RESEARCH SUMMARY

2020 futures: Making sense of the future

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Introduction – the story so far

The 2020 Futures briefing papers have described and explored the big issues and trends that will have an effect on schools and colleges in the decade starting in 2010. The papers have charted the impact of projected changes in:

- **Population** – including the trends towards an increasing, ageing and more ethnically diverse population; more people choosing to live on their own; and the increase in the number of couples projected to cohabit relative to those getting married.
- **Society** – including continuing and potentially deepening inequality; a more complex sense of personal and national identity; challenges to social cohesion; an expectation of public information being transparent and rights being enforceable; increased social networking; greater decentralisation of government; and a more plural politics.
- **Climate change** – including potential trends in weather patterns in the UK and the requirements being introduced via the Carbon Reduction Commitment to cut CO2 emissions – including in schools and colleges.
- **Health** – including the rise in the number of over 85 year-olds requiring care and treatment (and the associated cost of paying for this); the increasing prevalence of obesity and drink-related diseases and the associated growing emphasis on prevention; the trend towards providing more care outside hospital; and the rate and scope of new treatments, drugs and technologies.
- **Information and communication technology (ICT)** – including embedding ICT into a multitude of everyday objects; smart devices and applications that react to us individually when we use them; the growth of social software; the increasing mobility and capacity of devices; high-speed broadband across the country; and the blurring of the boundaries between different technologies.
- **Brain science** – including the growing understanding about how the brain functions to support the acquisition of language skills; the facility to read and undertake different types of mathematical tasks; and the importance of adolescence in the development of the brain.
- **Public services** – including the reductions in levels of public spending; increases in charges for services (and the range of services for which charges are made); smarter spending with public agencies in an area making better use of their combined spending power; greater personalisation and choice through entitlements and more open markets; more open real-time reporting of performance; and continuing changes to the roles of professionals, para-professionals and support staff.
- **Economy** – including some continuing migration (but on a reduced scale); more women in the labour market and part-time working; a drive to increase skills and productivity and to reduce worklessness; and the development of industries such as the low carbon economy, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and the digital economy and creative industries.

Six OECD scenarios

This briefing brings together the implications of these trends and projections and considers what they might mean for the school and college system as a whole. It describes six potential scenarios for schooling developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and considers the extent to which these scenarios are likely to develop in an English or UK context. It also discusses the factors that could influence moves towards one scenario or another.

The briefing concludes by reiterating the key messages and actions that school and college leaders should reflect on as a result of the 2020 Futures project, irrespective of which scenario comes about.

The OECD has analysed each of the six scenarios under five headings:

- attitudes, expectations and political support
- goals, functions and equity
- organisations and structures
- the geo-political system
- the teaching force

The detail of each scenario under these headings is found in Appendix 1.
Scenario 1: Back to the future: bureaucratic school system

This scenario envisages that national bureaucracies are robust enough to resist pressures for change, despite the grumbling of students, parents and the media. Decision making is hierarchical, regulation is often prescriptive, and there is strong pressure for uniformity. Formal classroom teaching, with teacher-to-student learning settings, is the norm, with little room for informal learning and community interaction. Schools are assigned additional tasks in response to problems arising in families and communities.

School and college leaders will recognise many of the characteristics of this scenario, as described in Appendix 1, Table 1. The bureaucratic approach encapsulates much of what has happened in education since 1988. Education policy is politicised; there is a strong and relentless focus on standards; the acquisition of qualifications is considered paramount; Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Test, Measurement, and Diagnostic Equipment Integrated Maintenance Management System (TIMMS) scores are used to rank the performance and progress of the education system; relations between schools and communities are variable; teacher trade unions are strong, with some firmly opposed to change; and inequalities continue despite attempts to address them.

However, the scenario does not altogether represent England in the 1990s and early 2000s. Unlike the scenario, funding has increased (although that may well change); there has been widespread use of ICT in teaching; teachers in most schools are generally not working in isolation from each other; and Teach First, the Graduate Teacher Programme and Higher Level Teaching Assistants have provided new and more varied routes into teaching.

Scenario 2: Schools as focused learning organisations

In this scenario (see Appendix 1, Table 2), schools are primarily learning organisations, revitalised around new knowledge of teaching and learning, a demanding curricula for all students in a wide range of disciplines, and a strong national network for sharing good practice. The system enjoys strong support from politicians and the media and substantial investment, especially to benefit disadvantaged communities and maintain good working conditions.

This scenario potentially provides a more appealing outlook for many leaders with its emphasis on knowledge-building, experimentation, innovation and life-long learning. Arguably some of the steps necessary towards making this a reality have been taken. For example, although there is no consensus on the goals of education (with arguments between those who see education as essentially utilitarian in nature and those who believe in learning for its own sake) there is strong public support for the value of education.

