

# GAZELLE IMPACT REPORT

DECEMBER 2014



policy consortium

## THE GAZELLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT RESEARCH WAS CARRIED OUT BY SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE POLICY CONSORTIUM

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The Policy Consortium is a group of experienced people with strong and varied track records in Further Education and Skills. Members of the Policy Consortium work together and individually, providing advice, support and research for education and training. Clients include providers of education and training, commercial and sector organisations and public sector agencies. The Policy Consortium also functions as a community of practice, sharing know-how and ideas.

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# GAZELLE IMPACT REPORT

COMMISSIONED BY THE GAZELLE GROUP



Prepared by the Policy Consortium

December 2014

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gazelle was formed in 2011. It believes that developing entrepreneurial attributes throughout education is the most important step any society can take to support youth employment and promote economic growth and social value.

This report concludes that Gazelle has had a significant impact on the sector by:

- raising the profile of further education colleges as supporters of enterprise and entrepreneurialism in the consciousness of external opinion formers and stakeholder bodies as well as the wider public;
- stimulating culture change and new ways of working in a number of colleges—impacting upon management, staff and learners;
- creating and growing a network of colleges that collaborate to develop enterprise, entrepreneurialism and employability;
- introducing a range of new contacts, ideas and approaches that are helping to bring about new thinking to align further education to a changing world of work and a new political context;
- developing leadership training, informed by extensive research into the concepts of enterprise and entrepreneurialism, that many participants see as increasingly relevant to current and predicted demands on leaders in further education.

While it is clear to a dispassionate observer that Gazelle has been a force for positive change, it is also clear that it does not always get full credit for its achievements. This weakness in positive communication is at least as important as recent negative commentary in limiting the capacity of Gazelle to take forward its objectives.

Alongside the positive messages, this report identifies some issues concerning the structure, strategy and purpose of Gazelle that need to be resolved if the momentum established to date is to be maintained and increased. The issues are complex and mostly already recognised by key members of the organisations involved in Gazelle.

Gazelle's broad range of ambitions and interests, from securing learners' employability to delivering enterprise education and strengthening links with industry, calls for greater clarity around messaging and communication. Key conclusions and recommendations in this report include:

**Clarity:** Explain the relationship between the various strands of Gazelle activities and ensure that research conducted by Gazelle is contextualised to the UK's business and educational environment.

**Efficiency:** Make greater use of regional meetings to reduce travel demands and costs and focus on digital communication tools to develop communities of practice across Gazelle.

**Communication:** Ensure that the aims and distinguishing features of Gazelle colleges are well understood within individual colleges and as a group as well as by sector interest groups, government and the wider public. This should include systems for addressing adverse publicity in addition to promoting the benefits of the Gazelle approach by using a compelling and diverse narrative that resonates with a wide spectrum of target audiences.

**Evaluation:** Capture and disseminate good practice across Gazelle to measure impact more systematically and to demonstrate good value for money in times of austerity. In some Gazelle colleges, monitoring and measurable quality improvement is taken very seriously with imaginative front-line attempts to capture impact. While there is a valid 'too early to tell' argument, efforts to measure progress along the way should be made and will provide helpful evidence for both internal and external use.

In conclusion, we believe that Gazelle's impact on its member colleges and on the wider sector has been both positive and significant. We commend this and recommend that Gazelle acts on the various areas for improvement identified in this report to realise its full potential. Gazelle has a positive story to tell. It has, in the opinion of its founders and members, delivered significant value to students and staff. That value will be enhanced and more effectively communicated by clarity around its strategic aims and by a structure and delivery system that reflects those aims.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This was independent research carried out by members of the Policy Consortium for Gazelle. The report details the main impacts that have emerged from the research and exemplifies the good practice that has been identified. It also sets out a number of key issues that need to be addressed by Gazelle if it is to achieve its full aims and potential.

