

**LEARN**

**ING**

12 early ideas from the  
Harris Student Commission

**ABOUT**

**LEARN**

**ING**

SOUTH LONDON SCHOOLS  
**Harris** Federation 

**NESTA** Making  
Innovation  
Flourish



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“Learning isn’t something that should be toyed with –  
it’s something I should value always.”

Elizabeth Komolafe, Year 11, Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich

# Foreword



Social, technological and demographic changes mean that today's young people will be living in a very different world – one that will present both challenges and opportunities. To make the most from these changes, young people will need a broad range of skills combined with appropriate knowledge. They will also need to take more responsibility for their own education and how it is delivered – to ensure that it equips them with the aptitudes they need for the future.

The Harris Student Commission on Learning is an excellent model of how this can be done, and NESTA is delighted to support its work.

Insights from the commission's work to date are far-reaching. This report highlights some of the emerging ideas of the student commissioners. It is surprising how often the consumers of education – the students – are overlooked.

We hope this report will act as an inspiration for others to experiment with new and pioneering ways to enable students and teaching staff to work together – and in particular to explore how education should be delivered to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Jonathan Kestenbaum  
Chief Executive

NESTA

# Introduction

At Harris, staff are deeply committed to enabling all young people to thrive and be successful, and our young people are energetic, enthusiastic and full of promise. In providing a great education that engages and motivates, it is our job to ensure that the skill of teachers and leaders is closely matched to the needs and potential of young people. It is when these come together that real and lasting success is possible.

The Harris Student Commission on Learning was established a year ago to give students a real voice and stake in how learning is organised within the federation. This goes much deeper than traditional student council work, which too often gives very little voice to students on the really important issue of their own learning. Our commission is about students and teachers working side by side to learn about effective learning and then test out new approaches to see what works best for all of us at Harris.

These learning partnerships are bringing together the expertise of teachers and the enthusiasm of students in new and powerful ways. But this is not only about developing better relationships for learning. The commission has been explicitly designed to influence what learning within the Harris Federation looks like in the future. Once the two years of commission enquiry are over, senior leaders, staff and students are committed to implementing the recommendations that are made.

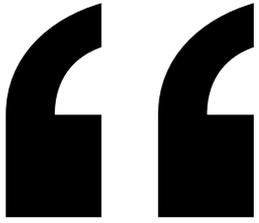
In this publication you can find out what the commission has been doing over the past year and what it plans to do next. Most importantly, you will read a set of early ideas about how learning could be in the future. These are the ideas that have captured the imagination of our young people and teachers in this first year and that the commission will investigate further in 2009/10.

We hope you are as excited as we are by what the commission is beginning to achieve, and that you will feel able to contribute to and support the commission in the coming year.

Lord Harris of Peckham  
Sponsor

Dr Dan Moynihan  
Chief Executive Officer





The commission has made me think more about what I'm doing. I've taken a closer look at what I'm learning in lessons and I'm taking a closer look at what I'm learning in general.

Matthew Gavin, Year 9, Harris Academy Merton

The commission is a huge opportunity and a big challenge for the participating students. I firmly believe its success rests with us working in partnership; students and staff together having new and different conversations.

Jane Fletcher, Lead Principal for the commission,  
Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

This is probably one of the most important things we have ever had the opportunity to do with students and for students – we mustn't let them down.

Vivolyn Walker, Senior Vice Principal, Harris Academy at Peckham

I left feeling inspired, excited and thoughtful. I enjoyed the Q&A session – it revealed deep appreciation among students of the issues raised.

Professor Charles Desforges OBE

I think they [the students] are brave and bold and I am deeply impressed by what the schools are trying to do.

Valerie Hannon, The Innovation Unit

We should concentrate on people's learning and how to make it better by involving them and engaging them. We need to actively listen and act on the things that matter most.

Indya Phillips, Year 9, Harris Academy South Norwood

As student leaders of learning we should be focusing on all the students in the academies to see how they like to learn. So that people can be happy about coming to school and going to lessons.

Whitney Ashbourne, Year 11, Harris Academy at Peckham

I used to be so negative about school. Before I never saw things from the teachers' perspective. Now I can see learning with new eyes.

Elizabeth Komolafe, Year 11, Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

As students and teachers are working together within lessons and at all times within schools, we feel teachers and students could use this partnership more effectively.

Chloe Golding, Year 8; Kieran Simpson, Year 9; Sharon Uwaibi, Year 11,  
Harris Academy Falconwood

We hope for it to be a sustainable thing. Not just for one year and then go back to the old ways but for it to carry on and improve as it goes.

Emanuella Adjei-Manu, Year 9, Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

”



# Harris Federation looking to the future

“Harris is making great strides in improving aspiration and achievement, but we believe the next stage in this transformation requires the full engagement of young people and their educators in the design and delivery of learning.”

Dr Dan Moynihan, CEO, Harris Federation

All Harris Academies are in challenging urban areas of South London where underachievement has been endemic and the education on offer has failed many young people. But these schools are showing a unique capacity to transform aspiration and academic success. In the last few years Harris Academies have improved at a rate far above the national average. The academies are very popular with parents and students, being typically at least five times oversubscribed for each place.

## But the federation is looking to the future...

What will learning in Harris look like in three years time?

What needs to be done to secure continuous growth and improvement?

How can students and staff begin to create a new design for learning together?

