The 21st Century Learning Initiative

Strategic Plan 2010
(23 July 2010)

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1 Mission

1.1 The 21st Century Learning Initiative is a registered charity. It was established in 1995, although it can trace its roots back to 1983 and its predecessor organisation, Education 2000.

1.2 The Initiative has strong values based around the belief that children and young adults should be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential for the benefit of themselves, their communities and humanity as a whole. It also believes that education should empower, encourage and sustain personal development, kindle enthusiasm and be fun.

1.3 The Initiative believes that each generation must take responsibility for preparing future generations to take their proper place in society. Consequently, the basic function of education in society must be to prepare and equip the younger generation for the kind of adult life that society values and wishes to perpetuate.

1.4 Our education system as it is today is a result of decisions taken over many generations by educationalists and politicians as they reacted to the social and economic environments of their day. However, contemporary research in the bio-medical, social and cognitive sciences into the relationship between innate human nature and socially-constructed nurture, shows that many of those decisions were misinformed and flawed.

1.5 The prime reason for the establishment of the Initiative and its essential purpose is to understand how humans learn and to be a catalyst for change, so that those charged with helping young people learn and fulfil their potential do so with that knowledge.

1.6 Our mission statement encapsulates that purpose. It is:

To enable our young people to fulfil their potential and take their place in society by basing their education on an understanding of how people learn.
2 Background and Environment

2.1 The Initiative has long recognised that our current education system is fundamentally flawed. That system has grown up over time, reflecting the decisions taken over many years by successive governments and educationalists. In order to thrive, young people need an education supported by three strong pillars: home, school and community. The current trend has been to place more and more burdens on schools alone to deliver the education that our children need, without recognising that the system itself does not take account of the nature of human development and how our brains develop and learn.

2.2 Discussions with those working in education today reveal a depressing picture:

• Many teachers feel disenfranchised, frustrated and undervalued.
• Teaching is no longer an attractive proposition for many graduates.
• Schools have limited freedom to decide what should be taught; they are largely told what to teach and how to teach it.
• More and more education decisions are being taken in Whitehall away from local authorities and individual schools.
• There is a lack of intellectual capital in many schools.
• The system is bogged-down with statistics and performance measures.
• Universities and employers no longer trust the grading system used at GCSE, AS and A level.

2.3 In its early days, the new coalition government has emphasised issues of governance in and of schools and is looking for new opportunities for innovative approaches to both learning strategies and administrative arrangements. The Initiative will monitor these developments and recognise their impact on its own future plans.

2.4 At the same time, it is possible that the current constraints on public expenditure may lead politicians to embrace arguments that could lead to improved quality and greater efficiency and effectiveness.
2.5 Early in 2010, the Initiative published the book *Overschooled but Undereducated*. The book explains the background to human learning, why our education system is simply not fit for purpose and needs to be revolutionised. It sets out the principles that need to be adopted in effecting change but it is (deliberately) silent on *how* change can be achieved. The book is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the work of the Initiative. There are now around 2,500 copies of the book in circulation. Feedback from readers (teachers and parents alike) has been hugely encouraging and supportive, but accompanied by a clamour for detail on what should be done next and the Initiative has been approached by a number of organisations and people wanting to explore how best to implement the principles of the book.

2.6 At the same time, the Initiative is itself at a crossroads. It faces a number of immediate challenges:

- The board of trustees is in the process of being refreshed as a number of long-serving trustees stand down.
- The Director is now 70 and, while he has no immediate plans to stop working, planning for his retirement has to start now.
- The demands on the Director and the Initiative are changing as more organisations become interested in effecting educational change.
- There are now no secure funding lines in place and the Initiative has only enough cash to continue normal operations for a few months.
3 Vision

.1 The Initiative’s vision (its long-term objective) is for there to be an education system that is truly fit for purpose, that is based on an understanding of how people learn, and that properly prepares our young people to fulfil their potential and to take their place in the world.

.2 In order to bring this about, some fundamental changes to the current system are needed. These include creating ‘all-through’ schools (integrating primary and secondary schools), turning pupil/teacher ratios on their head (relatively more teachers are needed the younger the child) and raising the quality of teachers. All this will necessarily take time. Educationalists and politicians will have to be persuaded of the arguments and it will require a fundamental shift in central government thinking to allow the necessary changes to happen.

