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Character, Culture & Values
Conference Report

University of Glasgow, 15th & 16th June 2015 || Dr Joan Mowat, University of Strathclyde

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About Character Scotland

Character Scotland is an educational charity formed in 2009 by a group of academics, educationalists and local entrepreneurs. The charity has formed an informal group of organisations, professionals, practitioners and members of the public who are enthusiastic about personal development and dedicated to supporting the cultivation and recognition of the personal qualities of people in Scotland. The Character Scotland website is a central resource of news and information from the charity and the wider network on the subject of character and values.

www.character-scotland.org.uk

About the Author

Dr Joan Mowat is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, University of Strathclyde, and is a member of the Advisory Board for the Conference organisation. Joan's initial interest in character education arose through the development of a values-based approach to promoting positive behaviour which won the SCRE (Scottish Council for Research in Education) award and attracted funding from the Gordon Cook Foundation. Joan then developed this work further through developing a values-based approach to supporting children with social, emotional and behavioural needs, the focus of her PhD. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded the further extension of this work over the Primary/Secondary transition within Falkirk and Aberdeenshire and further consultancy to develop 'Supporting Positive Futures and Transitions' across Aberdeenshire schools took place. Joan also undertook a short secondment for the Scottish Executive taking forward 'Better Behaviour – Better Learning', focussing upon pupil participation and peer support (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007).

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Published August 2015 by Character Scotland
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Charity Registration No. SC040962 Company Registration No. 365627

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 4

Foreword 5

1. Introduction 7

1.1 Background 7

1.2 Conference Objectives 7

1.3 Conference Structure 7

2. Reflections on the Event 8

2.1 Address by Angela Constance, MSP, Cabinet Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning 8

2.2 Keynote Addresses 8

2.3 Seminars 11

2.4 Open Space Discussions 11

2.5 Inspire>Aspire Award Ceremony 11

3. The Main Themes and Discussions to emerge 12

4. Recommendations 16

4.1 Key challenges for Character Scotland 18

4.2 Key recommendations for Character Scotland 18

5. References 19

Annexes

Link to Conference Programme on Character Scotland website
Link to Conference Companion on Character Scotland website

Acknowledgements

Personal Message from Gary Walsh, Executive Officer, Character Scotland.

From May 2013 until June 2015, I had the pleasure of piecing together the Character, Culture and Values conference. It was a process of inquiry, consultation and dialogue, which I hope will continue to evolve after the event. The intention was to curate an event that reflects the current Scottish context, and to establish and empower a diverse community of interest around the themes of character, values and citizenship education. The success of the event was a result of this diversity, as well as the involvement and equal participation of children and young people.

During the course of the conference, a number of observations were made that this work was fundamentally about people and how we come to know, do, relate and 'be'.

It also became apparent that the event, having attracted a broad group of professionals, practitioners and organisations, had in fact established a fraternity; a community of interest that represented a wide variety of perspectives and practices.

It is my hope that this event helps to support the excellent progress being made in Scottish education by strengthening and consolidating existing practice and policy, and that we can collectively move towards the cultural changes necessary for securing the best possible outcomes for children and young people in Scotland.

Thank you to our sponsors

The Conference was supported by a grant from The John Templeton Foundation and sponsored by the Scottish Qualification Authority.

Thanks are due to the conference advisory committee and partner organisations including CBI Scotland, Education Scotland, GTCS, The Improvement Service, Investors in People, The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at University of Birmingham, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Scottish Government, SQA, Scottish Youth Parliament and University of Strathclyde.

Thank you in particular to Dr Katherin Barg and Professor James Conroy from University of Glasgow for their advisory and logistical support of the conference.

Lastly, thank you to Dr Joan Mowat, University of Strathclyde, for her advice and support and for producing this succinct and readable report which will be a tremendous help moving forward.

