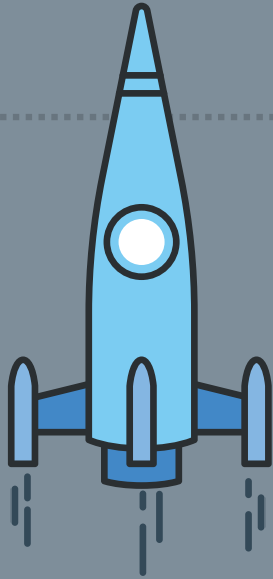




London South Bank University

EST 1892



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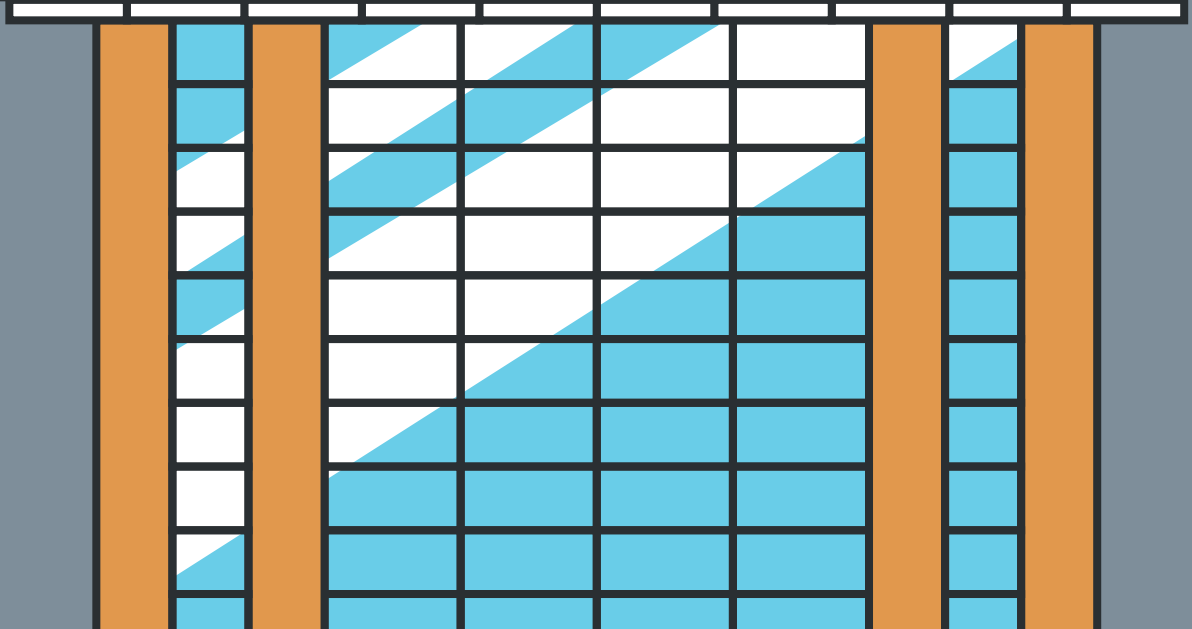
# FAMILIES OF LEARNING:

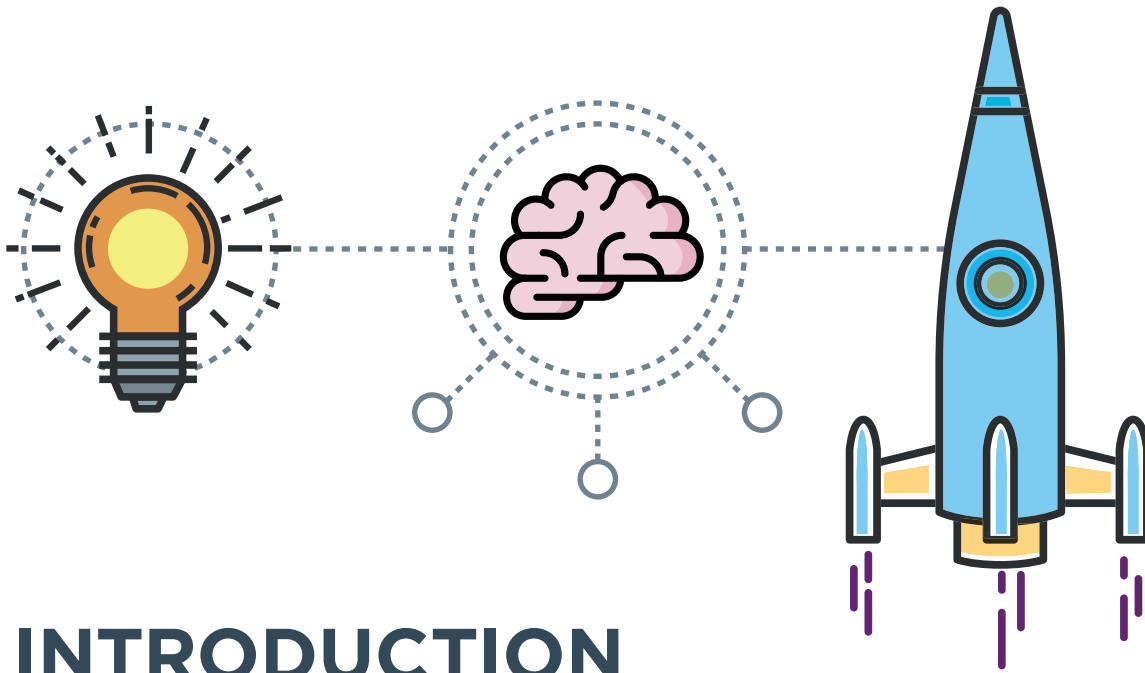
Co-Creating Local Solutions to Education System Failings

