Association of Colleges (AoC) response to DfE call for evidence Character and Resilience:

July 2019

Ian Bauckham CBE, Chair of the Character Advisory Group is seeking views on the development of character and resilience, the nature of different character-building activities provided to children and young people and what works best to improve outcomes. Ian Bauckham CBE writes:

"The Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP, has asked me to chair an advisory group which will make recommendations in the autumn of 2019 on character education and development for children and young people.

In recent years a priority for schools and colleges has been the improvement of academic outcomes, especially for disadvantaged young people, as we know that this can enable them to access a wider range of opportunities in education and employment. The government is committed through its education reforms to ensuring that all children, regardless of background, are prepared to thrive and succeed in adult life.

An excellent academic education and good qualifications sit alongside other important outcomes for young people. Developing aspects of character and resilience can also help young people to achieve their goals, overcome challenges, develop their readiness for adulthood, and help the most disadvantaged to compete more equally with their advantaged peers in the labour market.

The Secretary of State has defined character as:

- believing that you can achieve

- being able to stick with the task in hand

- seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future, and

- being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us.

Young people also benefit from developing personal character attributes such as kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility. These attributes can be developed and promoted through a wide range of activities, including, for example, sport, performance, creative activities, opportunities to be of service to others or to the community and experience of the workplace.

The Secretary of State has made clear that developing the work that schools are already doing to build character and resilience among young people is a high priority for him.

When the advisory group I am chairing makes its recommendations to the Secretary of State, I would like those recommendations to be informed by as wide a range of views, evidence and examples of good practice as possible. I am therefore launching this call for evidence. I would like to hear from heads and teachers in all kinds of schools, colleges and other educational settings, employers, and people running or working in local or national organisations that provide character-building activities. I would also like to hear from young people, parents and carers as well as representative bodies and academics with an interest in this issue and other groups and individuals.

If in your response to this call for evidence you mention any evidence of change or improvement in outcomes for young people that you have observed, please provide a source reference or other links to this.

I look forward to having your evidence on how we can help all children and young people fulfil their potential."

Questions:

10. We are defining character as:
• believing that you can achieve
• being able to stick with the task in hand
• seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future, and
• being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us.
To what extent do you agree that character and resilience are important in enabling young people to be successful and to thrive in later life?
These are clearly useful attributes for individuals to develop but this only represents a partial description of the characteristics we would wish to develop in our students.

11. Thinking about the aspects of character and resilience that you think are most important in order for people to be successful in life, are there any that you feel are not covered in the list below? If so, please list these and tell us why you feel they are important.

• Believing that you can achieve (e.g. being self-confident, believing in your own abilities)

• Being able to stick with the task in hand

• Seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future (e.g. deferred gratification, being aspirational and ambitious)

• Being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us (resilience)

• Having strong personal qualities and values like kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility.

• Social skills, such as being articulate and able to mix and work easily with others, forming and maintaining long term relationships and commitments

We feel that this definition doesn't do justice to the social dimension of young people's development, including working with others, teamwork, citizenship and political literacy. We would wish to see the connection made between these personal attributes and the knowledge and skills, political, economic and cultural literacy required to act effectively with others in society.
We want to help young people to become engaged, active and critical citizens of a democratic society, through practical experience as well as by developing their wider understanding of society.

12. Which aspects of character do you think are most important in the workplace, or most valued by employers?
The values, knowledge, skills and experiences which contribute to developing confident, informed, active, effective, critical and reflective team members, community members and citizens

13. What activities and approaches do you think are most effective in supporting the development of character and resilience? What evidence do you have to support this?

132 colleges (over 50% of all colleges) responded to our recent AoC survey of Personal and Social Development (PSD) in colleges. This showed that there is a strong commitment to PSD and enrichment activity in colleges. Over 95% of responding colleges agreed that PSD is an essential element of study programmes for all 16 to 19-year-old students.

