

City of London Education Services Company (ESC) Feasibility Study

Education Development Trust and ISOS Partnership

1. Background

As a contribution to its education, skills and cultural and creative learning strategies for 2018-23, and to inform its broader vision, the City of London Corporation (henceforth referred to as “the City”) commissioned Education Development Trust and the ISOS Partnership to carry out a feasibility study. The original purpose of the study was *to explore the potential for an Education Services Company (ESC) to support the City’s Family of Schools and additionally support and provide services to other schools across London and beyond.* Following early discussions with the Education Strategy Unit, the study also explored other potential ways for the City to harness its educational, cultural and business assets and expertise to improve outcomes for learners across London and beyond. Over time, with agreement from the City, the original brief evolved towards exploration of alternatives to an ESC.

We have now completed our study. The attached slides detail our process, findings and recommendations. The key points from the slides are summarised below:

2. Process

To gain a deeper understanding of possible foci of activities the City could undertake, the study tested the feasibility of a greater City role in the following areas:

- **Back-office support to schools (e.g. finance, HR, facilities management, etc.)**
- **School Improvement support**
- **Added value and Innovation (i.e. – career learning, cultural learning and fusion skills)**

These were examined across three potential beneficiary groups – the City of London Family of Schools, Livery Company supported schools and schools across London, England and beyond. The study commenced in October 2019 and was completed in April 2020 in two main phases.

- **Phase I** – an exploratory phase which took place between October and December 2019. The focus of this phase was to gather insight from key stakeholders across various institutions into where the City should invest to best support schools in the City and beyond.
- **Phase II** – a phase of targeted testing which took place between January and March 2020. Based on the findings from phase one, this phase focused on targeted testing of the feasibility of a City ESC and alternative City initiatives through additional interviews and market analysis.
- **Phase III** - Further development of the fusion skills-related offer.

Across the phases the following activities took place:

- **Initial desk-based research:** This included the understanding of the current City of London offer and assets, research of key initiatives taking place (e.g. Culture Mile), light market analysis and review of strategic documents.
- **Focus Groups:** The study team facilitated three focus groups with an overall attendance of c.30 participants from schools, city businesses, and cultural institutions, each discussing one or several of the potential activity area for the City. This included: cultural learning and fusion skills, career-related learning, back-office support and school improvement.
- **Interviews:** The study team interviewed close to 20 stakeholders from a variety of organisations. Some of which included: headteachers from the City of London Family of Schools, representatives of the CoLAT, Livery Companies, City businesses, Culture Mile Learning, City cultural institutions, headteachers outside of London, and the Durham Commission,

- **Targeted market analysis:** A review and analysis of the market in the areas of back office and cultural CPD.

3. Key initial findings and recommendations:

We outline our detailed findings against each of the three areas of potential activity in more detail in the full powerpoint report. We have summarised below the main findings and recommendations in relation to each area:

- **Back-office support.** Views on demand for services in this area were mixed with some Liveries interested in a more co-ordinated and joined-up offer. On the supply side there is limited expertise available and lots of potential competitors. For these reasons we recommend developing their own offer is not an area the City should prioritise.. Instead we would suggest time and effort is better spent on deepening CoLAT's work to secure efficiencies across the Family of Schools and sharing of back office expertise across Livery company schools. The latter could take a number of forms as the recent paper (29.04.20) to the City of London and Livery Company Education network on Governance and Compliance set out; from creating a centralised HR and legal service or collaborating to procure external service providers to more of a 'Trustpilot' shared database of expertise and sharing this expertise across schools.
- **School improvement.** There was limited demand from either the Family of Schools or wider Livery network for further school improvement services given the existing support that is provided already. Nationally, this is a crowded market with schools receiving support from many different sources. Given this, we do not consider that the City should try to enter the school improvement market at this stage. The one consistent need identified around teacher recruitment and retention is a difficult one for the City to support on a national scale and it is already working across the family on this. The City should continue to invest in developing CoLAT's school improvement offer and facilitating collaboration with and amongst Livery Companies by identifying common priorities and sharing expertise. Governor support is one area where the City and Livery Companies working together may be able to achieve greater impact and scale.
- **Added value and innovation.** Overall, our analysis strongly suggests that this is the strand where the City has the most unique, valuable, and sustainable role to play locally, nationally and possibly globally. There is significant appetite from cultural partners, schools in the Family and the Livery Companies to collaborate to transform schools' approaches to cultural learning, aligned to Culture Mile Learning's current strategy and longer-term ambitions. Fusion Skills was identified as the domain where the City could make the most difference: designing scalable models of practice that can influence debate, policy and practice; and playing a global 'system leadership' role. Fusion Skills is already embedded in the City's education and culture strategies, and there are existing programmes, relationships and goodwill to build on. In short, Fusion Skills is the area where there is the most significant alignment between the strategy/assets of the City and the needs/interests of schools and the school system.