July 2017



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# INTRODUCTION

Debate over the challenges facing post-Brexit Britain has highlighted two interconnected national crises that threaten our collective prosperity and wellbeing. One is the disparities in social mobility and employment opportunities in parts of the country. The other is the chronic shortage of people with the qualifications and skills - at all levels - needed to improve the UK's poor productivity. At the heart of both crises is a partially dysfunctional education system which is failing in its duty to serve the needs of individuals, communities and the UK economy.

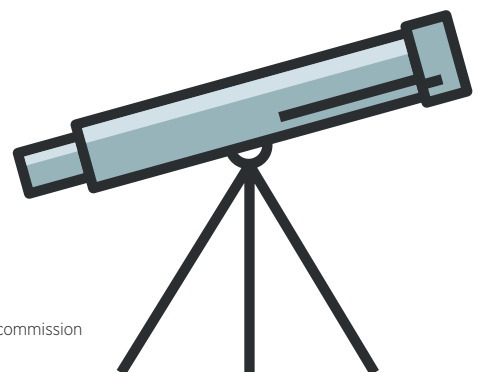
While this is a national problem, national policies can prove blunt instruments for addressing it. In keeping with the UK's localism agenda, set out for example in the RSA's Inclusive Growth Commission report "Making the Economy Work for Everyone"<sup>1</sup>, the challenge is for local institutions and communities to identify and produce local educational solutions.

This paper introduces a bold response to such a challenge, built on a new model of collaboration between educational providers, businesses and communities to co-create a local learning and skills eco-system that works in the interests of individuals, communities and employers.

London South Bank University (LSBU) is situated in south central London where it has provided professional and technical education for the people and businesses of the area since 1892. Today, educational provision is more complex than ever before with increasing numbers of learners accessing education at all levels, from basic to postgraduate qualifications. There is also a wider range of educational pathways; for example, in addition

to academic routes through GCSEs and A-levels, there are applied general qualifications like BTECs as well as a growing number of vocational opportunities including apprenticeships. Beyond individual learner requirements, businesses too have growing educational and training requirements for their staff. Serving all of these professional and technical educational needs requires a growing range of specialist educational skills which LSBU believes can best be achieved through a new model of educational collaboration.

LSBU is establishing what it terms a Family of Educational Providers. This is a group structure composed of likeminded educational organisations which provide high-quality learner-centred education in their specialist fields within a common educational framework. By providing access to a range of educational approaches the Family can offer learners a genuine choice between different styles of learning. Whatever a learner's educational needs, these will be met somewhere in the Family so enabling a focus on the individual.



