

‘Ensuring the best possible post16 outcomes in South West London’: a proposal for establishing a broad strategic education partnership that extends real choice to all

Nick von Behr www.behROUTcomes.co.uk

Summary

This paper outlines a rationale, context and requirement for a strategic partnership in education provision within an area called ‘South West London’.¹ The key benefit of such a partnership would be to ensure that real choice in education is extended to all, whatever their personal, family or other circumstances. This is particularly important for those students who, for whatever reason, are not able to achieve their full potential post16.

It is not yet clear who would lead on making this strategic partnership happen, but it would need to be a combination of the following key stakeholder groups:

- Head teachers and principals in schools and colleges (and their delegated leads)
- Local government/authority leads on education and careers
- Employers
- Higher Education Institutions
- Students
- Teachers
- Parents
- Independent advisers/knowledge brokers

The mechanism for such a partnership is not examined in this paper because this is a second stage issue. However, some case studies of how localities are currently operating (or planning to operate) are included in the annexes which are available on request. Interestingly two of these are for Richmond and Kingston local authorities which are both within South West London as defined in this proposal.

About the author: Nick von Behr runs an independent consultancy that advises on localised education issues. He previously worked at [the Royal Society](#), the UK’s national academy of sciences, and was responsible for managing its engagement with (inter)national 5-19 science and mathematics education policy.

¹ ‘South West London’ as defined in this proposal includes the six London Metropolitan boroughs of Richmond, Kingston, Wandsworth, Hounslow, Merton, and Hammersmith & Fulham. The first two of these boroughs are planning to merge the management of their children’s, education and some health services into a new social enterprise called ‘Achieving for Children’ (see later). This paper advocates a wider partnership focusing principally on post16 outcomes from education.

Rationale

The Coalition Government has made a clear commitment to improving social mobility, expanding equity and reducing poverty, such that all those who become adult citizens have been exposed to similar opportunities to improve themselves.² Much of the focus for this activity is centered on current and proposed changes to education and children's services in England.

In order to have a lasting impact such national reforms need to take place at a sub-national level within local communities that can help shape key decisions, as well as by engaging more closely with providers i.e. schools, and with beneficiaries i.e. young people and their families/carers.

These changes also need to take account of the following factors:

- the level of personal achievement at each critical stage prior to becoming a fully responsible adult
 - the quality of the professional staff/apparatus available within the locality
 - the frameworks, guidance, inspection and accountability models in place
- and last but by no means least
- cultural factors including, for example, gender and disability stereotyping, and socioeconomic, ethnic and political characteristics of communities.

All of this requires a focus on the right actions on education being taken within households, schools and colleges, in order to make the best post16 choices available to young people. Most importantly they need to follow through with this to achieve real benefits for themselves and their families and communities. A broad strategic education partnership would facilitate with this in the South West London area.

Context for the proposed strategic education partnership

The context arises first from the fact that education provision in England at a national and localised level is undergoing a critical transition and this will have an impact on the South West London area.

This transition is principally due to the following nation-wide factors:

- Compulsory education is being extended from age 16 to 18 by 2015;
- Related to this, Further Education's funding is tightening in hard times, which raises a number of issues about the optimal size of institution and type of student to cater for;

² See separate [blog](#) and linked commentary on the recent interim report by Alan Milburn, the Government's social mobility 'czar', as well as [DfE's proposals on the child protection system](#).

- 5-19 state education is being devolved away from national and local government and towards independent schools and consortia supported by the taxpayer (see also below). This could have an impact on quality careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) which from September 2012 will need to be provided directly by English state schools to all their Year 9-11 students;³
- Parents, carers and their charges are asserting their right to better public services;
- Higher Education, as a *quid pro quo* for receiving additional funding through raised tuition fees, is being made both more financially responsive to student needs. There are separate issues on how responsive universities will be to the overall strategic skills needs of UK plc;⁴
- New Labour's '[Every Child Matters](#)' agenda has been down-graded and replaced by a social mobility agenda with less onerous regulation.

In addition there are factors related specifically to post16 education, many of which pertain to the characteristics of South West London and similar areas:

- Academies and Free Schools are being proposed/established throughout the area and given their financial and legal independence this will have implications for the role of Local Authorities at post16 and beyond, particularly for young people designated for special provision. Some of these implications have been considered by the [LAAR project](#) which produced a final report in June 2012 for a [Ministerial Advisory Group](#) (MAG) chaired by Michael Gove, the Education Secretary. Wandsworth, Hounslow and Richmond all have direct input into this process though membership of the MAG or delegated Task and Finish groups.⁵ It is not yet clear what the final outcome of this work will be.
- The Head of Ofsted recently said in a [TES interview](#) that the inspectorate would be establishing 9 regional directorates in order to monitor school performance in a more strategic way. The Labour Party is [reviewing the 'middle tier'](#) as part of a wider education policy exercise and the Royal Society of Art's [Academies Commission](#) is also covering similar ground.
- There is variable quality of state-funded post16 education and so in a number of boroughs within the area there is significant reliance on high quality independent sector

³ The House of Commons Select Committee on Education is [consulting on CIAG provision in English schools and colleges](#) at the time of publication. The House of Lords Select Committee on Science & Technology [published a report in July 2012 on STEM Higher Education](#) which raised concerns about the quality of CIAG provision.

⁴ See recent [BIS response to consultation on HE WP](#) e.g. para 2.2.55. "We will continue to monitor the impact of our tariff and core and margin policies, and their effect on supply and demand ... This will include the monitoring the effect on subject choice in schools and colleges, in particular the take-up of facilitating subjects for degree-level study and STEM subjects specifically."

