

MILTON KEYNES:

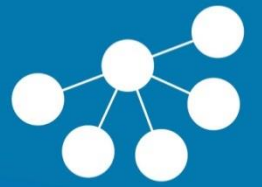
MAKING A GREAT CITY GREATER

Commission Working Paper 15
Education and Skills

Shared Intelligence

Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission





SHARED INTELLIGENCE

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

1. "OECD research shows that to be successful in today's knowledge economy, communities need to invest not only in the supply of skills but also in the demand for skills. By investing in skills demand, communities and businesses can become more competitive and can offer more qualified and better paid jobs, thereby improving their local economic profile and stimulating innovation."

OECD SKILLS FOR COMPETITIVENESS PROJECT¹

2. "What really matters is to build a strong system...which innovates in proportion to success. Knowledge in education is very sticky. You can have great autonomous schools, but that does not necessarily affect the system as a whole."

ANDREAS SCHLEICHER OECD²

3. The purpose of this paper is to explore what needs to happen if Milton Keynes is to provide world class education for 11 to 19 year-olds. This complements the ambition to establish a globally significant higher education institution in the centre of the city. The goal is that the quality of education in the City should be a core aspect of its attractiveness as a place in which to live, work and invest, and that all its residents should have the skills needed to take advantage of its growing economy including the low income white British households which are currently losing out.
4. The paper comprises three sections:
 - Trends in relation to education for 11 to 19 year-olds;
 - A review of the current position in Milton Keynes;
 - A concluding section which identifies a number of issues for the Commissioners to consider.
5. It should be read in conjunction with the working paper on university education in Milton Keynes which recommends the establishment of a new university – The Milton Keynes Institute of Technology – as the core of a new ambitious lifelong learning ecosystem.

TREND, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

6. Research carried out for the OECD's Skills for Competitiveness Project concludes that action at the local level to better link skills supply with skills demand will be critically important in action to enable economic growth. It concludes: "It is increasingly obvious that local actors need to take a joined-up approach to skills locally, linking educational investment, particularly in areas facing low-skilled equilibrium".³

¹ Skills for Competitiveness: A Synthesis Report, OECD (2012)

² Evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee 4th Report 2014-15

³ Skills for Competitiveness: A Synthesis Report, OECD (2012)

7. Speculation about the death of the school is widely seen to be premature and unwelcome. The trend towards increased autonomy for schools looks set to continue in this country and internationally. This is reflected in the current government's continued commitment to the transition of all schools to academy status⁴ with a significantly reduced role for local councils.
8. Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director of Education and Skills at the OECD, told the House of Commons Education Select Committee that that local flexibility for schools was linked to higher results.⁵ He also said that the most successful education systems internationally combined "local discretion" for head teachers and school leaders with a shared expectation of high standards.
9. Mr Schleicher warned MPs, however, that autonomy on its own was not a way of improving schools and that evidence from the United States demonstrated that that the downside could be isolation and a lack of coherence in maintaining standards. He told the committee: "in my view the country that is struggling the most is the United States, where you have some of the charter schools being part of the problem. There are great charter schools, but there are an equal number of charter schools who are part of the problem.... If you leave it just to individual schools, that is the picture you will get."
10. OECD data show that one of the key drivers of school performance is the level of ambition and standards being put into a system. Mr Schleicher said: "High-performing systems tend to place very high expectations on every school". Taking maths as an example he added: "Having a clear understanding in every school of what good mathematics performance is and very strong global standards, with a high level of autonomy and discretion at the front line, is very important".
11. This balance between institutional autonomy and closer links between schools and the communities they serve is a key theme of the Class of 2050, a review of the future of UK schools commissioned by Wates and based on interviews with a range of leading educationalists and commentators.⁶ Three sets of relationships are identified as being particularly important:
 - First, an increased role for schools as a hub for other community activities and public services including health and care and sport and leisure;
 - Second, closer links with local businesses, including involvement in curriculum development and delivering lessons;
 - Finally, closer engagement with parents: there is extensive evidence this is vital if all children are to reach their full potential and schools and colleges are to adapt to changing circumstances.
12. Research published by the Centre for Cities has highlighted the importance of city collaboration as a driver of improved employment outcomes for young people.⁷ The research refers in particular to the "Kalamazoo Promise", including a pledge to provide full college scholarships to every graduate of the Kalamazoo public schools. It notes: "Many describe it as an economic programme rather than simply a scholarship programme, with the Promise acting as a strong incentive for families and businesses to locate in the city."