There are a number of important points to make that underline the challenge of making a comparative assessment of impact:

- Gazelle is a rapidly evolving initiative so, inevitably, we have striven to capture a moving target;
- Gazelle colleges are independent further education institutions that are responsible for their own success and will adopt and adapt Gazelle developments to meet local needs;
- The colleges are all at different stages on the journey and are moving at different speeds.

Gazelle is a young organisation and should be judged in the context of its current stage of development. While its flexibility is a strength, it is now maturing and would benefit from developing its approach, systems and structures accordingly.

The research underpinning this report was undertaken by seven members of the Policy Consortium during August, September and October 2014. It involved a thorough review of literature relating to the underlying thinking of Gazelle; discussions with senior staff employed by Gazelle and its investment partner, Pearson; in depth interviews and visits to three of the founder colleges; telephone and face-to-face interviews with staff at seven other colleges in the Gazelle Colleges Group; and informal conversations with a number of other stakeholders, in other colleges and parts of the sector, to identify comparisons and 'external' perceptions of Gazelle as well as the extent of its 'thought leadership'.

The organisations interviewed for this report are listed on p.24 and a bibliography is provided on p.25.

# 1

## THE IMPACT GAZELLE HAS HAD ON THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR AS A WHOLE

### THE GAZELLE PHILOSOPHY

- There is widespread agreement that the further education sector needs to focus more on enterprise, entrepreneurialism and employability as reflected in Government policy and in the increased focus of many colleges on employability. Gazelle's drive to put enterprise and entrepreneurship at the heart of college business and delivery is seen to have played a key part in bringing about that change.
- Within Gazelle colleges there are differences in understanding and emphasis: some concentrate on preparation for self-employment; some focus on 'being enterprising' as a component of employability; and some view enterprise as a universal benefit for learners and communities.
- In practical terms, it can prove challenging to pursue the linkage between the themes of developing enterprise in students, supporting their learning through an entrepreneurial environment, and reducing college dependence on public funding. It is, therefore, increasingly important to be able to clearly articulate what distinguishes a Gazelle college from other colleges with similar aims.

### THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

- Member colleges, and principals in particular, reported that a major benefit of membership was the engagement with global thought leadership, particularly around enterprise and entrepreneurship. This represented a substantial early investment by the founder colleges; in particular, bringing PA Consulting and more than a dozen colleges together for seminal research and development ('Enterprising Futures' and 'Future Possible'). Principals remain keen to continue to strengthen thought leadership around key areas such as the enterprising curriculum, entrepreneurial leadership and enterprising STEM.



- The Policy Consortium would agree that these early reports were highly significant as reflected in comments by the influential Babson College, USA, and in a large number of responses internationally as well as nationally (particularly around the thinking in 'Enterprising Futures').
- There is also clear evidence of the influence of Gazelle's thought leadership in a range of reports; e.g. 'The Richard Review of Apprenticeships', the UKCES 'Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot', and Lord Young's 'Enterprise for All' report. These reports demonstrate the impact that Gazelle has had on promoting and strengthening the links between further education, enterprise and entrepreneurship.

## PARTNERSHIPS

- Our research has shown that a feature of Gazelle is its willingness to share much of what it has done with the wider sector. The Association of Colleges, for example, is now an active and positive partner with Gazelle as illustrated by its joint delivery of the Enterprise Summit to the sector and by AoC Create's involvement in the Gazelle May conference ('Transforming Leadership and Governance'), the largest further education conference outside the AoC Annual Conference. Principals outside the Gazelle Colleges Group have also been influenced by, and found useful, Gazelle's thinking and initiatives.

Overall, Gazelle is seen as an organisation that has been proactive in sharing its thinking and in bringing it to the attention of the sector as a whole.

## CASE STUDY 1

### GATESHEAD COLLEGE

## NORTHERN STARS ENTERPRISE SOCIETY

The Northern Stars Enterprise Society is a student-led organisation. Its objectives are to promote enterprise and provide support for business start-ups. It organises events and activities, and surplus funds raised go back into the Society. Two of the students involved in the Northern Stars Enterprise Society spoke convincingly about how the enterprise activities they had participated in were giving them the confidence to talk to people and to cope under pressure. This had led to both of them deciding to switch from chef training to hotel and events management, and one of them intends to go to university.