# A possible future...

## Harris Academy Learning Review

Extract from the second annual internal report,  
dated February 2012

“We witnessed a group of Year 10s discussing the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) module options for this term (the favourite was ‘Aerodynamics – how to make a bike fly’). It was clear that their decision-making was informed and intelligent.”

It was encouraging to see the student subject panels so embedded across the academy. Although we expected to see arrangements for students and staff to design high-quality learning together, the establishment of student subject panels in every year group for every subject shows the extent of commitment to this activity. In particular, we enjoyed seeing the Head of Mathematics and the Year 10 student subject panel putting the finishing touches to the algebra scheme of learning for next half-term, and we noted that the importance given to sessions for the panels to meet regularly with staff was reflected in their timetable allocation.

Your library and learning café was evidently a space used often and well by staff and students alike. We saw a group of six students from Years 7, 8 and 9 completing their biotechnology project work. They were scripting a podcast to be recorded with UCL students later that day, and available to the whole federation via Harris Voice by the weekend. We were impressed by the project that a group of your technology and humanities teachers were working on with the analyst from HSBC.

We witnessed a group of Year 10s discussing the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) module options for this term (the favourite was 'Aerodynamics – how to make a bike fly'). It was clear that their decision-making was informed and intelligent – they understood the detail of what was available and were making intelligent decisions which suited their learning needs. Having teachers so committed to team-teaching across so many subject modules is offering the students more variety and the teachers reported how exciting they found working in this way. We noted the importance you gave to intelligent timetabling.

The exhibition of Year 8's 'most valued learning products' was even more inspiring than last year. The students were rightly proud of what they had developed and were looking forward to the community auction in a few weeks time. We were particularly impressed by the cross-department Year 8 Second World War project – the anthology of poetry and letters from the front line was quite exceptional. We also saw the large number of letters received from local residents following the 'dealing with debt' campaign.

Finally, we would like to praise the way in which you have developed the Student Leader of Learning role. There are now over 200 student commissioners working in learning and enquiry partnerships with staff and during the visit we also saw reading recovery mentors, mathematics buddies and skills coaches in both music and PE all working very well. We listened to learning podcasts on the school radio and thought the range and quality was excellent. All around the school we saw and heard students willingly helping one another learn.

Of course we could not finish without praising the excellent work of your teachers. You shared with us that 65 per cent now have a Masters level qualification in teaching and learning and we saw for ourselves very high levels of teacher expertise in facilitating students to take the learning steps for themselves. We are sure the outcome of the recent federation student engagement and learning survey will match up to your academies' continuing improvement in GCSE, A Level and Baccalaureate results.

# About the commission

## Purpose and intent

The commission is an ambitious and groundbreaking initiative designed to bring about a radical improvement in student engagement, motivation and learning across the Harris Federation. It is about empowering young people and adults to work in partnership towards a key goal, to discover and share what it means to make learning both highly engaging and effective.

The focus is very much on enquiry into learning, with young people leading the way. Seventy student commissioners have become 'leaders of learning', taking on responsibility for this discovery process – which includes testing out new approaches to learning – in their own academies.

Many more students and staff from across the academies are also now involved. Awareness of the commission is widespread and new research and development projects, all collaboratively designed and delivered by students and staff, are providing new opportunities for others to participate.

By the end of the two years, the intention is that every pupil and every member of staff will have contributed in some way to the commission's work.

In Autumn 2010, the student commission will set out what it has learned. It will make clear recommendations for how learning across Harris should look. All of the federation's leaders are committed not only to supporting the commission as it carries out its work, but to taking forward in each of the academies whatever recommendations are made.

"The commission is a group of students across the federation who are working together to change learning both in the classroom and outside the classroom."

David Gayle, Year 9, Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

"Kids taking control of learning... it might sound ridiculous, but it actually is a good idea."

Shaqueel Reid-Robinson, Year 11, Harris Academy South Norwood

# Design features

## Partnership

The commission creates widespread opportunities for students to work with staff on the design, delivery and assessment of curriculum and pedagogy. The focus is on moving existing relationships between learners and teachers from co-existence to collaboration and on to genuine partnership.

## Learning

The commission is all about learning. Student commissioners are leaders of learning in their academies and across the federation. Their role is to actively enquire into when and how learning is most powerful. At the same time opportunities are created for teachers to learn through collaboration with students, from expert sources and from research.

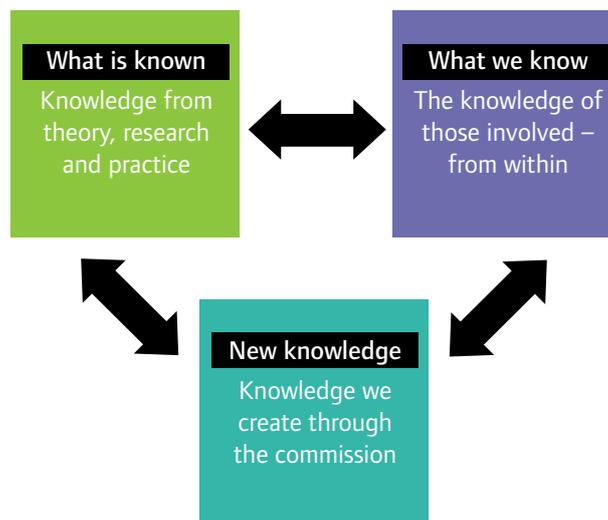
## Knowledge sources

The commission draws its knowledge about learning from within Harris Academies and from external experts and sites of excellent practice in the UK and abroad. Students and staff work together to create new knowledge about how to improve learning by testing ideas through practical projects.

