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Report to the City Council

Review of Post 16 Education, Training and Development Including the Connexions Service in Birmingham and Solihull

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Contents

	Page
1. Preface	3
2. Summary	4
3. Introduction	4
4. Terms of Reference	6
5. Method of Investigation	7
6. Findings	7
7. Conclusions	12
8. Recommendations	14
Glossary	15

Appendices

Appendix A	Post 16 Achievements
Appendix B	Summary of Enhanced Post 16 OfSTED Inspection Regime
Appendix C	'Schools Causing Concern' DfES Document
Appendix D	Range of Post 16 Courses provided by Birmingham & Solihull schools. Extract from Connexions 'Beyond 16' Document
Appendix E	Letters from Stephen Twigg MP re: Area Wide Action Plan



1: Preface

By Councillor Tony Kennedy
Chair of the Education and Arts Overview
and Scrutiny Committee



This is an informative report which gives members a good picture of the range of provision as it is and of the processes underway, which will determine the pattern of delivery for the coming decades.

This review has been undertaken at a time of considerable change and upheaval in 16-19 education which now permeates back to Post 14 or even Post 12 education through to lifelong learning. There is clearly a need for a further major study since this snapshot can only reflect the period when the scrutiny was undertaken. There are further issues to be examined around the engagement of young people in Post 16 learning - the effectiveness of teaching and learning; the exploitation and added value via new technologies and the pattern of development of provision across the city.

We look forward to further pieces of work which will thoroughly examine the issues raised.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Kennedy".



2: Summary

2.1 The objectives of the review were to:

- Ascertain current Post 16 provision in Birmingham schools
- Examine comparative outcomes and 'value for money' between schools
- Examine the implications of the Post 16 Area Wide Inspection
- Examine the implications of the 14 -19 Area Wide Action Plan

2.2 Key areas for consideration included:

- How to establish and maintain strong links between the City Council and both the Local Learning Skills Council and Birmingham & Solihull Connexions Service.
- Who best to serve on the new 14 -19 Policy Forum.
- How best the 14-19 Policy Forum and the City Council agendas can be harmonized in order to meet Best Value requirements.
- How best the three annual reports relating to the progress of the Area Wide Action Plan be reported to the City Council's Education Committee.
- How to ensure any actions resulting from the enhanced Post 16 inspection regime for schools (see Appendix B) can be addressed in the light of 'Schools Causing Concern' (see Appendix C, Chapter 4 'Inadequate Sixth Forms', Chapter 5 'LEA Powers', Chapter 7 'LSC Powers')

3: Introduction

3.1 Background

3.1.1 The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has been given the responsibility for planning and funding the provision of almost all government funded Post 16 Education and training (Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002) and has the remit to improve the quality of the provision that they fund.

3.1.2 The LSC also has the power to propose the closure of an individual school sixth form where two consecutive inspections have deemed it 'inadequate' plus the power to propose the reorganisation of 16-19 Provision in an area – the latter came into force on 1 April 2003 (Appendix C 'Schools Causing Concern' Chapter 7).

3.1.3 Since September 2002, the Birmingham and Solihull Connexions Service has had the responsibility for the delivery of career's advice and guidance to young people aged 13+. Within Birmingham and Solihull the



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

Connexions Service also has strategic and operational control of the Birmingham and Solihull Business Partnership which has a remit to bid for monies and charge organisations for activities relating to Work Related Learning.

- 3.1.4 The local Connexion's service has been organised into seven smaller, localised units so as to mirror the six Excellence in Cities (EiC) Networks of secondary schools in Birmingham, plus Solihull. Similarly the Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC), in an attempt to respond to the agenda for localised decision making, has assigned two key personnel to each EiC Network, plus Solihull, to act as 'champions' for that Network and to ensure that each Networks' plans harmonize with those of the entire area.
- 3.1.5 In November and December of 2001, Birmingham and Solihull underwent an Area Wide Inspection of 16-19 Provision led by HMI Graham Ranger. The Action Points arising led to the formation of an Action Plan writing team consisting of: Sue Reekie, LLSC; Janet Hall, LLSC; Tim Atkinson, LLSC; Mike Donovan, BASS; Maire Symmonds, Headteacher Bishop Challenor; Colin Flint, Solihull College; Peter Little; Training Provider; Ivor James, Solihull LEA and Mike Bell, CEBP/Connexions.
- 3.1.6 Their task was to write a 14 -19 Area Wide Action Plan. The plan addressed the 14 -19 range rather than 16-19 because of the DfES' stated intention to create a 14-19 continuum, and the fact that the future Area Wide Inspection would be 14-19.
- 3.1.7 This was completed in the light of an earlier (Summer 2001) joint LSC/LEAs commissioned review of 16-19 Provision in Birmingham and Solihull conducted by Terry Melia and subsequent working group deliberation involving key stakeholders from across the education and training spectrum.
- 3.1.8 Ministers accepted the Area Wide Action Plan in the autumn of 2002. A minor triumph is that it was the first ever to be accepted unchanged by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).
- 3.1.9 The Action Plan is being taken forward by a series of activities involving the LLSC, the LEAs, Connexions, Schools, Colleges and Work-Based Providers. The 14 -19 Policy Forum has not yet been set up as an appropriate Chair has yet to be appointed.
- 3.1.10 The Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002 place LEAs at the centre of decision making relating to 16 -19 Education Provision. They can propose the setting up of new provision; they can propose the merging or closure of provision in schools and they are charged with the raising of quality and standards of provision in schools. Most importantly they are required to follow a detailed set of activities in the light of a school sixth form being deemed 'inadequate' and the School Organisation Committee is the recipient of



