

Introduction

1 The Federation of Carlisle Schools (FoCS) was established in September 2002, as a means of drawing together in one organisation the many different collaborations between the schools in the greater Carlisle district. The schools involved are: Caldew School (Dalston), The William Howard School (Brampton) and Lochinvar School (Longtown), alongside the five city schools of St Aidan's County High School, The Morton School, North Cumbria Technology College (NCTC), Newman School, and Trinity School.

The collaborations so far include the working of the Carlisle Achievement Zone (CAZ) which is the schools' provision for students in years 10 and 11 who have found mainstream secondary schooling hard to manage. The co-operation also involves our work as specialist colleges – NCTC as a Technology College, St Aidan's for Sport, Trinity for Languages, Caldew for Business and Enterprise, and more to come – and the Pathfinder project in Carlisle, where we are held up as a model of good practice in the county, for the ways in which we have taken this agenda forward. A major development from September 2003 has been the joint ventures between the sixth forms of the schools – more of that in paragraph 20.

2 A review of post-16 provision in the Carlisle area was undertaken by Jim Donaldson CBE, former Chief Inspector of the Further Education Funding Council for England, and his report was published in May 2002. This review was a statistical exercise, but included a 45 minute interview with the headteachers of the schools. There was no other method used of exploring the situation – no students were interviewed, no other staff contacted, no governors approached, and no visits made to the schools. At its launch in May/June 2002, Mr Donaldson said that Option 4 (a Sixth Form College covering all eight schools) was the preferred option. The schools have raised many issues about the document and the process, which had produced it, since then.

The Review was then updated in March 2003, and A Needs' Analysis published in July 2003. This was then followed by The Preliminary Notice in October 2003 as the LSC Cumbria brought forward its intention to propose a Sixth Form College for Carlisle, and ushered in a round of public consultation in November and December. During this, the proposal has met with vigorous and overwhelming opposition, from parents and pupils, staff and governors, and other agencies.

While it is our view that all of this could have been done differently, it is time to move on, and for the Federation, the LSC, the LEA, and the colleges to work collaboratively, to address in a spirit of co-operation the big issues facing the city's education system: the need to improve many aspects of the schools' performance; the need to change the attitudes of many young people towards learning; the need to redevelop Carlisle College and to ensure its partnership with the schools; the need to develop a University for Cumbria, with a substantial base in Carlisle, and the need to tackle the falling rolls and surplus places in the city's secondary system.

With the LEA and others, the headteachers of the eight schools are bringing forward this alternative proposal, to make the Sixth Form issue part of this wider picture, and to address all of these matters in a spirit of collaborative partnership. Without the LSC Cumbria's work over the past two years, we may not have arrived at this point so soon. Nevertheless, we hope that the LSC can work closely with all the other players in the future, as they have consistently expressed their desire to do.

We are grateful to the LSC for allowing us to follow the structure of their own Preliminary Notice in this booklet, so that all parties can see clearly the parallels and alternatives.

The Proposal

3 The eight secondary schools will continue to work together in order to improve the quality of education in the city, not just for 16-19 year olds, but for all the 11-19 age group, and beyond. We believe that, working collectively, and in partnership with the James Rennie School, Carlisle College, Cumbria Institute for the Arts, the LSC, and the LEA, we can achieve the best possible outcome for all learners in the city.

We are already working together in many ways, and we are convinced that such collaboration is the ideal solution, rather than a Sixth Form College. Our solution, presented here, involves gradual, agreed and purposeful changes within the schools and colleges, rather than the sudden imposition of a solution from outside. We are sure that our proposals would bring increased choice to all learners, giving access to a wider range of academic and vocational courses, with the chance to 'mix and match', without damaging the very communities, the secondary schools themselves, which prepare students for the next stage of their education and careers.

We are confident that we can achieve the following:

- an increase in the aspirations and ambitions for all;
- even wider range of courses, building on the present situation;
- good progression into employment and higher education;
- high quality teaching in newly refurbished 11-19 schools and colleges, equipped to the highest standards, for the full age range to enjoy;
- increased use of computers and technology to improve learning at all levels;
- a continuation of the wide range of enrichment activities, for the Sixth Formers and also which allow them to enrich the lives of their schools and wider communities;
- increased participation in post 16 education;
- better retention rates of post 16 students;
- increased attainment both pre and post 16.

Principles underpinning the proposal – why co-operation?