“As student leaders of learning we should motivate the students that need motivating and it is important to have enough time to listen. Any ideas we have must be thoroughly thought through and be beneficial to everyone.”

Helen Babalola, Year 10,  
Harris Academy Falconwood

The commission is bringing together three fields of knowledge:<sup>1</sup>



1. Based on a model for networked learning issued by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services. Available from: <http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk/knowledge-base/tools-and-resources/three-fields-of-knowledge-diagram.pdf> [Accessed 22 September 2009].

# About commission activity

The commission in numbers:

70

student commissioners  
leading learning

2,600

students surveyed

50

'students as  
teachers'

11

external expert  
witnesses gave  
evidence

3

student commissioner  
development days held

30

partnerships of students  
and teachers planning and  
designing learning

300

staff surveyed

12

teacher professional development days delivered with student commissioners

100%

of staff aware of the commission

85

senior leaders worked with commissioners

800

students involved in research projects

1

online learning space created

11

new films about learning

20

internal expert witnesses gave evidence

250

teachers actively involved in commission activity

# The first year

## Internal insights

The commission surveyed nearly three thousand students and staff about teaching and learning. Respondents were asked to put statements in order of importance as a way of generating priorities for the commission. Over 2,600 students and 300 teachers took part and the responses showed similar patterns between the two groups, but also some interesting differences.

Students wanted to see more variety in learning and to be able to learn together. Teachers thought more student independence and a personalised approach were important. Both wanted challenging, problem solving lessons. At that time, Autumn 2008, neither group prioritised students designing learning with teachers.

### Priority for students more than teachers

Learning in groups  
Lessons where we use computers and other technology  
Learning things that we think are important  
Learning in different places from school  
Learning from people outside the academy  
Learning through homework tasks

### Priority for teachers more than students

Lessons where there is opportunity for active learning  
Students learning independently  
Lessons that focus on individuals' needs

### Priority for both teachers and students

Well organised and planned lessons  
Lessons when students get to be creative  
Students learning from other students  
Lessons where students solve problems  
Lessons that really challenge students

Video enquiry with students and teachers

Student commission launched at whole-federation staff conference

Student commissioners and staff co-leaders recruited

All academies raise awareness of the commission through assemblies, meetings with staff and leaders, update publication, etc.

Whole-federation online teaching and learning survey

Student commissioner development day – being leaders of learning

2008

Autumn

2009

## External insights

The commission has conducted a number of expert witness sessions where leading education experts have offered their views on key areas of learning and been quizzed by student commissioners. In its first year, sessions have been held with:

**Professor Guy Claxton**, Professor of the Real World Sciences and Co-Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester

**Professor Charles Desforges OBE**, Emeritus Professor at the University of Exeter

**Sue Hackman**, Chief Advisor for School Standards at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

**Valerie Hannon**, Managing Partner of The Innovation Unit

**Professor Stephen Heppell**, CEO of Heppell.net

**Professor David Lambert**, Chief Executive of the Geographical Association (GA), Professor of Geography Education at the Institute of Education

**Charlie Leadbeater**, leading thinker and writer

**Professor David Leat**, Executive Director of the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT)

**Ian McGimpsey**, Senior Manager – Education at the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)

**David Price OBE**, consultant, adviser and speaker working in arts and education

**Professor Gilly Salmon**, Professor of E-learning and Learning Technologies at the University of Leicester

Student commissioner development day – understanding enquiry

Internal academy expert witness sessions

Cross-academy expert witness sessions

Students as teachers research

Student commissioners and staff in academies plan classroom projects

**Spring**

## Internal insights

In summer 2009 student commissioners identified the following key areas of focus for initial academy-based projects:

- more practical work so students actually experience their learning
- what creates more effective 'out of lesson' learning
- having students teach students
- students and teachers planning lessons together
- finding out how communication between teachers and students can affect the students learning
- students observing lessons
- how widening choice in the curriculum impacts on motivation
- how communication between teachers and students can affect the students learning
- using technology, e.g. computer games, to help make learning exciting
- how enthusiasm and encouragement from the teachers can improve the learning of students
- applying more of the class work to real life situations to see how effective learning becomes

Student commissioner development day – engaging other students and staff

External expert witness sessions

Federation leadership conference

Students as teachers projects begin in all academies

Research and review visits in all academies

**Summer**

**12 EARLY**

**IDEAS**

**ABOUT**

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# Introduction to the ideas

These 12 Ideas bring together and summarise all that the commission has been inspired and challenged by in its first year. They represent the early thinking of the commission. There are still many unanswered questions and more to be understood in all areas.

The ideas come from all three fields of knowledge: what is known; what we know; and new knowledge we create.

Student commissioners have shown themselves to be astute consumers of insights and practice offered up by education experts, within and beyond Harris. They have selected the things that resonate with them from what they've heard – ideas they can see actually working and making a difference for them and their friends, in their classrooms.

Through classroom projects, particularly in the areas of students as teachers and students as leaders of learning, the commission is enquiring into key concepts like motivation, ownership and co-design. Through this practical enquiry further ideas are already beginning to emerge.

## **Learners, teachers, content and the curriculum...**

A simple framework organises the 12 Ideas into three domains within schools and learning: learners; teachers; and content and the curriculum.

