

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - STUDENT JOURNEY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Student Journey held in the Swale 2, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 23 June 2011.

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

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

13. Interview with Anne McNulty, Education Business Partnership Kent *(Item 1)*

Please provide an outline of the roles and responsibilities that your post involves, and an overview of the services supplied by Education Business Partnership Kent.

I am the Executive Director of EBP Kent, which is a limited company. Some 17,000 other companies work with us. We work with young people between the ages of 4 and 24, and we link to 67 Schools for Work Experience and a further 25 who contract purely for activities around employability. We are funded in small part by commissioning fees from KCC but most of our income comes from schools which purchase our services.

I am pleased to have been invited to address the Select Committee, as EBP Kent has been working on the Student Journey for 10 years. We work with pupils in Key Stages 1 – 5, and with university students. We work on the principal that every student is ultimately aiming to enter employment, whether at 16 in an apprenticeship scheme or after graduating.

We base our work on the need for employability skills such as customer awareness and teamwork, which are needed in all jobs, rather than technical knowledge, which will change frequently and require constant re-training.

We currently work with 35,000 young people from Key Stage 1 onwards, addressing issues like motivation, attitude and employability. We find that it is good to start early with softer skills. We use a range of different programmes. For example, 1,000 Primary school children will visit Turner Contemporary with EBP Kent to take part in workshops and science schemes, and we also go into schools to deliver inspired learning programmes. We start on these initiatives very early, with our enterprise partners.

Our aim is to let employers see young people's scope and how they could develop them. Employers tell us that young people are simply not fit for employment when they leave school, and they need preparation, so we provide employment

professionals to act as a link between young people and potential future employers to address the need to enhance their work-readiness.

We instil confidence in employers and run mentoring and skills events across Kent. From these and the comparisons we are able to make with other areas of the UK, we have seen that Kent is well developed and more advanced in some aspects of this work than many other areas.

We work with the Kent Federation of Small Businesses, universities, the Youth Offending Service and 40 special schools. The pack I have handed out lists examples of what we do, and also includes some examples of feedback from students.

We are not funded for what we do – we have a basic budget of only £3,000! – so we rely on the goodwill of universities, colleges, employers, etc to support our work. For example, one of our projects - ‘Special Choices’ – was funded by Sue Dunn’s directorate. This enables such activity to take place and the EBP is very grateful for such support. We deliver very good value for money!

Feedback from employers shows that they find our services very useful, and that there is much commonality in the issues they come across with preparing young people for employment. A German company sponsors bio-scientists, a discipline which links to 270 different careers, and they test young people’s knowledge of the scope of this field and the options it offers.

Is KCC using its resources effectively in this field?

There is some duplication of effort. I would ask if KCC feels that a filtration method is needed to help direct and focus its resources and give the best support.

Academies are very driven by a main sponsor. They will move away from KCC control but will EBP Kent capture them?

Academies will purchase the best services they can find, and we have to be good to win custom each time. Some academies have different levels of quality. Our aim is to work with every partner and together raise the quality.

Academies get their funding direct from the government. KCC needs to decide what services it wants to offer, without the budget that it once had for those academies when they were schools. Has the KCC been quick enough to capture the audience of new academies, or could we lose out to other providers?

I believe the KCC should take on a strategic and not an operational role.

Your presentation has been very useful to us, but what views do you get from students, and what level of take up?

The services we offer are spread geographically across the county, and we find that students have different experiences and aspirations in different areas. We demonstrate to them how little they will pay for university, to show them what they could do, but some need a cultural shift to see this. They see university as something which they cannot aspire to, and now see it as something they simply couldn’t pay for. Some employers offer to train a young person as part of an employment package. Some 117,000 young people each year do not go to

university, and there are lots of possible pathways for them. Services will need a certain amount of tailoring to suit different geographical areas of the county.

Employers need new young trainees to arrive with good basic numeracy and literacy. How seriously do schools take this?

Some schools do very well at preparing a child with a holistic, well-rounded education, and there are areas which perform better than others in this respect – although these areas can still contain pockets of significant deprivation. We have to have a foot in the door to influence inspired learning of the applied numeracy and literacy employers tell us they need. However, some very academically able students have poor social skills and do not have the inter-personal and time management disciplines which are also very important to employers.

Form your experience, how do you think schools see themselves? Can they be insular, and fail to see any role for themselves in preparing young people as useful well-rounded citizens? We would need to address this.

Schools on the whole do a brilliant job with the many constraints they have (for example, there were 352 White Papers last year relating to various aspects of education!) and they have to follow the system. We need to work with them. Year 12 used to have community experience sessions but the time previously spent on this had to be re-directed to exam preparation. The International Baccalaureate goes a long way to address some of these issues.

As an example of a way in which older students can take on a community leadership role, at the Turner Contemporary days we had sixth formers running a camera obscura workshop for younger students.

What you have told us has been very enlightening, and young people need to be able to benefit from the passion that you have. Employers need the ‘soft skills’, and these have not changed in the last 25 years, but we need to link the development of these skills into the school curriculum. They are ‘skills for life, not just for jobs’, and we need to spread the message about their importance.