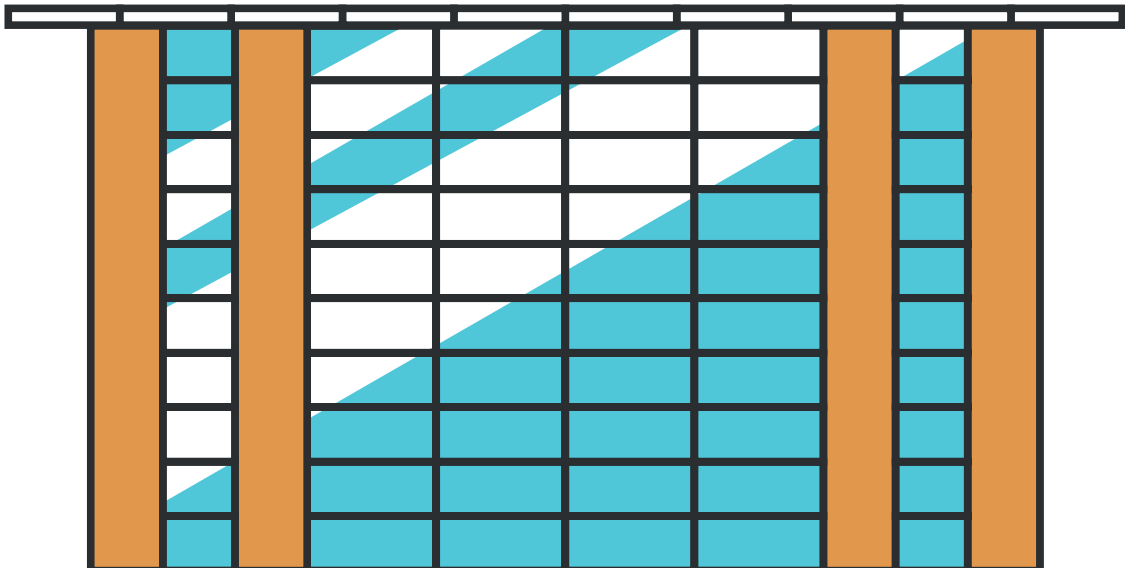
1. <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/final-report-of-the-inclusive-growth-commission>

This report is written by Prof David Phoenix OBE, Vice-Chancellor of London South Bank University (LSBU), with assistance from LSBU colleagues and from PA Consulting Group. Dave Phoenix is the Chair of the MillionPlus group of Modern Universities, a director of the National Centre for Universities and Business and a board member of Universities UK. He was awarded an OBE for services to Science and Higher Education and made a member of the Order of Friendship (China) for services to the country.



London South Bank University first opened as the Borough Polytechnic Institute in 1892. Its stated aims were to improve the social mobility of the people of south-east London by improving their employment opportunities; and to support the community by providing access to the applied

knowledge that would advance local businesses. 125 years on that mission remains largely unchanged. Around a quarter of LSBU students come from south-east London and the focus of the university remains on delivering high quality professional and technical education.





# A LEARNER-CENTRED SYSTEM

## Rhetoric vs realities

Regimes force schools, colleges and universities to compete against each other



**The idea that the education system should be designed around individual learners has been affirmed in any number of government policy declarations and providers' mission statements. No one doubts the good intentions behind these statements, but the reality has been very different: a system where funding and performance regimes force schools, colleges and universities to compete against each other, with learners and their attainments treated as sources of funding and performance metrics.**

Instead of a system that enables young people and adults to undertake the learning they need when they need it, learners have to navigate an educational obstacle course where the onus is on them to fit their aspirations to the provision on offer; an offer which for many is both limited and of questionable value. There is a well-established route for those learners who perform well on the academic pathway, which carries them seamlessly from GCSEs to A-levels and into university. This route is often presented as the norm, but in practice it serves little over a third of the 18 year-old age cohort and much less in some areas and in some social groups. Despite successive reforms to qualifications, funding and institutions, there has been little thought given to creating pathways which meet the needs of the 60%+ who do not follow what too many in government regard as the "traditional" route from school to university. On the academic pathway, the steps between Levels 3 and 4 (GCSE and A-Level) through to degree levels (Level 6+) are clear and easily navigated.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the "alternative" technical and vocational pathways are highly complex and often see learners stuck in educational and career dead ends.



2. <https://epi.org.uk/report/remaking-tertiary-education-can-we-create-a-system-that-is-fair-and-fit-for-purpose/>



There is a desperate shortage of provision of progression routes into and through the badly needed middle tier of highly skilled technical and professional roles. These are equivalent to levels 4 and 5 of the national qualifications framework, such as HNCs, HNDs and Foundation degree awards. Instead, most further education provision is at level 2 (GCSE equivalent) and level 3 (A-level equivalent). As Lord Baker has noted, *“Only 2.4% of [students in FE colleges] get to Level 4. That is an amazing failure because those are the jobs that are needed – levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 are needed more than levels 2 and 3. That compares very badly with European performances.”*<sup>3</sup>

For the great majority of young people, and for almost all those already in employment, the available opportunities are limited, with

commensurate constraints on educational achievement and social mobility. As a direct consequence of this systemic failure to provide the opportunities and progression routes that would best fit young talent to business needs, *“..too many young people simply drift into further studies or their first job, which often offers no real prospect of progression. The combined effects of this confusion are damaging to the UK’s economy because they mean that the workforce is not being given the skills it needs.”*<sup>4</sup> Reports from the OECD show that England has some of the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy amongst young people across developed nations and is ranked 28th of 33 countries for intermediate and professional skills<sup>5</sup>.

