



Final Report of the Education Task and Finish Group to Executive Committee  
22nd April 2010  
(Agenda Item 6)

## REPORT OF THE EDUCATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP

### 1. Summary

- 1.1. The Task and Finish group was set up to see what contribution Kettering Borough Council could make in improving the range of skills available in the local and future workforce, in order to help attract, over time, a richer mix of employment opportunities. The Council's broad objectives for the growth agenda include priorities for achieving higher grade, higher quality jobs and a better educational offer. Educational attainment in the Borough remains lower than the national average, and the employment profile of the area, whilst relatively robust even given the economic downturn, relies too heavily on low skill employment and, as a consequence, attracts lower than average salaries.
- 1.2. The Task and Finish Group therefore sought to take evidence from the education sector, from employers and the third sector, from young people themselves, and from those working with young people, to gain an understanding of the current pressures in the system and the degree to which these sectors were working together.
- 1.3. It was immediately obvious that there was a mismatch between what the education sector was being asked to do and what employers wanted, between young people's expectations and those of others, and the extent to which young people and their families are being asked to find their own way into employment and further/higher education. This means that, to a crucial degree, the fortunes of young people particularly are dependent on the motivation, skills and support of their families. The fortunes of individuals are also shaped by the extent to which they have a wider "hinterland" of experience outside of school, and an ability to demonstrate experience of voluntary or part time work or personal enterprise.
- 1.4. There is a need for a more effective and continuing dialogue between schools, colleges, employers and the wider community about what schools and FE/HE providers are seeking to achieve and what employers need, and how these can be made to join up more than they do.
- 1.5. Many of the issues highlighted below are not unique to Kettering or to Northamptonshire, although their impact can clearly be positively or adversely affected by the efforts of local agencies and actions; nevertheless there are opportunities to make a difference which are detailed below.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Task and Finish Group comprised Cllrs C Lamb (chair), C Groome, M Talbot (from May onwards) and K Watts. It met five times to take evidence and four times as a group, and members and officers convened or attended four further meetings with stakeholders. The group was supported by officers of the Borough Council, with some support from Northamptonshire County Council officers.
- 2.2. The Task and Finish Group's brief was to undertake a comprehensive research exercise in order to enable better understanding of the requirements of the Borough and the wider North Northamptonshire area, with regard to – Life long learning, and increasing the skills of the existing workforce both now and in the future to accommodate the growth agenda. The agreed headings to take this forward were:
- The transition for young people from primary school to secondary school and how that impacts on subsequent educational attainment.
  - The transition from school to work and further education and how well equipped young people are to cope with that transition to the satisfaction of employers particularly.
  - The impact the two new academies will have on educational attainment in the Borough, and how the academies will work with employers and the local community as well as with other public services.
  - Planning for school places in the future; how, when and where new school places are needed, including nursery places.
  - What the Borough Council can do to support education and life long learning, through the delivery of its own services.
  - What the Borough Council can do as an employer to improve education and skills
- 2.3. The group and/or officers has taken evidence from a range of individuals and groups as follows:-
- Primary and secondary school head teachers, as groups, and, separately, from the heads of Latimer Arts College and the new Buccleuch Academy
  - Tresham Institute
  - Northamptonshire County Council – Children and Young People's Services
  - The University of Northampton Business School
  - A selection of employers
  - A selection of Voluntary sector representatives
  - Police
  - The Northamptonshire Connexions Service (twice)
  - Kettering Borough Training

- Kettering Youth Council
- An ad hoc grouping of young people on work experience with the Borough Council in autumn 2009
- A local youth worker

At the same time, as part of its annual review of priorities, the Local Strategic Partnership held an event on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009, which focused, inter alia, on skills, education and employment. The conclusions of that event have been shared with the Task and Finish Group.

The Task and Finish Group is grateful for the time, energy and thoughtfulness given by those who gave evidence to it.

- 2.4. The Group did not explore the case for a university presence in North Northamptonshire. This was taken as read, particularly as this was being taken forward contemporaneously by a partnership of agencies submitting a bid under the *University Challenge* bidding regime.
- 2.5. The Group did submit a response, on behalf of the Borough Council, to the County Council's consultation on school organization which set out the proposed key principles in planning for school places, and for responding to the growth agenda. This response was circulated to the Research and Development Committee at an earlier meeting.