4 16-19 provision should be organised to ensure that in every area each and every young person has access, within reasonable travelling distance, to a wide range of high quality learning opportunities that will meet their interests, aptitudes and aspirations, and will promote participation and attainment in learning. Five key principles should underpin the organisation of post-16 provision and these are:

- > Quality
- > Distinct 16-19 provision
- > Diversity to ensure curriculum breadth
- > Learner choice
- > Affordability, value for money and cost effectiveness

These principles are taken from the DfES pamphlet (Principles underpinning the organisation of 16-19 provision) and are ones within which schools, colleges and the LSC work since its publication in September 2003.

5 The learning opportunities for all students should be of high quality. Distinct 16-19 provision to meet the particular pastoral and learning needs of this age group should be the norm, wherever they learn. Together, providers can support a wide curriculum offer for all 16-19 learners in our area. Well managed collaboration gets round the limitations of more localised provision and, in Carlisle, with a long history of collaboration and recent developments, real progress is now very exciting.

In the current academic year, new arrangements have been put in place by the schools to promote more effective collaboration and, thereby, offer young people access to a wider range of courses. This has been the next step for us in a process which will next involve the College of Further Education, the James Rennie School, and local work based learning providers. The range of opportunities will at least match those that would have been available through a Sixth Form college, while preserving the communities of the schools, and fostering their collaboration – a duty also required of the LSC.

6 This pattern of 16-19 provision will respect curriculum choice. Changes in the organisation of 16-19 provision in Carlisle will provide the improvements we all seek in participation, achievement and quality, through the provision of a broader range of educational opportunities, but without harming the foundations of schooling in years 7-11, continuing the work from the city's primary schools. Better value for money alongside the improvements in learning opportunities will also follow, although our main requirement is the quality of the learning and of the wider experiences that we provide for all students.

7 In 1999, Jim Donaldson, formerly FEFC chief inspector, said, of a report into the collaboration between schools and colleges for 16-19 provision:

"This report highlights many positive aspects of working together which exist between schools and colleges. In this age of collaboration, it is vital that the good work highlighted in this report is built upon, and weaknesses that also came to light are addressed. Working together is vital in the efforts of all education sectors in creating a lifelong learning society."

It does seem clear to the Federation of Carlisle Schools that working together from bases within the city's communities is the key. A Sixth Form College, based in the city centre, could only ever address 16-19 achievement, and its location would place it outside its communities. Lasting change to the secondary age range across the city is best achieved by co-operation and partnership, from the heart of the city's communities.

8 The onus will be on us to draw up and to meet ambitious targets. We shall continue our present approach, which is driven by students' individual talents and needs.

9 Co-operation between schools and colleges retains, for students and parents, proper **choice**. There will be provision of post-16 education within the context of the Church of England and Roman Catholic traditions, and outside both, of course. There will remain specialist schools for Technology, Sport, Languages, Business/Enterprise, and more to follow. The partnerships between the schools and the work of the two colleges should allow the best of both worlds: economies of scale in terms of cost effectiveness, and the continued development of the 11-18 school communities, with all their benefits, alongside the 'specialist' colleges for vocational courses and the arts.

Reasons for the proposal

10 The Federation of Carlisle Schools has been meeting regularly, in different groupings, to consider the ways forward for the secondary education system in the city, and to consider ways of raising the standards of achievement for all our students. The James Rennie School is also closely involved. Recently, meetings have also involved both of the city's colleges, and representatives from the work based learning providers. Our aspiration throughout this process has been to work with Cumbria LEA and the LSC. Our meetings with the LEA demonstrate the progress we are making in this partnership.

11 We are sure that a Sixth Form college would not meet the needs of Carlisle. We are also sure that, by working together and tackling the real challenges that we face, we will meet our key targets:

- **the need to increase participation in learning post 16.** Currently in the area this stands at 66%, compared with 69% in the county. We recognise the unusual employment pattern in the city, with many job opportunities for young people at 16, 17 and 18. Therefore, we set ourselves two targets: 70%+ of year 11 students staying in full time education from September 2005, and 98% of 16-19 year olds being involved in full time education or employment with training/education.
- **the need to monitor progress through courses,** so that students move, as necessary, onto appropriate alternatives during the 16-19 phase.
- **the need to increase achievement at GCSE.** Currently at around 45% achieving 5 or more A*-C passes, within three years, our target is to raise that headline figure to 55%. By the same time, no student should leave a Carlisle school without at least one GCSE at A*-G or qualifications in the key skills and a vocational area.
- **the need for a wide curriculum to be available for all sixth form students.** We shall continue to develop our collaboration, so that formal arrangements allow all students to choose from a full range of course provision by September 2005, with a minimum choice for all of 35 courses at level 3 and 15 at level 2. This will grow further into 2006 and 2007, with more level 2 and level 1 courses.
- **the need to 'mix and match' academic and vocational** will, of course, be possible, as it often is now, through the full involvement of Carlisle College in the scheme by September 2007 at the latest.
- **the need to provide good value for money and for avoiding duplication of provision.** Our plans will avoid all of the high capital and staff severance costs that would be involved in a sixth form college, and would allow any investment to be for the good of all students from 11-19. Competition was the modus operandi of the 1990's, but the climate in the city is already very different.

