We know that it is not always easy and occasionally we need to make sure that the ground rules for meeting together, discussion and debate are understood.”



Our vision is to be inclusive for our 19,000 students: for example, we will make a point of adapting the curriculum and physical space to meet the needs of a particular learner. This is a way of living out our values. We are developing the students to take their place in society and be the best possible citizens. We run ethics groups so that students can discuss difficult issues. We see this as part of the enrichment programme and the chaplain plays an important role in this.”



Our values are reflected through our mission, our vision and our values statement, which are revisited regularly. We focus on PRIDE – people, responsibility, integrity, diversity and excellence. These are underpinned by high standards. At the start of the year, students work with staff on the PRIDE features and work out what they will do and how they will behave as a result of engaging with the values.”



The college provides a personal coach for all students through six tutorials. These are based around themes of entrepreneurship and employability, including working with people from different backgrounds. The head of student motivation development shares good practice. All tutors are trained in motivational dialogue, which helps students manage behaviour, learning and working with others. This contributes to wider personal development, including personal beliefs and accommodating those of others. We also have regular programmes relating to awareness of others e.g. LGBT. We recently held ‘Inspiration 2014’ with 1,000 students relating to wider enrichment and values.”



We use learner journeys and make sure we try and see things through the student’s eyes: ‘I came to this college because...’ This leads into our leadership philosophy and what we want to see in the classroom. We work to help students be co-creative, respectful and engaged. As a result, our students take much more of a leadership role.”

5. Actions speak louder than words

There was a great sense that the results of their aspirations need to be seen in a number of arenas, not least in the way individuals go about their business. This was one of the defining characteristics of these leaders, namely that their values, vision and policies need to be evident in the way people treat one another, make commitments to improvements and are prepared to work on these every day.

For example, there were several instances of leaders acknowledging colleagues and students, particularly where they were ‘going the extra mile’ not so much in terms of working harder, but in being collaborative, supportive and embodying the college values. In these cases, short notes and letters are sent, thanking and affirming individuals for their contribution to wider college life. Considering many people receive letters from leaders, the impact of these missives appears to create a powerful virtuous circle, where the values are embedded to a remarkable degree.



We make sure we are living our values. For example, we have a ‘pledge’ wall on our professional development days. These are public and we encourage people to make an affirmation of how to make their contribution to the college the best it can be. As a result, it brings alive some of the aspirations. We encourage one another to be able to explain ‘what we have done to promote team work or inclusivity’. We have recently encouraged all staff to make eye contact with students when out and about in the college.”



It is in our DNA: 'We are nice people'. We aim for a morally correct, respectful place. This college is a good place to be. If we are trying to make the setting a decent place, what are the attributes you need to be working on in order to see this? You end up with spiritual values by default."



We express our vision through respect, by asking rather than telling, being collaborative and cooperating within our teams. This way of working has been recognised at the TES FE awards where we were identified as a 'cutting edge' college. We were named as 'provider of the year' for 2014 and recognised as a tolerant, respectful college."



It is possible to be a humane, caring leader without a faith background. My values influence me hugely in terms of how to do things well. We need honesty in being clear about why we are doing something. Egos can get in the way, and the more senior you are, the more deference you receive and this can result in your ego being polluted. Sometimes we are not aware of it and this is where our values should kick in. It is important to have humility and have our feet on the ground."



In the last four years we have worked hard to remove any sense of blame. We have done this through revisiting our core values and making it clear that one of the roles for the senior leadership team is to listen."



We promote the vision through linking it to performance management, celebration of behaviour that reflects our values. It is part of our recruitment and appraisal processes. We have a cultural programme to develop behaviours for staff. In addition, student charters, leadership opportunities for students such as in chaplaincy teams, youth parliament and disciplinary procedures handled through student committees are all ways of interpreting the vision into practice."

6. **These FE leaders express a strong sense of service and believe it is a privilege to be working and leading in the FE sector**

The commitment to public service was a key feature of the conversations with leaders. They expressed a desire to add value not just to students' lives, but to the wider community. They are often working in areas of high deprivation and see their contexts as opportunities for renewal and hope.