I agree! Many employers are also parents, so can see both sides of preparing a young person with good life skills as well as academic skills. EBP Kent seeks to promote the importance of this when we talk to schools, and most schools are very aware.

We have heard about ideals in the way young people are prepared for work, but the KCC must have a strategic role and be an enabler rather than a deliverer. We need an overview of what services are out there, what works well and how we can encourage it (for example, by lobbying MPs, etc). I believe that EBP Kent’s services should be available to every child in Kent, but how can we make this happen?

The Wolf review was very clear on a recommended standard for employment training, and those which do not meet this standard would not be able to operate. EBP Kent is the only organisation in KCC’s area which meets this standard. There are 120 EBPs across the UK. They are all separately constituted but they all have to reach the same standard, managed by the Institute of Education Business Excellence.

I believe the role of the Select Committee is about influencing. Many of us are School Governors, so we can and will influence.

The employability journey starts early; children need to start learning the soft skills from the age of 4. Are there any models which can be used to teach those skills to that age group?

I am not aware of one.

How does the UK compare to the USA in this field?

Their culture is different, and children are very outgoing at a very early age. We need to measure young people's progress by stage, not purely by age.

We have planned a digital media day for young people. Each school will prepare a 3 minute blog to sell their skills to employers.

I would find it helpful for you to comment on the Select Committee's preliminary findings, as I would value your view on what we come up with.

Yes, I would welcome an opportunity to comment.

14. Interview with Paul Barron, Director, Kent Foundation

(Item 2)

Please introduce yourself and outline the roles and responsibilities that your post involves.

I am the Director of the Kent Foundation, a post which I have held since 2007. I am not involved in much operational work, as the front-line delivery of services to young people is not my responsibility.

What is the Kent Foundation and what are its objectives?

The Kent Foundation was originally a charity, set up by the KCC in 1985 to help young people to set up in business. It had a Board of Trustees and used to work with the Princes Youth Business Trust, but the interests of these two bodies diverged. The Kent Foundation offered low-interest loans to young people wishing to set up their own businesses. This arrangement ended five years ago as loans were not being repaid, and the KCC was losing money as a result. It felt it was no longer able to support young people if they were not disadvantaged in some way, and so its focus changed.

In 2007, it did some research on where else it could direct its funding. I started in this post in 2007, with funding of £400,000 and a small office. One objective of the Kent Foundation is to sustain itself. It developed its resources and services, and now has 3 full time equivalent and 5 part time staff. We make use of volunteers as far as possible. Our role is now more strategic and includes bringing money into the KCC. Last year we supported 2,000 students.

We have just launched our 'Fourth Option' Business Plan, which we developed as we feel that young people go through education seeing just three options ahead for them: university, a job, or unemployment. The fourth option is to set up your own company. We are addressing how to get the message out about this fourth option, as widely as possible, and overcome the difficulties. Our mission statement is to support the economic development of the county.

Please provide data in relation to young people and self-employment in Kent.

I can only tell you my own figures. I know the Kent Foundation has about 60 young people on its books at the moment. It is difficult to say how many of these are successful, as the first businesses started in May 2008 and it is too soon as yet to see what will be successful. I am planning some research next year to look at the success rate of the businesses we support. Business development is necessarily something which has to be looked at in the long term.

What are the barriers and enablers for young people who want to set up their own business in Kent? What are the conclusions of the “EmPOWER” report?

There was some research undertaken in 2008 on the barriers that young people experience when setting up their own businesses, and the main reasons are included in the EmPOWER report, which Members were sent with the agenda for this meeting. Some of the answers received point to a lack of understanding of the business support which is available to them.

To what extent, in your view, do learning and skills providers in Kent prepare young people for work?

This varies a lot. There is a whole range of support offered to schools and universities. Some research has been carried out with other organisations. The Kent Foundation promotes collaboration, and we co-ordinate information and signposting. We meet four times a year with our partners to share good practice. Some organisations in the partnership compete with each other for schools’ business, but they all take part. I think the support available to young people should be more integral to the curriculum.

Our partners deliver soft skills workshops, which include communication skills, how to network, ‘networking versus not working’ and building relationships. Before you can get a sale you have to know how to build a relationship. Also, we support young people once they have started their business, whereas schools don’t.

To what extent, in your view, do vocational training, apprenticeships and work experience schemes meet local labour market needs and the expectations of growth industries in Kent?

There is no evidence that they do. Schools and colleges fill their courses as that’s how they get their funding. They offer courses in subjects that students want to do, but not necessarily those which will offer them the best chances of getting a job in that area. I don’t know how this could be managed – it’s a challenge.

In your opinion, are additional or different training schemes, courses and qualifications needed to prepare young people for work and to meet employers’ labour needs?

I have no evidence on which to answer this. The Kent Foundation style is more engaging than schools’ style. Schools are trained to teach, but many Kent Foundation people are from the Kent Youth Service and are geared to youth work and are alert to young people’s needs. Different approaches produce very different results.