12 FoCS published in September 2003 our first joint prospectus entitled: 'I'm going to stay 6n'. This provides an outline of how the schools have formed initial partnerships already, and the range of curriculum offered by what are now four centres for sixth form education in the greater Carlisle area. Copies of this prospectus are available from any of the schools.

Setting up a collaborative post 16 provision

13 The report of the review in Carlisle concluded that, in order to increase levels of participation in post-16 education, improve levels of student achievement and expand the range of subjects and programmes on offer, four options for the future of post-16 learning in Carlisle should be considered. These were:

Option 1: no change. Retain the existing structure of sixth form provision in each of the seven schools included in the review.

Option 2: introduce collaborative arrangements including joint timetabling arrangements.

Option 3: establish a new sixth form college in a central location operating a policy of open recruitment to all faiths and the consequential redesignation of 5 schools as 11-16 schools. Option 4: establish a new sixth form college in a central location operating a policy of open recruitment to all faiths and the consequential redesignation of 7 schools as 11-16 schools.

14 The council members of LSC Cumbria considered the findings of the review and took the view that option 1 could not be supported. The Carlisle schools are in agreement with this - no one says that things should continue as they are. Option 1 is not a real option, therefore.

In the view of the LSC Cumbria, Option 2, the introduction of more extensive collaborative arrangements, had, "despite statements of good intent, met with very limited success." This is not true, and the development of initiatives in post 16 provision, involving collaboration between institutions is now happening in exciting and innovative ways in the city. This will guarantee equal access for all 16 year olds in the Carlisle area to the full range of academic and vocational programmes. Although option 2 was not originally favoured by LSC Cumbria, it is the best choice for the local communities.

It is also clear that government policy is against the closure of good school sixth forms. Recently, it has been stated that: 'Government policy is clear: popular and successful sixth forms should be celebrated not closed.' (Stephen Twigg).

Therefore, while the LSC took the view that option 4 (or possibly 3) - the establishment of a new sixth form college - would offer the greatest opportunities for all post-16 learners in Carlisle, FoCS opposes this idea, in principle and in practice, and we believe that our proposal is not only better in itself, but presents a far better way of tackling the other deep issues within the education system.

15 Instead of option 3 or 4, the proposals we are now bringing forward seek to build on the current practice of institutions working together. This is, we believe, in the proper spirit which the DfES intended for a local LSC to follow, and the one that will best guarantee success.

16 Such collaboration will be able to make the best use of the resources in the area. It will allow us all to build on the excellent work we are already doing, such as:

- shared in-service training between the institutions;
- the provision of Carlisle Achievement Zone (CAZ) for some students in years 10 and 11;
- more common timetabling between the institutions;
- development of provision at level 2 and level 1;

- link Courses with Carlisle College, currently operating in years 10 and 11;
- the Community Sports' programme based on St Aidan's School;
- the use of Advanced Skills Teachers;
- development of the school's own chosen specialist subjects.

It would also retain all the vital aspects of 11-18 schooling, which are so important to the secondary schools in Carlisle, their pupils and staff, parents/carers and governors.

Transitional arrangements

17 The LSC Cumbria has indicated a willingness to collaborate with the schools and colleges. It would greatly help the work that is being done if the LSC Cumbria now became a full and active partner with us to improve levels of participation and achievement. Other funds would need to come from a variety of sources to develop the work collaboratively, rather than seeking the capital and other moneys needed for the build of a Sixth Form College and all the attendant disruption that that would have caused.

Therefore, the transition arrangements within our proposals are essentially incremental ones, which allow work already begun between and within our institutions to continue. One of its many advantages is that it will allow us to move smoothly forward, in clear and manageable steps, facing the challenges of the next decade without the enormous upheaval and sudden reorganisation that the building of a Sixth Form College would have created within a short time scale.

