



National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth: summer schools 2004

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Executive summary

The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth's (NAGTY) 2004 summer schools were of higher quality than those held the previous year. All were at least good and most were excellent. The Academy provided two week courses as well as the three week courses offered in 2003. Pupils attended from across the country. They found the experience exciting and challenging and most enjoyed working alongside and made friends with like-minded peers.

Membership of the Academy grew substantially during 2004 and recruitment for summer school places was better organised than in the previous year. As a result, all 1,050 summer school places were filled. Planning, with clear aims and objectives, was good or better at all venues. The induction of pupils was thorough, and all centres provided a good balance of academic and recreational activities.

NAGTY summer schools were expensive; each place cost about £1,900. However, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) subsidised each place, so parents were expected to make only a small contribution, depending on income. The Academy received funding from two industries to support a small number of pupils from disadvantaged families. These funding arrangements ensured pupils were recruited from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Academic staffing was of good quality with a high ratio of adults to pupils in lessons. As a result, almost all the teaching was at least good and most pupils made good or very good progress. Pupils contributed very well to sessions; they were highly motivated, open to new ideas and concepts and many gained in confidence. Just occasionally university lecturers failed to engage pupils effectively.

The quality of assessment and reporting about pupils' progress and achievement has improved since 2003, but is still variable. There are pockets of good assessment where individual tutors take the initiative. Written reports follow a common pattern but often lack detail and vary in terms of the advice and guidance about what pupils might do after summer school.

The quality of teaching accommodation was very good or excellent at all centres, an improvement on last year. Residential accommodation was usually very good except in one centre, where it was old and due for demolition, but there were few complaints. Resources were good or excellent.

The pastoral care of pupils in all centres was very good and often excellent. Residential assistants and other site administrators organised a wide range of recreational activities which were very popular with pupils.

Main findings

- The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth's summer schools has responded well to the findings of the Ofsted report *National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth: Summer schools 2003* and worked with centres to establish clear guidelines about teaching and learning, recruitment, staffing, and resources. The Academy has sought to refine the administration and organisation of the summer schools so that the quality of teaching and learning is as high as it can be.
- The Academy met its target of filling over 1,000 places. This represents a major improvement from last year. However, some centres were concerned about the capability of a small number of pupils to cope effectively with the challenges of their respective courses. Additionally, some course leaders had to alter their plans to better match the needs of late applicants.
- The quality of learning was generally very good and reflected the often excellent teaching. Most of the pupils made very good progress on courses that were more challenging and engaging than those they usually experienced at school. Progress could be improved still further in some centres by teaching pupils in narrower age groups, as on some courses such as mathematics.
- Overall the quality of teaching was much better than in 2003, although there were still isolated instances of sessions being over-directed by lecturers and teachers. Some centres appointed experienced consultants who had a good effect on recruiting, advising and guiding lecturers and teachers about how best to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils.
- The pastoral care of pupils was excellent. The commitment, energy and enthusiasm of residential assistants and site managers contributed significantly to this.
- The quality of assessment and reporting has improved since 2003 and is satisfactory. Centres felt that they did not have sufficient data about pupils' attainment before they arrived and many schools did not provide sufficient information about the strengths of pupils. Centres reported more fully on what pupils had learned but there remained a lack of consistency in the quality of advice and guidance about what pupils might tackle next.
- The Academy has improved its monitoring of summer schools. The training it provides for those involved in organising and administering the summer schools has had a very positive impact on the quality of pastoral care and teaching. The Academy continues to seek ways of improving its quality assurance and tightening the application process so that the eligibility of pupils is better assessed. The Academy needs to develop further its liaison with schools so that the progress pupils make at the summer schools is effectively built on afterwards.
- Young people who attended thought the summer schools were very successful, and many of those who had attended previously felt there had been important improvements.
- These summer schools are expensive. Staff ratios are high, there is an extensive out-of-hours programme and the cost includes residential accommodation and care.

However, the Academy has not yet developed criteria by which to judge the value of this expenditure in terms of educational outcomes.

