

FELLOWS CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

The Education Campaign

The RSA has a long history of innovative work in education, which has been characterised by a concern for social justice and the desire to equip learners to thrive in the real world. From March 2008, the RSA worked with a growing group of organisations to develop a charter for education in the 21st century. The document was finalised in July 2008 and can be seen at Appendix A. The aim of the document is to express the common ground that exists between a number of education initiatives.

The role of the education campaign would be to communicate the ideas within the charter to a far wider audience than currently are aware of them. Beyond just communication, the campaign would seek to empower parents, students and teachers with the ability to take action, and to change education in their local area for the better.

The RSA Fellows consultation was carried out as part of the early development of the campaign. Part of our goal was to discover the attitudes of RSA Fellows to participation in their local education provision, and to what degree they already acted locally.

The Consultation

We asked Fellows to give us their views on the idea of an Education Charter. We then asked them how they felt about a Campaign targeted at teachers, parents and students, and asked them for ideas about what they might do in their local area to support one or several of the points of a draft of the proposed Charter.

The consultation was carried out in two stages:

- An in-depth emailed consultation with around 50 Fellows
- Broader consultation with around 800 Fellows through an online survey

RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

I. Would Fellows sign up to a Charter?

The online survey initially asked Fellows whether they would sign up to a Charter based on the broad principles embodied in the below paragraph, and 78.3% of them answered yes.

"Young people must be equipped to meet the challenges of life outside school in the 21st century and narrow exam-focused schooling is increasingly unable to meet this need. Standards are higher than they have ever been, but a rapidly changing social and economic environment, complex global challenges like climate change, access to powerful technologies, and an improved understanding of how we learn, mean that the primary aim of schooling can no longer be to transmit a fixed body of knowledge. Of paramount importance is young people's capacity and desire to go on learning throughout life, and the curriculum must therefore find a balance between fostering young people's happiness, developing their competences and skills and enabling them to acquire knowledge. A Charter for 21st century education would seek to inspire parents, teachers and students to take action on these aims at their local level."

When later asked whether they would sign up to the draft Charter as it then stood, 67.1% of Fellows said that they would, 17.2% that they did not know, and 15.7% that they would not. Of the negative responses, reasons given often included reference to a specific point or form of words that the respondent felt they could not agree with.

2. How do Fellows feel about taking local action on education?

We asked Fellows how far they agreed with two statements and the results are below:

Table 1

I would like to see educational provision in my local area change to meet the challenges of the 21st century	
Strongly agree	60.1% (457)
Agree	33.6% (255)
No opinion	4.6% (35)
Disagree	1.3% (10)
Strongly disagree	0.4% (3)

Table 2

I believe that I could play a personal role in making positive change happen in schools in my local area	
Strongly agree	33.1% (240)
Agree	40.8% (296)
No opinion	16.4% (119)
Disagree	8.1% (59)
Strongly disagree	1.7% (12)

Fellows were generally very confident in the belief that change should happen in their local area, but were less likely to be very sure about their own role within that change. Although nearly three quarters felt that they did have a role to play, only a third strongly agreed that they would personally be able to make change happen.

The second set of questions around personal involvement asked about obstacles and the results are shown in table 3.

Table 3

Are there any obstacles to you taking local action to improve schooling in your area?	
Yes	60.0% (423)
No	17.9% (126)
Don't know	22.1% (156)

Most respondents felt that there were barriers to their involvement in local education, but nearly a quarter did not know and presumably had not tried to become involved.

Respondents who answered 'yes' to the previous question were then asked what the obstacles to their personal involvement were. 453 respondents (more than answered 'yes' to the previous question) told us what the obstacles to their involvement were and the number of times each was mentioned is detailed in Table 4.

Many of the respondents actually appeared to be giving reasons why positive educational change was not possible, rather than indicating what the barriers to their personal involvement were. Some of these respondents were obviously answering a different question to the one asked. However, for many the perception that positive change was not possible would be a factor in their decision to become involved with local education or not. The obstacles that are clearly direct answers to the question asked are therefore highlighted in grey in table 4, but the others have been left in because they are likely to be important factors.

