

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### 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, 28 July 2011.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Mr A R Chell, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr P J Homewood, 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

**4. Interview with Dara Farrell, Paul Ayers and Tamanna Miah, representing the Kent Youth County Council, with John Simmons, Youth Participation Worker, Kent Youth Service**  
*(Item 1)*

**Please introduce yourselves**

(DF) I am Dara Farrell, the former Chairman of the Kent Youth County Council (KYCC). I attended St Anselm's School in Canterbury, where I did my A Levels. I hope to get a place at the University of Kent at Canterbury to read Politics and Sociology.

(PA) I am Paul Ayers. I attended Hartsdown Technology College in Margate. In Year 12, while I was doing my A Levels, all my course work was lost by the school computer, and as I couldn't complete my A level course I left and did six months' work experience instead.

(TM) I am Tamanna Miah, and am currently the Chairman of the KYCC. I live in Sevenoaks.

**The purpose of inviting you to speak to the Select Committee is to learn about what was offered to each of you in terms of careers guidance, work experience, etc, and what you thought of it.**

**Please can you start by telling us about your experiences?**

(DF) I had a basic two weeks of work experience at the end of Year 10; one week at a youth centre and one week in a music workshop in Brixton. My parents thought my school had not placed enough value on work experience, so I also took on an extra week at a Housing Association.

**What careers guidance websites, etc, did you have access to, and when did you start using these?**

(DF) I had no citizenship lessons, ever. Careers advice was included in CET lessons, mixed in with bread making and sex education! Careers guidance took the form of asking us 'what do you want to do when you are older?' and it was very limited as the teacher giving it was not specifically trained and had very limited information to offer us. I now have less idea of what I want to do than I had previously. I want to be an MP, but it is difficult to see how to move forward to this. I am a member of a political party but there is no career path, as such, for MPs.

**Young people who want to go into politics need a clear career path, and need to have details of how being a County Councillor, for example, fits alongside full time work. Being a County Councillor does not work for everyone, as you need an income to live on. I think going to university to study politics is a good start, but you could also consider going to an entrepreneur group to look into being self-employed.**

(DF) I have had informal conversations about my ambitions with youth workers, etc, but the service offered by Connexions and others is very patchy and there is no set standard. There is only so far a personal advisor can go. Some young people go to Connexions expecting to be offered a job. Last year I was a UK Young Ambassador and went to Belgium and Spain to business awareness seminars.

**It is good for MPs to have some trade or profession behind them as a back up to their role as an MP. What would you like to see in place in terms of careers advice for young people, and what further help could be given?**

(DF) Connexions advice is an option, but people who drop out are less likely to motivate themselves to go and seek advice. To have maximum impact, interviews with Connexions advisors would need to be compulsory for all pupils. Also, having a leaving interview when you leave school, and not being able to leave until you have had that interview, would help. The interview would find out from each student what they had been told in terms of careers advice, and what the outcomes for them had been.

**You are dressed very smartly, which is very important for an MP! You make a good impression on an employer, and you have good drive and charisma and parental support. I was self-employed in business for 25 years, and I have been able to bring my experience from that to my role as a County Councillor. You would need a grounding in something else to back up your role as an MP. There are many career politicians now who have no experience of the outside world. Have you considered this aspect, or has it been suggested to you? How was this issue presented?**

(DF) No options like that were laid out for me, and in my careers interview I took the lead by setting out my idea. I am concerned that many MPs now have never had 'proper jobs'. Perhaps I could seek youth work as a job? I am due to start a part-time job as a Youth Worker next week.

**The Select Committee is looking at areas and formats in which information is made available to students. Have you come across KentChoices4U?**

(DF) We had to use it to sign up for Sixth Form, and I know all the Canterbury schools use it. It is easy to put in your options and make initial contact with a school, but I am not aware of it as a way of getting careers advice. We used it just in an IT lesson.