In addition, secondary schools and colleges increasingly have their own distinct ethos or specialism and tend to operate in a far less hierarchical manner than when selection was universally applied. There has been relatively generous funding, ICT use is widespread, there are strong links between schools and networking between teachers, the status of teachers has improved and City Challenge and other programmes have provided targeted support for low income areas.

However, there are areas where the position in England falls short of this scenario being realised. In particular there is a long way to go to meet the scenario descriptors in the crucial areas relating to the curriculum, innovative assessment, life-long learning, levels of guidance and counselling, and experimentation in teaching and learning linked to educational research and development.

Scenario 3: Schools as core social centres

In this scenario (see Appendix 1, Table 3), the walls around schools come down but they remain strong organisations, sharing responsibilities with other community bodies. Much emphasis is given to non-formal learning, collective tasks and intergenerational activities. High public support ensures quality environments, and teachers enjoy high esteem.

Again school and college leaders will be familiar with the core idea behind this scenario. Community colleges have been a feature of some local education systems since the 1970s. The launch of the Every Child Matters agenda in 2003 saw, in some areas, the development of
local networks of schools that brought together education, community services and services for health, protection, child care and leisure. Developing a learning community by involving parents as learners has been the emphasis for other schools. The steady growth of all-through 3-19 schools and the introduction of local or community sponsors of academies also reflects aspects of this scenario. The inclusion of citizenship in the curriculum in 2002 has reinforced engagement with the wider community. However, this scenario is far from being the norm. Involvement in tasks and life beyond the school can also be a burden as it brings new and unfair accountabilities. School and college leaders can feel that they have very limited control over the factors that determine students’ health and wellbeing and so should not be held to account for outcomes in these areas.

This scenario also throws into sharp relief the unresolved issue within education policy – graphically described in Figure 1 – of whether the mission of schools and colleges is narrow or broad. Is it their role to focus on educational attainment (more in line with the attributes of scenario 1), or should they be expected to contribute to addressing society’s wider problems such as reducing obesity, smoking and teenage pregnancy? Until there is consensus on this issue, neither scenario 3 or 4 is likely to provide a motivating vision around which all involved in education can rally.

**Scenario 4: The extended market model**

In this scenario (Appendix 1, Table 4), education takes on market characteristics and choice becomes prominent. Diversified services and private providers come to the forefront as systems disappear and governments see a markedly different role for themselves in setting rules for markets to operate. The decline of government involvement may vary between primary and secondary education, and between affluent and poorer areas.

This scenario is arguably closest to what might develop in England over the next few years. Already we have seen the first chains of schools, competitions to run new maintained schools, more formal competitions between sponsors for new academies, the introduction of school

**Figure 1: The dilemma over the scope of the role of schools and colleges**
accreditation, the entry of multinational players such as Kunskappskolan and EdisonLearning into the schools market, and new community organisations playing a role in school trusts.

Among the first actions of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 was to open up further the supply of schooling, with the introduction of free schools leading to an acceleration of a market approach to schooling. Good and outstanding schools have been enabled and encouraged to become independent academies.

In this scenario the role of local authorities and the state more generally will focus on ensuring that the market works smoothly (for example, that every child has a school place); stimulating providers to enter the market by ensuring a level playing field in terms of funding; regulating potential oversupply; and ensuring quality. As the scenario outlines, there is likely to be greater experimentation and diversification but potentially greater inequality as well – schools in deprived areas, for example, may not be able to attract sufficient numbers of high quality teachers.

Furthermore, as the OECD recognises, the ultimate test of whether this scenario takes root is whether it proves effective. The evidence on this from both the United States and Sweden is decidedly mixed.1

### Scenario 5: Learning networks

This scenario (Appendix 1, Table 5) imagines the disappearance of schools, replaced by learning networks operating within a highly developed ‘network society’. Networks based on cultural, religious and community interests lead to a multitude of formal and informal learning settings, with intensive use of ICT, including small groups, individualised arrangements and home schooling.

On its own admission the OECD recognises that this scenario is radical – even anarchic. The factors that might drive the abandonment of schools could be a combination of public dissatisfaction with available schools, rejection of organised public institutions, and widespread access to powerful interactive web-based new learning media. The scenario also assumes that networks based on family, community and religious interests are strong enough to form learning networks on a universal basis – which in an English context is extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future.

However, if the government of the day were, for example, to impose a narrower, more elitist academic curriculum, we may see a significant minority of parents opting out of the formal education system. The Labour government’s decision to introduce the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework in September 2008 encountered vociferous opposition from certain groups of parents and child care providers, including the Steiner schools. One of the unforeseen consequences of opening up the schools’ market could be that new education providers offer more radical and less traditional models of schooling.