## **...and partnership**

A fourth area – partnership – acknowledges that making a difference to the way learning takes place means addressing each of the domains through the way in which learners and teachers work together in the learning process.

“The teacher, the student, the content – if you change one, you have to change them all.”

Professor Richard Elmore,  
Harvard Graduate School of Education<sup>2</sup>

How could learning at Harris develop to ensure that all young people get an education which prepares them for a successful future?

2. Elmore, R. 'The (only) three ways to improve performance in schools.' [Online] Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. Available from: <http://www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu/leadership/leadership001a.html> [Accessed 10 August 2009].

# Summary of the ideas

## Learners

### **Deep and lasting motivation to learn happens when:**

- Idea 1: learners explore and understand the 'how' of learning;
- Idea 2: learners take responsibility for, and have ownership and control of, their own learning and achievements;
- Idea 3: learners take on roles that involve responsibility for the learning and success of others; and
- Idea 4: learners create worthwhile products and artifacts through the learning process.

## Teachers

### **The role of the professional in schools needs to develop to ensure that:**

- Idea 5: teachers are specialist enablers of learning – experts not only in subjects but also in learning and learning design;
- Idea 6: teachers are orchestrators of variety in learning; and
- Idea 7: teachers demonstrate that they are learners too.

## Content and the curriculum

### **Young people are engaged by a curriculum that ensures:**

Idea 8: learning explicitly combines valuable subject knowledge with the development of key skills and attributes;

Idea 9: learning both develops students' curiosity about the unfamiliar and connects to their interests and experiences; and

Idea 10: learning is deep, enquiry-based and practical.

## Partnerships

### **Changing the way learners and teachers work together involves:**

Idea 11: learning partnerships of students and teachers that inspire and motivate;

Idea 12: collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment.



# Learners

Everything the commission has heard puts motivation and active engagement at the heart of student success and achievement – both academically and personally, in school and later life.

And if motivation is at the heart of good learning then surely the best, most powerful motivation comes from within the individual learner, not from extrinsic factors.

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggests that deep and lasting motivation happens when:

Idea 1: learners explore and understand the ‘how’ of learning;

Idea 2: learners take responsibility for, and have ownership and control of, their own learning and achievements;

Idea 3: learners take on roles that involve responsibility for the learning and success of others; and

Idea 4: learners create worthwhile products and artifacts through the learning process.

**“Lots of students enjoy learning but don’t like school. Maybe we can change that.”**

Nadine Johnson, Year 9,  
Harris Academy at Peckham

**“The key to learning is actually involving yourself in the learning.”**

Funke Jinad, Year 11,  
Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

What gets young people switched on to learning now, and keeps them switched on for life?

What will excite and motivate those whose experience of learning so far has left them not just mildly disinterested, but deeply disappointed in and dismissive of the education on offer?

# Idea 1: Learners explore and understand the 'how' of learning

Initially student commissioners were limited in their understanding of, and conservative in their demand for, really good learning. Through the commission they have acquired new levels of knowledge and understanding of what learning is and when it is most powerful.

This has led to a major shift in students' expectations and appreciation of learning. As their knowledge of how and when learning is most powerful has increased, so they have become more self-aware and confident, and resolute in their commitment to make change happen. They have become more discerning consumers of the learning currently on offer.

This change can happen through new and challenging conversations between learners, teachers, senior leaders and experts about what good learning looks like.

In addition, when students have worked alongside adults and taken on elements of the teacher role, it has led to 'light bulb' moments. This includes a new awareness that being a good teacher is really hard and new-found empathy and respect for teachers.

"Now when I go into a classroom and sit down I want to concentrate because I know how to connect with the lesson."

Chloe Golding, Year 8,  
Harris Academy Falconwood

**Professor David Leat told the commission:**  
It is only when students analyse how they think that they can learn to get better at the challenges they face in school and later life. Metacognition can give students the confidence, independence and ability to learn more effectively.

"Expert learners push themselves. They try new ideas and different ways to do what they do. As Professor Desforges said, anyone can be an expert learner."

Sara Goddard, Year 8,  
Harris Academy Merton

How can opportunities be created for all young people to become 'tuned in' to good learning?

**The commission is trialing students as teachers projects in all academies**

"As a commission we need to be able to produce ideas that make learning at Harris the best in the world, but how can we do this without students being on the other side? It became clear that we needed to get students delivering inputs and working alongside teachers. The project has given me a new-found respect for the hard work that teachers put in 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Teachers face a mammoth task every day and the only way we are ever going to start getting across ideas is to co-design learning in association with teachers."<sup>3</sup>

## Idea 2: Learners take responsibility for, and have ownership and control of, their own learning and achievements

The commission is showing that when students are encouraged to take on greater responsibility and ownership of their learning, there is a positive impact on levels of motivation. In contrast, learning activity holds little relevance or interest when it is arbitrarily imposed on students who may not understand its purpose or personally value the outcome.

If one of the aims of learning at school is to develop in students a thirst for learning throughout life, then the key is to enable and support them first to understand and appreciate the importance of learning, and second to believe that learning belongs to them.

To achieve these greater levels of ownership, those who currently have control of learning need to transfer some of that control and create spaces and opportunities for students to take it on.

“Students need to be leading, and I have realised that the more students lead the better their learning is because they are taking control and they know what they need to do.”

Reyss Wheeler, Year 11,  
Harris Girls’ Academy East Dulwich

**David Price told the commission:**

To fully engage young people in the learning process, they have to be given both greater control over what they learn, and greater independence in how they go about it.

