

Forum for the Future of Education

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GCSE 3 → **TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON QUALIFICATIONS** **NO EXAMS AT 16?** **IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO CHANGE THE WORLD ON AN EMPTY STOMACH!**

TECHNOLOGY NEEDS TO DO THE HEAVY LIFTING

A CACOPHONY OF PASSIONATE VOICES ARE CALLING FOR CHANGE, BUT... THE SYSTEM

WE NEED A HARMONIOUS CHOIR WORKING IN UNISON: THIS IS OUR MOMENT - WE CANNOT LET FUTURE GENERATIONS DOWN!

SPACE FOR... CURIOUSITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WIDE CURRICULUM

SKILLS + TIPS: MORE TIME TO SHARE FOR SCHOOLS

SAFETY **WELLBEING** **GRADUATE**

COLLABORATION

WE KNOW MENTAL HEALTH HAS BECOME A LOT WORSE - THIS NEEDS FOCUS

TEACHERS ARE NOT MAGICIANS - IT MUST BE RESOURCED PROPERLY

MORE DIVERSITY IN TEACHING! A ROUTE FOR 600 TAs WITHOUT DEGREES...?

MORE SPACE + SUPPORT FOR NEURODIVERGENCY

LEARNING ABOUT META-COGNITION

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#OurChanceToBeHeard

Connections in Mind
Helping children succeed



Analysis Summary Report



Introduction

The Forum for the Future of Education was a comprehensive event, organised by [Connections in Mind](#) that took place on 22nd of June, 2021. The purpose of this online gathering was to bring together an inclusive collective of educators, parents, employers and learners, from all walks of life, in order to gather a diverse pool of data, which would accurately reflect the predominant opinion of the current education system.

Over the course of the forum participants shared their reflections on the education system, in recorded discussion groups, which enabled researchers to collect qualitative data around two key points.

Within the gathered feedback, a prevalent pattern of displeasure became apparent, with opinions of the education system ranging primarily from annoyance to general disdain. Participants were vocal in their disapproval of the current education system, and unanimously called for substantial reform.

However, there was also a burning drive for change, and a sense of unity, amongst everyone who attended the forum. As much as negative experiences were discussed, ideas for reform were abundant, and every attendant had something to contribute to the conversation around creating a more inclusive education system.

A palpable atmosphere of optimism radiated from these discussions, and the forum concluded with participants looking hopefully towards the future.



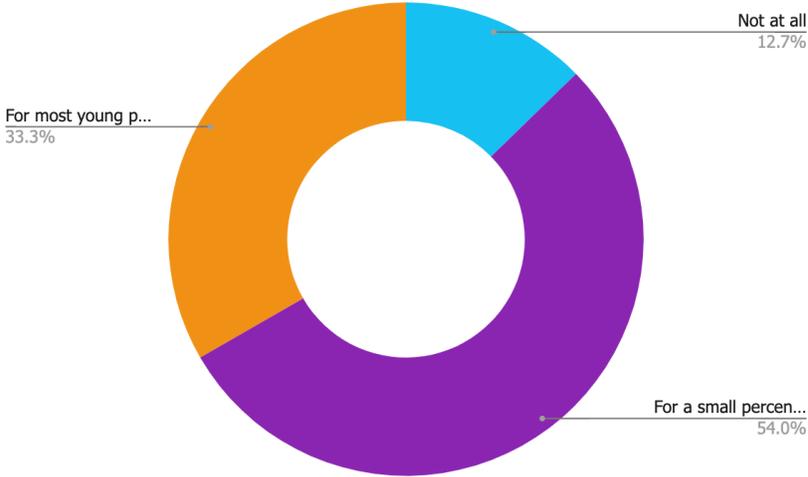
Initial Data Collection

To collect initial quantitative data, attendants were asked to complete a number of closed and open ended questions via mentimeter.com

1. What is the purpose of education? (Open ended)

There were an array of responses, notably 85% of respondents attributed the purpose of education to personal development rather than the improvement of society as a whole. 64% referred to the importance of skills as opposed to 19% who talked about a sense of perception or a way of looking at the world. When thinking about the type of skills to be developed people were more divided 30% of people talked about socio-emotional skills, 15% life-long-learning skills and 20% problem solving skills, whilst 19% felt that skills to help one fulfil one's purpose were most important.

2. Does the education system meet the needs of young people?





Discussion Group Questions - Qualitative Study

Following this, attendees were divided into pre-organised breakout rooms for discussion. These groups were selected based on their background and stakeholder position. The two questions posed for this study were:

1. What do we need to do to create the education system that we want?
2. What resources, talents, assets and networks do we have to help us do this?