⁴ Education Excellence Everywhere, Department for Education (March 2016)

⁵ Evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee 4th Report 2014-15

⁶ Class of 2050: A Vision for the Future of Schools, Wates

⁷ Youth Opportunity, Centre for Cities, April 2015

13. Some education leaders envisage a future in which there is a wider choice of schools at a local level, building on current models such as University Technology Colleges and Free Schools. At the same time, treating the schools in an area as part of a local education system is widely seen as being important with collaboration between the individual institutions on a number of levels. This includes curriculum specialisms and the provision of mutual support to poorly performing schools.
14. Universities are playing an increasingly important role in relation to schools as sponsors of academies, university technology colleges and free schools. In 2015 the Higher Education Funding Council for England reported that around 60 higher education institutions were involved in sponsorship relationships with around 150 schools.⁸ That is about half the HEIs but only a very small proportion of schools. This engagement is seen as being an important part of universities' community mission the goals of which range from offering opportunities to local students to wider economic growth.
15. A recent review of lesson from academy schools by the National Federation for Education Research (NFER)⁹ noted that there is little hard evidence of the impact of school collaboration. It concluded: "More research is needed to understand the contribution that school-to-school collaboration makes, particularly whether collaboration is effective in supporting underperforming schools to improve". An evidence review commissioned by the Department for Education and published in 2015 reached similar conclusions about the lack of evidence on the characteristics of effective inter-school collaboration.¹⁰
16. The RSA, however, has noted that "school systems that do not develop the innovative cultures, motivations and capacities of their leaders, educators and institutions are unlikely to see their efforts result in long-term sustainable solutions".¹¹
17. As will be explored in more detail below the characteristics of large secondary schools are significant in Milton Keynes. Reports suggest that the number of large schools in England is likely to increase. There is, however, little good quality research evidence to inform decisions about school size.¹²
18. The interaction between deprivation and education is a critical relationship with profound implications for a country's economic prosperity and the social mobility of its citizens. A recent review of the link in Wales by the NFER¹³ found that children eligible for free school meals have a low attainment rate throughout their progression through the education system. They are also more likely than other children to be absent from schools. The study concluded that "addressing this issue requires the application of a combination of targeted preventative interventions alongside the provision of continuing additional support and catch-up learning activities".

⁸ Working with schools: Universities sponsoring academies, university technical colleges and free schools, HEFCE Blog 25 March 2015

⁹ Academies: It's Time to Learn the Lessons, NFER (May 2015)

¹⁰ Armstrong, Paul, Effective School Partnerships and Collaboration for School Improvement: A Review of the Evidence. Department for Education (October 2015)

¹¹ RSA Journal, Issue 1 (2016)

¹² Secondary School Size: A Systematic Review, UCL Institute of Education ((2004)

¹³ Cook, Rutt and Sims, Deprivation in Education, NFER (October 2014)

19. Research drawing on the experience of the London Challenge and similar programmes in Manchester and the Black Country highlights the need for sustained action over the long term to tackle underachievement by white working class children. Elements of effective strategies may include:
- Rigorous monitoring systems that track individual pupil's performance against expectations;
 - Creative and flexible strategies to engage parents and carers;
 - Strong partnerships with a wider range of agencies to provide social, emotional, educational and practical support for boys and their families in order to raise their aspirations.
20. The question of underachievement by white working class children has been explored by the Commons Education Committee¹⁴ which concluded that "this problem must be addressed by ensuring that the best teachers and leaders are incentivised to work in the schools and areas that need them the most, and by providing better advice and guidance to young people. Schools face a battle for resource and talent, and those serving poor white communities need a better chance of winning".
21. The people interviewed for the *Class of 2050* envisaged helping young people to develop "soft" skills such as team work, creativity and resilience as being increasingly important. They also hoped to see better balance in esteem between academic and vocational training with schools increasingly being judged on where pupils go after they leave school (as well as on examination performance).
22. Many commentators point to the need for more innovation in education if schools and the communities they serve are to respond to these and other challenges. This could include, for example, more project-based learning. The RSA has identified four weaknesses in the way that innovation is currently emerging. These are that it is equity-light, teacher-light, evidence-light, replication-light and transformation-light. The challenge is "to enable ecosystems of innovation (including schools and practitioners) conditioned by the values of equity and democracy".
23. Writing for the RSA Arnie Barber, director of the International School of Prague, asked: "How can schools create new programmes and structures to meet the needs of today's learners? In my view, lasting change can only be accomplished if all school stakeholders, not just educational leaders, are enlisted as allies and partners in this endeavour. Teachers, students and parents need to feel that they have a real voice in shaping the school's future".¹⁵ The wider research evidence would suggest that this conclusion applies in spades to any action to influence the future shape of education in a city like Milton Keynes.

