

**LIFE LONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE**

**COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

**Aim**

To review the Education Department Communications Policy.

**Recommendations**

1. That the Local Education Authority should, as a matter of urgency formulate a communications policy.
2. That the L.E.A. policy should be harmonised with the developing Corporate Communications Strategy.
3. That the L.E.A. consider how to take appropriate steps to encourage schools to recognise that they are supported by: and included under the "umbrella" of the County Council.

Note: "Communication" in the context of these recommendations includes all communication involving the L.E.A.; schools; staff; governors; parents; pupils and the Community.

**Background Information**

Having been invited to review the Education Department Communications policy - we have to say that there is not one in place. Life Long Learning does not have one either. Having said that, we considered two main areas:- external and internal communication.

A key question arose when defining who was in each area. The public are clearly external clients and our medium for communication with them is often through consultation meetings; press reports etc. There was however, ambiguity when it came to schools. Our starting point when looking at schools was the six monthly monitoring report of the E.D.P. - just to remind you, the E.D.P. goal is: "To improve the communication between the Local Education Authority and schools".

The November 2000 update indicates that the measures taken to reach the targets set out have, in the main, been achieved. However, there do not appear to be any targets relating to external communication. These may however be incorporated in the Local Performance Plan 2001.

The present Communications team is headed by MikeMcCabe who has been in post for six weeks and is comprised of five officers, four of whom are presently in post. This seems to be a small team compared to similar authorities elsewhere. One of the stated aims of this team is to develop a corporate communication strategy to help Bucks County Council to do its' job better. This means that the L.E.A. is part of the corporate whole and needs to develop a communications strategy which complements the corporate work being undertaken.

Our L.E.A. Communications policy needs to develop a common understanding for communication with all interested groups. As this clearly involves matters of policy - it should be the responsibility of the appropriate portfolio holder(s). It is acknowledged that there have been significant improvements in this area since the first OFSTED Report, however some schools still feel isolated/unsupported. This may in part be despite, or even because of, increased financial autonomy. Mixed messages are being given to different schools from the LEA re individual relations between schools and the L.E.A. We need to be clear that schools are very much "part of the family". We consider this to be a key recommendation of this working group.

Internally, there seems to be a degree of confusion as to whom recipients of letters should reply. The current letter head format could, we feel, be revised for the benefit of recipients to make it clearer to them who is actually writing to them and to whom they should reply. We consider this to be a matter for the Head of Communications to address.

We recommend that a survey is carried out amongst schools to find out how much I.T. training is given to, e.g. school secretaries/bursars, to enable them to make the greatest use of the e-mail and the internet.

Despite the monitoring report indicating that most measures have been achieved, continued regular updating is necessary.

We would like to acknowledge the support received from Mike McCabe and Geraldine White in the preparation of this report.

Frank Sweatman  
on behalf of the Communications Working Group  
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