

Bridging the gap new opportunities for 16–18-year-olds not in education, employment or training

1. We welcome the report of the Social Exclusion Unit on this issue, and support their proposals.

Graduation

- 2. Although the report does not ask specific questions in relation to the proposals for graduation, FEDA would like to contribute the following response based on our relevant work.
- 3. FEDA welcomes the proposals for an overarching goal for 19-year-olds as these offer the potential for:
 - providing a balanced curriculum
 - developing the 14–19 curriculum as a coherent phase
 - securing the aims of inclusion.
- 4. The design of the overarching award will be a challenge. Key stakeholders (employers, higher education and others) need to be committed to recognise it, young people need to be motivated, and teachers must be prepared to deliver the curriculum. We are pleased to be supporting the work of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in taking forward proposals for graduation, drawing on our work in relation to:
 - an overarching certificate at advanced level (contracted research for QCA and its sister bodies in Wales and Northern Ireland carried out jointly with the Institute of Education)
 - the college diploma a proposed overarching award for adults, designed to motivate and encourage a broad curriculum

- entitlement curriculum for 16–19-year-olds to support the development of the FEFC funding mechanism.
- 5. We believe that the following points will need to be taken into account in developing a model:
 - graduation should be at 19, rather than by 19.
 If young people can graduate earlier, there is a
 danger of reintroducing notions of failure for
 those who do not. We agree that articulation
 post-19 will be important (for example with
 the proposed college diploma)
 - graduation should allow a range of levels of achievement to be recognised. This is challenging for designers of the award, who will need to set the baseline at a level that will encourage increased achievement without creating an exclusive award.
- 6. The Social Exclusion Unit recognises that pre-16 flexibility is still not being fully exploited and there are new initiatives to be incorporated. However, when these opportunities are exploited, levels of achievement should rise for the majority of those who might statistically currently appear as underachievers for reasons of disengagement.
- 7. An important benefit of the proposals is the potential for parity of esteem and progression through a variety of pathways, and the recognition of the need to develop a range of learner profiles rather than a standard one. We should, however, take care not to create a hierarchy of graduations depending on how each one was achieved (as has happened in France with Bacs).

- 8. We support the need for different routes to graduation; however, detailed modelling of the different fields of achievement and their operation in the different routes will need to inform the precise design specification. For example, 'experience and skills gained through work' are allocated in the example the report, to the enrichment field, whereas there may be a case for a field relating specifically to work experience and employability. FEDA has submitted a report to QCA suggesting that the following fields should be required:
 - key skills
 - broadening studies
 - work-related learning
 - management of learning
 - main study.

Teacher training

- 9. We welcome the identification of the need for specific training for teachers to address the needs of disadvantaged young people. Care must be taken with terminology used. Disadvantaged should not become a blanket term. Those who are disaffected from learning may not be disadvantaged but merely turned off by the system. Bearing in mind that not all disaffected are disruptive, we do not know how many achieve below their capability because of the impact of poor (i.e. uninspiring) teaching and lack of application of flexible approaches.
- 10. There will still need to be a strong focus on teaching and learning methodologies, on flexible provision, and on an individual approach. This is best achieved (from evidence of dealing with disengaged young people on New Start project) through effective initial assessment, guidance, support and curricular flexibility in a framework of recognising and celebrating a far wider range of achievements. All of this should form a key part of the teacher training whether for pre-16 or post-16 learners in both schools and colleges.

Right to time off for study

- 11. We believe that there should be a duty on employers to release young people in order to promote this opportunity more effectively. There should also be a requirement on employers to audit all employees aged below 18 and their qualifications, thus raising their responsibility and accountability. If this duty does not rest with the employer, the potential cost to the Youth Support Service of seeking this information could be significant.
- 12. We are also concerned about how the right to time off will be exercised if a young person is employed part-time, and perhaps by more than one employer. The position needs clarifying.

