

2030 Vision for the Cambridge sub-region

Education and Skills

This topic focused on education below degree level and on skills training. These were the areas which it had been agreed presented the greatest challenges in the sub-region.

Strengths and (mainly) weaknesses

- Only 28% of social housing is internet-linked – disadvantaging many schoolchildren.
- Maths teaching tends to focus on tests – but the steady shift towards jobs requiring problem-solving and management ability requires an education that encourages children to be taught to ask the right questions and understand how to use and apply knowledge.
- School-leavers' personal skills and manual dexterity (other than keyboard) are poor. Health & safety requirements (and transport costs) hamper work experience. Schools focus on educational attainment – too many students lack a passion for something.
- There are too many schools where teaching is strictly to the curriculum – rather than around it – where students are not individually assessed, mixed ability is the norm and the range of subjects is narrow and inspiration, praise, support and encouragement rare.
- Schoolchildren appear to have little ambition beyond that of getting their GCSE passes.
- Employers are well represented on the governing bodies of some schools but schools and FE colleges are generally not well informed of employers' needs. Careers guidance at all levels is variable in quality and the Connexions service has been ineffectual.
- The UK has been in gradual economic decline for 150 years partly because of its lack of an effective system of technical education. As the Wolf report (March 2011) observes, many qualifications have no market value and most are too industry-specific. English and Maths do not get enough attention and employers' views are excluded.
- The sub-region is highly successful in high-tech but the jobs in this sector are inaccessible to weaker students (and their families). There is a sub-regional preponderance of small firms unable to afford significant training costs.

Improving conditions in the sub-region: 2030 vision

- From its internationally-rated older University to its academies and village colleges, the sub-region has an impressive education infrastructure. The challenge is to build on this, to strengthen the engagement between the worlds of education and employment and to ensure that every student is informed, motivated and prepared for a multi-faceted career.
- Every student should be individually assessed in respect of needs and aspirations. In developing their own particular interests they will acquire portable skills more swiftly.
- Students should acquire manual, mental and social skills including problem solving and team working (the Maths Challenge and Duke of Edinburgh Awards should be exploited).
- Nationally, the syllabus should be broadened to encourage creativity and foster the ability to cope with rapid changes in technology. Early specialisation should be resisted.
- Students should be enabled to gain an insight into employment possibilities through voluntary work in the community or work experience within schools.
- VI form committees can bring employers and students together.
- Inspirational teachers with experience outside the educational sector are needed. Local undergraduates should be encouraged to consider a teaching career. Well-qualified teachers should be attracted to the sub-region through a programme enabling them to engage with outstanding local businesses (possibly through an in-service 'gap year').
- Risk-taking – teaching around subjects, rather than strictly to the syllabus should be encouraged. Nationally, the teaching profession needs less central micromanagement.
- Role models from the world of employment should be brought into schools and colleges to inspire and inform both students and teachers. Local frameworks should enable this.
- Existing structures (e.g. school governors) and practices enabling a two-way flow of information and understanding between employers and schools and colleges should be exploited to the full and provide models for areas where these are not yet developed.
- Collaborative education/employment initiatives – such as the Fenland Engineering Skills Centre at Chatteris and the Addenbrookes apprenticeship scheme and technical training school – are required to develop locally needed skills (inc. those for agriculture).