### **3. Findings**

- 3.1 The Task and Finish Group's findings can be structured under several themes:-
  - The difficulty of ensuring that young people are properly equipped for and supported during their transition from education to employment, including how they can widen their experience of life and work before leaving school or college.
  - The challenge for schools to support young people in their development, given that schools are primarily incentivised - and judged - on their ability to achieve exam results
  - Ensuring that there is sufficient emphasis in schools and colleges on providing a range of skills and qualifications suitable for the local employment market, and ensuring there is a good level of connectivity between schools, colleges and employers.
  - The difficulty that employers experience in understanding and accessing the range of training and development opportunities which exist to develop their employees and grow their business
  - Ensuring that qualifications are credible in the employment market
  - Ensuring that there is opportunity for people to be enterprising
  - Providing support for the wider workforce

#### 4. The current situation

##### 4.1 NEET group

- The proportion of young people aged 16-18 classified as not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in Kettering remains comfortably below the national average of 11.9%. In January 2010, there were 176 NEETs in the Borough, (5.5%), which is a significant improvement on the figure of 8.6% in July, although figures are always at their highest in the summer months. The government's national target is to reduce the figure from 9.6% in 2004 to 7.6% in 2010.
- The NEET group is the main client for Job Shop in Kettering run by Connexions.
- Work is being undertaken with William Knibb Centre who will provide some training, assist with organizing work placements, and assist with setting up a Youth Role Model Panel (young people who have turned their lives around and who will act as role models to NEETs on scheme)
- Work is being undertaken with Kettering Borough Training to provide some training
- Placements are being found for NEETs within the private and public sector

##### 4.2 Apprenticeships

- The current economic climate has had an adverse impact on the number of apprenticeships available, both in terms of placements and employers' ability to provide experienced staff to carry out on the job training. We were provided with evidence of declining numbers of apprenticeships amongst the engineering sector.
- KBC currently employs 11 young people as modern apprentices, a number which could increase as a result of the Future Jobs Fund programme, or through other means.
- In addition, Kettering Borough Training places young people with employers in the town, acting as one of a number of brokers carrying out this role under contract with the Learning and Skills Council (a role shortly to be transferred to the county council). The numbers of trainees in placements has reduced radically in the last twelve months, as employers have reacted to economic conditions.

4.3 Employers agreed that they were not taking on apprentices at the moment. There are therefore, borough wide, a shortage of apprenticeships and "starter" jobs in the Borough; this situation might improve with an economic upturn, but will take time to do so.

- 4.4 The Future Jobs Fund is a national programme to create more, short term apprenticeships, through placements in the public and voluntary sectors, starting March 2010. There is funding to meet the costs of placements for six months. The Borough Council has committed to finding 18 placements in the public and voluntary sectors in the Borough.

## **5. Helping young people move from education to employment**

- 5.1 Employers felt that they experienced more problems with the attitude and aptitude of young people arriving into the workforce than historically, and that the position had worsened in the last decade. It is clearly difficult to measure this; but they ascribed some of this to the focus that schools had had to develop on educational attainment, and on the fact that schools and colleges were rewarded by exam results and by directing young people into FE and HE. The schools, Tresham and UoN agreed with this analysis to a greater or lesser extent. It can be disadvantageous for schools to encourage young people to find jobs, given the targets they are required to achieve and the funding derived from meeting those targets.
- 5.2 Employers felt that young people arrived into the world of work ill-equipped by attitude and by skills, and felt that their ability to write applications, present themselves at interview, turn up to work on time and often enough, behave appropriately in the workplace and with customers had all deteriorated in recent years. Only one school was reported to teach its pupils about creating a CV, and the young people concerned said that they would have derived greater benefit from some CV creating lessons from employers rather than from teachers. Young people agreed that they would benefit from being taught interview techniques, a facility only available to the NEET group at present. Connexions and NCC agreed that practical help with CVs, job applications and interviews should be available to all, not just those in employment or training and any such sessions should be delivered in appropriate locations.
- 5.3 Schools faced a dual challenge – on the one hand there is a need to focus on academic outcomes in order to ensure school places are filled; on the other hand, with the move towards mandatory formal learning to age 18, there was a need to engage with employers and deliver a broader offer to the less able or those without traditional GCSEs. It was felt there was a fundamental need to bridge the gap between education provision and employment and there needed to be the ability within secondary schools to respond to the needs of those who were less academic. This would not be just about seeking employment for current young people but would mean meeting future needs too. Consequently, it was felt that every

opportunity for employers and schools to work together should be exploited. This could be through

