



ACS
INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOLS

EDUCATION STRATEGY REPORT

2023/24 (Final Update)



The 2020-2025 Education Strategy aimed 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. It reflects the desired position for our schools in 2025.

Launched in 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Education Strategy is now in its fourth year and has evolved. The strategy was designed around four objectives - important thematic opportunities for growth and delivered through ten challenging and collaboratively developed projects which we believe could make a positive difference in student learning outcomes.

Our strategy has been strengthened by the 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.

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.

Along the way there have been successes and experiments that have been less successful. Of the ten projects outlined as strategic deliverables, few are still underway, some have merged, some have been replaced, and some have become less relevant at ACS, at least for now. We expect to carry forward the main themes from this strategy into its next iteration. We have laid the groundwork for a powerful badging system to document workplace skills (and ACS student learning outcomes) in 2025, which will also be a component in more personalized qualifications delivered over the next five years.

Using the NEASC framework's continuum for transformational learning journeys¹, our progress so far is summarised in table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation of strategic progress

| 4 Objectives | | Strategic Projects to be Delivered | Level |
|---------------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| Personal and Academic Challenge | 1 | Advancing Teaching Excellence | Living it + |
| | 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 | Demonstrating Global Competence | Working on it + |
| Health, Safety and Wellbeing | 6 | Delivering Mental Health Policy and Practices | Asking what if |
| | 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 |

The tenth project, Explore Personal Learning Plans, is a project that has not progressed, primarily due to lack of suitable resources to design the project and a suitable to host the data. This project is subsumed within the new badging platform and represents ACS's contribution to student-led portfolio-based documentation of competency-based education.

A 'soft' measure of success is the extent to which the Education Strategy has meaningfully connected with the People and Partnership Strategies. Particularly notable is the extent to which both leadership conversations and practitioner attention have come to reflect the strategy's language and objectives. The impact is evident in allied leadership structures (e.g. group level safeguarding and medical alignment, and when we had ACS Doha, its 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). Restructuring of educational administration at ACS Cobham and Egham have been fully informed by the Education Strategy, as have development plans at all three schools.

Teaching excellence has been supported by a full programme of professional development and school-based initiatives including data-informed instruction, learning walks, and performance

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 |

management through a refreshed implementation of Educator Principles (quality standards) in our Professional Effectiveness System.

Demonstrating global competence is a focus of attention for 2024-25, with continued strength in programmes like Model United Nations, DP World Studies Extended Essay, DP Global Politics, the Global Citizen Diploma (Hillingdon) and growing interest in global civics. Longer term discussion is underway about longer term curriculum review and course availability that can strengthen our intentional internationalism and help students to be ready for the wide range of global challenges they will face as adults in the twenty-first century.

FOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

Advancing Teaching Excellence

The Future of Teaching Teacher Residency Programme launched in 2022, in collaboration with the ACS People Strategy, gave us our first graduates in 2023, with two being employed as full time members of ACS Cobham faculty in the Math department, which was identified as a high need subject area in 2022. The new cohort joining the programme has three teams one at ACS Hillingdon and two at ACS Cobham, with two teacher residents in each team working under three teacher leads. Not only has this programme given valuable experience to the residents involved, but feedback from the teacher leads has also been very positive and saying that they love their role – one of the teacher leads started at ACS as a student teacher a decade ago.



Teachers' professional learning and growth continues to be key to teaching excellence and following on from the January 2023 face-to-face multi-campus professional development day, another is planned for January 2025, with even more Teacher led sessions anticipated to be on offer for our 400+ academic staff to choose from.

Renewing our Early Childhood Education

In 2023 a refreshed philosophy of early childhood education was introduced to our parent community. We are now carrying out an inquiry into current teaching practice, development of a student-led assessment system based on Birth to 5 Matters, and developing the supporting narratives explaining the ACS advantage.

2. LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Developing Personalised Qualifications

The ACS High School Diploma and the Learning Results Portfolio projects merged into one modified objective as the strategy has evolved, to develop more personalized credentials for our high school graduates. The goal is to provide a more robust and accessible way for students to document their personal learning stories and demonstrate that they are ready for what comes next.

ACS continues to be members of and contribute to the work of the Coalition to Honour All Learning², and during the 2024/2025 academic year we are piloting a 'badging' system. The ACS Skill Badges recognise and quantify non-cognitive skills, achievements, and knowledge that future employers want to see in their candidates. The digital badges can easily be shared and verified online on platforms such as LinkedIn. In the past these skills have been tricky to quantify and a real challenge for educators across the globe. The badging system will also provide evidence for our school wide schoolwide learning objectives: caring contributors; confident individuals, and effective lifelong learners. The system will be fully launched in 2025/2026.



Demonstrating Workplace Skills

The IB Career-Related Programme (IBPC) has gained traction at ACS Egham and continues to thrive at ACS Hillingdon, providing headline engagement for students and prospective families.

ACS Cobham introduced a compulsory Service Learning course for Grade 9 and Grade 10 students in 2023/2024, giving students the opportunity to work on community related service learning projects and to develop workplace skills. ACS Partnership are also providing these students with opportunities to work with partner organisations providing exposure to a world beyond ACS.