Foreword

Dr Joan Mowat, Senior Lecturer,
University of Strathclyde

Character education is not a new phenomenon – it has been with us since the days of Aristotle and it has taken many shapes and forms. Some might argue that character education is already well represented within the Scottish curriculum through the health and wellbeing strand of 'Curriculum for Excellence', the SHANARRI (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included) indicators of 'Getting it Right for Every Child', the focus on the four capacities (Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors) and other initiatives such as 'Sustainable Schools', described by Bernard McLeary as 'a school where it builds on the interest and the motivation, the conscience, the morality of young people, and it develops their capacity in all these.' (Education Scotland website). Pre-millennium there was an upsurge in interest in Scotland in values education (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1995), with the Gordon Cook Foundation playing a key role in developments, and the millennium saw the introduction of citizenship education into Scottish schools (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2000). However, Avis Glaze advises that, whilst globally, elements of character education can be seen, there is very little evidence of a systematic approach towards character education and it could be argued that, whilst Scotland has made great strides in this direction, there is a need for a systematic and sustained approach towards it.

But, if Scotland is to develop character education more systematically, there are several key questions which need to be addressed: what is character education? Why is it important? What is the evidence base for it? If it is considered to be of value, what are the facilitators of and barriers to implementation? How does it articulate with other policy initiatives? By which means should it be implemented and who (or which organisation(s)) should be responsible for its implementation? How can progress be monitored and evaluated?

Addressing these questions is beyond the scope of this short discussion, but the first of these questions is infinitely more complex than it first appears. The field of character education is described by Arthur and Carr (2013) as being 'rife with controversy' (497) and Walker et al. (2015) characterise it as 'a disconcerting variety of theoretical stances, conceptual assumptions and curricular characterisations' (80). This is reflected in a wide range of approaches towards character education, not all of which are compatible with each other and which are represented in what is, for many, a highly confusing landscape of 'character education/development', 'virtues-ethics', 'values education', 'citizenship' (among many others). Berkowitz (2015), who has wrestled with this phenomenon for decades, cautions of the need not to get caught up in the semantics but to 'shape the character of our world and the character of our children.' (Extract from Keynote)

However, whilst recognising the complexities in the field and recognising also that it may never be possible to reach consensus and to reconcile what can often appear to be quite fundamentally different conceptualisations and underlying

philosophical and theoretical positions as to what character education is, it is important for Character Scotland, in particular, and for the Scottish community to come to a sense of what it stands for otherwise it will be very difficult to attract support and move forward. This is compounded by the negative connotations and what Kristjánsson argues are myths surrounding character education (2013) some of which are founded on notions of character education as being 'old-fashioned', 'not relevant', 'anti-democratic' (concerned with compliance and indoctrination), amongst other concerns.

As will become evident within this report, there are tensions around this quest. Is the goal of Character Scotland to reach consensus (if indeed this is possible) as to a set of desirable attributes/values (as some delegates suggest) or are there dangers inherent in this approach? Is it about producing sets of 'off-the-shelf' materials as suggested by another delegate or is it about a much more holistic approach?

Some very clear and powerful messages emerged from the conference which should help to steer the way in this respect.

Amongst them was the idea that character education is fundamentally about 'A way of being.' It is not an 'off-the-shelf' course but is primarily about relationships and the modelling of pro-social behaviour by adults in their interactions with children and young people. It is not an 'add-on' to the school or organisation but something which imbues all aspects of what the organisation does and stands for. It calls for high quality leadership and for self-reflection and self-awareness and a recognition that it begins with ourselves and our dealings with others. It is about empowering individuals to 'be all they can be' (not in the sense of self-grandisement) and creating the conditions in which this can happen. This means recognising the importance of human agency and that motivation comes from within and cannot be externally imposed.

Dr Tom Hamilton argued that character education is concerned with human flourishing at the level of the individual and at the level of society. It is concerned with moral behaviour and civic values, a perspective shared by Professor Berkowitz and Dr Avis Glaze. So, one of the priorities is to give full consideration as to what we mean by 'human flourishing' and how it can be supported.