This college serves a variety of communities – transforming communities comes through transforming individuals. While I am grateful for the remuneration, I am not in the job for profit but for a purpose and to change lives. I feel privileged to work with many who are disadvantaged in society. I love my work: it is challenging but worth it. I am so lucky, I have my batteries recharged every day."



I work to make sure my college is committed to fairness, trust and openness."



This is important and we aim to be building on rock rather than sand. These things don't change on their own; together we can create something brilliant. It enables us to keep an eye on what matters. If we have good provision, it helps to create good citizens. We believe it contributes to success, goes hand in hand with data, and when things are going well. Bottom line is the difference we make to learners."



It is critically important. We serve this city. We needed to provide entry-level qualifications because that is what some of our students needed. We are changing lives. This is recognised by Ofsted who commended the high success rates. The college now has people who can change the world. I had to grow my own staff, they now believe they can do anything. I feel a real calling to do this work.”



You, as principal set the tone, the buck stops with you. It is essential to be authentic, believe in values.”



It is a privilege to lead the college and I have a duty to make a difference.”



This is a community and we belong. One size can never fit all and one vision needs to have own colours put on it. People start to believe as one community and that it is worth being here and they will get plenty out of the experience.”

7. They look at every opportunity to maximise added value

A striking feature that emerged from talking with these leaders was the extent to which they affirm those with whom they come in contact.

Many said that recognising those who are showing high levels of commitment was an important aspect of their work. One leader also said that she asks trusted colleagues such as the chaplain to be open to potential areas of difficulty so that these can be addressed. Leaders like these appear to have carefully refined ways of extending their reach and influence.



I write personal letters to staff if they have shown behaviour that reflects our values. We now need to apply that same principles to our 12,000 students if we are to transform from good to outstanding. I believe in the power of small things and acknowledging others as I would like to be treated.”



We promote our values through our actions and making the values lived out. We need to be kind. When people have done something wrong, we try to come from a kind position. We hold to the golden rule that expects people to treat others in the way that they expect the college to treat them. I often say ‘You will be kind!’ and colleagues know where I am coming from. Some of them try and outperform my kindness, even the robust finance director! We provide free lunches for staff and students in recognition for doing the right thing. We notice when staff and students do work above the call of duty, or work which is recognised externally such as volunteering. We know that staff happiness measures are above target. This is significant, bearing in mind that there was significant restructuring two years ago. The governors have staff happiness as one of my performance management targets. This is an indication of how seriously they take it.”

8. Leaders know they are not perfect, but say that their values help them to rebalance

A strong characteristic of these leaders was their openness about not being perfect, that they were still learning and that they actively sought feedback to improve their practice.

Many spoke of providing time both formally in meetings and in informal contexts to ask colleagues for feedback on ways they might work better.



I expect to be challenged, and regularly say 'I am a learner'. We are one team and one goal. We have moved away from a command-and-control ethos to inclusive and modelling from the top. There has been a shift away from a staff-centric culture. I say to myself: 'If this were my child, my brother or sister, what would I want the college to do about it? How would I want them to be treated?'"



I have to understand how to form relationships, to have an enquiring mind, respect and understand what shapes them."



If colleagues have hard messages, I am prepared to change my mind."



I try to lead by example: I am not perfect and I sometimes get it wrong. We have a 360-degree process in place to get rounded feedback. We celebrate acts of kindness."



I know I have a good set of values, that I treat people fairly honestly and build relationships based on trust. When I don't know what to do, I have a real faith and confidence that I will find the right thing to do. This comes from my values. I believe there is a connection and that I am tapping into a deeper wisdom."



It needs honesty in trying to be clear about why you are doing something. Egos can get in the way and the more senior you are and more deference you receive can result in your ego being polluted. Sometimes we not aware of it and this is where values should kick in. Recognising spiritual values means that I don't allow my ego to dominate. I aim for humility, with my feet on ground."



The learning and development culture is underpinned by the principal, who says, 'I am a learner and I regularly expect to be challenged.'"