Table 4

Obstacle	Number of mentions
Limited time for involvement/distance from schools	112
National Policy Framework is barrier to change	56
Local authority	44
No connection with schools	38
Too old/retired	22
Schools are resistant to change	18
Involvement with campaign might conflict with professional role	18
Problems with schools are financial	15
Respondent is involved in education on a national level	13
Outsiders cannot change schools	13
No obvious pathways to involvement if one doesn't have children	13
Involvement of respondent with independent sector (work or children)	12

Teachers are resistant to change	12
Too many government initiatives for schools to deal with already	11
Access to schools is difficult	10
Wouldn't know what to do to get involved	9
Won't be taken seriously (variety of reasons)	9
Can't answer question as stated	7
Partnership is what is needed	6
Local resistance to change	6
Don't want to interfere with hard pressed schools	6
Am already doing things locally	6
Unions would be resistant to change	3
Respondent wants to be more involved with education	3

Time is obviously the biggest factor, followed by a lack of connection with schools. The latter obstacle is often framed in terms of not having school age children which many seemed to see either as a reason not to be concerned with local education, or as a disqualifying factor to involvement. This was explicitly stated by 13 respondents who said that there were no obvious pathways to involvement with local education if one did not have school age children.

It was interesting that a number of respondents disqualified themselves from involvement on the grounds that they taught, or had children in, the private schools sector. Other concerns about being out of touch, not knowing anything about the National Curriculum, and lacking experience with school age children led to a sense that people fear 'not being taken seriously' by schools.

It is clear from this consultation that even among RSA Fellows with professional involvement in education, there are multiple barriers to involvement in local education, despite a strong sense that they could play a personal role and an even stronger sense that change is desirable. Much of the concern is about time, priorities and need to focus on other things, but a significant number of respondents cited a sense of not feeling qualified, not having an obvious route to involvement, or fearing not being taken seriously.

3. Do Fellows agree that a campaign is a good idea?

There was a very positive response to the idea of a campaign from a number of Fellows: "This email is inspiring", "I view this as an exciting and timely campaign", "the general thrust of a National Education Campaign as you outline it is excellent".

From the in depth consultation, Fellows that responded to the question 'would a charter inspire you to action at a local level' most agreed that it would. Fellows had some reservations: including that the charter might duplicate what was already being done by other initiatives, and that it was in fact too close to what the government was saying already and therefore needed to be more distinctive. However, several Fellows were keen to be involved at a deeper level and welcomed the opportunity to comment, and in the near future, to act.

Where Fellows disagreed with the concept of the campaign, it was about the idea of a campaign focussed on teachers, parents and students. Some thought that the idea was misconceived and that the campaign should be targeted at central government rather than at schools which, it was argued,

were doing all that they could: "I am less confident than you about the extent to which innovation can happen without some relaxation of the National Curriculum and testing regimes". Others, however, thought that "the focus on supporting local action is a good idea", with an emphasis on the importance of diversity and adjustment to local needs.

4. What did Fellows think about the role of a Charter in the campaign?

Not many Fellows saw the relevance of a charter to action in their local area. Often they stated that they supported the principles broadly, but did not make suggestions for how the Charter could assist existing or planned initiatives. A few suggestions were made: one Fellow thought that a charter would raise awareness generally of the sorts of things they were addressing in the school of which they were a head. No Fellows explicitly said that a charter would not help their initiatives.

The lack of explicit connection made by Fellows between the points of a charter and action that they are frequently already taking in their local area is perhaps indicative of the potential role for a campaign such as this: to provide the link between shared ideas and specific practice in local areas. The consultation has made clear that there is not necessarily a natural link in people's minds between the points of a Charter outlining a vision for education in the 21st century, and actions that they could be, or already are, taking. The Campaign might be able to make this link by disseminating examples with clear links to each point of the Charter: providing people with connections with each other and with the larger principles behind much educational practice through shared language.

5. What did Fellows think about the draft Charter?

Although the Charter was in draft form at the time of the consultation and was subject to significant revision, we thought that the views of Fellows would be useful to feed into the redrafting of the Charter and so invited comments, primarily in Phase 2, but also in Phase 1 of the consultation.

Comments on the Charter fell into two categories: comments on the content of the Charter (which were generally very favourable with a few notable exceptions) and comments on the tone of the Charter (where many Fellows had some reservations).

a. Content

Most Fellows agreed with the principles of the Charter, and several stated that they "fully supported" it and were "four square behind the aims". 67.1% of Fellows that completed the online survey said that they would sign up to the draft Charter as it stood, 17.2% that they did not know, and 15.7% that they would not.

Criticisms of the content of the Charter fell into three main camps:

- Firstly Fellows who thought that the principles in the Charter were too well established to be worth saying
- Secondly Fellows who objected to the perceived implication that education is currently about the transfer of knowledge and that knowledge should be demoted in favour of skills

- Thirdly Fellows who thought that the Charter contained too much 'motherhood and apple pie' and not enough 'grit', risking the Charter being written off as more of the kind of education commonly perceived to have failed in the 1960s and 1970s

b. Tone

Many Fellows found that the negative tone of the Charter to be unnecessary and potentially alienating:

The main argument for a more positive tone to the Charter was that negative statements risk alienating schools and teachers through implied criticism of current educational provision. By making generalisations about the current system it was felt by some Fellows that the Charter risks being written off by those who do not recognise the negative characterisation in their experience.

