



1<sup>st</sup> December 2008

Dear Mr Theodorou,

**Re: PSB Review**

Futurelab is an independent research and development lab for 21st century education, providing robust research, powerful ideas, practical solutions and useful tools to improve education. Futurelab's role is to work with education's communities to imagine, develop, research and promote models of learning which meet the needs of all learners today.

In June 2008, Futurelab was commissioned by Channel 4 Education to review 4 new outputs (Battlefront, The Insiders, Year Dot and Slabovia TV) against current education policy and practice priorities. Three developments in Channel 4 Education programme were particularly significant for this review.

- a. The move away from teacher centred education programming to a focus on the young person as the primary audience;
- b. The move away from broadcast to the use of young people's own tools and resources; and,
- c. The move away from 'telling young people what they need to know', to engaging young people (particularly hard-to-reach) in ways that will encourage and motivate them.

Findings clearly showed synergy between Channel 4 Education outputs and current drivers in policy and practice. Important, gaps in current provision were found to be addressed by one or more of the outputs. Here is a summary of the review:

Battlefront

Battlefront follows the lives of 10-20 teenagers who are driven by a passion for change. The teenagers embark on a process of campaigning using resources such as the internet to promote their individual issues and to gather support. Each campaigner is supported by an experienced mentor, for example, the founder of Bebo. As well as a web page, each campaign will be shown in a TV series following the highs and the lows of the young person's experience. Young people viewing the project on and off line will be encouraged to get involved through online social networking and sharing sites, such as Facebook, Bebo, Flickr and YouTube.

The educational goals of this project are diverse: as well as offering the opportunity for all viewers to understand the issues the young campaigners are raising, it also aims to enable young people to learn more about campaigning as a process and how to use social software resources to support campaigning.

Battlefront takes advantage of the new technologies used for learning already familiar to young people in and out-of-school. The use of an online space and web 2.0 tools (for example, YouTube, Bebo, MySpace and Flickr) allows the young person to download and upload information about the campaigns when and where it best fits into their lives. The combination of linear TV and the web to connect young people with one another creates a greater opportunity for young people from a range of backgrounds to learn about each other, learn from, as well as, interact with one another.

Battlefront is an important experiment that can assist government to understand how learning can happen outside schools, how it can build on young people's own resources, how young people can have a voice in shaping the experience and determining the levels and medium of their involvement. All of these are critical to understanding how we might *personalise* learning, how we might enable *learner voice*, how we might really create a *100% curriculum* based on young people's interests, and how connections might be made between different sites of learning (relevant to the *extended schools* agenda).

The five strands of the Every Child Matters agenda (2004) are pertinent to the aims and objectives of a project such as Battlefront. In particular, the 'make a positive contribution' strand of the ECM agenda calls on schools to encourage young people to *'engage in decision-making; engage in positive behaviour in and out of school, and; develop enterprising behaviour'*.

'Aiming High for Young People' (2007) outlines the following vision – that *young people should be valued members of society, whose achievements and contributions are welcomed and celebrated. This means society viewing young people positively, not seeing them as a problem to be solved.*' The report actively endorses giving young people 'real influence' taking a lead in making decisions on matters that affect them.

Youth Matters (DfES, 2006), with its poignant strap line *'Something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to'*, stated that a quarter of young people do not participate in any positive activity. *"..don't patronise. We shouldn't be treated as lesser people – we have an opinion"* was one person's comment during the consultation process.

The Gilbert Review (DfES, 2007) emphasised the need for young people to develop skills and attitudes, that are often misleadingly labelled 'soft-skills' but rather should be named life-skills or critical skills, these include: *'being confident and able to investigate problems and find solutions; being resilient in the face of difficulties, and; being creative, inventive, enterprising and entrepreneurial'*. From this same review is the statement that *'learning, clearly, is not confined to the time they spend in school.'* The New Secondary Curriculum (QCA, 2007) sets out as one of its key aims the goal of fostering: *"responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society."* Battlefront has clear synergy with all of these specific educational goals or problems.