The future vision needs to be clear, but not so rigid so that other people do not have the chance to influence it."

9. These leaders are clear that the spiritual values translate into college structures and processes

What was clear was that these values do not just remain locked in leaders' heads. They talked about how these become visible through the processes and opportunities provided for learners and staff.

This was evident in two key arenas: first, in the way systems are made explicit around values and time is given to work these through so that staff and learners have ownership of them; and second, the way that SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development is promoted in their settings.



When I took over the college, there was a complete denial of faith and beliefs. We had some difficult tensions in early days with students from different backgrounds and no one had the skills or confidence to address this. The SMSC curriculum had bypassed the college. I believe this is fundamental and as such beliefs and attitudes need to be taken as a template to create a quality organisation. This means creating an open, accessible place for young people to learn and this includes providing a safety net for vulnerable young people. We have created a belief that we can do it. As a result our workplace is more values-driven and humane, and has a shared purpose. There has been an impact on morale and performance.”



Spirituality in its broadest terms does have a place throughout the college. There has been a shift in recent years from when SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) issues were not a part of college life. It is now very different: we want our students know that it is OK to be them. They all need to be allowed to celebrate their faith and to share it in all its aspects. It is not possible to separate people from who they are outside the college.”



The college has five strategic ambitions, which are very clear and well publicised. All staff and students know what they are. We encourage students to do projects in the local community and often these are social enterprises. We also include the on-site nursery in our big projects. The nursery children are very much part of our community.”



I am responsible for two colleges and six schools. SMSC is most evident in the college, which I have led for 10 years, and I am transferring what has been learnt to other settings. This is not a quick piece of work. It takes time and perseverance.”



We have 1,000 staff. Many things are outside our control, for example, the government and competition etc. But what is in our control is how we behave as a community. Behaviours linking back to values are the anchor because they are within an individual's control. I believe the principal and governors are there to manage the external maelstrom. We find this works well and we support one another. Our staff appreciate this. We need to refocus on what we can control and trust that the principal will manage external issues.”



We role model. We nominate outstanding behaviour linked to values, for those colleagues who make a contribution over and beyond what is expected. We expect behaviour to be linked to college values and not just a set of words. We believe it is more important for behaviour to be aligned with values than technical skills, which can be learned. This is built in to performance management structures, because it is too critical to go unnoticed.”



We have a tutor system and the chaplaincy has a role in creating lessons and will also customise tutorials. Ofsted reports have identified this aspect of our provision as a strength, as has [fbfe](#) and [LSIS research on SMSC](#). We see it as part of students' entitlement.”



We inherited some very difficult situations when we merged with another college three years ago – we needed to address some physical and behavioural issues between our students and the local town. As a result we worked with the Ascension Trust and were one of the first colleges to pilot a college pastors programme. We also took on board and applied the recommendations of the fofbe work on SMSC.”



Our values are reflected through our mission, vision and values statement, which are revisited regularly. We focus on PRIDE – people, responsibility, integrity, diversity and excellence. These are led by curriculum areas managers. We run workshops to agree how these will be articulated. These are underpinned by high standards. At the start of the year, students work with staff on the PRIDE features and work out what they will do and how they will behave as a result of engaging with the values.”



The college provides a personal coach for all students, through six tutorials. These are based around themes of entrepreneurship and employability, including working with people from different backgrounds. The head of student motivation development shares good practice. All tutors are trained in motivational dialogue, which helps students manage behaviour, learning and working with others. This contributes to wider personal development, including personal beliefs and accommodating those of others. We also have regular programmes relating to awareness of others, e.g. LGBT. We recently held ‘Inspiration 2014’ with 1,000 students relating to wider enrichment and values.”

10. FE leaders have a clear view about the space of spirituality, faith or belief issues in their colleges

These leaders recognise the place of spirituality in their colleges.

They referred to prayer spaces, chaplaincy, pastoral support, tutorials and the link between spirituality and wider accountability measures, such as the equality and diversity obligations. They also see this as a key plank in meeting the needs of their students.