The Learning Card

13. The Learning Card needs to have considerable status and street credibility across the full range of young learners. Care is needed in drawing parallels with NUS cards as university students are an elite group of learners (as viewed by those who would not be able to participate). With careful development and marketing, it could represent a significant breakthrough and advantage for all young learners. We welcome the recent announcement by the Secretary of State to move ahead with implementation.

Youth Support Service

- 14. The analysis of the current situation understates the role of colleges in supporting 14–19-year-olds who have opted out or been excluded from school. The report appears to assume (paragraph 10.1) that those who remain in schools are appropriately dealt with in terms of curriculum choice, personal guidance and support. This is not necessarily the case.
- 15. We welcome the proposals and set out below our responses to the specific questions raised.

Functions

Question 1. Are the proposed functions of the new service correctly specified? Are there other functions it should also undertake? Are there any functions listed it should not undertake?

- 16. FEDA strongly supports the proposal for a Youth Support Service and personal advisers; in general, the functions seem to be appropriately specified. However, there are additional functions that are important if the measures are to improve access and opportunities to excluded groups.
- 17. The model of personal support suggests that the problem only lies with the young person, whereas the preceding analysis in the report also demonstrates that there is institutional inadequacy and an inequitable range of appropriate opportunities around the country.
- 18. The learning support service proposed in *Learning* to Succeed is for all students, so targeted action is essential to meet the needs of socially excluded non-participants and ensure that support is in direct proportion to need. The entitlement for all young people to advice and guidance, and the role of careers education and personal and social education (PSE) in schools and colleges need to be emphasised.
- 19. We therefore propose the following additional areas should be addressed.

Data gathering

20. Gathering and making sense of statistical data will be a vitally important and daunting task and needs a

standardised approach. Development of an individual learning record may be a way forward. Consistent and complete data would be facilitated if responsibility and accountability for all 13–19-year-old learners were under the auspices of one body. Our response to *Learning to Succeed* points out the difficulties of having responsibility split between QCA (National Curriculum), and the Learning and Skills Council (work-related learning) for the 14–16 age group. A clear responsibility for data resting with the Youth Support Service should be considered as an option.

- 21. Our research has shown that it is far easier to contact and log the pathways of those disengaged young people who are below 16 as there are statutory requirements for record-keeping. This is not the case after the age of 16 and it is therefore easier for them to slip out of the system.
- 22. Students' experience of work as well as their educational history should be recorded.
- 23. To ensure the services reach those most in need of support, it will be important to record data on, for example, ethnicity. Progress of different disadvantaged groups will need to be mapped to see if the support mitigates against any of the difficulties or discrimination they may face.

Personal advisers

- 24. Personal advisers need to provide more than a point of contact. The role needs to be supportive and continuous. Rapport will be essential if it is to be of real benefit. Therefore, it is essential to have the right kind of people in place. Lessons should be drawn from the experience of the Learning Gateway.
- 25. The report does not mention initial assessment and diagnosis. These provide the basis for advice and guidance, especially in the early stages of development of flexible approaches and individual achievement profiling. We recommend that this is an identified responsibility.
- 26. Advocacy on behalf of the student is not explicitly included. This is an important competence identified as part of the role of advice and guidance workers (e.g. by the lead body and NVQs). Developing self-advocacy skills and other skills and confidence so that the young person moves towards growing independence should also be part of the function of the service, which from the description seems to imply a dependency model.

Monitoring provision

27. The agency should have a role in mapping whether there is sufficient provision (especially informal and innovative provision, but also employment, education and training and special projects) to meet the needs of the most vulnerable non-participants.

28. It is important that this new service does not merely serve the *status quo*. There are changes that are needed in the system, especially around flexibility and choice pre- and post-16 that can potentially play a vital role in promoting the 'staying in learning' culture. Thus identification and monitoring progress of at-risk learners, needs to be accompanied by a broader, more strategic consideration of learner provision and benchmark standards of flexibility, especially in the 13–16 phase, but ideally viewed across the 13–19 continuum.