The other major theme in comments on the tone of the charter was a desire for something more concrete than broad aspirations. The provision of examples - which has always been a core element of the proposed campaign - should therefore reassure many Fellows who currently have concerns about the aspirational and potentially vague nature of the draft Charter.

Appendix A

The Draft Charter used for the consultation

1. The primary responsibility of a school should shift from achieving exam results to making sure that young people enjoy learning and exploring ideas, and are capable of carrying on learning throughout life

What do we mean?

Too many children and young people do not enjoy the experience of being at school, and leave school never wanting to learn again.

Children often experience a narrow curriculum which restricts their opportunities to explore their ideas and interests in favour of emphasising performance in tests. We believe schools can be creative, and make education exciting. However, the frequency of testing and the importance attached to a school's place in league tables has shifted the focus away from the breadth of learning and pleasure in education. The frequency of, and importance attached to testing has disillusioned parents, teachers and students on the purposes of learning.

The pace of economic and social change is fast, and it isn't going to slow. To thrive in an uncertain future, young people need to be confident learners, and creative, curious people. It is therefore schools pre-eminent role to instil in students a love of learning so that they are keen to learn while at school, and throughout their lives. To do that, young people need to have more leeway to inquire, and to pursue their learning with more freedom.

2. Schooling is not just about transmitting subject knowledge. Education in schools should seek to foster the emergence of wisdom in young people

What do we mean?

Fostering wisdom could be described as helping young people to think and act using the full breadth of their knowledge, having an understanding of their own needs, while taking account of the differing needs and perspectives of others. Most of the energy of schools goes into the development of the core knowledge, theoretical concepts and ideas behind the major subject disciplines.

This is an imbalance which needs to be redressed. Improved governance and democratic participation, climate change and other ecological problems, the growing pressure on resources associated with the global growth in consumption, diversity in the UK and the importance of social cohesion, are all major long term challenges which point to the importance of wisdom.

3. No child's experience of school should be defined by failure. Every child must enjoy success at school and schools have a responsibility to actively support all young people to fulfil their potential however they are intelligent or talented.

What do we mean?

The current criteria of 'success' in education (5 GCSEs at grade A-C) mean that around 40% of young people leave school having 'failed', on the basis that success in education means passing tests. We do not believe that any child's experience of school should be defined by failure, let alone 40%

of children. That doesn't mean exams should be made easier, or standards dropped. Instead, it means recognising that each of us will have different ways in which we prefer to learn, and in which we choose to express ourselves. Schools tend to teach, and students are tested, with an exclusive focus on logic, numbers, and linguistics. Those who learn through pictures, movement, or who excel within relationships and emotional awareness tend to find their talents squeezed out. They are forced to learn in ways that suit the system, not the student.

We need to stop saying that some ways of being clever or talented are better than others, and we must make sure schools' overriding concern is to work with all young people to achieve their full individual potential. This would involve understanding each individual's ambition and talents, and measuring their success in reaching the aims that matter to them and their families, rather than the government.

4. Schools should reduce the attainment gap between rich and poor students through working alongside other local services and the wider community

What do we mean?

The attainment gap between students of different socio-economic groups remains startling. Schools cannot, and should not, tackle this gap alone as there are often complex forms of disadvantage at work which prevent young people from achieving at school. Schools should instead work with a broad range of community services to provide holistic support to young people so that socio-economic background does not remain a defining factor in school attainment.

5. Schools should not be sites of conflict, but be intelligent communities where young people can learn to be happy and build relationships with peers and adults that are characterised by respect

What do we mean?

Teachers are forced to fight for control to make young people do what they don't want to do – sit still, listen and passively accept what they are told about subjects they often can't see the relevance of. The result is an ongoing, damaging and ultimately pointless conflict. Schools that are communities of learning rather than disciplinary institutions provide scope for children to form positive identities and productive relationships with peers and adults.

6. Students should work in partnership with their school to design their own learning and shape the way their school community operates

What do we mean?

Students should be able to exercise some control and ownership over what they learn and how they learn it. Children taking more responsibility over their own learning means that teacher's roles can be more about facilitating the learning of the students, providing support, resources and structure as they work together towards shared goals.