A 2016 report from the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Exclusion highlighted the impacts of these failings on the aspirations and experiences of communities across the country, and recommended *“the development of a coherent and navigable transition for those aged 14-24.”*<sup>6</sup> Smoothing the technical pathway between levels 3 and 4 will be a key objective of the Family.

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England has some of the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy amongst young people

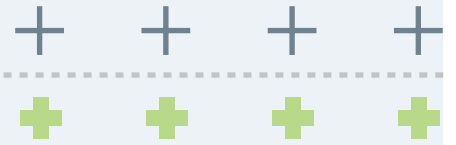
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3. Lord Baker of Dorking, House of Lords 2016. Polytechnics Debate Column 1550. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2016-05-05/debates/160505104000508/Polytechnics>

4. Overlooked and left behind: improving the transition from school to work for the majority of young people, Select Committee on Social Mobility, HoL Paper 120, April 2016

5. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/oecd-skills-outlook-2015-9789264234178-en.htm>

6. HoL Paper 120, op cit



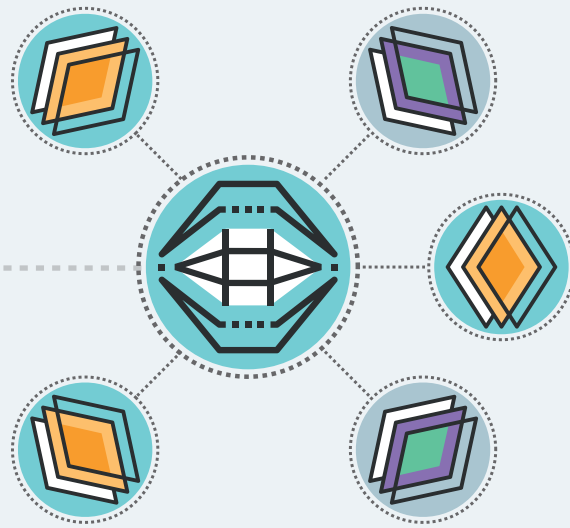
## A LOCALLY-DRIVEN, BOTTOM-UP SOLUTION



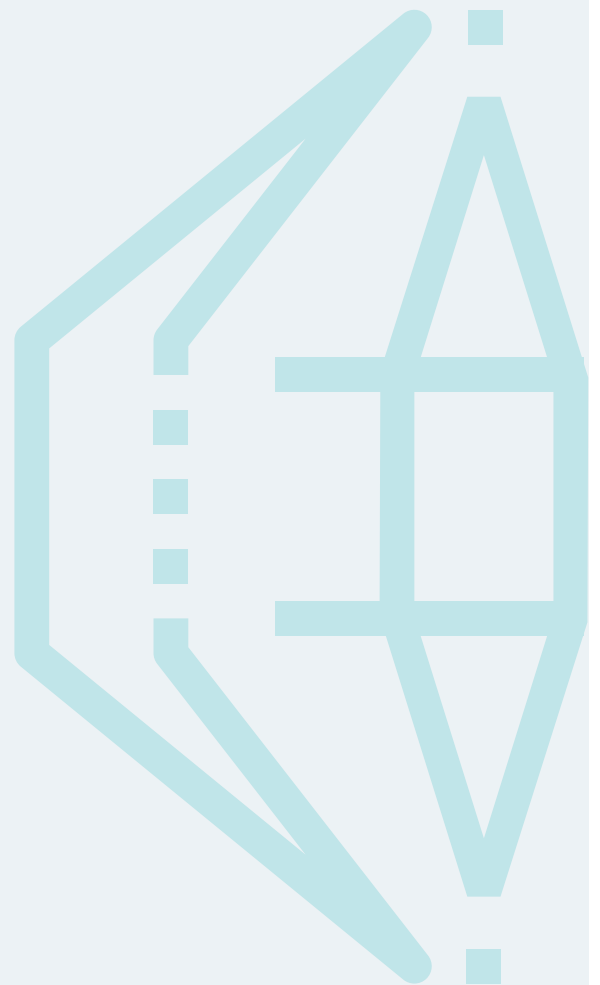
There has been any number of top-down policy initiatives intended to address the UK's need for effective professional and technical education. A recent report from the Institute for Government<sup>7</sup> identified no fewer than 64 separate pieces of legislation relating to vocational, FE and skills education since the 1980s, overseen by 48 different government ministers. The result has been, if anything, a worsening of the underlying problems and their effects. The time is ripe for a different approach.

