ACS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

EDUCATION STRATEGY REPORT 2022/23

ACS's Education Strategy was launched in 2020 amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. It reflected the desired position for our schools in 2025, and its principal objective was to increase the unique quality and value of the ACS educational experience. The strategy aims to deepen an already solid foundation, driving key innovations that set a stage from which we can choose how to extend our impact into the future. A further aim of the strategy was that through its implementation, we will position the group to respond directly and creatively to geopolitical volatility in our markets and uncertainty in the premium independent international school sector.

Now in its third year of implementation, our strategy continues to evolve. We have moved fully into the 'getting back to normal' post-pandemic world, incorporating innovation and lessons learned in teaching and learning that came because of remote schooling. There have been some successes, and some experiments that have been less successful. Some of the ten projects we outlined as strategic deliverables still underway; some have merged or been replaced; and some have become less relevant at ACS, at least for now.

Our strategy still aims to provide:

- a sharper focus on inspirational teaching that continually improves academic results
- demonstrated public benefit and global competence through a greater range of educational experiences
- an expanded and carefully monitored notion of what it means to belong to a healthy international learning community
- equitable, distinctive, and systematically implemented support for all students to achieve challenging educational goals.

The strategy was designed around 4 objectives—important thematic opportunities for growth, delivered through 10 challenging and collaboratively-developed projects that we believe could make a positive difference in student learning outcomes.

Strategic Adaptation

All strategy is provisional and must be adjusted over time in response to changing circumstances, challenges, successes, and emergent understanding. At the same time, strategy must be disciplined and directed toward a fixed point: our mission, or true North Star of developing the next generation of global thinkers and doers who are ready to change the world. A global pandemic, along with a sharp focus on racial injustice and harmful sexual behaviour, required us to reconsider our priorities. Events beyond the school gates have led us to re-interpret strategic objectives, providing painful but essential opportunities for growth in DEI and contextual safeguarding that we almost certainly should have, but did not adequately imagine.

Other projects, thanks to the dedication and innovation of ACS educators and organisational leaders, have moved ahead. Using the NEASC framework's continuum of transformational learning journeys[1], our progress so far is summarised in Table 1.

4 Objectives	Ten Challenging Projects	Level
Personal and Academic Challenge (2023-24)	Advancing Teaching Excellence	Working on it
	Renewing our Early Childhood Education	Working on it +
Learning Beyond the Classroom (2022-23)	ACS High School Diploma	Thinking about it
	Learning Results Portfolio	Not yet evident +
	Personal and Workplace Skills	Thinking about it
	Demonstrating Global Competence	Thinking about it +
Health, Safety and Wellbeing (2020-21)	Mental Health Policy and Practices	Living it
	An Emphasis on Wellbeing	Asking what if
Diversity and Inclusion (2021-22)	Explore Personal Learning Plans	Not yet evident
	Create a Robust Multi-Tier Support System	Working on it +

Table 1: Evaluation of strategic progress

We are revising our expectations for project delivery, based on accomplishments to date, feedback from stakeholders, available resources, and current aspirations—combining some projects and recognising work that has superseded our plans from 2019. Table 2 defines our current objectives and charts the progress we can reasonably expect to achieve.

4 Objectives		Strategic Projects to be Delivered	Projection 2024-25
Personal and Academic Challenge	1	Advancing Teaching Excellence	Asking what if
	2	Renewing our Early Childhood Education	Living it
Learning Beyond the Classroom	3	Developing Personalised Qualifications	Working on it
	4	Demonstrating Workplace Skills	Working on it
	5	Describing Global Competence	Working on it
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	6	Delivering Mental Health Policy and Practices	Living it
	7	Supporting Student Wellbeing	Asking what if
Diversity and Inclusion	8	Championing DEI-Belonging	Asking what if
	9	Designing a Robust Multi-Tier Support System	Living it

Table 2: Projected progress through 2025

[1] The NEASC ACE Learning Ecosystem 2.0 uses a five-point continuum. The continuum is not a judgment on quality or worth, but rather a way to understand process and growth that may not always proceed in clear, linear fashion. The self-evaluation above, which includes feedback from the Education Committee, uses '+' to designate substantial progress that we expect to be delivered to the next level by 2025.