Please discuss the findings of the “EnCourage” survey, and of the “Making the Journey from Student to Entrepreneur” report.

The report sets out actions which are recommended to address the issues raised in the survey. One challenge is to use more modern technology. Last year, Kent Apprentices set up a Facebook page and a linked Twitter account. Since then, visits

have increased by 230%! A business incubation unit has been established in the Old Town Hall in Gravesend, using a model from a national organisation called the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA). Young people pay no rent for its use but pay a share of bills and broadband costs. There are 8 desk spaces for use. Many young people start their businesses from home to keep costs down, and can 'go to work' at the Gravesend centre. A business mentoring programme was set up in 2010, which offers 27 business mentors who are trained to mentor and who offer one hour per month of personal mentoring.

What response has this had from young people?

They have loved it. The mentors also get something out of it; the satisfaction of helping the next generation of young business starters, and they can pass on the benefits of their experience, as they are all successful business people. Mentoring gives them a chance to give something back. They do not tell young people how to run their businesses, but encourage them to think for themselves.

Mentoring has been mentioned several times by previous interviewees as a key tool to help young people. Are there enough mentors to allow each young person a chance to link up with one?

Mentors would have to be trained well and matched carefully with a young person. They have to be clear of their role – ie not telling someone how to run their business, as I have said. Mentors would have to be matched using several criteria; nearness, as a mentor would have to be accessible and easy to get to; gender, as some young people ask for someone of the same gender as themselves; personality, as a relationship has to work for mentoring to be successful, and a mentor must not overpower; and skills set, although this is perhaps the least important of these criteria.

I agree with all that you've said. I started my business 35 years ago, and I know the key thing you have to have is motivation. Lack of money and keeping yourself out of debt is a great motivator!

We try to match young people's enthusiasm, but we have to be honest with them. Some people do not have the drive or suitable mentality to establish and run their own business, and some people are more able than others to manage the risks of being in business.

It seems to me that the game is changing. The Kent Foundation now has a strategic role and is a smaller outfit than previously, but with a higher value. Where do you see the Kent Foundation being in five years' time?

I want us to deliver enterprise education and help to follow through with support if someone wants to start their own business. At the moment we only work with sixth form colleges. I would seek to work with more than 2,000 young people, as we do at present. In business start-up you always have to look a few years ahead.

As the UK comes out of recession, what changes do you see coming in the sort or size of company that people set up?

I don't know.

Is it true that 50% of all new businesses fail in their first few years? When would you expect the present businesses to establish themselves and start to show a profit?

At the end of 2012, and then to show a positive balance sheet annually after that.

Do you connect to Business Link, and will you in the future?

We used to signpost young people to Business Link, and also send Business Link a young person's details and ask them to make contact. The future of Business Link is uncertain, as 1-to-1 support for start-ups has ceased now and their courses are stopping.

Do you think Business Link's support model is suitable for young people?

Not necessarily. 19- and 20-year olds would go on a course and find that they were much younger than most of the other participants, and they felt that they didn't fit in. The Kent Foundation goes to Business Link's events and takes young people to them. This year one young man has his own stand at an event, promoting his business.

What is your view of vocational training?

I think the focus needs to change, but the way we measure success needs to change as well. Schools and colleges focus on bulk participation rather than on successful completion of a course, or the suitability of a course for its participants. Softer skills are not always included in vocational training. We need to develop young people's skills and knowledge but also their attitude – not just for those aiming to set up their own business but to boost their employability generally.

As an employer I see low skills levels, so I do mentoring at local schools. I agree we need a cultural change in the way we prepare young people for the world of work, as teachers have no experience of being in business. We need to inspire business people to take on a bit of teaching!

Do you find that red tape and regulation is a burden to what you do? The Select Committee could help tackle the red tape. What is the biggest barrier that you can see to your success in the next five years?

Funding is the biggest issue for me, as if I don't achieve that I don't have an organisation. I have excellent trustees with vision, and excellent staff, and these will always be vitally important, but at the end of the day I need to have funding for the Kent Foundation to continue. We are set up to make the best use of the money that we have.

Could you help more young people if you had more funding?

Yes, if we had more money we could replicate the Gravesend Old Town Hall business incubation project elsewhere, and more young people could benefit. The Gravesend project costs £7,000 – 8,000 per annum, and involves employing one person for 10 hours per week to run it. If I could spread this and have a project in each of the 12 districts, I would have 12 people needing line-management.

Do you get any funding at all from the KCC?

I get free accommodation and a budget of £53,000 per annum.

It's good to see sales and marketing mentioned in Kent Foundation documents as they are both important parts of business. Sales are a key driver, but the marketing has to be right to get to the point of making a sale.

A residential course this week for young people includes a section on sales. 80% of sales come from existing customers, so good relationships and customer skills are vital to keep hold of loyal customers. Research has shown that if a customer leaves

a long-standing arrangement, it is more often than not because someone at the company has been rude to them. All marketing and sales skills are wasted if you are rude to the customer!