### Scenario 6: System meltdown

This scenario (Appendix 1, Table 6) depicts a meltdown of the school system. It results mainly from a major shortage of teachers triggered by retirement, unsatisfactory working conditions, and more attractive job opportunities elsewhere.

This crisis scenario could be brought about by a major exodus of teachers, leaving mid-career or through retirement, that far outstrips the inflow of new recruits in a tight market for skilled labour. The scenario assumes that the government only recognises the severity of the problem too late and that the measures necessary to rectify the situation take too long to show results. As in the other scenarios, the most deprived areas would suffer the most.

It would be easy to dismiss this scenario in a UK context, particularly as teachers’ salaries rose substantially in real terms in the early 2000s, incentives to enter teaching (particularly for scarcity subjects) are strong, and jobs for graduates have been scarcer due to the financial climate – making teaching a relatively attractive profession. In addition, in anticipating a bulge in school leader retirements from 2009 to 2015, the National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services implemented a succession planning strategy. However, a combination of a freeze on public sector pay, reduced pension entitlements and a resurgent private sector could change the situation, although system meltdown still seems unlikely.

### The challenge for ASCL

None of these scenarios quite captures what is happening or is likely to happen in England or any
of the devolved administrations. We are more likely to see elements from the various scenarios come together to determine the shape of education – although scenario 4 may well come closest to the overarching scenario for secondary schools.

The scenarios nevertheless are instructive. They show that many of the issues that school and college leaders are dealing with on a day-to-day basis are as a result of an overall policy vision. For example, as highlighted above, the fact that schools have been assigned additional duties in response to problems in families and society is not chance. It reflects a view that the state (and its agencies and resources) have a responsibility to intervene and ameliorate the worst social problems. Likewise, the move to introduce free schools stems from a market perspective that competition is in itself a good thing that sharpens performance in every sector.

The challenge for ASCL is, therefore, twofold. It first has to engage with policy makers about the consequences of some of their plans, as they are shaped by their long-term view of how schooling should evolve. ASCL has been very effective in doing this. However, like Sisyphus in the Greek myth who was given the job of trying to roll a boulder up a hill only to see it keep rolling down again, it is a never-ending process.

The second challenge for ASCL is to continue to develop and promote its own vision of what education in the 21st century should look like and what drivers should move the system to deliver it – so that the detail of policy is steered by a scenario which has been shaped by school and college leaders themselves. It is a future that compels and has momentum because education professionals have persuaded parents, policy makers and society to buy into it.

The work ASCL has done to campaign for a new curriculum for 14-19 year-olds based around a general diploma is one example of this – even though the full vision has yet to be realised. This sort of proactive policy making and campaigning is likely to be even more necessary if ASCL wants to move the education debate and terrain decisively in favour of a scenario it favours.

The challenge for school and college leaders

Irrespective of which scenario develops, the trends identified through this project and summarised at the beginning of this briefing mean that there are a number of proactive steps that school and college leaders can take to ensure that they and the institutions they lead are fit for the future.

1 Prepare for fluctuations in student numbers

This will partly be driven by demographic factors. The picture will vary by region and density of population but, generally, the number of 15-19 year-olds will decline through to 2020, although the trend will reverse during the 2020s. The number of 10-14 year-olds will also fall for the next few years but as the rising birth rate feeds through from primary to secondary schools the numbers will start to rise again after 2014.

In addition, the effect of greater competition between schools may also lead to greater volatility and make it harder for schools to work together to plan for increases and decreases in the overall student population.

2 Think about how to educate in a more diverse environment

The UK population is much more ethnically diverse than it was in 1970 and this trend will continue. One of the factors driving a higher birth rate is the increase in the proportion of births to mothers born outside of the UK. The trend will particularly affect parts of the country where the population is already ethnically diverse: London, West and East Midlands, Yorkshire and the North West.

Diversity in society will also extend to children living in less settled family patterns, a more open approach to personal relationships, and a more pluralistic approach to religion, culture and politics.

Managing this diversity and achieving social cohesion will be all the harder because of the continuing levels of inequality. Affluent and poor may live in the same town but tend to lead very separate lives. For example, already nearly half of all social housing is located in the fifth of neighbourhoods with the highest levels of deprivation.

Given this background the school and college system as a whole will need to work to recruit significantly more teachers and leaders from minority ethnic backgrounds. There could be increasing pressure to reform the current
admission arrangements so that they break down rather than reinforce barriers in society. Leaders of institutions and their governing bodies will need to make sure that they have a deep understanding of their local community and that they work with parents and community leaders to forge strong links. This will help to raise educational aspirations and make sure that the curriculum is appropriate to students' needs. It also potentially provides a strong platform for involving parents and the wider community in learning and for dealing with behaviour problems in school and social problems in the community.