Analysis Methodology

The discussion that took place in the small group breakout rooms was recorded and transcribed to create a readable report. Using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, each conversation was then coded and given shorthand labels to describe the information. This allowed for a condensed overview of the ubiquitous themes and common talking points that recurred throughout the data. These codes were then collated and split into common themes. Then they were gathered and broken down into easily identifiable quotes, with each code also adding to the total prevalence of a theme, highlighting how often a talking point came up.



Summary of Thematic Findings

1. What do we need to do to create the education system that we want?

Question 1 explored the changes that are needed to create the education system that we want. Four overarching themes and emerging sub themes were identified, in no particular order these were:

- Depoliticise and Empower Educators and Experts
 - Depoliticise Education
 - Trust Teachers
 - Training for Teachers
- Curriculum & Assessment
 - Skills Needed for Work and Life
 - Redress Assessment
- Cultural and Societal Shift
 - Change Society's Expectations and Views
 - Involve Businesses
 - Engaging and Inspiring
- Flexibility and Student Centered
 - Student Voice
 - Mental Health
 - Flexibility



Depoliticise and Empower Educators and Experts

The study found a strong consensus among education professionals, teachers and employers that the education system needed to be depoliticised. Key issues raised included politicians' personal opinions and political agendas being imposed on the education system and a lack of long term vision and change being made with the learners' best interests in mind. There was also agreement among all participants that teachers should be given more control and say over the future education system. It was felt that politicians lack trust in teachers in being able to facilitate this and that teachers needed to feel more valued to reduce the number who leave the profession.

In order to create the education system that reformers want there needs to be a shift away from politicians deciding the direction of the education system and instead there needs to be collaboration between educators, learners and businesses. Further, there needs to be more funding available for training teachers in areas of mental health, wellbeing and neurodiversity, as well as more general professional development opportunities.

Curriculum and Assessment

It was agreed among all groups of participants that the education system is outdated. There needs to be a change in the curriculum from passing exams to supporting learners in developing the skills they need for work and life, and importantly for the jobs and skills that will be needed in 20-30 years time. This included vocational qualifications, social interaction skills (e.g. empathy, public speaking and social creativity) and encouraging learners to develop these skills in the areas that they are interested in pursuing as careers through apprenticeships and 'in class' collaborations with industry. Among teachers, education professionals, employers and learners it was agreed that the education system is not fit for purpose



and that it has turned into an ‘examination system’ and ‘exams factory’. Other forms of assessment were discussed, for example, interdisciplinary project work, teacher assessed grades and collaborative self-assessment between staff and learners with an emphasis on metacognition and self-regulation.

Cultural and Societal Shift

Reformers believe that we need to encourage a culture shift in which businesses play a key role in shaping the future education system. For example, incentivising businesses to share their expertise and insights into how their industry would change over the next 20-30 years and the skills that they would be looking for in future employees. This was a shared vision among all groups of participants with employers at the forefront. Further, the current study found that we need to create a culture in our education system that is both engaging and inspiring for learners and teachers. Ultimately, there needs to be a supportive school environment in which they are able to freely explore their talents and passions without box-ticking.

Another important finding that was shared among teachers and employers in particular, is that our education system needs to be able to collaborate with society including parents. To achieve the education system that we need, there must be a shift in our society to be more inclusive of values such as empathy and kindness, rather than one that is individualistic and outcome driven.

Flexibility and Student-centered

The general consensus is that the education system is ‘rigid’ and that staff are ‘limited by the system’ which ‘measures everyone with the same ruler’. Developing a flexible and student-centered education system was perhaps the largest emerging



theme, covering education professionals, teachers, employees, learners and parents. Learners need to have a voice in the curriculum and be represented during the decision-making process. Further, we need flexibility in the curriculum that would allow learners to make choices and develop agency whilst taking into account individual needs and abilities. Our learning environment must be more accommodating for those who are neurodiverse or have other physical or learning difficulties.

Finally, and most importantly, our current education system is not equipped to handle the overwhelming number of learners seeking mental health support. We need investment in services, workshops and programmes that support the wellbeing and mental health of learners. We need initiatives that build resilience and mental welfare, whilst educating learners on how to seek the support that they, or a friend need, whether that is within the school or with other mental health organisations.

2. What resources, talents, assets and networks do we have to help us do this?

Question 2 explored the resources that we have to support us in our journey towards education reform. Four overarching themes and emerging sub themes were identified, in no particular order these were:

- Networks and Co-ordinated Efforts
 - Networking
 - Learning from other countries
- Technology
 - Technology as a Facilitator of Learning
 - Technology as an Assistant
- Business Involvement



- Business can help raise awareness amongst the public and government
- Business should fund work for change

- Teacher Training and Experts
 - Respect for the teaching profession
 - Teaching and learning expertise in universities and teacher training programs

Networks and Co-ordinated Efforts

There was a strong consensus that utilising current networks was key to supporting reformers to create the education system that we need. Engaging other educators, parents, businesses, researchers and local communities to collectively promote all avenues of academic and career development were thought to be fundamental. It was interesting that whilst some organisations were mentioned there was no one organisation or network that was consistently identified as leading the call for change.

