

Hadrian Learning Trust

**Report on Initial Consultation  
on Proposal to Change the Age Ranges of  
Queen Elizabeth High School and Hexham Middle School**

23 January 2018

**Contents**

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Consultation process	2
3.	Number of responses	3
4.	Outline of responses	5
5.	Conclusions of the Trust Board	6
6.	What happens next?	7
7.	Appendix – summary of responses to each question	8

## **1. Introduction**

This report sets out the results of the Initial Consultation carried out by Hadrian Learning Trust in the Summer Term of 2017. The consultation sought views on a proposal to bring together Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS) and Hexham Middle School (HMS) in order to create a single Secondary school. As a result, the age range of Queen Elizabeth High School would change from 13-18 years to 11-18 years.

Hadrian Learning Trust would like to thank everyone who took part in the consultation, either by attending meetings or submitting written responses. We particularly appreciate that many people took the time to respond at length. Every response was read and considered by the whole Trust Board.

Sections 2 and 3 of the report describe the consultation process and number of responses received. Given the length of many responses, it would not be practical to list every point made. Therefore, the overall response to each question is outlined in Section 4, with a more detailed summary of issues raised provided in the Appendix. Please note that we gave an undertaking that all responses would be treated in confidence, so we have not identified the views of individual stakeholders. Section 5 presents the conclusions the Trust Board have reached as a result of the consultation and then Section 6 outlines next steps.

## **2. Consultation process**

The consultation ran for a period of four weeks, between 26 June and 21 July 2017.

All stakeholders were consulted, including:

- Staff at HMS & QEHS
- Students at HMS & QEHS
- Parents/carers of students at HMS & QEHS
- Parents/carers at all other First & Middle schools in the Hexham Partnership
- Headteachers and Governors of all other schools in the Hexham Partnership
- Headteachers and Governors of other schools feeding into the Hexham Partnership
- Trades Unions
- Interim Chief Executive & Interim Director of Children's Services, Northumberland County Council
- Church of England and Roman Catholic Diocesan Heads of Education
- County Councillors representing wards with schools in the Hexham Partnership
- Guy Opperman MP.

The Regional Schools Commissioner was informed of the consultation but was not a consultee, as she would be the decision maker should a Business Case for the proposal ultimately be submitted to the Department for Education.

The consultation received considerable publicity in the Hexham Courant, other newspapers and on regional television.

Consultation documents were available from the schools' websites and offices, in order to ensure that the wider community had the opportunity to respond.

Drop-in sessions were held to give consultees the opportunity to ask questions of Trustees and Senior Leaders face-to-face. These included:

- Staff Drop-in Session at HMS on Monday 3 July 15.30-17.00
- Staff Drop-in Sessions at QEHS on Wednesday 5 July 15.30-17.00
- General Drop-in Session at HMS on Monday 3 July 17.30-19.00
- General Drop-in Session at QEHS on Wednesday 5 July 17.30-19.00

In addition, the Chair of the Trust Board and Executive Headteacher made themselves available for individual appointments on 11 and 13 July.

Consultees were asked to complete a Response Form, which asked for their views on three statements and an open question which enabled them to make other comments or suggest alternative proposals. Response Forms could be submitted via email, by hand or by post.

### 3. Number of responses

The number attending consultation events was relatively low compared to the potential number of attendees, with the exception of the HMS Staff Drop-in.

<b>Table 1: Consultation Events</b>	<b>Number. Attending</b>
HMS Staff Drop-in	31
QEHS Staff Drop-in	9
General Drop-in at HMS	30
General Drop-in at QEHS	25
Appointments with Exec. Head/Chair	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>

Table 2 below sets out the total number of consultation responses received. We have included standard response forms, non-standard response forms such as letters or emails, and responses which arrived after the official deadline. Each is counted as one response, regardless of how many people signed it (for example, joint responses from members of the same family). Where an identical response was received from each family member, these were counted as separate responses.

