



NCER^{CIC}
National Consortium for Examination Results
Community Interest Company

The Strategic Use of Education Data – Friday 20 May 2016 - Durham

Chair's Introduction – The Big Picture (*As delivered*)

John Freeman CBE, NCER Chair

Welcome to you all – I know we are going to have a really interesting day, and I'm looking forward to all the inputs and the discussions. This year we are holding two parallel Seminars, one was in London in late April, and one here in Durham hosted by ADCS North East. Many thanks to Rachael Hitchinson for making all the local arrangements and suggesting that a non-London-centric event would be welcomed! We are also grateful to the LGA for their support, and particularly to Karen Denyer who has managed the logistics for us.

Just to remind anyone who is not familiar with NCER, we are a community interest company c-owned by all local authorities – we are your company and we have no other clients. Because every local authority is a member we are able to offer genuine economies of scale, a national community of interest, and robust data solutions. We also have effective links with the LGA, ADCS, and the DfE.

There are a few housekeeping details before we start.

- We will finish on time – that's the Chair's main task and key performance indicator – so we will be away by 1500.
- Mobile phones to silent please – any that ring will incur a penalty of £5 to a charity of my choice, which is the Creating Chances Trust, a charity of which I am a trustee, with the aim of improving educational outcomes for children in care in the Black Country.

So, to the business of the day.

We will circulate a note of the Seminars and so we would really find it helpful if you wrote any issues or questions to be included in the formal note in your best handwriting! If at any point of the day you want to raise an issue or want a particular question covered, please raise it with me, or my NCER colleague **Peter Richmond**, who is both Company Secretary and Vice-Chair of NCER. **Edd Shackleton** from Southampton, who is the NCER Development Director, and **Donna Ross** from East Sussex, the NCER Marketing and Communications Director are just a little remote and won't be joining us today. We are also joined by **Andy Kent** and **James Burch** from our software partner, Angel Solutions, and they will also be more than happy to talk to colleagues over lunch. And of course we have **Holly Emery** from Doncaster – Holly will be able to ground some of the strategic input in day-to-day local authority practice – not to tell you how to do it, but rather to illustrate how one local authority has faced its challenges and made progress.

The collated slide pack and this input will be published on the LGA and NCER websites and Karen and Rachael will email details later.

I said I'd talk about the 'big picture'. That seemed fairly straightforward when we were planning the Seminar late last year, but it has become very much more complicated and uncertain over the last few weeks.

The publication of the education White Paper in March, '*Education Excellence Everywhere*' has caused a huge debate and much concern, not least among the LGA member local authorities, and MPs from all sides. Without going into detail or being party political, the level of concern seems not to have been expected by the DfE, and there have been, daily, modifying announcements from the DfE – the most recent are that small rural primary schools will be protected, that local authorities will be able to be partners in multi-academy trusts, and that local authority will be able to continue to provide school improvements services where academies want them. Of course,

many local authorities, including those present today, are working to develop school partnerships, trusts, traded services, mutual companies among a wide variety of models for working with schools and academies, and other partners..

I was going to bring my cuttings file to demonstrate the amount of debate and dissent that the White Paper has generated, but it now fills two lever-arch files and is too bulky to carry around. The County Councils Network has had national TV coverage for its opposition to the plans, and the analysis published by the LGA has been covered in the national press – analysis showing that maintained schools do every bit as well as academies and in many cases better, and carried out for the LGA by our partners Angel Solutions.

As I finalised this input I was watching coverage on the Queen’s Speech – which the BBC is reporting as an ‘Education for All Bill’. No doubt I’m an old reactionary, but I thought we had education for all children from 1870, extended through the age ranges right up to the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2010 which extended participation in education for every young person up to the age of 18. There are significant changes from the White Paper and some important nuances and I’ll touch on those later. And we all need to remember that much of the political mood music on children’s services has been about adoption, with everything overlaid by the European Referendum kerfuffle.