Careers guidance and preparation for progression / employment were seen as essential by 100% of the colleges which responded. Physical and mental health and wellbeing by 98%, enrichment or enhancement activities by 98% and citizenship education by 96%. 99% of colleges offer curriculum enhancement activities within teaching departments.

14. We are keen to understand how access to character building activities can help make the greatest positive difference to groups of children and young people vulnerable to poorer life outcomes, such as those living in poverty/with economic disadvantage, having a disability or SEN, being a young carer, living in care and others.

Colleges enrol a higher proportion of disadvantaged young people and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities than school sixth forms and, in our survey, they reported that PSD and enrichment activity make a real difference to participation, engagement, confidence and skills development.

86% of colleges encourage all students to be involved in at least one enrichment activity.

80% of colleges record student involvement in PSD and 77% record student involvement in enrichment activity.

79% of colleges have a staff member or team dedicated to PSD and/or enrichment activity.

29% also offer certification for either PSD or enrichment activity.

87% of colleges expressed a willingness to share good practice in this area.

15. What evidence do you have of specific activities or approaches that can be particularly helpful for these groups of children? Please be specific about which groups and provide details of the evidence you have e.g. references, links:

Colleges are offering a wide range of PSD and enrichment activity. The following are offered by 95% or more colleges:
• Careers and progression guidance (100%).
• Learning about British values, extremism, exploitation and staying safe, including e-safety (100%)
• Marking awareness days or months, such as Black History Month (99%).
• Educating about physical and sexual health, mental health and wellbeing (96%)
• Charity fundraising (96%).
In addition, the following are offered by over 75% of colleges:
• Opportunities for competitive sports (89%) and non-competitive physical activity (90%).
• Citizenship education, eg: in human rights, politics, democracy and the law (90%).
• Student societies and groups such as a women's group, LGBTQ and friends (90%).
• Learning life skills (89%).
• Opportunities for volunteering and Youth Social Action (89%).

• A lecture programme with external speakers (77%).
The following are offered by 50-75% of colleges:
• National Citizen Service (74%) or Duke of Edinburgh Award (51%).
• Visual arts projects (70%), dance and drama activities (63%).
• Leadership development, including sports leadership (69%), public speaking and debating (53%) and campaigning activity (57%), including environmental projects or campaigns (57%).
• Entrepreneurship or youth enterprise activity (64%) and learning economic literacy (58%).
• Road safety education, including driving lessons (59%).
• Opportunities to undertake research, including via an Extended Project Qualification (58%).
• International links and partnerships (52%).
The following are offered by fewer than half of colleges:
• Peer mentoring schemes (45%).
• Music or DJ'ing activity (48%) or instrumental music lessons (29%).
• Creative writing projects (47%) or reading programmes (45%).
• Opportunities to learn another language (32%).
• Model United Nations General Assembly (11%).

16. We are keen to understand how developing character and resilience in children and young people may contribute to reducing the likelihood of gang membership and youth violence (e.g. knife crime) and preventing anti-social attitudes. Are you aware of any character-related work focused on this area?

Colleges are doing a great deal of educational work to raise their students' awareness of risks and how to keep themselves safe beyond the college campus.
Values, rules and processes need to be constantly restated and whole-college cultures of respect and non-violence nurtured. This can contribute to community, institutional and individual resilience when specific challenges are faced.
This work needs to start from young people's lived experience and be co-produced with them. There is also much benefit from the positive and timely use of 'teachable moments'.
Resilience needs to be about more than coping strategies and colleges aim for young people to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence they need in order to exercise more agency whatever their context.

20. Please indicate what sort of activity or activities you offer (tick all that apply)?

Sport and physical activity, Creative activities (e.g. coding, writing, musical composition, design), Performing arts (e.g. dancing, drama, playing music, public speaking), Volunteering and membership (e.g. community action, charity work, uniformed groups, Duke of Edinburgh, National Citizen Service), World of work (e.g. work experience, entrepreneurial activities, contact with employers),
Other:
Student engagement and citizenship education activity.

21. What differences have you seen in children and young people as a result of the activities and approaches to character education that you are responsible for?
Our Active Student survey and PSD survey reported many examples of the positive impact of these activities on young people's confidence, knowledge and skill.