Recent reports from Ofsted (2007) indicate that citizenship education is improving in schools. However, citizenship education is usually delivered and controlled by teachers rather than been driven and owned by learners themselves, and as such, there are doubts over how 'authentic' an experience of citizenship such education can actually deliver. In contrast, the content of Battlefront is learner-generated. The young people have chosen to actively participate in campaigning and in a manner they wish to, many choosing to take advantage of the technology-media already heavily populated by young people themselves, such as online social networking sites. As such, Battlefront may be an important example of authentic citizenship education that formal education could aspire to and learn from.

### Year Dot

Year Dot follows a fly-on-the-wall documentary format that cuts across both linear television and online. 15-20 teenagers over the course of a year will try to gather support from around the internet, through social networking and video-sharing services, to reach a personal goal. The story of each teenager will be told as part of two series to be aired on Channel 4 in the autumn.

As with Battlefront, Year Dot is learner-driven – generating its content from the users' experience. It is also focused on showcasing the potential for young people to learn from

each other, from a wide range of sources of information via the web, and in pursuit of a personal goal. As such, it clearly demonstrates new models of *personalised learning*, facilitating *learner voice and choice*, and offers new ways of building on *informal learning* experiences for powerful educational goals.

Year Dot addresses a number of key curricular and educational objectives, specifically: raising aspiration, developing emotional resilience, developing creativity, developing citizenship and developing life skills.

***“Many young people don’t know what to aspire to. They need to be given the personal skills and confidence to go out and be what they want to be.”***

Aiming High for Young People, 2007

Aspirations are not a given. Young people need to be guided and supported in order to realise their aspirations. In particular, young people from families and communities with low aspirations need intervention if they are not to continue traditional cycles of low socio-economic status.

Year Dot aims to provide access to the life stories of young people from diverse sectors of society, and to provide insights for other young people into how they develop their aspirations and cope with failures and success. Access to social networking and sharing sites online allow any young viewer to have their say and participate in the lives of these showcased young people. This provides the young ‘viewers/users’ with an authentic and meaningful context in which to observe and develop skills such as resilience and self-efficacy. These are identified by DCSF as key factors in determining whether or not someone succeeds in reaching a goal.

***“Improved social and emotional skills are essential to building young people’s resilience and allowing them to fulfil their potential. These skills help to shape how young people view themselves, their level of self-esteem and aspiration and the extent to which they can take control of their own lives. They are essential for learning, better health and developing the resilience and capability to manage more complex transitions to adulthood.”***

Aiming High for Young People, 2007

June 2008 witnessed the first national festival of talents supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The festival was in response to the call from the Children’s Plan (2007) to celebrate young people’s talents, share their aspirations and drives and benefits from raised self-esteem and improved confidence.

***“All children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them.”***

Children’s Plan, 2007

Year Dot has resonances with this festival, which was supported by a website [www.shineweek.co.uk](http://www.shineweek.co.uk) that enabled young people to share their stories using written narratives, photos or even film – other registered young people and interested adults were then able to add comments to their posting as long as they were positive or at least constructive. As such, the Year Dot model could be said to be in line with existing government strategies to promote creativity.

Year Dot aims to showcase the goal a young person is trying to achieve within 12 months through a transitional stage in their life, for example, going to college. Viewers/users of the Year Dot website and the accompanying television series will be able to follow the stories of these young people and witness their triumphs and setbacks – whilst being able to send their comments and own stories of support. This method allows young people to have authentic experiences, engaging in the here and now,

feeling part of the process and able to influence future directions. Year Dot shares the same sentiment as that stated in Youth Matters (2006) "*as they progress through their teenage years (they require) impartial, personalised advice to make the right choices.*" Since September 2007, all secondary schools have been delivering a curriculum that includes the teaching of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). The government has endorsed the view that the development of life skills enables young people to become "*effective and successful learners; be self-motivated; make and sustain relationships; deal with and resolve conflict effectively and fairly, and; solve problems with others or by themselves.*" Year Dot is likely to showcase all these skills and enable young people to see how critical they are in authentic 'real world' contexts.

The Leitch Review of Skills (2006) argues for the need to increase qualifications and skills acquisition. In response, the government has put in place policy to raise the number of young people continuing into further and higher education (Aim Higher for Young People, 2007; Children's Plan, 2007).

However, some young people may find it difficult (due to family or community environments) to gain access to others who have experience of further and higher education, or to others who demonstrate the attributes required to achieve a range of informal learning or personal goals. Year Dot, provides an opportunity for young people from any background to access the sorts of personal histories and stories that many other young people may take for granted. It provides an opportunity for real-life inspirational stories to be shared amongst similar and different young people as it allows them to learn from and alongside other young people in common spaces.