Character Scotland clearly has a very important role to play in this quest and it is evident that in its short existence it has garnered support from a wide range of constituencies which are keen to forge partnerships and to continue to work collaboratively together and work with Character Scotland to create a warrant for character education in Scotland and to make the rhetoric reality.

At the end of the report a series of challenges are identified for Character Scotland in taking this agenda forward, some relating to managing the expectations of the organisation and others relating to the relationship of Character Scotland with the wider policy context. These are followed by a set of recommendations.

I would draw to your attention the companion booklet to the conference which draws from a wide range of perspectives from those who played a key role in the conference. Let's keep the dialogue going.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This conference, the first of its kind in Scotland, represents a significant achievement for Character Scotland which, since its inception has made an impact in Scotland reaching out to a wide range of constituencies and key organisations, such as Education Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, amongst others, a credit to the dynamic and committed team behind it. However, what perhaps distinguishes the organisation, as represented within the conference itself, is its wide reach both in geographical terms (national, UK, international) but, more importantly, its extension beyond traditional schooling to encompass the pre-5 sector, further and higher education, the 3rd (charitable) sector, parents' organisations, policy makers, industry and business, bringing together an eclectic mix of people to the conference. However, true to its ideals, at the forefront of the conference were young people themselves, with the contribution from the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) of particular note. All young people presenting at the conference were a credit to themselves, their schools, their families and, more broadly, the nation.

1.2 Conference Aims and Objectives

"If we want a society in which citizens care about one another – in which qualities such as honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, and optimism are pervasive and violence of any kind is discouraged – we have no choice but to nurture these qualities in our homes, in our schools, and in our communities."

Dr Avis Glaze (2015)(Keynote address)

One of the key objectives of the conference was to explore and build on the continuing global shift towards character and values-based education. It aimed to provide a platform for wide-ranging and creative discussions focussing on how we can best support young people to deal with the complexities of life, learning and work in the 21st Century. Through engaging with a wide range of questions, such as, 'How do we learn to be human, and why is this important?' 'How do we empower people and communities to make the most of their strengths and values?' the conference aimed to provide the opportunity for delegates to connect and be inspired to find that common ground.

1.3 Conference Structure

The Conference was structured around a series of Keynote addresses delivered by a wide range of speakers from academics, to members of the SYP, school children and a business entrepreneur. These were interspersed with parallel session seminars of extensive scope, reaching out to a wide range of audience interests, culminating in an Open Space session, a means of empowering delegates to lead

on issues of specific interest to themselves in informal dialogue with colleagues. The Inspire>Aspire 'Global Citizens in the Making National Awards' were presented in the Bute Hall. A final bonus for those who opted into an additional day was an outing to New Lanark to celebrate the lifework of Robert Owen. The Conference dinner was well attended and was addressed by Kerry Young who illustrated her talk with her publications.

2. Reflections on the Event

2.1 Address by Angela Constance MSP, Cabinet Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

The Cabinet Secretary, whilst not addressing character education directly, talked about a range of policy initiatives in Scottish education which focus upon aspects of character and pupil wellbeing including 'Getting it Right for Every Child'; the values-based approach of 'Learning for Sustainability' and the GTCS revised professional standards, amongst other initiatives, and talked about the key challenges facing Scottish education (such as the gap in attainment) and the Scottish Government's response to them.

2.2 Keynote Addresses

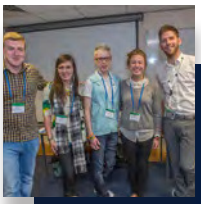
2.2.1 Dr Avis Glaze, President of Edu-quest International Inc. and former Superintendent of Schools and Director of Education in Ontario, Canada.

Dr Glaze, recipient of the Robert Owen award, gave an inspirational address in which she drew from her experience to reflect upon a systematic character development programme which involved the community in its widest sense from all within the school community, to the business community, politicians and all stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success of the education system and the building of peaceful, just and harmonious communities.