Not yet evident	Thinking about it	Working on it	Living it	Asking what if
The Learning community has...				
... not yet begun to reflect on improving its programs, structures, practices, and conceptual understandings	... begun to think about the need to shift toward its chosen future vision, having initial conversations about its aspirations	... embraced the shift that is needed and begun to plan; systems and structures are being designed; approaches are being trialled, and early feedback gathered	... aligned its systems and structures, and can identify impact through evidence, artifacts and stakeholder feedback	... practices that represent a transformational shift: innovative in design and reshaping structure and purpose

Strategic vision provides behavioural nudges toward shared goals and helps to set a common agenda for growth. Strategy shapes conversation, a first step toward influencing culture through sustained attention focused on a limited number of strategic objectives.

Our strategy has been strengthened by the articulation of refreshed articulation of ACS's mission, vision, and values. Similarly fundamental, the strategy has helped to prioritise efforts to change structures and systems that enable innovation and deliver results. Survival is also a strategy: continuing recovery from the long tail of COVID-19, a major IT incident, and the unplanned deployment of a new Learning Management System (that also doubles as the organisation's intranet) have absorbed enormous time and energy. However, improvements in Infrastructure and administration improvement can free-up resources for more forward-facing impact.[2]

A 'soft' measure of success is the extent to which the Education Strategy has meaningfully connected with the People and Partnership Strategies. Also notable is the extent to which both leadership conversations and practitioner attention have come to reflect the strategy's language and objectives. Just over half-way in, the strategy's impact is evident in allied leadership structures (e.g., group level safeguarding and medical alignment, and ACS Doha's move to NEASC accreditation), habits of mind (e.g., engagement with the Education Strategy Services Team), and ways of working (e.g., schools as collaborative 'laboratories of innovation' and shared problem solvers). A major restructuring of educational administration at ACS Cobham was fully informed by the Education Strategy.

Four Strategic Objectives

1. Personal and Academic Challenge

Advancing Teaching Excellence

To highlight and share effective practice, a Teaching Inspiration newsletter was launched in 2021, and a peer-recognition award scheme has been introduced. We have streamlined and aligned professional effectiveness standards with school development goals, and we are ready to deploy several new job descriptions that will update our expectations of academic staff and school leaders. For driving improvement, the centrality to the NEASC collaborative learning protocol of a 'shared definition of high-quality learning' will provide both levers and measuring tools, some of which are already in place (e.g., learning protocols and 'learning walk' classroom visit programmes).



In 2022, we launched the new Future of Teaching Teacher Residency Programme, in collaboration with the ACS People Strategy. Designed to impact student

[2] "You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. Your goal is your desired outcome. Your system is the collection of daily habits that will get you there." James Clear, *Atomic Habits.*

learning outcomes and teacher development at multiple levels, the programme began with one new team (Teacher Lead with two early career teachers) in a high-need subject area (mathematics). We have initiated an ongoing evaluation plan to monitor progress, in terms of educator support, talent development, and career progression.

Teachers' professional learning and growth is key to teaching excellence. As we got 'back to normal,' in January 2023, we held the first face-to-face multi-campus professional development day since 2020. Teachers led sessions aligned with the Education Strategy and their school's strategic goals. Approximately 40 unique sessions were on offer for more than 400 academic staff to choose from—including a range of personal and social wellbeing activities.

A trial of high-quality micro-credentials has met with limited success. The implementation of this research-based strategy continues to be logistically problematic, although it is likely to be useful for some specific circumstances and types of learners.