- Services in schools
- Services out of schools
- One stop shops

- 5.4. There was little evidence of how out of school activities were designed to improve employability and attributes such as team working, application and setting objectives. Nevertheless, the ability to demonstrate skills which are useful in the workplace from out of school activities makes a big difference to the employability of young people. Bishop Stopford and Southfields Schools did carry out some structured activities of this kind; if it is not already in place elsewhere in the school system, the task and Finish Group would encourage its development.
- 5.5 It was felt that there could well be existing opportunities that people did not know about, and Connexions for example were developing new routes to connect young people and employers more effectively.
- 5.6 Those young people with a “hinterland” – experience of volunteering, part time work - and those with supportive and engaged parents, fared better than others. At the same time, education providers criticised the approach of some employers towards young people, who left them to sink or swim. It was generally agreed that the single most important influence in the employability of a young person remained their family and the way in which parents etc supported them or didn't. There were varying views about the extent to which young people were motivated to get a job and succeed.
- 5.7 Encouraging young people to grow their hinterland, by volunteering: - the ability of volunteering opportunities to re-advantage people of all age groups back into employment was emphasized. Only one school- Bishop Stopford – was reported to actively facilitate their pupils to undertake voluntary or charity work. There might be good practice here for other schools to follow. There are two programmes within Bishop Stopford:-
- The “Community Challenge” provides pupils with £5 each and asks them to use this funding to generate ideas which raise money for Cransley Hospice.
  - in year 9, pupils are able to choose two charities and arrange events throughout the year to raise money for them.

Those young people we spoke to said they would be interested in getting involved in charity work, although they were unclear how to go about it. Equally, there was a need to equip voluntary bodies as well to be more engaged with schools and colleges in encouraging volunteering; this is

potentially something KBC, the County Council and other funders could do through their service level agreements. Volunteering opportunities could be arranged through the Northants Young Volunteers Association (NYVA) and there was a need to encourage schools to be engaged with this work.

- 5.8 Other opportunities exist – the work of the Princes Trust for example, whereby businesses provide time and money for their employees to mentor unemployed young people through a structured 12 week development programme which aims to build confidence, skills and motivation through challenging team work in the community.
- 5.9 Regular careers fairs are held jointly with UoN and Connexions. In future, the planning should involve the Northamptonshire Business Partnership, Job Centre Plus and other providers such as Aim Higher. KBC could act as a host for future Northamptonshire Enterprise Careers Fairs, as well as help promote them.
- 5.10 Encouraging more work placements. It was felt by colleges and schools that it was harder to get work placements and that they were not always meaningful for the young people involved (or the employer). Young people from Kettering Science Academy, who were on work experience with the Borough Council, were invited to a group discussion on their experience. The main themes from the discussion were:-
- The wide variety of satisfaction with the experience – some had been pleasantly surprised by the variety and range of experience offered; others had found themselves in an office environment when they had wanted something quite different
  - The absence of preparation they had undergone prior to the placement, and the lack of experience any of them had in, for example, being interviewed.
  - The difference in attitude of students from the same school towards the expectation and outcomes of their work experience.
  - The lack of desire from some students about taking responsibility that their work experience had relevance to their future career aspirations.

Schools and the Borough Council therefore needs to ensure that work placements within the Council have a true experience of a working environment, and that the young person is being properly matched to a role which reflects their interests.

- 5.11 Internships are currently funded by HEFCE and NEL and there are currently 25 places for unemployed graduates to find work/develop their employability through structured work placements and accredited training. There is no geographical restriction to sign up for this scheme other than the graduates must be Northamptonshire based.