Recommendations

The Academy should:

- ensure that centres provide more opportunities for pupils to be taught with others of their own age and level of expertise in order to improve further the effectiveness of teaching
- review the assessment and acceptance of pupils for summer school places so that pupils are better matched to courses and there are no adverse effects of accepting late applications
- ensure that data about the prior attainment of those who are accepted for places at summer schools are always available and in good time, so that centres can improve further their planning and the quality of teaching
- improve the consistency of end-of-course reporting to better identify what pupils and schools can do to build more effectively on achievements at summer schools
- demonstrate how summer schools represent good value for money.

Pupils

1. Almost 1,050 pupils aged 11–16 took part in the summer schools in 2004. This represents a significant increase in numbers compared with 2003. The number of schools sending pupils rose from 316 in 2003 to 532 in 2004. Just under 85% of these were maintained secondary schools, and just under 12% independent schools. Better communication with schools by the Academy, and substantially increased membership, were major reasons for this increase. Three schools sent over ten pupils each, including one which sent nineteen. A large number only sent one pupil. There were almost exactly equal numbers of boys and girls but, as in 2003, there were marked gender differences on some courses, for instance, 90% of pupils on a robotics course were boys. Conversely, girls outnumbered boys on English courses. At a centre catering predominantly for science, girls were significantly under-represented.
2. Pupils attended from 143 of the 150 local education authorities (LEAs) in England, which was a significant increase on 2003. Just over a third of pupils came from LEAs with Excellence in Cities (EiC) programmes, a slightly lower proportion than in 2003. Just under a quarter of pupils came from only nine LEAs. Although geographical proximity to a centre remained an important factor in pupils' choice, more pupils than last year applied to centres further away from home. Only one pupil at Lancaster came from Lancashire. At Canterbury, just over a quarter of pupils came from the south east whilst just under 15% came from the north west.
3. As in 2003, about one third of pupils came from minority ethnic groups, the largest being from Indian and Chinese heritage with only small numbers from Pakistani, Black African and Black Caribbean heritages. Just over 10% did not indicate their ethnicity.
4. Three hundred and sixty five schools contributed financial support for pupils at the summer schools. Even so, 16 young people cancelled their place because of funding problems, 10 because the school did not contribute. In some cases, schools had not set criteria for the Academy's summer schools, had no clear process for identifying suitable pupils and had not budgeted for supporting them.
5. Each summer school place costs about £1,900 but the DfES subsidises every place, so the maximum charge is £490 for a two week summer school and £640 for three weeks. Parents of pupils attending independent schools are expected to pay the full charge while for those at maintained schools the school is asked to contribute £210 or £290 respectively. In 2004 about 75% of all pupils' schools made a full or partial contribution with the remainder being paid by the pupil's family. An Academy bursary scheme subsidises these costs further on a sliding scale depending on family income. Where schools do not contribute, families must find this part of the fee and there are no bursaries to supply this. Families in this situation are encouraged to seek other sources of funding including educational charities, their LEA or family and friends. External funding partners Transco and Caterpillar have nominated a total of 26 'scholars' for whom all the fees were paid in 2004. These funding mechanisms ensured that pupils were recruited from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Staffing