18 The secondary schools recognise that there are substantial challenges ahead. There is an overriding issue of falling rolls within the secondary population in the city over the next ten years. At the moment, there are some 1250 surplus places out of the 9000 capacity of the eight schools. In ten years' time, that figure will have doubled to around 2500. Working with the LEA, and with other interested groups, the Federation of Carlisle Schools sees clearly the need for change and development. No one is asking for the status quo simply to be maintained. In such circumstances, adding another 1000 places into the system, by building a new college, is clearly very ill advised.

What we hope and intend should happen is that every pupil at the age of 11, in the greater Carlisle area, has an equal chance of attending a well equipped and successful secondary school. Each of these should be 11-18, and the centre of wider education and activities within its community. Each would develop its own ethos, within the frameworks established. There would therefore be diversity and choice, with equity.

We also see further issues developing with the likelihood of local and regional government reorganisation in the area, and within the various initiatives coming from the DfES, such as the specialist schools' programme and the Building Schools for the Future scheme. We believe that our proposal makes good sense in the light of these and other developments that will happen within the next 10-15 years. We think that we can set the system up to take full advantage of such new initiatives and funding. The challenges of the next decade can present opportunities, rather than threats, and much depends on our catching the tide.

Objectives of FoCS proposal

19 We are of the view that the continued developing of the structure of post 16 provision in Carlisle is essential to tackle the major issues of access and participation, standards of achievement, the range of programmes available, retention on courses, routes of progression post 16, the level of ambition and aspiration among many students in the city, and the successful developing of proper communities of care within our schools and colleges. Therefore we aim to:

- establish a common approach to post 16 study, under the F6F (Federated 6th Form) or similar logo;
- increase the number of students staying into education and training at 16 – from its current 66% to 70%+ within the next three years;
- improve student retention rates in post 16 education, seeking to achieve a maximum of 10% leaving a course mid-year, but allowing suitable transfer onto other courses;
- ensure equitable access to courses and to high achievement for students in all schools, by developing the current collaborative timetabling arrangements, so that common timetabling exists in 5 schools by 2004 and in the seven schools by 2006;
- build on our best practice of guidance for students in Years 9, 10 and 11;
- widen the choice of subjects available, particularly at levels 2 and 1;
- improve the successes at the end of year 11, in GCSE and other pass rate terms. From the current position of around 45% overall, we intend to reach 55% within three years.
- improve the successes of students in the Sixth Form, so that by 2006 the average level 3 points score will be above the average for the county, and therefore above 260 points.
- increase the opportunities, where it is appropriate for students to mix and match the vocational and academic, by making strategic provision between the schools and by working closely with the colleges, achieving appropriate integration with Carlisle College's timetable by September 2007;
- continue to offer choice, while avoiding duplication of provision, and fostering such competition between schools as is healthy (eg in sports, Young Enterprise, Public Speaking, and other activities);
- offer better value for money, rather than an extravagant capital build which only benefits Sixth Formers, and rather than the costs of redeploying or making redundant many staff.

Implementation

20 From September 2004, the seven 11-18 schools have established a common approach to providing sixth form education: we operate as four centres, with William Howard School and Trinity School operating semi-independently, St Aidan's, Newman and NCTC forming one partnership, and Caldew and Morton forming a second partnership. Both partnerships have common timetabling throughout their Sixth Forms. All seven schools have long had some common timetabling, from the Carlisle Co-op days, and this remains. That is our current position.

21 During the academic year 2003-2004, we are working on the following elements of our collaboration:

- reduce duplication of provision of level 3 courses;
- allowing full access to 'minority' courses only available in one or two centres;
- cover a range of level 2 courses between the schools, ensuring systematic coverage and access, in central locations;
- look further at the common approach to timetabling, involving William Howard and Trinity schools, and looking at morning and afternoon blocking;
- involve Lochinvar School and the James Rennie school in planning post-16 provision;
- work effectively with Carlisle College, and Cumbria Institute for the Arts, with the aim of setting up a formal timetabled arrangement by September 2007;
- develop links and work with work based learning providers, already begun.

We believe that these will address aspects of the recruitment, curriculum choice, and retention issues.