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

any formal proposals from the LSC if it decides a school's 16 -19 Provision should be closed.

3.1.11 It is in the light of the above that this review was undertaken.

3.2 Committee Members

The following Committee Members took part in the review:

Councillor Les Lawrence	Conservative Group
Councillor Philip Murphy	Labour Group
Councillor June Fuller	Conservative Group
Councillor Gurdev Manku	Labour Group
Mr Rod Bamford	Parent Governor representative
Father Edwin Cownley	Catholic church representative
Ms Mary Edwards	Anglican church representative

4: Terms of Reference

4.1 The review was expected to increase members' knowledge and understanding of school activity in Birmingham in order to ensure that future partnership working with both the LLSC and Connexion's Service is undertaken from a positive awareness and strength.

The 'Findings' section is broken down into the four objectives of the review:

- Ascertain current Post 16 provision in Birmingham schools
- Examine comparative outcomes and 'value for money' between schools
- Examine the implications of the Post 16 Area Wide Inspection
- Examine the implications of the 14-19 Area Wide Inspection Plan

5. Method of Investigation

The methods used included the following:

- Examination of written documentation relating to Post 16 education
- Discussion with Key LEA Officers
- Discussion with Key LSC Staff
- Discussion with Key Connexions staff
- Discussion with Training Providers
- Discussion with FE staff
- Analysis of:
 - The 16-19 Review
 - The Area Wide Inspection Report



- The Area Wide Action Plan
- The LSC Development Plan 2001-2002

6: Findings

6.1 Current Post 16 provision in Birmingham Schools

6.1.1 Appendix D shows that the main offering in Birmingham schools consists of AS (first year) and A2 (second year) qualifications. There are a limited number of vocational A levels offered at 29 of the 42 schools in Birmingham delivering post 16 provision. There is a common 'core' of some 16 to 20 subjects on offer in almost all schools.

6.1.2 It should be noted that St Peter's, St Martin's, Solihull School, Park Hall, Heart of England and City Technology College are all Solihull schools.

6.1.3 28 schools offer a very limited number of intermediate courses - mainly in Business, ICT, Leisure & Tourism and Health & Social Care.

The number of foundation courses is very limited indeed.

The range of 'other courses' is similarly very limited.

Only 21 schools are offering the opportunity of accreditation for Key Skills although most are addressing the issue of Key Skills, as this is a vital part of the Post 16 inspection framework.

6.1.4 The Connexions Service is providing good information for students about the range of options available to them via their 'Beyond 16' booklet – available from Connexions Office on Broad St. telephone 0121 248 8004/5.

6.1.5 Key Issue: Range of Courses Provided

Many schools are not 'comprehensive' in their Post 16 course offering, Thus disenfranchising many young people who might wish to remain in school for at least part of their Post 16 education.

6.1.6 Key Issue: Parity of Esteem

Despite many exhortations to act in a different way many schools are Sending out a message that vocational courses do not share the same status as 'academic' courses.



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

6.1.7 Key Issue: Joined up approaches

At the moment there is not a great deal of dialogue between schools and colleges about organising a comprehensive range of provision between them and for arranging that provision according to clear and coherent student needs/wants analyses matched against aptitude.

6.2 **Comparative Outcomes and 'value for money' between schools.**

See Appendix A – Post 16 Achievements

The tables show a steady improvement both in terms of successful completion and higher attainment across the vast majority of schools in Birmingham.

