PROJECT COUNCIL

#BigEdConversation  #MillionConversations
ABOUT THE PROJECT COUNCIL

Who we are
- A diverse group of 25 young people aged 13 – 19, from across England
- A group of leaders
- Experts by experience, who are passionate about changing education for the better

How we work together
- Monthly project council zoom meetings
- Quarterly in-person meetings
WHAT WE DID

We held **SIX BECs** across England, reaching mainstream schools, students in alternative provision and neurodiverse students.

Project Council members **designed** and **facilitated** every BEC, with support from Leaders Unlocked.

Our BECs included:
- standing debates
- group discussions
- creative activities
BEC DESIGN

The Project Council aimed to:

- gather young people’s **views** on the purpose of education, the current system and ideas for change
- be **inclusive** of students in alternative provision and neurodiverse students

The Project Council felt a strong sense of **ownership, pride and purpose** in the design.
BEC DESIGN

The Council created:

- an **agenda** for the BECs
- a pool of **standing debate** questions, to get participants moving and sharing
- a set of **creative activities**

Our **creative activities** included:

- storytelling
- poetry
- drawing

They were designed to reach **neurodiverse** participants and anyone who might not feel comfortable sharing aloud.
WHAT WE HEARD

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION
THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

CURRENTLY ON SHAKY GROUND

The system is built on shaky ground:
- A fragile \textit{victorian} system
- \textit{Fearmongering}
- Perpetuates \textit{elitism}
- Teachers have a \textit{superior} attitude

"The current status of education is where you are taught to be institution-alised and be a \textit{follower}, instead of a \textit{leader} or entrepreneur."

It's a system with the wrong aims:
- Prepares for \textit{subservience}
- Doesn't encourage \textit{leadership}

"School is pretty much, sit down, shut up, let me teach you how to work in a \textit{9-5 office job} instead of doing what you love and learning life skills!"
THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

SHOULD BE A PREPARATION FOR LIFE

Education should be about **LIFE**, not just **WORK**.

Education should be about **DISCOVERY** and self-understanding.

“**It should be more about LIFE SKILLS and more PERSON-CENTRED,**”

“I still don’t know what I want to do with MY LIFE,”

“What is it **supposed** to be? A system that prepares you **FOR LIFE,**”

“The future should be for wider career **OPTIONS** and advice and help to be an **ENTREPRENEUR**,”

LEADERS UNLOCKED
WHAT WE HEARD

VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SYSTEM
EXAM STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Exam Stress** can take a toll on students’ mental health.

It feels like there’s more focus on academic results than on **wellbeing**.

“Teachers put a lot of pressure on students. It’s all about the exams.”

“Can I share my personal experience? My maths teacher put a lot of pressure on us because of an exam but I got so stressed I couldn’t focus on the questions... I had to leave the room and then I **puked up**.”

“If you go to a teacher for help with academic things, they’ll help you but if it’s about socio-emotional stuff, that’ll get **less attention**. I know academics is the point of school but it would be better if they cared about **emotions** too.”
LABELS CAN BE HARD TO SHAKE

Many students are labelled and allowed to become **self-fulfilling prophecies**.

"If you get a punishment, you start to see yourself in a **negative** way."

Sets and exam results are often the source of these labels.

"I was dropped to a lower set. From there, the **hope was gone**."

"I was labelled as **gifted** but felt **too much pressure** and felt like I was failing... Now I'm outside education I feel much more proud."

**LEADERS UNLOCKED**
**Low Awareness of Diverse Needs**

Students with diverse needs—including neurodiverse and disabled students—often face **Stigma**.

“There’s a lot of **Stigma** in mainstream.”

“At my previous school I had no one. Everyone **bullied** me.”

“Everyone knows you’re going there because something is **wrong.”**

**Mainstream** is often hard.

“Teachers don’t always understand what needs to be in place. I’m disabled and don’t always get **understood**.”

But **alternative provision** can be different.