They developed an idea for an events management agency as part of the Market Maker competition. They have been involved in organising a number of events, such as taking over the college restaurant to provide a Gala Dinner, and organising the college's Student Awards evening. They have developed



contacts in the hospitality and hotel business, notably at the Marriott Hotel. They were keen to emphasise that the Northern Stars activity could be undertaken alongside their coursework and they had developed their self-confidence and awareness of different career paths. And it was a lot of fun.

## 2

### THE IMPACT GAZELLE HAS HAD AT WHOLE-COLLEGE LEVEL AMONG ITS MEMBER COLLEGES

#### THE PURPOSES OF GAZELLE

Three distinct purposes emerged from our conversations:

##### **Gazelle as a pressure group seeking to change the nature of the sector in specific ways**

This is a role it has performed effectively around the enterprise agenda and by stimulating new approaches to delivering learning. If this were to become its central role, Gazelle would aim to 'represent' the wider sector on relevant issues; seek policy change where current systems get in the way; and engage at levels below senior management.

##### **Gazelle as a mutual support and development network with a focus on helping members to grow new approaches to learning and leadership**

The Gazelle Colleges Group is clearly valued by member colleges, and staff we spoke to welcomed the opportunity it gave them to collaborate with peers with a similar mindset and undertaking a similar journey. Members are keen, however, to supplement their involvement in Gazelle-managed networks with more local and online networks to encourage wider participation and reduce costs.

##### **Gazelle as a commercial organisation seeking to stimulate investment in new approaches to learning by colleges and by third parties**

An important achievement of Gazelle has been to demonstrate that the sector can generate external investment in new approaches to leadership and learning. The founder colleges made a substantial initial investment and Gazelle has subsequently attracted investment from an external partner.

For Gazelle to continue to prosper, it will need to adapt to the changing requirements of its members. Several colleges who are positive about the value provided by Gazelle have, nonetheless, chosen not to renew their membership. This is not a criticism of their experience to date but a recognition that, in the present economic climate, a £30K investment requires tougher scrutiny and an appraisal of alternative returns on that investment.

Gazelle will need to find new ways of engaging with colleges across the wider sector, while maintaining exclusivity for colleges wishing to sustain a model that delivers a broad and distinct range of products, services and opportunities for their own colleges. It will be helpful to agree on a clear and concise statement of what Gazelle means; for the group to evolve in the direction of a collaborative mission group; and to develop clear criteria for membership and for what members can expect in return.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- The Gazelle Leadership Programme with Babson College, USA, was one of the most positively received Gazelle activities. The programme provides practical approaches to help leaders act in an uncertain climate to solve problems and develop innovation in their colleges. Over 70 leaders from across the Gazelle Colleges Group have now participated in the programme, with many impressed with the content and taking the learning and concepts back into their colleges, either individually or as part of cross-college project teams.
- By connecting with world-class organisations such as Babson and the Kauffman Foundation, Gazelle has brought new thinking into how a more entrepreneurial culture and practice should be built into organisations, and is making an important contribution to leadership training and development for the sector. It should also take credit for the inclusion of an enterprise and entrepreneurship strand within the leadership framework under discussion with The Education and Training Foundation.
- Suggestions for improving the programme include stronger advocacy by college leaders; the creation of a critical mass to effect culture change; the dissemination of key learning to middle management and front-line staff; and a more cost-effective approach to effect wider reach.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND NETWORKING

- Joint staff development and networking opportunities were positively received and many would like to see more, specifically for teaching staff. There are established networks for principals, staff and student ambassadors, teaching and learning, marketing and commercial development. In addition to national networks, some are also being established at a regional level to facilitate wider participation and save travelling time and costs.
- An illustration of the power of networking was identified by outputs from the tri-annual Principals' meeting. These included the rapid take-up and development of STEM centre facilities across a growing number of colleges, and the implementation of an investment programme for students inspired by the John Lewis Partnership J-Lab initiative (Case Study 2). A sub-group of eight principals is also developing a strategy around STEM and the vocational curriculum.
- Other examples of the expansion of ideas is provided by learning companies and by some of the shared innovations in design thinking, Entrepreneurial Thought and Action, the Ice House Entrepreneurship Programme, and widespread participation in initiatives such as Market Maker, Pantrapreneur and other challenges created by Gazelle.