The key message of the address is that education worthy of its name is essentially about character. A fundamental purpose of education is to socialise the next generation into the cultures, values and ways of being of a society. Such a process is essentially holistic – it is not enough to educate minds, we also need to educate hearts. Drawing from Gary Marx's 21 trends for the 21st century (2014), Professor Glaze discussed some of the moral and ethical challenges facing young people relating to advances in science, living in a multi-cultural society and within a digital age, and the role which character education could play in helping them to develop the critical faculties and resilience required to face up to these challenges in a moral and ethical way. She then set out to define what character education is, initially by setting out what it is not (cc. Fig 1).

It is not

- schools taking on the role of parents
- compliance
- indoctrination
- a text book or a manual
- exclusionary
- reilgious exclusion or indoctrination
- imposing a set of moral standards



It is

- 'It takes a village to raise a child'
- the development of critical consciousness and skills to enable children and young people to make informed, moral and ethical judgements
- self-management and discipline
- competencies
- standards of behaviour
- student engagement

Figure 1: Defining Character Education

It is crucial that character development is embedded at all levels of the school, adopting an inclusive approach in which diversity is respected. It is not a 'bolt on' to the school but needs to be infused within the curriculum, reaching out beyond the school to its community. A critical aspect of the approach is the modelling of what it is to be of good character by the adults who come into contact with children and young people through their social interactions.

Dr Glaze observed that, within a global context, whilst there are elements of character education at play, there is very little evidence of systematic individual programmes of character education.

2.2.2 Bishopbriggs Community Ambassadors and Professor Kay Livingston

"Together they are more than the sum of their parts and they have demonstrated that High School pupils can achieve great things when they are given the opportunity to make a real difference." **(Prof Kay Livingston, keynote address)**

Professor Livingston introduced the Bishopbriggs Community Ambassadors, a group of senior pupils from Bishopbriggs Academy who, in 2014, with the support of Scott Lafferty, East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Youth Officer, and their teachers, had set themselves up as community champions. Their work has involved them in a wide range of voluntary activities within the school itself and bridging to the community, including raising money and awareness for Amnesty International and making bridges between the younger and older generations through supporting literacy in Primary and pre-school settings, befriending elderly people, setting up clubs for young people within the school and a host of other activities. The group was awarded the Diana Award for group

volunteering.

Professor Livingston built upon the points made by the previous speakers about the importance of knowledge translating into action. Her message was that character can best be encapsulated as 'a way of being' and 'just something we do.' Key messages to emerge from the young people were 'just do it'; 'finding a spark' – a common goal and shared vision, making an impact upon the wider community; and 'getting out there and experiencing it for yourself' because it is the right thing to do.

2.2.3 Professor Marvin Berkowitz, Professor of Character Education and Co-Director of the Centre for Character and Citizenship at the University of Missouri

Professor Berkowitz described character education as being fundamentally about 'A way of being and most notably a way of being with others'. It is not a class, not a course. For most educators it is about finding different ways of being with all constituencies of the school, leading to academic flourishing and the development of moral human beings. To be effective, character education requires an understanding of both character development and the complex comprehensive approach required for effective outcomes to be achieved. A major challenge is to enable educators to understand character education in depth rather than at a surface level. Berkovitz draws from Paul Houston, the Former Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators, to argue for the need to redesign schools to meet the needs of children and young people more effectively. However, fundamental to this is self-knowledge and a willingness to change at an individual level in order to impact upon the classroom, the school and beyond.

At the heart of character education are five principles, encapsulated within the acronym PRIME:

- Prioritizing character education
- Relationships
- Intrinsic motivation
- Modeling
- Empowerment

In conclusion, Professor Berkowitz made the case that, in reflecting upon character education, it is important not to be hung up with semantics. The key issue is to shape the future of our world and the character of our children. We are in the people changing business.