Students also have the right to be involved in the decision making and governance of the institutions that are designed for their education. Not only is this a learning process for students, but it can be linked to school improvement; relationships between students and staff are often improved, decision making will normally benefit.

7. Schools should engage parents in children's schooling

What do we mean?

It is now well established that support from parents can have a major impact on the attainment of children but at the moment parents are often uninvolved or disempowered, or have a combative relationship with those providing education for their children. More well-off families experience higher levels of parental engagement. Parents should be given the support they need to engage positively in the life of a school and the education of their children. Parents have a lot to offer the community of a school in terms of their time, effort, expertise about their children. They can have a role to play in assisting the design of education that fulfils the needs of their children. There is also a democratic purpose in giving parents more voice in the schooling of their children, thereby making schools more open and inclusive communities.

8. Schooling should be made relevant and disengagement prevented through the use of practical, real-life learning

What do we mean?

Currently the National Curriculum prescribes to children almost all of what they learn. The problem is students often do not know why they might need the knowledge being taught in the classroom. This switches many children off, and the impact on their life chances of the resultant disengagement from school can be severe. Children's learning is made more relevant by connecting it to real experience, places and situations in their local areas. This puts knowledge in context, and can excite young people about what they have to learn.

9. Teachers should not be 'deliverers' of a set curriculum, but instead act as creative professionals and curriculum developers

What do we mean?

The language of education often limits teachers to being the deliverers of a centrally-set curriculum, and head teachers as deliverers of standards and discipline. We believe that teachers and head teachers should be allowed to be creative professionals who are encouraged and enabled to innovate educational practice at school and classroom level.

Appendix B

Final Charter

Education for the 21st Century: A Charter

The world is changing rapidly. The globalised economy creates opportunity, challenge and unpredictability. The great challenges of sustainability and the shifting demographics of our population will require new thinking, and collective action. As we increase our understanding of human intelligence and behaviour, we know more about how we can learn effectively, and the value of learning throughout life. Meanwhile, young people bring with them the expectation not just to sit and listen, but to participate, to interact, and to shape.

The last ten years have seen the standard in education improve, the quality of teachers at all levels get better, and investment in buildings, IT and resources. However, in our changing context the old models of education born of the industrial age make little sense. If we want to help our young people to become the adults they will need to be to thrive in the 21st century, we need not just to adapt, but to transform.

This Charter sets out the principles we believe should inform future development of education for young people, in which we include learning of all kinds, whether formal or informal, and whether offered by schools, colleges, universities, training organisations or elsewhere.

The Charter

It is the primary purpose of education to awaken a love of learning in young people, and give them the ability and desire to carry on learning throughout life.

We need to recognise that education has many aims

Education must nurture creativity and capacity for independent and critical thought.

Young people should leave formal education equipped with the confidence, aptitude and skills they need for life and for work.

Education should help young people to understand how to be happy and to develop and maintain their own emotional, physical and mental well-being.

Every young person has the right to develop to their full potential

Ability comes in many forms and learners need to be supported to enjoy success no matter where their talents lie.

The educational success of learners should not depend on their background. Schools, communities and families must work together to close gaps in attainment.

The curriculum in schools and colleges should balance abstract and practical knowledge so that every learner can access high quality academic and vocational opportunities.

Education should engage the learner with exciting, relevant content and opportunities for learning through experience and by doing.

Education must be a partnership

Learners have a valuable role to play in contributing to the design of their own learning, and in shaping the way their learning environment operates.

The education of young people should be a partnership of schools, parents and the wider community in a local area.

Schools should be inclusive, creative communities which build tolerance, respect and empathy in young people.

We must trust our schools and education professionals

Every teacher should be a creative professional involved in the design of curricula and learning environments, and should be supported and developed to fulfil that role.

Every school should be different, every school innovative and we must find ways of holding them to account for their performance that rewards rather than stifles this creativity.

Appendix C

Examples of Practice

From Phase 1 of the consultation, Fellows were very forthcoming in providing the RSA with details of work already being done that fits with the principles embodied in the Charter, as well as providing some suggestions for future work that could be done. A sample of the examples are given below - they are enormously varied and responses ranged from full project details to just a few lines which reflects the open nature of the invitation to submit ideas:

Example 1 - Janus Community Alliance

"We are a member of the Janus Community Alliance which is a network of nine schools who share innovation. We also have a number of partner schools abroad so that we plan our curriculum to have a deeper level of learning. We began this by doing a history project with our partner school in Belgium on the World War and this involves joint residencies with children from both countries learning together. We are doing cultural work with our Hungarian partner next month when our school choir will sing in a concert. Each year we receive visits from both teachers and children from our partner school in Chongqing in China. This involves the teaching of Mandarin Chinese and curriculum projects on the Three Gorges Dam project and the Yangtze River. The difference is that we were the first primary school to take children to do this work in China with Chinese children working with our children. In October we will be taking children to China to do a Business and Enterprise project at our partner school and the Zongshen motorcycle factory. A number of years ago we purchased two minibuses so that we can take children to do first hand learning. We now have a third bus which enables us to do more exciting visits. We have very few behaviour problems on both our sites due to the high motivation of our students. Our results are also good without having to operate a narrow curriculum. The job satisfaction for our staff is also an important factor for us. It is often forgotten that if you operate a narrow test driven curriculum, then that has implications for the motivation of teachers as well."

Example 2 - English Secondary Students Association (ESSA)

ESSA is a student led and student run organisation which seeks to promote student voice through providing training, organisation and a forum to secondary school students in England. Founded by a student and run by a council of 18 11-19 year olds, ESSA provides school students with the tools they require to exert some influence over their learning environment, their school environment and the nature of their education.

Example 3 - Heads Serving High Poverty Communities

"I would be really interested in working on a project with RSA on bringing together a small group of heads serving high poverty communities (white working class estates really - communities particularly hit by the social policy agenda) as sharing within similar communities is often more productive of change than across localities. I know some that would be key supportive figures in such a project and could draw in more."

Example 4 - Student and Parent Lesson Evaluation

"Engaging children and young people is in my view a necessary condition for bridging the attainment gap. This is in itself a broad area requiring a range of strategies. My focus is on lesson quality. Young people need to be supported in becoming independent learners. They also need to develop skills in working with others and getting the best out of teaching and the use of IT. I suggest a project that aims to train young people to judge the quality of lessons; to inform subsequent learning and provide guidance on what actions they need to take in preparation for the next lesson. The underlying principle being that a lesson should have clearly defined objectives for each learner and link to the next one. Point 7 involves parents in such an exercise. If the project requires an evaluation of every relevant lesson this should be shared with parents. A pilot might include parents trained to conduct lesson observation in the same way. Involving young people and their parents in judging lessons can not work where 'schools are sites of conflict'. If teacher professionalism is valued, however, then the evaluation process can be de-personalised and used to secure improvements for individual learners."

Example 5 - Quality Care Campaign and Hove Park School

"One of our key objectives to achieving sustained quality care is through a highly trained workforce. The care industry is keen to work with schools to enable young learners to have an insight into the vital role care homes play in our society. My own care homes have been working with Hove Park School over the last few years and it has been a most successful partnership."

The campaign's goal is to ensure that the new Care Quality Commission enables social care providers to deliver a quality care service by:

Placing residential care at the heart of communities and recognising care as a positive career choice for young learners at school

Ensuring every home complies with minimum regulatory standards

Assuring public confidence in Residential Care by challenging negative perceptions and stereotypes and highlighting the vital role care homes play in our society

Commissioning care on quality and not cost

Establishing robust costing models that enable providers to deliver quality care

"This has been a wonderful experience for our young people and broadened their experience and skills. The opportunities they have had to work with the staff and residents have been enormously influential and I know that it will be remembered for many years." Tim Bartlett Head Master Hove Park School

"We value the partnership between the Pembroke and ourselves. As a school, the opportunities given to us to enable our students to experience real situations are invaluable both for their course and their futures. We also value the opportunity to change minds, perceptions and stereotypes across the generations. Our students who follow health and social care will without doubt be far more skilled in their approach in their future careers thanks to their experiences at the Pembroke" Carole Lee Head Teacher Hove Park School

"The Pembroke has been delighted to facilitate this very successful partnership with Hove Park School. The students have impressed both residents and staff by their professional approach and natural caring instincts. A mutual respect has developed over the year and permanent friendships have developed. I wish the students every success and hope that some of them will think seriously

about becoming professional carers in the future, the industry needs people just like them." Sue Brand Proprietor Pembroke Hotel

"It has been a wonderful experience as oldies, having contact with the younger generation. It goes to prove teenagers are not all bad." Len Chapman Resident

"It opened our eyes to the real world and the responsibilities we will have when we enter it. It also gave us skills we can use as well" Fiona Navan Student Hove Park School

Example 6 - Where is my school?

"One way to promote the charter is by putting it to work in a concrete project. A group of parents in my neighbourhood are working to start a new local secondary school (<http://www.whereismyschool.org.uk>). Perhaps the RSA campaign could work with them, to help them establish a school along the lines of this charter."