- Sustaining and growing these networks will be important for Gazelle, with greater use of social media and virtual groups to supplement face-to-face meetings. More opportunities for students and teaching staff will ensure that the networks are open and inclusive, and will also help to raise awareness of what Gazelle has to offer.

## CULTURE AND MINDSET

- The Gazelle approach has had most impact where it pervades the culture and mindset of a college (Case Study 3). While there were no examples of leadership, staff and students being as one in their engagement with the Gazelle philosophy and practice, even the most enthusiastic accepted that it was too early in the journey for this to have happened. Culture shift takes a long time, and the transformation agenda promoted by Gazelle is long-term in its ambition.
- There were several instances where the same enthusiasm and engagement could be seen from the Principal, the senior team, staff at the front line and students engaged in learning; while, in the same colleges, we also encountered staff and students who were less engaged, unaware or even cynical about Gazelle.
- Persistence is, therefore, important along with continued evaluation and feedback to governors, staff and students supported by improved messaging and internal communications (explored under Theme Five).

## INTERNATIONAL POTENTIAL

- A number of colleges are using learning and concept development from Gazelle to win international work in places as diverse as South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Colleges involved have used much of the Gazelle thinking around entrepreneurial college development to distinguish their offer and secure significant contracts. This is encouraging and creates a good foundation for future development.

# IMPACT ON GAZELLE COLLEGES

## CASE STUDY 2

### CITY OF BATH COLLEGE

## B-LAB

At one of the principals' networking meetings, the Principal of City of Bath College was inspired by the story of J Lab—a concept introduced to them by a director from the John Lewis Partnership. In J-Lab, John Lewis make small-scale investment funds available to those with innovative ideas, helping them move their ideas from concept to reality.

City of Bath College decided to try out this out with their students and and make small scale investments in their innovative ideas. Although at an early stage, the idea is proving popular. The word is spreading across the student population with students commenting that this is the sort of change that feels 'real' to them as an impact of Gazelle.



## CASE STUDY 3

### BARKING AND DAGENHAM COLLEGE

## CULTURE AND MINDSET



Barking and Dagenham College joined Gazelle in 2012 for several reasons: looking to 'supercharge' their activity still further through working with like-minded institutions to share experiences and ideas; accessing a recognisable brand and identity for stronger profile and impact; and greater access to 'big value' resources such as links to more entrepreneurs. A genuine 'competitive edge' is perceived through

all this, too. This image of broadly integrated cross-College approaches and impacts is well evidenced through the involvement of many different types of learner, together with the use of facilities, resources and ideas to support that (in other words, a transferable, common core 'golden thread' for all, seeing the 'T-shaped learner' concept as a universally desirable one).

There are examples of imaginative and unconventional settings for 'being enterprising' and 'entrepreneurial', well beyond the more familiar and immediate goals of self-employment or direct employability. They suggest holistic thinking as well as significant embedding and imaginative adaptation of the Gazelle philosophy and its underpinnings and activities. Efforts are under way to track short-term progress and impact in college enterprise and entrepreneurialism work in various ways as a necessary adjunct to longer-term measures of effectiveness (e.g. start-ups after 5 years).