<b>Table 2: Consultation Responses</b>	<b>Number</b>
Standard Forms	353
Non-Standard (emails/letters)	30
Letters from Corbridge Middle pupils	36
Late Responses	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>439</b>

We do not have sufficient data to calculate a percentage response rate. However, as a guide, there are currently circa 3,500 children in partnership schools, so potentially the total number of respondents could have been into the thousands.

Table 3 below breaks down responses by category. Please note that some responses crossed several categories: for example, parents with children at more than one school; parents who are also staff members. This means that the number of responses below is greater than the total shown in Table 2.

<b>Table 3: Respondent Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Schools & Other Organisations	19
HMS Staff	13
QEHS Staff	30
HMS Students	10
QEHS Students	16
HMS Parents	49
QEHS Parents	45
Parents of Other Schools	231
Other/not specified	92

Table 4 below shows the breakdown of parental responses by school compared to the total number of full-time pupils on roll in January 2017 (Source: DfE). Please note that there is an element of double counting here, as some parents had children at more than one school, so the total is greater than shown in Table 3.

<b>Table 4: Parental Responses by School</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>F/T Pupils Jan. 2017</b>
Corbridge Middle	73	325
HMS	49	470
QEHS	45	1266
Sele First	33	390
St Joseph's Middle	21	340
Whittonstall First	21	60
Whitley Chapel First	20	25
Beaufront First	19	75
Broomhaugh First	15	70
Chollerton First	12	35
Corbridge First	10	135
Hexham First	6	110
Slaley First	6	45
Acomb First	2	55
Humshaugh First	2	30
St Mary's First	1	105
Other/not specified	30	-

## 4. Outline of responses

In order to better understand the views of stakeholders, the Initial Consultation asked four open questions rather than for a simple agree/disagree/don't know response. Therefore, it is not possible to quantify the number of responses supporting or opposing the proposal.

We outline briefly below the overall response to each question. A summary of specific points made is included in the Appendix on pages 8 to 11. Please note these reflect the views of individual consultees and are not necessarily accepted by the Trust as accurate or correct.

*We have set three key objectives for our schools: first and foremost, improving educational experience and outcomes; secondly, becoming financial sustainable; and, thirdly, securing capital investment. Please let us know your views on this.*

Most responses to this question were broadly sympathetic to the objectives themselves. However, the majority of those responding did not agree that moving to an 11-18 system was the best means of achieving them.

*We have concluded that the status quo for our schools is not sustainable and that there needs to be a change. Please let us know your views on this.*

Those supportive of the need for change tended to reiterate the arguments made in the consultation document around educational fit with the national system and the link between financial sustainability and educational provision.

Those who opposed change, who were in the majority of those responding, tended to argue that the problem lay with QEHS/HMS and therefore any solution should be found within those schools. Their focus was mainly on the potential negative impact on other schools.

*It is proposed that Queen Elizabeth High School and Hexham Middle School should come together to create a single 11-18 Secondary school. Please let us know your views on this.*

Those who supported the proposal tended to argue that this was the best response to strategic challenges and/or cite specific educational benefits.

Many questions focused on what the specific implications would be for their own children, which it is not possible to answer at this stage, as much would depend on details of implementation to be developed with other parties.

Those who did not support the proposal, who were in the majority of respondents, tended to argue in favour of what they felt were the benefits of the Three-Tier system or highlight the potential negative consequences for other schools in the partnership.

*Please let us know if you have any other comments on this consultation or if there are any alternative proposals that you would like us to consider.*

Some respondents made an overall response in this section rather than answering the previous questions. Some comments concerned the nature of the consultation process and information provided. Many felt that it would be better to hold a wider consultation involving other schools and the Local Authority. A range of alternative proposals were made around curriculum offer, school structures and any future process. Summaries are provided in the Appendix.

## **5. Conclusions of the Trust Board**

As we acknowledged at the outset, this initial proposal was bound to leave many detailed questions unanswered at this stage. We appreciate that this has caused uncertainty for staff and parents who would be directly affected by any change.

Before embarking on this Initial Consultation, the Trust Board were aware that any age range change had the potential to be contentious. Having read the many consultation reports on such changes elsewhere, we also anticipated many of the arguments made in favour of maintaining the status quo – often centred on the educational experience felt to be offered by middle schools. We do understand these. Respondents sometimes overlooked the fact that we run a successful middle school as well as a high school.