Partnership working between schools and colleges – and with further education and universities – on both the curriculum and extracurricular activities could grow in significance as a way of building social cohesion by enabling students from different backgrounds to meet and understand each other’s issues, interests and cultures. All-through 3-19 schools and schools working cross-phase through local trusts could be other important ways of developing a more cohesive approach.

3 Plan to cut carbon emissions

Carbon emissions from schools account for 15 per cent of all public sector emissions. From 2010 onwards schools will come under pressure from their local authority to record, measure and reduce their energy consumption as schools' emissions will form part of an authority’s carbon footprint in the new Carbon Reduction Commitment. The scheme, which will be fully in place from 2013, brings with it significant financial incentives and sanctions to use less energy as part of a broader national strategy to cut carbon emissions by at least 34 per cent by 2020.

Generating heat and power is the single biggest cause of schools' emissions – although goods purchased and school travel and transport are also significant factors. The government estimates that 20 per cent or more energy reduction in schools could be achieved by low to no cost measures.

Schools and colleges can also promote sustainability through the curriculum and in the way that the broader life of the institution is organised. Many are already acting on the environment agenda, although an Ofsted report in 2008 found that schools in general had a long way to go to meet the sustainable schools' standard. The sort of initiatives that will increasingly be on the agenda for school and college leaders include:

- strong curriculum leadership to ensure that sustainable development forms a core part of the development plan
- embedding understanding of the planet's life support systems and how human action affects them in the curriculum alongside literacy, numeracy and ICT
- using a school or college and its grounds as a major teaching and demonstration resource for sustainable living
- implementing imaginative travel plans, supported by practical measures, as a way of creating a strong culture of walking and cycling
- promoting sustainability within the school and beyond
- involving students in local projects and school councils and enabling them to put their understanding of local issues into a global context

4 Keep abreast of developments in brain science

Neuroscience is still a young science and almost certainly there is more we don't know than do know. However, the potential for brain research to help educators understand the learning process is enormous.

The challenge for school and college leaders will be to keep abreast of developments. They should be encouraging new and experienced teachers to become familiar with how different parts of the brain function and relate to different aspects of learning and learning difficulties.

In particular they need to be aware of how the brain develops in adolescence – how the parts of the brain that fuel sensation-seeking are operating at full throttle while the parts that act as a brake on our urges are still
developing. This interlinks with the surge in the production of hormones in the teenage years making adolescence a time of deep emotional development and mental change.

As school and college leaders increasingly understand the science and, for example, the link between emotional and physical well-being and cognitive performance, they need to be prepared to rethink the organisation of the school day, the role and frequency of physical activity, the availability of counselling and support services, the style of teaching and the nutritional content of school dinners.

5 Continue to embrace the ICT revolution
Schools and colleges, like the rest of society, have travelled an enormous distance since the early 1980s when the Sinclair Spectrum and the BBC Model B defined new technology. Over half of classrooms have interactive whiteboards and the vast majority of the rest have access to data projection facilities. Nine out of ten teachers and full-time further education (FE) practitioners say that they are confident in using technology as part of their job.

However, we are only beginning to understand the power of ICT to transform what it means to be a learner. Young people are the biggest users of ICT. They have grown up with digital media in a way that makes it almost as natural as breathing. The mobile devices we use and take for granted in our personal lives will become vital learning tools.

In the future, curriculum and pedagogy will need to be centred more on actively engaging students and facilitating learning than transmitting knowledge. It will require greater reliance on using visualisation and virtual worlds, collaborative discovery, creating shared web content, providing and discussing feedback online, giving students more opportunities for peer review and more open questioning and discussion. This will happen among students, with the teacher and, via the web, with a wider audience.

The role and focus of teachers will change radically. Initial teacher training will need to equip teachers to carry their natural familiarity with digital technology into their pedagogy in the classroom. And existing teachers will need to improve their use of technology to support the practice of assessment for learning and data management.

6 Extend the principle of personalisation within education
Education has moved a long way in recognising the need for personalisation to match the prevailing consumerist culture. The organisation of catch-up support, the growing range of curriculum options available to students at ages 14 and 16, and the extra support for gifted and talented students, are a recognition of the need for personalisation. But if scenario 4 – the extended market model – is potentially going to become the dominant scenario then school and college leaders will need to be prepared to take personalisation to another level.

The establishment of free schools in effect creates a voucher system with funding following the student very directly and transparently. A pupil premium related directly to the number of disadvantaged students in a school will create pressure to narrow the gap in attainment for those individual students. Further reforms to the way that support is provided for students with special education needs are likely. The performance of students on particular courses could be part of a new accountability framework – as is being proposed for the further education sector. User feedback, both from students and parents, will grow in significance.

