A place for learning

Putting learning at the heart of citizenship, civic identity and community life

POWER TO CREATE

RSA

21st century enlightenment

A place for learning

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Tony Breslin FRSA

POWER TO CREATE

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Foreword

A place for learning, the third paper in the RSA's *Power to Create* series is not framed in the conventional manner of a report on a key issue, in this case lifelong learning. Instead, Tony Breslin's text is built around a memorandum from an outgoing and highly regarded director of education to a newly elected city mayor outlining a set of policy proposals. We have chosen this format for three reasons:

1. Although we shall doubtless continue to produce reports in more established formats, we sense that there might be some report-fatigue out there, and since our mission – none more so than in this series – is focused on encouraging individuals and organisations to embrace what we call the 'Power to Create' and to have the confidence and capacity to be creative in all that they do, we feel that we ought to 'walk the talk' and bring some creativity to the style of our own reporting.
2. We want to emphasise and make real the importance of place and of locality in all of this. Certainly, since the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) and the incorporation of FE colleges in the early 1990s, and arguably since the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority over a decade earlier, most would accept that the role of local government in education has been in progressive decline, a decline that culminated in the white paper, *Education Excellence Everywhere*, published in spring 2016, with its proposal for a fully (or perhaps now largely) 'academised' school system. Of course, local authorities could simply depart the stage, either gracefully or in protest, or they could carve a new role: inspiring, leading and cajoling various local partners drawn from every sector and walk of life into autonomous, locally-grounded movements that place the importance of education and learning at the heart

of citizenship, civic purpose and community identity. We rather like this option – one which challenges traditional rationales for educational endeavour and which we have given further exposure to in our recent and on-going activities in two related areas referenced in these pages: our work on Cities of Learning led by Anthony Painter, and our work on the future of further education, led by Mark Londesborough.

3. We want to give voice to those who work in education, especially those of creative and progressive intent. For this reason, we have chosen the vehicle of a memo and an accompanying policy paper, from a retiring director of education, Mike Barter, to a newly elected city mayor, Essi Spanier. Mike has "seen and done it all" and grown a little cynical in the process (sound familiar?) but he has also found himself improbably inspired by the education-focused campaign of the subsequently successful mayoral candidate, Essi, whose very existence owes much to what, not too long ago, we used to call "New Localism".

As well as the memo and accompanying paper, the author also provides a brief outline of Kensalfied, our notional city. Kensalfield is not entirely a work of fiction. Especially if you live in one of the UK's smaller cities or larger towns, you will see points of recognition. In providing this detail on an imagined place and local authority, the aim is not to 'embellish the story'; it is conversely, that the thinking herein is based on real places, the proposals on realistic circumstances, and the concerns on the needs and aspirations of real people.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to three themes that run through the analysis presented in these pages. First, if we are to build a culture of lifelong learning in our communities and our society that is genuinely 'cradle to grave', we have to change what we do in our schools. In particular, we need to think about how we engage families, and the communities from which these families emerge, in the life of the school: lifelong learning does not follow schooling – rather, it embraces and re-purposes schooling as a key juncture on every individual's learning journey.

Second, what my RSA colleague Anthony Painter has framed as the "new digital learning age" in the first paper in this series, offers us opportunities to remodel and widen access to education in a host of ways, most of which we have yet to imagine, but we will only be able to imagine these possibilities if we are willing to *unlearn* much of what we know about learning first.

Third, one outcome of this 'unlearning' must be a wider rebalancing of the public discourse about educational *purpose*. Yes, learning will need to continue to prepare individuals for employment in whatever form it takes – and support individuals and families as they navigate the multiple career transitions of 21st century working life – but it must also enable individuals to strive and thrive in every aspect of their life beyond the workplace: as citizens, as local residents, and as family and community members.

And although Tony Breslin articulates this thinking through the imagined city of Kensalfield, we might pose the question to civic, business and community leaders, educationalists and policy influencers in the private, public and voluntary sectors: could your region, city or town embrace the spirit of Kensalfield, a city of learning in every sense of the term? If, by the end of this paper, you're even thinking that the answer *could* be "Yes", come and talk to us. We'd love to work with you to make Kensalfield a reality in your community, town or city; we believe the outcome could be transformational for all concerned.

Matthew Taylor
Chief Executive, RSA

October 2016

Kensalfield

Kensalfield could be any small or medium-sized city in the UK, or it could be a larger town, one of those 'near-cities' lacking only in a cathedral, but, to provide some hooks on which to hang the narrative in this document, we have given it some characteristics.

Kensalfield has a population of just over 310,000, making it the 12th largest city in England and the 14th largest in the UK. It was substantially extended in the 1950s and 1960s, at around the time that the 'new towns' initiative was giving rise to places like Corby, Hemel Hempstead and Milton Keynes, and is the UK's second most diverse city. Just under half of the population define themselves as white British while a quarter identify as Indian. The white British population is, on average, six years older than the minority ethnic population. Kensalfield is a comparatively young city, with an average age of 36.7 (against a national average of 38.7 across England and Wales); 8 percent of its population are aged under four while 16 percent are over 65; 53 percent of the population is female. The numbers that are economically active are comparable with UK averages: 84 percent (83.2 percent) and 71 percent (72.5 percent) but there are significant differences between the affluent west and the poorer east of the city and, to a lesser degree, between the wealthy south and the comparatively less well-off north.

The most deprived wards include Harlesford, to the north of the city centre, Mann Green, a large mono-cultural (and 'white') 1970s social housing development to the east, and Mills Brook, a former industrial area to the southeast and site of the prison and the Kensal Cross retail and leisure development. More affluent areas include Parkland, an affluent, new build suburb to the southwest of the city, Morefield, another affluent suburb, also to the southwest, and Fortunes Rise, home to the university and a large student and graduate population to the northeast. The most diverse wards are both on the edge of the city centre: Willesby, a diverse inner city area just to the south which is proving increasingly popular with young professionals, and Canalside, a regeneration area to the west

and home to the city's new Arts Hub and many of Kensalfield's creative industries.

