

Proposal to offer post – 16 provision by Archbishop Holgate’s School

**Initial response on behalf of “Learning City York”
(York’s Lifelong Learning Partnership)**

York’s 14 – 19 Learning Partnership is tasked with strategic development of 14 – 19 provision within the LA area which will enable all young people to access the National Entitlement (to be in place by 2013) and raise participation and progression rates (all young people should continue participate in education to the age of 18 by 2015). Archbishop Holgate’s School, along with all York’s secondary schools, two Colleges and a consortium of training providers, is a member of the partnership. The Local Authority is the lead strategic partner, working closely with the Learning and Skills Council. These two organisations fund the partnership’s activity.

We want to support the school’s proposal and have been working with it, and other partners, to develop a strategy which will lead to the successful and efficient delivery of high quality provision across the entitlement. This clearly requires agreement across the partnership on the contribution that each partner will make to that whole city entitlement. This work is continuing. It is, therefore, unfortunate that the rules underpinning the “Presumption” dictate timelines for the school to progress their proposal which conflict with this process. The contribution that partner providers will make to the provision of the lines of learning the consultation document suggests that the school will offer have not yet been agreed within the Partnership.

The remainder of this brief initial response will summarise those elements which we are pleased to see included in the proposal, those about which we are seeking further clarification and those where we would encourage the school to reconsider its plans. John Harris (Headteacher) has attended either group or individual meetings where these issues have already been aired.

Provision at Levels 1 and 2

We were disappointed by the lack of emphasis on, and detail about, Level 1 and 2 provision in the consultation booklet. This had been a strong theme in the earlier feasibility study and previous position papers from the school. At the consultation meeting (17 September) the strong statements about the school’s commitment in this area, and to provision for vulnerable and challenging learners, were most welcome. We have repeatedly emphasised to all partners that the forthcoming raising of the participation age, the need for more learners to reach Level 2 to enhance their life chances and the moral imperative to reduce the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) mean that an expansion of Level 1 and 2 provision post 16 is necessary, along with new and creative approaches which will make this provision more attractive than hitherto.

A – Levels

We welcome the statements made at the consultation meeting confirming that the school does not propose to offer A – Level Courses. This line is consistent with the recommendations of the earlier feasibility study, the Strategic Area Review and our own analysis, which clearly indicates that a reduction and consolidation of A – Level provision will be needed over the next few years. However, there is a need to clarify the nature of the contribution of A – Levels to level 3 Diplomas that the school might offer. A Diploma at level 3 will be equivalent to 3 A – Levels. It could contain an A – Level as part of the Additional / Specialist Learning component. Diploma learners based at the school would have to study such an A – Level at another institution. In taking plans for level 3 Diploma provision forward there is clearly a need to look at the relationship between additional and specialist learning. If significant proportions of learners take an A – Level as additional learning it might prejudice the development of a range of new specialist learning opportunities, due to lower learner numbers.

Baccalaureate diploma qualifications

In earlier discussions we have made it clear that we believe it is extremely unlikely that the school will be able to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma because of accreditation and funding arrangements. We also believe that attempting such a development could detract from the school's stated focus on Applied Learning and diminish the impetus behind other developments. High quality provision would be more likely to result from a clearly defined, limited and focused range of developments. At the consultation meeting the Cambridge pre – U Diploma was mooted as a possible choice of level 3 course. All available information on this qualification (which has yet to be accredited by the QCA) leads to the conclusion that it will be a “traditional” academic level 3 package. The school's feasibility study suggests that there is no need to expand such provision in York. We believe that the school should reconsider its proposals in this area.

Learner Numbers

We would like the school to provide more rigorous analysis to support its projected learner numbers. In particular we would like firmer data relating to the number of learners the school expects to recruit from the East Riding of Yorkshire LA and other York schools. Alongside this, further information about the number of learners the school expects to recruit at each level would also permit a more coherent and considered analysis of the number lines of learning the school could sustain. It must be remembered that, in the future, the LA will be responsible for commissioning post 16 provision and that demand will be a critical factor in the commissioning process, which will be constrained by fixed budgets.

Lines of Learning

We welcome the statements made at the consultation meeting relating to the distinctive nature of the proposed provision. The school intends placing the new Diplomas, and their associated lines of learning, at the core of its provision. This is a very positive feature of the proposal. We would, however,

like the school to consider reducing the number of lines of learning listed in the consultation document. This request is made for four reasons:

1. The number of full time equivalent learners envisaged would be unlikely to sustain the 10 diploma lines suggested (to which a commitment to potential involvement in another – Land Based & Environment – has subsequently been added), particularly if learners are to be distributed across 3 levels (even allowing for some co-level delivery arrangements). The best advice available from colleagues at the LSC is that the minimum number of learners necessary to sustain a delivery group will be in the region of 10 to 12 under the commissioning model.
2. Commitment to a more limited range would allow the school to focus on developing the highest quality provision, enhance that provision's distinctiveness, contribute provision in new lines of learning which would be genuinely complementary to that offered elsewhere and enhance the school's "Leading Edge" status as an innovative and "cutting edge" provider.
3. We agree with the school that there is a need to increase the breadth of provision available to post 16 learners. Demographic factors mean that, at level 3, this expanded breadth will be accessed by fewer learners than is currently the case. As indicated above, this must be accompanied by the removal of some existing provision – it will not be possible for everybody to do everything, or even everything that they aspire to do.
4. Other partners have already committed resources and engaged in development work in many of the lines of learning listed in the consultation document, in some cases in advance of Archbishop Holgate's doing so. They, too, can demonstrate considerable records of achievement in the relevant areas. Reducing the number of Diploma lines of learning in the proposal would recognise the legitimate interests and aspirations of other providers and powerfully demonstrate the school's stated commitment to collaboration, trust and openness.

As previously stated, we want to support the school's proposals, not least because the development of post 16 provision at Archbishop Holgate's offers the opportunity, through the capital funding attached to the "Presumption", to provide significant new facilities to support Diploma learning in York. We hope that the school will give serious consideration to the issues raised above and would be happy to discuss them further with Governors and Senior Leaders.

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