¹⁴ Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children, 1st Report of Session 2014-15, House of Commons Education Committee

¹⁵ Barber, Arnie, *The Nature of Nurture*, RSA Journal (2016)

MILTON KEYNES TODAY¹⁶

24. Three characteristics of Milton Keynes are particularly important in setting the context for a review of the current position in relation to education for 11 to 19 year-olds in the city.
25. First, it has experienced a period of significant population growth and is planning for continued growth. Over the ten years to 2014 the city's population increased by around 39,700 people or 18.1%. This rate of growth was more than twice the English rate (8.2%) and higher than the rate across the SEMLEP area (12.2%). This is feeding through into pupil numbers: last year 35% more children started in reception classes than left year 11.
26. Second, it has a high and growing proportion of pupils with English not as a first language. In secondary schools 18.7% compared with 14.3% nationally; and in primary schools, the proportion is even higher at 24.9% compared with 18.7% nationally.
27. Third, the city has a lower than average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals: in secondary schools the proportion is 12.9% compared with 15.7% nationally.
28. There are 12 mainstream state-funded secondary schools in Milton Keynes 9 of which are academies. Three schools are rated as "requires improvement" by OFSTED. The others are rated as "outstanding" or "good". No secondary schools are rated as "inadequate".
29. Performance across primary schools has been improving since 2011, with a 12% increase in the proportion of pupils achieving level four or above in reading, writing and maths between 2011 and 2014. The city has outperformed England in every year since 2012. 85% of state funded primary schools are rated by OFSTED as "outstanding" or "good", with none rated as "inadequate". It is too early to know the full extent of the impact the improvement in primary school performance will have on subsequent educational attainment.
30. The extent of further education provision in the city is limited. Milton Keynes College is the largest provider, delivering more than twice the number of education "starts" than any other provider. No FE providers are rated as "outstanding" by OFSTED, and the majority are currently rated as "requiring improvement" or "inadequate".
31. One of the initiatives underway in Milton Keynes is Urban School Data. Awareness of this project is limited, but it is an interesting collaboration between the council and the Open University. An innovative programme, it involves work with schools to enable pupils to critically analyse complex Smart City data sets, and to use data literacy skills to investigate critical urban issues. Data literacy is seen as being an important civic skill that forms the foundation of an innovative knowledge economy.
32. There are at least two significant challenges that must be addressed in Milton Keynes if the goal of providing world class education and training for 11 to 19 year-olds is to be addressed.
33. The first challenge is the poor educational performance of young people from white British low income families. This is a national challenge, but it is more acute in Milton Keynes and is compounded by the availability of a large number of low skilled jobs enabling people who leave

¹⁶ The evidence in this section is drawn from: Milton Keynes Skills Strategy Evidence Base Report, Milton Keynes Council (January 2016)

school with no formal qualifications to get a job. For example, the percentage of white British pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE (at 59.6%) is 2% lower than for all pupils, compared with a 0.3% gap nationally. This reinforces a culture of low aspiration and is reflected in the fact that the proportion of 16 to 18 year-olds that are recorded as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is well below the national average (4% compared with 8.1%) and youth unemployment for 16 to 19 year-olds is also below the national average (21% compared with 24%).