In terms of educational infrastructure, Kensalfied has:

- Three FE colleges across five sites: Kensalfield New College, City and Willesby College, Mann Green FE College.
- 22 secondary schools, nine of which are academies, and several more outside the city's boundaries which are accessible from it.
- One university technical college.
- Seven children's centres, down from 11 five years ago.
- 68 primary schools, six of which are academies or free schools.
- Five special schools.
- Three pupil referral units
- Four independent 'prep' schools.
- Two independent secondary schools, one with HMC status.
- One university, Kensalfield Metropolitan University – a 'new' university that was formerly Kensalfield Polytechnic.
- A recently opened arts centre and theatre, where the Kensal Community Arts Hub is based.
- An active Education Business Partnership.
- Eight public libraries, down from 13 five years ago, and two mobile 'book buses' operated by the library service.

Beyond the educational sphere, Kensalfield offers a wider infrastructure that includes:

- One Category A prison (HMP Kensal).
- One open prison (Willesby Manor, privately operated).
- Two NHS hospitals (City and Canalside) and one NHS urgent care centre, all overseen by one NHS trust, as well as one private hospital, operated by one of the major national care groups.
- 58 care homes or sheltered housing complexes.

- Six community centres and five sports and leisure centres.
- One professional football club, established in the Championship, which plays at the council-owned Kensalfield Arena, which has a popular and nationally recognised outreach programme focused on “football in the community”.
- 40 active places of worship, representing all of the major faiths.
- Five FTSE 100 companies.

Kensalfield has no specific identity-defining industry, such as steel or pottery or shipbuilding, but partly due to a location that grants it easy access to the UK motorway network, it has particular strengths in logistics, warehousing and science, as well as a growing range of businesses focused on emergent technologies. It also has a growing cultural sector, based largely, as noted above, around the recently formed Kensalfield Community Arts Hub, centered on the new Kensalfield Arts Centre and theatre in the Canalside regeneration district.

Memorandum

To: Essi Spanier, Mayor of Kensalfield
From: Mike Barter, Director, Education and Learning
Date: 4 October 2016

Placing learning at the heart of our civic culture

First, as the outgoing Director, Education and Learning, let me congratulate you on your election as the first Mayor of Kensalfield. Let me also say how welcome was your focus on education in general, and lifelong learning in particular, in the campaign leading up to your election.

The paper that accompanies this memo sets out 20 steps that might be taken to help deliver the educational objectives you emphasised during the course of your campaign to become mayor. These are not steps to be taken simply by you or by the city council (although your leadership both of the council and the wider community will be instrumental to their success, and the access that you will enjoy to local 'influencers' and 'powerbrokers' can act as a catalyst for change). Rather, they are steps that we need to take as a community; actions that need to be *taken* by people, rather than *done* to them.

You have said that you want education and learning to be the heart of our city's civic culture, that you see learning as central to the rejuvenation of our city and to unleashing the creativity of our people, and that you want this culture to not just be focused on schools but on "any setting in which learning could take place".

Courageously, you have also contended that learning is not just about developing the employability of our people, vital though this is; it is about developing the ability of Kensalfield residents to engage as citizens and to use leisure time effectively and for personal and family fulfilment. I concur wholeheartedly with your view that learning should be "celebrated

for its value in empowering us across a triple scorecard: as individuals, as citizens, and as employees and entrepreneurs".

Education is a tool that no one can take away from you

Kate Hunter, Tutor of the Year, Regional Award London and South East England

Indeed, given that it has been predicted that "47 percent of US jobs are at risk from automation in the next decade or two" (Barber, 2016), my view is that we cannot continue to tie the purpose of education *solely* to the *promise* of employment and career, even if to move away from such a position will prove politically difficult.

The 20 suggestions outlined in the paper – 15 of which have an overtly local focus – are inspired by your election campaign. They are likely to take place across a range of settings and will need to be taken by a range of partners working together, for instance:

- Schools and children's centres.
- Colleges, libraries and the university.
- Employers and employers' organisations.
- Stakeholders active across a multiplicity of sectors and fields, including those engaged in sports and leisure, health and social care, and criminal justice.
- Creative and cultural institutions and organisations, including the recently established Arts Hub.
- Community and third sector organisations, including our various faith communities.

To reiterate, the suggestion is not that you should seek to 'action' each of these ideas – your inbox will include many other priorities beyond the realm of education and, of course, there will be budgetary constraints – but please do explore the possibilities offered by each, with a view to doing something in each of these settings and with each of these partners. This is vital if you are to make your stated aspiration a reality – that you want Kensalfield to become a 'City of Learning' during the course of your tenure.

These ideas have been developed following a workshop, held at City Hall last month and convened by the Education and Learning Directorate that I lead. Participants included various senior city council officers, including the chief executive, and a range of influential local figures – such as directors, CEOs, chairs and principals – drawn from almost 30 locally based organisations and a range of sectors, including:

- Kensalfield New College
- Mann Green FE College
- Kensalfield Primary Headteachers' Forum
- Kensalfield Secondary Headteachers' Forum
- Kensalfield Churches Together
- Kensalfield Interfaith Forum
- Kensalfield UTC
- Kensalfield Community Museum Project
- Kensalfield NUT
- Kensalfield Youth Offending Team
- Kensalfield Community Arts Hub
- Harlesford Women's Centre
- Morefield Special School
- Kensalfield On-line
- Workers' Educational Association, Kensalfield
- Kensalfield Gazette
- HMP Kensal
- Kensalfield Youth Council
- Canalside and Willesby Business Forum
- Kensalfield Chamber of Commerce
- Mills Brook Family Centre
- Harlesford Children's Centre
- Kensalfield Widening Participation Project
- Willesby Community Relations Council
- Kensalfield Third Sector Forum
- City and Canalside NHS Hospital Trust
- Harlesford and District Age UK
- Kensalfield Metropolitan University
- Kensalfield Metropolitan University NUS

Others, including some leading figures in education, business and the local community, who were unable to join us at the workshop, will have more – and may have better – ideas, and you should harness these, but those suggestions offered in the pages that follow are intended to provide a starting point.