Next steps include further promotion of teachers' accomplishments and more effective storytelling of their impact on school results and student learning outcomes.

Renewing our Early Childhood Education

A refreshed philosophy of early childhood education is now shared with the parent community. Next steps include an appreciative inquiry into current teaching practice, development of a student-led assessment system based on Birth to 5 Matters (which will inform Education Quality Framework KPIs), and the development of supporting narratives which explain the ACS advantage.



2. Learning Beyond The Classroom

Developing Personalised Qualifications

As this strategy has evolved, the ACS High School Diploma and the Learning Results Portfolio projects have been merged into a modified objective to develop more personalised credentials for ACS high school graduates. Recent Ministry of Education requirement changes in Doha offer an opportunity for us to reflect and perhaps revise our school-leaving certificate, so that it better captures the depth and range of students' academic and personal achievements. Our goal is to provide more robust and accessible ways for students to document their personal learning stories, demonstrate that they are ready for what comes next, and curate meaningful evidence to support early development of their personal 'brand.'

ACS continues to contribute to the work of the Coalition to Honour All Learning, of which we are members. This consortium of leading international schools focuses on the development of high school qualifications that value depth of thought and promote human flourishing. The group's goal is to design an interactive competence-based matrix that forms part of an alternative transcript that will allow universities, employers, schools, and students to understand and embrace more holistic avenues of learning in every student's profile.

We continue to explore a suitable skills and dispositions assessment system, competency badging strategies, and moderation protocols like those developed for Hillingdon's Global Citizen Diploma—a simple and systematic way to document students' experiences, reflection, learning and achievement of significant goals across a range of important domains. O*ther digital technologies, like student-owned* Academic Dashboards and goal-setting processes, are now providing students, parents and advisors real-time data about academic performance and wellbeing that will inform this ongoing conversation.

Demonstrating Workplace Skills



ACS offers opportunities to develop workplace skills beyond the classroom primarlitythrough our curricular programmes. The IB Career-Related Programme (IBCP) was authorised at ACS Doha, and re-launched at ACS Egham (but with limited success, leading to further evaluation and exploration of a different direction). Hillingdon's CP courses are thriving, providing headline engagement for students and prospective families.

Several projects under this objective involve extensive collaboration with the ACS Partnership Strategy. For example, we explored Paragon One as an externship partner, with some individual student success. However, we have not been able to sustain or scale the partnership. Service learning through partnership opportunities, and the record-keeping potential of the ACS Partnership App, are ongoing explorations.

In February 2022 ACS piloted ACS Beyond, a global learning platform. ACS Beyond's objective is to bring together experts from around the globe to work with talented young adults aged 14-17 who want to nurture their interests and learn new skills. This is achieved by offering unique courses designed to go beyond the school curriculum, enable students to learn what they love from the best in the field. The courses are designed to develop workplace skills and learning beyond the classroom. In its first year in 2022, ACS Beyond offered three courses, in its second year, 2023, it is offering five courses.

In October 2022, ACS Partnerships hosted a day out at Thorpe Park for 8,553 students and 1000+ teachers and support staff 100+ state schools and ACS UK schools. The purpose of the day was to make 'learning fun.' Seventy-five external collaborators were invited to provide 200+ STEAM activities and students were given a 'gamification card' which needed to be stamped before they could enjoy the rides, a massive 141,060 gamification stamps were awarded on the day. Hundreds of ACS students and staff provided support and engaged in real-world learning, both in terms of event management and their own interaction with the people and organisations contributing to the day.



We continue to reflect on how the ACS 'Ready' narrative exemplifies and challenges further development of the schools' academic and co-curricular programmes. We have also undertaken research in collaboration with the UK IB Schools, YouGov, UK businesses and ACS's marketing partners about employability and workplace skills. This research will inform future programme development as well special events like ACS Doha's 2040 Future Skills conference.

