

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education, Culture and Sport
DATE	23 February 2012
DIRECTOR	Annette Bruton
TITLE OF REPORT	Transformation Options/City Campus
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS/12/009

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an interim review on City Campus Project and in particular the initial phase, the implementation of travel afternoons in session 2011/12

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee

- notes the content of this report;
- instructs officers to bring a progress report on the City Campus Project on an annual basis
- instructs officers to complete the final evaluation of the travel afternoon provision, at the end of the initial phase, and include this in the City Campus report

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are none at this stage, other than the costs of completing a further review which can be met from existing budgets.

4. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The City Campus project is a transformational project agreed by the Council to enhance learning opportunities for pupils, initially in the senior phase of secondary school education.

The aim is to give pupils access to a far broader range of appropriate courses and learning pathways than would be available in a single school.

The City Campus approach encourages our schools to work in partnerships with

- neighbouring schools in local consortia;
- a wider range of local schools in a broader consortium;
- schools across the city, such as in the travel afternoon initiative;
- local providers from business and industry as well as the voluntary sector;

- other educational providers – Aberdeen College, Aberdeen University and Robert Gordon University;
- other community partners including cultural and sports services;
- other Local Authorities – e.g. a partnership with Shetland Islands Council has already been established;

In addition, we are aiming to develop key learning skills that will better prepare our young people to contribute in the modern world. These higher order skills, such as independent learning and enhanced use of ICT, will better prepare young people for the next stage in their lifelong learning journey.

The range of options and learning pathways will eventually include applied and vocational learning opportunities as well as academic subjects. Our vision is for pupils to construct an appropriate, balanced curriculum which meets their needs and aspirations, which they are able to access anytime, anywhere.

It was agreed that the initial phase of the project would be the organisation of centrally delivered courses to enhance the range of opportunities for senior students. This became known as the travel afternoons, as all schools were encouraged to timetable four afternoons where pupils could travel to the city-wide provision. The method of delivery was developed following several 'ad hoc' arrangements between schools for the delivery of Advanced Higher courses. For example there was a successful link between Aberdeen Grammar School and Kincorth Academy for the delivery of Advance Higher Physics during 2010/11. The pupils who attended this course from out with their home school all achieved A passes, gained from being part of a larger teaching group and mixing with pupils from another school.

In session 2011-12, fourteen Advanced Higher courses as well as courses at Higher, Intermediate 1&2 and Access level in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) were offered to pupils attending all city secondary schools. These were delivered at Aberdeen Grammar School and Harlaw Academy, as these were the most accessible schools on existing transport routes.

This new provision was intended to enhance curricular choice for senior pupils so these courses were in addition to those offered in each 'home' school, and were selected following an audit of likely demand across all the secondary schools.

An interim review of the provision of these centrally delivered courses was carried out in December 2011 and early January 2012. As courses had been running for only half the school year, this review was limited in its scope but it was necessary to complete this in time to allow schools and the education authority to plan provision for the forthcoming session (2012-13).

A range of positive and negative issues were raised and these are highlighted in the accompanying report (Appendix 1). The provision for session 2012/13 will build on the lessons learnt from this review.

The review will be concluded on completion of the initial phase and will include parental views. This will include an analysis of the examination results of pupils undertaking these courses and will provide a fuller indication of the benefits of the programme.

In summary, the interim review of the travel afternoons concludes that the aim of delivering enhanced access to Advanced Higher courses was supported and

welcomed by staff and students across all schools and the introduction of the travel afternoon initiative did widen subject choice significantly for young people. Students attending courses were generally positive about the experience. There were however a number of recommendations and four particular areas for improvement.

- Communication

Communication with pupils and parents at the time of making curricular choice will be improved through the production of clear information in both an electronic and leaflet form.

- Support

Support for staff and pupils will be improved through the appointment of a central co-ordinator for the programme and clearer guidelines on the respective responsibilities for host and sending schools. This will include advice on induction programmes for pupils and better use of ICT.

- Staffing

It is acknowledged that professional opportunities to deliver Advanced Higher courses should be provided for staff across the city. Subject network groups will be encouraged to manage this with support from the central co-ordinator. Alternative models for delivery will be examined.

- Transport Costs

No pupil should be prevented from accessing centrally delivered courses due to excessive transport costs. We will examine alternative means of funding transport costs including discussions with local transport providers.

5. IMPACT

This report is likely to be of interest to the public. It will affect those with children and those working in schools. It will also be of interest to those involved in lifelong learning and to other public provider partners.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The interim review of travel afternoons (Appendix 1) describes the Scope of the Evaluation, the Views of Interviewees (Students, Staff in Schools – both Facilitating and Teaching Staff in Sending and Host Schools), Conclusions and Recommendations.

7. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Draft – Interim Travel Afternoon Evaluation

Background

In the current school session 2011-12, Aberdeen City Council offered a range of Advanced Higher (AH) classes to students in all twelve secondary schools, to be delivered in the two city centre schools – Aberdeen Grammar School and Harlaw Academy.

The purpose was to broaden curricular options for students in S6 by providing courses in addition to those which were available in their “home” school.

It is intended to make similar provision in session 2012/13. While a full evaluation of the Travel Afternoon (TA) programme is not yet possible it was agreed to undertake an interim evaluation to help inform planning for session 2012-13.

Scope of Evaluation

During December and early January a small team visited all secondary schools in the city. Interviews were held with:

- Young people who were participating in the travel afternoons, those who had attended initially but have dropped out and those who had decided not to take part;
- Senior staff with responsibility for facilitating travel afternoons; and
- Teaching staff in both sending and host schools.

In total, 64 staff and 77 young people were involved in discussions. The number interviewed varied between schools and was based on the availability of staff and pupils. In the current session, 200 students are participating in the TA initiative, of these around 75% were based in the host schools. The team did not receive data from all schools in relation to current and previous uptake of AH.

The views of parents were not sought as part of this exercise.

Views of Interviewees

Students

Young people in all schools would prefer that their subject choices were available in their home school. However, they were well aware of the budget constraints that the service was experiencing and most had a clear understanding of the rationale for the travel afternoon scheme. Almost all felt that travel afternoons offered a very wide range of subject choices. A few suggested extending subject choice to include modern languages, applied mathematics and mechanics, if there was sufficient demand. The extent that travel afternoons were promoted varied considerably across schools. In schools where the scheme was promoted, methods used to inform young people about travel afternoons included:

- promotion in assemblies
- discussion at parents’ evenings
- discussion in social education
- individual discussions with staff

- inclusion in course choice sheet, annotated TA
- inclusion on course choice sheet, but no indication of TA/location.

A few young people who were unaware of the location indicated that they might not have chosen the subject if they had realised they would be travelling, but having done so they were enjoying the course.

The most frequent reasons given for non-participation in travel afternoons were:

- sufficient choice in home school
- effective local consortia arrangements
- cost of travel
- difficulty of travel
- strong relationships with staff in home school which young person felt could not be replicated elsewhere.

The main reasons young people gave for dropping out of travel afternoons related to travel issues including:

- cost of travel
- not having time for lunch or having to eat on public transport
- arriving late and feeling awkward
- arriving late and missing initial instruction.

In all schools, both participating and non-participating students raised concerns regarding the possibility of young people being prevented from attending due to the cost of travel.

Most young people who were participating in the TA programme were enjoying the course. They were particularly enthused when they perceived teaching to be of a high quality. The four hours allocated for teaching compared well with that provided in AH classes across the city. However, almost all students from sending schools felt that, compared with students in the host school, they were disadvantaged by not having ready access to a familiar member of staff and informal opportunities to discuss any difficulties. Students in host schools also identified the lack of tutorial support as a downside of the programme. In several schools, students commented on the lack of access to GLOW and the inadequate use of ICT to support communication and independent study.

A significant concern for participating students related to the lack of effective two-way communication between home/host schools. A few young people also indicated that participation in the TA programme had a negative impact on their ability to undertake leadership roles and maintain their involvement in extra-curricular activities such as the school orchestra. Young people from both sending/host schools reported that despite some initial awkwardness they felt positive about learning alongside pupils from other schools and had made new friends. Schools had taken few steps to encourage them to mix. Despite these issues, participating students supported the continuation of travel afternoons as they delivered greater choice and helped make classes viable.

Around a quarter of schools continued to provide AH courses for individuals and pairs. The subjects studied were generally available as part of the TA programme, the exceptions being music and

physical education. Overall, this group of young people tended to receive less direct teaching time than those taking part in the TA programme.

Staff in Schools

In the current session, participation rates are very low in the majority of sending schools for the reasons outlined above by young people. There was a strong correlation between the level of involvement in the TA programme and attitudes towards the worth of the scheme.

Facilitating and Teaching Staff in Host Schools

Facilitating staff felt that overall the programme had been worthwhile and supported its continuation. They identified a range of benefits for young people as a result of the TA programme. These included:

- increased likelihood that young people would be able to follow AH subject choice
- the opportunity to mix with young people from other schools
- increased independence for young people.

Facilitating staff in host schools also highlighted a number of challenges in introducing the TA programme. Blocking timetables to support TA impacted on arrangements for all year groups. There were significant time demands on senior staff particularly during August coping with rapidly changing numbers as classes increased or dwindled. There was a high drop-out rate when young people did not achieve sufficiently strong grades at H level and a few schools offered AH with very small numbers of participants.

While arrangements had been made for science staff from schools to meet to tackle issues related to investigations, facilitating staff identified a range of areas where clearer procedures were required.

Senior staff also indicated workload issues when class sizes were large and teachers were involved in reading/on-going oversight of dissertations.