Many of these suggestions are effectively cost-neutral; they are less about expenditure and more about orientation, ambition and moral purpose – although we will need to budget for the increased demand for learning that we hope will be an outcome from the efforts proposed. Others, notably our efforts to celebrate learners' success might attract commercial sponsorship. Some, especially those targeted at closing the

With the right help and the right attitude we can achieve amazing things, often things which we did not think possible, overcoming the odds and realising that we can do it

Graham Hasting-Evans
Managing Director, NOCN

achievement gap between our less and more wealthy residents, between males and females, and between our different ethnic, cultural and faith communities, may attract funding from a range of government initiatives in this sphere, from the various National Lottery funds, or from specific charitable trusts and foundations who share our aspirations, such as the Education Endowment Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Finally, I am convinced that we should not confine our thinking to the city's boundaries. We need to be a regional and national player in the various debates about the future of learning. To this end, the city council ought to work with its partners and stakeholders to agree on five or six areas of priority on which, as a city (rather than just a council), we should lobby for changes to education and skills policy nationally. Further, we should seek support for these priorities from our four members of parliament, and renew these priorities annually or upon their achievement. It is for this reason that, alongside the 15 locally-focused proposals, I suggest five national reforms and/or campaigns that we ought to call for or support, but these ought properly to be discussed across the authority and with our stakeholders, and agreed by all.

As you are aware, I retire as Director, Education and Learning at the end of the calendar year. Perhaps we can build some of the thinking outlined here into the induction process for my successor, Shula Hogarth, who took part in the workshop and who has a fine record in just this kind of work. As you may know, Shula joins us having spent the past five years leading one of the key players in the lifelong learning field after beginning her career as a primary school teacher in Monks Langley, just 15 miles to the west of Kensalfield, before going on to lead a Birmingham-based national education and participation charity.

Although I shall be moving on, I will of course remain a supporter of Shula and her team, and will be pleased to assist in any way that you or she thinks appropriate.

I am happy for you to share the attached paper with anybody or any organisation that you see fit. It is intended as anything but 'confidential'.

Yours, Mike Barter
Director, Education and Learning
Kensalfield City Council

POWER TO CREATE

Twenty steps designed to transform Kensalfield into a City of Learning

Local activity within Kensalfield

15 of my 20 proposals are locally-focused and about steps that we can and should take in Kensalfield, not just by working across the city council's various functions but with and through our educational and business communities and civil society. These proposals are set out below.

1. **Make education our mission, and our city a City of Learning**

If we are serious about building a culture of learning that enables all of our citizens to fulfil their potential we need to place this at the heart of Kensalfield's civic identity, of all that we do as a local authority and a major employer, and all that we encourage and help others to do.

One positive step that we can take towards this is to declare Kensalfield as one of the first Cities of Learning in the UK, an exercise coordinated in the UK by the RSA, already well established in the US and now running in 12 cities there. It is important that everyone understands up-front that this is not a public relations exercise. Rather, it is about working with anyone and everyone that can help provide learners with multiple opportunities and settings in which to engage in accredited learning, and about being overt and public about these efforts.

If we get it right, more adults will be able to achieve their ambitions, our communities will be stronger, our businesses will be more successful and people will lead healthier and more prosperous lives

David Hughes and Stephen Evans
Former and current Chief Executives, Learning and Work Institute,

Critically, the City of Learning approach is about connecting learners, learning opportunities and learning institutions (schools, colleges, libraries, training providers, the university, the new arts centre and so on) through a digital network, one that facilitates the accreditation of learning through a system of 'Digital Open Badges'. This may sound like 'techie' stuff, but one US city that has embraced the model, Dallas, has registered nearly 35,000 learner accounts, 70 percent of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds, over the course of just over two years. These learners are supported by more than 200 partner organisations. It would be tremendous if we could have anything like this impact in, say, Harlesford, Mann Green or Mills Brook.

As a public statement of intent I would suggest that 'Kensalfield – City of Learning' branding appears on all city council stationery within six months of your election, all advertising within three months, and all online communications within one month. Your political capital – and public and media interest – will never be as high as it is now: use it! And encourage local employers, community organisations and educational institutions to get on board early and publicly. City of Learning should become *their* brand, not ours. Perhaps we could support its launch with a

Kensalfield Lifelong Learning Innovation Fund, something that might pump-prime creative and potentially self-sustaining initiatives designed to build learner appetite, engagement and success.

2. Build a movement

This is about much more than delivering what some might see as another 'administrative' programme or council 'project'. It is about building a *movement* that, in terms of learning, gets people involved and gets them going. The city council ought to, and is equipped to, play a key encouraging and enabling role, but this is not something that we should seek to 'run'. Rather, we need to establish (and I know the language is horrible) a "special purpose vehicle", and get the city's educators, businesses and civic organisations to own it and drive it.

We should encourage this movement to be creative about what we mean by lifelong learning at every juncture and in every phase, and we should be outward-looking and evangelical about this. This means encouraging the education and business communities in Kensalfield to participate in pilot programmes focused on educational innovation. One possibility might be the development of a citywide 'Great Ideas' programme to encourage new approaches to – and new settings for – learning, projecting the message that we are innovators and entrepreneurs in the field of educational endeavour.