**If you are not shown how to use it correctly, you won't be able to make the best use of it! Are you aware of anywhere else to go for advice? Did any of your friends go elsewhere?**

(DF) Most go to Connexions or to a specific recruitment service, like the Army.

**Is it important and/or necessary to receive Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), either personally, or by using a computer?**

(PA) It is important to be able to speak to someone face to face, as everyone's individual circumstances are different. You need to be able to have a discussion, as no website has everything. You also need to be able to speak to a youth advisor, one to one.

(TM) Connexions interviews are very brief, and apart from that you are left to find out things for yourself. You need a session with a personal advisor, too.

**Did you feel that advisors were trying to influence you one way or the other, either to stay at school or go to a Higher Education college, to do your A Levels?**

(PA) I stayed at the same school where I had done my GCSEs, as the school was happy for me to stay.

(TM) I also stayed at the same school for A Levels, but I was pushed to stay. The school was very negative about colleges and what they could offer me, whereas it would offer me lots of support if I stayed on.

**All three of you seem very well motivated, but we also need to speak to young people who are not motivated. Less motivated students might not go to Connexions. Should the issues of employability and being a good citizen be introduced earlier to school children?**

(PA) I was involved with the 'Aim Higher' group, and had a meeting with an advisor in the second year of Secondary School. The Chairman of the group kept changing and the meetings became patchy. To be of any use, this sort of initiative needs to be kept up and have some consistency.

**Can you tell us more about your experience of this?**

(PA) I was a Looked After Child (LAC) in Council care from the age of 8 until 18. I was promised that I would have help and advice through school, but this never happened. As a LAC, I was labelled as having 'extra needs', and schools get additional funding for supplying extra support to LAC, but this never happened, and was never checked up on. It's the same for other LAC that I know; there's a lot of paper but no follow-up, and this includes issues around leaving care, finding housing, etc. If you want to get anywhere with these issues, you have to chase them up for yourself.

**So you are saying that what the KCC says and does for its LAC are not the same. Please let us know separately about the issues and problems you have experienced as a LAC, as Select Committee Members can and will follow it up in their role as Corporate Parents.**

**You present yourself well, and you seem to have done very well in tackling these issues on your own. It is good that you are able to express and highlight these issues, as it will help other LAC to have a better experience.**

(PA) It is a myth that LAC do not perform well at school. Some teachers do not bother with LAC as they do not see potential in them. I have seen this attitude both as a pupil and in my role as a volunteer sports coach. I and one other LAC were in the top performing 5% at our school, and both of us have been Head Boy, so LAC can and do perform well at school. I saw my foster family as a step family – something which many other young people have – so I didn't see my home situation as being any different from anyone else's.

**Did you have good support from your Foster Carers as you went through school?**

(PA) Yes I did, and they continue to support me now by reminding me to keep my CV up to date and by driving me to interviews. Some Foster Carers do it for the money rather than any commitment to the child, and they have no family coherence or affection (for instance, they treat a fostered child differently from their own children, enforcing different mealtimes and bed times for them). This lack of love and support can be worse than the home that a child left behind when they went into care.

**It is very useful to hear the information that you have given us about the experiences of LAC at school. The Select Committee could look at whether or not the KCC as Corporate Parents should monitor this more closely. How can others help when LAC have had a bad experience?**

(PA) Social workers only have to visit a LAC once in six months, and you have to chase them up if you want more contact than this, so the level of contact does need more monitoring. I had seven or eight social workers in my ten years as a LAC, and I know that one of them had a caseload of nine at once. If a LAC had access to a counsellor this would avoid the need for social workers to intervene if there were a problem.

**I suppose it depends on how you identify things; is it necessarily a 'problem' or is it just an 'issue' that you want to talk through with someone?**

(PA) If a social worker is aware of a problem they can help a LAC to address it, but some social workers are not good at identifying a problem, and if a child doesn't feel able to tell them about it, it will not get dealt with. Social workers are not trained to identify the problems that LAC have.