Importantly, formal education has yet to demonstrate that it is able to offer these experiences and to tackle inherited social and educational inequalities. Year Dot may provide a powerful and important experiment in this area.

### The Insiders

The Insiders is a career information project using short-form comedy developed from the real-life work blogs of individuals across various professions, ranging from a policeman to an aspiring fashion designer. The project will span over web and TV to help 14-19 year olds understand the ins-and-outs of working life beyond the more formal job descriptions normally available.

The Insiders provides a common accessible space for young people to *voice* their individual career needs and aspirations. It enables a dialogue between people in the know and those wishing to learn more - unveiling layers of work life not usually exposed by other career education or guidance means that are meaningful to the young person unravelling the finer details. Using the familiarity of *new technologies* to upload their own questions and experience, users are able to direct the content of The Insiders to meet their own career needs and aspirations. They can choose a specific career to find out more about or simply share their own experience of it. As such, the Insiders provide young people with a *personalised learning* experience. The Insiders may be accessed at any time outside school (informal learning) through online tools enabling the user to gain meaningful knowledge and experience – in line with the principles of an *extended school*.

The Every Child Matters agenda (2004) states as one of its five key aims, to ensure all young people '*achieve economic well-being*'. Young people should be able to engage in life-long learning; be ready for employment, and; live in households free from low incomes. Schools are partially addressing this aim through their careers education and guidance programmes which are now a statutory requirement in the secondary curriculum. Careers education and guidance is seen as essential in helping to guide young people through the difficult shift from learner to worker.

From the post-war to the mid-1970s, the pathways young people followed from compulsory education to work were relatively straightforward (IPPR, 2006). However, by the end of the 1970's youth labour markets collapsed with deindustrialisation and young school leavers found themselves in direct competition with experienced workers. More and more young people who are looking for first time job opportunities are more dependent on their own agency and motivation with good personal and social skills – life skills – gaining more value in the workplace (Leitch Review of Skills, 2006; Children's Plan, 2008).

However, the life skills necessary for employment in today's market seem to cut across social divides with research indicating that better-off children are much more likely to attend constructive, organised or educational activities, while poorer children are more likely to spend time 'hanging out' with friends or watching TV- activities associated with poorer personal and social development (Wikeley, 2007). There is therefore an even greater need today to develop appropriate guidance for all young people and to understand how informal activities can play a role in supporting understanding of possible careers.

***"Young people particularly value support and advice from other young people and opportunities to experience the options available to them."***

Children's Plan, 2008

IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) covers a range of activities that help young people to become more self-reliant and better equipped to manage their own learning and personal and career development. The Children's Plan (2007) made recommendations that young people be supported through transitional years, particularly in view of the government's proposal to raise the statutory age for education to 18 by 2015. These recommendations included 'taster' provision, allowing learners to experience different types of activities that they may wish to pursue in the future – helping them make the right career choice. Specifically, guidance in the form of peer mentoring as well as other experiential learning should be made available.

***"Four people would have left my college if there had not been a peer mentor."***

Youth Matters, 2006

The final report of the Skills Commission's inquiry into IAG for young people, (Inspiration and Aspiration, 2008) found that, *"most young people used informal advice more often than they used formal advice. When asked where people go for careers guidance, answers included 'people around me who have experience in the areas I am interested in' and 'an employer or someone with (desired) experience'".* Of significance, the Skills Commission inquiry into IAG also highlighted the growing importance of the internet, with many young people canvassed on their views of IAG stating that the internet was their first port of call.

***"Employers understand that there is a need to move beyond older methods of delivering careers guidance to ensure that...they receive applications from enthused individuals with relevant skills."***

Inspiration and Aspiration, 2008

The recent review of IAG in the UK (Inspiration and Aspiration, 2008) clearly identifies the need for careers education and guidance to be driven by the learners themselves. Learners need to have interactions with others who are already on a career path of interest. Providing opportunities to gather information alongside sharing pre-conceived thoughts and ideas about a particular career which may make it seem less achievable or even too achievable. The Insiders provides a realistic, pragmatic approach to IAG in the UK.

