

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education, Culture and Sport
DATE	8th October 2009
DIRECTOR	Annette Bruton
TITLE OF REPORT	Learning Strategy Update
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/09/043

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report provides an update on consultation on the Aberdeen Learning Strategy and outlines proposals for the next stage in the development of a final strategy for *Aberdeen City of Learning*.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the content of the Report, and the appendix.
- 2.2 Agree the principles, vision and priorities which have already been consulted on and which have met with wide approval among stakeholders.
- 2.3 Agree the short term objectives set out in the draft strategy and instruct officers to include these in future service plan objectives and take forward work to see these objectives implemented.
- 2.4 Instruct officers to carry out further work to widen out the strategy to better address learning to include school education and wider lifelong learning.
- 2.5 Instruct officer to publish to stakeholders, the consultation results to date and the arrangements for taking forward the learning strategy.
- 2.6 Instruct officers to consult further on this and bring back to Education, Culture and Sport Committee, by April 2010, a long term strategy for implementing the vision for Aberdeen: City of Learning, including medium and long term proposals for the learning estate.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Implementation of the short term recommendations can be met within existing resources.
- 3.2 The development of a longer term strategy can be met within existing resources. The financial implication of implementing this strategy will be brought to Education, Culture and Sport Committee with the strategy proposal.

3.3 Separate financial information will be brought in relation to the school estate strategy which is also being considered by Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

4 SERVICE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

This proposal fits with the vision in the Community Plan to develop Aberdeen as a 'City of Learning'. It is congruent with *Vibrant Dynamic and Forward Looking* and the Single Outcome Agreement. It will form the basis for delivering A Curriculum for Excellence.

This report articulates with the report to Education, Culture and Sport Committee from Community Learning and Development on Learning Hubs and the report on the School Estate.

5 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Appendix 1 summarises the feedback from the consultation on the Draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy.

6 REPORT

6.1 Background

Elected Members have received regular updates at previous Committee meetings on the development of the draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy.

As part of the process stakeholders and members of the public were invited to give their views. One of the two main mechanisms used for gathering written responses was via a structured questionnaire. The other main mechanism was via a series of 'Listening Meetings' and events, during which a whole range of comments and views were comprehensively recorded. Over 20 such meetings were held, which was unprecedented in terms of past exercises. Almost 700 people attended the meetings. The consultation and engagement process was supported by a dedicated learning strategy microsite, which received over 2000 "hits".

6.2 Main Considerations

In total over 280 completed questionnaires and other responses were received. Along with feedback for the meeting and compared to other consultation exercises this level of response was a comparatively good one. However, despite this, the level of response did not match the aspirations held for the consultation and engagement process. Of the responses 91% of consultees confirmed that they had read the draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy. Despite this level of response, officers advise that for a strategy as far reaching as this a fuller and more comprehensive response and engagement is essential to ensure implementation. It is particularly important that we engage more fully and appropriately with children and young people.

A general issue emerging out of the consultation and engagement process, and therefore the responses, seems to be the emphasis given to the learning estate in Listening Meetings. This focus, which centred on the Priority *Fit-for-purpose schools/learning estate*, generated much debate. Whilst this was appropriate, it

left less opportunity to discuss learning more widely and the aspirations to improve learning in Aberdeen City.

A number of key themes emerged from the responses, which were:

- a desire for more detail and information about each proposed priority and the related objectives and how we intend to implement and deliver on these;
- highlighting equality and ensuring a fair share of resources for all;
- ensuring that there were adequate resources to deliver the Strategy;
- the importance of supporting learning via fit-for-purpose buildings and facilities;
- a significant degree of concern over potential school closures; and
- a desire to ensure that the council made decisions on the basis of accurate information and sound educational arguments

Further details about the responses from the consultation are outlined in Appendix 1. These responses signal support for the vision, principles and priorities in the draft strategy, whilst seeking clarification, a more streamlined strategy and more detail on the nature of the medium and longer term objectives.

6.3 Proposals

There is a clear indication from the consultation that the general vision – *Aberdeen: City of Learning*, the principles and the priorities commanded support from stakeholders. However, it is also clear that more needs to be done to engage with tertiary and higher education, with partners in the voluntary sector and with business and industry to develop this vision so that it is better understood and more ambitious. More work requires to be done to make clear in the strategy how we will deliver the medium and longer term objectives.

Importantly, the strategy needs to set out more clearly how we will provide not only the best learning opportunities for individuals throughout their lives but also how this will contribute in real terms to the wealth, economy and regeneration of Aberdeen City.

In order to do this it is proposed that further work is undertaken by officers, with all key stakeholders, to streamline the draft strategy, consult on medium and longer term objectives and set out the economic advantages for people in Aberdeen. A further report on progress with this, including a final proposed strategy would be brought to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee by April 2010 with interim reports at each Committee.

The short term objectives, if agreed by Committee would immediately be put into effect by officers and these would be reported on regularly to the Committee.

7 REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Copies of all Appendices and information relating to this Report are available in the Members' Library.

- Draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy

Consultation on Draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy

As part of the Council's consultation process on its draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy (ALS), stakeholders and members of the public were invited to give their views. One of the two main mechanisms that the Council used for gathering written responses was via a structured questionnaire. The other main mechanism was via a series of Listening Meetings and events, during which a whole range of comments and views were comprehensively recorded.

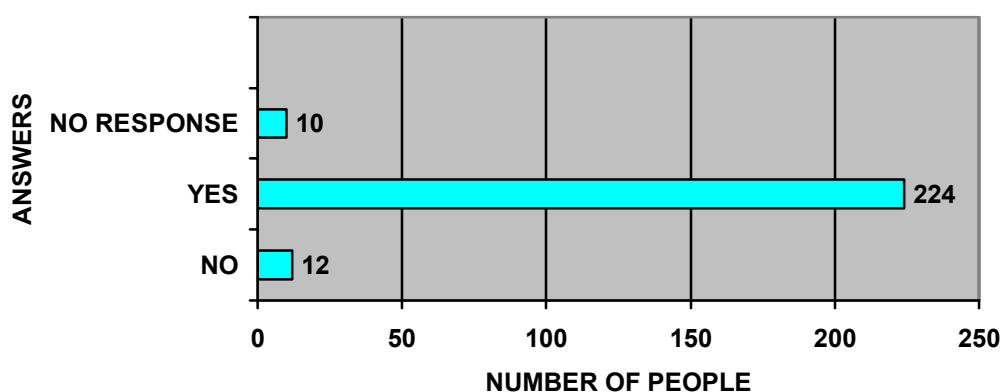
The questionnaire was available on-line as part of the dedicated ALS microsite and as a paper copy. Whilst being one of the main mechanisms for gathering views, opinions and comments, the Council did not wish to constrain consultees and so it was made clear that the Council would also welcome comments via letter and email as alternatives to using the questionnaire or in addition to using it.

To assist consultees' consideration of the issues, everyone attending a *Listening Meeting* event was provided with a pack of the main documents and information being used. The pack included:

- A copy of the draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy;
- A summary leaflet;
- Storyboards providing more detail about each priority; and
- Information about school populations

This information and other documentation were available to view and print off the Aberdeen Learning Strategy microsite. Alternatively, people could request copies of the information to be sent to them via post or email.

In total the council received 246 completed questionnaires. Of the 246 responses, 224 (91%) consultees confirmed that they had read the draft strategy, 12 said that they had not, with 10 not indicating whether they had read the strategy or not. What was not clear was where a single respondent was replying on behalf of a group – for example a headteacher responding on behalf of school staff for the whole school.



A general issue emerging out of the consultation and engagement process, and therefore the responses, seems to be the emphasis given to the learning estate in Listening Meetings. This focus, which centred on the Priority “Fit-for-purpose schools/learning estate”, generated much debate. Whilst this was intentional, it does seem to have unintended consequences. In particular, it seems to have resulted in less of a response than wished for on other aspects of the draft learning strategy.

Of the questionnaires:

- 243 were completed by education employees of Aberdeen City Council (teachers, support staff, nursery nurses, staff within the Education Service) and others; and 34 were completed by parents / guardians. The number of responses by parents/ guardians was very low
- 2 were completed by staff from other Aberdeen City Council service areas
- 1 was completed by a staff member from a partner organisation
- 5 questionnaires were spoiled.

What respondents thought of the draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy

As a strategy document:

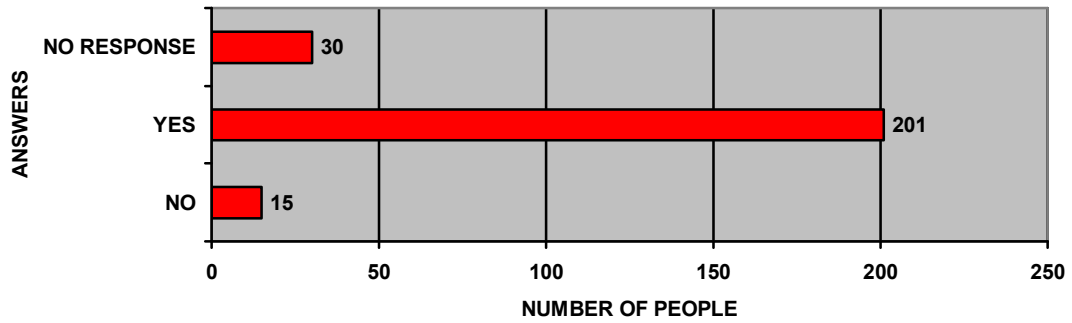
- A majority of respondents (60%) felt that the draft ALS, as a document, was well presented.
- However, 24% felt that it was not
- 60% of respondents said that the document was easy to read, but 32% felt it was not:

In terms of clarity and how easy it was to understand:

- 80% of respondents said that they understood the vision for learning that was set out, but 12% said that they did not understand the vision



- A slightly greater number of respondents (82%) felt that they understood the key principles and values underpinning the draft strategy