**What other help could LAC get?**

(PA) Other support could come from Foster Carers, if they had better training in identifying the need for support and how best to give it. This seems to be lacking in the training that Foster Carers are given.

**Members will put you in touch with the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services, so that issues around LAC can be explored in depth.**

**What career advice were you given at school, and what else are you aware of?**

(PA) I only used Connexions at the GCSE stage. All the careers I was told about said that a young person needed experience and a driving licence, so many of them were inappropriate for that age group. The only options left were Saturday jobs and paper rounds. I saw very little option for me so I did six months' voluntary work experience as a sports coach and then approached the Prince's Trust to look into setting up my own business. You have to be 18 to do this, so I ended up working for my stepmother. There is nothing else around for young people of 16.

**Did you come across apprenticeships as an option?**

(PA) No, my only study option was university, for which I would have needed four A Level passes, but as my course work had been lost I couldn't get those passes. I chose sports coaching as I already had a qualification in that.

**Did you find out about or make contact with the KCC Sports Development Unit?**

(PA) No. I worked with the Thanet Schools Sports Trust. I am an Olympic Ambassador for 2012.

**I will put you in touch with the KCC Sports Development Unit, as you could look into the possibility of an apprenticeship there.**

(PA) I had looked for a sports-themed apprenticeship before, but the only ones offered are for football or gymnastics.

**Are girls treated in the same way as boys, in terms of careers advice? What message do girls get about careers, from when they first start school?**

(TM) In Year 10, I started being asked what I wanted to do but I always said I didn't know, as I have never known and still don't. I have never had any careers guidance or support. There are so many doors I could go through but I don't know which one to pick. My parents are not able to offer me much practical support or advice.

**Do you feel that there are opportunities for you?**

(TM) Not many, and I would have to find them myself. I found out about the KYCC by chance, and I had to find that for myself; there is no spoon-feeding. I wish I had had more opportunities earlier. I got into the Sixth Form but I am not happy about how I got there. I failed a year as I have not had support in the past.

**You should keep looking for what opportunities there are, and always think what you enjoy in life, as that might well be the area you end up working in. Your parents might see you being a top professional, but this might not be what you want. You need to set your sights differently - not lower, just differently. Did you have any advice at all about what you might want to do?**

(TM) I had one very brief interview with Connexions but this was never followed up.

**If the onus was on you I think the emphasis is wrong.**

(TM) Yes, I need them to help me. I don't have an idea in mind that I can steer towards.

**Have you ever been to a careers festival? Companies set up stands and talk to young people about what they do and what they are looking for. They are a good thing to go to, to see ideas and opportunities.**

(DF) I am aware of careers festivals but have never been to one.

**I know from my involvement with careers festivals that they are well received by students, and we hear very good feedback. They offer information about a range of jobs and include practical activities suitable for a wide age range. I think Connexions should link more to festivals, and listen to feedback from young people who attend them. Much thought goes into avoiding stereotyping, eg hairdressing for girls, construction for boys, etc.**

**I went to one and was very impressed. I wish I could have gone to one when I was 18 as it would have helped me. They can tell you about recruitment and paying for training.**

**The information which the Select Committee has heard points to the need for a cultural change. Why do you think young people go through school?**

(TM) To get a job, or to get to university.

(PA) For experience, and to get some qualifications. Some go to school as they have to, and see it as a hindrance rather than a help. Some cruise through and fail their GCSEs as they see an easy life on benefits. Benefits are too easy for young people to access, and young people assume they will get benefits and so don't learn to try to support themselves. Education should be a back up, but they need to have some ambition for themselves.

(DF) I went to school as I had to. I am not very academic and was a clown at school, and they did not expect me to stay on to do A Levels. From primary school onwards, the earlier intake in the year always got more teaching as their teacher was shared between fewer pupils, before the second intake arrived. All the disruptive children were put together in one class, and that class was not given as much attention. They only took an interest in me once they saw my first A Level course results. Young people need to be encouraged to stay on into the Sixth Form and pursue A Levels, but they see it as too traditional. I think A Levels are too easy to drop if they seem difficult. I felt like a number at school. Except in the retail sector, employers will not take you on unless you have experience. I got my job with the Youth Service because I had experience, not because I had A Levels.

