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## Good Practice Example

Title:	Strategic and practical support for local communities
Provider:	Cornwall College
Type of provision:	FE College
Region:	South West
Remit area:	Learning and Skills
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Brief description:	The effective use of local sites as locations for the delivery of a broad curriculum, covering all sectors of the FE curriculum and significant HE provision as well.

## Overview – the provider’s message

“We serve a widely dispersed population in Cornwall by ensuring local delivery of a great range of courses that people have told us they want. All that we do is underpinned by one of our central values – putting the learner first. This means that we recruit learners onto appropriate provision and commit to ensuring that they successfully complete their courses. We work very closely with schools across the county.

We raise the aspirations of local people and help them to fulfil their potential. Our successful approach to partnership working has been a key element in helping us to raise our game and move us into the top quartile of colleges nationally, in terms of our performance, over the last four years.”



*Dave Linnell, Principal*

## The good practice in detail

What images does Cornwall generate in your mind? If you’re one of the millions of holidaymakers who have visited the county, then probably you have memories of long hot summer days, golden sandy beaches, pretty fishing villages, paddling or surfing, pasties and excited children. But there is another side to Cornwall that visitors often don’t see.

Cornwall is recognised as one of the poorest parts of Europe by the European Union. With low average wage levels and a lot of seasonal jobs, it is one of the ‘sparsest’ areas in Europe, where rural communities are often small and separated by long distances. It is not an easy place to travel around, especially if you rely on an often infrequent public transport service. So in many ways, what makes it a great place to visit can make it a tough place to live.

And that's where Cornwall College plays a role. When Ofsted inspected the college in May 2010, they said that the way the college meets the needs of the county's communities, schools and employers, and the way it works in partnership with them, is outstanding. The report says: "The college has a well-earned reputation for flexibility and a highly developed sense of social responsibility, and makes a significant contribution to both the social well-being and the economic regeneration of the county."

Cornwall College has grown out of the successful merging of a number of smaller colleges across the county over the last 15 years. There are seven major sites covering a wide geographical area. These local sites have been retained and they provide very good locations for the delivery of the broad curriculum, covering all sectors of the FE curriculum and significant HE provision as well. The strategic decision to keep these sites open, sometimes in the more sparsely populated areas of the county, manage them locally and ensure that they respond to local needs has been maintained over many years. There has been no overarching trend of centralising provision. While this dispersed approach is costly and means it is harder to achieve and sustain consistently high quality provision, there is no doubt that it has worked.

### **Local college councils**

A key element of this success has been the establishment of local college councils, each serving one of the college sites. These councils include representatives from the local community, businesses and voluntary groups. They have a membership of between 10 and 20 people and provide a voice that helps to shape local provision and make it accountable to the community. As Debbie Wilshire, the Deputy Chief Executive says, "Each college council member links the college into their own personal networks in Cornwall, creating a spider's web of contacts across the county."

Each council meets once a term and reports directly to the Corporation Board. A senior manager attends each council meeting to contribute to the discussions about future developments. This closely intertwined membership allows each council to help to shape corporate policy and strategy and ensures that decisions made by the Corporation are based firmly on the needs and aspirations of local communities.

### **The benefits for the Cornish community**



College council members ooze enthusiasm for the system and the way it works. Peter Hardaker, former CEO of Cornwall Farms Ltd, is Vice Chair of the council for Duchy College, Stoke Climsland (the land based college site) and is a member of the Corporation Board. He says, "Cornwall is a very contained economy. Most people who live in Cornwall also work in Cornwall. The danger is that it becomes too introspective and doesn't encourage new ideas and ways of thinking. Working with our partners in the region, nationally and in Europe, the college

has helped Cornish rural communities to develop ambition and drive, and central to this has been partnership working and the way the college councils have challenged and supported the college."

#### *Farmers receive their certificates*

There are some excellent examples of council members working with the wider education community to create innovative and exciting new opportunities for local people. A recent

example is the work of the South East Cornwall Learning Partnership that has created a new travel and tourism academy based at St Mellion International Resort. Stephen Towers, the Resort Director of St Mellion and a college council member, sees this as a 'win-win' development. He says, "This new development is a great example of local business and education partnership in action. Young people can have a high quality experience in the hospitality industry and gain their qualifications without having to travel for hours. The college really listens when people come to it with ideas."

Nicky Taylor is the HR Director for Samworth Brothers, a large company whose best known local product is the Ginsters pasty. She chairs the Saltash council, is a Corporation board member and chairs the Tamar Education Business Partnership based across the river in Plymouth. She is hugely enthusiastic about the way the college staff approach partnership working saying, "The staff are always up for working with you. It's really refreshing. They get what it means to be in a proper partnership. As well as being keen to make things work, they also have a passion to excel and really care about their learners."

There are a host of other examples where the college has worked with other local groups such as trade unions and voluntary groups to create provision that meets local people's needs. Rob Garrett, the local officer for Union Learn the learning arm of the TUC, has been working with the college for nine years now. He sees the college as creating flexible



provision to overcome the specific problems of local working people. For example, he and the college carefully planned an ICT and Skills for Life programme for the fire-fighters at Falmouth who work a shift pattern on four different watches. The programme included the use of laptops and online learning, as well as delivery at various times of night and day. Eleanor Beard of the 'WILD Young Parents Project' (a voluntary organisation that works with young parents across Cornwall), sees the benefits for her clients of the formal and informal contacts with college staff. She says they are, "down to earth, know our client group well and can work with them effectively. They respond well to our clients' needs."

*Fire-fighters receive their certificates*

Overall the college has a multi-headed approach to partnership working that makes it a welcome and valued partner wherever it goes. As all the senior managers agree, successful partnership working is based on having first class staff who know the local community and can work alongside them to help them to develop their talents.

Philip Rees, Chair of the Corporation Board, agrees with them, but he also identifies a final dimension; strong and clear strategic leadership. He sees the college as encouraging an entrepreneurial approach from staff which helps the college to grow, maximise income and create success by selling itself well. It is also a college that is keenly aware of its social obligations to the disadvantaged areas of Cornwall and marries these well with an outgoing and entrepreneurial approach.

So there is a lot to learn from Cornwall College about harnessing the enthusiasm of local communities and getting them to work with you to develop wider opportunities. Sally Foard, Director of Curriculum and Quality says, "We know the communities we serve and we find practical ways to help people to realise their ambitions".

## **Provider background**

Cornwall College ([www.cornwall.ac.uk](http://www.cornwall.ac.uk)) is a large general further and higher education college with sites across much of Cornwall, a predominantly rural county whose traditional industries such as mining, agriculture and fishing have declined over recent years. Household incomes and skills levels are low, and seasonal unemployment is high, although there are areas of affluence. The college offers courses in all subject areas. In 2008/09 there were around 30,000 enrolments on further education courses and 7,000 on work-based learning programmes. The college also offers a significant amount of higher education provision.