We respect the views of stakeholders who are passionate advocates of the Three-Tier system. We accept that, for some, our rationale was not sufficient to persuade them that change is necessary. We note that those who did not support the proposal formed the largest number of respondents but only constitute a minority of all our stakeholders. The overall number of responses was 439 compared to a potential total of thousands.

The proposal did have support from a range of different stakeholders, often conditional on details of a co-ordinated and fully-funded implementation. The fundamental difference between support and opposition seemed to hinge on the extent to which it was accepted that the Trust's three key objectives are intertwined.

Although some responses suggested alternative proposals, in the view of the Trust Board these would not deliver our key objectives.

When we launched our consultation, we said that we wanted to widen the debate about the future of education in this area for the next 30 years or more. Clearly, the dynamics of both the local and national educational landscape have shifted further in recent months.

Consequently, we warmly welcome Northumberland County Council's decision to instigate a big conversation about Education in the West. This will cover provision in both the Hexham and Haydon Bridge Partnerships, educational and financial sustainability, capital investment and the potential consequences of our own age range proposal, among other issues.

Hadrian Learning Trust intends to play a full part in this wider debate. We recognise that any proposals that we make will need to be considered in that wider context.

In the light of this, we believe it is appropriate at this time to signal our own current thinking. At a meeting on 16 January, the Trust Board decided that it remains of the view that a primary/secondary arrangement would be in the best interests of the children who progress through the school system to be educated at Queen Elizabeth High School. As such, we believe it will be appropriate in due course to proceed to a formal consultation. We will discuss with the Regional Schools Commissioner and Northumberland County Council how that might best work in conjunction with the Education in the West process.

We believe this is a once-in-a-generation chance to build a school system that delivers the very best education for our children and know that we have a responsibility to help shape this. With careful consideration for children in the transition period, with the right investment across our schools, with the right planning informed by research, we can create a sustainable system, with access to state-of-the-art, specialist facilities and with the scale to invest properly in children's academic and personal development.

## **6. What happens next?**

This outlining of our position is intended to inform the Education in the West process, rather than to pre-empt its outcome. At this stage, all that we have decided is to consult further. Details of that will be published in due course.

We will make no final decision before the Summer Term. Any decision will take into account the views expressed in our consultation and the outcome of Northumberland County Council's process. Should the Trust Board decide to go ahead, we would submit a Significant Change Business Case to the Regional Schools Commissioner/ Department of Education for approval.

While Hadrian Learning Trust can only make decisions for the schools in our own Multi-Academy Trust, we are committed to working in partnership with others.

## Appendix – summary of responses to each question

### Positive Comments on key objectives

- *3 objectives are clearly intertwined.*
- *Primary/Secondary is better fit with national system/Key Stages.*
- *Splitting Key Stage 2/3 makes it difficult to ensure progress/deliver curriculum.*
- *One school change is better for children.*
- *Two-Tier system works well elsewhere.*
- *First schools would be more sustainable due to extra funding that comes with 2 additional year groups.*
- *Confident we could provide excellent primary experience for our children.*
- *2 more years in caring environment would enable students to transfer to secondary with greater confidence.*
- *Transition at age 13 makes it hard for students making GCSE choices.*
- *QEHS badly in need of capital investment.*
- *Consistent transfer age across West Northumberland better for parental choice.*
- *Investment for future of area and its pupils.*