Spirituality has a major place in the college because of large number of Muslim students, many of whom have different views. There are increasing numbers of Christian groups from Eastern Europe, West India and Africa, all of whom have different perspectives. Our aim is to create a safe place for issues to be raised and discussed in class. We have a faith space and there are discussions about whose place it is. It is important to understand that tensions can be quite close to the surface. So we have policies and procedures in place and these are underpinned by equality and diversity. We do not shut down difficult discussions and we try to support staff when dealing with forced marriages or homophobia and students of different faith who might have different, deeply held points of view.”



The college is a place where students and staff can express their spirituality. They have requested a larger prayer meeting space, and this is now being made available. It is not designated to any one group. There is a very good climate and culture and the underpinning principle is to be inclusive and not exclusive.”



We are there to support and to provide opportunities for spiritual development. The PSD (personal and social development) sessions have been developed by the college with a focus on equality and diversity and religion. We also include opportunities for volunteering and all students are encouraged to engage. This has been created to be of wider benefit to the all-round development of students as individuals.”



We do have a strong view that we should develop students' thinking on spirituality and faith we do have chaplain, but also a Muslim prayer room and quiet room. The most important thing is to challenge people and get them to think about where their spirituality might be. We draw on the LSIS and fofe materials and have tried to an extent to make sure that those conversations take place while students are here. Funding has tightened and we no longer have tutorials, but we still make a point of providing opportunities for SMSC development. These are through formal services such as Holy Communion, the Christmas carol service and Remembrance Sunday graduation ceremonies in the cathedral. While we make it clear that these events are not explicitly linked to Christianity, we draw on the 500 years of worship and to draw on this to enhance college life."



People bring their spiritual and faith perspectives with them and it is not the place of the college to deny any point of view – it is important to acknowledge difference and to have it open for discussion. People live their lives through their beliefs and we believe that by making it open we create a more harmonious environment."



Faith is important and it is where I lend my physical presence. It is important that people are free to follow their own beliefs as long as they respect the rights of others. We have one prayer room – it has no symbols."



The chaplain is part of the support team and provides counselling for people who need additional support. We have six core values, including respect and value for all individuals, teaching and learning and a commitment to excellence. These are written down main corridors and we talk about them."



We articulate our 'raison d'être' through our vision, values and ethos. We used an external consultant to work with students and staff to come up with words to describe the college. These are used throughout the college: for example, they are on display in the reception. We are absolutely committed to making our values visible."



Our values and mission are informed by our ethos, even though this is not explicitly Christian."

11. Senior leaders and their teams promote vision, values and ethos through their leadership

The commitment to openness and freedom of expression is evident from the expectation that colleagues are free to express their personal beliefs both formally and informally.

These leaders also ensure that structures such as performance management incorporate college values and that staff have objectives that match these. And importantly, time is given, for example, in reviews, to make sure these can be embedded. One senior leader referred to the principal as living and breathing his ethical values:



As such, it comes from the top. Other members of the leadership team talk about their faith and all are encouraged to articulate their values through talk and being open. You are able to be who you are."



We have a competence-based performance development system linked to college values. Performance is set against achievement objectives and also measured against values. The PRIDE values (people, responsibility, integrity, diversity, excellence) were introduced two years ago and these are now starting to have impact. The performance development reviews focus on these and staff are given time to prepare and think about them.”



We are revising our values and vision around ‘Seven E’s’ and equality and diversity are at the heart of everything we do. The principal leads on equality and diversity and this sends a powerful message – we make sure there are representatives from across staff and students to develop frameworks around our values, e.g. transgender issues. The climate is set by the leadership team and as a result staff understand it is important to permeate throughout the college. This is a change from the past, when there was careless chatter about homophobia and racism. We expect certain levels of behaviour and all know very quickly what is acceptable and what is not. We are here to get the best out of people.”



We have articulated our vision through the ‘Highbury Way’. This took over two years to work through, as we believe it needs to be owned and embedded.”



