

SELECT COMMITTEE - STUDENT JOURNEY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Student Journey held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 7 June 2011.

PRESENT: Mr K Smith (Chairman), Mr M C Dance (Vice-Chairman), Mr A R Chell, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr R J Lees and Mr M J Northey

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr G Romagnuolo (Policy Overview Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

9. Interview with Martin Blincow, Learner Support Manager, Kent County Council *(Item 1)*

During the interview, Mr Blincow used a laptop and projector to demonstrate various website pages.

Please introduce yourself and describe your role and responsibilities

I am the 14 – 19 Learner Support Manager. I think a key part of what we need to do to prepare young people for work is to explain to them the complexities of work. The philosopher Alain de Botton wrote a book called 'The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work', which inspires me greatly. We should take more time and put more effort into helping young people to understand what is involved in a job.

My team has responsibility for KentChoices4U.com, work-related learning, enterprise education and progression into Higher and Further Education. All this is part of the message of what is involved in the adult world beyond school.

What we deliver is the 14 – 19 IArea Prospectus, and Common Application Process, which is web-based and has an IAG portal. This includes signposts to impartial information available locally, and an online application process. We have the largest online application process in the UK, and by the end of 2011 this standard was meant to be available across the whole UK, but this target has now been removed by the Government.

Kent was an early adopter of the September Guarantee, under which all 16 – 19 year olds have to have a guarantee of a place in a school or college for the start of the September term. We manage this process online. This gives us early warning of any young person who has not got a place and avoids the danger of them becoming NEET. We have engaged local providers, area by area (although we are trying to improve the take-up in some areas), and 95% of year 11 pupils are registered online.

Can you identify any young person who has not applied for places?

Yes we can.

We have 245 providers and 10,000 different courses to offer. This year we have a new IAG portal at the front of the prospectus to help young people, parents and teachers. We will see how this runs this year and re-design it, if necessary, next year.

Screen showing example of front page as seen by online user.

A user can search by geographical area and find providers in that area. Other buttons offer links to Employers pages, Parent and Carers pages, Higher Education, Careers, etc. We collate and present existing information; we do not produce any of it ourselves. University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is responsible for 85% of local authority Area Prospectus software across the UK, and seeks to improve the quality of information for 18 year olds. Many young people will receive and keep more than one offer of a course place so they have a 'spare' to fall back on in case they don't get their first choice, and this means that many spaces (ie all the spares) are not taken up at the start of the academic year and are therefore wasted.

What affect has the, or will the, increase in university fees have on the choices young people make?

I expect that this will reduce the applications for Higher Education in the short term. These have already started to drop as many people thought that the increase was coming in this year. We need to address what these young people might do instead of going to university, so we will add a link to 'Not Going to Uni' on the website.

Many young people think of their future in terms of what they want to be or what they want to do as a job, so we need to take that as a starting point and work back to what courses they need to do to get there.

Yes, we will include a link called "I could..." and set out examples of what is involved in, and what skills are needed for, different careers. From this they can be guided back to which course to choose. Pathways are important.

There is still a supply-and-demand issue, eg 900 jobs unfilled in the rural sector. How can we address this?

The way in which we link with employers is one of things we want to develop.

Screen showing application screen, of similar style to a shopping channel – pick and 'add to basket', 'review later', etc. Applications and offers can both be made via the screen.

The approach we tend to have on line is an educational one, as most information is from schools. We write to all parents and carers in October to tell them about the system and how to use it.

Screen showing the number of users.

Users are mostly year 11 and year 12 pupils. Many keep their accounts open from one year to the next, and we are seeking to develop this facility. Some users are 'out of county', eg Cranbrook School receives a percentage of its applications from abroad.

We can identify any young person who has not activated their account. We know that 20% of young people have difficulty accessing IT, eg if they have no computer at home, or their school has limited access to IT equipment.

Can you tell if they use the site? It's an excellent site but, to benefit from it, young people have to engage with and use it.

We have seen the usage increase, both in terms of the number of pages visited and the length of time spent on site.

Young people seek something interactive, so there is a need for a complete service.

Information and advice can be delivered by technology, but guidance still needs to be delivered in a face-to-face chat.

Is the service you provide duplicated anywhere else in Kent?

No, we are the only team offering this, although there might be some level of overlap with apprenticeships.

We could seek to develop the site and broaden the offer, but we need to consider how best to do this, perhaps by adding software that we can sell to schools. We could offer a 'mainstream' option and an 'other' option, so people can see the whole range in one place. It would be very useful to be able to include apprenticeships, and profiles of some employers. Some employers prefer 18 year olds rather than graduates. They take them on then and train them in their own way, using a combination of in-house and Higher Education courses. There are large employers, eg Boots, who want to attract trainees, so it would be useful to be able to signpost people from our site to jobsites.