I also have a cuttings file about other education issues that have hit the media, beyond the White Paper – and there are more than a few, from exclamation marks to the maths curriculum, to testing and assessment, to headteacher training – I won’t go into detail because some of that comes later. Only last week Sir Michael Wilshaw was talking about the primary curriculum and its lack of focus on science and the arts, and the narrowing effect of the Ebacc.

As Chair of an organisation working on education data, I must say that we seem to have a testing and assessment system in chaos – and if it seems chaotic to me, and

to many professionals, what must it seem like to children and parents? I'll touch on the detail later.

Having said that, everything in the White Paper indicated what the government wanted to do – and I mean both the DfE and No 10 – and everything since has been a lot of hot air. The Queen's Speech included just two sentences: *'A Bill will be brought forward to lay foundations for educational excellence in all schools, giving every child the best start in life. There will also be a fairer balance between schools, through the National Funding Formula.'* Ignoring the ungrammatical nature of the second sentence, this seems pretty uncontroversial and extraordinarily bland.

The BBC reported:

Education for All Bill (Mainly England only)

- *Powers to convert under-performing schools in "unviable" local authorities to academies*
- *Goal of making every school an academy but no compulsion to do so*
- *Head teachers, not councils, to be responsible for school improvement*
- *A new national funding formula for schools*
- *Schools to be responsible for assisting excluded pupils*

The Queens Speech and the accompanying briefing notes are on www.gov.uk and are easily found.

Of course, whatever happens, it seems certain that, with only a small majority in the House of Commons and no majority in the House of Lords, there will be further changes and concessions. So while all the political lobbying and debates are really important, we won't know what falls out of all that until much later – until the legislation starts its parliamentary process. And even then it is subject to amendment. Watch this space – at the very least there is likely to be some delay in implementation and significant changes around the edges.

But, as I say, today I'm starting from the White Paper and the Queen's Speech, incorporating some explanation and interpretation by from officials about ministers' intentions, and some official press statements.

I'd have to say that there is a great deal in the White Paper that is only sketched out, which was perhaps the intention.

Let's start then, with the role of the local authority. Everything I say here is based on the assumption that the White Paper and Queen's Speech will be implemented in full. That is perhaps the most extreme assumption, and it might well prove to be wrong, of course, as I've already said. But we have to start somewhere.

The White Paper says that all schools will become academies by some time in the next parliament. This is modified by the Queen's Speech to say only in 'unviable' local authorities – an interesting and objectionable word – and I'd like to see any analysis of what it means, as we all know that local authorities (like schools) can both improve and decline in performance, and 'unviable' seems to me to have a meaning implying permanence. We already have provision for '*coasting*' and '*inadequate*' schools to be '*academised*' – a horrible word, but not as bad as '*MAT-ised*', also now part of official jargon – under provisions of the Education and Adoption Act 2016. What the White Paper does *not* say, however, is that local authorities will have no involvement in schools and education. The role of local authorities would be as '*champions for families and communities*' – as set out by Michael Gove in his 2010 White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching'.

There will of course be a transitional period from where we are now to whatever the end state looks like, and that period will last for several years, bringing its own challenges.



So, the system for school organisation, which is already diverse and perhaps fragmented, will become even more diverse. The only definite feature is that, in such a diverse education system, local authorities will continue to need to act for – to speak up for – local communities, families, children and economies.

So let's dive into the detail. The functions that local authorities will retain include:

- **admissions** (normal and in-year) (a strengthened and renewed role)
- **exclusions** (though schools will be responsible for 'assisting' excluded pupils)
- **school place planning**
- ensuring that the needs of **vulnerable pupils** are met (SEND, children in care, alternative provision, safeguarding, home education, children missing education, children at risk of radicalisation (and noting the issue of unregistered schools, which may yet come our way));
- **promoting the [meeting of the] needs of parents**
- **promoting the [meeting of the] needs of the local economy, and**
- an important one – **'where necessary calling for action from the Regional schools Commissioner to tackle underperformance.'**

As far as I can tell, the intention is to remove the *duty* to provide school improvement services but leave it as a *power* that may be exercised with local partnerships of schools. But what will certainly remain is a quality assurance function – you can't **'call for action from the Regional Schools Commissioner'** unless you know what is going on. In technical terms, as I understand the intention, the 1996 Education Act Section 6A duty would be repealed but the 2004 Children Act Section 10 duty (to promote cooperation to secure the five ECM outcomes) would remain.