- 6.2.1 There are concerns to be raised about the low numbers taking up and successfully completing Modern Foreign Languages and clear issues about the paucity of offering and achievement in community languages.
- 6.2.2 When matching up some of the numbers completing their individual courses against the number of schools offering those courses, it appears that there is some over-provision. This must, however, be set against the whole range of an individual student's programme and the range of numbers taking courses within an institution. What might seem unviable on paper can be very viable when the above contexts are considered.
- 6.2.3 This view was strongly reinforced by HMI Graham Ranger in his verbal feedback meetings to providers and is a view supported by the LLSC.
- 6.2.4 Schools and Colleges under the auspices of the LSC, the LEAs and their desire to improve and develop are examining ways of being more student focussed and cost effective in terms of provision and outcome. A great deal of effort is thus going into developing better 'recruitment, retention and results' strategies.
- 6.2.5 Value for money issues raised in the Area Wide Inspection have been largely addressed by Handsworth Wood Girls giving up their Sixth Form and the International School and Sheldon Heath going into partnership to provide a joint sixth form from September 2003.
- 6.2.6 Recent Enhanced Post 16 school inspections in the Birmingham area have produced favourable value for money judgements from OfSTED. Two schools facing inspections in the spring however, may cause concern in terms of outcomes, quality of teaching and learning and value for money.
- 6.2.7 Key Issue – Over Provision

Schools are looking to collaborate with each other in order to create viable groups and improve outcomes. The LLSC is undertaking with LEA



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

representation on the working groups, a series of subject reviews to elicit a clear picture across the Authority regarding subject numbers.

6.2.8 Key Issue – E Learning

The development of distance and on line packages is one way schools are extending the range of courses they have on offer and as a means of addressing any group size issues. Ensuring that there is the necessary infrastructure and investment is a major challenge facing both the City and the LLSC.

6.2.9 Key Issue: Languages

The LSC and LEA are jointly developing with The Brasshouse Language Centre approaches to the availability, quality and service delivery of a range of languages.

6.2.10 Key issue: Inadequate Sixth Forms

Following LEA input two, small sixth forms were recently (Spring 2003) deemed as providing "value for" money by Ofsted. These sixth forms were initially of concern to the LEA due to their size. Lordswood Boys has 50 pupils and George Dixon International School has 68 pupils. These inspections could have led to adverse judgements. However, following extensive support by the LEA, who were able to guarantee the quality of teaching and student learning, these schools were able to meet the necessary requirements.

6.2.11 **Implications of the 16-19 Area Wide Inspection**

The LEA was represented by a number of officers during the inspection but Mike Donovan and Vicki Walsh-Atkins, both of BASS, led in terms of providing documentary evidence, briefing schools and other contributors and liaising with HMI Graham Ranger. Regular updating and information sharing was facilitated by BASS for the schools and as a result a very strong bond was cemented between the schools and the LEA.

The report, was, in the main, very positive. This was due in no small part to the extensive collaborative work between the LEAs and LSC; both at executive and operational level that was in place well before the inspection.

The views of David Cragg, Executive Director of Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council and those of the LSC's relating to collaborative working are captured in the preface to the 16-19 review: 'This must and will be done on a collaborative basis with the respective LEAs in Birmingham and Solihull'.

The key issues for attention from the Area Wide Inspection were that broad strategic planning of 14 – 19 education and training across the area should



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

include objectives designed for:

Access and Participation:

- Improve overall rates of participation in Post – 16 education and training
- Raise participation levels in north Solihull and in parts of Birmingham
- Raise attainment at Key Stage 4 especially for African Caribbean boys
- Improve the skills of key workforce
- Increase the proportion of trainees from minority ethnic communities

Standards achieved and progression:

- Improve completion and pass rates
- Raise standards at Advanced level
- Improve completion levels on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks

Curriculum and programmes offered:

- Reduce the duplication and inefficiency in the range of qualifications on offer
- Improve the match between the curriculum offered and the needs of the local labour market
- Review the geographical spread of training providers to meet the needs of local communities

Teaching and learning:

- Increase the number of qualified teachers and trainers in work based training
- Develop students' access to ICT in schools.
- Support and guidance
- Improve the support to students with special education needs (SEN) in schools
- Improve the level and quality of advice to school leavers about employment and work based training

Management, collaboration and liaison:

- Develop further the necessary collaboration between institutions
- Improve quality assurance arrangements in sixth forms and training providers
- Establish better links between training providers
- Cost effectiveness and value for money



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

- Improve the efficiency of a minority of sixth forms
- Address the financial weaknesses of some colleges

6.2.11 Clearly not all of these focus on schools' 16-19 provision but they do create an environment for collaborative approaches to a variety of issues in which the Regional Development Agency, City Council, Connexions, Colleges, Training Providers, Schools and the LLSC have very strong interests.