What changes are going on at the moment, for instance funding changes?

In terms of changes, there is the National Careers Service and the Education and Skills Act. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has a website and a helpline to signpost people. By 2012 I would expect our responsibility for a universal careers service to end and for this to be with schools instead. Our responsibilities are to track all learners and to give information advice and guidance (IAG) to all year 11 pupils and particularly to those identified as 'vulnerable learners'. Maybe schools haven't given enough thought to how they will do this. We will have to trust schools to make their own decisions, and they will have funding for this from the Dedicated Schools Grant, but there is the potential that the quality of service provided will drop and that coverage will become patchy. We could suggest a kite mark scheme to set standards. Schools will need guidance and support to do this. BIS has very few pages of guidance so will need more, and guidance will need to be clearer. Some information contradicts other information in the same site, and some is open to different interpretations.

How could you check how well schools were delivering careers advice? Would careers advice be delivered by teachers who are taking that on in addition to their teaching commitments?

A kite mark scheme, if this is brought in, would help check quality of provision. When resources are tight and cutbacks are being made, careers advice might be one of the first areas to be squeezed.

I think KCC will have a major role in this. This Committee's recommendations will need to be carefully thought out to make a real difference in this area.

As schools are clustering and gaining more independence, KCC will lose its influence over them, so we'll need to be quick to get in and make our case. If we could enforce a kite mark scheme, parents would be able to choose a school which has the kite mark accreditation and will give good careers advice. We have the Connexions contract until 2013, and there is a 20-point IAG health check, but it is quantitative rather than qualitative. There is 18 months to set up a new scheme ready for the start of the National Careers Service.

Time will be tight for the Select Committee to influence future provision, once it finishes its work and publishes its report.

October/November is the key time to brief schools for next year.

As schools convert to academies and become autonomous, the KCC will lose its control over them, and the quality and consistency of careers advice might be reduced. Is there a body we can use to check and/or control what careers service is delivered?

Freedom is good but you still need security. Careers advice in schools is sometimes provided by any teacher who has some spare time, and these teachers have all sorts of backgrounds. A framework to standardise careers advice could be provided by the Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Network.

KentChoices4U.com was intended as a vehicle, and each school would have a designated person who would be responsible for getting young people on board with it.

Yes, we tend to have one named contact in each school – eg the Head of Sixth Form.

Wolf did not say much about IAG, so we are asking what will be done about it.

The government will hold two summits – one with young people and one with career organisations – to address this. Work-related learning and careers education for young people under 16 will no longer be a statutory provision from September 2012. Roles will change, and it will no longer be a duty, but will be an 'expectation'.

The Committee has been told about the importance of parents as shapers of their children's views. Is your site parent-friendly?

There is a 'parent' button, which takes them to information for them. There is a link for parents to give feedback, and their comments help shape the site.

Could we establish a 'Kent Kite Mark'? Would that demonstrate KCC's power and responsibility in this field?

We could do. It could perhaps be called 'Kent Expects...'

There is a chasm opening up between KCC and the schools which are becoming academies. I think we should deal very carefully with the changes and the new relationships.

Some people in my team have the specific job of building and managing relationships between KCC and its partners. We could assess what services we can offer to academies, and we would charge them for the services we provide, so this will make a different type of relationship. Academies are still on the CEIAG networks.

Do you have links to the Kent Youth Service?

Yes, and also to Gateways and Libraries.

**10. Interview with Els Howard, Educational Consultant, K College, Ashford
(Item 2)**

Please introduce yourself and describe your role and responsibilities.

I am based in Hythe and work as a consultant in the Shepway area. My role links education with work, and I work very closely with Secondary schools. I have been involved in running skills fairs for the last three years, at which it is usual to get 95 stands and some 12,000 student attendees. I also sit on education-based committees. I am not involved in (or interested in!) the politics around careers advice and school/work links; I am someone who wants to be involved in doing things!

I work as a part-time lecturer at K College in Ashford, and this regular contact with students helps me understand their needs. I meet some very needy, vulnerable students who come from deprived backgrounds and who desperately need help to build their confidence, so pastoral care and support is very important. I find that progress with these students is made up of many 'small wins'. Something as simple as a smiley face on a good piece of work can help build confidence.

Yes, the Committee is finding out that pastoral care is an important part of what we need to look at.

