

Bill Rammell speech: RIBA/LSC Event

28 March 2007

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning everyone. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. It's good to know that now I've seen inside RIBA's impressive headquarters I won't need to end my speech with the old Archie Rice joke from The Entertainer "Don't clap too hard it's an old building."

The issues you're here to discuss today are incredibly important. A person's surroundings - the environment in which they live, study or work - have an incredibly powerful impact on their ability to learn and develop.

Over the last decade, we've worked hard to overturn years of disinterest and underinvestment by previous Governments in the buildings and services of the FE system.

Since its creation in 2001, the LSC has approved the investment of almost £2 bn of capital investment in more than 600 capital investment projects. The evidence proves that this investment is paying off.

Independent research has concluded that capital projects costing more than £1.5m have a positive impact on learner participation. Whilst capital is just one of a number of factors that impact on attainment, the results indicate that increased investment has a positive relationship on learner success.

Previous studies reached similar conclusions, and these new findings give further support to existing anecdotal evidence that new capital projects make a difference to the whole community as well as to the performance of the individual institutions.

These improvements in facilities ensure all colleges can use the space they have available to greatest effect. As maintenance costs fall, they have more money to spend directly on learners. This is good news.

But still too many learners are condemned to study in substandard buildings. This directly affects the standing and reputation of colleges with learners, local employers and the communities they support.

We believe our strong investment in FE capital is one of the most important ways we can continue to reinvigorate the FE system. Supporting the successful delivery of our FE reforms and helping FE become the powerhouse of learning we need to address this country's skills challenges.

Our skills base in this country is no eighth wonder of the world. It's far from being a Taj Mahal, a Sistine Chapel or

a Durham Cathedral. And despite our great progress in renovating the UK's skills base over recent years, we're still nowhere near completing our grand design.

Leitch's report was clear. Faced with global, fast-paced markets, employers need to attract and hold on to the brightest and best people. If they can't find them in this country they'll look elsewhere.

It's an economic imperative that current and future employees have the type of attitude and skills that boost our country's productivity and profitability. And critically, they – along with their bosses – must ensure their skills stay relevant and marketable; that their learning and training continues throughout their working lives.

As a country, we need to commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020, benchmarked against our leading OECD competitors. This means that by the end of the next

decade we need everyone to be able to read and write; for everyone to have good basic qualifications; and for more people to be qualified to the very highest level.

To get there, our further education system needs to reach just beyond traditional learner groups – people keen to pick up a skill, trade or qualifications – to target people who feel they've learnt enough already and question what more or any time spent in school or college can really do for them.

Who are these people? Some of them are young people who give up on formal education at sixteen; especially the ten percent out wandering the streets not in any form of education, employment or training. But also it's a fair chunk of our existing workforce - 70% of the 2020 workforce has already left compulsory education.

Our comprehensive package of fourteen to nineteen

reforms is designed to inspire and help all young people realise their potential through continued training and learning.

The recent publication of the Green Paper - Raising Expectations has kick started a period of consultation on our new proposals:

- That by 2015, all young people should remain in some form of education or training until their 18th birthday
- Whether in a school, college, work-based learning provider or as part of a job

And we feel our substantial investment through the Building Schools for the Future and FE Capital programmes –will help ensure we have truly world-class facilities for young people to learn in.

Our 14-19 reforms are about offering young people a

broad range of options which includes more stretching A-levels, improved access to the International Baccalaureate, professionalised Apprenticeships and the development of new diplomas. These are a revolutionary approach to education, with a unique blend of practical and academic learning.

They are the most far-reaching and fundamental reforms going on in education anywhere in the world. And it can't be achieved overnight. It requires partnership and collaboration.

But the prize - real choice between high quality alternatives to inspire every young person to continue in learning and training beyond 16 – is invaluable. And it's up to us to make sure our FE system, working with others, can help deliver it.

To target far more of our workforce, throughout their

working lives across a wide range of occupations; and to ensure that those learning acquire the skills employers need demands a closer and more trusting relationship between employers and colleges.

Many colleges already work well with employers. But, to deliver learning to employees on the scale we need requires bigger, bolder thinking – whether in the classroom, workplace or online.

Employers want to be confident that their investment both in terms of the time and money they spend with colleges will pay off. High quality buildings and facilities are among the important signs they'll look at to reassure themselves their resources are being spent with the right provider.