## 3 THE IMPACT THAT GAZELLE INITIATIVES HAVE HAD ON LEARNERS, THEIR DEVELOPMENT, AND THEIR FUTURE POTENTIAL AS EMPLOYEES AND ENTREPRENEURS

### LEARNING COMPANIES

- 'Learning companies', where students engage in 'real work' as part of their learning, have been progressed by nearly all the colleges we visited. Gazelle has given a new impetus to commercial learning, including introducing fully-fledged companies with students engaging in real-time operations with customers. Examples include a property development company at Highbury College and a fitness company at North Hertfordshire College (Case Study 4). Some colleges are planning to roll out the concept across the entire curriculum so that all students can benefit from being part of a learning company.
- There was some divergence between those who felt Gazelle's learning companies should conform to a standard template and others who welcomed the flexible models that have emerged. Support from the centre was proposed for tackling policy issues and constraints, and legal issues, around the establishment of learning companies.
- We understand that following a positive mention in 'The Richard Review of Apprenticeships', discussions are underway with the Government over how the learning company concept might be explored as a key feature of the expansion of apprenticeships, and we support this direction of travel.

### COMPETITIONS

- Over 3,500 students have participated in Gazelle competitions. While the concept is not new, Gazelle has focused on social enterprise and entrepreneurship including engaging entrepreneurs as partners. An added value aspect of the competitions has been the opportunity for students to network and collaborate across a wide range of colleges (Case Study 5).
- Participation has been extensive involving managers, tutors and support staff, and Cardiff and Vale College has delivered enterprise content for the Level 3 Welsh Baccalaureate through the Market Maker competition (Case Study 6).

- Involvement in these competitions can give participants the experience and confidence to start their own business, with skills including developing a good business proposition, financial planning, negotiating with suppliers and pitching to investors.
- Members are keen to keep the costs of engaging in some of the competitions under review and for the offer to be refreshed to avoid 'flooding the market' with the same activity year-on-year.

## DESIGN THINKING AND ICE HOUSE

- Gazelle has uniquely introduced design thinking—a framework of approaches and techniques to encourage creativity and problem-solving—at curriculum and student level. Dozens of principals and managers have been trained in design thinking, and the evidence for a design thinking approach to curriculum innovation is apparent in City College Norwich.
- Gazelle would benefit from communicating and disseminating these concepts more vigorously to engage the wider college workforce.
- Gazelle has partnered with the Kauffman Foundation to introduce the Ice House Entrepreneurship Programme to the Gazelle Colleges Group, an online programme designed to instil entrepreneurial thinking in both educators and students.
- Some content from Ice House can be used as part of a student's programme or it can be taken as a stand-alone qualification. The number of participants to date has been low, so it is too early to comment on its impact and usefulness; but there is evidence of participants finding the programme to be effective (Case Study 7).

## STEM CENTRES

- One of the significant success stories of Gazelle, and one that is still being written, is Gazelle STEM Centres, a new learning model that encourages the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects. Two centres have been built on the model established by South West College—North Herfordshire College and Barking and Dagenham College—with a further centre under development at Preston's College.
- There is evidence of very strong links being built between the colleges and local hi-tech business and industry as a result of the STEM centres. Students have been exposed to new career options and aspirations, and to new ways of learning and applying learning from STEM subjects. Significantly, STEM centres have been opened up to local schools and their teachers, using imaginative and high-quality learning materials and techniques. School staff report taking ideas back from the centres to apply in their own lessons.
- While set-up costs can be significant, those canvassed indicated that the investment was more than rewarded by the impact and results. One area for development could be a higher level of exposure, perhaps through study visits, across the wider sector; something that would enhance the wider reputation of Gazelle.

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE

## FIT4LESS COLLEGE COMPANY



Members of the public are constantly surprised to discover that the highly successful Fit4less gymnasium in the heart of Stevenage town centre is actually a learning company owned by NHC. It is run on the Gazelle entrepreneurial philosophy and staffed substantially by learners on studies ranging from fitness coaching to business administration. Fit4less staff are recruited through the college's own

employment agency, Student Crew, which is also run as a learning company. The venture raised the earnings of students by £250,000 last year, providing a financial lifeline to many who would otherwise have quit their studies. Fit4less is a place of both earning and learning for up to 50 students.

The college successfully bid for and rescued the gym from closure two years ago when the LA Fitness chain went into the hands of administrators and local membership had dwindled to below 700. NCH re-launched it in the commercial market, demanding that students and staff run it as a viable entity with no subsidy, and membership is now 2,500. All parties were dependent on successful advertising and promotion to the public, since there would be no rescue package if the venture failed.