- 5.12 In conclusion, it is felt that practical assistance needs to be provided to help schools and colleges equip young people for work. This can take many forms:-
- Practical help in interview techniques and preparation, CV preparation, and appropriate work placements, for all people whether or not they are in education and training at the time.
  - Mentoring support and some sort of directory or exchange facility to match young people and mentors, as well as a mechanism to recruit mentors.
  - Building connections between young people and the community, voluntary or charity sectors, to benefit the latter whilst helping to skill up the former.
  - Holding careers fairs which also made connections to these other avenues of support.
  - Providing parents and carers with information on higher education courses and options.

## **6. Improving the support, in school, or elsewhere, for young people**

- 6.1 Observations above indicate the difficulty in focusing attention within schools especially on careers advice and access to information, with Connexions providing some services. Work is being undertaken by Connexions on increasing the confidence and competence of young people preparing to enter employment through various schemes, but schools were not necessarily properly geared up for them. Both employers and young people themselves suggest that not enough was being done. Although all schools have to provide careers education, they are not always able to provide dedicated careers support to all young people, irrespective of ability.
- 6.2 There was a need for better information management about courses, funding, opportunities and schemes, not necessarily web based, as this would continue to exclude those most in need of the information. The current system of promoting employment opportunities within schools was also variable. The need therefore was to provide access to a range of services under one roof, or as a one stop shop. Careful thought would need to be given to its location. If, for example, the William Knibb Centre was selected as a site, work would have to be done to address the reputational challenges that would be thrown up by this choice.
- 6.3 It was also recognised that there was a need for more confidential and impartial advice for young people.
- 6.4 A package of support for schools could be developed, bringing together information about schemes, programmes, funding and opportunities,

- which would help to support teachers and teaching support. This could, for example, include developing an on-line training package for CVs etc.
- 6.5 The information available to parents was also often lacking, with the result that parents gave their children unrealistic expectations about what was available, particularly in the current jobs market. Information to parents was therefore also key.
- 6.6 Schools could be approached by other public or voluntary sector bodies to help deliver PSE courses, partly to lift the burden on teaching staff, but also to give additional perspectives on the wider world, from practitioners within particular sectors. Equally, enabling teachers to carry out volunteering opportunities or external placements would widen the quality of teaching and information available to people in school.
- 7. Making the work of schools and colleges more relevant to future needs**
- 7.1 There was a feeling amongst employers and the third sector that there was insufficient vocational training and too much focus on directing young people, sometimes inappropriately, into FE or HE courses.
- 7.2 There was concern expressed by business representatives that the quality of in-school careers advice was poor or apparently non-existent. The work of Connexions, outside schools, whilst it might embrace careers advice, was not a substitute. Businesses also felt that schools had a poor understanding of the local labour market and lacked the contacts and understanding to bridge that gap on behalf of their pupils.
- 7.3 There was concern that the intention of the government to ensure all young people who were in learning until the age of 18 would increase the degree of alienation from some 16-18 years olds, if not handled well.
- 7.4 As referred to above, employers felt that young people were insufficiently equipped to enter the workplace and that supporting young people to develop a wider set of skills, outside the school setting, for example in the voluntary sector, was critical to their successful transition, and in making them more attractive potential employees. Although it was unlikely to be seen to be particularly attractive to the younger age group, there were vacancies for work in charity shops, for example, which could also be more widely advertised within schools and colleges.
- 7.5. The Task and Finish Group were aware of the legal restrictions on young people taking on part time work before set ages; these appeared to be overly restrictive, both for employers and for young people themselves and

it was felt that there would be some merit in asking the MP to explore the possibility of selected relaxations of current rules to enable wider experience of the workplace, without putting at risk the protections that the law sought to apply.