2.2.4 Josh Littlejohn: Entrepreneur

Josh is the owner and director of 'Socialbite', a chain of sandwich shops which are based upon the principles of social business, inspired by the Nobel prize

winner, Professor Muhammed Yunus's publication, 'Creating a World without Poverty.' 100% of the profits are donated to a range of charities – national and international – and the company seeks to provide opportunities for employment for those in social deprivation: 12 of the current 26 workforce were previously homeless. Josh was motivated by a social conscience and a desire to challenge social exclusion and the lack of social mobility for the disadvantaged in society for whom there is a metaphorical ceiling beyond which they struggle to progress.

2.2.5 After-dinner speech by Kerry Young

Kerry Young, author of The Art of Youth Work, Pao (shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award and Commonwealth Book Prize) and Gloria, drew from her writings to illustrate the complexity of moral behaviour and judgements within the reality of people's lives. As a youth worker she observed that there always has been 'concern about the development of young people's values and the sort of people they are to become' (Young, 2006: 9).

2.3 Seminars

It is difficult to do justice to the richness, range and variety of the seminars on offer at the conference. These ranged from philosophical discussions as to the purposes of education and 'How do we learn to be human?' to presentations from teachers and pupils outlining how they are developing character education within their schools; to 3rd sector organisations which promote character education; presentations from representatives of the Scottish Youth Parliament; presentations based upon current research into character education; explorations of character education through outdoor education; perspectives from youth work and community education; and an examination of how we might assess and acknowledge character within the framework of the SQA. Here is a flavour of one of the seminars:

"I highly enjoyed the seminar led by Primary 7 pupils and their teachers from Mount Vernon Primary School in Glasgow. The presentation gave very interesting insights into how the teachers implemented the Inspire>Aspire poster programme and why the pupils loved taking part in it. Also I was impressed by the high quality of the pupils' presentations and their competence in answering questions from the audience."

Katherin Barg, Robert Owen Centre. University of Glasgow.

"The Scottish Youth Parliament seminar, 'Young People and Character' showed me how active, engaging learning about values and attitudes to things that matter - and don't have 'right' answers - can be explored in a fun way with and by young people."

Margaret Tierney, Scottish Qualifications Authority

2.4 Open Space Discussions

The Open Space Discussions generated a wide range of meaningful insights: 'The need for a collaborative, facilitative approach based upon trust'; 'The importance of all individuals when driving through change (co-production)'; 'The need to work with the wider community'; 'Pushing things forward makes things happen through your actions'; 'competing agendas'; the need to involve the Scottish Government … One participant simply said, 'The inspiration that Avis Glaze continues to be!'

2.5 inspire>aspire Award Ceremony

'inspire>aspire: Global Citizens in the Making' is Character Scotland's personal development programme for young people aged 10-18; it has been running in Scotland for the past 7 years

and this iteration of the programme has attracted participation from 58 different Commonwealth nations and territories.
According to Julie Thompson, Programme Manager:

"Pupils use our unique poster template and supporting pupil and teacher resources to complete our process of self-discovery and inspiration and this concludes with them making informed personal statements about their own future ambitions. The final questions ask young people about their vision for a better world and what they will personally do to bring this vision to life. We encourage pupils to turn this into an #iwill pledge , inviting them to tell the world about their vision and plan to make a difference (see www.iwill.org.uk).

An external panel of judges select the most inspirational pieces of work, and we celebrate these young role models at the inspire>aspire awards."

3. Main Themes and Messages to Emerge

Expectations of the Conference

Key expectations of the conference were that it would provide opportunities for people to enhance their own professional learning and to network and build alliances. An important aspect of this, for some, was gaining greater insight into what character education constitutes (and the evidence base for it) and to explore the concept of character and other related concepts, such as values. For others, being able to take away insights and practical ideas about how to take forward character education within their organisations was important. Focussing upon the place of character education within the broader policy context and the role that Character Scotland could potentially play in this quest were other expectations of what the conference would bring.