⁵ Sue John, Head Teacher, Lampton School, Hounslow chairs a [Task and Finish Group looking at Educational Excellence](#) and also sits on the MAG. Councillor Peter Dawson, Chair of Education & Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Wandsworth Council, sits on a [Task and Finish Group looking at Sufficiency and Fair Access](#) and also sits on the MAG. Nick Whitfield, Director of Education and Children's Services in Richmond sits on the same T&F group as Councillor Dawson.

or out-of-borough FE provision at this level. The emergence of [Teaching Schools and their alliances](#) may help to address this, but it is still early days in this new national-led policy development to see how well it impacts at a localised level.

- Conservative led Richmond Council recently agreed to extend all its 11-16 maintained schools to 11-18 in response to parental demand. The Liberal Democrat opposition raised concerns about the threat to local FE colleges and the ability of a consortia of smaller 6th Forms to offer the full choice of subjects. This will need to be tackled.
- Within or nearby to the South West London area are significant employers many of a top international renown and Higher Education Institutions to which those in post16 education may apply. ⁶ This has implications for the provision of work experience, internships, mentoring, apprenticeships and recruitment opportunities for those who live in this area.

Overall strategic requirement

The key requirement for a strategic education partnership to satisfy is expressed in the title of this paper: ensuring the best possible post16 outcomes in South West London by extending *real choice* in education to all. The emphasis on ‘real choice’ is key as currently it is difficult to assess the ‘reality’ of the offering.

A portfolio of projects are currently happening or being planned within the area’s individual boroughs, ranging from large changes to physical infrastructure e.g. building of new (parts of) schools, to tailored teaching and learning interventions for targeted groups. These may be funded by central government, the Mayor of London, boroughs and others, including religious and other charities.

However, what is really required is an overarching strategy that ensures complementarity and efficiencies, in the absence of any single co-ordinated lead at this level. [The Mayor of London’s current Education Inquiry](#) may provide an indication of where some of this might come from when it reports in September this year, but this is not guaranteed.⁷

This is a systems-based approach designed to cover as broad a range of stakeholders and their needs as possible.

Expected partnership benefits

A partnership would expect to produce the following real benefits at a localised level within the defined area called South West London:

⁶ Such employers include for example BP, GlaxoSmithKline, British Airways, BAA London Heathrow etc. Greater London has some of the best rated Higher Education Institutions in the world. Unfortunately it is difficult to access precise information on which ones post16 students go to from South West London schools and colleges, but see recent [DfE/BIS data on post16 destinations by local authority and HE mission group](#).

⁷ The focus of the inquiry and indeed the Mayor of London’s current education activities is very much on targeted areas of London, the fewest of which are found in South West London. Richmond and Kingston are often used as comparators for extremes between ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ e.g. Tower Hamlets. The recent Mayoral campaign included a suggestion from one candidate for [an independent education commissioner for London](#).

- education provision that correctly matches the needs of each learner, whatever their particular circumstances. This includes those who come from ‘comfortable’ backgrounds but still require support because of, for example, special educational needs, including specific disabilities;
- A set of identified post16 career paths for young people that suit future local, London, national and global requirements.

Specific outcomes and delivery framework

The partnership would be expected to produce the following specific *outcomes*:

- Contribution towards an solid evidence-base of key factors that impact on high quality education provision in South West London
- Recommendations for relevant joint actions by local decision makers to ensure diversity of post16 progression routes and real choice for all
- A delivery framework that best enables any required changes to take place and which would include within it:
 - A graded list of the most significant evidence-based influencing factors that impact on the quality of education provision in South West London
 - Prioritised criteria/indicators and accompanying measures for ensuring that the required outcomes happen and that the benefits can be satisfactorily evaluated.⁸

Success criteria and factors

A sound working partnership would be defined by the following *success criteria* for South West London:

- Labour markets are better attuned to a localised and wider supply of skills
- Compulsory education systems better meet needs of HE and employers
- More young people are achieving raised aspirations whatever their particular circumstances
- The locality survives in the midst of uncertain EU and UK national and regional political and economic change

The following *factors* may have an impact on these success criteria:

- The capability of compulsory education to adapt to changing circumstances
- Political parties and their determination to deliver manifestos/policies

⁸ This might learn from the Education Endowment Foundation’s approach using [a tool kit](#) to evaluate different types of education initiatives, from the Mayor of London’s [Project Oracle](#) approach to London youth projects, or from the National Foundation for Education Research’s programme ‘[From Education to Employment](#)’ which is looking at potential ‘NEET’ (Not in Education, Employment or Training) indicators.

- The willingness of local citizens to assert their own and wider group demands
- The future prospects for sustainable economic growth in the locality and its neighbourhood
- The views young people have about what they really want (and what they believe they can do about it)

In conclusion

As has been shown in this paper there are plenty of reasons for establishing a strategic education partnership in South West London. Richmond and Kingston are already moving in this direction with their plans to merge the management of their children's, education and some health services into a social enterprise called 'Achieving for Children'⁹.

This proposal argues for the main focus of a strategic partnership on education, and within that post16 outcomes, across a broader grouping of LAs.

In this way **all** our young people will have the education and employment choices available to them to allow them to succeed in life.

⁹ There is some information available about 'Achieving for Children' (AfC) on the Borough of Richmond upon Thames website. A more up-to-date analysis of AfC was presented to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its [24 July meeting](#), for which the minutes were not available at the time of publication. On [10 July 2012 it was announced](#) that there would henceforth be an Interim Joint Director of Children's Services for both boroughs following a poor Ofsted report on Kingston.