Major policy shifts can only succeed if they go with the grain of public opinion

Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive, RSA

We also need to encourage this movement to embrace, and to draw on, the rich variety of cultural and creative institutions and organisations across the city and region, including those based in the Kensalfield Community Arts Hub (based at the city's new arts centre and theatre), and we need to ensure that these bodies – and the local artists, musicians and performers that they support – are encouraged to work with children's centres, schools, colleges and libraries and any other body that we might think of conventionally as 'educational' in its purpose. We also need this movement to champion the growing importance of the creative industries as local employers.

3. Learn together

For many who have not previously fulfilled their potential through formal education, the prospect of re-entering learning can be a difficult one – a personal challenge but, if sufficient support is not in place, a lonely task – and one last experienced as a journey that ended in *personal* failure. For others, learning no longer appears to need interaction, other than with a YouTube tutorial or an online manual.

We need to challenge these conceptions of the lone learner by focusing on building an approach to learning that is social not solitary, perhaps using 'Learn Together' as the strapline that accompanies 'Kensalfield – City of Learning' branding. This means younger people learning alongside older people, work colleagues and families learning together, work in special education being a part of the educational mainstream, not an adjunct to it, and a welter of activities – from homework clubs to adult reading programmes – that bring learning into the public space, whether this is in the school, college, library or community centre.

4. Lead by example

We need to encourage civic leaders and figures of influence across Kensalfield to share and celebrate their experiences of learning.

One option might be for you – and as many other local business and community leaders as you can bring on board – to make a Personal Learning Pledge. This would involve signing-up for a locally delivered programme of study, and inviting every Kensalfield adult resident who is not currently engaged in formal education or training to join you by embarking on their own personal learning journey, signing-up for a course or qualification on a specific and widely promoted day at the start of each academic year.

It's important for people to see themselves reflected in the people who make decisions

Steve Morrison, Head Teacher, London

More broadly, we need to ensure that learners of all ages have access to multiple role models who can demonstrate the benefits of returning to learning – in the workplace, in the community and as individuals, so that they can see tangible examples of learner success in all sorts of settings across the city.

I am wary of the idea of setting a formal target around, for instance, how many new adult learners we ought to engage in learning or how big an increase we ought to seek in attendance at school parents' evenings, but if we were to see, for example, a 20 percent increase in either (or both) during your term of office, the impact on our city would be transformational, and especially so on the lives of residents in our more disadvantaged areas.

5. Make 'lifelong' learning lifelong

We need to encourage our partners to articulate an approach to lifelong learning as something that is genuinely *lifelong*, rather than simply a post-school corrective for those for whom formal schooling has been less than successful.

In such a model what happens at school is part of the lifelong learning journey, and this places a new responsibility on schools, but one which teachers and school and college leaders are likely to embrace rather than resist, for it takes us beyond the current habit of "tests, targets and tables".

This means working with parents, teachers and school and college leaders to develop a new Kensalfield City of Learning Pledge – one shared across our schools and colleges. This would be focused not simply on the achievement by learners of strong examination scores, vital though this is, but on the development of an appetite and capacity for learning and of character traits and dispositions (resilience, self-confidence, collaborativeness etc) that will serve them for the rest of their lives. In Kensalfield, to leave school with a stack of qualifications but no love of learning or little ability to either work with others or see a task through to completion should no longer be sufficient.

The RSA believes that cultivating everyone's creative capacities throughout life, working in particular with people and communities who lack the opportunities, power and resources to realise their aspirations and put their ideas into practice is crucial for an adaptive, inclusive society and a successful education system

Mark Londesborough, Programme Manager, Creative Learning and Development, RSA

6. Stand on the shoulders of giants

Too often, those in education justifiably complain that educational initiatives are top-down and developed without their input. Alongside those from the business community, teachers and educational and civic leaders need to be at the forefront of this endeavour, such that their professional expertise *and* their local knowledge infuses the range of innovations undertaken.

One possibility would be to encourage the formation of a Kensalfield Educational Leaders' Network, with colleagues drawn from all phases and sites of learning, including children's centres, schools, colleges, training providers, the university and libraries, including governors and professional association representatives.

Such a group might periodically welcome into its ranks senior leaders from complementary fields – children's services more broadly, the cultural and creative community, local businesses, social services, health, the criminal justice system, nutrition, sport and leisure, and the voluntary sector – such that, to recall a phrase briefly popular in the early New Labour years, the approach taken to lifelong learning in Kensalfield is a model of "joined-up" thinking, planning and practice. As mayor, you are in a terrific position to pull in the local powerbrokers to this and similar networks, and, if we are to truly succeed in becoming a City of Learning, we need the buy-in of these powerbrokers from the start.

The provision and quality of adult learning remains patchy, and those who need it most currently get the least of it. More work is needed to support adult learning in local communities – this should be a key ingredient in adult education developments in the 21st century

Andreas Schleicher, Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD

7. Focus on 'Closing the Gap'

One of the conundrums of offering a plethora of new educational opportunities is that they are often most likely to be taken up by those who least need them. It is a truism that adult education classes are often stuffed full of individuals already educated and qualified "up to their eyeballs". At a time when resources are scarce it is vital that learning opportunities are targeted at the most disadvantaged.

This means ensuring that the desire to build inclusion drives all that we do. Here

a series of Kensalfield Learning Charters setting out our commitment to specific groups might provide a practical means of concentrating minds around persistent gaps in access, experience and achievement, for instance with regard to:

- Specific social groups afflicted by persistently low literacy and numeracy rates and an associated lack of stable employment opportunities, including members of particular minority ethnic communities and white working-class boys and young men.
- The families of school-age learners in receipt of the pupil premium.
- Those who are under-represented in admissions to further and higher education and to the professions.
- Those with health issues or disabilities, howsoever defined.
- Children in the care system and care-leavers.
- Young people and adults who care for others.
- Those in, or who have been in, the criminal justice system.
- Those who are out of work or in low-paid and unstable employment, the so-called 'precariat'.
- Older learners, especially those who may have missed out on, or been poorly served by, formal education.