Overall our analysis suggests that:

1. The City should not invest resources in creating an Education Services Company.
2. The City's most immediate priority should be to consolidate the relationships and practices within its existing Family of Schools.
3. There are possibilities for further exploration and investment that go beyond the ESC, but might provide foundations for a future ESC. The City could:
 - a) Increase its efforts to foster back-office and school improvement-focussed collaborations between the CoLAT, its broader Family of Schools and the Livery Companies
 - b) Pilot a CPD programme for teachers, drawing on all of the City's assets to support schools' aspirations to improve curriculum design, cultural capital and fusion skills

- c) Play a national leadership role on fusion skills by building a long-term, system-changing collaboration between a larger number of schools and the City's cultural and business institutions
- d) Contribute to the City's ambitions to improve social mobility by working in a deep, sustained way with one or two areas of significant economic and educational challenge

4. Fusion Skills: Recommendations and next steps

Following consultation with the Town Clerk and other Members you asked us to focus any further work on the development of idea c: the creation of a long-term, system-changing collaboration between a larger number of schools and the City's cultural and business institutions around Fusion Skills. Within this, we were asked to explore possibilities around the fourth idea: a targeted geographical offer.

4a. Reminder – Why the focus on Fusion Skills?

We identify three reasons why we think this is such a critical area for the City to focus on:

- This area is of high priority for schools today due to employers demands and the changing labour market, but the system in England appears 'stuck' and unable to develop the long-term thinking and action that such an agenda requires
- Fusion Skills are already embedded in the City's education and culture strategies, and there are existing programmes, relationships and goodwill to build on.
- The need in developing Fusion Skills cuts across the various school partnerships and structures, enabling the City to create an initiative that reaches a wide group of schools.

4b. What might any new offer around Fusion Skills include?

We have identified seven potential areas we think the City could focus on in developing the future offer around Fusion Skills:

1. **Pedagogical innovation and Joint Practice Development.** Support a small number of schools to become genuine test beds for robust, innovative pedagogies and other classroom-based practices that support Fusion Skills.
2. **Pilot Fusion Skills programmes.** Design, trial and scale age-specific, subject-specific and cross-cutting programmes, including family learning and school-to-work transition. Explore possibilities for blended/hybrid learning
3. **Curriculum design and focused peer review.** Support schools to review their current curriculum offer and identify how to strengthen the development of fusion skills. Develop a tailored Fusion Skills peer-review offer.
4. **Develop CPD and Leadership Development programmes.** Use resources of the City and Livery to develop high quality resources to support schools on Fusion Skills. Trial the concept of an accredited 'Fusion Skills City Teacher'.
5. **Apprenticeship Pathways.** Work with providers (including City and Guilds) to include Fusion Skills as a structured part of the programme of learning, learner portfolios and the "20% off the job element".
6. **Assessment and Qualifications.** Develop fusion skills-infused approaches to assessment and qualifications design, with a possible focus on alternatives to GCSEs.
7. **Governor support.** Develop a national network of "Fusion Skills Champion Governors" to promote these skills. Explore the development of shared governor audit teams and Governor Peer Reviews.