22. How do you know that these activities and approaches are having an impact and how do you evaluate this? If any of your evaluation is published, please provide links.
Quantitative and qualitative surveys and questionnaires based on young people's self-reporting of impacts as well as data on attendance and achievement.

23. Thinking about how school life can contribute to character development, are there any areas which feel are not covered in the list below? If so, please list and tell us why you feel they are important. If there are any areas you feel are not covered in the list above, please add them.

- Sport, which includes competitive sport and activities such as running, martial arts, swimming and purposeful recreational activities, such as rock climbing, hiking, orienteering, gym programmes, yoga or learning to ride a bike

- Creativity, which involves all creative activities such as coding, chess, arts and crafts, writing, graphic design, film-making and music composition

- Performing, which involves activities such as dance, theatre and drama, musical performance, choir, debating or public speaking

- Volunteering and membership, including activities which bring together teams for practical action in the service of others or groups, such as volunteering, litter-picking, fundraising, and structured youth programmes or uniformed groups like Beavers, Brownies, Cubs, Guides, Scouts, Cadets and Duke of Edinburgh

- World of work, including practical experience of the world of work, work experience or entrepreneurship. For primary age children, this may involve opportunities to meet role models from different jobs.

- Teaching practices in lessons which support development of character

- A strong school ethos and climate including a whole school approach to character education

We would add representation and advocacy activity: mentoring, being a student representative, a student council or student union elected officer or student ambassador, being an advocate for mental health / well-being, physical activity, sports, reading, maths, equality / LGBTQ etc.
Political and economic literacy: Membership of a youth parliament or local youth board or panel. Campaigning activity, eg: Amnesty, Greenpeace, climate change, womens' groups, homelessness, anti-racism, anti-hate speech, anti-violence, community organising, Model United Nations General Assembly etc.
Peer mentoring or mentoring younger students including subject mentoring and peer counselling.

24. How do you find the individuals and organisations you use to help you support children and young people to develop character and resilience?

This varies from college to college and colleges are working with a wide range of partners to provide PSD and enrichment activities:

The most mentioned partners in our survey were:

• National Citizen Service: 34%
• Police: 27%
• Duke of Edinburgh programme: 26%
• Health services, PCTs / CCGs / Hospitals: 23%
• Local authorities: 22%
• 'Charities and voluntary organisations' (unnamed): 20%
• Sports Clubs, foundations and governing bodies: 19%
• Employers and Chambers of Commerce: 18%
• Universities: 15%
• Banks: 13%
• National Careers Service, CEC / NCOP: 12%
• MIND: 11%

25. Thinking about the activities which can help to build character, which kinds of activities are the most difficult to find?

World of work (e.g. work experience, entrepreneurial activities, contact with employers), Work placements will be increasingly difficult to find as T Levels come on stream over the next few years with their substantial requirements for industry placements.

There needs to be more local collaboration to provide a local infrastructure which can support the full range of personal development activity which young people should have access to.

Colleges are very well placed to act as local hubs for such work because if their size and community reach - this can enhance the overall offer, reduce duplication and lead to economies of scale.

Music Hubs which organise instrumental tuition and ensembles across a local area are a good example of this approach.

26. We are interested in your views on the best ways to support schools/colleges in character development work. Which of the following could be helpful:

• Information and guidance, Practical examples from other providers working in similar contexts,

• Identifying and sharing outstanding practice.

Some investment is necessary if we are to develop the collaborative infrastructure which could make existing funding stretch further and reach more students.

AoC is able to help identify and share good practice, build networks and support regional and national collaboration both within the college sector and between colleges and other providers.

27. Finally, please share any views or specific examples of character development which have not been captured elsewhere which you think will assist us to support schools and

other organisations in character development. Please share your views and/or examples.

We would be happy to provide case studies from a range of colleges across the country.

AoC contact: Eddie Playfair, Senior Policy Manager eddie.playfair@aoc.co.uk
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