Following on the success of the 2022 day out at Thorpe Park, ACS Partnerships hosted its second day out at Thorpe Park in 2024, delivering its objective to make learning fun, it attracted 10,000 children and 1000+ teachers and support staff from over 100+ state schools and ACS schools. Through the STEAM activities on offer, students had the opportunity to engage in real-world learning. Older ACS students had the additional advantage of supporting the event through event management and interactions with the people and organisations contributing to the day.

² The Coalition to Honour All Learning is a consortium of leading international schools focusing on the development of high school qualifications that value depth of thought and promote human flourishing.

Demonstrating Global Competence

In its white paper, commissioned by ACS, Harvard's Research Schools International (RSI) cited the UNESCO report on 'Futures of Education' which stressed the role of education in 'addressing common challenges, uniting around common endeavours and providing knowledge and innovation needed to shape sustainable and peaceful futures for all'. Global competence is fundamental to a good international education.

In 2021, ACS embarked on a multi-year research and professional development project with RSI, to develop students' global competence. Phase 1 of the project was to produce a white paper, phase 2 was a survey of teacher practice and student perception into how global competence is being supported and how it can be further developed at the school, and phase 3 was for a small team of teacher/staff research fellows from ACS to collaborate with RSI and develop professional development workshops to meet the needs and interests of each school (Cobham and Doha). Phase 1 and phase 2 were achieved, however, phase 3 has not been achieved due to the sale of ACS Doha and the restructure of ACS Cobham, resulting in the research fellows either leaving ACS or finding themselves in a new position.

However, we have continued to focus on Global Competence in our Professional Development initiatives throughout 2024/2025. Our summer reading list offered fiction and non-fiction literature based on global competence, the August PD offered our faculty a selection of seven workshops led by experts in the field, all with global competence as an underlying theme, and the January 2025 cross-school ACS teacher conference had over half of its 60+ teacher-led sessions around the theme of global competence.

As global conflicts continue in Ukraine and the Middle East, we have been proactive in supporting students and staff, and mindful of our responsibility to promote civil dialogue, human rights, peace and justice, and to support humanitarian response to displaced people.

In addition, Hillingdon's Global Citizen Diploma programme for all high school students is doing well, and across all the ACS schools, students are involved in the world beyond the classroom through activities in clubs such as Model United Nations. We are also engaged with the global Education Benchmark Group (US) and the World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence.

3. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Health, Safety and Wellbeing continues to be at the forefront of our work and behaviour at ACS schools. The infrastructure to support student wellbeing continues to strengthen, building on the schools' already strong pastoral care and safeguarding programmes. Our methodology is student-led, beginning with the development of a Student Wellbeing Charter and student wellbeing champions on each campus. We are also continuing to collaborate with a powerful network of expert partners and service providers, on a local, national, and international level.

Expanding our wellbeing work, a small team is currently exploring the many connections between belonging, wellbeing, and global competence as we strive to build a community where everyone is heard, seen, and trusted.

Delivering Mental Health Policy and Practices

The Student Mental Health policy was reviewed and updated in January 2024, based on the template provided by The Key used across the education sector.

Each student is assigned a school counsellor who supports and advocates for the student. The schools also provide access to professionally qualified BACP-accredited counsellors which families can access at a subsidized cost through ACS International Schools.

Our in-house Mental Health First Aid trainer left the organization at the end of the last school year, but we have outsourced that provision and remain committed to our training matrix that provides multi-tiered support.

Supporting Student Wellbeing

Students are at the center of our wellbeing offering, supported by the School Wellbeing Leads and our expanding support network (school climate, DEIB, global competence, teacher wellbeing, digital welfare, outdoor learning, etc.). By integrating services, using data constructively, and working collaboratively, we continue to look for new ways to understand and respond to the needs of our students, both individually and as a cohort.



In 2023/2024 we undertook a review of the Student Wellbeing Charters, first created in 2021 when students returned to school following the pandemic. A series of workshops were held with students from all three schools to redefine the Lower School and Upper/Senior School charters, now known as the Wellbeing Triangle. Students felt the original charters had ‘lost their voice’ once it had been through a ‘brand’ exercise, therefore, it has been important to ensure that student voice remains intact this time, even when reviewing against our brand guidelines.

We are still being supported by partners, such as the Wellbeing Hub, hosts of an online Wellbeing resource rich platform for students, families, teachers and staff. Our membership of the Wellbeing Hub supports an equal number of ACS Partnership Schools to also get membership as no cost, in 2024/2025 we have ‘gifted’ membership to eight schools (one group is a 7-school MAT so that counted as one). Our other partner is Smoothwall, who’s EI Pulse survey is used across our schools on a weekly basis to gauge student wellbeing.

In addition to the weekly EI Pulse check-ins, we continue to conduct a more details student wellbeing survey, based on questions from the OECD/PISA international survey and the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Health Survey (WEMWBS).

The ACS Wellbeing Strategy is currently under review and a new five-year (2025-2030) strategy is being drafted and will be shared with key members of the ACS community for review in Spring 2025.