It also means strengthening Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services and ensuring that those with the greatest need, including individuals from the groups listed above, have priority and early access to this guidance. This will require us to work closely with and through local employers and with all of the relevant agencies to ensure that lifelong and life-wide learning is supported by a culture and practice of lifelong access to appropriate and skilled advisory support.

Finally, it means deliberate action to raise the aspirations of our poorest communities. Here, we ought to encourage the university to ensure that children and families in areas like Harlesford, Mann Green, Mills Brook and Willesby are exposed to the full range of educational and career opportunities. We need to get bright young undergraduates and graduates, and academic staff, into the city's primary and secondary schools to share their experiences with children and young people who might not have considered that a higher education is "for them".

We should reject the charge that, today, "too many young people are going to university". This is certainly not the case in our poorest communities, where far too few are progressing to either further or higher education.

8. Think digital

Technology is transforming our educational options, personalising and broadening opportunities and access, for instance, through YouTube tutorials and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). But, in what Anthony Painter and Louise Bamfield describe as the "new digital learning age" (RSA, 2016), these opportunities need to be harnessed for all, not just the "confident creators" who are already using them. As a city we need to bring together the brightest tech-brains in the region to advise and guide us on how we best embrace current and emergent technologies, especially the ability of these technologies to connect learners, and disengaged learners in particular, within and beyond the city's boundaries. Our status as a City of Learning, and our resultant ability to learn from other Cities of Learning, will enable us to do this.

We also need to encourage local learning providers, notably those in the adult education, vocational skills and FE sectors, to develop an on-line portal (the LearnKensalfield.com domain name is available) or an app through which:

- Courses and other local learning opportunities can be showcased by providers.
- Learners can assess and sign-up to what is on offer.
- Content from around the world can be accessed – both by learners and by teachers, tutors and others involved in providing support to learners.
- Advice and guidance about learning choices, can be delivered to, and accessed by, learners of all ages and in all circumstances.

Such a portal or app might be funded in the longer term through support from advertisers and/or corporate sponsorship (perhaps from locally-based 'tech' sector businesses) but is likely to need some start-up investment.

In particular, we need to engage the so-called 'app-generation' as fully as possible, not least because smart-phones and tablets appear to have been more successful at crossing the so-called 'digital divide' than other earlier technologies.

9. Make learning local

The current moves towards devolution of both political authority and educational funding – notably the adult skills budget – allow us, as a city, to localise our educational offer, especially that provided through our three FE colleges, to a much greater degree. This ought to enable us to ensure that there is a match between local provision, employment possibilities and the broader needs of the city, not just as a group of residents and council tax payers, but as a community of citizens.

At another level – that of the individual student – research tells us that reluctant learners often shun conventional schools and colleges as places for learning because of their earlier experiences of the 'system'. For this reason, there might be mileage in exploring the potential of using empty 'hard-to-let' retail units in neighbourhood shopping centres as Community Learning Hubs or, more simply, 'learning shops'. These could be coordinated through our FE colleges, function as advice centres and provide a series of 'pop-up' "classrooms on the corner", especially in areas like Harlesford and Mann Green. Many of the empty retail units in these wards are council-owned and might require only light touch renovation.

Although international examples are of limited value in terms of direct transferability, one lesson from abroad is the importance of local decision-making, where 'local' means close to the consumer and the needs of the locality

Baroness Sharp of Guilford

Research also tells us that when reluctant learners do re-engage with schools, it is with primary schools as parents. We ought to encourage our primary schools to use this opportunity to get people back into the system, especially young mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds, by placing our 68 primary schools at the heart of our efforts to promote learning in the community, where possible using schools as sites for adult and community education.

Locality is also about civic identity, about the heritage of the city and its communities. This means working extensively with and through those based in local creative and cultural

organisations, such that our heritage is shared, enriched and understood by all, not owned by a 'creative' elite to the exclusion of others, especially those who may not have confidence or social capital to engage in such an arena. The newly established Kensalfield Community Arts Hub could help us to do this.

In practical terms, one option might be for the hub to develop a Kensalfield Oral History project. This has the potential to connect libraries, schools, colleges and the university with cultural organisations and those in elders' groups and sheltered housing facilities, thus enabling young people to capture the experience of their elders and to grasp the rich and diverse heritage of our (and their) communities.

10. Make families agents of change

Family Learning Programmes have been a largely unrecognised success story of the past two decades, and one that we should build on. Here, there are several options but three, in particular, are worth outlining:

- Encourage the launch of what would amount to a Kensalfield Family Learning Programme, using our 68 primary schools and 22 secondary schools as Family Learning Centres, focused on building parental understanding of the education system, with initial activity focused on our four most deprived wards.
- Explore the potential of a re-modeled pre-school and early years service focused on outreach, with early years 'Education Visitors' performing a role that is the educational equivalent of the health visitor, ensuring that every family has a basic understanding of how very young children learn, the kind of environment and encouragement that might best support their learning, what they need to do to prepare their child for entry into nursery and primary education, including how they might go about choosing a school, and how they can best navigate a complex and ever-changing school system.

Perhaps we should be providing more support for prospective parents and helping them understand what we hope to see when children join school

School Leader (anonymous)

- Develop a new team of 'Transition Advisers' to help families in our poorest wards negotiate the 'pinch' points they will encounter as their children move through the education system – into secondary school, into GCSEs, into post-16 learning, and on to HE, training or employment thereafter.

These are just possibilities but the overarching principle is that we need to develop approaches that will enable our poorest families to have access to the kind of cultural and social capital enjoyed and unknowingly taken for granted by their middle-class peers. In so doing, these strategies might offer a means of 'closing the gap' and 'widening participation' every bit as important and effective as the pupil premium and similar initiatives.

