

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Report of the 14-19 Working Group

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Background

As part of their work programme for 2008/09, the Children's Services Scrutiny Board decided to carry out an inquiry which would examine the potential impact of a range of changes to 14-19 provision. These include changes to the curriculum and the introduction of diplomas; the increase in apprenticeships; the raising of the leaving age; the transfer of funding from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities; new information, advice and guidance (IAG) requirements; the local review of college provision; and the ongoing development of trusts and academies.

As part of this inquiry, it was decided to hold several working groups to meet with representatives of partners/stakeholders to discuss their roles in the future delivery of 14-19 education and training in Leeds. This first working group gave members the opportunity to discuss these issues with education providers, including schools, colleges and work based learning providers.

In particular, the group decided to discuss the ways in which the new arrangements could be used to help those young people who struggle to achieve in the current system (such as those who become NEET), and also to examine how the shift towards more collaborative working was affecting providers.

Working Group Meeting

The following key information emerged from the discussion at the working group meeting:

Several school representatives explained how partnership working had begun to transform post-16 provision in areas where there have traditionally been

small 6th forms, with very variable provision and small classes. This principle was now being extended to the entire 14-19 provision including efforts to engage colleges and work-based learning providers. The only area of concern was related to IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance), as most young people still saw the teachers in their 'home' school as the best place to go for advice, despite the fact that more innovative sources of advice should be available. In particular, there was a danger that teachers and Connexions PAs may be offering advice which was too 'traditional', and that many of them lacked a full understanding of the range of options on offer, including diplomas and apprenticeships. However, providers were keen to point out that this may be due to a lack of support from Connexions, rather than lack of dedication on the part of staff.

Questions were raised by members as to how this type of collaboration would function with the introduction of more academies and trust schools. However, these were recognised as simply another group of providers.

School representatives also raised concerns that collaboration could become simply another 'layer' in addition to families of schools, wedges and extended schools clusters. There is an increasing and urgent need to introduce real coherence between these various groupings.

As well as schools being encouraged to think beyond their local area, and join forces with others, colleges also face the challenge of thinking more 'locally' in the new environment. Ironically FE provision is being centralised at a time when schools are attempting to develop a new model of provision which covers the whole wedge or local area. However, Pete McCann made it clear that Leeds City College see their contribution as an essential part of this new landscape. The college is particularly focused on running those courses which would prove too expensive or specialised for individual schools to provide, and meeting other gaps in provision. They are also committed to providing an attractive learning environment for those 40% of young people who leave school without sufficient qualifications to join the workplace.

In terms of apprenticeships, the representative from West Yorkshire Learning Providers expressed concern that Leeds was in danger of falling behind in offering work based learning opportunities. In particular, it was felt that there is a need for improved IAG, which promotes work based learning not just to young people but also to their parents, who may have outdated preconceptions about apprenticeships. It is also essential that major employers (including the Council) make a commitment to providing apprenticeships, and that better links are established between these employers and schools. One possible way forward is a dedicated 'apprenticeship careers event', which would help to raise the profile of work based learning among young people, parents and employers. It was unclear whether this would be a single central event, or a series of smaller, more localised ones.

In order to address the needs of the most vulnerable young people members felt that pastoral care needed to be improved. It was explained that collaborative working could actually increase the capacity for assisting those

young people needing extra support, especially when linked to extended services. Pastoral care also continues into further education, with a great deal of work being done to improve self-esteem and give young people who had not been successful at school a fresh start in a new environment.

The need for adequate governance arrangements where various providers are working in partnership was highlighted by members, as well as the need to include young people in the process so that they see the value of these partnerships and cooperate with them. Parents also need to be convinced of the value of collaborative arrangements, as many may initially be uncomfortable about their child travelling to a different school to study certain subjects.

Another potential barrier is the different funding arrangements for schools and colleges, and the different terms and conditions for teaching staff. Providers stressed the need for a level playing field, so that institutions providing the same course would be given the same level of funding for doing so. This year, the issue of funding is likely to be particularly crucial given the shortfall in LSC funding. In the future, differences between salary and payment regimes for teaching in schools and colleges may produce difficulties, especially if staff are employed by more than one institution.

Transport could also become an area of concern. In some areas of the city where collaborative working is functioning well, transport problems have been successfully overcome – for example by hiring coaches to take pupils from place to place. The cost of this is being met by the schools and other partners, and this is money which cannot therefore be spent on provision. In the longer term, protocols may need to be developed to cover this, as well as arrangements for timetabling and support for students.

Finally the issue of guidance in terms of raising the participation age was brought up. Providers felt that the lack of central government guidance could prove problematic in light of the fact that the first wave of young people due to stay on to 18 would be starting school in September 2010, and schools would therefore need to be in a position to plan their pathways this time next year.