**Would you welcome employers visiting schools to talk to pupils about careers?**

(TM) We had one employer event in Year 10, set up like a 'speed dating' arrangement, in which young people had a chance to talk one-to-one with an employer for a few minutes to find out about what they do and what they look for. It would be very helpful to have more of this sort of event.

(PA) A careers day at the end of the year would be helpful.

**What skills do you think employers look for in a young person?**

(PA) Good language skills, confidence, good appearance, approachability and social skills.

(TM) IT skills, adaptability, communication skills, social skills.

**In my career I taught in different schools, and I know that children don't differ that much across schools. I see education as a joint adventure between a child and their parents. Young people develop at different rates, and it is not possible to identify their different strengths and skills at the same time, so schools should give a range of experiences to try out your range of skills. Much of life happens by accident, and you can't always plan a career path. At 18, you are still very much at the start of your journey.**

**How useful do you think it would be to have personality tests at 16 or 17? These would identify the sort of personality and strengths that you have.**

(TM) I think this would be a good idea. Some tests that we had identified creativity as one my strengths. I would welcome more of this sort of testing.

**Two things that I think the Select Committee will take from this session is that:- (a) we need to hear from some Schools Careers Advisors as to how they see the service they provide, and (b) we need to talk to Connexions about the things you have told us about their service.**

**What change do you think KCC should make to improve the experience of young people preparing to leave school?**

(DF) To stop teaching children (of all ages) to pass exams! Everything is geared to SATS, as this is how schools demonstrate their performance, but this is a very limited, and limiting, way to educate young people. Many employers value good grades, but there also needs to be recognition of other skills.

**I have a colleague who came across from the USA to teach in the UK and found that the teaching qualifications were not as transferable as she had expected. The UK mostly wants maths, English and science teachers. What teachers want to teach is geography and history, but they cannot find posts in these subjects. Teaching of the core subjects is too strict and puts people off going into teaching. How would you teach? And how would you measure the success of a school?**

(DF) I'd start measuring by looking at exam results, but you also need to assess the range of experience, like volunteering as a sports coach or speaking in the House of Commons. The school curriculum needs to cover more breadth. Many subjects are taught by people who are not specialists in that subject, and they are limited to teaching from a book. There is a lack of current affairs teaching, of the sort of subject that you need to be able to talk about in a university interview. Students need more experience of life, and basic general knowledge.

**I think teachers need a deep knowledge and a love of a subject to be able to teach it in the best way possible. What they can pass on to young people is a love of knowledge and how to have an enquiring mind.**

(DF) I think the general curriculum is not necessarily applicable and doesn't offer practical life skills, like finance and household management.

**Do you think that careers education and IAG should be part of the national curriculum? And what should the Select Committee recommend about IAG, to best meet the needs of schools and employers?**

(TM) Careers education should be compulsory. If it had been this would have helped me.

**Should it start earlier?**

(TM) Yes. It should not be at the last minute, as it is too little too late. It is too easy for a student to dismiss careers education and drop out of it if they do not feel motivated. The transition between years 11 and 12 is a big time to drop out of things, which is a shame. You can waste your education, while someone in a third world country is desperate to have the chance of the education that you have wasted.

(PA) Careers education should be a compulsory part of the curriculum, and should link to, and/or be built into, every other subject. This way, it is not an 'extra' to be fitted into the timetable, and it does not appear as a burden on time. More specific, subject-related parts can be included in the teaching of other subjects, with some general aspects covered in Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) lessons.

(TM) I think it should be made more interactive.

**Have you had any mentoring?**

(TM) I had some in Year 7 but more would be helpful. It would also be helpful for it to carry on longer.

