

By: Mr Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills

To: County Council – 17 May 2012

Subject: Select Committee: The Student Journey

Summary: To comment on and endorse the report of the Select Committee on the Student Journey.

Introduction

1. The Chairman of the then Children, Families and Education (Learning and Development) POSC, and the Chairman of the then Regeneration and Economic Development POSC, proposed in October 2010 a select committee to explore ways to improve the employability of young people in Kent. This was agreed by the then Policy Overview Coordinating Committee at its meeting on 3 November 2010.

Select Committee Process

Membership

2. The Select Committee commenced its work in April 2011. The Chairman of the Select Committee was Mr Kit Smith. Other members of the Committee were Mr Alan Chell, Mr Ian Chittenden, Mr Mark Dance, Mr Peter Homewood, Mr Steve Manion, Mr Michael Northey and Mrs Carole Waters. In addition, Mr Richard Lees was co-opted onto the Committee.

Terms of Reference

3. The final terms of reference were:

- To investigate the extent to which learning and skills providers in Kent prepare young people for work, and enable them to apply their learning in the workplace.
- To explore the relevance of training and skills provision for young people against local labour market needs and growth industries in Kent.
- To seek out and listen to students' views about, and experiences with, their preparedness for work and their employability.
- To examine the efficacy of partnerships between local businesses and local educators, and the opportunities in Kent for young people hoping to enter the labour market at key transition points of their educational journey.
- To look into the extent to which careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) enables young people to make informed choices about their future education and employment at key transition points.
- To consider the potential impact of changes in national policy on the educational and employment opportunities, and choices, of young people in Kent.

- To make recommendations, after having gathered evidence and information throughout the review.

Evidence

4. The Committee used a number of evidence sources to inform its investigations, including oral and written evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, over 170 completed questionnaires, and evidence and information from nine official visits.

Report

5. A copy of the report's Executive Summary and its recommendations is attached in Appendix 1. The full report is available on request to the report's author, Gaetano Romagnuolo (gaetano.romagnuolo@kent.gov.uk or 01622 694292).

Conclusion

6. We would like to congratulate the Select Committee on completing this challenging piece of work. We would also like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee.

7. Recommendations

We recommend that:-

- (a) the Select Committee report be endorsed by the County Council;
- (b) the Select Committee be thanked for a useful report on a complex and challenging issue; and
- (c) the witnesses and others who provided evidence and made valuable contributions to the work of the Select Committee be thanked.

Background Information: *None*

Mr Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills

The Student Journey Select Committee Report

Executive Summary

*Helping young people in their journeys through
education to employment*

May 2012

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Committee Membership

1.1.1. The Committee consists of nine Members of Kent County Council (KCC): seven Members of the Conservative Party, one Member of the Liberal Democrat Party, and one Member of the Swanscombe and Greenhithe Residents' Association.



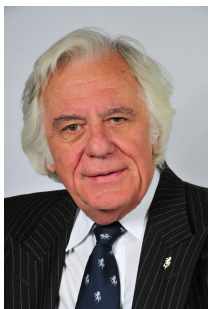
Mr Alan Chell
Conservative Member
for Maidstone South



Mr Ian Chittenden
Liberal Democrat
Member for Maidstone
North East



Mr Mark Dance
Conservative Member
for Whitstable



Mr Peter Homewood
Conservative Member for
Malling Rural
North East



Mr Richard Lees
Member for the
Swanscombe and
Greenhithe
Residents' Association



Mr Steve Manion
Conservative Member
for Dover North



Mr Michael Northey
Conservative Member
for Canterbury
South East



Mr Kit Smith
Conservative Member
for Deal
(Chairman)



Mrs Carole Waters
Conservative Member
for Romney Marsh

1.2. Scene Setting

1.2.1. Young people are the future for England and its economy. Raising their aspirations, and creating the right opportunities to improve their skills and attitudes so that they can enter sustainable employment, are crucial for their independence and the quality of their lives, as well as for the country's economic recovery and growth.