.3 In working towards this vision, there is much that can be done now. There are many aspects of good practice that can be applied within the constraints of the current system, including:

• Unlocking the passion and sense of moral purpose in teachers;
• Focussing teaching solely on the needs of children (not politicians);
• Encouraging effective and passionate leadership in schools;
• Helping schools develop clear values and visions;
• Abolishing the fear of failure;
• Creating environments where schools and teachers can try, fail, learn, try again, develop and succeed;
• Raising the intellectual self-expectation of teachers;
• Creating curricula relevant to the communities that feed the schools;
• Encouraging adventurous outdoor activities for urban based children.
Our medium-term objective is to create a critical mass of individuals who understand and support the principles of an effective education system and who will, collectively, work to bring about the changes needed.

The Initiative sees its role as one of informing debate and being a conduit for change. It wants to see an increasing number of people released from the shackles and constraints of the current system, empowered to adopt best principles and good practice, and working to raise the self-esteem and potential of teachers and young people. As more and more individuals appreciate the benefits and realise their potential, so we believe will the critical mass be attained.

Our immediate objective is to find the first 20 individuals (the advocates) who will both strengthen the Initiative and help create that critical mass.
4 Strategies and Action

In order to achieve its objectives, the Initiative will pursue a number of key strategies:

| Principles                      | • The key messages and principles set out in *Overschooled but Undereducated* will be distilled for each relevant group of stakeholders.  
|                                | • A blueprint for an all-through school based on these principles will be produced. |
| Communication                  | • An updated briefing paper will be prepared for MPs.  
|                                | • Consideration will be given to the best means of identifying and disseminating best educational practice (within the constraints of the current system).  
|                                | • The form and content of the Initiative’s website will be reviewed and revised.  
|                                | • The use of other media (internet, video, television) will be explored. |
| Influence                      | • Target groups for the recruitment of the advocates will be identified (see 4.4).  
|                                | • The potential to work with organisations holding similar views will be explored.  
|                                | • Consideration will be given to the best way of establishing an Advisory Board to assist with the dissemination of key messages and best educational practice. |
| Finance and Funding            | • The Initiative’s operations will continue to be rigorously controlled in a cost-conscious manner.  
|                                | • Alternative funding lines will be pursued.  
|                                | • The potential to employ a fundraising consultant will be explored.  
|                                | • A detailed funding plan will be produced and maintained. |
| Resources                      | • A plan will be drawn up to deal with the retirement of the current Director.  
|                                | • Suitable premises to house the Initiative’s staff and archives will be maintained. In this regard, the opportunity presented by the expiry of the current office lease in August 2010 is currently being explored. |
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| Trustees | The balance of skills and experience needed of the board of trustees will be reviewed and new trustees will be recruited as appropriate. |

.2 All the above points are currently being examined with a view to understanding precisely what needs to be done and by when. A more definitive action plan (with responsibilities and action dates) will be established by 31 August 2010.

.3 In formulating the important messages of the Initiative, some key phrases have been identified:

- *The current education system is upside down and inside out;*
- *Children must be at the heart of education;*
- *Go with the grain of the brain;*
- *Adolescence is an opportunity not a problem;*
- *Seeds need watering;*
- *Learning should be fun;*
- *Teaching vs Learning, Showing vs Doing;*
- *Remember the three-legged stool (home, school, community);*
- *Children should be enthused at the end of term, not teachers exhausted;*
- *We are preparing children for jobs tomorrow that may not exist today.*

.4 Critical to achievement of the vision is the recruitment of suitable and relevant advocates (see Influence section in 4.1). Preliminary thinking is that these people will come from the following groups:

- children aged 16-18;
- head teachers;
- school governors and parent organisations;
- think tanks;
- journalists;
- dioceses and other faith communities.
The Initiative will be unable to achieve its objectives if sufficient funding is not obtained. A number of potential funding opportunities are currently being explored but this issue remains urgent. Until such time as adequate funding is arranged, it will not be possible to develop all the resources needed to fulfil the actions of this section.
## SWOT Analysis

### Strengths
- Credibility (est. 1995, John Abbott, the book)
- Intellectual capital; synthesised knowledge
- Network of contacts
- Significant buy-in already achieved
- Track record of principles in action (Canada)
- Integrity and moral purpose
- Context of message defined
- Message focuses on what is best for children ...
- ... and is relevant, timely, attractive, universal and needed

### Weaknesses
- Lack of secure funding
- Reliance on John Abbott (now 70)
- Message can seem scary and accusatory
- Key messages not distilled for all stakeholders
- How to action the principles not defined
- Operations currently stretched and unfocused

### Opportunities
- Improve communication of the message (distil arguments, make more direct and emotive)
- Broaden communication of the message (internet etc)
- Widen sphere of influence
- Work with other organisations (e.g. IEA)
- Establish new funding lines
- New government and political climate

### Threats
- Forced to close through lack of funds
- Inability to recruit a successor to John Abbott
- Message lost through failure to engage with right people in the right way
- Message lost through establishment apathy