(PA) In my school it wasn't introduced until Year 10, and I was a mentor for other LAC in my school. I have never received mentoring. I think the school set it up as it would be good for the school's profile, but it does benefit both the mentor and the young person being mentored.

(DF) I have not done, or had, any mentoring.

**What could be done to encourage young people to think differently about living on benefits? How could a young person's school experience change their attitude?**

(PA) Once students finish their GCSEs and leave in May or June, they have a very long holiday stretching ahead of them. If they stayed on at school for another few weeks, they could use that time for careers education, learning how to draft a CV, doing voluntary work, etc. This would be a better use of their time and would enhance their employability. A school's care of duty (like the KCC's care of duty for its LAC) should extend up to the end of July.

(TM) I didn't know anything about writing a CV until I was 16, and this was entirely new to me at that age.

(DF) We must find a way to put an end to third- and fourth-generation unemployment as it becomes ingrained as a culture, and those who have seen their parents and grandparents live on benefits see it as OK to live like that. Living on benefits is too easy an option. I am appalled that so many people live on benefits and lack a work ethic. They have been let down by the education system and by the State.

**Would it be good if schools had to refund the government money they received for educating a student if that student did not secure a job within a set time, say two years?**

(DF) It would encourage schools to do something about preparing young people properly for work and encouraging them to expect to work. It would make schools accountable for what they do. It is too easy now to churn out each year of school leavers and never be concerned about them again.

(TM) I don't think school prepares you for jobs or life skills at all. My school is designated as an arts school, and people seek to get good marks in art as the school does not seem to bother much with you if you are not good at art. If someone drops out of school, the school does not do anything about it.

(PA) Finding employment can be hard, so I have considered setting up my own business and being self-employed. Young people could be encouraged to do this.

**There is funding available to support entrepreneurs, from bodies such as the Kent Foundation. The Select Committee has recently interviewed the Foundation's Director, Paul Barron, and we'll put you in touch with him to access some advice.**

(DF) Once a young person is in employment, they need as much support as they did before, to help them to stay in a job and make a success of it. Some employers can treat young people badly, and if you are inexperienced you don't know how to handle this.

**If we start to sum up now ... do you think we have covered everything you want to say?**

(John Simmons) Many good points have been made, and the information given must be very useful to the Select Committee. The Youth Service has not been mentioned specifically but we play a valuable informal role in supporting young people with life choices. We give good individual support.

**This session has been a real eye-opener for the Committee! I think we need to talk to many more young people, to get first-hand accounts of how things work**

**or don't work. We will meet more young people at subsequent interview sessions and on visits. Is there anything we have missed today?**

(DF) I am surprised you haven't already heard some of the things we have said today. You should definitely speak to the Children In Care Council (*representatives from the CICC will attend a session in September*). I agree with what John said about the Youth Service. They have done such a lot for me, and I am where I am due to them. I would like the Committee to look at how the Youth Service can move forward in the future.

(PA) Some issues that we have covered are area-specific. For example, in Thanet there are particular issues around employability. The links you have offered me to address the LAC issues I mentioned are very helpful – Thank you.

**The Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee will touch on the Thanet employability issue, and can push for future work to be done to look at it, so this issue will be picked up and taken forward.**

(TM) If you are looking at issues which affect particular areas, there is an issue for Sevenoaks. As it is seen as an affluent area, people do not realise that it can be a struggle to find a job there, or work experience to combine with further education. I and my friends have sent out many CVs without success. We can't afford to travel out of the area to access opportunities elsewhere. Employers reject your application if you are still at school, so the only thing open to you is Saturday and Sunday work, which is just not enough.

(PA) I think youth unemployment will increase now the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has ended, as it would have helped young people to travel to a job and/or training. The lack of an EMA now forms a barrier to young people getting into work.

**Speaking to you today has been an invaluable experience for the Committee. I hope we can make a difference for young people in the future. What you have told us has been very enlightening, and tremendously useful. I've found out much about the KYCC that I didn't know. Thank you so much for coming to speak to us.**

Thank you for inviting us!