People hoped to contribute to debates and to share insights from their experience of character education (which spanned a wide range of fields and sectors) and some hoped that it would be an enjoyable and inspirational experience. What delegates hoped to gain most of all from the conference was a desire for new knowledge, ideas and strategies to inform practice, building networks and partnerships not only during the conference but thereafter. Some were seeking inspiration to sustain their efforts in the field: 'a sense of hope, enthusiasm and drive.'

Challenging thinking

For many, the conference had served to challenge their thinking and, in some instances, to take them beyond their comfort zone: 'Marvin Berkowitz was a powerful speaker who disrupted my quiet acceptance of award ceremonies and badges.' For others, it had confirmed that they were on the right tracks. A small minority indicated that this had not been the case and questioned the relevance of character education for their professional context. For some, it had prompted questions around what character education is and the varied and wide nomenclature around it – 'character education', 'character development', 'values education', 'virtues-ethics', 'citizenship', 'global citizenship','rights and wellbeing', amongst others. Others had been prompted to think about how the development of character could be measured: 'Can we be intentional about it given that it is so individual?' Reflecting upon the purpose of character education had been the focus of a few participants: 'What are we trying to do and why?' (an issue which had been raised by Professor Conroy in the opening address to the conference). One delegate had pondered about whether a set of 'agreed positive character attributes in our Scottish cultural setting' could be agreed.

'To clarify what people mean by "character education." I think I know what I mean, but I do not often recognise what others seem to be talking about.'

'To find about/think about education in more innovative ways. Have practical means of implementation and strategies to take back to school and have a network of support to help and assist with new ideas.'

'It helped affirm what I already suspected to be true - that character development needs to be the central purpose of education.'

'In all of the seminars I attended there was high quality dialogue surrounding Character Education taking place. The conference really made me reflect on my influence as a teacher and what I can do in my classroom and wider school to promote and embed Character Education.'

Key messages to emerge for delegates

The most important message to emerge related to making character education a reality in Scotland – 'Do more. Talk less.' The modelling of pro-social behaviour by adults was considered to be an important element of this - 'It sits on the shoulder, not the shelf' - and the view was forwarded that it should be integral to the school and what it stands for. Another important aspect of this was raising awareness of the importance of character education more widely. Reflecting upon the place and status of character education in Scottish education exercised the minds of some delegates. There was quite wide divergence in views with one delegate considering that there is a lack of coherence to character education in Scotland and that it doesn't offer anything not already represented within 'Curriculum for Excellence' and other Scottish educational policies. Others drew to attention the need to aim for a research-evidenced approach; the need to achieve consensus around values; and looking to self as the starting point ('It starts from looking in the mirror').

'The debate is not really on getting 'buy in' for its importance and value, but is based on what character is and how best to develop/foster the skills/attributes/attitudes effectively.'

'Character, culture and values are important - their formation in people depends on rich, deep and challenging experiences shared with other people - these cannot all be planned for in advance.'

'The development of character is critical in growing well-educated, responsible young people. More so than qualifications and status.'

'That we as individuals have direct influence based on what we do and how we behave to the world and people around us.'

The Conference acting as a catalyst for change

In giving consideration as to how delegates would change their practice arising from participation within the conference a range of ideas/strategies was forwarded. Acting as an advocate for character education and raising its profile was an important imperative for some. High quality leadership and a systems-level approach were important for others, focussing more broadly upon the level of the school, its culture, values, systems, structures and practices and investing in the professional development of staff -'You cannot fill a cup with another cup which is empty.' Others were intending

to modify their practice in working with pupils/students/clients. For others, it was about personal goals – 'having faith in character education.' A few delegates focussed upon the role that Character Scotland would play in this endeavour (to follow) and in scoping the field to determine which initiatives were 'out there' and whether they were considered to be effective (or not).

'Think more about building strong, positive relationships within school.'

'Find a way to integrate student-led action as an opportunity for every learner throughout their school experience.'

'As an academic, it has prompted me to think more deeply about what constitutes character education and it would be my intention to deepen my understanding of this field, to publish within the field and to incorporate it within my teaching at the university.'