6.2.12 The Birmingham and Solihull Post 16 Headteachers Partnership played a very strong part in shaping the Action Plan where issues related to schools. Their views and recommendations were conveyed and shaped by Mike Donovan (BASS) and Maire Symmonds (Headteacher Bishop Challenger) to the writing group.

6.2.13 **Key Issue: Maintaining the bond between the 11-18 schools and the LEA**

Implications of 14 – 19 Area Wide Action Plan.

Activities relating to schools are being co-ordinated through the secondment of Mike Donovan (BASS) to the LLSC for 2.5 days a week and the secondment of Richard Lloyd from Park View School to the LLSC to complete a European Social Fund Contract relating to Work Related Learning.

A part time position has also been requested by the LLSC and filled by a BASS Associate Advisor to carry out much of the schools related activity contained within the Action Plan. This is in addition to the range of activities being provided and delivered by the BASS 13–19 Team for Headteachers, Heads of Sixth Form and the area.

The Action Plan met with a great deal of approbation from Stephen Twigg, MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Young People and Learning.

6.2.14 **Key Issue: Maintaining and developing joint LEA/LLSC work**

There is a clear expectation that the partnership and collaborative working that has existed and exists should continue – indeed it is seen as a model for other LEAs/LLSCs.

6.2.15 **Key Issue: Reporting on the progress of the Action Plan**

The thrice yearly reporting to the DfES on the progress of the Action Plan commenced in January 2003. LEA involvement in that reporting is being co-ordinated through BASS.

The methodology by which this reporting is shared with the City Council has



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

yet to be established.

6.2.16 Key Issue: Make up of the 14- 19 Policy Forum

The two cabinet members responsible for education in Birmingham and Solihull do not reflect the relative size of the two authorities.

7: Conclusions

- 7.1 The philosophies aims and objectives of all those concerned with Post 16 education and training are united in seeking to provide breadth and quality of opportunity and outcome to learners.
- 7.2 Where areas of concern arise, all the key agencies express a genuine desire to work in partnership to try and ensure that learners' needs are met.
- 7.3 What needs further work is the development of clear lines of communication between the various agencies to ensure that the various priorities, accountabilities and understandings can be shared and given due regard.
- 7.4 In lots of ways Birmingham is at the forefront of this inter-agency approach to 16 – 19 education and training within the country. The opportunity to forge ahead and become a beacon of good practice for all should be seized.
- 7.5 The City Council should find ways of establishing and maintaining strong links with both the Local Learning and Skills Council and the Birmingham and Solihull Connexions Service.
- 7.6 The City Council's representation on the 14 – 19 Policy Forum should be reviewed and subsequently discussed with the Local Learning and Skills Council in order to try and reflect more appropriately the relative sizes of Birmingham and Solihull.
- 7.7 Liaison at council level with Solihull over 14-19 issues needs to be developed in order that local accountabilities are reflected.
- 7.8 A system needs to be established through which City Council representation can be arranged on any appropriate operational/working groups set up by the 14-19 Policy Forum.
- 7.9 The issue of no governor/parent representation on the 14-19 Policy Forum is one that might usefully be raised at the Forum.



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

- 7.10 The need to keep pupils, parents and the public informed of the continued and continuing developments within 14-19 education suggests a need to utilise a wide range of methodologies to ensure not just knowledge but a real understanding of the issues.



8: Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	Birmingham should develop existing lines of communication between the various agencies involved in post-16 education and training	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R2	Birmingham should develop a strategy for post 16–19 education and training	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R3	The City Council's representation on the 14–19 Policy Forum should be reviewed with the local Learning and Skills Council to reflect more appropriately the relative sizes of Birmingham and Solihull. In addition, the capability of existing bodies to fulfil the function of the forum should be considered	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R4	Liaison should be developed at Council level with Solihull over 14-19 issues to ensure that local accountabilities are reflected	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R5	A system should be established through which City Council representation could be arranged on any appropriate operational/working groups set up by the 14-19 Policy Forum	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R6	The city should raise the issue of developing governor/parent/student representation on the 14-19 Policy Forum	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R7	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should maintain scrutiny of on-going 14-19 developments, locally and nationally to ensure that the needs of the citizens of Birmingham are met	Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee 01 December 2003
R8	The thrice yearly reports to DfES on the Action Plan should be shared with the Cabinet Member (through the 14 – 19 Policy Forum) and the Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003
R9	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis until completed. The first report should be within six months of approval of these recommendations by Council	Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning 01 December 2003



Glossary

Area wide inspection:

An area wide inspection is an assessment, by OfSTED, under The Learning and Skills Act, 2000, of 16-19 education and training provision by all providers in a geographical area. Typically, the area coincides with LEA boundaries although some reports may cover two LEAs.