### Questions or Concerns about key objectives

- *Prefer the Three-Tier system.*
- *No evidence that transitions affect children.*
- *GCSE results already very good, due partly to feeder schools.*
- *Ofsted judge majority of middle schools to be good or better.*
- *3-Tier students do better than national average at GCSE/EBACC.*
- *Pupil experience is more important than outcomes.*
- *Middle schools act as bridge/stepping stone between small rural first schools and large high school.*
- *Pastoral provision is better in middle school.*
- *Middle schools are better for social, emotional and intellectual development.*
- *Specialist teaching and facilities would be lost in Year 5 & 6.*
- *Year 7 & 8 pupils get more opportunities for self-development in middle schools.*
- *Same ends could be achieved by closer collaboration with middle schools.*
- *Needs of rural Northumberland are different to other areas.*
- *Would damage sustainability of small rural first schools.*
- *Not fair to other schools/unilateral move by high school.*
- *How would this benefit disadvantaged/SEND students?*
- *Bullying/bad language is rife in secondary schools.*
- *Not clear what assumptions are behind financial projections.*
- *Driven by financial reasons/puts money before education.*
- *How allowed to become academy given financial projections?*
- *QEHS could lose students to other high/independent schools.*
- *Sixth Form should be reviewed.*
- *Hadrian Learning Trust could improve financial position by expanding MAT.*
- *Is capital investment guaranteed/dependent on change to Two-Tier?*
- *Other schools would require capital investment to become Primaries.*
- *Impact on staff morale/anxiety.*
- *Risk of disruption to education of children in middle of change.*
- *Mix of transfer years between schools could create difficulties for all.*
- *Aim should be to develop coherent, sustainable educational system for area.*

### **Positive Comments on need for change**

- *Agree that current situation for partnership as a whole is not sustainable.*
- *Recognise challenges faced by QEHS.*
- *Statistics in document present compelling argument.*
- *Whole education system predicated on a Two-Tier model.*
- *KS2 accountability rests with school who have students for less than 2 years.*
- *In secondaries, students have longer to settle in before rigour of GCSE's.*
- *Agree that children's progress slows when they move schools.*
- *Further savings cannot be made without impacting on students.*
- *Finance = quality education.*
- *Three-Tier model is inherently inefficient – underlined by shrinking real-terms budgets.*
- *Students need to study second language in Year 7 & 8.*
- *Need to reflect changes in other schools and long-term population trends.*
- *Need positive approach to change to face challenges.*
- *Recognise Trust has students' best intentions at heart.*

### **Questions or Concerns on need for change**

- *No evidence that first and middle schools are unsustainable.*
- *Impact on other schools in the Partnership.*
- *More collaborative conversation between schools needed.*
- *High School is dictating change on rest of successful Partnership.*
- *Review High School provision rather than force change on others.*
- *Problems are result of sixth form entry policy.*
- *Wait until impact of National Funding Formula changes are clearer.*
- *More information needed on assumptions behind modelling.*
- *Becoming a MAT was supposed to bring extra funding.*
- *What financial modelling has been done/advice sought?*
- *Question financial management at Hadrian Learning Trust.*
- *Cost of restructuring versus financial gains.*
- *Risk that school system could become fragmented.*
- *Parents will want their children to stay at middle school until end of Year 8 if other middle schools remain open.*
- *Concern that children at Corbridge Middle will not be guaranteed places at QEHS.*
- *Risk losing students from outside catchment.*
- *Some first schools are too small to become primaries.*
- *What happens at QEHS is easiest part of equation.*
- *Concerns about KS3 delivery by secondary schools.*
- *What other options have been considered?*
- *Are financial stability and capital investment more likely in a Two-Tier system?*
- *Full risk assessment required.*
- *Significant capital investment for all schools must be guaranteed to implement change.*
- *Risk of significant disruption/loss of staff.*
- *Concerned about logistics of change.*
- *Being out of step with national system is not reason to change.*
- *Where other areas have made change, has resulted in worse outcomes.*

### **Positive Comments on proposal to create 11-18 secondary**

- *Better to be strategic than react to crisis.*
- *Not many Three-Tier schools left in the country – there has to be a reason for this.*
- *Should have done it years ago.*
- *Too much variation in provision before Y9.*
- *Current system is working well but recognise challenges facing QEHS, which will inevitably impact on educational journey of all children.*
- *Middle/high system is luxury we may no longer be able to afford.*
- *Making best of current model does not make it fit for purpose going forward,*
- *One transition is better– despite all the effort that goes into making it as smooth as possible for children.*
- *Would not support multiple entry points for educational reasons.*
- *Two-Tier works well in other parts of country, no reason Hexham should be different.*
- *Children at age 9 are too young to move school.*
- *More time with students to recognise/support SEN and other issues.*
- *Would make real difference for children struggling with literacy.*
- *Older students should not be viewed as a threat but a superb resource to support younger children.*
- *Secondary schools can offer greater depth of specialist teaching from Y7.*
- *Advantageous to have experience of challenge of GCSE's when teaching Y7 onwards.*
- *Ambition that merger of HMS/QEHS results in retention of best of both worlds.*