The more that schools and colleges have systems that ensure they know, understand and can respond to the needs of each student the more they will be equipped to manage in a more personalised environment.

7 Foster a democratic school
Achieving change and consent within society is becoming harder. Freedom of information has encouraged people to think that there should be no secrets and that they have a right to see everything. Individuals are much more willing to assert their rights and to want redress. Challenge – and aggressive challenge at that – is the default position of many when they are aggrieved.

School and college leaders will need to develop parent voice to the same extent that they have fostered student voice if they are to...
manage changes, with parents as allies rather than as vociferous or disgruntled opponents. Good two-way communications with parents can help them to engage more actively with their children’s learning.

Schools and colleges can also help young people to prepare for this evolving and more assertive society by making citizenship not just another subject in the curriculum but an essential part of how their institution acts and works. They can support student-led activities and active citizenship within and beyond the school. They can encourage discussion and debate, including challenges to the status quo, and foster the characteristics of a democratic school.

8 Improve the skills base and transform information, advice and guidance

The biggest losers from the credit crunch recession have been young people. Youth unemployment has soared to record levels. For many young people this should be temporary as job opportunities expand as the economy recovers. However, the economy already faced problems prior to the onset of the banking crisis – particularly in relation to developing skills. In 2010 the nation was more skilled than ever before but still found itself too far down the league table compared with other similar economies. In 2008 nearly a quarter of 19 year-olds failed to achieve a level 2 qualification and the UK has been particularly weak on producing enough employees with good technical skills.

Supporting the skills agenda and, in particular, ensuring that far fewer young people fail to obtain basic skills will, therefore, be a priority for schools and colleges. This will involve raising aspirations among students about what they can achieve and the possibilities open to them. It also means schools and colleges understanding and engaging with their local economy on its skill needs and job opportunities. This is already starting to happen. The 14-19 diploma agenda has resulted in schools and colleges starting to work more closely with local employers. Sponsorship of trust schools and academies has brought closer ties with universities.

School and college leaders should also expect a greater emphasis on vocational qualifications and a more employer-orientated skills framework – the aim is for one in five young people to be undertaking an apprenticeship within the next decade. The number of advanced apprenticeships will be increased to help address the shortage of technical and intermediate skills.

Information, advice and guidance services are patchy and often fragmented. Young people are not guided around the system in an impartial joined-up way. A big challenge for school and college leaders is to be part of integrating online services with external and school-based careers advice to provide a seamless high quality offer for every young person.

Another challenge some school and college leaders are likely to take on over the next decade is family and community learning. It is potentially a win-win policy, benefiting not just the educational outcomes of young people but also adults and the broader skills agenda as well.

9 Learn to maximise the use of every pound

The funding constraints over the next few years will be severe – even if schools and colleges are spared the worst of the cuts. Increasingly school and college leaders have access to good business management support. As many institutions gain greater financial autonomy under changes being introduced by the Conservative Liberal Democrat administration they will need to develop and draw on this expertise and become razor sharp in securing value for money.

Benchmarking and medium-term financial planning will have to become the norm. Interrogating staffing costs, the largest proportion of the budget by far, and analysing the mix and use of staff will be essential. School and college leaders will need to ensure that teaching and support staff are employed and deployed to meet the precise demands of the current curriculum and the timetable rather than how it was a few years ago.
Some of the schools that are part of chains are using their multi-site operation to identify and cost a course or programme and relate that to performance. They are then applying the model to other schools in the chain. There is no reason why all schools, irrespective of whether they are part of a chain or not, should not collaborate to exchange data on staffing inputs and costs of comparable courses. In late 2009 the Audit Commission reissued its Workforce Tool which allows schools to cost subject areas related to attainment.

Schools will also need to move away from procuring goods and services and organising back office functions and ICT licences and systems on an individual school basis and make sure that they are part of a partnership or larger consortium. Properly constructed school partnerships provide a basis for not only promoting improvements in standards but also for sharing costs in areas such as professional development, specialist posts, school catering, grounds and buildings maintenance services and senior leadership.

Conserving energy to achieve reductions in carbon use is an important goal in its own right but reducing energy use will also be an important way of reducing spending.

The current regulations on what schools can charge for are unclear. But as extended services grow and as ICT developments lead to students increasingly using personal devices in school for their studies, the government will almost certainly be forced to provide greater clarity about the limits of what schools can charge for. Charges are only likely to provide additional funding at the margin but along with maximising income from hiring out school premises they could provide a modest useful additional resource.