- A high proportion of respondents (80%) stated that they understood what the Council was trying to achieve in developing an Aberdeen Learning Strategy:-

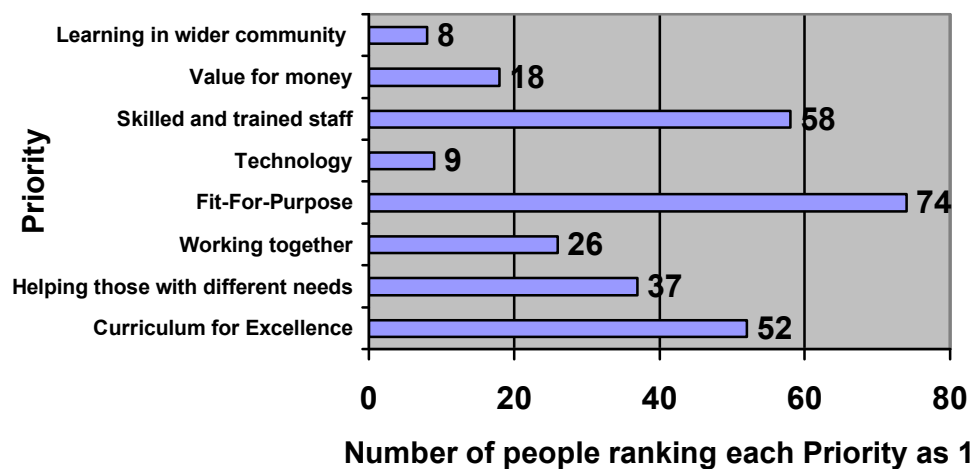
We were keen to know if people felt that the learning strategy would eventually have a positive impact on learning in Aberdeen City. Of the 280 questionnaires returned, 214 respondents expressed a view on what they thought the impact of the draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy document would be:

- 45.8% thought education would improve
- 36.4% thought education would stay the same
- 16.4% thought education would get worse
- 1.4% were not sure

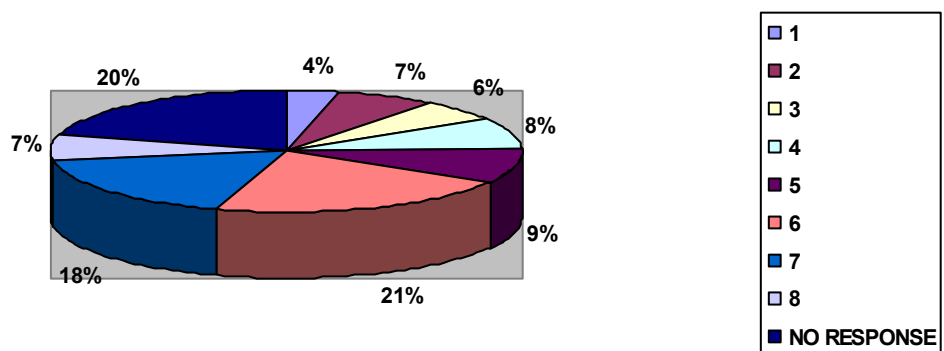
Comments on the 8 proposed priorities

The focus on the learning estate may have resulted in less attention being given by respondents to other aspects of the draft ALS.

Respondents were asked to rank the eight priorities in order of importance, where a ranking of 1 was most important and 8, least. The diagram below shows the number of people who ranked each of the eight priorities as their number 1:



- 74 respondents (32%) ranked the need for a “fit-for-purpose schools/learning estate” as number 1. In addition 27 respondents (12%) ranked this priority with a rating of 2.
- 58 respondents (24%) ranked ensuring that we have “skilled and trained staff” with a rating of 1. In addition 71 respondents rated the need for “skilled and trained staff” with a ranking of 2
- 52 respondents (20%) ranked “A Curriculum for Excellence” as number 1. In addition 27 respondents (11%) gave “A Curriculum for Excellence” an importance ranking of 2
- “Technology” was rated as the top priority by only 9 respondents (4%) and by only 8 respondents (7%) as their second most important priority:



For other priorities, respondents said:

- Helping those with different needs
13.4% ranked this as their highest priority
3.5% ranked this as their lowest priority
- Working together
4.7% ranked this as their highest priority
3.5% ranked this as their highest priority
- Value for money
3.6% ranked this as their highest priority
28.7% ranked this as their lowest priority
- Learning in the wider community
1.2% ranked this as their highest priority
42.3% ranked this as their lowest priority

Some of these rankings may have resulted from the focus on the Learning Estate.

Themes emerging from the consultation

- Equality and fair share of resources for all
- Money and resources are insufficient to deliver the Strategy
- Creating a two-tier school system, with some having 21st century buildings and facilities, and the rest not
- Scepticism that the Council will be able to fulfil its promises
- Listening to frontline staff and reacting to their needs
- Concern over accuracy of school roll projections and how they may be used to make decisions
- More detail and information about each Priority and how we intend to deliver
- A degree of concern over potential school closures and therefore a preference for no change