

European Commission: Consultation on Schools for the 21st Century

Response from Learning and Leisure Services, North Lanarkshire Council

1. How can schools be organised in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competences?

(a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century

North Lanarkshire's *Raising Achievement For All* policy, launched in 1998, has focused on developing a wide range of competences in young people. As such we have developed a wide range of cross-authority programmes which have aimed to 'develop the whole person', both academically and in terms of the range of competences described in the European Framework. The RAFA policy includes a series of 'experiential targets' for different stages, entitling all young people to the kind of enriching educational experiences which we think will help them grow into well-rounded, well-motivated, participating, thinking citizens of the future. These include commitments to have every young person perform on stage, take part in sport, be involved in the community, help younger pupils, have a residential experience etc. In order to help schools deliver these targets, we have a number of cross-authority programmes and provisions, including:

- Aiming Higher with Outward Bound, a week-long personal development programme for 1000 S4 students drawn from all 25 secondary schools on an annual basis. The aim is to challenge young people to develop self-reliance, trust, resilience, self-belief and a realisation of their abilities, through the medium of the outdoors.
- An extensive programme of music instruction and performance, both choral and instrumental, involving a large number of young people drawn from schools across the authority, and an extensive concert schedule at home and abroad including visits to Pistoia, Italy and Mallorca.
- A extensive sports programme with opportunities to participate at all levels as well as specialize, and again involving a number of international twinning arrangements
- A vibrant arts programme involving artists working in schools and opportunities to exhibit and perform
- An outdoor education residential centre which every P7 pupil has the opportunity to attend.
- A primary modern languages programme
- A new 'Active Literacy' programme which is achieving excellent results
- Enterprise in Education programme, along with the Enterprise and Design Challenge, and a large number of business partnerships
- Vocational Education in secondary schools, taught in school rather than having students attend College

We believe, however, that the most important way that schools can be organised to develop the key competences in all students is to change classroom practice. North Lanarkshire is now in its sixth year of rolling out Co-operative Learning to all of its schools, and to date nearly 3,000 staff have been trained. Using highly structured group work, Co-operative Learning engages all students in active learning, reinforcing both responsibility for the group and individual accountability, strengthening social skills and developing both confidence and an enthusiasm for learning. It is applicable to every stage, and every subject, and has been enthusiastically received by both students and staff. A number of other authorities in Scotland are working in partnership with ourselves to roll out co-operative learning to all of their schools, and we believe this offers strong potential to help us develop the four capacities of *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

(b) *How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems*

A number of European links are already developed with the authority which have been beneficial to young people from all countries involved. We have already established links with Hesse and Mallorca to share self-evaluation processes based on HGIOS and the sharing of PRD policies and practice.

Co-operative learning was introduced to the authority from Durham, Ontario, Canada, via the Bertelsman programme and subsequent European links. European assistance could go a long way to help boost this programme and to extend the availability of training throughout Scotland and other Member States.

2. How can schools equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?

(a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century

Learning is more likely to become a lifelong activity for young people entering adulthood if their early experience of education has been such that learning is perceived as meaningful, relevant, intrinsically rewarding, and above all, fun. Learning which takes place in a social context, and where young people are actively engaged in projects where they are challenged to achieve a group task, find out information, take responsibility for their own learning and apply their learning in new circumstances is much more likely to be the kind of learning which people will want to hold onto and to replicate later in life. For this reason, active experiential learning, such as Co-operative Learning, should be increasingly used in schools. The Assessment is for Learning programme is another powerful way of involving students more in their own learning, and of increasing the sense of ownership in learning.

Young people not only need the motivation to carry on learning when they leave school, but the opportunity. One of the main benefits of North Lanarkshire's 'Enhanced Comprehensives' programme is that links are made to local clubs, outside agencies and further and higher education which encourage young people to maintain and develop their interests on leaving school. In the Sports Comprehensives, for example, enhanced facilities and opportunities to participate in sport while at school are available to all students. Community management of the sports facilities means that close links are formed with local sports clubs, who become involved with the young people while at school and make it more likely that they will keep up their interest and continue to pursue a healthy lifestyle after leaving school. Those students who have gained their Community Sport Leadership Award (CSLA) often go on to organise activities for younger students, become a coach within the club structure, or study sport at college. Similarly, the Music Comprehensive's link with a local Further Education College in terms of music technology provides pathways for students to develop their talents and perhaps pursue a career after leaving school. In the national context, the Schools of Ambition programme could offer powerful leverage in this respect.