We believe it is important to counter the negative influences around us, e.g. reality TV, lottery. I believe in old school hard work at core. I want to provide a counterbalance through explicit values. These include respect and courtesy – we work hard as a college to make sure these are upheld. Parents are told about these at open evening, e.g. if there is smoking outside grounds, students are given a brush to clear up. In this college, being good is rewarded. We need to give everyone a chance to help realise values. At its core the needs of the many outweigh the needs of a few. If we don’t work on this agenda, who will?”

12. These leaders ensure that there is support for staff and students to address issues of faith, belief or spirituality

A commitment to developing the ‘whole’ person was expressed by many leaders and a number referred to the fact that faith and belief are an important part of their lives outside college.

As a result, they believe that this aspect of life should be honoured within the college through support structures and spaces for reflection.



We have online weekly reflections and meditations. There are prayer rooms, physically designated areas that are multifaith. We have procedures in place authored by the chaplain in case of crisis; the chaplain is at heart of the college recovery plan. We have credit-sized cards with details of how to contact the chaplain and other organisations for support. Our chaplain goes round the college with sweets on Friday. This is so simple and so human! People open up to him. I also ask the chaplain to ‘loiter’ in the right places so that I have honest feedback about issues within the college. The governing body holds me and the leadership team to account and we have to show return on investment. They give total support to the wider spiritual provision in the college.”



We have a chaplain and a multifaith room for other faiths, which is about to be extended. The chaplain works in the centre of the college and from student restaurant, and promotes counselling for staff and students. The time for the chaplain is being extended. We also link with the university chaplain, who contributes to talks in tutorials.”



We have online training for all staff on equality and diversity and how to deal with difficult issues and this is compulsory. We also have tutorials across the college, which have specific faith and belief issues. The equality and diversity leader works with curriculum teams such as business studies and opens up discussions about faith-based issues in religion, such as Muslim principles in finance. They are proactive and look for opportunities to deal with wider SMSC issues. This was recognised as good practice during the last Ofsted [inspection]. There is support for staff and students to engage with difficult discussions.”



Every six weeks, we have a review and development week. This includes catch-up and additional opportunities for more individual conversations with staff focusing on, for example, being a decent person, employability and responsibility towards the environment. We have a charter and respect agenda to which we refer regularly.”



Students are supported through learner services and there is organisational development for staff.”



This sits within the equality and diversity committee, which holds me and the college to account.”

13. FE leaders are clear about the role of chaplaincy in their settings

We asked whether the colleges have a chaplaincy and if so how this contributes to the vision for the college. There were varying responses to this and the underlying theme was that students and staff should have opportunities for reflection.



We have multifaith provision on both campuses. There is no chaplaincy, but Muslim students have an imam on site. We also have multifaith forums. Members of these sit on the equality and diversity committee. Speakers from most denominations come in for tutorials and enrichment, for example, Holocaust Memorial Day.”



The college draws on a regional chaplain for support. There are links with most other religious organisations in Bradford – mosque, cathedral and Roman Catholic community and also the university chaplains. The college has a purpose-built area and probably one of the best facilities in country for Muslim students – but it is called ‘Unity’ because it is for all faiths and none. There have been some issues over who owns it and uses it. However, we have a very good student union leading on who uses it, how it is left and who manages it.”



We do not have a chaplaincy, but different faith leaders work in the college with staff and students.”



Our chaplain is an ex-member of staff, who was made redundant and wanted to return to the college.”



We have a prayer room and a Christian Union, but it is not forced down people’s throats. We aim for a morally correct, respectful place.”



Used to and have been trying to find out what happened to it! These questions about spiritual leadership have brought it back on the agenda. It fell through the net and didn’t have a direct personal contact, so we are now looking at this.”



We do not have a chaplaincy, but a spiritual facility and this is being expanded due to student demand. We work hard on principles of equality and diversity. We have a visiting chaplain and representatives from faiths to work with students. Our enrichment and engagement are strong.”



Our chaplaincy is one of the best; it is at the heart of the college. It is very visible and we are unapologetic about this. The chaplaincy is multifaith. We have full-time provision funded by the college and plus team across faiths. The chaplain is line-managed through student services but the principal is the sponsor. This gives credibility and prominence in landscape, because it is important to gain acceptance. We keep it constantly alive, by celebrating events. As principal, I meet regularly with the chaplain who is asked to be the moral conscience and give the correct version of the culture, climate, team understanding of our values. I often ask him to go to those areas where I have concerns.”