10 Don’t give up on collaboration

The extended market scenario will provide lots of incentives for schools to retreat within their institutional boundaries. They will be competing for students (and even, perhaps, the most deprived students, in order to maximise their income from the pupil premium) and the best staff. It could even be in their interest for other schools to fail so that they have the opportunity to take them over.

But to equate autonomy with isolation would be a mistake that would leave both the school system and an autonomous school the poorer. Just as in the commercial world rivals collaborate, in an education market it will make sense to enter into partnerships and alliances.

The research evidence is clear. A school giving support gains as much as a school receiving it – through leadership development, the impetus of fresh ideas, shared professional development, access to areas of expertise and new opportunities which help to retain able and aspiring staff. And in a world of public spending cuts economy of scale dictates that schools and colleges maximise their purchasing power by acting together.

Perhaps the strongest argument for facing future challenges together rather than alone is a moral one. The purpose of education leadership should be to want the best for all young people and to work with others to achieve that. That provides the strongest, most sustainable foundation for facing the next decade – whatever challenges and unexpected events materialise.
**Appendix 1 OECD future scenarios of education**

**Table 1: The characteristics of scenario 1**

This scenario envisages that nationally school and college bureaucracies are robust enough to resist pressures for change despite the grumbling of students, parents and the media. Decision making is hierarchical, regulation is often prescriptive, and there is strong pressure for uniformity. Formal classroom teaching, with teacher-to-student learning settings, is the norm, with little room for informal learning and community interaction. Schools are assigned additional tasks in response to problems arising in families and communities.

| Attitudes, expectations and political support | ● Resistance to radical change despite parents, employers and the media expressing dissatisfaction with schools.  
● No major increase in overall funding – the continual extension of schools’ duties stretches resources.  
● Education, especially schooling, is politicised and often at the forefront of party politics. |
|---|---|
| Goals, functions and equity | ● Much focuses on curriculum, assessment, enforcement of standards and the promotion of formal equality.  
● Formal certificates are considered the main passports to economic and social life, as well as the next steps in the education system.  
● Inequalities of opportunity and results continue despite policy emphasis on formal equality. |
| Organisations and structures | ● Schools are knitted together into national systems with complex administrative arrangements.  
● There is dominance of the single unit – school, classroom, teacher – each in relative isolation from the other.  
● There is no radical change in the organisation of teaching and learning despite greater ICT use.  
● There are very patchy connections between schools and the community. |
| The geo-political system | ● The nation is still the main locus of political authority, even if under pressure.  
● The corporate world, the media and multimedia organisations express interest in education markets, but their influence remains minor.  
● There is pressure from globalisation, including international surveys of educational performance. |
| The teaching force | ● There are highly distinct teacher corps, with strict rules of entry.  
● Strong unions and associations resist change.  
● In hierarchal decision-making structures, teacher classroom autonomy may be strong. |
Table 2: The characteristics of scenario 2

In this scenario, schools and colleges function as focal learning organisations, revitalised around a knowledge agenda in cultures of experimentation, diversity, and innovation. The system enjoys substantial investment, especially to benefit disadvantaged communities and to maintain good teacher working conditions.

| Attitudes, expectations and political support | ● There is wide political and public agreement on goals and the value of public education as a ‘public good’.  
● Generous funding and close attention to resource distribution fosters quality outcomes and equal learning opportunities.  
● The media is supportive of schools, permitting freedom to innovate and individualise programmes. |
| Goals, functions and equity | ● A highly demanding curricula is the norm for all students, in a wide range of disciplines and specialisations.  
● There is a continuation of diplomas as the major qualification currency, alongside innovative methods of assessment.  
● Life-long learning functions are recognised; extensive guidance and counselling is offered.  
● There is an elimination of low-quality programmes, plus focused efforts for low-income communities. |
| Organisations and structures | ● There are schools with distinct profiles based on non-hierarchical, team-oriented organisations, and professional development.  
● There is a focus on new knowledge in teaching and learning; there are strong links with knowledge-based industries; and investments in educational research and development.  
● Students are mixed by age, grade, and ability; there are links among schools, tertiary education, and enterprises (local, national, and international).  
● ICT is provided for communication and networking and as a tool for learning. |
| The geo-political system | ● There are strong government frameworks and support, with focus on the weakest communities.  
● Students and teachers use national and international networks to promote sharing and production of knowledge.  
● Countries with schools as learning organisations as the norm attract attention as world leaders in education. |
| The teaching force | ● There are teaching corps with high status and working conditions under varied contractual arrangements.  
● Generous staffing promotes innovation in teaching and learning, professional development and research.  
● Teaching moves away from being a lifetime career, with increased mobility into and out of teaching.  
● There is strong networking as the norm among teachers and with external sources of expertise. |
Table 3: The characteristics of scenario 3