22 However, we believe that there is much more work to be done, not only in strategic planning for the future, but in the development of the systems which are to do with quality in the schools and colleges in Carlisle. This is true of the full secondary range from 11-19, but with particular reference to the Sixth Form, other aspects of the collaborative proposal, which we are now making, are as follows:

- a co-ordinated focus on monitoring and improving the quality of **teaching and learning** in Sixth Forms in Carlisle, eg by auditing the performance of groups by gender, or socio-economic background, for example;
- a **Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)** shared across all institutions, enabling online dialogue between teachers and students, the provision of resources to facilitate independent learning, setting and marking of homework, assessment, and the recording and analysing of student perceptions;
- a web-based **monitoring system** across Carlisle for tracking student achievement, and for practical matters such as attendance and exam entries;
- the use of the **extended school day** to make more options open to 16-19 students, and more widely to adult and other learners in the city;

- **the development of adult and continuing education programmes** alongside the Sixth Form developments, and within the context of the changing face of both Further and Higher Education in the city;
- **student and parent conferences**, run jointly by the schools, to address matters such as Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), university applications through the UCAS system, and student finances;

Carlisle City Learning Centre

A true enrichment of the Federation 6th Form would be the building in the city of a City Learning Centre, of which all 16-19 students would be members. This would foster equality of opportunity and access to all, and give a common focus to the Federation's work. It could have wider purposes too, with GCSE students, and with Adult learners. It would be there for all within the age range, and would be a significant investment in the achievement of the 16-19 age group in the city and its wider area.

It would contain a Library/Resources centre, with top quality ICT facilities, as well as study and seminar rooms. It would also include recreation and social areas. Every 16-19 year old would be automatically a member, allowing students on, for example, work-based programmes, access to the best quality study support. It would be open, say, from 8.00am to 7.00pm, and would be the joint responsibility of the Federation's schools, just as Carlisle Achievement Zone is. In other words, we already have successful experience of running such a city centre venture, funded between us.

It would also act as a focal point for the change in the arrangements between the schools, and, of course, funds would need to be brought in for this project for the good of most of the post 16 students in the city and beyond.

The Management Structure

23 The management structure for these aspects of the Federation's work would have three main tiers:

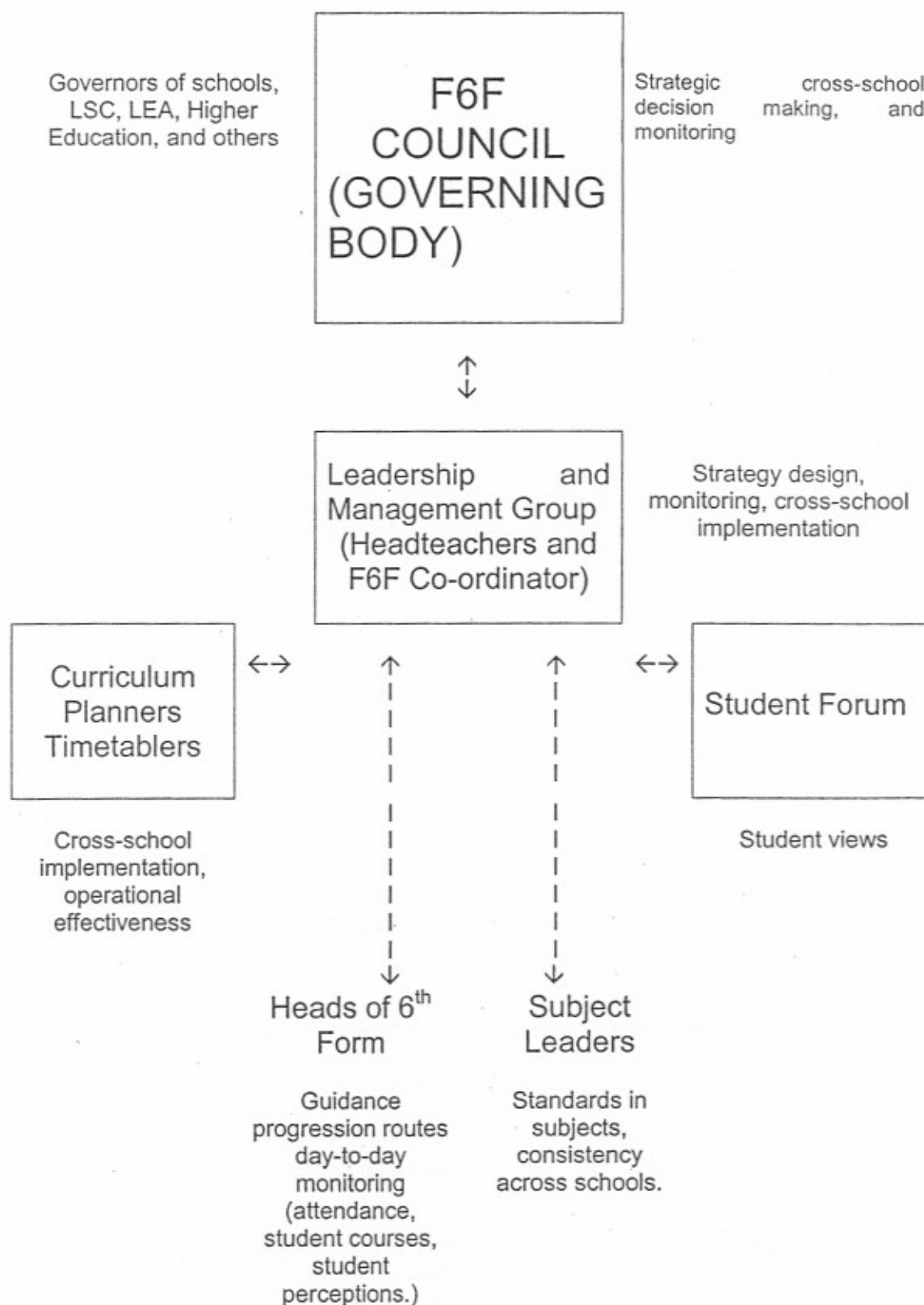
- a) Headteachers of the secondary schools, along with the headteacher of the special school, and the principals of the colleges;
- b) Curriculum planners/timetablers
- c) Heads of Sixth Forms