1.2.2. Global economic recession has resulted in falling youth employment. The proportion of unemployed young people aged 18 to 24 in Kent has risen dramatically, accounting today for more than a quarter of the youth labour population. But youth unemployment is not a single issue requiring one solution. Young people embark on different "student journeys", and the issues for those who lack qualifications or work experience are different from those who hold vocational or academic qualifications.

1.2.3. For many years the English education system has given rather greater emphasis to academic achievements than to practical, vocational training, leaving a shortage of appropriately trained and educated young people to fulfil the different needs of the economy. Formal qualifications are often a necessary but not sufficient condition for obtaining the types of jobs which young people aspire to.

1.2.4. Improving the employability of young people is a crucial task if we want to contribute to the country's economic recovery as well as to give the best possible prospects to future generations of workers in Kent.

1.3. Terms of Reference

- To investigate the extent to which learning and skills providers in Kent prepare young people for work, and enable them to apply their learning in the workplace.
- To explore the relevance of training and skills provision for young people against local labour market needs and growth industries in Kent.
- To seek out and listen to students' views about, and experiences with, their preparedness for work and their employability.
- To examine the efficacy of partnerships between local businesses and local educators, and the opportunities in Kent for young people hoping to enter the labour market at key transition points of their educational journey.
- To look into the extent to which careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) enables young people to make informed choices about their future education and employment at key transition points.
- To consider the potential impact of changes in national policy on the educational and employment opportunities, and choices, of young people in Kent.
- To make recommendations, after having gathered evidence and information throughout the review.

1.4. Scope

1.4.1. The breadth and complexity of this topic requires a clear and focused approach. Possible key themes and issues to be covered by the review are detailed below:

- To investigate the extent to which learning and skills providers in Kent prepare young people for work, and enable them to apply their learning in the work-place.
 - a. To consider the extent to which the content of courses in secondary schools, colleges and universities in Kent prepare young people for the world of work.
 - b. To investigate the extent to which secondary schools, colleges and universities in Kent adapt the structure of their courses to enable students to develop workplace skills and experience.
 - c. To investigate the reasons for student dropouts.
- To explore the relevance of vocational training and skills provision for young people against local labour market needs and growth industries in Kent.
 - a. To explore the extent to which current vocational training, apprenticeship and work experience schemes meet local labour market needs and the expectations of growth industries in Kent.
 - b. To consider whether additional training schemes, courses and qualifications are necessary in order to meet local labour market needs.
- To seek out and listen to students' views about, and experiences with, their preparedness for work and their employability.
 - a. To record the diversity of educational journeys that students take from dependent childhood into employment.
 - b. To explore students' views about, and experiences with, their employability and preparedness for work. The Committee should be innovative in gathering information and evidence from students.
 - c. To explore the social, economic, access and community dimensions affecting the journeys that students embark on.
- To examine the efficacy of partnerships between local businesses and local educators, and the opportunities in Kent for young people hoping to enter the labour market at key transition points of their educational journeys.
 - a. To investigate the effectiveness of current partnerships between employers and educators in Kent in helping young people to enter the labour market.

