

Raising the profile of the Common Core

A project with children and young people

End of project report – May 08



"This project demonstrated the ability of children and young people to make a positive contribution to the development of a world class workforce; one that truly listens to the views of children and young people and is capable of responding."
Tomorrow's Child

"It's the 6 things that people working with children and young people should have and know about." Young Person

Report for: Children's Workforce Development Council
Report by: Sonia Mayor

Children's Workforce Development Council

Creating a world class workforce for children, young people and their families

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1. Introduction

In 2008 the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) commissioned projects with six groups of children and young people from across England to help raise the profile of the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge ('Common Core') and to show how these skills can be embedded in everyday job roles.

The project was tasked with the production of leaflets designed from the perspective of children and young people on the Common Core skills. However, the enthusiasm of everyone involved led to the project taking on a life of its own as the projects set about embedding the Common Core in their own localities. There is local level 'buy in' to develop these skills and projects are working to spread the message and influence key stakeholders.

The projects have demonstrated the ability of children and young people to cut through to the heart of the issues of the Common Core. This was reflected in the images they created: big ears to listen with, a big heart etc. These are universal symbols which resonate with a broad audience irrespective of age.

The results of the project will be used to influence further work to help raise awareness of the Common Core and its importance across the children's workforce as part of a campaign to promote integrated working in 2008-09.

This report provides:

- a summary of the project process
- an outline of the six projects
- an explanation of the way in which the Common Core is being taken forward at local level
- recommendations for CWDC to move forward to embed the Common Core, as part of the national campaign to raise awareness of integrated working within the children's workforce
- key messages to CWDC around future engagement of children and young people, specifically around the involvement of schools.

2. Background

The Common Core is six things that the Government wants all workers for children and young people to know about and do. They are:

1. Effective communication and engagement (with children, young people and families)
2. Child and young person development
3. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child
4. Supporting transitions
5. Multi-agency working
6. Sharing information

The Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) asked the Children's Workforce Development Council (CDWC) to help raise the profile of and embed the Common Core in Children's Services.

CDWC & DCSF selected six projects and asked them to design leaflets to highlight how people are using the Common Core as part of their every day jobs and to raise understanding among the children's workforce of the Common Core.

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3. Project analysis

3.1 Tender

The invitation to tender was announced on 14th December 2007 and closed on 18th January 2008. The project had tight timescales to deliver. Applications were assessed by a panel made up of CWDC and DCSF staff in mid January with work to commence by the end of January 2008.

Lessons learnt

Projects advised that CWDC should consider issues such as 'time of year' in the announcement of tenders. Four sites stated it was by chance they had seen the bid before Christmas and underwent a pressurised timescale to submit the application, particularly in involving children and young people in the process. Schools said they would be more likely to get involved in the autumn term.

Time considerations needs to be given in the project specification to the user group that it is targeting. Time needs to be built in for evening and weekend work when working with children and young people to deliver projects as this can affect ability to attend meetings and project delivery. (This was built into this project).

One site recommended publicising the tender in a national paper like the Times Educational Supplement or via a letter sent directly to Head Teachers and Heads of Design Technology to attract school involvement.

3.2 Selection process

There were 13 applications. After much debate among the panel, the five sites shown in the table below were selected as they provided a good mixture of occupational roles, cutting across sectors. Southend Department of Children and Learning site further divided their project work between two independent projects in two separate school-based projects (Westcliff High School for Girls and Southend High School for Girls).

A good mix of children and young people were involved across the projects in respect of age range, looked after children and gender. All the projects demonstrated excellent project management skills and the ability to deliver in short timescales.

Site	Worker Roles
Southend Department of Children and Learning (Westcliff High School for Girls and Southend High School for Girls)	Teachers, School Roles, Doctors and Nurses
Connexions North Tyneside (in partnership with voluntary sector and Children's Fund)	Youth Workers, Social Workers and Teachers
NCH The Children's Say	Learning Mentors, Educational Welfare Officers and Teachers
Heywood's Young Spirit, Crime Concern	Police Community Support Officers, Youth Inclusion Project Workers, Youth Offending Team, Police Officers, Activity Instructors and Project Workers
Youth Pathways to Employment, Cumbria	Social Workers, Family Placement Officers

3.3 Project process

CWDC appointed a consultant to provide support to the projects to deliver this work. A design company, Tomorrow's Child, was also recruited to support the children and young people with their leaflet designs. CWDC communications department worked closely with these parties on the project.