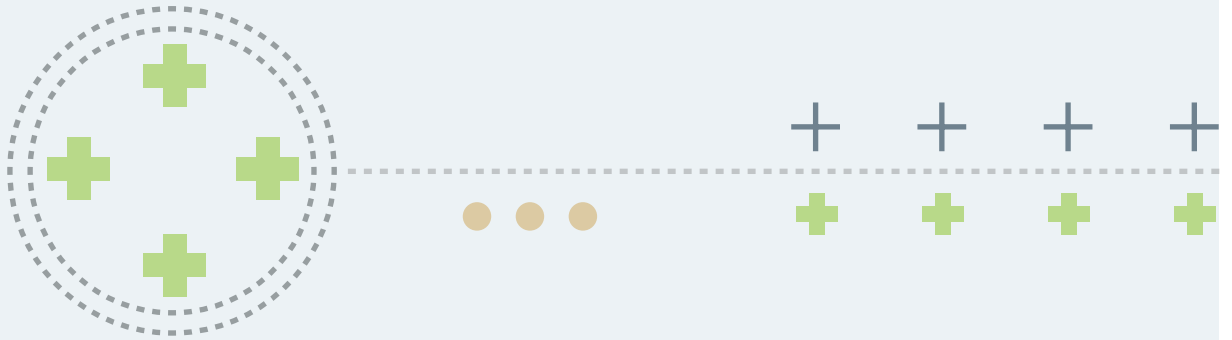
London South Bank University (LSBU) is pioneering an alternative solution to the issues of educational opportunity and inclusiveness, built bottom-up by educational providers and other partners at a local level. The University is convening and orchestrating a group of like-minded specialist educational providers, along with employers and civic partners, to create a Family of Educational Providers for south central London.

The time is ripe for a  
different approach



The diverse members of the Learning Family have committed to working together within a common Educational Framework and shared governance arrangements, to provide a comprehensive range of educational opportunities that better serve the people and employers of the locality. The members of the Learning Family cover the range of educational and skills development, from schools through to degree-level and post-graduate provision. Initial Family members include the South Bank Engineering Academy, the South Bank Engineering UTC, as well as a new Institute for Professional and Technical Education which, through LSBU's Passmore Centre, links to nearly 1000 businesses, along with the University itself. Plans are also advancing for a Further Education College to join the Family.



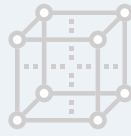


# THE EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK & INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATHWAYS

Key to LSBU's approach is providing learners with an individualised and applied learning experience which builds social capital and confidence. Underpinning that is a belief that any Family of Educational Providers needs a shared and underpinning Educational Framework, with all members adopting an aligned pedagogic and curriculum approach. LSBU's Educational Framework has four elements: providing knowledge; creating opportunities to apply that knowledge; providing enhancement activities to generating the confidence to apply it; and ensuring the knowledge is current to the professional environment into which the learners progress.

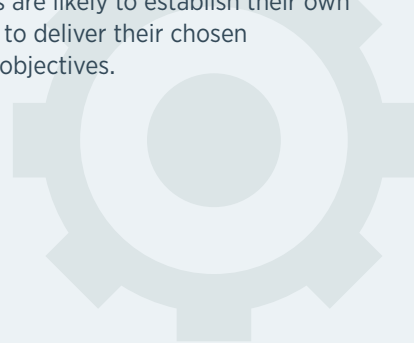






Supporting learners through the Framework there are individualised Learning Pathways which enable them to learn what they need through the right learning approach for them. This might mean pursuing one subject area through a more academic approach perhaps at the Academy, whilst taking another subject using a more applied learning style through a BTEC programme at the UTC.

Together the Framework and the accompanying Pathways go beyond delivering qualifications. Through programmes of extracurricular activities, exposure to the work place and volunteering, they develop the professional qualities prized by employers – creativity, team-working, leadership, self-motivation – attributes that LSBU summarises as “underlining entrepreneurial development”. This is the approach of the educational framework adopted by the LSBU Family, but other groups are likely to establish their own Frameworks to deliver their chosen Educational objectives.



Any Family of Educational Providers needs a shared and underpinning Educational Framework



## REAL LIVES, REAL GAINS

The impacts of the learner-centred opportunities provided by the Learning Family will, by definition, be different for every student concerned. The following stories illustrate the diversity of learners and of the pathways they might pursue.