With students like the ones I describe, you need to start from 'I can't ...' and nurture and train them to build their confidence. It would be helpful to have a mentoring scheme to help students grow in confidence and skills. The College used to link with Education Business Partnerships, which offer mentoring projects for adults. The challenge with mentoring is that you need to dedicate time to it, but the Government is only interested in progress which can be measured in figures. When I was a Governor of a school I was involved in exclusions panels, and from that I could see patterns of what goes wrong in students' school careers. Schools need help to address these issues. Colleges are geared to keeping young people on their books so they maintain the funding for those young people, but they are limited in the resources that they can give to addressing issues like pastoral care.

Does the behaviour of disaffected young people in a group adversely affect the education of others?

I don't agree with people who say that disaffected students should be removed from the 'normal' class, unless their behaviour is very threatening. It is important to look at other ways of dealing with them, and build a system which will include them, as withdrawal is not a solution. They have already been rejected in other areas of their life, perhaps by their family or step family, and we need to find a way to make them feel part of society. Perhaps people from local companies could be asked to volunteer their time or sponsor an initiative to address these student's issues, or perhaps older or university students could act as mentors, particularly if they had similar issues and successfully overcame them.

Maybe Challenger or Skills Force would work with this sort of project?

Extra teaching support for needy children would take massive resources. Teachers might well be sympathetic to a student's problems, but the limited

resources they have means that, ultimately, a student must conform or be removed from the class.

I think you'd need to distinguish between urgent situations – eg threatening someone with a knife, in which a student must be removed from others immediately, without discussion - and other levels of disruption, which require different treatment. There is no structured approach which sets out how to deal with different types and degrees of behaviour, so such a structure would be needed.

People refer to pastoral care in a school, but all teachers show care for their students. There are ways of building up a student's confidence and self-respect. If you praise some small aspect of a young person's appearance or conduct, they will soon start to take pride in that aspect and make an effort to develop it.

Mentoring seems a good option where there is no other source of support, and we should look at how it could be achieved. I mentor young people in my area and I can see the difference it makes, so I know that it's a valuable tool, but how is it viewed by teachers and other professionals?

Mentoring used to be done more, and I was directly involved in it, but many schools gave it up as it took up too much time. Schools let go of mentoring schemes when their links with the Education Business Partnerships ended. There was a scheme in which very well-trained educationalists went into schools to mentor students. These mentors had networks and meetings at which best practice was discussed and shared. There was also a mentoring scheme which involved volunteers from outside the education field. This had the advantage of allowing young people to let off steam about school life and teachers to someone independent. Schools and students both need this sort of support.

Can you tell us a bit about the 'Inspiring Communities' initiative?

This project exists in six areas of the UK, including Folkestone. It involves a group of students and their parents, who need to be carefully chosen. I designed four projects which could be taken on by families who were struggling with long-term health issues or unemployment, and I worked with the group over a year. The students involved were the very needy, who had no role model of a successful adult who had achieved in higher education. I can give you some examples of successes:-

- One young man who was very withdrawn and had been bullied joined the project for a year. He went to London to a skills event for Higher and Further Education, and to Brussels for a few weeks to work with the European Community. I had helped him learn some French before he went there. He had a really good outcome from the project.
- A mother with low confidence and self-esteem surprised me by going off to explore Brussels on her own, following a map, and she gained a massive confidence boost as result.

Long term effects are still going on, like the projects which introduced young people and parents to the benefits of cooking together. Three of the parents are now pursuing GCSE courses. These projects did not take much funding, but I found a small amount of money for the initial set-up. From that point, much of the progress was the result of the participants' enthusiasm to carry it forward.

Many agencies work with vulnerable families, but these agencies are not linked up. Such links do not necessarily need financial support; the passion and drive of those involved are more important drivers. We need to support the parents to support the students. It is not their fault they are ill or unemployed. They are very caring parents, but the system and their health problems are stacked against them and they lose confidence.

The 'softer' aspect of education - the socio-economic setting - is important. We could say that all young people should be offered mentoring to fill in any gaps that are left by other forms of training.

Some schools deal very well with students' disruptive behaviour. We should ask if any research has been done into how these schools handle it – ie what methods they use – and what makes a difference, either positive or negative? Many students go through a bad phase and will come out of it eventually, but it has to be managed properly when it is happening.

What is very important is the curriculum. Learning needs to be re-designed to lead a student realistically to their future working life, and should not be aimed at university as those who do not attend university can be seen to have fallen short. I think the challenges of young people setting out into the world of work and training should be sorted out first, then from there you would work back to set up a school curriculum which supports this.

Yes, this Committee is about looking at the route, and vocational rather than academic training. Do you use KentChoices4U?

No.

It would be very helpful to have your views on it. Would you take a look at it and contact us with your opinion, please?

How does what you do relate to what academies have to do to attract good students?