We believe that these separate strands of activity need to be underpinned by a new organisation with the following remit:

- Advocacy, research, policy development and influence
- A deep partnership with a small number school groups, City-based businesses and organisations with a long-term commitment to leading systemic change

- A broad offer for a wider group of schools
- A targeted geographical offer to work in a deep sustained ways with one-to-two areas of significant economic and challenge (including an Opportunity Area outside London)

4c. Why is there a need to create a new organisation to take this work forward?

From our work to date, it is unclear whether the existing structures, or the City Itself, has the requisite institutional form to take a more systemic, transformative approach to fusion skills. In addition, the City is limited by a governance, commissioning, committee and risk structure, both as a corporation and local authority, which could hinder the rapid and responsive approach needed for this type of programme. We believe that achieving these goals requires a deeper, longer-term collaboration between a larger number of schools and the City's cultural and business institutions. These schools and institutions should become Fusion Skills world leaders and innovators, and the City itself should play a system leadership role.

For this reason, we suggest the City should develop a City Fusion Skills Civic Trust that could enable long term, systemic collaboration on the most complex and ambitious fusion-skills-related objectives, building a coalition/critical mass of committed schools that includes but is not limited to the City Family and the Livery-supported schools. Schools would be connected to a wider, more radical mission that seems too risky to achieve independently. Cultural and business institutions would provide long-term backing and relationships to support this mission. Whilst the Trust would focus on Fusion Skills, it would provide a forum for self-generated collaboration on other standard school improvement and back-office priorities. The annex to our report includes a number of English and international examples to learn from.

4d. What might the new organisation look like and how might the financing work?

We suggest a Fusion Skills Civic Trust could follow the basic model of an Umbrella Trust where groups of schools (including but not limited to Academies and MATs) and other partners (e.g. businesses, HEIs) agree to work together over the long-term through a formal collaborative partnership. There are a number of potential advantages to this approach over others we have considered but most important is that the terms of the partnership encourages long-term, sustained, collaboration without changing the overall governance of individual institutions or the MAT, and any related accountabilities. Crucially, Umbrella Trusts are not accountable for school performance, and have no formal intervention powers - therefore, the fundamental principle of school/MAT autonomy remains.

Umbrella Trusts can take many forms and can develop their own Memorandums of Understanding with individual schools and other partners. More work would be needed to develop the detailed legal and governance model but we outline one potential model in the report for membership of any Trust linked to financial contributions. On this basis the City would take a 25% membership stake, Liveries and Businesses would take 25% each and the rest might be allocated to smaller members who pay an annual membership or one off fee. Cultural institutions might also be given a member stake in recognition of any in-kind contributions they make.

The report sets out the principles for a financial model. This shows that the City is likely to need to make an upfront investment of £250,000 per year to build and develop the capacity of the organisation but that this should become a declining proportion of the Trust's overall revenue over time as the revenue from other partners and from traded activities increases over time. We suggest you should aim for upfront financial commitment from a small number of Livery Companies and Business organisations so they have a strong commitment to the Trust from the start and to increase the number over time as the Trust demonstrates its impact. Our initial estimates suggest the Fusion Skills Civic Trust would need a budget of £500,000 in Year 1 growing to £1million by Year 3. Year 1 costs are estimated between £400,000-£500,000.

4e. How could this work be taken forward next?

We have included a proposed timeline with suggested milestones and activities, with a view to a 'soft launch' of the Trust at the October Fusion Skills conference, and creating a fully operational Trust for the start of the 2021-22 academic year. We have also suggested the following next steps to maintain momentum:

- Developing a more detailed programme of work
- Testing interest and appetite from key Livery Companies and other school groups
- Interviewing key stakeholders, including within DfE and targeted Academy Trusts, to understand how the Trust could work with areas in significant economic and education challenge
- Developing more detailed options for financial models and governance models

We thank everyone involved for their active participation in this work would be delighted to discuss our findings further with the Board and other colleagues from across the Corporation.

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