Connexions Service:

Connexions is the Government's new support service for young people. The goal of Connexions is to ensure success through learning and a smooth transition to adulthood and working life for every young person. Working alongside its partners, Connexions provides teenagers with (or connect them to) the support they need to benefit fully from formal and informal learning. This may involve tackling barriers to learning, advice on career and learning goals, or challenging aspirations and stereotypes. Connexions assumes the role of the careers service

The Excellence Challenge

The Excellence Challenge is an initiative designed to address the under-representation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in post 16 and higher education (HE) and builds on the EiC programme in secondary schools. It:

- Provides additional support for young people in EiC areas who have the ability to enter HE; gifted and talented programmes will be extended to the post 16 age group through sixth forms and further education institutions and new widening participation programmes will support all those aged 13 to 19
- Increases funding to HE institutions to reach out to more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Provides clearer information and better marketing routes to HE, with particular focus on reaching those communities who do not have a tradition of HE participation
- Provides financial help for young people through Opportunity Bursaries.

Excellence in Cities:

Excellence in Cities (EiC) was announced by the government in March 1999 to create 'inclusive schooling which provide a broad, flexible and motivating education that recognises the different talents of all children and delivers excellence for everyone.'



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

The first phase of EiC took forward this intention in secondary schools in some of the major urban areas of England that faced the most severe difficulties presented by problems of socio-economic disadvantage. Birmingham was one of these first phase authorities.

There are 6 key strands to EiC:

- Learning mentors for all pupils who need them
- Learning support units for pupils at risk of exclusion
- A network of new city learning centres
- More beacon and specialist schools
- Small Education Action Zones, and
- Extended opportunities for gifted and talented pupils

All the city's secondary schools and about one third of its primary schools receive EiC funding, totalling £15, 130, 256 in the financial year 2002-03

Inadequate sixth forms:

The Learning and Skills Council has the power to propose the closure of a school sixth form or LEA maintained 16 to 19 institution. The new power derives from the Learning and Skills Act 2000, but is subject to conditions. If the LSC recommends closure, this will be based on the quality of education and learning, not on value for money considerations or pupil numbers. The closure proposal will only be triggered:

- Where the sixth form or institution has failed to address weaknesses identified in an adverse report from OfSTED
- Where serious weaknesses or failure is still identified on re-inspection
- Where the normal LEA or school mechanisms for addressing weaknesses have failed.

Learning and Skills Council:

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) became fully operational on 1 April 2001. Replacing the Further Education Funding Council and Training and Enterprise Councils it is responsible for all post-16 education and training excluding higher education. This includes further education, work-based training, adult and community learning and, from 2002, school sixth forms. It operates through 47 local Learning and Skills Councils, which deliver national priorities at the local level. Locally, the LSC covers Birmingham and Solihull.



Post 16 Education, Training and Development

National Vocational Qualifications:

NVOs are work-related, competence based qualifications that reflect the skills and knowledge needed to do a job effectively. They represent national standards recognised by employers throughout the country. Vocational and academic qualifications are different in terms of measuring knowledge and skills. There is broad comparability rather than equivalency between vocational and academic qualifications.

Post 16 Qualifications:

In September 2000, major changes to post-16 curriculum for 50 years were introduced. Schools and colleges are now able to offer young people a wider range of subjects at A level. The changes are intended to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to compete better in the ever-changing world of higher education and employment. The key elements are:

- A new AS qualification, representing the first half of the full A level, designed to encourage take-up of more subjects in the first year of post-16 study and reduce the numbers who drop out with nothing to show for their efforts
- A new revised A level specification
- Changes in coursework limits for A levels, together with a requirement for a significant element of 'synoptic' assessment, which tests understanding of the specifications as a whole
- New advanced extension awards based on revised special papers (S levels) and more widely accessible than current S levels
- New vocational A levels
- Key Skills, designed to encourage all young people to develop the skills of communication, application of number and information technology

Schools Causing Concern:

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 lays out the framework for intervention by LEAs in schools that OfSTED has judged to be seriously weak or requiring special measures, or those where LEAs have identified significant problems. Any school failing its OfSTED inspection has to be turned around within two years. Where that is not achieved, the LEA should consider closure. Fresh Start or, for secondary schools a City Academy, are options to consider where closure is not possible.