- b. To consider the job opportunities for young people in Kent, at the key transition points in their educational journeys (around 14, 16, 17/18 and 21 years).
- To look into the extent to which careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) enables young people to make informed choices about their future education and employment at key transition points.
 - a. To explore current policy and practices concerning careers IAG provision for young people in schools, colleges and universities in Kent at key transition points (around 14, 16, 17/18 and 21 years).
 - b. To consider whether the quality and reach of this provision could be enhanced.
- To consider the potential impact of changes in national policy on the educational and employment opportunities, and choices, of young people in Kent.
 - a. To consider whether there may be national policy changes affecting the educational and employment opportunities, and choices, of young people in Kent.
 - b. To examine the implications of the Wolf Report and the implementation of its recommendations by the Government.
 - c. To consider the potential impact of these changes – if any - on the educational and employment opportunities, and choices, of young people in Kent.
- To make recommendations after having gathered evidence and information throughout the review.
 - a. To report progress and developments to the (then) Scrutiny Board and the Policy Overview Scrutiny Committees throughout the review.
 - b. To make recommendations based on the evidence and information gathered during the review.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Student Journey Select Committee recommends the strengthening of the 14-19 Strategic Forum, which should include representatives and leaders of learning and skills providers and of businesses in the County. The Committee proposes that the name of the Forum should be changed to the “14-24 Strategic Training and Employment Forum”.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that KCC’s Skills and Employment Team facilitates the use of existing Local Planning Forums to promote dialogue between local learning and skills providers and local employers. Although strategic leadership is necessary to secure commitment at county-wide level, local issues and solutions are best discussed at local level, with local accountability residing within Locality Boards.

Recommendation 3

The Select Committee endorses Recommendations 4 and 11 of the Wolf Report and recommends that:

- KCC’s Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills should write to the Secretary of State for Education to urge that performance management indicators and systems do not give schools incentives to divert low-attaining pupils on to courses and qualifications that are not recognised by employers or accepted by colleges for progression purposes.
- Funding for full-time students aged 16-18 should be on a programme basis, with a given level of funding per student. The funding should follow the student.

Recommendation 4

KCC’s Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills should write to the Secretary of State for Education to press for the teaching of employability and “soft skills” in the curriculum from Key Stage 1, and for the improvement of young people’s literacy and numeracy standards, especially those of the lowest attaining learners.

Recommendation 5

The Skills and Employability Team should develop a personal, electronic version of a portfolio containing a list of activities that young people in Kent should undertake in order to improve their employability. This e-portfolio, which the Committee wishes to name “Footprints”, should be available to all students in Kent, from those in Years 5 and 6 in primary school to those in university; it should record the activities that will help students enhance their employment prospects during their different “student journeys”.

Recommendation 6

KCC's Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills should write to the Secretary of State for Education to recommend the setting up of the proposed national kitemark scheme that validates the different CEIAG quality awards for schools, colleges and work-based learning providers.

Recommendation 7

The Skills and Employability Team should set up a pilot scheme, in at least two secondary schools/colleges per District, where suitably trained mentors are regularly available to give students careers information, advice and guidance.

The Skills and Employability Team should also pilot an online careers education mentoring website for Kent which is based on the national model of www.horsesmouth.co.uk. The website should provide a safe social network for informal mentoring and should enable users to search for a mentor. In addition, it should give information on how to become a mentor, and should be a source of inspirational mentoring stories. The scheme should encourage the recruitment of mentors from the business community.

Recommendation 8

KCC should channel part of the Early Intervention Grant to the Skills and Employability Team in order to enhance the employability of Kent young people aged 14-24.

Recommendation 9

KCC should support the Young Chamber project by meeting the Chamber's annual licence fee of £500.

Recommendation 10

KCC's Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills should write to the Secretary of State for Education asking him to consider the allocation of more appropriate and proportional funding per student for International Baccalaureate courses.

Recommendation 11

KCC should not integrate the kentchoices4u website into the corporate KCC website. The Skills and Employability Team should instead promote the use of the kentchoices4u website by introducing, if possible, hyperlinks and QR codes in other KCC websites that are popular with young people.

The apprenticeships section in kentchoices4u should be expanded in order to offer more information to young people about the choices that are available to them.

Finally, access to this website should be extended to Kent children in the last two years of primary school. This is necessary for the effective delivery of Footprints and to support the consolidation of the employability skills of young people in Kent.

Recommendation 12

KCC should allow all its Divisions to use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, in order to enhance their communication and engagement with young people, and to support them into employment. Social media access and usage should be moderated as appropriate.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that KCC's Regeneration Board continues to support the GradsKent project by providing funding for a further 2 years. Any income generated by GradsKent should be re-invested into the project with the aim of making it self-sustaining.