“We should try to get away from having a teacher standing at the front of the class telling us what to do. Good learning means that we take more responsibility over what we learn and how we learn it.”

Chelsea Chapman, Year 9,  
Harris Academy South Norwood

What is known about how young people can best be supported to value and take hold of their own learning?

## Idea 3: Learners take on roles that involve responsibility for the learning and success of others

The deep commitment that student commissioners are showing to improving learning for their peers is inspiring to all those working with them.

These young people are challenged and motivated by their role as 'leaders of learning', working with and on behalf of others to discover what works and make learning better for others. Importantly, they know that understanding when and how learning engages the disengaged is at the heart of their responsibility.

Providing students with a range of opportunities to teach and support the learning of others gives an increased sense of purpose and self-confidence, as well as helping them acquire transferable skills like team-working, project design, planning and reliability. In these activities the teacher is an expert guide who provides instruction and support throughout.

"When you're given the chance to teach, you're still learning because you have to know the stuff inside out."

Kieran Simpson, Year 9,  
Harris Academy Falconwood

### Student commissioners are developing a peer support project focused on personal extended study (PXS)

"We will be researching why people responded to it [PXS] differently by either failing to complete it or exceeding expectations. We will do this by supporting the people who did exceptionally well in their PXS to mentor those who did not complete one to be able to submit one of a high standard. These mentors are the new wave of student commissioners at our academy."<sup>4</sup>

"We should speak to all the students that go to our schools. Speak to those who do the work to see why they do it, and how they find doing it in this way. But also speak to those disrupting the lessons to see why they disrupt it and how we can make it better for them."

Joseph Atkinson, Year 9,  
Harris Academy Merton

What would a school look like where all young people worked with peers to help them learn more effectively?

What approaches to peer support positively shift motivation and achievement?

## Idea 4: Learners create worthwhile products and artifacts through the learning process

When students see relevance and significance in the end product of their learning there is a positive impact on engagement and active participation. Being ‘creative producers’ provides students with opportunities to self-direct and take greater control over the learning process.

Focusing learning on the development of a useful output means students create something that someone else, either within or beyond school, will value. It can be a tool for helping students empathise with and positively influence communities and situations beyond their familiar environment, and also a practical way of connecting subjects to the real world by housing specific content knowledge in the delivery of a real-world task.

“Professor Gilly Salmon talked to us about e-learning. At her university students help each other learn by podcasting revision strategies for other students.”

Mayowa Sofekun, Year 10,  
Harris Academy Bermondsey

Student commissioners have been particularly inspired by how project-based learning is undertaken at the **High Tech High network of schools in San Diego**.

The **Maya Community Project** was a joint venture between a class from High Tech Middle and Virmah, an organisation that works to send Mayan students in the highlands of Guatemala to school. Through the project students researched the ancient Maya and learned about the current conditions of indigenous people in Guatemala. Students then applied for various jobs and worked together to write, translate, publish and sell a children’s book about Mayan culture. The teacher leading the project reflected:

“By creating a product that could be marketed and sold to address a real need – sending Mayan children to school – I was able to bridge my classroom and the world outside while still teaching history content. In addition, students felt they were creating something of lasting value. Seeing people from around the world purchase their book was a powerful reinforcement of the importance of their work.

What seems to strike students right away... is that the book is really published. Not bound together at school, but published like the books they see at the store or in the library. Their faces light up when they find out that they will be able to buy the book online... Using the same technology as adult designers and publishers to create a professional-looking product was a huge motivator for students.”<sup>5</sup>

What would school be like if the outputs of learning had value other than as a means of assessment?

What if learners were creating learning resources for other students or for staff, or being asked to develop something that someone outside school would enjoy, find useful or informative, and perhaps even spend money on?



KNOW  
"One's mind,  
once stretched  
by a new idea,  
never regains its  
original dimensions."  
—Albert Einstein



# Teachers

Teachers are the experts, guardians and liberators of learning in our schools. In order for learners to become more responsible for and independent in their learning, teachers are developing yet more flexibility in their approaches and more creativity in the application of their expertise.

As young people become more discerning consumers of the learning on offer, teachers will need to adopt a more reciprocal and collaborative approach to learning design and delivery.

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggests that the role of the professional in schools needs to develop to ensure that:

Idea 5: teachers are specialist enablers of learning – experts not only in subjects but also in learning and learning design;

Idea 6: teachers are orchestrators of variety in learning; and

Idea 7: teachers demonstrate that they are learners too.

**“Allowing students to progress beyond their potential will require a positive mixture of teacher knowledge and expertise combined with student input.”**

Kurt O’Brien, Commission Co-leader,  
Harris Academy Falconwood

What does it really mean for teachers to be ‘enablers’ of learning? What would they do more and less of?

## Idea 5: Teachers are specialist enablers of learning – experts in subjects, learning and learning design

The traditional image of teacher as deliverer, imparting knowledge in a one-size fits all format to passive student consumers, is still the everyday reality in many classrooms. Where this is the norm, students are also being taught that the secret to good learning is dependence on someone else to deliver the goods to and for them. That all they have to do is accept what is on offer.

The commission is beginning to understand that if students are to be learners for life, confident and motivated, successful both academically and personally, immediately and in the future, then the role of the teacher needs to evolve.