I am a Governor of the Marsh Academy, which is over-subscribed. It has a very different culture now that Roger De Haan is a director and investor in it, and has changed a lot since it became an academy. It was previously in special measures but is now outstanding. The buildings are old and not well maintained. It has been turned round by a new Principal, who meets with parents regularly and works closely with them. Now it competes with the grammar school for good students.

It attracted an innovative Chinese maths teacher who used to work in local industry. He approaches maths teaching by highlighting the practical applications of maths. He also runs a weekend Badminton club at the Academy, and some students have joined who have never willingly taken part in PE before. The Badminton club starts at 8 am every Saturday and Sunday, and has 45 students. Some students who would not have stayed in school previously now do so as they would not be allowed to take part in the Badminton club if they skip other classes. This man has had a 'Teacher of the Year' nomination as his inspiring approach has made such a big difference to the attitude of so many students. It goes to show that smart new buildings aren't everything when it comes to running a good school!

I know other places that have very tatty buildings but are excellent schools and many times over-subscribed.

Inspiring and dedicated personalities are important too. One thing that Roger De Haan has brought to the Academy is that he views students as clients, to whom you must deliver a good service which meets their needs. Head Teachers need to be very involved with students on a daily basis, as that personal contact and interest are important.

The Government's response to the Wolf report refers to the need to raise the attainment of low-performing pupils. Local authorities have to look at best practice across their schools and local academies to assess how this could be addressed, and report back to Government in December 2011.

I think we need to work better with industry, and I do a lot of work with local companies. One project involves local companies seeking some artwork for their premises – something relevant to the company – and local students produce some artwork for them. Students have to demonstrate initiative in producing and pitching their art project to the company. This interaction helps the students' understanding of local industry, and makes industry something less distant and more relevant. Previously, students might see a large company such as Pfizer as being purely about science, and hence discount them as an employer if they are not interested in science, but such a company also employs people to manage administration, staff catering, site maintenance, etc, so could offer employment which is not related to science. There are many very successful local companies (eg Unilever) in the UK who offer mentoring very successfully to local Primary and Secondary schools.

Some young people still go to Secondary school not being able to read or write. How can we live with this? They are bound to become the unemployed of the future.

Schools are responsible for young people's education but not for their employability, and they need a way to measure a student's employability.

It will be very hard to embed this. I think it is essential that teachers have a taste of industry and do not just open a textbook. Traditional teaching methods are inflexible.

What recommendation would you like the Select Committee to make to address the issues you have told us about? Select Committee recommendations have the power to bring about change.

There is a need for much time and energy to be spent on preparing young people for work. It is not necessarily about large sums of money. Many people are willing to give their time and skills to help young students. It needs more than just people in grey suits.

Many teachers are not exceptional but are very capable and able to lead young people. The best teachers have some other life experience apart from teaching – like an industry mathematician who plays Badminton. The old saying that 'it takes a village to educate a child' is true. How far would such a system need to be formalised? Finding good people to mentor and inspire young people seems to happen randomly or by chance, and arrangements seem to be *ad hoc*.

Mentoring would need to be formalised as you'd need to find and train the right people. Mentoring cannot be undertaken by just anyone. What I would like the Select Committee to recommend is a national mentoring scheme. This would need to be organised by a body which is independent from schools, and would need also to have someone in the KCC to make links.

If the mentoring system were formalised, would you risk losing the brilliant eccentrics?

Some people are natural mentors. Some have had problems in their past and can see instinctively where a young person is coming from.

I think there should be an employability aspect as part of the context of a mentoring scheme, when this is implemented.

Yes, if something is not properly embedded in a scheme, it could miss being properly measured.

I am concerned about the financial imperatives of colleges, ie keeping students in seats so the college continues to receive funding for them. We should re-visit the IAG on which students based their decision to choose a particular college or course. The aim would be to get them to stay in a course because they wanted to be there.

In Further Education, we do have some students who don't want to be there, as they haven't found the right college or the right course. Maybe colleges should not be funded for the number of students in seats, as this pressures them into holding onto unsuitable or unhappy students.

The KCC can influence this. I know from a Councillor colleague that his Rotarian group gives young people experience of interviews by conducting real life interviews with them. They keep the tone friendly but even then some young people find it very frightening and do not handle it well. I think it would be useful for students to have more of this sort of link, and I know the Rotarians would be willing to help. We could identify a project and seek groups which would be interested in delivering it in their area.

If such a scheme were to include local businesses, it would have to be right for the school and the business. Needs should be identified first, and then a suitable scheme built up to meet them.

I have a passion for this subject, and am open to any ideas which will help address young people's needs. I am happy to answer any further questions that the Committee might want to send me.

There is a thought I will leave with you – to fail at something is not necessarily bad thing, as failure is part of success.