Another sub theme that emerged was *learning from other countries*. Considering how education systems in Europe are structured in terms of assessment and promoting both academic and technical vocational routes can provide strong evidence that the reformed education system does have its benefits. This will also enable reformers to model elements of the desired education system on aspects of other countries' education systems without having to start from scratch. Overall, utilising and expanding networks internationally with all stakeholders will be the next logical step.



Technology

In order to facilitate change it was agreed across all groups of participants that embracing technology as a facilitator of learning was essential. Technology can help reformers to create the education system we need by providing educators with powerful tools that can optimise learning. Specifically, technology will support educators in creating a classroom environment that increases engagement and enables students' varying needs and learning styles to be fulfilled. Further, it was suggested that technology could be used as an assistant. For example, using apps and online games could be used to support students in developing their mathematical and english and vocabulary skills. Integrating some aspects of online learning into the curriculum would also enable teachers to spend more time with students who need the additional 1:1 support.

Business Involvement

Participants from all sectors identified the power of enlisting business support for reform. This fell under two main themes; raising awareness of the need for change and funding/supporting change. There was a strong consensus that business should be much more involved in education and a sense that business has more power over the government to “lobby on our behalf” and help the public and politicians to understand that “school leavers aren't equipped to deal with the work”.

Attendees also recognised that the education sector itself does not have the resources to fund a movement for change and that investment from business in terms of funding work for reform would be important to bring about change in a timely fashion. It was recognised that businesses would need to do this as a long term investment in their future resource rather than “monetising” education per se.



Teachers, Training and Experts

Much was made of respect for teaching as a profession and time for the development of experimental pedagogical research within schools. Teachers especially desired recognition of, and autonomy over, their own profession. They currently feel that they are not trusted enough and that research into the best practice rarely trickles down to the classroom, because of time and skills constraints.

Attendees are aware of the wealth of research and expertise within the field of education in universities and other training organisations which is not utilised in Initial Teacher Training because time for this training is constantly being squeezed. They would like to see much more resources “invested in our teacher training” and CPD so that they can be part of a profession which is trusted and respected by the public and government alike.

Participants feel that this lack of training, respect and autonomy feeds poor teacher retention with many new teachers “often leaving the profession within the first five years”.

Conclusions

Key stakeholders in education desire change, they are disappointed and frustrated with the current system which they feel doesn't meet the needs of the majority of learners. However, they are excited and passionate about working for change.

The attendees want to bring about reform by redressing assessment and the curriculum and working to inform the public about the need for change. They would



like to depoliticise the education system and create a system led by educators which is flexible and student centred.

Participants struggled to identify the resources, talents, assets and networks which could help them do this. When they did, technology and teacher training were seen as important vehicles for change. They acknowledged that they could use professional networks and co-ordinated efforts to bring about change and that the power of big business was a great untapped resource. Importantly there was no one organisation they commonly recognised as leading change, from which one might infer that they are looking for clear leadership.

Limitations

It is important to recognise that this event was attended by people who self-selected to voice their opinions about education reform. Therefore, it is likely that the results are skewed to represent the views of people who are interested in education reform and more research would be needed to ascertain that they are representative of the majority of stakeholders in education.

Whilst schools were encouraged to include students in the event, very few students attended. It would have been preferable to have more representation from the learners themselves too.

Next Steps - Victoria Bagnall - Event Co-Founder

My theory of change is based on the work of Duncan Green; critical junctures in history often act as a catalyst for change and that change comes from the people. I believe that the COVID 19 crisis has provided such a critical juncture for reform in the UK education system and that the time is ripe for change. The findings from this event have given those working in education reform a clear mandate to work urgently for



change. In a peer discussion environment, guided by open ended questions, stakeholders clearly outlined what we need to do to bring about change and what resources, talent, assets and networks they have to do this.

Those calling for reform want to mobilise the public and business to help them depoliticise the system so that they can scrap the current system and create a flexible learner centred model which really serves the needs of all stakeholders. Sadly currently they don't feel that they have the trust, respect, or autonomy to bring about that change and they struggle to identify an organisation or network to rally behind to bring about change.

I call on all those working in education reform to take up the mantle: organise themselves; raise money and support from business; and commit themselves to delivering reform. Our findings clearly show that many in the education community are ready to be led for change, they need a movement they can mobilise behind in order to feel empowered so that they can dedicate time and energy to the movement. Now is the time for action, future generations will be so grateful that we came together for this historic effort.