Teachers need to be expert guides on their students' journeys through school, enabling and creating spaces for young people to learn for themselves and with others, framing learning challenges that encourage deep learning, providing inspiration, guiding and ensuring understanding through feedback.

David Price introduced the Commission to **Sri Aurobindo**, who believed the role of the teacher is to help perfect students' instruments of knowledge. The teacher shows the students how to acquire knowledge for themselves.

Mentoring and coaching lie at the heart of the **Musical Futures** framework, where the music leader has a specific role to: set the task; stand back; observe, diagnose, guide and suggest; model and demonstrate; take on pupils' perspectives; help pupils achieve the objectives they set for themselves.

Teachers in the project unanimously agree that shedding their more didactic role for that of a coach is the most challenging, unnerving, though eventually liberating, aspect of the project.

“Learning could be more powerful if we gradually gave students responsibility for their own learning and had teachers trust and guide students through their learning.”

Zainab Jalloh, Year 11,  
Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

“Outstanding teaching is what we pursue, but teaching that is outstanding when it makes our students the key players, leading their own learning. We the ones in the wings, offering our congratulations, the facilitators, the stage managers.”

Jane Fletcher,  
Lead Principal for the Commission

What is the expertise of our most expert teachers? What is it they know and do?

What do we know about creating learning spaces that students are keen to occupy?

## Idea 6: Teachers are orchestrators of variety in learning

Harris students have told the commission that when teachers use a range of learning strategies and approaches, the classroom is more exciting, interesting and dynamic.

The most expert teachers are creative. They flex and improvise according to student responses and new information, and they regularly seek feedback about and adapt their practice.

In these teachers' classrooms, students' learning preferences are accounted for and there is choice in the learning process. They continually search out new ways of connecting topics to the real world, building on what students already know and challenging them to go further.

Variety extends to the way resources are utilised to motivate and engage learners. New technology is used in a range of ways to support learning and relevant expertise is drawn from within and beyond the school.

**Professor David Lambert** told the commission:

The relationship between the teacher and student is vital to ensuring that students are motivated. Teachers need to have passion for their subjects and they should try to pass this passion on to their students.

They need to:

- be creative and flexible with the curriculum
- appeal to children's curiosity
- give learning a real living context.

**Student commissioners** have identified what helps make lessons engaging:

- more interactivity – getting students participating in the lesson
- using a variety of approaches, e.g. group work and individual work
- teachers showing enjoyment
- focusing on things students can relate to and care about
- hearing different voices in the lesson
- exploring information in interesting ways, e.g. through practicals or using technology
- using questioning and having pace to the lesson
- making learning challenging for all students

“When we learn in different ways there is a better and more exciting atmosphere in the classroom. We have more choice and it's like we're all learning together.”

Fachiema Menjoh, Year 11,  
Harris Academy Bermondsey

“The best methods of teaching and learning can't be set in stone – they change as time passes and vary for individuals.”

Megan Walker-Rhind, Year 11,  
Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich

How can the most effective pedagogical approaches be utilised across different subjects?

## Idea 7: Teachers demonstrate that they are learners too

In the commission students and teachers are finding out together what makes learning powerful. A new, more reciprocal learning dynamic is developing that differs significantly from the traditional expert/novice relationship.

While Harris teachers remain learning specialists, through the commission they are openly demonstrating that they want and need to keep learning too. They know that being a good teacher means reviewing and reflecting on your practice, actively seeking to improve and being able to empathise with students as learners.

In the classroom, students need to be encouraged to ask their own questions by teachers who integrate those questions into the learning process – whether they know the answer or not. Teachers need to model their own commitment to learning by actively encouraging students to contribute expertise and ideas by providing regular feedback, and by being more open about their own successes and failures.

**Professor Guy Claxton** told the commission: Teachers should be partners in learning. It is their job to acknowledge when they don't know something and work with the student to find it out. They themselves should be models for life-long learning.

"It gives you loads of confidence when you realise that you're able to help your own teacher learn something new!"

Martinique Bartley, Year 10,  
Harris Academy at Peckham

"More teachers should be displaying that they are also learning."

Cecilia Tran, Year 10,  
Harris Academy Merton

What is it that teachers can best learn from their students?

...tences by clicking on the boxes.





# Content and the curriculum

If schools take seriously their role in preparing young people for success in life, then learning content surely must continually connect to the rapidly changing world beyond school.

A good curriculum extends the ambition of students and motivates them to achieve. It is flexible, knitting together valuable and compelling content with the development of the skills and attributes young people need.

It is one where important subject knowledge is illuminated through connections to students' current and future context, and where students work with teachers to make this a reality.

There is also a particular focus on cultivating learners' readiness and willingness to learn, and their ability to keep learning throughout their lives.

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggests that young people are engaged by a curriculum that ensures:

Idea 8: learning explicitly combines valuable subject knowledge with the development of key skills and attributes;

Idea 9: learning both develops students' curiosity about the unfamiliar and connects to their interests and experiences; and

Idea 10: learning is deep, enquiry-based and practical.

How can valued subject knowledge be framed so it is valuable to and valued by young people?

How do we ensure that teachers possess the highest level of subject knowledge and expertise in their area of specialism?

## Idea 8: Learning explicitly combines valuable subject knowledge with the development of key skills and attributes

Young people need to gain the knowledge, skills and attributes to be successful in the globalised economy. More than this, schools must help young people broaden their horizons, develop the mental, emotional and social capacities they will need to be successful and happy, and navigate an increasingly unpredictable future.