## CARDIFF AND VALE COLLEGE

## PANTREPRENEUR



Three students from Cardiff and Vale College were selected to represent the College in the national stage of the Pantrepreneur 2013. Their team, called 'Threads', developed a business plan, marketing and sales strategies, and learnt about social

entrepreneurship during the competition. As part of the project, 'Threads' organised a successful launch event, sold pants and vests at farmers' markets and ran a pop-up shop in Cardiff city centre.

The final of the competition was held at the Sunday Times Education Festival, where 'Threads' presented to a panel of industry experts and were placed third out of a total of 134 teams nationally, winning a £250 prize. One of the team said: "I really enjoyed taking part in Pantrepreneur. The competition has given me increased confidence, experiences and opportunities. I'm looking to use all of these skills when I progress to university. My advice to others is to go for it and don't let anything stop you. Team work and presentations helped my confidence—such as talking to a room of 30 people." This student has now progressed to university to study branding and advertising.



# IMPACT ON LEARNERS

## CASE STUDY 6

### CARDIFF AND VALE COLLEGE

## MARKET MAKER



Market Maker has been used by Cardiff and Vale College within the Welsh Baccalaureate in place of the standard enterprise activity. Twenty tutors were trained in Market Maker by Gazelle staff and the college is now cascading this to other tutors. Gazelle helped to keep teams on track and arranged for students to have contact with the Institute of

Directors. The Market Maker experience felt more real as an enterprise activity with students coming up with their own ideas to progress in the competition.

Numbers have increased from 250 students last year to 300 this year. A number of non-Welsh Baccalaureate learners are also interested in participating in the challenge. Outcomes from this experience include a noticeable increase in students' confidence and skills and several students starting their own businesses. 5000 full-time students have exposure to entrepreneurship, since they have an enterprise link as part of their induction. As this is kept on Moodle, it is available to part-time day-release students too. The CAVC Market Maker winners in 2013 "went to New York to visit CUNY and gained amazing experiences—this has had a huge impact on recruitment".

## CASE STUDY 7

### SOUTH WEST COLLEGE

## ICE HOUSE

The Ice House Entrepreneurship Programme was delivered to a group of full- and part-time higher education students undertaking the University of Ulster Foundation Degree in Business Services Management at South West College, Enniskillen, in 2014. The course duration was 8 weeks extended to suit student needs.

A review of the first cohort of students suggests that facilitated workshops had provided an excellent platform to discuss learning on a weekly basis and to investigate the application of the learning to the students' businesses and their studies. While it was difficult to balance the commitment with the formal programme, a facilitator ensured that learning progressed by dipping in and out of the online learning during workshops to challenge the discussion and its application. Four of the students



on the programme carried out a 'live test' of their solution through their business 'On The Run', a food delivery service to South West College staff and students. Following an enthusiastic response from customers, the students are now considering launching this business.

# 4

## A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF THE STRUCTURE OF GAZELLE—AN ASPECT CURRENTLY UNDER REVIEW BY THE GROUP

Most people we spoke to, including from the founder colleges, were convinced that the current structure needs to change and few could describe it with accuracy. For some, this did not matter; but others spoke of “needless” complexity.

- It is recognised that the structure is complex and this derives, in part, from different purposes and from the various phases of development of the organisation.
- We are aware that members have spent some time in the past year debating these issues and are reluctant to recommend a further period of internal focus that could be detrimental to more external-facing work. We do, however, conclude that the Gazelle brand would be stronger with a more focused purpose reflected in a simpler structure. One possibility could be to reserve the Gazelle brand for ‘core’ purposes and have a separate brand and organisation for other roles.
- Most people we spoke to recognised that there was a difference between the founding members and other members of the Gazelle Colleges Group, creating the potential for a conflict of interest. The five founders supported much of the early research, brand and activity through an investment and commitment significantly greater than the investment of Gazelle Colleges Group members. There was limited understanding of what the difference is, whether it matters, and whether it represents a permanent or transitional state of affairs.
- We fully accept that there has been no intentional lack of transparency. We recommend a clear structure with a commercial side and a ‘not for profit’ side, run by different CEOs, supporting colleges on a collective and collaborative basis. This would make clarity of purpose easier to achieve and communicate and would avoid potential conflicts of interest going forward.