A clear project brief was developed for the consultant and for the sites. All 13 applicants received full feedback regarding their application and were given reasons why they were successful/unsuccessful.

All projects received a minimum of two visits from the consultant, the first taking place at the beginning of the project process to ensure that the Common Core brief was clearly understood. This was an important meeting as it set the context of the work and created the opportunity for the sites to clarify any issues relating to the brief. It was important to tailor support to individual project sites.

All the sites found it challenging to demonstrate how workers were using the Common Core in their everyday job roles. All the sites stated that this project had highlighted that there is still much work to be done to raise awareness of the Common Core among professionals. The perception from all six projects was that a greater number of workers may have participated in the interviews that the individual projects were conducting with local professionals if they had known more about the Common Core skills.

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Feedback from four of the sites was that the face-to-face meeting with a national CWDC representative made the children feel important and acted as a motivator. The projects were also encouraged at this meeting to consider how the learning from the project would be disseminated locally. The consultant provided further support via face-to-face meetings, email, telephone and the production of Q&As.

The projects had seven weeks to produce a minimum of two leaflets. Draft leaflets were then submitted to the design company. Tomorrow's Child had a child centred approach to their work and engaged sensitively with children regarding any reworking of their materials whilst acknowledging that their hard work was fundamental to the outcome. There was a very tight turnaround time to rework leaflets before meeting with the children and young people. The meeting with the designers has been cited by the children and young people as one of the very positive aspects of the whole project. To quote some feedback:

- *Very good, they listened to our views and how we made the art work*
- *They made me feel really proud of my work*
- *It was good seeing our art work like that and seeing what people thought of it.*

At the meeting, the design company provided the groups with a powerful visual presentation which explained the importance of design and its effect upon people's lives. Three of the sites commented that the children found this talk "inspirational" and created an opportunity for learning outside of the project. This talk highlighted to the children the importance of their work and enhanced their understanding of the importance of design upon their lives.

There were some key learning points in the engagement of children and young people. Two hour slots had been allocated to each of the projects over two days. The content and style of the meeting with the designers was described by the sites as fast moving and exciting. In hindsight, the projects indicated the need for some reflection time to be built into the process, which would have allowed for children and project staff to have time to talk through changes to their leaflets independently of the design team and CWDC.

Lessons learnt

Clarification of the role of the project manager at the outset, with estimations of time required, would have been beneficial to all and future specifications will include this. One site stated that for any future bids they would appoint a dedicated project co-ordinator/project manager who could give the project sufficient time and support.

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The sites had a mixed response to the tight timescales which were seen as positive in terms of keeping focused, however, with very little room for slippage. The consensus was that when working with children and young people a greater degree of flexibility is required. More flexible timescales could also allow time for the sites to see the draft leaflets prior to meeting with the designers.

Project sites stated the need for greater clarity from the outset on the decision-making process in terms of the number of leaflets to be produced, which professionals would be featured and selection of leaflets.

Consideration should be given to ensuring that any future design specifications include making materials accessible from a disability perspective.

What worked

- Believing in children and young people's ability to deliver something worthwhile
- Clear brief from the outset
- Face to face contact with CWDC, particularly in the start up stage, to steer projects in the right direction
- Regular communication with the sites
- Providing children with direct access to a child centred design company that understands and values children's participation
- Excellent project management in all six projects
- Supportive and committed project managers
- Encouraging creativity and inspiration

4. Sites

The consultant steered the work of the following five project sites:

Cumbria County Council

The young people involved in the project were from the Pathways to Employment scheme at Cumbria County Council and were aged between 17-18 years. A project manager and a team of staff from Brathay Hall in Ambleside supported the young people. An intensive two day residential programme was organised to fully brief the young people on the Common Core, which included team building activities, interviewing skills and further break down of the project objectives. A further day was allocated for interview preparation and a day to interview staff. The group reconvened to collate the materials gathered and worked with an art worker from Brathay Hall to draft the final leaflets.