We are in the process of appointing a new chaplain.”



We have found that the college pastors programme, which includes representatives from all faith communities, has had great impact on the ethos within the college. They are visible and are present in all the communal areas of the college and have a very calming influence. We considered a multifaith chaplaincy and preferred the pastoral model. We have 24 pastors who work with us between two and four hours a week. We value their diverse backgrounds – some have a youth work background, some are grandparents. Some of our programmes attract students with very difficult lives and we make sure they are part of our community that has a ‘family’ ethos. The college pastors programme has helped us to transform beliefs and values where discussion is now upfront. For example, they help to run faith groups and to open up conversations about faith. They advised on how the prayer room should be used by Muslim students. Some students were challenging female students who chose not to wear scarves and the pastors stepped in to calm situation down. If we hadn’t had them on site, this could have got out of control. Having this diverse group drawn from all our local faith communities is a tremendous asset to college life.”

14. These leaders ensure that their colleges promote opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development for their students

All were clear that the provision for their students was more than the raw scores of qualifications results. They know that they have wider obligations, which not only meet inspection criteria but also provide their students with opportunities for spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.



We are drawing on the LSIS guidance – this used to be part of a tutorial, but we now have one-off sessions and do offer opportunities for spiritual development through the cathedral such as art and photography. There is a concert in the cathedral every year. We recognise there is a thin line between SMSC and form of worship, but we believe it is important to provide these opportunities, such as Ash Wednesday.”



We do this through tutorials and provide plenty of information on activities round the edge, e.g. community service, charity events, community involvement, fundraising and self-help groups, e.g. Young Carers Group. We have created a basket of activities and recognise the impact this has on learning. We believe we tick all boxes on SMSC. We provide plenty of opportunities for student leadership: for example, some college employees are also students. We give recognition for community involvement and volunteering.”



We do this through student services woven into tutorials and also during the year with a particular focus on SMSC education. We understand ‘spiritual’ as being tolerant, considerate and accepting that things may not relate to your faith or belief position. To meet cultural provision we have a whole week roll-out on racial and cultural awareness. Some aspects are delivered through the curriculum, e.g. RE, sociology, hospitality, catering courses, social and child care.”



Spirituality has a major place in this college because of the large number of Muslim students, many of whom have different views; there are increasing numbers of Christian groups from Eastern Europe, West India and Africa, all of whom have different perspectives. Our aim is to create safe place for issues to be raised and discussed in class. We have a faith space and there are discussions about whose place it is. It is important to realise that sensitive issues can emerge because these are quite close to the surface.”



There is plenty around moral, social and cultural but less on spiritual. We have a very good enrichment team and are good at responding to need. We have three days of tutorials around a theme – the staff deliver these and choose topics across equality and diversity and SMSC, such as child exploitation and street pastors. Students welcome these.”



Through lived-out experience and PSD sessions.”



This is done through the curriculum, with teaching staff. It is part of the explicit curriculum in the early years, world geography and is being delivered by teaching staff. The curriculum manager shares good practice.”



There is a RAD (review and development) week with enrichment activities. If enough students get together and request an event or activity then the college agrees to find a way of doing it – as long as it is not illegal, doesn’t cost anything and doesn’t hurt anyone!”



We use the tutorial system up to a point and it is probably a bit inconsistent. We try to promote a wider sense of leadership in citizenship. We ask ourselves, as a wider piece of work: how can we help them and manage it? We ask them how it gets woven into your experiences – e.g. young Muslim women express themselves differently in college compared with at home. We try provide a space for them to explore this.”

15. These leaders make the link between their values and the success of their colleges

The principals were asked whether they believe this approach to leadership and associated college provision is important, and whether these factors, both strategic and operational, contribute to the success of the college.