Learning is too often seen as an activity which is confined to classrooms and is about passing exams, rather than having a wider relevance in people's lives. It is important that all opportunities to make connections between the classroom and the outside world are taken so that student see the relevance of what they are learning.

Increasing the opportunities for Skills for Work Courses within a school setting not only provides young people with and SQA Intermediate 1 or 2 qualifications, but also gives them 'first option' on a range of College courses. In North Lanarkshire, Skills for Work has proved to be a motivating alternative curriculum for young people for whom the academic curriculum has not been intrinsically motivating, and who would otherwise have been 'turned off' learning for life. Other alternative curricula such as Skillforce, where learning often takes place outside a school setting, have proved similarly engaging. For young people judged to be particularly vulnerable, the Active Steps programme funded by the Big Lottery has had success in offering

the opportunity to participate in learning of their own choice, ultimately gaining Duke of Edinburgh Award, a certificate in first aid or (for example) the British Equestrian Certificate.

Young people's responses to education are largely linked to how education is perceived and how it is valued in the home. Greater parental involvement leads to higher expectations, and to raised attainment and achievement. Where school-based family learning and adult education opportunities (often centred around core/basic skills, ICT, healthy lifestyles etc) are offered to parents, this not only re-engages parents in learning, but boosts the likelihood of education for young people being positively perceived and supported in the home.

Learning can also be made more purposeful and connected for young people by introducing them to concepts such as global citizenship, and helping them become more aware of an international dimension through opportunities to interact with students from other countries via twinning arrangements etc.

(b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems

Opportunities for broadening the horizons of students and staff by twinning classrooms, schools and authorities from different member states would help students see the practical applications of ICT and would increase their awareness of the world in which they will play their role as future citizens.

Parallel programmes and approaches to vocational education are likely to be of interest since a number of Member States are more advanced in their use of vocational training than we are in Scotland. We also have much to learn in respect of ways of involving parents in educational programmes which links with other countries would help advance.

Since early experiences of learning is seen as crucial in forming young people's attitudes to learning, Early Years education would be another area where we would be likely to benefit from the experiences of other Member States in, for example, the delaying of formal education until the age of 6 or 7.

Once again, our experiences of using Co-operative Learning could be shared with other Member States.

3. How can school systems contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic growth in Europe?

(a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century

While it is true that there is currently a link between school attainment and later educational attainment, and on subsequent wages, and that there is a correlation between attainment and economic growth, the thrust of the rest of the discussion paper suggests that longer term, a raft of skills – the European Key Competences in fact – will be necessary to sustain economic growth, and these competences include but also go beyond the qualities which we currently measure in international student tests such as PISA and TIMSS.

There is a danger that if we continue to focus solely on the skills and attributes which are measurable, without changing our approaches to pedagogy, we will be failing to prepare our students for a world in which they are required to demonstrate the social, communicative, entrepreneurial and cultural competences which will help them adapt to the changing circumstances we know they will encounter. While, therefore, it is absolutely essential that literacy and numeracy are mastered to a high level of competency, and that academic qualifications are gained, it is vital that this is not at the expense of demotivating students from pursuing lifelong learning. It is equally vital that in the course of acquiring competence in a range of disciplines, the methodology used takes account of the need to have students involved as active learners, as described elsewhere in this response, so that they gain the communicative and social skills necessary to operate in a complex economic environment, and develop in enterprise and creativity.

It is essential, also, that we close the gap between those students who currently 'succeed' against any number of indicators at school, and those who do not. To do this we need to have appropriate curricular pathways, sufficiently flexible to embrace the choices and needs of all of our children, and not just those who can currently cope with the choices offered to them. Increasing the opportunities to follow vocational pathways, and creating parity of esteem for these, will go a long way to keeping large numbers of young people currently not in education, employment or training, or showing early signs of dropping out of the system, from contributing to the economy. In North Lanarkshire we have a number of programmes which are working well, but could benefit from support to be able to extend these opportunities to young people in all of our schools.

We are also working hard to ensure that no child falls through the net in terms of developing functional literacy and numeracy at the appropriate age, and are achieving good results, particularly with Active Literacy. Adult Literacy and Numeracy is another area where it will be necessary to make substantial progress if we are to contribute to economic growth in Europe.

The gender imbalance in employment is a matter of concern, particularly the drift of girls into low-paid areas of the employment market. This is something we hope to address via S4 work experience and through partnerships with industry and with further and higher education.

(b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems

Building sustainable links with European partners to share awareness of employment trends and the needs of the economy would be beneficial for all concerned. We could also learn much by sharing information and good practice around the area of vocational training.