6. All centres used a combination of university academic staff, teachers from local schools and teaching assistants to deliver the academic programmes.
7. As in 2003, in almost all courses inspected by HMI this year, the course leader was a member of the university academic staff, often the chair or head of department. Highly qualified university academic staff were also heavily involved in the teaching including, for example, a professor of mathematics education at the Exeter centre.
8. All the courses inspected made very good use of experienced and highly qualified teachers from local schools. In almost all cases, university staff and local teachers worked well together and formed very effective teams for planning and teaching. Where this relationship was not developed so well, as in one isolated case, the quality of teaching was only satisfactory and ideas and experience about teaching gifted and talented young people were not shared.
9. In most sessions observed, teaching assistants were enthusiastic and skilled enough to support activities well. They had wide and varied experience but in one or two cases assistants were not used effectively.
10. Most centres made very good use of other expertise to support their programmes. In one, excellent use was made of professional artists and musicians. In another, an ex-pupil was employed most effectively to co-ordinate pupils' requirements for photographing items in space via a telescope in Hawaii. In a citizenship course outside experts enabled pupils to develop important skills in analysing and critically discussing animal rights issues.
11. Strategies for recruiting and training summer school staff have developed well since 2003. The Academy disseminated sound advice to centres about the need to appoint staff who are effective in their teaching of able and gifted young people. As a result some centres employed consultants to help them address this issue. Others worked with LEA advisory services and university teacher education departments to sharpen recruitment procedures. Where this worked well, for example at Canterbury, clear appointment criteria were developed and candidates were identified carefully. In some centres course leaders are responsible for appointing teachers, but they apply rigorous criteria, based on capability to provide high-quality teaching to able pupils.
12. Summer schools had a better balance of staffing to deliver their programmes in 2004 compared to 2003. There was better continuity of staffing over the three week courses, and as a result pupils did not experience discontinuities and disparities to the same extent as 2003. Where staff changed at the end of the week, there was always one member of staff who remained constant, and pupils found the staff changes stimulating.

Planning and management

13. Planning was good or better at all summer schools. Early recruitment of staff meant that courses were planned effectively with clear aims and objectives. Teaching and learning strategies were generally matched well to the needs of the able young people. All centres provided a good balance of academic and recreational activities. On the basis of past experience, some courses were planned to suit different age groups rather than to cater for the whole 11–16 age range. Some centres expressed concern about teaching the full 11–16 range and plan to sub-divide groups next year. For instance, on one course teachers had to address the needs of a 12-year-old who did not recognise chemical symbols, whilst at the

same time provide challenging tasks for a 15-year-old who had obtained a double A* at GCSE.

14. There were additional concerns about the length and tightly packed nature of the summer school day. Some course leaders felt that pupils needed more time for reflection at the end of the day and they plan to incorporate such an element next year. The best courses provided time for pupils to complete a log of their activities and to discuss progress with their teachers. One centre organised a day where pupils could experience what the other courses were like.

15. The best planning built on experience of previous years. For example, pupils were expected to complete challenging pre-course tasks so that time was not taken up establishing the level of ability in the first few days of the course. Where this was not done effectively or where late applicants had not completed the work, pupils spent longer than was necessary finding their feet. Some centres were involved in planning and organising other summer schools or further courses for gifted pupils and this improved the overall quality of planning.

16. The role of the site director was crucial in determining the quality of summer school programmes and their effectiveness, for example:

- directors developed teams of suitably qualified and experienced staff who helped appoint other staff and train them well, as at Canterbury
- directors used their pre-course time well to respond constructively to the Academy's advice and guidance based on the 2003 inspections recommendations
- one summer school was organised and administered by a partnership between the university and a private company specialising in the education of able young people and these arrangements worked very well.

17. Induction was good or better at all summer schools. Centres used written information and presentations to inform and guide parents and pupils of the academic and pastoral care arrangements. Residential assistants also undertook valuable induction training and were very well prepared for their duties and responsibilities. One centre appointed a full-time gifted and talented administrator from the university staff to co-ordinate and manage day-to-day arrangements and visits. He was also an important link between the academic and residential staff and this ensured communications were clear and any concerns were attended to promptly. In one of the centres day-to-day communication between residential assistants and senior organisers was less effective.

18. The Academy responded promptly and effectively to the recommendations from the Ofsted report *National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth: Summer schools 2003* and centres were generally positive about the quality of monitoring and communication it provided. For example:

- centres responded positively and well to the Academy's advice and guidance about appropriate teaching and learning strategies that teachers needed to address in their planning and teaching sessions
- residential assistants found the induction training very useful

- centres appreciated the monitoring visits made by Academy personnel, and were encouraged by the findings and suggestions.

19. However, there was confusion in two centres about whether they or the Academy were responsible for assuring the quality of teaching and learning. In consequence, at these centres, the monitoring of teaching was inconsistent.