Values are important. We were part of the trial for no-notice Ofsted inspections. The team spoke to over 500 students and said that the vast majority are safe and that it is a harmonious place to learn. We have a massive business case to ensure we have satisfied customers/students to ensure they will succeed. This in turn means success for the college.”



Working to these principles has been a key factor in the success of the college. The college has moved from ‘requiring improvement’ to ‘good with outstanding features’ and I believe that a significant factor in this has been to articulate and live out spiritual values and to make these explicit in college life.”



People first: that’s an essential component of accountability.”



We think a great deal about ‘The Bromley College experience’, what it means to be a student here, and why our students say that they feel they are lucky to be here. Our work in this area has translated into the fact that we are now significantly oversubscribed.”



I believe that culture has an impact on standards; these have risen in recent years and this is due in part I believe to paying attention to this aspect of college life. We know that the inspection framework has changed and we make sure we consider the data carefully for outcomes for different groups of students. We are talking to students more about what they think and feel, but it is not a quick journey.”



I am convinced that if you have the right leadership students will succeed well; if you have the right people in place who then ensure you have the right kind of teaching and learning, and this is the key reason why colleges succeed or fail. Our success rates are good and due to having conditions where the whole community can flourish, but this is also about ensuring that where things are not working you deal with it.”



I believe values are important to leadership: behaviour shapes the human being, and we all have to learn how to be inclusive, to give and take respect. Student leaders are developed and they are involved in college life, such as on the reception. You, as principal, set the tone: the buck stops with you. You must be authentic, believe in values.”



I want to be associated with a college that is learning and open-minded. You have to take people where they are. The only person you can change is yourself.”

Finally, first impressions

Principals were asked what someone would notice if they visited the college.



What they notice is happiness, laughter, great visual displays and aspiration and getting to that next level and a respectful community. The college glows with that sense of community.”



Energy and embracing and how welcoming people are.”



There is a genuine friendliness in the campus. Treat people as a good human. Eye contact.”



Visitors comment on how friendly everyone is. There is plenty of visual affirmation of students’ success. The campus is used by the local community and it has an ‘open doors’ feel.’



This is a positive, happy vibrant place. Student behaviour is mature. People are purposeful and enjoy being here.”



A visitor would notice how articulate and communicative students are. The campus has a friendly, pleasant, nice feel about it.”



The college is a really happy place. Everyone is motivated and polite – we have had unsolicited emails to support this. It is possible to leave a mobile phone in the dining room and it will be handed in. There are terrific levels of trust.”



There is a genuine friendliness in the campus.”



There is an enthusiasm here, which you can actually feel. It is quite special. People feel it, sense it and comment on it. I believe that organisations live: people come and go, but some of the qualities of engagement and commitment live through the DNA of the college.”



It is a happy, buzzing place. A visitor would sense really good student behaviour, really friendly staff, calmness, a sense of pride. This is shown in small things, for example, a complete respect for the buildings – even though these are several years old. Our values are visible – we want to our students to be life’s success stories.”



Conclusion

This project was one of the first of its kind to take a subject that is generally considered hard to talk about openly. It set out to find out the extent to which leaders running good and outstanding colleges were prepared to identify their spiritual values and to articulate whether these might be evident in the structures and outcomes for learners.

And what is clear is that, for these leaders at least, spiritual values are a major contributor to the success of their colleges. Reflection and promotion of spiritual values is an evolving and piece of work: these leaders are not standing still, but continue to grow themselves and their colleges through reflection of the highest order.

Postscript



Preparing for this interview has given me the chance to reflect on what we are doing. It has been reaffirming for us and helpful to talk this through with the leadership team.”



It has been lovely to be able to talk about this aspect of my work to someone who is interested in it.”

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Glossary

AoC	Association of Colleges
CEL	Centre for Excellence in Leadership
fbfe	National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education
FIFEF	Faiths in Further Education Forum
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
NEAFE	National Ecumenical Agency for Further Education (now fbfe)
PSD	personal spiritual development
SMSC	spiritual, moral, social and cultural
RSA	Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

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Contact the 157 Group

The 157 Group Limited
P O Box 58147
London
SW8 9AF

www.157group.co.uk
info@157group.co.uk

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