34. The second challenge is the relative poor performance of the city's secondary schools as a group. It is significant that while the proportion of schools that are rated "outstanding" or "good" is, at 75%, slightly higher than the national average (73%), pupil attainment at GCSE level is below the average for England with around 49% of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and Maths compared to 53% nationally (in 2014).
35. The task of tackling the link with deprivation is also challenging in relation to primary schools: the primary schools in the most deprived areas of the city are more likely to receive a lower grade from OFSTED than those in other parts of the city.
36. This mirrors a weakness in the English inspection regime which has been identified by the OECD. As Andreas Schleicher told the Commons Education Committee: "If you look at the focus, much of the inspection has been geared just to the very lowest performing schools. Probably the schools that have suffered the most are the next layer of schools, so there could be a more systematic view of the school system."
37. It is also significant that:
 - The skills strategy evidence base¹⁷ suggests that there is a sustained low skills challenge in Milton Keynes, with the proportion of people with no formal qualifications – 10% - being slightly above the national average;
 - Although employment rates in the city are generally high, there are above average levels of unemployment for people aged 20 to 24 (16% compared with 12% nationally) which points to a mismatch between young people's skills and the opportunities available;
 - There is a significant contrast between low resident based median earnings ((£28,903) and higher median wages for people working in the city (£29,528).
 - Milton Keynes has an above average pool of working residents, but below average levels of employment in medium skilled occupations.
38. There are a number of factors which influence these challenges.
39. First, the Index of Multiple Deprivation points to some severe concentrations of education and skills deprivation in the city. 14% of neighbourhoods in Milton Keynes are among the most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. All three of the secondary schools that are rated as "requires improvement" serve these communities and are among the most deprived 40% of schools nationally. The people who live in these neighbourhoods include white British low income households, many of which have experienced inter-generational worklessness and low aspirations.

¹⁷ Ibid

40. Second, although the amount of collaboration between secondary schools in Milton Keynes is growing – including, for example, meetings of subject heads – further work is needed if there is an ambition to develop a culture of mutual support and constructive challenge across the school system. The evidence from elsewhere, set out in the previous section, suggests that more extensive and sustained collaboration will be required if the quality of secondary education is to be improved.
41. Third, as noted above, Milton Keynes has very large secondary schools many of which have are planned to expand further in response to rising pupil numbers. For example, Walton High School currently has 1,500 pupils and is due to double in size, while Stantonbury Campus has 2,000 pupils. It is difficult to unpick the impact of size on school performance. There is little good quality, clear cut research on the topic. *Education Guardian* recently reported that most of the largest secondary schools are rated as “outstanding” or “good” by OFSTED, but in Milton Keynes Stantonbury Campus was rated as “requires improvement”.
42. Two factors relating to size are self-evident, however:
- The fact that there are only 12 mainstream secondary schools in Milton Keynes means that it should be logistically easy to facilitate the type of collaboration referred to above;
 - A poorly performing large school affects the life chances of a large number of pupils.
43. What is significant, however, is that all of the secondary schools in Milton Keynes have 6th forms. The proportion of students remaining in sustained education after Key Stage 4 is equivalent to the proportion nationally (88%), but there is a lower proportion of pupils going to an FE college or apprenticeship. Significantly the number of starts in FE among learners in Milton Keynes fell by 23% between 2011-12 and 2013-14.
44. This is reflected in performance at Key Stage 5 for academic results, which are below the national average, with 68% of students achieving 3 or more A-levels at grades A*-C compared with 78% nationally. In contrast, performance at Key Stage 5 for vocational results is above average, with 49% achieving at least 3 substantial qualifications compared with 47% nationally. This must raise questions about whether schools are directing young people into appropriate pathways to meet their interests and abilities.
45. There is a danger that this school-focused bias towards academic qualifications is being compounded by weak links between businesses and schools. According to a survey of a stratified sample of 1,428 businesses in Milton Keynes carried out for the council by BMG Research in 2014, 21% of respondents said they had some link with schools. According to the survey only:
- 8% of businesses had hosted pupils for work experience;
 - 4% had given talks in schools;
 - 3% had hosted visits from schools to their site or premises.
46. Similarly, only 12% of respondents were currently employing an apprentice, 26% would consider doing so and 61% would not. Overall, participation in apprenticeships in Milton Keynes is below the national average (3% compared with 5%) and the city has a low apprenticeship success rate – 59% in the 2013-14 academic year.
47. In considering the scale of the education measures facing Milton Keynes it is important to note the city’s success in raising standards in primary schools. In 2008 the council was subject to

government intervention on the back of poor school standards. Today, as was noted earlier, the city's primary schools consistently outperform England as a whole. Council officers attribute the success to a sustained programme of action, the council's recognition of the central role of head teachers, the constructive relationship with the primary schools and the quality of the council's school improvement team. There is a need for continued action to maintain and improve the quality of primary education in the city.

