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Draft statement of

Scrutiny Board
(Children's Services)

14-19 Review of
Education and Training
Provision in Leeds

Introduction



Introduction

1. Education Leeds submitted a report to Executive Board in January 2007 which outlined the findings of the review of 14-19 provision in Leeds undertaken by Cambridge Education on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).
2. The Cambridge review highlighted the challenges Leeds faced as a city to transform Level 2 and Level 3 outcomes; increase participation in Post-16 learning; reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training; and develop the highly skilled workforce the city needs to compete in a global economy.
3. We were informed that delivering these improvements would only be possible through major transformational change and that these changes would be supported by a major LSC capital programme that could result in up to £200 million investment in the Further Education (FE) estate.
4. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 gave the local authority a new duty to provide the strategic lead for securing the 14-19 entitlement for young people. This includes the essential role of making sure that schools and colleges between them make the full range of opportunities available in their area.
5. A number of options were being explored with the LSC, key partners and stakeholders. A detailed report on potential options was to be taken to Executive Board in May 2007.
6. Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) welcomed the opportunity to comment on the review prior to the report to Executive Board in May.

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7. Members learned that the suggested changes to 14-19 provision were designed to significantly increase Level 2 and 3 outcomes and increase progression rates into further and higher education. This was likely to result in a refocusing of FE resources away from Level 1. Members were concerned that the refocus of resources should not be detrimental to other aspects of the education system such as adult learning, SEN, projects focused on disaffected and disengaged young people, and the teaching and learning of 'soft' or 'life' skills.
8. Members were keen to see clear links with other services such as libraries and the youth service to ensure that the needs of those outside formal education were met. The board urged officers not to forget the long term costs of not meeting the needs of this group such as crime and drug and alcohol misuse.
9. Concern was expressed about how the changes might affect young people with special educational needs. Many of these learners make the transition to higher education later than other pupils and the colleges do not currently cater for their needs. Officers reassured us that all the discussions they have held had raised the profile of SEN provision. They acknowledged that current arrangements were not ideal. Members wanted to see clear plans in place showing how the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs (up to 25) would be met in the new 14-19 world.
10. Members were informed that the Cambridge report indicated that the current organisation of FE colleges will increasingly fail to meet Leeds' economic and social needs. There was a strong case for merger accompanied by the potential for substantial investment in the FE estate by the LSC. The creation of a single or perhaps two FE colleges (bringing together Park Lane College, Leeds Thomas Danby, Leeds College of Building, Leeds College of Technology and Joseph Priestley College) would be best placed to deliver the required outcomes.
11. This, it was hoped, would ensure no wasteful duplication or competition around skill areas. It would also support clear, comprehensive and effective planning and clear structures for collaboration that would facilitate a city-wide approach to the planning of provision and the creation of clear learning pathways. This is not possible with the current provision of FE colleges.
12. Members were keen to make the point that the merged college

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appeared to be only an administrative device and that the locations would still be the same. Members were concerned about the potential contradiction between the desire to streamline provision and eliminate duplication with the need to continue to provide learning opportunities in various locations.

13. In addition, the board were keen to point out that improved learning infrastructure did not necessarily lead to improved teaching and learning. The aspirational improvements in outcomes at Levels 2 and 3 would not be achieved with new and renovated buildings alone.
14. The complexity and geographical location of the new arrangements leads to another concern: transport. In particular we were concerned that students in outer areas of Leeds might find it difficult to travel between sites. Transport (including the potential costs to students) has come up as an issue for young people many times in various consultations. It is important, therefore, that the full curriculum is accessible from their locality and that transport practicalities have been fully considered.
15. In addition, access to the full curriculum for those living in outer areas of Leeds might mean that they access provision in a neighbouring authority. Members were keen to stress the need for effective joint working with our city region partners to ensure no artificial barriers are in place, and that pupils can access the full curriculum at the most convenient place geographically regardless as to where local authority boundaries lay.
16. Members were also concerned, given the short timescales for such fundamental changes, that the young people moving through the system now, were not adversely affected. The project needed to be a carefully managed phased development.
17. Members were informed that the new post-16 funding methodology due to come into force in 2008 would lead to major reductions in funding for many Leeds schools. In particular it was suggested that many inner city school sixth forms would no longer be viable. Current provision, we were informed, in many inner Leeds schools delivers below average outcomes and inadequate choice, largely due to very low student numbers.
18. Members were concerned that the new 6th form funding arrangements, which will be based on actual retention and achievement performance, could lead to schools taking a more cautious approach to allowing

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students onto courses, thus narrowing rather than widening access for borderline students.

19. We were also concerned about how the schools themselves would cope with such a sudden reduction in their income. We were pleased to hear from Education Leeds that a proactive approach was being taken to this problem. Members wanted to see what plans and resources were being put in place to support schools through these difficult transitions. In addition, we were concerned about the possibility of staff redundancies, and noted that FE college staff are currently paid less than teachers in schools.
20. In addition, Members were concerned that the social benefits of small sixth forms not be lost. The board pointed out that many young people from deprived backgrounds particularly benefited from the supportive environment and opportunities for personal development available in a small 6th form, and that they would find it more difficult to find the support they needed if they were part of a large college. Members felt that clear arrangements for how young people will be supported through 14-19 needed to be included in the project plan.
21. Members stressed the importance of the development of 'soft' or 'life' skills in our young people.

Officers admitted that the current curriculum was not able to develop these skills adequately. We were pleased to hear that the profile of such skills would be raised in the next paper due to go to Executive Board in May.

22. We were concerned that many families might find it difficult financially if 16-18 year olds were required to be in full time education. We heard that those on apprenticeships earned upwards of £80 per week and that students from families on benefits or below a certain income threshold were entitled to an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of up to £30 per week. The threshold, however, would present a problem for some families.

Recommendation 1
That these concerns must be raised by Education Leeds when responding to the green paper 'Raising Expectations'.

23. Members were also informed that the direction of travel proposed would not work unless the ICT fabric was improved. We were reassured that the development of the Leeds Learning Net 2 platform (required to develop learning applications) was well advanced. An e-prospectus was being developed, curriculum materials and leisure activities would be accessible over the internet, and

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e-ILPs would be in place for pupils from the age of 8. Members look forward to a clearer position statement with regard to IT being included in the May paper to Executive Board.

24. Above all we were concerned that the needs and opinions of the learner were not represented in the reports produced so far. Effective consultation with those who will be most affected by these changes is essential if the transition is to be a success. We were particularly concerned in the light of national pressure being applied to agree organisational changes quickly in Leeds.

Recommendation 2
That Education Leeds and the LSC ensure that young people are properly consulted on the proposals for change before any final decisions are made.

Recommendation 3
That Education Leeds report back to us on how the Scrutiny Board's many concerns about the 14-19 review are being addressed.

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