20. As mentioned above, the cost of each summer school place is very high. As yet the Academy has not developed criteria by which to judge the value of this expenditure in terms of educational outcomes. However, it is planning to improve its liaison work with mainstream schools and provide more opportunities for summer school pupils to develop their abilities and skills further. In this way, as part of its core priorities, the Academy plans to develop stronger outcome measures.

The quality of teaching and learning

21. The quality of teaching was good or better in all centres and only in one case did it give pupils insufficient scope. Centres had been well advised by the Academy about the needs of gifted and talented young people in terms of teaching and learning approaches. As a consequence, centres made very sound arrangements for teaching staff to consider and respond to important teaching issues prior to making their plans and designing courses. In one centre, a local education authority adviser for gifted and talented education worked with staff to ensure that lesson plans effectively addressed important teaching and learning issues. In another centre an external consultant had been used to undertake similar work. These initiatives had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching in those centres. However, centres expressed concern about the limitations they experienced teaching groups that contained the whole 11–16 age range.

22. In the few instances where teaching was just satisfactory it was because university staff did not engage pupils effectively and had not developed close enough relations with other teaching staff to share ideas about pedagogy and use of resources. In some mathematics sessions in one centre, the lecturer missed opportunities to challenge pupils to provide more developed and well-thought out responses. This situation would have been avoided had there been planned occasions for the practising teacher, who shared in the delivery of the sessions, to be more closely involved.

23. The quality of learning was very good or better on most courses inspected. Most pupils made good progress and some made excellent progress. The very good teaching led to very good learning with pupils who were mostly highly motivated to learn and open to new ideas and concepts. For example, at York pupils following a linguistics course experienced a very challenging and stimulating session on the science of speech. The investigation and accompanying discussion of cosmological ideas and theories in a space science course at Canterbury, managed extremely well by two teachers, was excellent and pupils left the session buzzing with thoughts and plans for further investigations. Similarly, pupils on a sports science course were excited by being able to use the university's specialised testing equipment and learn how to measure the body's reaction to physical activity. Pupils generally contributed very well to sessions and many clearly developed in self-confidence.

24. The quality of assessment and reporting about pupils' progress and achievement has improved since 2003 following guidance from the Academy. Centres responded positively to this guidance, but there are still inconsistencies in practice. Some centres and courses undertake their own baseline assessments and monitor individual progress carefully, often in discussions with pupils. For instance, pupils accepted for a philosophy course were expected

to write an essay about their philosophical interests before starting and this was used to assess their ability and plan appropriate activities. Similarly, pupils on an art course were asked to complete a questionnaire on their use and experience of various media which was then used to shape teaching and learning activities. A few other centres did little internal monitoring of assessment procedures and expect the Academy to undertake all follow-up work with schools.

25. Written reports follow a common pattern but often lack detail and vary in quality in terms of advice and guidance about what pupils might do after summer school. The Academy provides guidance to schools on how to develop the work of pupils who have been on summer schools. However, this liaison and support work with schools needs to be more explicit about how pupil progress can be sustained.

Accommodation and resources

26. The quality of accommodation for teaching was very good or excellent overall in all centres. This is an improvement on last year. Where teaching accommodation was provided off-site, it was always very good.

27. Residential accommodation was at least good and mostly excellent in all but one of the centres, where it was old and due for demolition. Generally there were few complaints about residential accommodation, and pupils and residential assistants made very favourable comments about it.

28. Resources were good or excellent overall. Access to university resources was generally good, although the staff in charge of two university libraries were nervous about young students using their facilities. Lecturers and teachers used their own resources to supplement those provided by the university, and these were nearly always well produced, and contributed very positively to the very good pupil learning and progress that was observed. The quality of specialist facilities was excellent overall. ICT resources were excellent in all centres, and course leaders and teachers ensured that pupils used these resources most effectively. This was an improvement on 2003 and pupils were expected to research many of their ideas further using this medium. However, the range of fiction available for pupils was sometimes limited. Resources for leisure activities were almost always good and often excellent.