11. Build a network of volunteer tutors and mentors

The London 2012 Olympics revealed the potential of volunteering through its Games Maker Volunteer programme, and volunteer-based reading programmes are well established in a number of cities in the UK.

We ought to learn from these activities by recruiting local volunteers committed to working with adult learners on literacy and numeracy and with those from migrant and minority communities on language development, tapping into existing national and local civil society and business-led volunteer programmes where possible. Over time, these volunteer tutors and mentors, and the kind of 'Education Visitors' and 'Transition Advisers' suggested above, might evolve into a new cadre of 'Community Organisers for Learning'.

12. Work hand-in-hand with employers

It is vital that employers and bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Education Business Partnership and the local branches of professional institutes play a central role in the re-invention of Kensalfield as a City of Learning. We need local employers, especially larger employers to champion the value of learning at and through work, and we need local people to be able to access a range of work-based learning activities.

You might encourage the business community, civil society, the education sector and the city council to work together to develop a set of agreed and deliverable work-based learning priorities. These might relate, for instance, to the provision of work experience placements for school and college students, apprenticeship sign-up and completion rates (in light of the recent government target to achieve three million apprenticeship starts by 2020), employee access to personal and professional development opportunities, and education-focused corporate responsibility initiatives.

Skills are the number one business priority. They're crucial for raising our productivity and staying globally competitive

Carolyn Fairbairn, Director General, Confederation of British Industry

More broadly, we need local employers to play their part in changing attitudes towards professional, technical and vocational education, such that it is not seen as the poor relation of academic study, either in the community or in our own schools and colleges. All who are active in developing Kensalfield into a City of Learning need to live by this view, through their own work and that of their organisations.

Finally, you should encourage Kensalfield's employers – across the business, voluntary and public sectors – to be active and high profile participants in the Campaign for Learning's Learning at Work Week, a successful and long-established national initiative (about which I'll say more later) and in national programmes to recognise best practice, such as the Learning and Performance Institute's Annual Learning Awards and the Learning and Work Institute's Festival of Learning Awards.

13. Work with professionals in the criminal justice and healthcare spheres

If working with a range of professions and sectors is a pre-requisite for developing a city-wide commitment to education and learning, we know that working with colleagues in the criminal justice system and in health and social care is likely to bring particular benefits – in-short, lower re-offending rates and reduced demand on our health and care services, and GP surgeries and accident and emergency units in particular.

This knowledge should inform our policymaking and our partnership building as a local authority. The evidence with regard to education and crime is especially clear: community

safety can be enhanced and fledgling criminal careers cut short through early intervention. We ought to work with all agencies in the criminal justice system in Kensalfield to ensure that any first-time engagement in the system triggers an immediate educational intervention, and we should work with HMP Kensalfield and Willesby Manor Open Prison to determine that, within five years, nobody is discharged from our local prisons or their associated facilities without access to a pre-employability programme focused on enhancing literacy and numeracy skills, making job applications and developing interview skills. The link between offending and poor educational attainment – and low literacy levels in particular – is an enduring and national phenomenon; locally, a part of our learning mission must be to challenge this.

The inability to access and interpret information stemming from a lack of basic skills presents individuals with a fundamental challenge to take control of their own health

National Literacy Trust

Similarly, as recent health education initiatives have shown, educative approaches to health and wellbeing can improve life-chances and the quality of life, but they tend to be less effective in areas of economic deprivation. We need to draw lessons from these campaigns to inform our broader work, and take steps to ensure that their messages are clearly understood, especially in our poorest communities.

14. Strengthen governance, participation and voice at every level

Research tells us that the process of participation is an engine for driving personal and community development. Again, as part of the building of a wider learning culture, we need to encourage – across the city but especially in our more deprived communities – community participation in educational governance and in other bodies such as parent-teacher associations (PTAs). Here, we should not just be appealing for volunteers to become school and college governors or PTA representatives, but providing skills development programmes that will build the candidate base for such engagement, and encourage active citizenship more broadly in the process.

This is one area in which the city council might itself take a lead, building a Kensalfield Community Participation Programme, developing advocacy skills such as public

speaking, lobbying and chairing meetings. Again, this should be focused on our poorest communities, with the expressed aim of developing community capacity and engagement in places like Mann Green, Mills Brook, Harlesford and Willesby. Some years ago the Citizenship Foundation, a national education and participation charity, led a ground-breaking programme called Youth Act, developing such skills amongst young people in severely disadvantaged communities. We could learn from that, but do something that reached out to all of Kensalfield's citizens, whatever their age.

Our local Youth Council is thriving and many of our schools and colleges have been commended for their work on student voice. This ought to become the norm across the city and can help us to develop 'voice' for a range of other learner cohorts and in a range of other settings.

Effective governance works through building capacity, open dialogue, and stakeholder involvement

Tracey Burns and Florian Köster

15. Celebrate success

If we are to build a real culture of learning across the city – to be a genuine City of Learning – we need to celebrate the success of our learners and all who work with them, A series of awards programmes for learners, learning-focused organisations and local employers come to mind – but these need to emerge from the movement that I have talked about, rather than be handed out or down by the city council. In addition, we ought to encourage a culture in which successful learners from Kensalfield are supported to enter the various national awards offered for engagement in adult learning by bodies such as the Campaign for Learning and the Learning and Work Institute.

We also need to work in partnership with those involved in similar initiatives elsewhere, making our contribution to the wider Cities of Learning movement: the *local* need not be *parochial*. One option might be for the city to host an annual education conference or a lifelong learning innovation convention – this could evolve into an influential 'hackathon' bringing together educationalists, technologists, designers and community activists to share best practice and explore new possibilities in education and lifelong learning. At the very least, and more mundanely, it would allow us to disseminate

outcomes from our endeavours as a City of Learning and to learn from others – across the region, the country and beyond. It is to this broader stage that I now turn.