ISSUES FOR THE COMMISSION TO CONSIDER

48. If Milton Keynes is to become a true regional economic centre it must provide world class education and training. That objective will be achieved only if the quality of education for 11 to 19 year-olds improves dramatically. The progress that the city has made in improving primary education in Milton Keynes shows what can be done. Achieving a similar scale of transformation in secondary schools and further education will require commitment and determined effort on the part of the schools and colleges, the council, businesses and parents.
49. Responsibility for improving the quality of education in Milton Keynes must not be confined to the city's schools. Writing for the RSA Joe Hallgarten calls for approaches which "Draw on resources from both within and beyond traditional public institutions to create enabling conditions and cultures for innovation".¹⁸ He goes on: "We need leaders who understand that this is not a quest to converge on solution, who have the political savvy to create the legitimacy for radical change, and draw on international networks as a source of imaginative ideas rather than prefabricated policies.
50. When thinking about the action needed to secure this transformation it is important to consider this paper alongside the working paper on *Options and Opportunities for University Education in Milton Keynes*. It recommends the establishment of a new university in the city, the Milton Keynes Institute of Technology (MK:IT). The paper working paper sets out a vision for a new type of university, two elements of which are directly relevant to the themes in this paper: and "learning partnerships" which recognise that education, skills training and personal development to meet individual and employer needs must be designed and realised through systematic multi-partner collaborations; and the concept of "living lab research", recognising that complex social and economic challenges demand research-led multi-disciplinary innovations developed in real world contexts and involving the communities that they effect.
51. A learning partnership, bringing together education providers, the council and the wider community, is essential to deliver a programme of activity to improve the quality of 11-19 education. Key elements of this programme should be:

¹⁸ Hallgarten, Joe, Scope for Change, RSA Journal (2016)

- A step change in the degree of collaboration and mutual support between secondary schools and between schools and colleges, informed by further research into what forms of collaboration are most likely to drive school performance and improve outcomes for students;
- A continue focus on the quality of primary education;
- A concerted effort to engage parents in low income households to engage with schools and to support their children in learning, informed by further research into the kind of engagement that is most likely to narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers;
- Action to secure greater and more consistent engagement by businesses and business leaders in schools to both influence the curriculum and provide young people with early experience of the world of work;
- Action to work with schools to wrap a set of family focused services – justice, welfare, children’s services, public health – around schools to enable an integrated and preventative approach.

52. It is also important to be aware that in seeking to deliver its vision Milton Keynes will need to act in the absence of an established evidence base which can be used to help frame a programme of action. In particular:

- While there is extensive evidence of the link between deprivation and educational attainment, the task of breaking link is one the biggest challenges facing society;
- DfE and NFER have both identified a significant evidence gap in relation to the impact that school-to-school collaboration might have (or not have) on helping underperforming schools;
- The Institute of Education has identified another evidence gap in relation to the impact of size on school performance which means that it is difficult to be clear about whether the presence of large schools in Milton Keynes is a strength or a challenge (or both).

53. The role of the proposed MK:IT in carrying out “living lab” research is potentially important in supporting work of this type.

54. As noted in paragraph 13 universities are playing an increasingly significant role in local school systems. The prospect of creating a new type of university, MK:IT, provides an opportunity to build that role into the institution’s core purpose from the outset.

55. This proposed focus on the school system must be considered in the context of the clear direction of travel towards increased autonomy for schools. The role of Milton Keynes Council in this context will be critically important. Whatever the changes to the council’s statutory duties over the coming years the Commission may wish to urge it to deliver “four Cs” in relation to the provision of education and training for 11 to 19 year-olds:

- **Celebrating** success.
- Where necessary **Convening** discussions and action to secure collaboration and peer support between institutions.
- Where appropriate providing constructive **Challenge** of school and college performance.
- **Creating** the conditions for innovation.

56. Some governance structure will be required to deliver this collaborative approach. This could take the form of a learning board to champion a commitment to deliver world class education in the city by 2050, with significant progress being made over the next decade. This board would work closely with the Founders Board which re recommended in the working paper on university education in Milton Keynes.

57. Elements of such a programme could include:

- Supporting a MK Promise guaranteeing a university place or vocational training equivalent for every young person backed up by first class advice and guidance to ensure that they chose an option which is best suited to their abilities and ambitions;
- Building on the success of the MK Tariff to fund additional investments in education which could focus initially on investment to ensure that the best teachers and leaders are incentivised to work in the schools serving the most deprived areas in Milton Keynes.



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