“When I was diagnosed when I was 8, I didn’t even know what autism was, this school **helped me** to understand it.”
WHAT WE HEARD
IDEAS FOR CHANGE
MORE SUPPORT FOR WELLBEING

Ways of **REDUCING PRESSURE** should be built in to the system.

**“Teachers need to recognise and PREVENT how much pressure that they are putting on people.”**

**“It would be good to have the ability to SIT THINGS OUT when it feels too much.”**

Strong and close **RELATIONSHIPS** with teachers are really important to students.

**“Students need more ONE-TO-ONE support. Meet them where they are.”**

Students described their ideal teacher as:

- “Understanding, patient and a good listener.”
- “Respectful, thoughtful, someone with good listening skills.”
IDEAS FOR CHANGE

BEHAVIOUR SYSTEMS
BUILT ON EMPATHY

Behaviour systems should prioritise students’ WELFARE and foster mutual UNDERSTANDING.

“There should be HELP for disruptive students.”

“In the future, the teacher is RESPECTFUL and EMPATHETIC and helps the student to calm down and return to study.”

Teachers should be trained in INCLUSIVE and COMPASSIONATE behaviour management.

“There should be more SUPPORT, some young people have mental ill health or other NON-VISIBLE things such as ADHD.”

LEADERS UNLOCKED
IDEAS FOR CHANGE

A MORE DYNAMIC CURRICULUM

The curriculum should be more enjoyable.

And it should also prepare students for real-world challenges.

“There should be more fun, but educational activities.”

“We should have opportunities for youth leadership.”

It should involve more applied learning.

“If there’s a fight they say ‘Tell your teacher’, but in the real world there aren’t teachers. What do you do?”

“We should cover more first aid in PSE, as well as mental health first aid.”

“They teach you mathematics but not applied.”
WHAT WE HEARD

OUR SURVEY
At our BEC in Hull, we conducted a survey of the 18 young people who attended. Here is a selection of the results.

Knowledge is not the same as intelligence

- Agree: 44%
- Neutral: 39%
- Disagree: 17%

Is pressure in the school system necessary?

- Agree: 61%
- Neutral: 11%
- Disagree: 28%

Removing students from the classroom does more harm than good

- Agree: 33%
- Neutral: 17%
- Disagree: 50%

School prepares students for the real world

- Agree: 61%
- Neutral: 11%
- Disagree: 28%
CREATIVE RESPONSES

DRAW SOME CHANGE

Help with mental health
Stereotypes
more exam help
Experience
GCSE
less strict
less pressure
life

Parking bay: Good
Conduct card
Toilets
Cubicles in girls
Changing room

Draw Some Change!

Toilet
Free good
deficit

more suitable
substitutes
less stick

less stick in
general

less stick

contacts

no contact cold

Not allowed

Change in
cracks

Child 2, 3

Notebooks
CREATIVE RESPONSES

MY IDEAL TEACHER

**What?**

**Why?**

- Kind
- Funny
- Lively
- Helps w/ problems
- Jokes usual
- Social side
- Sporty (plays sports)
- Have similar interests

**Who?**

- *Jenny*

**Where?**

- The best room ever

- Teachers

**When?**

- Every day

- 9 to 3:30

**Why not?**

- Fun
- Not snotty

- RAT

- Toilet pass

- Teacher

- Hi!
School is cruel,
Some may say,
Another exam,
Another day,
And when that day has dawned on you,
We still have piles of work to do,
We still have hours we have to cram,
Just to pass the next exam.

Everyone takes the same class,
But some stand out from the mass,
We are too focused on our future,
Never able to live in the moment.

Education system ever so outdated,
Schools not realising students stress,
Leading to declines in mental health,
When will they realise not one system fits all?

Disabilities are liabilities
the expectations are high
but the support is low
you’re always on the verge of tears,
do your teachers even know?
Should they show you more care?
Do they even know you’re there?
Separated from the smart,
You were doomed from the start.
CONTACT US

The work outlined in this report was conducted by Leaders Unlocked, in partnership with Big Change.

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