### **Questions or Concerns about proposal to create 11-18 secondary**

- *Where are Y5 & Y6 going to go?*
- *What will be the pathway/admissions arrangements for my child in Year X?*
- *What is the earliest we can apply?*
- *How would first schools cope with transition to primary?*
- *What will be the impact on other middle schools in the short and long term?*
- *Not against in principle but must be viewed in context of impact on all schools.*
- *Three-Tier system combines academic excellence with pastoral support.*
- *Three-Tier system is reason families move into area.*
- *Children have outgrown small rural schools by Y4.*
- *Many first schools do not have physical space to become primaries.*
- *Parents may choose to educate their children elsewhere.*
- *Middle schools have better extra-curricular offer than first schools.*
- *Middle schools have specialist teachers & facilities.*
- *Closure of schools providing good quality education.*
- *Risk of individual children becoming 'lost' in large secondary.*
- *Worried about bullying.*
- *Children from small rural schools moving to large secondary with 18 year olds.*
- *Fewer opportunities for Y7 & Y8 in secondary.*
- *QEHS has failed to maintain exceptional educational standards.*
- *Curriculum at QEHS is already being narrowed.*
- *Another exam factory secondary with wasted KS3.*
- *Secondary schools nationally are also under financial pressure.*
- *Can QEHS secure enough Y7 & Y8 students if CMS/ St Joseph's do not change?*
- *Will students be attracted to a super-size school?*
- *How will QEHS accommodate extra pupils?*

- *Where would a new site be?*
- *If on same site, how much disruption would that cause?*
- *Only potential gain would be for QEHS to raise capital through sale of HMS site.*
- *Investment required to accommodate extra students at QEHS.*
- *Disruption of education during transition from one system to another.*
- *Job insecurity would be key concern.*
- *Investment required during transition: change management; curriculum & pastoral planning; training to retain high quality staff in either primary or secondary settings.*
- *Proposal is not for merger but closure of HMS.*
- *Requires buy-in from other schools to succeed.*
- *Mixed economy of Two and Three-Tier would be most damaging outcome.*

### **Other comments/alternative proposals**

- *Review of system appropriate given wider educational and financial landscape.*
- *Consultation too short/wrong time of year.*
- *Provide details of other options considered.*
- *Not enough detailed evidence provided.*
- *Insufficient engagement with other schools in partnership.*
- *MAT was established to educate children aged 9-13.*
- *No guaranteed places in Y9 is threat.*
- *Prove that educational outcomes/experience are declining to justify change.*
- *Other Two-Tier partnerships locally have not felt need to change.*
- *Move HMS and QEHS onto single site without changing age range.*
- *Enlarge MAT/create partnership-wide MAT/Tynedale MAT.*
- *New build, all through 4-18/9-18 school for Hexham.*
- *Create infant/junior schools/turn HMS into junior school.*
- *Create distinct 'schools within a school' in the new secondary.*
- *Increase overall student numbers at QEHS/HMS.*
- *Increase sixth form numbers by reducing entry requirements.*
- *Close sixth form/create Sixth Form College for Tyne Valley.*
- *Distribute sixth form through partnership schools in university campus style.*
- *Reduce curriculum options/other provision.*
- *Offer more vocational courses.*
- *Lobby government to secure additional funding/government policies can change.*
- *Seek sponsorship from business.*
- *Increase revenue from lettings.*
- *Borrow the funds for capital investment.*
- *Sell existing sites and move to new site.*
- *Change staff terms and conditions.*
- *County Council to provide support to other schools to implement plans.*
- *Suitable staffing protocol essential to protect jobs.*
- *Work with Local Authority and other partners to create coherent solution.*