The Insiders manages to cut across any social divides as it plays itself out across media platforms familiar and popular with young people across the social divide. Young people are able to follow the real life events of people in careers that they may aspire to enabling them to make good decisions on whether a particular career path is right for them and what they need to do to achieve their career aspiration.

### Slabovia TV

Slabovia TV is a cross-platform project that incorporates linear television with user-generated web content in innovative and unconventional methods, to explore key soft educational issues, such as, sex and relationships. The ten part TV series will cover relevant biological, cultural, historical, and practical issues related to sex and relationships education. Further to this, a fictional Slabovia broadcaster will move to the web, in a participatory comedy project encouraging teens to upload their own 'Slabovian' content to the internet (using Flickr, MySpace, Bebo and You Tube), to help them discover new ways of approaching this sensitive topic such as conducting fun science experiments.

As with the previous 3 projects Slabovia TV – by allowing young people to use their familiar online tools, by enabling user-generated content, by encouraging playful and *informal learning* environments – acts as an example of a learner-driven, potentially *personalised learning* environment. It also serves as an experiment in using informal cultural forms (comedy) to engage with complex educational issues.

The advice from Ofsted (2007) is that effective Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) enables a young person:

- to communicate a point of view clearly and appropriately;
- to listen to the views of others;
- to make sensible choices on what to do in particular situations;
- to manage relationships with friends confidently and effectively, and;
- to act responsibly as an individual and a member of a group.

Inspections by Ofsted (2007) revealed young peoples' reluctance to discuss some personal issues with teaching staff and in front of their peers.

During the nineties and early part of this decade many schools were at the centre of the governments attempts to lower teenage pregnancies – the highest in Europe. Although we have witnessed in the UK a drop in teenage pregnancies there still remains concern amongst young people of the lack of good education in sex and critically, personal relationships.

***“Alarminglly 61% of boys and 70% of girls over the age of 17 reported not having received any information about personal relationships at school.”***

SRE: Are you getting it? UK Youth Parliament, 2007

*Be healthy* is one of five key strands in the Every Child Matters (2004) agenda. This agenda states as one of its outcomes, to help young people lead sexually healthy lifestyles. Most of this, however, occurs during timetabled PSHE lessons throughout KS3 and KS4. The statutory SEAL curriculum (2007), commonly delivered through PSHE, aims to provide young people with competencies for making and sustaining relationships through the fostering of social and emotional skills required to have positive relationships.

In Youth Matters (2006), interviews with young people suggested that they held peer mentoring in high regard, as a way to learn life skills and would welcome more interaction with other young people with whom they feel they can relate to in terms of what they may be thinking or experiencing.

With the pervasiveness of technology in the lives of so many of our young people there is a call for education to make best use of this technology and its familiarity and mobility to young users. As the Gilbert Review (2007) into personalisation stressed, we need to use technology to help “[blur] distinctions between informal and formal learning – giving children the ability to choose what they learn and when they learn”. Sex and Relationships education would benefit from such an approach. Slabovia TV offers such an insight into this approach.

Ofsted (2007) reported little user satisfaction in sex and relationships education in schools and a need to rethink the provision of this statutory requirement at secondary level.

***“Many young people say that parents and some teachers are not very good at talking about the more sensitive issue, such as sex and relationships ... In the case of SRE (sex and relationships education) young people do not want just the biological facts but want to talk about feelings and relationships.”***

Time for Change? Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), 2007

The recommendation from the Children’s Plan (2008) to review effective Sex and Relationships Education provides further confirmation of the need to look at alternative methods for providing young people with opportunities to foster healthy sexual lifestyles and positive relationships that lead to well-being.

Slabovia TV provides an alternative space for young people to explore issues around sex and relationships – away from adults and some peers who they wish to keep a distance from when discussing sensitive topics. It allows young people to fully interact with the content – through downloading or uploading so that they are able to personalise the content to address their specific needs and issues. Furthermore, Slabovia TV puts young people in contact with people with shared interests or questions – making this a collaborative learning experience rather than a didactic one.

We believe that Channel 4 Education’s new direction is meeting not only policy and practice needs but significantly, is addressing gaps currently in education provision. Channel 4 Education are uniquely positioned and should therefore be provided with significant financial support to help them realise their educational goals that will make impact both in and out of schools.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Leila Walker (Senior Researcher)