Describing Global Competence

Global competence is something educators talk about increasingly and is fundamental to a good international education. A recent white paper by Harvard's Research Schools International (RSI), commissioned by ACS, referenced multiple recent "global overlapping crises" many of them international, pointing to an increasingly unpredictable future for all. The paper cited a recent UNESCO report on 'Futures of Education' which stressed the role of education in 'addressing common challenges, uniting around common endeavours and providing the knowledge and innovation needed to shape sustainable and peaceful futures for all.'

ACS has successfully implemented the exclusive Global Citizen Diploma programme for all high school students at its school at Hillingdon, and all its schools continue to extend students' involvement in the world beyond the classroom through activities in the clubs, such Model United Nations.

In 2021 ACS started work with Research Schools International (RSI) on a multi-year research and professional development project designed to develop students' global competence. To date we have completed a white paper that will inform the study. We are currently in the next phase which comprises surveys of teacher practice and student perception into how global competence is being supported and how it can be further developed at the school. These surveys are being administered at ACS Cobham and ACS Doha where all Middle and High School students and teachers have been invited to take it.



A small team of teacher/staff Research Fellows from ACS has been identified to collaborate with RSI on this research. The collaboration begins in February 2023. RSI's research team will create a plan for two professional development workshops - one at ACS Cobham and one at ACS Doha. The workshops will be designed by RSI working together with ACS International Schools to tailor these professional development workshops to the needs and interests of each school.

The follow-up Research Study and dissemination of findings and related materials is planned for 2024-25, when we plan focused delivery of this strategic domain.

We have also recently engaged with the Global Education Benchmark Group (US) and the World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence. We expect further reflection on the role of ACS Schools in the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 and PISA's 2018 innovations in assessing global competence.

3. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Health, Safety and Wellbeing is at the forefront of our work and behaviour at ACS Schools and became more so in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic engulfed all our lives. A new student Wellbeing Strategy is now being systematically implemented. Students have been at the forefront of this work, exercising voice and choice in the collaborative development and ongoing implementation of student wellbeing charters at each school.

Delivering Mental Health Policy and Practices

Introduced in 2020, our Student Mental Health Policy promotes positive mental health culture, increased understanding, and awareness of common mental health issues, and offers high quality school counselling, pastoral care, and medical support. We have introduced Mental Health First Aid training and have a Mental Health First Aid trainer on our staff. Participants for this training are identified by role, both student-facing and staff-facing.



Supporting Student Wellbeing

Our Student Wellbeing Charters are now embedded in everyday practice, with growing awareness of their importance across the schools. We are still being supported by external partners, but our new partners are those who have tools for our community to tap into on an as-needed basis. Amongst these partners are The Wellbeing Hub who

hosts an online Wellbeing tool hosting information, webinars, and support contacts for a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics, in addition they can provide bespoke sessions on request. (Our memberships support an equal number of ACS Partnership School students and families.) The EI Pulse survey is an online student 'check-in' survey which can be taken on any mobile device, including a smart phone, and asks three questions to gage how a student is doing at a set time each week. This tool was trialled at ACS Doha in 2022, and its positive feedback has resulted in introducing it to the UK schools in Winter 2023.

In addition to this locally focused and agile weekly approach, we will conduct bi-annual student wellbeing surveys which include a longitudinal measure of cohort mental health (Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale), as well as dimensions overall student wellbeing based on recommendations of a recent report by the Wellbeing Research Centre of the University of Oxford in collaboration with the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO). Both instruments provide national and international benchmarks we will use to establish ongoing KPIs that will help us monitor progress and gauge the success of interventions.

Our proposal for sharing ACS's mental health and wellbeing strategy was accepted for presentation at the IB's Annual Conference in The Hague in 2022. With additional work in progress to organise and increase the reliability and accessibility of safeguarding data, we expect to have better information to assess this essential dimension of the learning community's experience.