Pastoral care

29. The pastoral care of pupils in all centres was very good and often excellent. Each centre employed a site manager who in turn helped to appoint a team of residential assistants. They were typically university students, usually from the host university or nearby. They were carefully selected and undertook induction training prior to the start of the summer school. They were co-ordinated by senior residential assistants. Residential assistants were enthusiastic, energetic and made a huge contribution to the success of the summer schools. They provided round-the-clock support for small groups of pupils of the same gender. They dealt with minor incidents of misbehaviour well and sensitively helped some young pupils over early bouts of homesickness.

30. Centres tracked pupils' behaviour very effectively using specially designed forms provided by the Academy. Any concerns were reported promptly to the appropriate person. Only two pupils across all centres had to be sent home for poor behaviour and these incidents were dealt with sensitively, and with the support of the Academy. In only one

centre were concerns expressed about weaknesses in the line of communication between residential assistants and site managers.

31. Residential assistants and other site administrators organised a wide range of recreational activities and some centres provided pupils with opportunities to undertake optional activities. The most popular were cultural and historical visits and sporting events, but talent shows were also very well supported. A small number of older pupils felt that they were supervised too tightly, especially at weekends, and a few others felt that the highly organised days provided too few moments for reflection.

Views of the pupils and staff

32. All pupils interviewed thought that their summer school experience had been very successful. They had made new friends, had been excited and challenged by the teaching and made academic contacts which they were determined to maintain afterwards. Those on the three-week programmes did not feel the courses had dragged on too long. Many of those on the two-week programmes were sad the courses had ended. Some pupils thought that the mixed-aged groupings had limited what they could do, even though they enjoyed their overall experience.

33. Pupils thought the quality of teaching was very good on the whole, although one or two thought some sessions had been over-directed by teachers. Pupils valued working alongside other able young people and felt this experience compared very well with the less stimulating learning environment of their schools. This made many of them even more determined to maintain contacts with their new-found friends of similar aptitude and ability.

34. Many staff at the centres found the three-week programme tiring and some would only experience a short break before their mainline university work began. Other teaching staff on two-week programmes found the experience of teaching able young people positively rejuvenating. Some of the pupils indicated that friends at school had been deterred from applying because of holiday commitments but that this was less the case in relation to two-week programmes. Residential assistants were invariably positive about their experience of summer schools, and many felt it had enabled them to develop personally and confirmed their wish to work more with young people.

Annex

The summer schools for gifted and talented pupils organised and co-ordinated by the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, based at the University of Warwick, were first inspected in 2003. At that time the programme ran at five centres: Christ Church University College, Canterbury, and the universities of Durham, Exeter, Warwick and York. Each summer school lasted three weeks and overall 500 pupils aged 11–16 took part.

The inspection findings in 2003 were very positive. There were four main recommendations. The Academy needed to:

- ensure that all those appointed to teach on summer schools were effective in their approach to teaching the age-groups and types of pupils
- investigate further the reasons why numbers of pupils attending summer schools were lower than target numbers and take further steps to ensure that all gifted and talented pupils know about and have access to the summer school programme
- improve assessment and reporting arrangements so that reports contained adequate information about what pupils had learned and what they might tackle best
- provide opportunities for those involved at the centres to meet and share information when planning courses and to review good practice.

The purpose of the 2004 inspection was to evaluate the quality of provision and how far these recommendations had been addressed. The Academy's provision was extended from 25 programmes in 2003 to 57 in 2004. Almost 1,050 pupils attended courses at seven centres, the five original sites and two new ones at Lancaster and Imperial College, London. Four of the centres ran two-week programmes and two, Warwick and Canterbury, ran three-week programmes.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited each summer school and, as in 2003, inspected at least one course in depth and others more generally. With reference to the main findings in 2003, they inspected the quality of staffing, course planning and management, the teaching and the learning, and suitability of the staffing, resources, accommodation and pastoral care. In most cases, HMI visited during the first week of the summer school and returned towards the end of the programme.