'Share, share, share!! I hope to get management and colleagues on board in order to embed character education in all areas of school life.'

Tell them from us – Key messages to Policy makers

There was a wide range of perspectives with regard to the message that delegates wished to draw to the attention of policy makers, amongst which were the need to create time and space within the curriculum for personal growth and development; the need to embed character education within 'Curriculum for Excellence'; and the need for a cautious approach to implementation: 'character education can't become the latest 'buzz word'/initiative. We don't want a crash and burn.' It was considered important to invest in the professional development of teachers and leaders. A further delegate forwarded a perspective of character education as being 'the umbrella protecting everyone else underneath' and as being intentional (ie. it doesn't just happen), cautioning, 'just because you think that that's what you already have – it doesn't necessarily mean it is.'

Some delegates drew to attention the danger of a curriculum focussed upon competencies/outcomes/impact/standardised testing leading to a reductionist (rather than an holistic) approach to education and a focus upon 'teaching to the test', narrowing the curriculum. Others commented upon the relationship between academic learning on one hand and a more holistic approach, focussing upon the social and emotional development of the child, on the other: 'Education is more than academic performance.'

A few delegates focussed more broadly on the type of society we wished to create in Scotland: 'When making policy choices think about the key messages here at this conference - what future society will your policies create?' It was suggested that there is a need to understand more fully the linkages and relationships between character education and other current policy initiatives to support children's rights and participation. One delegate warned about the dangers of government 'micro-managing people's life-worlds' and the bureaucratisation of learning.

'Let's turn the rhetoric of making Scotland a good place to grow up into reality. Value-based learning and development of strong resilient characters and communities requires a concerted effort across professions, organisations, communities, parents and young people to create an environment - the conditions that inspire our children (to) make a better future.'

'If we are serious about 'Curriculum for Excellence' we need to look beyond a competencies-based (and sometimes a 'ticky box') approach to developing the potential of each child to the full. A focus upon values and character education may be one means of achieving this end.'

'Character Scotland is raising the issue as an important feature missing from our landscape. Arguing for the civic is needing a steward and advocate such as Character Scotland.'

'… it could be that what this requires is wholesale change in how we learn, how teachers are trained, how we think of our education system and what we want to get out of it and who should facilitate character education.'

Character Scotland's role in moving the agenda forward

The vast majority of delegates were highly complimentary about the role that Character Scotland had played in putting character education more fully on the agenda in Scotland. The organisation was regarded primarily as a forum/hub which served a wide range of purposes amongst which were raising the profile of character education and being 'a key agent for change'; promoting dialogue and building networks; co-ordinating and supporting work in the field; helping to bring greater coherence and clarity to the field; and bringing together best practice in the field. A few drew attention to necessary conditions for development such as the need for systems-level change.

It was also considered that, for the agenda to move forward, there would need to be greater involvement of local authorities and senior policy figures; a need to scope the field and try to reach consensus as to what character education is and how it can be developed; clarification as to what constitutes the 'key elements' of character; and to infuse character education across the curriculum, amongst other suggestions.

How Character Scotland can support future developments

The key elements related to communication. Some organisations wished to enter into dialogue with Character Scotland to create synergies; to work collaboratively together on developments and/or sought assistance from Character Scotland in disseminating the work of their organisation. Some looked for direct input from Character Scotland in working with staff and/or young people. Some wished to seek guidance and support from Character Scotland in moving forward with character education. A few looked for Character Scotland to build upon current practice. However, one delegate cautioned about the dangers of the establishment of normative character standards in which some children might be seen to be deficient.

4. Key Challenges and Recommendations for Character Scotland

4.1 Key Challenges for Character Scotland

Meeting Expectations

1. Managing the (sometimes competing) expectations of the organisation. (e.g. character education as imbuing the organisation or being 'a package off the shelf').

