

***Pathways for All* one year on**

An appraisal of progress made and a date for your diary

Dr Tony Breslin, Independent Chair, *Pathways for All* Strategic Board

The *Pathways for All* Strategic Board was formed in September 2022 to take forward the recommendations of the *Pathways for All* review published earlier that year. On **Tuesday 28th November**, the first ***Pathways for All* sector wide meeting** is planned to take place and will bring together school, college and training organisation leaders, and other key stakeholders, at the University of Kent in Canterbury to assess the changing post-16 education landscape - one that is impacted by, on the one hand, a cost of living crisis that makes participation in post-16 education a very different proposition for many potential learners and, on the other, by an evolving qualifications landscape and a training and teaching profession that is, post lockdown, much more adept at using digital technologies to bring learners together. These new levels of digital literacy are a potential game-changer given the multiple demographics and geographies of the county.

The review had contained eight recommendations:

1. Make a concerted effort to improve outcomes from 16+ provision
2. In parallel, raise young people's aspirations through more effective Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG). Once raised, these aspirations need to be actively supported, including by those with an influence over what young people decide to do post-16. By proxy this means ensuring those who influence young people are themselves properly informed
3. Develop a 'collaborative offer' to support the current network of sixth forms, many of them very small by national standards. This should cover all providers (specifically including GFECs, other organisations providing vocational learning and alternative 16-19 providers) and will require partnership working between all concerned.
4. Improve the provision available below Level 2
5. Take further steps to support young people's mental health
6. Improve and enable access to provision
7. Take the opportunity to learn lessons from the Covid-19 lockdowns, and not simply assume everything should or will return to 'normal'
8. Create a 16+ Strategic Leadership Board to ensure all involved parties collaborate to deliver these recommendations, and to oversee the sector's future strategic development.

The formation of the Strategic Board amounted to action on one of the recommendations, Recommendation 8. So, a year on, how are we doing?

We ought to start by acknowledging that forming a board, and one that pulls together a number of leading players in the post-16 sector across Kent, is a significant commitment but any board is only as good as the outcomes it helps to generate. It would be easy to think that we've set up a board and the job is done, with Recommendation 8, in the vernacular, 'sorted'.

But, of course, the purpose of Recommendation 8 is about more than forming a board; it is to ensure that the sector is provided with the strategic leadership necessary for the delivery of Recommendations 1-7. If the wider recommendations are not delivered, Recommendation 8 has failed, whether or not a *Strategic Board* has been created. Rather, the board is charged with ensuring that “all involved parties collaborate to deliver these recommendations” and with overseeing “the sector’s future strategic development”.

To this end, the Strategic Board meets on a monthly basis during term time across the academic year and has created a series of “Recommendation Implementation Groups” or RIGs, one addressing each recommendation, and drawing in a wider group of practitioners – education and training specialists working in the field who are acutely aware of opportunities that might not yet be sufficiently acknowledged and the challenges that learners may face in accessing these. Each RIG meets ahead of each board, such that their work both informs and drives the board’s deliberations.

Pathways for All is distinctive amongst apparently similar reviews in other local authorities because of the depth of the research that underpins it, and the commitment to act on the eight recommendations. Each of the Recommendation Implementation Groups have met on a regular basis since late Autumn and have begun to formulate plans of action and the groups, together with the Strategic Board as a whole, have been reflecting on their progress over this first academic year of operation.

In this context, the Strategic Board held an away day at Canterbury Christ Church University late last month and identified a range of themes emerging from its work, and that of the RIGs, in recent months. Those present focused on the issue of strategic leadership, and the detail of Recommendation 8 beyond the formation of the Strategic Board itself, and explored two key and interlinked questions:

1. What does our strategy (for delivering on the challenges set out in the *Pathways for All* review) need to look like as we move forward, especially in light of contextual changes that have come to the fore since the publication of the review, such as the cost of living crisis and the possibilities offered by online and blended provision?
2. How do we make this strategy happen, on the ground, both across the sector and the county in a way that enables us to navigate emergent challenges, changes in the way we work and in the employment market, and in a way that facilitates joined-up thinking while avoiding duplication?

In terms of the vital “making it happen” challenge, those present thought it vital to:

- A. Continue to engage with practitioners and other stakeholders in the spirit of the review;
- B. Find ways to encourage and facilitate practical partnerships on the ground;
- C. Explore how we might best share examples of successful practice across the county, whether these case studies are Kent-based or drawn from elsewhere;
- D. Ensure that the widest range of stakeholders have access to information about the latest developments in the post-16 policy agenda;
- E. Strike the right balance between progressing each of the recommendations and prioritising particular recommendations at specific points in time;

- F. Ensure that the RIGs for each area continue the work that they have initiated this year, whatever the prevailing local, regional or national policy focus at any particular point in time.

Against this background, it was agreed to stage an event for Heads, Principals and other senior leaders across Kent, which will focus on two issues:

- I. The latest developments in policy and practice, so that as a community of school, college and training provider leaders, we are clear about the emergent post-16 landscape and what this means for our own organisations and, critically, the young people we serve;
- II. Opportunities to address these through local partnership working and other forms of collaboration in Kent.

A subgroup will be working across the summer and we will be sending invitations and publishing the aims and a programme – detailing timings, speakers and workshop activities - early in the Autumn Term. Logistical arrangements will be announced at that point.

Until then, if you lead a school, college or training organisation, or if you are a stakeholder in any other part of this rich and diverse terrain, please keep your diaries clear for Tuesday 28th November, the first *Pathways for All* Annual Meeting.

Dr Tony Breslin
Independent Chair
Pathways for All Strategic Board
pathwaysforall@kent.gov.uk.

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