4. How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?

(a) *Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century*

The Scottish Comprehensive system presents a powerful model of the attempt to make learning outcomes more equitable, and despite the challenges it now faces, and the realisation that we have not served the needs of all of our children as they deserve, it is still a model which at root supports the promotion of equity. The NLC Enhanced Comprehensives (currently, 3 Sports, 1 Music, 1 Enterprise, 1 Expressive Arts and 1 Technology - 3 of them funded via the Schools of Ambition programme – are an attempt to revitalize the Scottish Comprehensive and to give each school a distinctive status: explicitly, all of them are dedicated to broadening participation and to including all members of the school community and wider neighbourhood schools.

The consultation paper mentions the difficulties caused by ‘tracking’ children into different schools based on ability, which exacerbates inequality. While the comprehensive model avoid actual separation of children in terms of schools, the practice of ‘setting’ students based on assessed ability in different subjects can sometimes produce the same effects in terms of students’ estimation of their own ability to learn and to succeed being undermined. Once again, Co-operative Learning is a powerfully inclusive technique which allows students to contribute to the work of the group while recognizing different skills and abilities within the group. Having students take responsibility for not only their own learning but that of other group members has been proved to be a powerful way of raising the achievement of all group members, with students teaching each other. In this way, the perceived need for ‘setting’ can be overcome, with benefits for students of all levels of ability within the group. (It is useful also in this context to note the work of Professor Donald McIntyre on the characteristics of classes where the teacher believes that every child has a limitless capacity to learn (*Learning Without Limits*): typically in these classes, the teacher avoids setting, shares ownership of the learning with children, and encourages students to teach and learn from each other.)

With a range of social, gender, cultural, ability/disability and linguistic differences in every school and classroom, no one approach can bring about equity. In North Lanarkshire we have placed a great emphasis on allocating resources in the direction of greatest need, deliberately weighting funding and other forms of support in areas where there was the greatest degree of deprivation, as part of our *Raising Achievement for All* strategy. The Outward Bound programme, Easter Schools, Summer Schools, out of school hours learning, breakfast clubs, nurture groups etc are examples of this principle in action.

A dedicated English as an Additional Language (EAL) Unit supports a rapidly growing number of children and their families, including Polish families and a number of Congolese refugees who have recently come to stay in North Lanarkshire. Tracking the progress of these children in the terms of academic but also wider achievement has become an essential approach to ensuring they are properly supported. Increasingly, this approach is being applied to a wide number

of young people, particularly those students who are Looked After and Accommodated, and once again, our duties as corporate parents to ensure that children succeed in the widest possible sense are a pressing concern. Additional resources are likely to be necessary if we are to adequately meet the needs of all children, particularly those who are most vulnerable and face the greatest challenges.

It is vital also that we actively tackle racism, sexism, anti-sectarianism and other forms of prejudice and stereotyping, so that we equip young people with the skills they need to live peaceably with one another in a tolerant and respectful society.

(b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems

Learning from other systems, particularly those facing acute challenges in coping with diversity, would be most valuable.

5. If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?

(a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century

'Personalisation and choice' are key design principles behind *A Curriculum for Excellence*, and in many ways the advances we have made in introducing more flexible curricula, relaxing age and stage guidelines, working on Personal Learning Plans, Individual Education Programmes, and Co-ordinated Support Plans have strengthened our ability to offer a more customised and personalised education to young people. References already made earlier in this response to vocational education and curricular flexibility are equally relevant here, as are references to Co-operative Learning in increasing students' understanding of and capacity to work with students of all different abilities and backgrounds.

Staff training in a variety of teaching methods and approaches is critical, and approaches which have had some success in North Lanarkshire include Solution Oriented approaches, Restorative Practices, Co-operative Learning and Active Literacy.

Although special schools as independent units continue to exist, increasingly our pupils with additional support needs are educated either in special schools which share a campus with a mainstream school or in units within a mainstream school, or are fully integrated, with additional support, within a mainstream setting.

In the case of looked after and accommodated students, our role as corporate parents needs to be fleshed out to encompass a broader range of responsibilities in ensuring that children and young people experience a broad range of learning opportunities. Multi-agency work is of the essence in co-ordinating the work of all those involved in this process.

(b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems

We have a considerable amount to learn, and the sharing of information and approaches across member States would be most useful.

6. How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?

(a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century

A number of projects and approaches help prepare young people for active citizenship. These include learning about healthy lifestyles, having a global dimension to a number of aspects of the curriculum, operating fair trade projects, becoming recognized as 'Eco Schools', twinning with schools abroad, becoming engaged in charity work supporting and learning about special projects in the developing world, developing anti-sectarian and anti-racist programmes and so on.