4. Diversity and a Culture of Inclusion

Championing DEI- Belonging



The importance and value of focused attention to DEI has become apparent to international schools. ACS is well connected to this global community, which also represents a matter of importance to our students and staff. Much more than we should have anticipated in 2020, the Education Strategy has been an important clearinghouse and driver for change in this domain. Collectively, these activities and initiatives constitute a project in their own right.

Since August 2020, our DEI Council has challenged and supported ACS to embed Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is embedded across our organisation. In 2022, we successfully transitioned to new leadership and continued to expand the group's diversity. The Council provides feedback and direction for changing systems and processes, including strategy-led initiatives such as:

- reviewing our curriculum and literature to reduce cultural bias and promote intercultural awareness
- trialling 'Name Coach' software that gives students control over how their name is pronounced, with recordings accessible from our Student Information Systems

- developing, monitoring, and training to support inclusive language guidelines
- engaging with community organisation through ACS partnerships
- implementing good practice guidelines for gender diversity in schools
- contributing to inclusive design for capital improvement projects
- revamping information systems to allow more accurate and age appropriate, pastorally aware data about students' ethnic identity, home languages, gender identity, sexual orientation, and transgender status

Events and training

Show Racism the Red Card and Black History month are two of the events that are fast becoming annual events across ACS. In addition, schools have a DEI calendar and offer events from this that are in-line with other activities on their campus. PD events offer all staff classroom-based professional development as well support external DEI training.

DEI in action across ACS

DEI continues to be a focus across our schools. In March 2023, the "Hacking Neurodiversity" film will be launching after two years of work by ACS Partnerships and Inrehearsal. At ACS Egham's Lower School, the Inclusive Design classroom working group have been busy support all students through pedagogy and classroom design. In addition to this we continue to work with, and learn from, external organisations such as UTCAI and ODIS (Organisation to Decolonise International Schools) whose founders, Xoai David and Clara Reynolds, were recently welcomed to a DEI Council meeting to share their stories, experience, and knowledge with us.

A Robust Multi-Tier Support System

In 2022 we concluded a consultation with internal and external subject matter experts, which is leading to several workflows scheduled to be delivered in 2023:

- standardised service levels and more objective identification of needs
- documented process flows and improved records management
- preliminary consideration of more comprehensive 'wrap around' services
- revision SEN Policy to reflect contemporary understanding and practice
- implementation of Universal Design for Learning as a provision for all students and common strategy for SEN services that are delivered principally by general education teachers

We have implemented the PowerSchool Special Education module to promote more consistent record keeping and student progress monitoring. We also have begun collaborating with the U.S. State Department's Office of Overseas School's Advisory Committee on Exceptional Children, and exploration of pathways for knowledge exchange with the Jemicy School (Baltimore, USA) on dyslexia and other related language-based learning differences.

Strategy Beyond 2025

In 2023-24, we will begin to explore what the next Education Strategy will hold. Our attention will likely remain on learning beyond the classroom, as well as other aspects of the current strategy that may be in initial stages of delivery. We know that climate change education, global engagement, and integrated technology will probably be high on the list of opportunities for growth.

We are likely to rally around NEASC collaborative learning protocols, since all ACS schools are looking critically to advance their understanding and practice for three learning principles:

Evidence of Learning

Learners engage with feedback that promotes self-awareness, improvement, and proficiency. Learners demonstrate growth and development in a variety of forms.

Learner Autonomy and Engagement

Learners have age-appropriate, goal-oriented autonomy over their learning and make informed choices supported by guidance within and beyond the classroom.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Belonging

The learning community exhibits a culture of inclusiveness that enables the diverse needs, identities, and interests of all learners and community members to be acknowledged, actively celebrated, and proactively addressed. Differing viewpoints and opinions are invited in pursuit of an informed and welcoming community.

One appropriately challenging approach might be to use the Education Strategy to support schools' development of these principles, and drive innovation that leads toward asking 'What if' in at least one domain for each school (a KPI of the Education Quality Framework).