Teaching staff in the host schools felt that there was some benefit for their pupils who were meeting young people from other schools. They welcomed the widening of subject choice and felt that the TA programme provided a worthwhile bridge between school and university. They enjoyed working with students from various schools and seeing them grow into a team.

Staff in host schools identified a number of areas where there was room for improvement.

- The annual date for changing timetables varies across schools. As a result, students joined the TA classes over a period of weeks. This resulted in some young people missing introductions and initial lessons.
- Lack of clear lines of communication was an on-going concern.
- Delivering staff recognised that there was variation in the level of support received by young people with investigations and dissertations in their home school.
- Schools use different software and this created difficulties for some students when specific packages were not available in both schools.

- Staff acknowledged that insufficient travel time and cost had been an issue for some young people.
- Staff who were no longer delivering AH were concerned about the longer term impact on their professional development.

Facilitating and Teaching Staff in Sending Schools

Almost all facilitating staff in sending schools indicated that it was hard to justify blocking the timetable given the impact on all pupils when there was no or minimal uptake of the TA programme. A few schools had not taken account of TA when preparing timetables.

A minority of staff in sending schools thought that the programme had been worthwhile and most had reservations about the financial implication for their school. In those schools where there was a good level of uptake, staff recognised the potential benefit for the young people concerned. Most teaching staff would prefer to see the scheme refined with greater emphasis on local consortia arrangements.

Teaching staff concurred with the concerns of young people regarding travel issues and the reduced capacity of young people to participate in wider aspects of school life. They raised two significant professional concerns.

- Due to a lack of clear communication procedures, they were not well informed regarding pupil progress. They were disengaged from the assessment and quality assurance process which informed students' estimates, despite remaining as the presenting establishment.
- Staff in sending schools were unaware of the criteria used to select teachers to deliver the AH courses. They felt that by primarily using teachers in the host schools there was an unintentional message that these schools were "better" than others. In the longer term, staff felt that the pool of staff with experience of delivering and assessing at AH level would be reduced.

Conclusions

The aim of ensuring equity of access to AH courses was supported and welcomed by staff and students across all schools. In the current session, the introduction of the Travel Afternoon initiative widened subject choice significantly for young people and those attending were generally positive about the experience. However, participation rates from sending schools were low overall. Logistical factors, such as travel time and cost, concerned almost all students. While there was a financial cost to all schools, in the current session, there was no discernible benefit to around half of the schools.

Almost all the differences between schools relating to the range of AH subjects on offer, class size and teacher contact were unchanged. For example, a number of schools continued to run AH classes with extremely small numbers reducing the opportunity for students to benefit from working in a larger group. This may alter in session 2012/13 and beyond when there are further reductions in staffing.

Travel Afternoons have not been endorsed by all schools and many favoured an expansion of consortia arrangements. However, while some obvious partnerships exist that was not the case for

all schools. In its first year of operation, the Travel Afternoon initiative has demonstrated that as the number of schools involved in a project increases so the number of potential difficulties increases exponentially. Looking ahead, with further development, Travel Afternoons may be one of a range of strategies to broaden the curriculum and provide a more tailored experience for young people in the senior stages.

Recommendations

The Education Service should produce and distribute to all schools a clear overview of the TA programme so that there is consistency of information. This will ensure that young people and their families understand what is involved before they make course choice decisions.

The Education Service should take steps to ensure that no young person is prevented from participating in the scheme due to cost factors.

The Education Service should consider enhancing staff professional development by inviting expressions of interest from teachers who are keen to deliver AH courses as part of the TA programme.

In order that young people feel welcome in the host schools, an induction experience should be offered before the course begins.

Poor communication was a recurring theme of all interviewees. This needs to be improved as a priority. The action points below provide a starting point for the coming session.

- Identify a coordinator for the TA scheme and key contacts in each school.
- Establish clear criteria for gaining a place in a TA class in the event that it is over-subscribed.
- Improve the sharing of information regarding any additional support needs of young people attending TA classes.
- Establish clear procedures to provide home schools with prompt information on attendance, concerns, progress and predicted grades.
- Agree responsibilities for contributing to pupil reports and UCAS applications.
- Clarify expectations of support to be provided for students with investigations and dissertations.
- Make better use of ICT to support learning and communication.
- Agree arrangements to enable young people to take part in any required field work.
- Identify roles and responsibilities in the event of any student disciplinary issues.
- Ensure that young people do not travel unnecessarily in the event of teacher absence.
- Introduce inclement weather procedures.
- Improve the flow of information to parents, particularly in relation to progress reports and parents' evenings.

At the end of the current course delivery, the Education Service should seek the views of all staff, senior students and their parents on current and future provision in the senior years of secondary education.

The Education Service should undertake a full cost/benefit analysis of the TA scheme and alternative consortia arrangements when AH results for 2012 are available.