In this scenario, the walls around schools and colleges come down but they remain strong organisations, sharing responsibilities with other community bodies. Much emphasis is given to non-formal learning, collective tasks and intergenerational activities. High public support ensures quality environments, and teachers enjoy high esteem.

| Attitudes, expectations and political support | ● There is wide political and public agreement on the goals and value of public education, and generous funding.  
| | ● There are high-trust politics: authorities, teachers, employers and other community groups co-operate with schools.  
| | ● There is widespread recognition of schools as centres of community activity and solidarity.  
| | ● Media support fosters freedom to develop pathways and partnerships.  |
| Goals, functions and equity | ● Schools continue to transmit, legitimise and accredit knowledge, but with intense focus on social and cultural outcomes.  
| | ● Competence recognition is also developed in the labour market, liberating schools from some of the pressure for their students to focus on employer-recognised qualifications.  
| | ● There are more non-formal arrangements and a stronger recognition of life-long learning.  
| | ● There is clear recognition of diversity and strong social cohesion goals.  |
| Organisations and structures | ● There is education in new organisational forms, which are less bureaucratic and more diverse.  
| | ● A general lowering of the ‘high walls’ around schools increases student diversity, inter-generational mixing, and joint youth-adult activities.  
| | ● There is a softening of the divisions between primary and secondary levels and an emergence of all-age schools.  
| | ● There is strong ICT development with an emphasis on networking among students, teachers, parents, community and other stakeholders.  |
| The geo-political system | ● There are strong central frameworks, catering particularly to communities with a weak social infrastructure.  
| | ● There is also a powerful local dimension, developing new forms of governance.  
| | ● Technological progress and a narrowing of the ‘digital divide’ creates virtual communities and gives students widespread contact with events, discoveries and other schools around the globe.  |
| The teaching force | ● There is a core of teaching professionals with high status, but not necessarily in lifetime careers, with a variety of contractual arrangements and conditions.  
| | ● There is a prominent role for other professionals, community actors, and parents in various learning contexts and settings.  
| | ● The teaching profession is often combined with other community tasks and responsibilities.  |
Table 4: The characteristics of scenario 4

In this scenario, education takes on market characteristics and choice becomes prominent. Diversified services and private providers come to the forefront as systems disappear and governments see a markedly different role for themselves in setting rules for markets to operate. The decline of government involvement may vary between primary and secondary levels of education, and between affluent areas and those with limited resources.

| Attitudes, expectations and political support | ● There is significant reduced belief in the value of public education and possible funding resistance by taxpayers. ● Divergent and conflicting positions are expressed by stakeholders; teachers’ associations are unable to resist greater privatisation. ● There is a withdrawal of governments from their direct involvement in schooling, pushed by dissatisfaction of ‘strategic consumers’. ● The stability of new market solutions is dependent on how well they meet perceived shortcomings. |
| Goals, functions and equity | ● The curriculum is re-defined based on outcomes (compared with programmes and delivery); there is an emphasis on values as well as cognitive outcomes. ● There are new accreditation arrangements, and new information and guidance on educational choices – some organised publicly, much privately. ● Life-long learning becomes the norm for many, with diversified educational careers that go far beyond merely ‘staying in school’. ● Inequality is tolerated; there is perhaps greater homogeneity of learner groups. |
| Organisations and structures | ● There is a flourishing of privatisation, public/private partnerships, individualisation and home schooling. ● There is greater experimentation with organisational forms; new learning settings soften the boundaries between teacher and learner. ● Primary and secondary levels diverge in development, with quicker recourse to market solutions for learners of secondary age. ● All stakeholders see gains from imaginative use of ICT and a flourishing of networks. |
| The geo-political system | ● Public authorities are not active as education providers, but may remain responsible for assuring quality, providing incentives and regulating the market. ● Powerful international providers and accreditation agencies come into the market; as do players at local and national levels, many of them private. ● There are diverse stakeholders in educational governance, including community grass-roots organisations. ● Funding arrangements, largely private, are crucial in shaping the new learning markets and ensuring quality. |
| The teaching force | ● The wide range of profiles and contractual arrangements in the new teaching force makes it a less distinct group. ● Teaching professionals are plentiful in desirable residential areas and areas of market opportunity but shortages may appear in disadvantaged communities, compromising quality. ● Rapid market adjustment is challenging, but flourishing accreditation arrangements pull new professionals into the learning market. |
Table 5: The characteristics of scenario 5

This scenario imagines the disappearance of schools, replaced by learning networks operating within a highly developed ‘network society’. Networks based on cultural, religious and community interests lead to a multitude of diverse formal, non-formal and informal learning settings, with intensive use of ICT.