- 7.6 Equally, there was a need for employers to make the time to communicate their needs and demonstrate what it is that schools and colleges need to do; there was no real avenue for that dialogue to take place now. Inviting employers to Options Evenings in all schools, for example, should be encouraged.
- 7.7 There is an opportunity, with the creation of two new academies, to develop new ways of working with the wider business, public and voluntary sectors. At present, the academies have made little inroad into the consciousness of the business sector as to what they want to achieve and how they might do it. At the very least, a pilot in one school would be worthwhile. The pilot could include:-
- A dedicated base on the school premises
  - A lead professional in each school who could maintain contact with the business sector, perhaps through some wider network arrangement
- 7.8 It was agreed that there was a need to invest energy in a secondary schools partnership in Kettering in order to enable individual schools to break out of silos, and which would help improve inclusivity for young people. Services could then be delivered across the partnership, as occurs now on some teaching subject areas.
- 7.9 There was support for the idea that the Borough Council could help broker this approach, and that appointing an education champion at councillor level would be an additional support. The Council could also help schools understand how best to exploit and benefit from the growth agenda and respond to changing employment patterns and demands.

## **8. Helping employers through the maze**

- 8.1 Employers complained that they found it difficult to understand the range of training and development opportunities that existed, that they found it difficult to understand the qualifications structures that now prevailed, and how each level of qualification was relevant to their business needs, and they speculated that for small businesses, the task would be much greater. They told us that it was not easy to find or access funding for training or apprenticeships, and, again, this would be even more difficult for small businesses without dedicated HR teams.

- 8.2 There was clearly not enough awareness amongst the employers who spoke to us, about the 14-19 agenda in schools and colleges. There needs to be an effective, easy to understand and continuously maintained information stream on this matter.

## **9. Credible qualifications**

- 9.1 Those employers and voluntary sector providers the Task and Finish Group met had become less trusting of the qualifications young people had secured, because their application of them in the workplace was below expectations. There was a suspicion that grade inflation had exaggerated the value of each level of qualification.
- 9.2 Educators wanted employers to more clearly describe the skills they needed, to help schools and colleges sell those to their students.

## **10. Opportunities for enterprise.**

- 10.1 Kettering benefits from the advantages of having The Business Exchange, the SATRA Innovation Centre and now Chesham House, which together provide various functions, such as acting as business incubators, as centres for business support and as venues for providing more general advice, skills and assistance to new and growing enterprises. There is clearly an appetite for these services, as witnessed by their swift take up. The University of Northampton, for example, considers that it is more strongly represented in Kettering, through Business Link, Chesham House and other measures such as conferences and jobs fairs, than anywhere else off campus in the county. Nevertheless, there remains a need to increase the awareness of the services that already exist.
- 10.2 Members endorsed proposals to widen the FE offer in Kettering Borough, particularly for vocational courses, this could be done, for example, through encouraging and facilitating Tresham to deliver their Windmill Avenue campus extension, and encouraging other providers, such as Moulton College, to widen their offer as well. Innovative approaches, for example by utilizing premises on the Boughton Estate for agriculture related provision, should be encouraged.
- 10.3 The perception of what volunteering meant needed to be enhanced, and the Borough Council could play a role in this, with a view to attracting young people to see work for companies on a voluntary basis to help determine if a particular type of career would appeal to them. This happens to some extent already, through work placements and could be enhanced.

- 10.4 There is an opportunity to increase the amount of adult learning which takes place in school premises, but it has to be recognised that many adults did not enjoy their time at school and would not voluntarily go back to a school or college premises to learn.
- 10.5 There should be greater celebration of enterprise and enterprising success and endeavour, The Council, together with partners, such as Tresham or UoN, should consider an awards scheme, or more effectively in the short term, encourage and facilitate all schools to take part in the national Young Enterprise competitions.
- 10.6 Enterprise and employment fair – the Council should host or help deliver future enterprise and careers fairs (usually held in November each year). The function of these fairs could be broadened to accommodate the need to assist those with technical rather than academic aptitudes access opportunities in the future. The event needed to focus more on assistance than marketing, with training for skills such as CV preparation, and completing application forms, signposting people to other sources of help and encouraging volunteering.

## **11. Conclusions**

- 11.1 Equipping young people for the workplace and helping them identify future career options is a job for the whole public sector, not just schools and colleges. Schools and colleges can be the setting for much of what is available, because of their reach and convenience, but there are other settings which are also important.
- 11.2 The dialogue between employers and the education sector about needs and problems needs to be deepened, widened and sustained.
- 11.3 The experience of young people, in the workplace, in voluntary activity, and in training needs to be widened. The role of parents and carers in setting aspirations, and supporting young people, in turn needs to be sustained and helped.
- 11.4 The following recommendations are intended to prioritise the Borough Council's role in encouraging these changes.