Local authorities will therefore continue to need effective educational data and to be able to use it strategically, and of course directly, where schools do not become academies in the medium term – not necessarily to intervene directly, but to work with maintained schools, MATs and other groupings (Chains and Dioceses, for



example) – in order to hold to account all those who deliver education to local citizens. As I said earlier, there are already many developing models for local authorities working in partnership with schools and academies – which is all part of their general role of *'acting as champion for families and communities'*.

All this will happen in the context of significantly reducing resources for schools and for local authorities, and the introduction of a new national funding formula. It is therefore vitally important that data and data analysis is made available as simply and cheaply as possible – and that is what NCER aims to do, with our partner, Angel Solutions.

Without going into detail now, because it will be covered later, NCER systems are state of the art and highly cost effective. I've had the pleasure (and I mean that!) of demonstrating NCER systems to Regional Schools Commissioners, to senior DfE officials, and to Ofsted Directors, and they all say that they don't have access to such powerful tools. I've also demonstrated to ADCS Council and three ADCS Policy Committees with the same response. Later you will see some of the products – in the form of 'tasters' – and I urge you to take an hour or so to explore the products when you can, back at your various ranches.

A key feature of what we do is to put the analytical tools in the hands of senior managers – with local data teams adding value by local contextualisation or bespoke analysis. The central tools are, though, designed to be usable directly by senior managers.

I'll close this rapid overview by touching on a particular interest of mine, the education of children in care. The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford and Bristol University published some excellent research last summer that led to a full retrospective cohort analysis of every child in the country who was eligible to take GCSEs in 2014. The researchers identified some important issues, and factors which made a difference to outcomes. I'm delighted to say that ADCS are supporting



financially the development of Project Circe, which implements an analytical tool for all local authorities to help virtual school heads work better with local schools to improve the educational outcomes for all children in care. ADCS have written to all directors of children's services. The ADCS funding will kick-start the project, and is a really significant step, but ADCS, in association with NCER and NAVSH, are also seeking direct funding from local authorities – because of the ADCS input we are able to keep that down to a few hundred pounds for small local authorities, rising to a couple of thousand for the largest. (Please, when you are back home, check whether your local authority has signed up yet!) We are confident that this work will prove to be extremely valuable, and Angel Solutions have already started work. We'll touch in Project Circe in the 'after lunch' session. However, Peter Richmond, who has taken on the lead for Project Circe, will be more than happy to discuss it with you during the breaks.

So, in conclusion, we are working in a challenging and unstable environment, but we all need the best information to help us focus our increasingly limited resources where they can make the most difference for the children in our areas.

I haven't touched upon regional working (But I was with the South East ADCS two weeks ago, and Peter Richmond was with Yorkshire and Humber recently, and also the North West Data Group), so regional working is a key development area for NCER. Neither have I touched upon further analysis of academies, MATs and chains, or other groupings – some of that will be dealt with later.

So to move on, I am going to change my metaphorical hat from strategic to tactical. John Crowley from Norfolk can't be with us today – travel from Norwich to Durham for a single session is uneconomical - but what I'm going to (try to) do is to distil his slides, and also those from Rebekah Edgar at the DfE who presented to the Annual Meeting of NCER last week, into a single seamless explanation of what's going on with assessment and reporting. Peter Richmond will be listening carefully and will correct me where needed.



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And just before I start, I'll say that in order to carry out our analysis of assessment and examination results, colleagues at Angel Solutions have had to develop a deep understanding, and we have published a summary of all that as summary fact sheets – as with all NCER materials, they are available to all local authorities.

John Freeman CBE

NCER Chair

18 May 2016