ACS' approach to Student Wellbeing will be shared in an AAIE Leadership Conversation in March 2025 and in a workshop at the ECIS Leadership Conference in Stuttgart, Germany in April 2025.

4. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Championing DEI – Belonging

The DEIB Council continues to grow its membership and its influence in individual behaviour and attitudes, curriculum, and community, and since adding 'belonging' into its title, belonging is now embedded into how people think about this council. The DEIB networks are also growing with two new networks, Disability and Neurodiversity.

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
- developing, monitoring, and training to support inclusive guidelines
- engaging with community organization 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 language, gender identity, sexual orientation, and transgender status

Events and Training

Show Racism the Red Card and Black History month are now annual events across ACS. For the second year running ACS were invited to take part in the Pride parade in London in summer 2024. The DEIB Council Leaders also hosted a panel session to share their experience at the ECIS Leadership Conference in 2024. In addition to these, there is a DEI calendar and each school decides if the event will be recognised, celebrated or embedded, depending on the school community and the resources available to support the event.



DEI in action across ACS

The 10-part 'Hacking Neurodiversity' film series, created in partnership between ACS Partnerships and Inrehearsal, was released over the course of 2024 and is available to our community to view on YouTube.

At ACS Egham the third Human Library event was held and continues to be popular and looks like it is quickly becoming a regular part of the school calendar. Students at Hillingdon have added 'Humans of Hillingdon' as a regular column in its student newspaper, Hillingdon News, this is based on Humans of New York and aims to get to know the members of its school community better. A DEIB Podcast was also introduced in Autumn 2024, My First, My Last, My Everything, which is also aimed at getting to know the person behind their everyday role by sharing their stories through their firsts, lasts, and everything which can be anything from books, holidays, music, etc.

Finally, we are continuing to work with, and learn from external organisations, such as UTCAL, ODIS, and most recently (AIELOC) Association for International Educators and Leaders of Colour and Monique Vogelsang.

A Robust Multi-Tier Support System











Having concluded a consultation with internal and external subject matter experts in 2022, we are now working towards delivering:

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

STRATEGY BEYOND 2025

Our current ACS Education Strategy expires in 2025. In 2023/2024 we began to explore our next Education Strategy and what that will hold. Strategic vision provides behavioural nudges toward shared goals and helps to set a common agenda for growth. It shapes conversation, a first step toward influencing culture through sustained attention focused on a limited number of strategic objectives.

Our timeline for Education Strategy 2025-2030 preliminary work and engagement is shown in the image below.

| | |
|---|--|
|  | 26 March 2024 - ACS Board Strategy Day |
|  | 4 June 2024 - Strategy Workshop with ESST and invited ACS staff. Purpose - outline what the objectives of the 2025-2030 Education Strategy should be. |
|  | Attend ACS Cobham, ACS Egham, and ACS Hillingdon Wednesday afternoon school meeting. Purpose - engage with SLT/Teachers/PSO to extend the discussion and outline around the objectives of the 2025-2030 Education Strategy. |
|  | Review the HR, Partnerships, PD, Growth, Wellbeing, DEIB, and IT strategies to ensure the Education Strategy is aligned with these (possibly a workshop with representatives from these teams to do this review). |
|  | Share Strategy Development Plan and content with the US Diplomatic Community (possible 1 hour virtual meeting) |
|  | ACS-Wide PD Day, opportunity to liaise with SLT and Teachers to further develop the 2025-2030 Education Strategy. |
|  | Joint Community (Parent, Student, Staff, Partners) Strategy Input Event (Ian Gilbert) Draft of the 2025-2030 Education Strategy ready to share with key stakeholders. |
|  | ACS Board Strategy Day. |
|  | Create a communication plan and promotional materials |
|  | 2025-2030 Education Strategy approved and ready to launch. |

From our preliminary work to date we are considering a 'honeycomb' model with 'Joyful, life-worthy, learning' at its center.

How do we direct attention toward learning that is meant to inform, last, and enlighten; develop big understandings that have many opportunities across life to engage, offer insight, inform action, and require an ethical response?

What can we do design and deliver curriculum that is rich in disciplinary insight/foundational knowledge, without allowing demands for achievement and information to undermine learning that matters. What can we do to promote educational experiences that fill learners with joy: engaged, curious, and open to new experiences?

David Perkins, Futurewise: Educating our Children for a Changing World
Gholdy Muhammad, Unearthing joy: A Guide to Developing Culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning

We also know that Climate and Technology are challenges and high opportunities for growth, as shown by the World Economic Forum's outlook for global challenges in the next 2 and 10 years.



In February 2025 we are hosting a community-wide event, Shaping Tomorrow: Exploring the Future of Education Today, to discuss what an education strategy looks like. We have invited Ian Gilbert from Independent Thinking to give a keynote and facilitate a panel discussion. The panel will include an Alum, Tijn Den Hollander, an ACS Teacher, Cy Iravani, an ACS Trustee, Hugo Pinto, and an ex-State School Head, Karine George.

We expect to share the draft of the new strategy in May 2025, with a launch in September 2025.