The commission is learning that modern curriculum design isn't about throwing out traditional subjects in favour of a skills- or competency-based model: quite the opposite. It is about finding a more nuanced and flexible approach that uses relevant challenges, themes and questions to frame learning opportunities and which allows core subject content, personal, learning and thinking skills, and life-necessary competencies to be effectively melded together and valued by young people.

**NESTA** points out that the education debate often becomes enmeshed in the false dichotomy of 'knowledge' versus 'skills', when real-world value is to be located in how the two are interwoven; that is, how well the education system prepares young people to pursue, acquire, and utilise different bodies of knowledge and skills.

**Professor Guy Claxton** proposes eight 'character strengths and virtues for the learning age' – curiosity, courage, exploration, experimentation, imagination, discipline, sociability and thoughtfulness. A way to effectively develop these virtues might be to "create sizeable chunks of time where young people can, both alone and in collaboration, get their teeth into real hard learning challenges that engage and intrigue them. And that means trusting young people more."<sup>6</sup>

"You can realise that every subject is linked to the real world and has the ability to explain something."

Travis Payne, Year 9,  
Harris Academy South Norwood

"Teachers shouldn't just teach us to retrieve trivial information...this only sets us up for school and not for skills needed in the real world."

Millie Harriet Cook, Year 8,  
Harris Academy Bermondsey

What are the best ways nationally and internationally of effectively combining the learning of subject knowledge, key skills and attributes?

## Idea 9: Learning both develops students' curiosity about the unfamiliar and connects to their interests and experiences

Engagement and motivation are closely tied to the extent to which learning feels relevant – and too often the use and value of subject knowledge is not made clear.

Learning needs to connect learners to the world around them in new and exciting ways. A motivating curriculum broadens students' understanding and perceptions, and extends what they value. It also builds on students' interests, ambitions and real-life experiences.

Students have told the commission that it makes a difference when teachers take time to see things from their perspective and show they value students' views and interests. When teachers do this, topics, questions and subject knowledge can be framed in more authentic and engaging ways.

Connecting education content to real-world challenges and experiences means undertaking more learning in places and spaces other than school, and drawing on a wide range of knowledge and expertise.

### **David Price told the commission:**

Work from the near to the far – start with what excites students and move from there. If you focus on interest then achievement will follow.

### **Charlie Leadbeater told the commission:**

Design learning around questions that students find interesting.

### **Professor David Lambert told the commission:**

The vast majority of young people think it is important to learn to know what is going on in the world around them, and also what is going on for others around the world. In a study for the Geographical Association, it was found that 92 per cent of children thought it was important to learn about issues affecting people's lives in different parts of the planet.

**"We can make students more enthusiastic by getting them to question why the curriculum is relevant."**

Matthew Gavin, Year 9,  
Harris Academy Merton

**"When what we're learning about feels unrealistic it can be quite demotivating. We need to see that stuff is real and that it happens."**

Lancelot Spencer, Year 10,  
Harris Academy South Norwood

How can the boundaries between school and beyond be made more permeable?

# Idea 10: Learning is deep, enquiry-based and practical

Students really enjoy grappling with, enquiring into and fully exploring interesting ideas, knowledge and challenges through their learning.

Working in this way requires time (weeks rather than hours) for students working individually or as teams to undertake the design, implementation and evaluation of broadly envisioned project work, and also for more practical learning, e.g. primary research, presentation of findings and creation of tangible learning outputs.

The commission is currently exploring how project-based opportunities allow for greater integration of school-based and beyond-school learning.

**Valerie Hannon** told the commission:  
The Learning Futures programme emphasises relevance as a route to engagement and in part this means a greater focus on learning that is enquiry- and enterprise-led.

**Ian McGimpsey** told the commission:  
Learning through themes and projects encourages students to think more deeply and be more creative. Learning should be more collaborative, taking place across subject boundaries to help students think and communicate laterally.

“Learning is boring when a teacher continuously talks about the same subject not giving children the opportunity to actually do some practical work.”

Student survey response

“We need to learn how and why, not just learn about. This means that when we are working we are thinking deeper.”

Saidatu Oduyayo, Year 10,  
Harris Academy Bermondsey

What different learning designs allow for deep learning?





# Partnerships

Making a reality of the ideas set out here will require relationships between students and teachers that are characterised by high levels of trust, understanding and empathy. Within the commission these kinds of relationships are being developed through collaborative endeavour. They have the potential to create the conditions for young people to take on greater responsibility for learning and teachers to open themselves up further to input and challenge from students.

The work undertaken in the first year of the commission suggests that changes in relationships between learners and teachers involves:

Idea 11: genuine learning partnerships of students and teachers that inspire and motivate; and

Idea 12: collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment.

**“The most important thing is that you know that teachers trust you.”**

Tia Henry, Year 9,  
Harris Academy Bermondsey

How is it practically possible for teachers to have genuine learning partnerships with all their students?

## Idea 11: Genuine learning partnerships of students and teachers inspire and motivate

In a learning partnership teachers acknowledge and demonstrate that learning belongs to learners, while learners understand that success and achievement are in their hands.

Rather than learning being 'done to' young people by adults who know more and better, learning happens with and alongside. Learning becomes a partnership act between teacher and learner.

In the commission, teachers and learners are on a learning journey together and many of these new learning partnerships are being formed. They are being developed through shared commitment to a clear outcome, doing real work and learning together, taking mutual responsibility and openness to challenge and change.