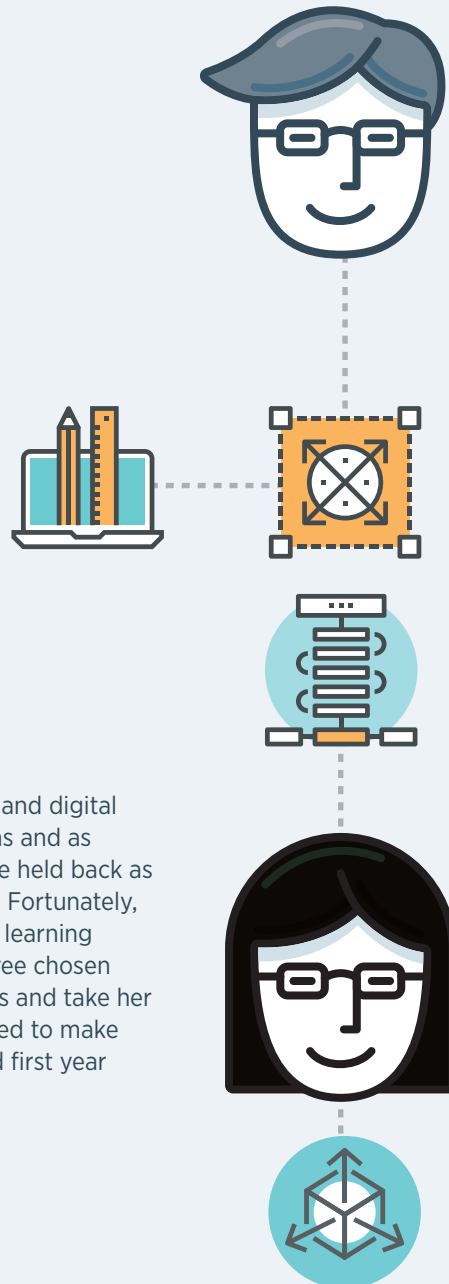
### Helen's Story

Helen left school at 16 to help support her parents. At 21 she got married and gave up work to bring up twins. Later Helen wanted to go back to work, but without any qualifications struggled to find anything other than part-time shop work. Helen took some evening classes at the local Adult Education Institute to earn qualifications she hoped would help her onto the career ladder. She hoped it would also help her to engage her children in school. Helen studied GCSE English and maths and as her children progressed through school was able to demonstrate the value of working hard at school and to help her twins with their lessons. With her additional qualifications and support from an independent careers advisor Helen found a job at a local hotel, which sponsored her to study for an HND in hospitality management. She now works at the hotel as assistant manager. In the evenings she studies Business Spanish at the FE College where her children are taking their A-Levels.



## Kofi's Story

Kofi did well at primary school and was always interested in designing and building his own ideas. He went on to the local academy but found the style of learning too academic. He began to lose interest and his marks began to suffer as a result. Fortunately, his teachers recognised his potential and were able to recommend moving him to a partner institution. At the UTC he found new enthusiasm due to the different kind of learning which focused more on the practical application of what he was being taught. He continued with maths and physics but was also able to do a BTEC in engineering while continuing to study art at the academy. Kofi went on to a study in a first rate engineering department at a UK university



## Ayesha's Story

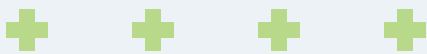
Ayesha found at an early age that she had flair for art and design and digital subjects like computer science. However, she struggled with maths and as secondary school progressed it looked like her education might be held back as she failed to progress in maths as quickly as in her other subjects. Fortunately, she was able to work with the local educational family to create a learning pathway which worked for her. The college let her start on her three chosen A-levels on the understanding that she would continue with maths and take her GCSE when she took the A-levels. In her second year, as she started to make steady progress in her maths, they also arranged for her to attend first year degree modules in Digital Games at the local university.

Helen, Ayesha, Kofi and everyone else deserve an education system which helps people to create their own stories like these. Without access to high quality English and maths teaching, Helen probably wouldn't have passed her GCSEs and got onto the career ladder. And without her as a role model, her children may not have been successful at school. Without independent careers advice Helen wouldn't have known of local shortages of skilled workers in hospitality and chosen to follow that as a career. Without the partnership between the two schools Kofi would not have had access to the UTC style of learning. He might have failed to reach his potential in the academy and been asked to leave at 16. Without the flexibility offered by the Family, Ayesha would have been held back to complete GCSE maths, missed out on other routes to learning and would very likely have failed to reach her potential in video game design.



# ENGAGING EMPLOYERS WITH LOCAL LEARNING SYSTEMS

Research by Dr Anthony Mann<sup>8</sup> highlights the value of regular engagement between learners and employers in motivating learners, enhancing career aspirations and relating education to the workplace. As well as creating personalised opportunities, the Learning Family can engage with local employers, identifying and connecting them with potential employees from across the spectrum of skills and education, and offering them the opportunity to help shape and support learners' career choices from an early age. Where employers need help to up-skill current employees, the Family can offer across a wide range of needs including maths and English support, apprenticeships at all levels, sponsored degrees, CPD and evening classes. Another story illustrates how this can work from the perspective of one local employer.