2. Managing the scope of expectations of the organisation given that the conference has raised awareness and hopes of what can be achieved and that the organisation is relatively small and sustainable funding has yet to be secured.

3. Character Scotland has, quite rightly, not pigeon-holed itself into a specific area (education) and this was reflected in the breadth and diversity of delegates at the conference, for which the organisation should be commended. However, this brings with it particular challenges in meeting the expectations of such diverse groups (and some of the feedback touched upon this point).

Clarity of Purpose

4. What is the goal of Character Scotland? Whilst, particularly in the early

Current and former members of the Scottish Youth Parliament led a seminar session during the conference

stages, it is important to start the debate and be open to a wide range of views and perspectives, there comes a point at which Character Scotland will need to articulate clearly what it stands for given the very wide divergence in perspectives as to what character education is (reflected in different understandings of 'character'), some of which are not compatible with each other. This relates to the perspective forwarded about the lack of coherence in the field.

5. Following on from the above, is the goal to achieve consensus as to what character education is? Is it, as one delegate suggested, to arrive at a set of desirable attributes/values to which all should aspire (an approach which another delegate warned may potentially lead to deficit thinking when children/young people 'don't come up to the mark')?

Matters of Perception

6. Character education has a long history and some manifestations of character education have their roots in a 'philosophical tradition relying on conservative and hierarchical methods' (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006). Negative perceptions of character education abound and whilst Kristjánsson (2013) critiques what he describes as the myths of character education these perceptions may be difficult to shift (and, indeed, may have some basis in reality, even if tenuous) and may prevent people (who otherwise would be attuned with the philosophy of Character Scotland) from engaging with character education. As such, Character Scotland needs to think very carefully indeed about how it goes about 'getting its message out there' and how it markets itself, including the name of the organisation.

7. One key way of addressing some of the misgivings about character education is to build a body of robust research around it (not to 'prove that it works' but to appraise it critically).

Character Scotland and the wider policy agenda

8. There is a need to take greater cognisance of and articulate more effectively with the range of policies (particularly those pertaining to education) that have aspects of character development inherent within them and are focussed upon wellbeing and human rights but perhaps also to act as an independent voice in relation to them.

9. In the short period of its existence, Character Scotland should be commended for the wide range of public bodies and 3rd sector organisations around the table but, for real change to be a possibility at the national level, it needs to enter into discussions/debate with local authorities and other key policy makers.

4.2 Key Recommendations (not in any specific order of importance)

1. Taking cognisance of the points above, give consideration as to how the expectations of the organisation can be effectively managed within current resources, enter into discussions at a national level with key policy makers about the sustainability of the organisation and seek more sustainable sources of funding which would allow Character Scotland to build and play a key role in character education in Scotland. Seek partners.

2. Through continuous dialogue and debate, engage with some of the more difficult aspects of character education and come to a consensus as to what the organisation stands for. How does it reconcile the competing philosophies and agendas and explore how we understand and support the concept of a 'flourishing individual'?

3. Engage more fully with the academic community and form partnerships that could lead to successful bids for funding to scope the field, build a body of robust research around it and act as a body to disseminate current research.

4. Examine the articulation between character education and current policy initiatives in Scotland (particularly, but not solely, those pertaining to education) and build coherence in approach working in partnership with key policy organisations and policy makers, including local authorities.

5. Continue to actively support organisations and schools through promoting dialogue and discussion; offering guidance and support; co-ordinating efforts and acting in any other ways which are considered to be appropriate.

6. Recognise the importance of leadership at all levels, systems (national and local authority), school and at the level of the individual practitioner in taking this agenda forward and support endeavours to build leadership in Scotland (as through the auspices of the Scottish College for Educational Leadership).

7. Continue to act as one of the voices for character education in Scotland and strengthen bonds with other organisations which have at their heart the wellbeing of children and young people and a flourishing Scotland.

8. Look outwards to the international landscape and build partnerships (as exemplified within the conference).

9. Quite simply, keep up the good work!

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Character, Culture & Values

Conference Report

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