"I don't feel threatened anymore. I can have adult conversations with teachers and it's helping my learning."

Sumon Miah, Year 8,  
Harris Academy at Peckham

"Students and teachers need to be able to respond positively to criticism and advice. Only that way will they learn how to improve and discover the best ways of learning together."

Jake Sherwood, Year 13,  
Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

**Student commissioners are working with the Mathematics Advanced Skills Teacher (AST)** for the federation to investigate student attitudes towards mathematics. Having undertaken surveys, analysed results and made recommendations, they are now working together on subject internal reviews. This will involve students and staff conducting lesson observations and interviews, and collectively making judgements and recommendations for improvement.

What can teachers learn from students?

What can students uniquely contribute to these learning partnerships?

## Idea 12: Collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment

Arrangements that allow learners and teachers to take joint responsibility for the design and delivery of learning help to build good relationships and shared understanding of the learning process.

The commission is learning that it takes time and commitment to co-design well. The collaboration needs to go beyond students feeding into pre-planned lessons and move towards the creative, in-depth co-planning of whole schemes of work. In this way opportunities are opened up for students' knowledge and experience to help ensure content and process are as relevant and engaging as possible.

The most interesting models of co-design involve devising powerful ways in which the student and teacher can co-deliver learning, and exploring how peer support approaches can make a positive impact. Such models also build in approaches to co-assessment and reward that extend, challenge and motivate all students.

“Co-design is how we get the best from the experience of teachers and the enthusiasm of students to create learning that is both educational and exciting.”

Vincent Nimoh, Year 9,  
Harris City Academy Crystal Palace

“The good thing about the commission is that there will always be ideas that come up. We can then share ideas between us to make learning better.”

Jessie Gallagher, Year 10,  
Harris Academy Falconwood

The commission is trialing approaches to ‘students as teachers’, looking at how students can be active in all elements of the teaching process including planning, design and delivery. More needs to be learned about exactly how and when the student as teacher can add real value and quality to the learning of others.

What approaches to collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment fit sufficiently well with the rhythms of school to allow for all students to take part often?

# What next? Plans and challenges for the year ahead

The challenge for the next phase is to grapple with and develop further the ideas that have been set out in this interim publication. Even in the writing of this publication a number of questions have been raised and these will bring focus and momentum to the commission's future activity. By the end of the second year a set of clear, evidence-based recommendations will be made to federation leaders setting out how learning at Harris needs to change for the future.

In the next year the commission will test, trial and research new approaches that specifically set out to apply particular ideas. A wide range of commission projects across all academies are already underway, and many more will be undertaken.

More so than in the first year, the commission will be explicitly seeking out models of practice in schools, both in the UK and internationally, that have implemented these ideas in interesting and effective ways. Looking outward to other schools that are further down the line in making these ideas a reality will be a critical source of new intelligence.

Commission leaders recognise that the commission faces a number of challenges as it moves into the next phase of activity:

## Challenge 1

Getting greater numbers of teachers and learners actively involved in commission activity

## Challenge 2

Finding ways to involve the most disengaged students and most sceptical teachers

## Challenge 3

Keeping the focus on enquiry and not moving to implementation too early

## Challenge 4

Maintaining a dialogue with senior leaders to ensure the recommendations have active support

## Challenge 5

Learning the lessons of delivery so that other schools or groups of schools could set up their own student commissions

## Challenge 6

Paying sufficient attention to the systemic changes that may need to be made in order for academies to deliver commission recommendations

# Key questions for year two

In taking forward the specific ideas set out, the commission will focus on the following key questions:

## Learners

What gets young people switched on to learning now, and keeps them switched on for life?

What will excite and motivate those whose experience of learning so far has left them not just mildly disinterested, but deeply disappointed in and dismissive of the education on offer?

How can opportunities be created for all young people to become 'tuned in' to good learning?

What is known about how young people can best be supported to value and take hold of their own learning?

What would a school look like where all young people worked with peers to help them learn more effectively?

What approaches to peer support positively shift motivation and achievement?

What would school be like if the outputs of learning had value other than as a means of assessment?

What if learners were creating learning resources for other students or for staff, or being asked to develop something that someone outside school would enjoy, find useful or informative, and perhaps even spend money on?

## Teachers

What does it really mean for teachers to be 'enablers' of learning? What would they do more and less of?

What is the expertise of our most expert teachers? What is it they know and do?

What do we know about creating learning spaces that students are keen to occupy?

How can the most effective pedagogical approaches be utilised across different subjects?

What is it that teachers can best learn from their students?

## Content

How can valued subject knowledge be framed so it is valuable to and valued by young people?

How do we ensure that teachers possess the highest level of subject knowledge and expertise in their area of specialism?

What are the best ways nationally and internationally of effectively combining the learning of subject knowledge, key skills and attributes?

How can the boundaries between school and beyond be made more permeable?

What different learning designs allow for deep learning?

## Partnerships

How is it practically possible for teachers to have genuine learning partnerships with all their students?

What can teachers learn from students?

What can students uniquely contribute to these learning partnerships?

What approaches to collaborative learning design, delivery and assessment fit sufficiently well with the rhythms of school to allow for all students to take part often?

# Thanks

The student commission would like to thank all the teachers, academy leaders and experts who have supported them in the past year.

## 2008/09 Harris student commissioners

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