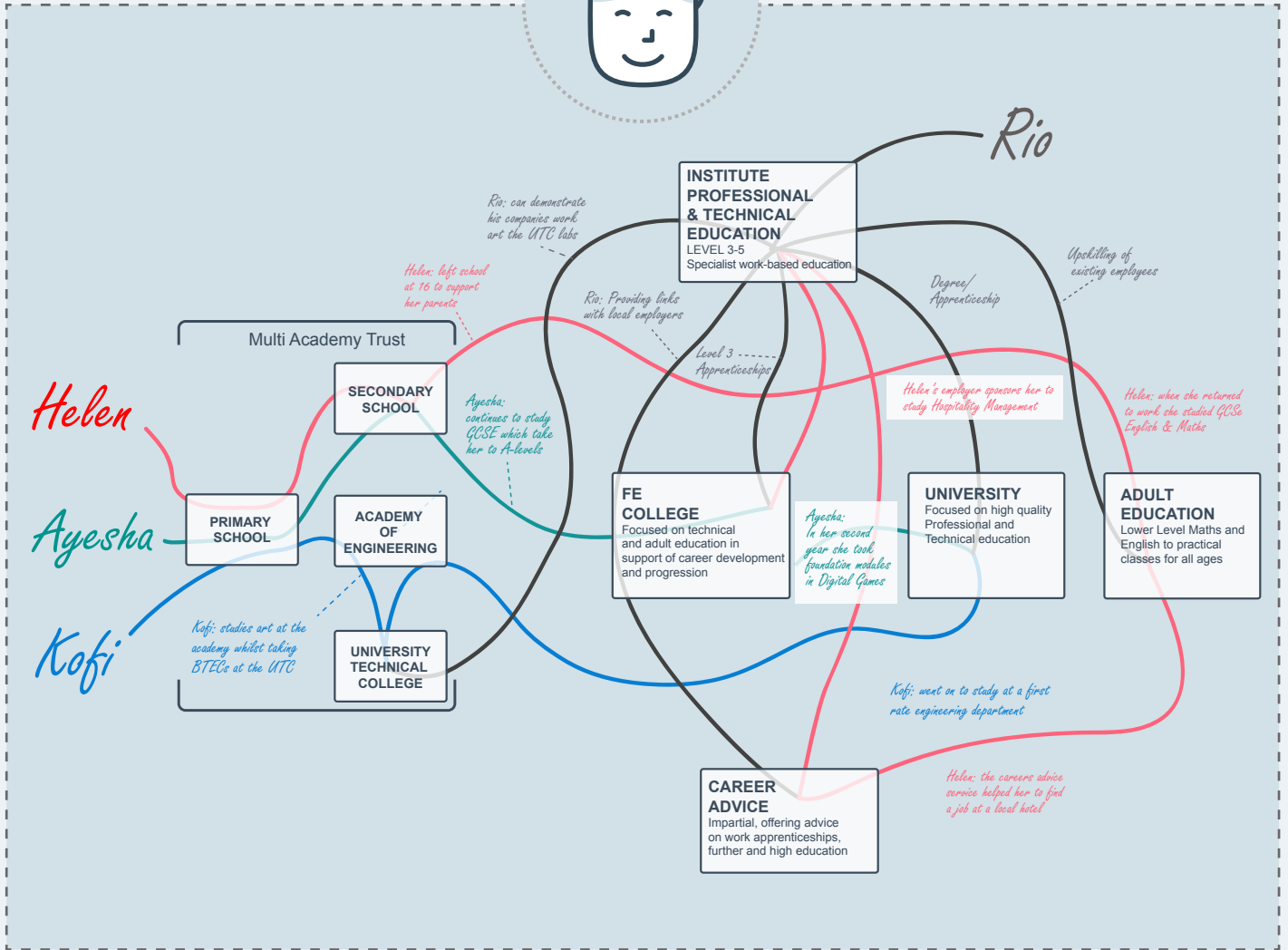
## The employer - Rio's Story

"The shortage of young people coming into engineering is well known; and it's my job as Head of Talent Management to overcome this for Acme. What's made it almost impossible, until now, is dealing with the plethora of local educational organisations which each provide only a portion of the technical skills needed for a well-rounded candidate. This has all changed since the University's Passmore Centre (part of the LSBU Family) opened. For the first time I have a real 'one-stop-shop' and can talk to one organisation about a full range of help for all my employment and training needs.