# 5

## A DETAILED CONSIDERATION OF GAZELLE COMMUNICATIONS—AN ASPECT CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS OF THE GROUP

### MESSAGING

- The Gazelle leadership has made significant efforts to articulate the core message: the need for entrepreneurial students who are better prepared for work and self-employment and, latterly, a focus on colleges as businesses.
- Our enquiries suggest that this message needs to resonate more closely with the problems colleges face, and to be more clearly communicated to core stakeholders including parents and staff.
- A significant number of people asked for “clearer”, “simpler” and “more concise” messaging. It was noticeable that where the marketing network was strongest, there was less concern; indeed, there was evidence that the use of networking is increasing significantly and becoming a powerful mechanism for member colleges to promote entrepreneurialism, share intelligence and disseminate best practice.

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- Communications need to be addressed at three levels: between Gazelle colleges, within colleges’ local environments, and nationally. On the latter point, it is important to build a compelling narrative around the ‘big picture’ and around how Gazelle works in practice. Dynamic information is required to support that narrative, with stories across the spectrum of enterprise activities demonstrating how enterprise and entrepreneurialism directly relate to and impact upon individual students.
- There are indications that the situation is improving with the growing effectiveness of the Gazelle marketing network. It is also recognised that combined internal and external communications within colleges, and media and marketing around Gazelle membership and activities, need to be managed at senior management (if not director) level.

- A question was raised over the need for continuing professional development in overstretched communications departments in order to keep up with the pace of change in communications technology. This was generally recognised as a symptom of the wider sector facing a rapidly-increasing pace of change and volume of requests for information at very short notice. Where modernisation had happened, we found Gazelle operating most effectively.
- Several colleges were building strong communications systems at all three levels (internal, external and national), with North Hertfordshire College, in particular, ticking all the right boxes as a model of modernisation for the wider sector (Case Study 8).

## ISSUES MANAGEMENT

- The pro-active start for Gazelle, from the high-profile launch at the 2011 Association of Colleges conference in Birmingham under the auspices of Seven Hills, was powerful and effective. It was clear from our conversations with PR groups and some college leaders, however, that closer monitoring of negative signals and effective pre-empting of likely bad news was required.
- Many people in the colleges and agencies we spoke to considered that while a high dependence on pro-active promotion and communications brought considerable benefits, Gazelle could have been better prepared for the debacle in the trade press ('FE Week', the 'TES' and 'Private Eye') and on social media.
- Opinion diverged, however, on how to respond. Several colleges felt there should have been a swift riposte, "making clear Governors had been involved throughout, that they approved plans and expenditure, and received regular reports on finances and developments". Others suggested Gazelle was wise not to respond. It was evident that there has been some scepticism from colleges outside of the Gazelle Colleges Group towards the brand, at least in the short-term.

## DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

- There is considerable scope for a more creative and productive approach to the use of college websites and social media channels. There are contrasts between how the 23 colleges use digital media to promote Gazelle: 8 feature Gazelle on the home page; 10 have Gazelle sections; and 7 demonstrate a clear relationship to Gazelle.
- Communications staff and, to some extent, principals were aware of this and were rethinking priorities, staffing and resources committed to communications.
- Issues identified as needing attention included the regular refreshing of Gazelle-related materials on their websites and a more effective sharing of ideas—promotional, pedagogical and entrepreneurial—to ensure a cost-effective use of resources.
- The national Gazelle websites were also seen as "improving considerably" and "making their mark" after an uncertain start, with several college managers describing the latest version as "good". There was also recognition that the use of social media was slowly gathering pace, albeit more needed to be done to share web pages among colleges and exploit digital channels including Facebook, Twitter and other media.