Institutional arrangements
Question 2. What is your view of the respective merits of the options for local delivery set out (in paragraph 10.10)?

Question 3. Among existing services, which do you think should be absorbed into the core Youth Support Service, and which do you think would function more effectively as partners or contractors?

29. FEDA supports the proposal for a national agency to oversee the work and agrees that not all employees need to be directly employed by the agency. One agency body contracting per area would be preferable to a loose partnership; however, to avoid duplication or piecemeal opportunities there should be a statutory requirement to work with a range of agencies and for them to provide information to the Youth Support Service. Common service standards would encourage close cooperation and a better service to clients.

Right to time off for study

- 30. Awareness raising with employers about right to time off may not be sufficient. The service may have the responsibility to monitor at a local level the utilisation by employers of this right not only at the vacancy stage but also through practical implementation. Although not mentioned, this monitoring will also potentially cover young people involved in work-based training through Modern Apprenticeships and National Traineeships.
- 31. A body with responsibility for 13–19 learning could contribute to the development of innovation and full exploitation of opportunities available and ensure coherence along the 13–19 continuum. Our work shows the need for:
 - partnership development
 - working at individual-learner level for profile development
 - whole-cohort approaches to raise parity of esteem for work-related learning opportunities
 - wider recognition of activities undertaken
 - joint staff development and sharing cross-institutions.

Targets

Question 4. What is your view of the approach suggested to targets for the new service?

Outcome targets

32. FEDA strongly supports specific targets for underachieving groups. Additional targets could relate to young people leaving the area (the particularly mobile population of young people who have left care or those in youth custody).

Process targets

- 33. We support targets based on knowledge of clients and on the percentage in education and or training. Figures should also be collected for those at work. It is not clear whether the targets of participation leading to 'at least level two' is any level-two qualification or graduation. This will need to be clarified.
- 34. There should also be targets for the agency for securing sufficient provision in the locality that meet the criteria in annexe E (what works in engaging and retaining 16–18-year-olds in work-based training) or similar principles.
- 35. There is a clear need for a top-down/bottom-up iterative approach to setting and monitoring targets. Otherwise there is the danger that top/bottom will merely result in young people being shoe-horned into options to achieve national targets. This would serve to alienate young people even further, result in making it even more difficult to include the most recalcitrant and, perhaps what is most important, contribute nothing to the concept of lifelong learning.

Staffing and professional formation Question 5. How best do you think the mix of skills needed to deliver the new service can be developed in the short and longer term (paragraph 10.17)?

36. The mix of skills required could be achieved through professional development for existing staff, building on their skills and adding additional skills. A professional qualification might be constructed from a mix of the competences

- approved for youth and community workers and the NVQs on advice and guidance.
- 37. In the short term, and to overcome cultural differences, staff from the careers service could be involved in secondments to the youth service and *vice versa*. Similar arrangements could operate for college staff, youth trainers and others in key worker roles in voluntary organisations.
- 38. Development of peer mentoring involving young people as support workers, would suggest that in-service training will be most appropriate.

Implementation

Question 6. What do you consider to be the key issues for the implementation phase?

- 39. FEDA supports the proposal for working groups to take forward plans for implementation in four main strands.
- 40. There is a need for very close links between group A (learning products and delivery) and group B (graduation); i.e. on participation and achievement. Development of the progress file could provide a link.
- 41. There appears to be no group looking at tracking, which is very complex with young people. This makes multiple transitions and hard-to-reach (e.g. homeless) young people especially difficult to track snapshot targets of participation and achievement do not capture this. This may be work that group C could undertake.
- 42. There are many positive ways in which FEDA could contribute effectively to the provision of such a service, especially given the very tight timescale for its introduction. FEDA has published with DfEE a guide to supporting disengaged young people Further education: giving young people a new start, and recently undertook an evaluation of colleges' role in New Start and how they could support the Learning Gateway. FEDA has also produced several pieces of research on transition and guidance.