I can get involved with potential employees at 14 or sometimes even earlier; going into schools to talk to pupils about engineering. At the UTC I can get more involved by using their excellent facilities to demonstrate some of what we do in our business. Along with other employers I provide them with ideas about their career paths - at Acme, for example, they can come to work for us at 16 on a Level 3 apprenticeship. If they do well they can move on to a sponsored HNC or HND programme on day release and move up to work in more senior roles. For the more academic we offer two options. They can either do a Degree Apprenticeship or a Sponsored Degree. Either way, they work for us 4 days a week and we pay them and cover their tuition fees.

What's great about the Passmore is that, through their adult education offering they can help to up-skill our existing work force - whether that's giving someone the technical skills they need to maintain and install one of our systems or putting one of our managers through a professional HR qualification. This allows us to build people's career in partnership with them; that way they can progress in their career and we can hang on to an experienced and loyal employee.





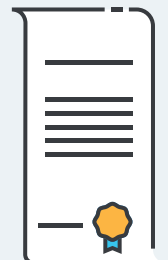


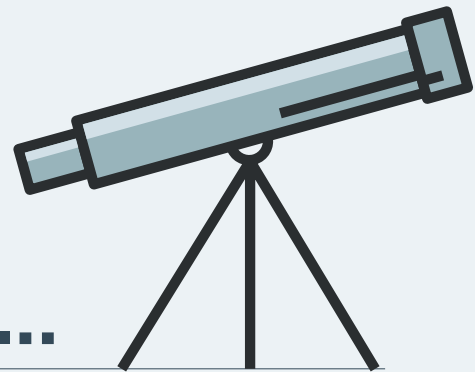
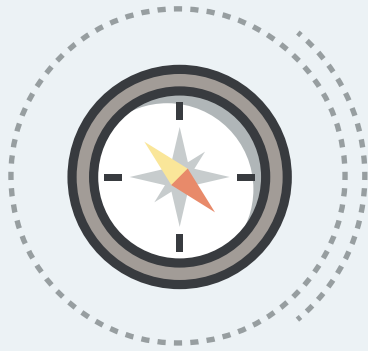
# HOW THE LEARNING FAMILY WILL WORK

The Learning Family is a formal grouping of like-minded educational institutions, each retaining their identity and autonomy but with overarching governance and quality structures, a common Educational Framework and shared values, approaches and operations.

Key to the effective working of the Learning Family is the alignment of member institutions within a group structure in which the chief executive of the group takes responsibility for governance and quality assurance throughout. Local governing boards at each institution have responsibility for student attainment and academic delivery. This two-tiered approach enables the group to operate holistically, removing competition and facilitating the sharing and cooperation between institutions necessary for prioritising individual learners and their needs at a local level.

The group structure opens a wide range of opportunities for sharing and collaboration. These will both drive value for money and create new services for learners, the community and businesses. Currently examples include the use of LSBU governance, finance and HR resources to support the MAT schools and the new Institute for Professional and Technical Education. Learners in the Family institutions also have access to LSBU online learning platforms. At a less formal level, the Family already supports the development of social capital and educational ambition amongst learners through a range of volunteering projects including mentoring and exchanges. LSBU students volunteer at Family schools providing role models for pupils and building their own social capital, experience and confidence. In future, Adult Education could be taken deeper into local communities using school facilities in the evening and at weekends; Family members could offer a more holistic approach to careers advice, as well as help with educational, job and funding applications; specialist university facilities could be made available to learners from the local FE College and University Technical College; specialist teaching expertise could also be shared between institutions.





## LOOKING AHEAD...

Ultimately LSBU aims to grow an inclusive educational group providing accessible educational opportunities from school years to workforce skills development, and facilitating life-long learning by offering straightforward progress and re-entry. The Family will offer learners, across all levels and ages, high quality education in the styles which best suit their needs when they need it. Learners will be able to transfer easily between technical, vocational and academic pathways, building a portfolio of skills, experience and qualifications.

LSBU believes that this vision can be provided by a group of complimentary specialist educational providers working together to support individual learners more effectively than through competitive organisations acting separately. The LSBU Family represents the response adopted by a group of providers in south central London. It is not suggested that this approach will be suitable for every locality in the country. However, the wider education community and those who have an interest in it locally and nationally are encouraged to engage critically with these ideas. In doing so they may see opportunities to help meet the skills shortages and social mobility issues in their own area. In south central London, some in education and the civic community are not prepared to wait any longer for yet another top down solution.





**London  
South Bank  
University**

EST 1892

## 125 years of transforming lives, businesses and communities

London South Bank University (LSBU) provides a highly applied academic environment which supports students into professional careers by providing them with the knowledge and skills that are attractive to employers. At the same time, it supports employers and the professions by providing the education, consultancy and high quality applied research they need to grow their businesses.

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