

REPORT TO: Council Committee for Education

MEETING DATE: 19 June 2012

BY: Executive Director of Services for People

SUBJECT: Listen and Learn Sessions 2012

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report to Committee on the key themes arising from our series of Listen and Learn sessions held in three secondary schools in March and April this year.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
- i. Note the content of the report
 - ii. Ensure that this feedback from young people is used to shape future Education and Children's Wellbeing and Education policy and strategy making
 - iii. Ensure that this feedback from young people is used to shape Council and Community Planning partners' policy and strategy making
 - iv. Recommend that all executive directors participate in future Listen and Learn sessions
 - v. Recommend that we feed back to young people what impact their contribution had had in the shaping of policy and strategy in East Lothian.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Listen and Learn sessions have been held in secondary schools for the last two years. They provide an opportunity for students to express their views about a wide range of issues to the Executive Director of Services for People. This in turn feeds into the work of the East Lothian

Community Planning Partnership, which is committed to ensuring that, as stipulated in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people are able to exercise their right to express their views and have them taken into account in all matters affecting them. More information on this can be found in the East Lothian Young People's Participation Strategy.

3.2 The sessions were held at Ross High School (14 March 2012), Musselburgh Grammar School (22 March 2012) and North Berwick High School (26 April 2012). The format for each day was the same. The Executive Director met with a group of harder-to-reach young people in one session and with members of the pupil council and senior pupils in the second session. Pupils had reflected on the topics they wished to raise beforehand, and in some cases, had prepared presentations and short videos to illustrate their concerns. The sessions and preparation were facilitated by the Involvement Officer and the Dialogue Youth Officer. Some of the themes arising from the sessions were shared across the groups, and others were matters of local concern. Just fewer than 200 young people took part across all three events.

3.3 The most prevalent concern was employment. Pupils felt that:

- There were not enough jobs locally – both full-time jobs for school-leavers and part-time jobs for those still at school
- There were not enough apprenticeships, particularly for girls
- There was not enough information about jobs available in schools (i.e., pupils wanted local opportunities to be collated and displayed prominently in schools and online)
- They should be encouraged to prepare for employment sooner (for example, from the time that they start at secondary)
- There should be less focus on getting university entrance qualifications and more on making young people employable
- There should be many more opportunities for work experience during any pupil's secondary school career
- Schools should forge links with local and national employers and take every opportunity to get them into school to talk pupils and set up work experience and other employment opportunities
- Local employers, for example, garages, should be encouraged to come in and hold practical classes in school
- Former pupils should be encouraged to come back and talk to pupils about their experiences in gaining and sustaining employment.

The Hospitality and Tourism Academy and Care Academy projects received whole-hearted approval from pupils, and they also wanted more

projects like the Tots and Teens childcare project at Knox Academy and the Hairdressing Salon at North Berwick High School. They were extremely interested in the prospect of paid work experience. There was a split in opinion about internships. At Ross High School, students were very keen for internships, whether these were paid or not, but elsewhere students felt that interns should be paid. Pupils were keen to make full use of their time and school buildings, and were open to doing vocational courses in the evening, Friday afternoons, and in some cases, at the weekend too.

- 3.4 Leading on from this, pupils in each school had concerns about transport, some of which related to their worries about employment. The current availability of public transport affects young people's ability to access employment, training, further and higher education. These concerns were particularly pronounced amongst pupils at North Berwick and also amongst pupils who live in outlying communities who attend Ross High School and Musselburgh Grammar School.

Pupils also felt that:

- Both rail and bus fares were high and young people needed more subsidy to be able to use them, particularly post-18
- Bus services in North Berwick were too infrequent, meaning that pupils had to leave after-school activities early or (in the winter) stand in the dark and poor weather for 45 minutes, waiting for the next bus to come
- There were poor and infrequent services between Musselburgh and Wallyford and Whitecraig
- Buses were not adhering to their advertised timetable, for example, arriving and departing too early
- The size of bus was often too small for the number of people who want to use the service.

They were also concerned at North Berwick High School about the behaviour of some of their peers on public bus services on the way to and from school, and this leads into the next major concern raised at the Listen and Learn sessions – the way the rest of the community perceives young people.

- 3.5 Young people felt that they did not have a very good image in the community, and while acknowledging that some young people did not always behave well, they were upset about their poor image, which they felt was largely unjustified. A pupil at North Berwick encapsulated the situation when he said:

'There's lots of older people – when it's raining and you've got your hood up – they give you dirty looks. Do something for them, though, and they're over the moon. They're really influenced by a stereotypical view of young people.'

Another young person said that the 'bad stuff' that young people did seemed to get much more attention than the good. They felt that there was fault on both sides. In Musselburgh, one young person said about an adult education class she had attended:

'There was also a real lack of respect from adults at photography classes I went to. They didn't want me there.'

However, the young people had a wide range of ideas of how to tackle this, ranging from working with the community to tackle the litter problem in Tranent, an interest in young people leading IT classes for older people in Musselburgh, and a commitment to visit people in care homes in North Berwick regularly. It was also clear that some young people in the groups actively intervened with other young people who were behaving badly.

This strand of the discussion ties in with one of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People's (SCCYP) strategic priorities for 2012/13, which is to promote respect and challenge prejudice and negative perceptions of children and young people in society.

- 3.6 Pupils in each school raised the issue of what they saw as preferential treatment of people who behaved badly in school. This is summed up in a statement from one young person at Ross High School, who said:

'If you kick off, you get attention. If you get good grades and behave well, you could still be having problems, but no-one notices.'

They found it hard to accept that poor behaviour at school often indicated an unsatisfactory situation at home or poor mental health, but they did agree that a way forward would be for schools to make greater efforts to explain why disruptive pupils were dealt with differently and rewarded for good behaviour.

This led to a discussion of the guidance system in schools by some of the groups, and they were keen to look at other systems of supporting all pupils. Some felt that they too had had significant problems at home but because they had not altered their behaviour at school, they had gone unsupported. One group also complained that the current system, coupled with what they saw as unsatisfactory pastoral support systems in one local primary, had led to young people with dyslexia going unnoticed and unsupported for far too long, with knock-on effects on their attainment at secondary.

They were very interested in systems of guidance used in English schools, where registration groups were not single-year but included pupils from all years in small tutorial-style groups.

The promotion of understanding of the personal challenges that young people face in their home situation, or with their mental health, fits in with another of the SCCYPP priorities this year, which is promoting inclusion.

3.7 Each school felt that they had difficulty accessing information about job, educational and leisure opportunities, and in Musselburgh pupils were also unhappy with the limits placed on the use of information technology in schools. Their comments included:

- The school's wifi is not open to pupils
- It would be good to use our own technology more at school and just using more technology at school anyway, like iPads and things
- Could we look at the positive uses of new technology in schools, like mobiles phones, tablets and apps?

That group agreed to look at how they could create a Musselburgh Grammar School app that will put young people in touch with school information and information about what's happening in the Musselburgh area.

Musselburgh Grammar School pupils wondered if there should be more connections between Musselburgh Grammar School and other East Lothian Schools – they had the idea of a virtual campus that could access resources at other East Lothian schools, Edinburgh colleges and the Open University.

3.8 Other issues young people mentioned included wanting to have a greater input into community planning and the physical environment around them. They also all wanted more social outlets locally in the evenings and at weekends. They were also keen to have a say in what and how they learn at secondary.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The information from these sessions should influence all relevant policy formation, and in particular, should have an impact on any revision of the Youth Vision strategy document.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial - None

6.2 Personnel - None

6.3 Other – None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

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