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE COMMUNICATIONS



NHC created an Assistant Principal post for marketing, press and PR to ensure that internal and external communications have high status and profile. The college abandoned outmoded college press and PR structures, in favour of a commercial

press relations and communications unit run as a commercial entity along Gazelle lines. They also created a PR learning company through which the learners deal with commercial media transactions.

The college applies constant but low-key badging of Gazelle on entry signs, media releases, business invitations and educational partnership initiatives. Gazelle is never trumpeted as 'the' badge, but appears each time the college is mentioned, such as in a quote by the principal where the line is always "principal of a Gazelle Group college". A new website includes a Gazelle section to arouse interest in Gazelle and draw people into the site. Internal and external communications are an agenda item for detailed report-back every month at governors' meetings. All key messages about Gazelle are communicated as they develop in order to keep the media on-side.

### RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GAZELLE COMMUNICATIONS

- There is a need to re-think the communications strategy at every level, and it is clear from our observations that this is beginning to happen.
- Nationally, there is a need for some re-thinking about the balance between pro-active marketing and troubleshooting. This is not about burying bad news or evading criticism, but about sharpening the message, trumpeting successes, sharing concerns at all points, and making sure the press and media are well informed at every stage. Where credit is due for a specific Gazelle initiative, it should be given.
- Communicating success is about more than a promotional tool; it is about highlighting a proven value of investment in the brand—an essential adjunct to effective communications.
- Locally, colleges can do more to develop a strategic approach to internal and external communications and to follow best practice by representing these issues at the highest level of seniority. More use should be made of the popular and growing Gazelle networks to encourage this.
- There was clearly a high level of expectation that Gazelle would provide, from the centre, a range of good case studies and standard definitions and descriptions for use in wider promotion to stakeholders and the public. During our visits to member colleges, it was clear that this needed to be addressed but that some progress had already been made.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy Consortium's overall conclusion is that Gazelle has a good story to tell and individual Gazelle colleges have some solid achievements that deserve more widespread recognition. These include the development of new and exciting approaches to teaching and learning in individual institutions, and an increase in the reputation of the sector nationally in relation to an emerging policy focus on enterprise and entrepreneurship. Gazelle also deserves credit for demonstrating a sector-led approach to curriculum and leadership development.

Gazelle benefited, in its initial stages, from some charismatic and inspirational leadership that opened up new possibilities for the sector. There is now a need to balance the emphasis on innovation—crucially important in the early stages—with a structure more attuned to the smooth and efficient running of a large and complex organisation.

The potential impact of Gazelle could be affected if a number of factors remain unaddressed. These include:

- Clarity of purpose
- Structural reform
- Communications

Our core recommendations are:

**Focus:** Develop activities around a succinct set of core propositions that clearly define what it means to be a Gazelle college; the benefits for learners and employers; and how 'Gazelle central' can help colleges achieve those aims.

**Codify:** Indicate how progress towards overall aims will be measured through a combination of soft and hard indicators.

**Streamline:** Adapt the organisational structure of Gazelle to separate the commercial and core aspects, and streamline the organisation to improve value for money in a sector under continuing pressure to cut back on costs.

In conclusion, we consider that Gazelle has had a significantly positive impact on its member colleges and on the wider sector. We commend that, while recommending that Gazelle takes action on the various areas for improvement identified in this report if its full potential is to be realised.

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# ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED

## GAZELLE COLLEGES

Barking and  
Dagenham College  
Cardiff and Vale College  
City College Norwich  
City College Plymouth  
City of Bath College  
Gateshead College  
Highbury College  
New College Nottingham  
North Hertfordshire Colleg

## OTHER COLLEGES

Cornwall College  
Greenwich College  
North Warwickshire College

## OTHER BODIES

Association of Colleges  
Edge Foundation  
The Education and  
Training Foundation  
Pearson  
Seven Hills  
TEN Group  
UK Commission for  
Employment and Skills  
157 Group

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