Heywood's Young Spirits, Lancashire

This project was led by eight young advisors aged between 16-20 years, four females and four males, supported by a participation worker and a project manager. The advisors were fully briefed on the Common Core to ensure they had a good understanding of the six elements and the project brief. Two full days were spent interviewing workers from Police, Youth Work, Children's Social Care and Youth Offending Teams, about their job roles and how they met the Common Core. A week long residential was held where specific time was allocated to this project to compile the leaflets.

NCH The Children's Say, Gateshead

This project was led by six children and young people aged between 10-14, supported by two participation workers and an artist who assisted the children with their ideas and designs. The first task that the group took on was to redefine the Common Core into everyday language. The children and young people interviewed Education Welfare Officers, Children's Service Co-ordinator, Head of Service for Children and Young People, Participation Workers and Teaching and Learning Support Assistants. They asked workers to describe which of the Common Core they thought related most to them, what was their strongest area and what was their weakest (area most in need for promotion). These ideas were reinterpreted by the children into eye catching illustrations.

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Connexions, North Tyneside

This group of children and young people were aged between 10-19, supported by workers from Children's Fund, Connexions and the Youth Service. The first task was to make sure that the children and young people had a good understanding of the Common Core. A conference was planned for the young people to meet with a range of professionals so that they could talk to them about their day to day work and how they used the Common Core skills. The following workers were interviewed: Teachers, Youth Workers, Connexions Personal Advisers, and Social Workers. Further days were scheduled so that the children and young people could bring the subject to life with their words and images.

Southend Department of Children and Learning

This site consisted of two school based projects consisting of a group of young people aged from 14 to 15 from Westcliff High School for Girls and a group of young people aged 16 to 17 from Southend High School for Girls (SHSG). Both groups were supported by teaching staff and the Children's Workforce Team. The groups were given in-depth presentations on the Common Core. Class room time was allocated to discuss and design characters to appear in the leaflets. Scenarios were also created on how these particular workers used the Common Core in everyday job roles. Interviews were carried out with workers and research conducted on websites.

Lessons learned – Involving Schools

There was some key learning to come out of involving schools. Schools were seen to be an ideal vehicle for this type of project – particularly if the material can be used for examination coursework and curriculum awards. School based projects have increased capacity when projects like this can be used for coursework.

The perception was that Local Children's Services Officers are a good link between CWDC and schools. Better links could be built between CWDC, School Improvement Teams and Curriculum Advisers as they are a valuable resource to tap into

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5. Dissemination at local level

All the sites were asked about plans for local publicity and how the learning would be taken forward at local level. Below are some of the approaches that the consultant identified will be taken and reflect some of the additional outcomes of this project:

Influencing stakeholders

- Working with the Children's Trusts to look at how we can 'roll out' the Common Core of for the whole workforce.
- Working with higher and further education locally to ensure a seamless link to courses delivered and information provided.
- Local celebration events, to which senior managers from a variety of organisations will be invited.
- Developing and embedding the Common Core into the recruitment and selection process, including induction, across the directorate in the first instance and then the rest of the children's workforce.
- Presentations to partner agencies and organisations.
- Plans for students to talk to: Children's and Young People's Partnership, local university and Youth Council, plus talk in school assemblies.

Publications/websites

- Feature the project on local websites for young people.
- Articles about the project planned for a number of local publications.
- Contact local press with promotional material (Southend site has already secured media interest).

Leaflet distribution

- Leaflets will be widely distributed to Children's Centres, Police, Youth Offending Teams, School Councils, NCH, Connexions, Local Authorities and other partner organisations. It will be a key tool in raising local awareness of the Common Core.

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Recommendations for CWDC

- CWDC representative to attend local celebration events. The projects stated that it was important that a national organisation was seen to be engaging face-to-face.
- Revisit sites in six months to explore implementation at local level.
- CWDC capitalise on local enthusiasm and launch national campaign to coincide with local dissemination.

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6. Communications: informing the national campaign

All the sites emphasised the need for further work to promote the Common Core. To fully embed the Common Core, there is a need for cultural change, and it was felt that a communications campaign would help to change people's hearts and minds.

Many studies have reported on the anxiety experienced by the children's workforce about changing roles and working across professions. This point was echoed in discussions with the various sites. A national campaign should bear this in mind and could help to alleviate some of these issues. Sites suggested some simple, clear messages such as "You're Doing It Already", "Don't Give Up Your Day Job", which would reinforce the message that no additional work or training is required to implement the Common Core.