Our place on the national stage

As a city, our work locally will be significantly strengthened if we can build strong partnerships, relationships and networks with those working on shared agendas and with similar intentions, both in lifelong learning specifically, and in the wider educational sphere – regionally, nationally and internationally. We should ensure that we are strongly partnered with bodies such as the various professional institutes, the Campaign for Learning, the Learning and Work Institute, the National Open College Network, Union Learn (organised by the TUC), the National Literacy Trust, the National College for Teaching and Leadership, the Further Education Trust for Leadership, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Education, the RSA, and the Workers' Educational Association.

Many of those active in promoting lifelong learning in Kensalfield, including many who helped to develop the ideas in this paper, have excellent access to a rich tapestry of national networks. We need to ensure that we benefit as a city from this access, and that these relationships inform what we do and how we do it. Hosting the kind of education conference or lifelong learning innovation convention suggested above is one way of pulling these networks together but Kensalfield ought also to embrace, and play an active role in, the various established national events designed to champion learning such as Learning at Work Week, the Family Learning Festival and the Festival of Learning (formerly Adult Learners' Week), and we should volunteer to participate in pilot projects and take up seats on steering groups and advisory panels.

The five proposals set out below relate to action that we can take as both an alliance of partners drawn from all sectors and, specifically, as a city council, working alongside other local authorities, or regionally and nationally focused partners or campaigns such as those cited above. As one of the UK's smaller cities, we are more (not less) typical of most UK cities and our messages have relevance for many of the country's larger towns. For this reason, we should not be shy in stepping

onto a national stage, so often dominated by a small number of huge conurbations.

1. Support calls for a National Strategy

An important report, commissioned by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Education, *Adult Education: Too important to be left to chance*, written by Dr. Deirdre Hughes and her colleagues at the University of Warwick and launched this summer, called for a cross-departmental "national and regional strategy for adult education, health, employability and wellbeing", something that bodies like NIACE (one of the founding partners of the Learning and Work Institute) have long called for.

While we should continue to argue for a national strategy that is not simply about "adult education" but focused on *lifelong* learning for individuals at every stage in the life-course – one that embraces, re-purposes and reinvigorates schooling rather than one that follows it – I would suggest that we, and those we are working with, should be supportive of the concept of a national strategy in this area, and active in the campaign for one.

Devolution agreements will give individual cities and areas, including Kensalfield, greater freedoms, but this must not open up national disparities in practice that fuel inequalities in prioritisation and access. In the tradition of 'system leadership', a national strategy, one developed by a plurality of partners rather than imposed by government, can help spread good practice and promote equitable outcomes.

2. Argue for qualification reforms that are "lifelong learning friendly"

We, and our partners, need to campaign for qualification reforms that support our local aspirations, and which work for schools, students *and* adult learners, especially reluctant learners who are returning tentatively to studying. This means supporting reforms based on the kind of principles highlighted earlier in this document, for instance those that seek to:

- Put creativity and the cultural sector at the heart of the educational landscape, such that the arts and

humanities are seen as a vital aspect of a genuinely broad education.
- Place outcomes such as the development of character and employability on a par with the gaining of grades, as advocated by Professor Bill Lucas, the Institute of Directors, the RSA and others.
- Develop the confidence and participation skills of learners of all ages and all circumstances.
- Place professional, technical and vocational education on a par with academic studies.
- Widen participation by learners of all ages from disadvantaged and 'non-traditional' backgrounds in further education and training and in higher education.
- Elevate the further education and skills sector and adult and community education to a position where they are considered the equal both of statutory schooling and higher education.

More broadly, I would argue that we – and our partners – need to draw government's attention to a central tension that arises from the recent reforms to GCSEs and A levels in particular. Moves to raise standards, as measured by levels of attainment amongst school leavers, have led to a move away from continuous assessment and modular examinations, when it is precisely these kind of 'learn as you go' and 'bite-size' approaches that appeal to tentative and busy adult learners, who may need to feel that they can "dip their toe in the water" without being recorded as a "drop out" a term or two later.

In short, whatever the merits for school students or school standards, recent reforms have had the unintended consequence of making a return to study less attractive to many adult learners. Why? Because, for these time-poor, tentative adults, often with employment and family responsibilities, a two-year course with a 'high stakes' examination at the end of it is too risky and threatening a prospect, and – for many – one that didn't reap benefits during their school years. We need to work with a plethora of partners, locally and nationally, to get this point across.

3. Champion the Citizens' Curriculum

The Citizens' Curriculum was originally developed by NIACE as part of a major investigation into lifelong learning led by Tom Schuller and David Watson the best part of a decade ago (Schuller and Watson, 2009). They argued for a lifelong entitlement to educational access for those with a range of educational needs. These needs include literacy and numeracy, but go significantly beyond these conventional "basic skills" to address "skills for life and work" such as digital capability, health and wellbeing, and money management. A personalised programme of study, co-constructed with the learner, accompanies this focus, which might be termed 'Basic Needs Plus'.

In the run up to the last election, NIACE reported that the model "has been successfully tested in 16 community pilots and found to make learning more relevant and engaging, tapping into what motivates people and their ambitions for the future". We should encourage our partners to support their call for the Citizens' Curriculum to be rolled out nationally, not least because this would enshrine an educational entitlement for some of our so-called 'hardest-to-reach' learners, and benefit residents in our poorest areas, such as Harlesford, Mann Green and Mills Brook. Significantly, it also, offers an approach that offers to do more than address short-falls in basic skills, one that promises to build participation, engagement and citizenship in the process.