| Attitudes, expectations and political support | ● The government is less involved in educational governance, with reduced public accountability.  
  ● There is a dissatisfaction with ‘school’, particularly its bureaucratic nature, and its perceived inability to deliver learning appropriate to complex, diverse societies.  
  ● Communities abandon schools, supported by political parties, the media and multimedia companies in the learning industry.  
  ● There are new methods of private and community funding consistent with development of a ‘network society’. |
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| Goals, functions and equity | ● Traditional curriculum structures decline as school systems are dismantled; new values and attitudes are key.  
  ● The demise of schools also brings new arrangements for child and youth care, through, for example, sports, cultural activities, and community groups.  
  ● There is an emphasis on the use of ICT for information, guidance and marketing, and on new ways to certify competence.  
  ● There is the possibility for inequalities between those operating within the network society and those left outside. |
| Organisations and structures | ● There is a widespread use of informal educational settings such as small groups, home schooling, and individualised arrangements.  
  ● ICT is used extensively for learning and networking; the software market flourishes.  
  ● A few public schools may remain to serve those with no other access to network society.  
  ● If so, primary schools (with basic knowledge and socialisation) are more likely to survive than secondary schools. |
| The geo-political system | ● Educational networks are based on diverse interests: parental, cultural, religious, and community – some local, some national, some cross-border.  
  ● Local and international dimensions are strengthened at the expense of the national; new forms of international accreditation emerge for elites.  
  ● The role of education authorities shifts toward bridging the ‘digital divide’ and regulating education markets.  
  ● Community players and aggressive media companies help drive the dismantling of national school systems. |
| The teaching force | ● Most classrooms disappear, replaced by diverse community-based settings and experiential learning.  
  ● There is a blurring and disappearance of the boundaries between teacher and student, parent and teacher, education and community.  
  ● Learning networks bring together new clusters of learners and interests.  
  ● The profession of ‘teacher’ disappears, but new ‘learning professionals’ may emerge to support informal networks. |
### Table 6: The characteristics of scenario 6

This scenario depicts a meltdown of the school system. It results mainly from a major shortage of teachers triggered by retirement, unsatisfactory working conditions, and more attractive job opportunities elsewhere.

| Attitudes, expectations and political support | ● There is intense public and media dissatisfaction with education in a vicious circle of declining standards and a crisis in teacher recruitment.  
● The scale and long-term nature of the teacher recruitment crisis overwhelms possible policy solutions.  
● Policy initiatives and measures to rectify the situation are either too late or take too long to show results.  
● The crisis either increases political conflict over education or leads to a consensus on emergency strategies. |
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| Goals, functions and equity | ● Established curricular structures are under intense pressure, especially in subjects where qualified teachers are in short supply.  
● The shortage might stimulate positive change – reviews of curricula, a shift from supply-oriented to demand-oriented education.  
● It might lead to strengthening testing, examinations and accountability mechanisms in reaction to sliding standards.  
● Inequalities widen between groups divided by residential location as well as social and cultural affiliation; affluent families desert public schools. |
| Organisations and structures | ● There is public pressure in response to declining standards and large classes which drives some schools back to highly traditional methods.  
● Others respond with innovations utilising expertise from sources such as tertiary education, enterprises and communities.  
● A diverse mix of learning settings emerges: lectures, student groupings, and home learning.  
● ICT is used to replace teachers, with technology and media companies active. |
| The geo-political system | ● The crisis initially strengthens the powers of central authorities but their position weakens in proportion to the duration of the crisis. Communities that are not in crisis seek to protect themselves by increasing their autonomy.  
● Corporate and media interests in the learning market intensify, offering new alternatives.  
● International initiatives to ‘lend’ and ‘borrow’ trained teachers between countries multiply, including between the North and South. |
| The teaching force | ● Initiatives seek to bring retired teachers back to the schools; teaching posts are created for semi-professionals, possibly compromising quality.  
● Teaching conditions worsen as the ratio of teachers to students falls, with acute problems in the worst-affected areas.  
● Rewards increase for teachers; the home-tutoring market flourishes. The role of unions/associations increases in the face of their relative scarcity but weakens as the profession goes into decline. |
References


3. See http://www.schoolresources.audit-commission.gov.uk/Resources/Workforce Tool.xls

4. All information in the Appendix is adapted from the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, The Starter Pack: Futures Thinking in Action, Paris, no date.
This is a summary of eight briefing papers developed as part of the ASCL 2020 Futures project, which aims to stimulate a debate for school and college leaders about developments in the wider society that are likely to affect what it means to be an education leader in 2020. The research was carried out by consultant Robert Hill with generous support from Becta and EdisonLearning. For more information go to www.ascl.org.uk/home/publications/2020_future

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