## 12. Recommendations

### 1. *Helping the transition from education to employment*

- 1.1. There should be a structured offer for young people which provides help in preparing CVs and completing application forms, preparing for interview and coaching in interview techniques
- 1.2. Young people in apprenticeships, training positions and on work experience or in internships, and their employers, should have access to mentor support, which in turn requires a register of mentors to be maintained and for mentors to be recruited to it.
- 1.3. The Council and its partners should continue to host and extend the provision of careers fairs involving schools, training providers and local employers
- 1.4. The Council should offer more work placements to more schools and more young people
- 1.5. The Council should support the creation of (paid or unpaid) internships by local companies, and should consider the creation of unpaid internships itself for specific projects
- 1.6. The Council should increase the number of apprenticeships it offers over time.

### 2. *Support for Young people in School*

- 2.1. A package of support for schools could be developed, bringing together information about schemes, programmes, funding and opportunities, to help teachers and teachings support; including, for example, an online training package for CVs etc.
- 2.2. Volunteering programmes such as that developed at Bishop Stopford School should be created in all secondary schools and the Borough Council could assist in this by bringing schools and the voluntary and community sector together.
- 2.3. The work of existing bodies such as the Princes Trust should be supported in kind by the Borough Council as a structured way of supporting young people with practical work and volunteering experience.

- 2.4. PSE courses could be delivered in schools by public and community and voluntary sector bodies, to ease the burden on teaching staff
  - 2.5. Explore the possibility that an existing training brokerage could facilitate the provision of a confidential and impartial advice for young people, either in tandem with a mentoring scheme or independently.
  - 2.6. Schools should be asked to work together to develop structured out of schools activities which develop skills such as team-working which would better equip young people to fare well in the workplace.
3. *Skills and qualifications that are relevant to the workplace and credible*
    - 3.1. There should be a mechanism by which business and the public sector can communicate their skills and qualifications requirement to local schools and colleges, and address issues which arise as to the effectiveness of work based and day release training. KBC to work with Northamptonshire County Council and the Northamptonshire Chamber to bring these sectors together.
    - 3.2. The Council should help broker the establishment of a Secondary Schools Partnership to support and enable employer engagement and improve the quality of careers advice
    - 3.3. Employers should be encouraged to engage in Options evenings in schools
    - 3.4. The Borough Council should appoint from amongst elected members, an *Education Champion* to help broker these recommendations.
4. *Helping employers through the maze*
    - 4.1. One of the two academies should be asked to pilot the idea of a business liaison service which might include:-
      - A dedicated base on the premises for information provision, and for businesses to use themselves for recruitment, promotion, and contact with the school involved

- A lead professional in each school who could maintain contact with the business sector, perhaps through some wider network
  - 4.2. Existing business networks could be utilized in a structured format by schools, Connexions, training providers and young people's support services to provide information about qualifications, curriculum, funding opportunities, training programmes and the wider 14-19 agenda in schools and colleges
  - 4.3. That the MP be asked to work with members of the task and finish group to identify changes in the restrictions on young people taking on part time paid or voluntary work, which would benefit them, whilst not risking the fundamental protections that the law sought to apply.
5. *Supporting enterprise*
- 5.1. The University, colleges and business support facilities should come together to develop a joint marketing drive to promote their services and offer.
  - 5.2. The Council and partners should promote the idea of voluntary internships within companies
  - 5.3. The Council should explore with partners whether or not to develop an awards scheme to celebrate enterprise and entrepreneurial achievement.
  - 5.4. In the shorter term, the Council should encourage and facilitate all schools to take part in the national *Young Enterprise* competitions.
  - 5.5. The Council should develop an enterprise and employment fair as a supplement to careers fair, with a focus on those with technical rather than academic aptitudes to access opportunities in the future, or establish their own businesses, with practical advice on CVs, making applications, and in encouraging volunteering.
  - 5.6. The Council should do what it can to encourage a wider and more diverse FE offer in the Borough, particularly in vocational courses, and should encourage and facilitate existing providers to widen their offer and other providers, such as Moulton, to develop a local offer over time.