The consultant asked the project sites to suggest ways that the Common Core message could be transmitted. These also reflect some of the additional outcomes of this project. Below are some of their responses:

Posters/publicity

- Launch bold, eye catching poster campaign. A national campaign would raise awareness and provide a good base on which to build more local initiatives. Perhaps a catchy slogan or title that would build on the branding of the Common Core leaflets.
- Display posters in schools.
- Develop a simple chart highlighting Common Core skills and how these might be applied in day-to-day job roles.

Influencing stakeholders

- Target universities and awarding bodies to ensure inclusion of Common Core on course material.
- Colleges of further education and higher education institutions should be targeted – so that Common Core can be included in the curriculum.
- Liaison with exam boards – so that Common Core is included in assessment arrangements.
- Greater linkage required with the Integrated Qualifications Framework.
- Inclusion in 'Training Needs Analyses' and Performance Management Frameworks
- Build on the work that museums/archives have done on Common Core.

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Publications/website

- Coverage in press, stakeholder publications, with input from children and young people to share their experience.
- Coverage of Common Core through website links on delivery partner websites.

Support

- Short briefings to workforce on the Common Core.
- Support from CWDC communications/marketing on taking work forward at local level. Local Authorities and schools need help with press and publicity.
- Advice on how local projects can be featured in national CWDC publications.
- Establish National Project Group to build on the work started with this project. The purpose would be to provide information and advice, and act as a 'sounding board' to CWDC on issues around the Common Core and implementing the same within the workforce.

7. Engagement of children and young people

Developing a 'bottom-up' approach and working directly with children and young people will help to embed the key messages of the Common Core.

A strong message to policy makers and practitioners was to involve children and young people in the roll out of any initiative as this would create opportunities for practitioners to listen to the views of children in their everyday work. It would also value and strengthen the voice of the child in workforce development and training.

The following are quotes from the project sites:

- *“Children are excellent communicators and can disseminate informally the information they have learnt to other children, young people and adults.”*
- *“Excellent way of consulting, communicating and involving children and young people in the children’s workforce strategy.”*
- *“Students have gained an insight into the ways in which professionals work with children, their job profiles and conditions of service. This has implications for recruitment into the children’s workforce in the future.”*
- *“Any policy, standard, suggested good practice should be explained to children and young people. Only once they know what standards, quality is expected can they know it is being achieved. If all this information is available people will aspire to deliver and receive high quality services.”*

This initiative provided excellent opportunities for children and young people to volunteer in a number of roles e.g. group work, filming and photography, interviewing the workforce and supporting younger children to be involved. At one site this enabled the young people to gain volunteer awards.

The children and young people that engaged with the project worked through challenges and barriers collaboratively promoting their own personal development. The projects reported increased self esteem and levels of confidence among the children and young people involved in this work. Among the comments from young people were:

- *“I’ve learnt to behave better”*
- *“I’ve proved I can do this”*
- *“I’ve learnt how to work together as a group”*

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Many project managers also stated that the project had increased their own knowledge and understanding of the Common Core.

The following are recommendations by the project sites to CWDC:

- More opportunities for children and young people to participate in the work of CWDC.
- Involve children and young people from the outset, when policy is being formed, not just at the commissioning stage. “We could have helped you write the Common Core in more people friendly language.”
- CWDC should be leading the way in involving children and young people on all aspects of workforce reform. Sets the gold standard and paves the way for effective engagement.
- Well thought out and planned engagement of children and young people sends out a strong message to the children and young people that ‘their opinion counts’.
- Provide a list of the ways in which CWDC have involved children and young people in their work. This should be available on the website.

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8. Further information

The [Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce](#) sets out the basic skills and knowledge needed by people (including volunteers) whose work brings them into regular contact with children, young people and families. By using a common language, it will enable professionals to work together more effectively in the interests of the child and underpins successful integrated working.

Full information can be found at:

<http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/common-core>

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/>

For further information on this project please contact:

- Claire Owens

Email: claire.owens@cwdcouncil.org.uk

- Carol Dewhurst

Email: carol.dewhurst@cwdcouncil.org.uk

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