Peer mediation, buddying and mentoring, and peer-tutoring programmes are increasingly adopted in schools and have proved very valuable.

All North Lanarkshire Schools have Student Councils, and these feed into a cross authority Student Council of over 100 young people representing all our secondary and special schools, with some primary school attendance at particular times. Co-operative learning techniques are used to ensure that all students are actively involved in discussions and consultations. We also promote and support the election processes connected with the Scottish Youth Parliament. Such processes are excellent as introductions to the democratic systems with which we hope young people will become actively involved in later life.

(b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems

Twinning and partnerships, with exchange visits, are invaluable in increasing awareness and understanding of cultural diversity and the need for tolerance and understanding between different nations, as well as a realisation of the things we hold in common and shared values etc.

7. How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?

(a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century

The commitment in North Lanarkshire to train all teachers in Co-operative Learning techniques (an intensive 4-day training including follow-up) with ongoing support for staff in schools is testimony to the central role we see this taking in delivering *A Curriculum for Excellence*. The *Harvard Teaching for Understanding* programme is being delivered to a much smaller number of teachers in authorities across Scotland, but this is another example of a generic approach to learning and teaching which focuses on more actively engaging young people, as is the Critical Skills training or training in Rich Tasks being run in several authorities. It is vital that Initial Teacher Education takes more account of Co-operative Learning approaches (or similar) in actively engaging students and that pre-service training emphasises the need to develop the whole person, whether this be seen in terms of the four capacities or the eight key competences, as the responsibility of every teacher. Understandably, the current system continues to emphasise a subject focus, particularly at secondary level.

It is important that CPD for school staff be seen as going far beyond participation in courses, but that this encompasses placements in other aspects of integrated children's services, in industry and so on. Increasingly, research suggests that focused classroom observation and sharing of practice by school staff in a 'professional learning communities' model is a powerful means of improving classroom practice. All staff in the authority have an annual entitlement to Professional Review and Development (PRD), and maintain a PRD portfolio and CPD plan.

Training in Restorative Practices and Solution Orientated approaches have been well-received by teachers coping with the increasing demands placed on the system in terms of behaviour management. Multi-agency training should be given a higher priority to help meet the need to integrate our approaches to supporting young people, particularly the most vulnerable.

(b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems

Resourcing the large scale CPD needs of staff across the board is a major issue, and where expertise exists and programmes have been found to be successful, this should be shared.

It should be noted, however, that Member States, including the UK and Scotland in particular, need to ensure that systems of assessment and accreditation reflect all the key competences and not merely those aspects of the key competences which have traditionally been valued and are easy to measure. If teachers continue to be held accountable for only traditional academic attainment, which only a proportion of their students figure in, then the generic CPD approaches to educating young people for lifelong learning in the 21st Century will be regarded as irrelevant by a good proportion of teaching staff.

(No part of this consultation appears to tackle this issue head on.)

8. How can school communities best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?

- (a) Actions within our own national context to ensure schools deliver the quality of education needed in the 21st Century*

The leadership and motivation needed by school communities has to be provided by everyone working within the school system: from the Scottish Government, including agencies such as HMIE, the SQA and Learning and Teaching Scotland, to local authority leadership, to school leadership and the leadership distributed throughout the organization such as school or nursery staff, students and their parents. Student and Parent Councils play an important role in this process. *A Curriculum for Excellence* provides an excellent framework for working towards the key competences, and has been well-received, although much uncertainty exists about how this can be implemented in practice.

Given the huge culture shift necessary if we are to move education forward to meet the demands of the 21st Century, it is important that a consistent message goes out from everyone involved in a leadership role. This has to be done in a spirit of challenge and encouragement, and with a shared understanding that in the change process, some experimentation and risk-taking will be necessary. The sharing of ideas and good practice plays a key role, whether this be organized within a school or cluster between classroom teachers, via headteacher conferences or indeed national conferences. North Lanarkshire has a major track record in running national conferences which spotlight innovation, and similar conferences at international level could usefully be held. A new policy on Leadership and Management was adopted as NLC policy at the last cycle.

- (b) How European co-operation could be effective in supporting Member States in the modernization of their systems*

It is encouraging that amongst Member States a very similar agenda is emerging. *A Curriculum for Excellence* offers a strong model which a number of other countries could learn from, and opportunities for leaders in different member states to learn from each other in this process would be hugely beneficial.