4. Support calls for a Career Advancement Service

The proposal from the Learning and Work Institute for a Career Advancement Service targeted at those who are in receipt of benefits, whether they are in work or not, is one we should support as a city council for two reasons: first, because of the recent growth in the number of people in precarious employment situations (the 'precariat'), for instance on low paid 'zero-hours' contracts or in temporary or part-time positions; second, because of the increasing complexity of the labour market and the end of the traditional career ladder, such that the notion that such work is essentially 'transitional' or a career starting point is no longer valid for many in these roles. Such a service offers to 'trip the lock' and enable these individuals the support and guidance to move beyond their current circumstances.

We need to work with local employers across all sectors on the detail of what such a service needs to look like locally so as to ensure that it meets their (and our) objectives, and we need to continually make the ethical and business case for a well-trained, professionally aspirational and securely employed workforce.

And, of course, given the perspective offered in this paper which places schools at the heart of the lifelong learning agenda, we need to ensure that there is universal access to excellent careers education and guidance and the opportunity for all to engage in high-quality professional and vocational education and work-related learning during the school years – programmes such as those organised by World Skills UK have much to offer in this respect. As a local authority, we are able to exercise some influence here, even if our 'hold' over schools is not what it was before the academies age.

The first object of any act of learning, over and beyond the pleasure it may give, is that it should serve us in the future. Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further more easily

Ted Sizer

POWER TO CREATE

5. Focus on types of *learner*, not types of *learning*, and incentivise participation

The evidence from research across the lifelong learning landscape is clear: to reiterate a point made earlier, those most likely to benefit from engagement in lifelong learning are often the least likely to do so. Especially, at a time when public finances are tight, we need to think about how we strike an intelligent balance between making learning attractive to all, while targeting provision at those who have hitherto proved reluctant learners.

One approach might be to turn current thinking on its head; rather than targeting our efforts at types of *learning* ("we need more individuals educated to Level 2, so let's fund Level 2 provision but not extra-mural studies that individuals might take part in out of interest"), let's target types of *learner* while being laissez-faire and permissive (and, in funding terms, supportive) about what they choose to learn. In other words, let's focus on getting reluctant learners into the system on their terms, not ours, and then gradually 'nudge' them towards specific areas once their learner-confidence has developed. A

one term short course, with no apparent or overt link to employment might be the 'taster' than can draw them back into education and on the track towards signing up for something more substantial, such as a one-year GCSE programme in a core subject. If successful, we should promote this approach nationally.

A second approach, proposed by the Institute of Directors in a recent, well-received report (IOD, 2016), is to look at how we can create financial incentives to engage in learning through the tax and benefits system. As part of this, we could do worse than take another look at ideas like Personal Career Accounts and Education Savings Accounts, which have been compared to the government's recent 'Help to Buy' initiative in the housing market. The Learning and Work Institute talk about a model in which the individual, their employer and the government would contribute to a Personal Career Account that individuals can draw on at key junctures in their career. Internationally, there is precedent for this. In Singapore, the Workforce Development Agency incentivises adult learners seeking career advancement with a range of financial packages. We should look to support both the Institute of Directors and the Learning and Work Institute in pursuing these objectives, and we ought, as a city and as a local authority, to offer to work with them on their further development.

An Education Savings Account would enable individuals to save for their future education and skills needs to meet the changing requirements of the labour market

Ruth Spellman, Chief Executive and General Secretary, Workers Educational' Association

Finally, we should urge government to reconsider the suitability of a loans-based model for FE learners. Asking an 18-year-old to take out a loan to cover fees and the other costs of higher education at least has the merit of a working lifetime to pay it back and the very real prospect that they will enjoy the high lifetime earnings that make repayment likely. Engagement in a further education course as a middle-aged adult offers neither, but is every bit as vital to that individual's personal and professional growth.

Endnote

The above, in its totality, represents a significant body of work, but encouraging action on even a modest number of these 20 proposals can lay the foundations for establishing Kensalfield as a City of Learning. Doing so would enable us to redefine our broader civic and local identity as one that has learning at its heart, an identity that will help our people to be more innovative and creative as employees and entrepreneurs, and to engage more effectively as citizens, parents, consumers and neighbours. Moreover, putting learning 'front and centre' in this way would mark us out as a city increasingly defined by our appetite for creativity and innovation in what will continue to be one of the most important areas of social policy: education and lifelong learning. That would be a legacy that any mayor, but especially our first elected mayor, might be proud of.

Mike Barter
Director, Education and Learning
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these issues to flesh out the kind of directions that we might take. It was at this roundtable that we agreed to take forward Matthew Taylor's typically creative suggestion that we frame our thinking in terms of an advisory note to a newly elected city mayor. Every attendee at that debate and the subsequent roundtable has had an impact in what follows in these pages. As I write this, I am conscious that David Hughes and Steve Mulligan are both moving on to pastures new, David to a key role in the landscape of lifelong learning as chief executive at the Association of Colleges. If there were ever any thought that our FE colleges would not play such a part in this landscape, and there should not have been, this can now be put safely to rest.

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- *Adult Education: Too important to be left to chance* – All Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education.
- *The new digital learning age: how we can enable social mobility through technology* – RSA.
- *Possibility Thinking: reimagining the future of Further Education and Skills* – RSA in partnership with the Further Education Trust for Leadership.
- *Remembered Thinking… On Further Education and Leading* – the Further Education Trust for Leadership.
- *Learning to be employable: practical lessons from research into developing character* – City and Guilds in partnership with the Centre for Real-World Learning.

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Between September 2001 and August 2010, he was chief executive at the Citizenship Foundation, the leading education and participation charity. Prior to this, he was general adviser, 14-19 Education, in Enfield, north London, where he led on the production of the council's first lifelong learning strategy. A teacher by profession, he has taught and held management and senior leadership roles, including head of department and director of sixth form studies, at schools in Haringey and Hertfordshire. Tony has published over 70 texts and articles and has spoken widely in the UK and overseas on education and participation issues.

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future of school governance, Governance in the Academies Age: issues, opportunities and challenges, which is scheduled to report towards the close of 2016.

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