The Committee recommends that GradsKent continues to work on the following objectives:

- Increasing the number and visibility of student and graduate employment opportunities, including internships and graduate careers.
- Working with businesses to identify skills shortages, and encouraging graduates with in-demand skills to work in Kent.
- Working with local universities to increase their students' employability.
- Engaging with students, graduates and employers through appropriate channels, including social networking sites, where return on investment can be demonstrated.
- Keeping pace with changing technology in order to remain accessible to users, particularly through developing GradsKent into a web app which offers increased functionality when visited on a smart phone.

Recommendation 14

The Skills and Employability Team, in partnership with employers, learning and skills providers and other local organisations, should:

- Set a target whereby 10% of 16-18 year old young people in each cohort in Kent are undertaking an apprenticeship within an agreed timeframe.
- Ensure that the take-up of work experience placements increases, by promoting and encouraging the organisation of more placements throughout the year and not exclusively in the summer months.

Recommendation 15

The Skills and Employability Team should increase its support, advice and guidance to young people and to local employers who offer, or intend to offer, apprenticeships, internships and work experience programmes in Kent. In particular, the Team should:

- Establish a dedicated unit which is charged with the development and delivery of the apprenticeships strategy in Kent.
- Ensure that the unit also acts as a single point of contact, providing support, advice and guidance to young people and to businesses that offer, or intend to offer, apprenticeships and work experience schemes. The unit should ensure that the staff who operate the main KCC switchboard are trained to put employers and young people seeking apprenticeship-related information through to the unit/contact point.
- Encourage the setting up of a database which maintains shared information and contacts on apprenticeships, internships, work experience, health and safety, and other related matters.
- Help to cut bureaucratic processes in order to ease the setting up of apprenticeships by employers and their take-up by young people.

Recommendation 16

- KCC endorses Recommendation 14 of the Wolf Report, and urges the Government to adopt and implement it. In view of Kent's special reliance on SMEs, particular incentives to help them should be considered.

Wolf Report – Recommendation 14

Employers who take on 16-18 year old apprentices should be eligible for payments (direct or indirect), because and when they bear some of the cost of education for an age-group with a right to free full-time participation. Such payments should be made only where 16-18 year old apprentices receive clearly identified off-the-job training and education, with broad transferable elements.

Recommendation 17

In order to fulfil its Corporate Parent responsibility, KCC should actively promote and increase the apprenticeship take-up of looked-after children, care leavers and other vulnerable young people, both within KCC and across Kent.

In addition, the Skills and Employability Team should ensure that apprenticeships are offered by a greater variety of teams within the Authority, and that the placements are not all office-based.

Recommendation 18

The Skills and Employability Team should encourage learning and skills providers to agree voluntary targets to reduce the number of young people who could potentially become NEETs when they leave school or college.

Recommendation 19

KCC should consider proposals, such as that of the Kent-based construction company Denne, to develop and support the delivery of work-focused programmes to be taught in secondary schools in Kent.

Recommendation 20

The Committee commends the valuable work that IMPACT Ashford does to help local young people who are not in education, employment or training to develop their social and academic skills and to enhance their employability.

The Committee recommends that the Skills and Employability Team promotes across Kent the work of organisations such as IMPACT Ashford as examples of good practice.

Recommendation 21

KCC should put in place measures to enable Kent employers to buy the Kent 16+ Travel Pass for their apprentices at KCC's purchase rates.

Recommendation 22

The Skills and Employability Team, the Kent Foundation and other proven agencies should further encourage schools to raise awareness amongst their students about the option of becoming self-employed, and to provide information about the support and guidance that are available.

The Kent Foundation should be supported in promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment, and in increasing the number of Kent young people starting up a business. The organisation should also be encouraged to deliver enterprise education to young people in Kent.