Terms of reference and operating procedures of b) and c) will be determined by a), and each group would meet no less often than each half term. Secretarial and administrative support required, and consideration will be needed for a Co-ordinator/Project director.

There would also need to be further sub-groups, such as Subject leaders, and Heads of Year 11, to meet for specific purposes, such as exam entries, consistent standards, Year 11 guidance etc.

Further consideration will need to be given for the Governance of this enterprise, which could be formed from representatives of all the institutions' governing bodies, meeting, say, twice yearly, to receive reports on recruitment, retention, achievements etc. There would clearly be scope for the involvement of the LSC, the LEA, the City Council, and the Higher Education institutions as part of this group. There would therefore be a Board to govern this, the F6F Council.

In diagram form, this is shown below:



Costings

24 We would welcome support for this project from the LSC and the LEA and from other agencies such as the City Council. There will be some administrative and co-ordination work to do, of course, amounting to perhaps £35,000 - £45,000 per year. Wider funding would be welcome, but the schools are committed to this process and look to other bodies to support us in the venture.

25 It would be helpful in the short term, for funds to be available to support the development of the level 1 and level 2 courses. Again, the source of such funding is not clear, if the LSC is not able to support us in this way.

26 The capital part of our programme would be in the building of a central Learning Centre. The one-off capital costs of this could be in the region of £1.5-£2 million, and this would be a very exciting, and possibly unique aspect of the development of the scheme.

27 These costs would make very effective and affordable alternatives, to the benefit of all students in the city.

How to respond to this proposal

28 There is no requirement that these proposals follow a statutory route. What they seek to do is to elaborate upon the present position and direction that the schools are establishing, before the local LSC interrupted with its own Sixth Form College proposal. However, we would welcome a full endorsement and commitment from the LSC Cumbria, the LEA on behalf of the County Council, the city council, the governing bodies of the schools and colleges, and the DfES, for the developments outlined in this document, which we think are exciting and innovative, and which move us forward directly and at a fitting pace, from where we are now.

29 We hope that the LSC Cumbria will be able to withdraw its proposal for a Sixth Form College, and throw its weight and influence behind these ideas and their development and implementation.

30 The Federation of Carlisle Schools would welcome responses to the ideas set out briefly in these pages. These can be sent by letter to:

Mrs Janice Murphy, The Secretary of FoCS, St Aidan's County High School, Lismore Place, Carlisle, CA1

Responses will be acknowledged within two working days of being received, and answered in more detail (if required) within two weeks. Responses will not be published, unless requested.

The Federation of Carlisle Schools

Our 2003-2004 brochure, 'I think I'm going to stay 6n', is available in hard copy from any of the schools.

We also refer to a report by the then FEFC and Ofsted, published in 1999, called 'Post-16 Collaboration: School Sixth Forms and the Further Education Sector.' This is available from the national LSC web site.