Our reform agenda aims to establish a truly demand-led system, where the needs of employers and learners are at the core of what FE colleges deliver.

We want to ensure that as outlined in our FE White Paper and empowered through our FE Bill, the expansion we need is driven through the provision of relevant, high-quality learning and services.

And the system is supported by a culture, where excellence, flexibility and responsiveness to learner and employer needs are the order of the day. And where staff and learners feel valued and supported.

Ensuring well-designed buildings and the best use of space for learning are a big part of what will help us create this culture. Continuing to improve the state we're in, in our FE Estate is a critical factor in this work.

In 1997 nothing was spent on FE capital. In 2007-8 we plan to spend just under £500m. This will rise to almost £600m in 2008-9 and £750m in the two years after that. A

total of £2.6bn between 2007/8 and 2010/11.

And we've focussed our investment where it's needed - to modernise and develop the college estate, the National Skills Academy and our CoVE networks.

We want every student to learn in a modern, attractive fit-for-purpose environment – be it in school or in college.

Our massive capital investment is designed to help us establish a world-class training infrastructure. A solid base of support for the delivery of diverse and specialised provision to meet employer and learner needs.

The recently launched LSC National Capital Prospectus - which fulfils a commitment we made in the FE White Paper - sets out an overview of how the capital programme will help us deliver strategic reforms including the 14 – 19 agenda and other major policy objectives.

The prospectus includes three case studies on how capital expenditure and state of the art buildings are helping to rejuvenate our FE system.

Truro College principal, Jonathan Burnett OBE talks of how new teaching, catering and student accommodation is helping to motivate learners and staff to achieve their best.

Principal and Chief Executive of Matthew Boulton College, Christine Braddock believes the college's popular new premises are helping to create more learning opportunities for the people of Birmingham and wider West Midlands.

Peter Davies, CB, CBE – Principal of City Lit is delighted that City Lit now has world class facilities to match its first class teaching.

These are just a few of the tangible examples of the

amazing impact this investment in and commitment to world-class facilities is having on staff morale, learners' success and the renewal of local communities. And we want to be able to write more of these great case studies.

Therefore following the huge success of the 2006 RIBA/LSC 'Design Excellence in Further Education' competition, it is with great pleasure that I am able to announce that a further competition will be held in 2007.

More details will be made available later this spring - but I can confirm that it will again focus upon recognising design excellence in the FE sector, and will in particular look to acknowledge the progress being made in addressing sustainability issues. This is a fabulous competition that firmly places the spot-light on FE and celebrates the inspirational buildings that are now characterising the sector.

North Manchester Sixth Form College and North City Public Library were the 2006 winners. They were particularly noted as 'very attractive, stimulating environments' and, importantly, are an example of sustainable design at national, regional and city level.

The bench mark has again been set high - but I know we have some superb projects underway, and look forward to seeing those come to fruition over the coming months and years.

Both within the context of this award scheme and LSC prospectus, we've made our strong commitment to embedding the principles of sustainable development across the FE system clear.

Sustainable development asks us to make better use of existing resources; deliver value for money, better ways of working and improved performance.

Without fundamental changes in the ways all of us in this country work and live, we will not succeed in overcoming the environmental challenges we face globally. We all have good intentions, but the time to act on them is now.

Education is the best way to change behaviour. And in recent years, we've taken significant steps to promote sustainability in the post-schools sector further – in teaching, learning, systems and services.

Ensuring sustainable development in the design and development of FE buildings and building systems is vital. From the initial procurement of services to the cutting of the ribbon and every day use of these completed facilities, all college capital projects must reflect the highest standards of sustainable design.

Stephen Gardiner (British Architect) said "All problems are

solved by good design.” Investment in design and innovation, bricks and mortar is in FE - an investment in the future success of all who come to learn or work there. This programme is the foundation on which we aim to implement the reforms and measures that will strengthen and support our FE system for decades to come. And we have clear evidence it’s making a difference to learners, employers and communities.

Our commitment is resolute. We are dedicated to overcoming the skills challenges we face. And we hope your innovation and imaginative approach to FE capital will help us continue to do this successfully.

Who knows maybe in the years to come, we can create an FE building so great it’ll inspire mad French rock climbers to forgo scaling the Malaysian Twin Towers and head to our college campuses instead!

Thank you.