

## Schools: Building on Success

### Response from the Learning and Skills Development Agency

1. The Learning and Skills Development Agency is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. This includes addressing the agenda for 14-19 education and work with disaffected young people. Our activities include research to inform the development of policy and practice in this area. We have a clear brief to work across the learning and skills sector, providing support for colleges, work-based training, adult and community learning, and schools post-16, with a particular focus on quality improvement and support for the implementation of policy. The Agency has developed strong working partnerships with relevant organisations to ensure added value and the ability to work most effectively across a wide spectrum.
2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Government's proposals for the future of education set out in the Green Paper, *Schools: Building on Success*. We particularly support the goals that are evident in the proposals of raising standards for all and increasing inclusion.
3. We concentrate our comments on those proposals that have clear relevance to our remit and expertise. A substantial proportion of our response is therefore focused on the proposals for changes to the 14-19 curriculum. There are several key points within this that we would like to emphasise.
  - It is not clear in the Green Paper whether those learners who are envisaged as making early progress to GCSE level will then be able to move to post-16 providers at a younger age, or whether they will remain in the school sector. This point requires clarification, as it will have significant implications for both the FE and HE sectors.
  - As the paper suggests, effective delivery of a flexible system with new pathways for 14-19 year-olds will require increased collaboration and exchange between providers, employers and community groups. We suggest that Learning Partnerships and local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) will have important roles to play in facilitating effective partnership working.
  - The goal of achieving parity of esteem for the vocational, academic and work-based routes will only be achieved if the vocational curriculum is of high quality, offering clear vocational relevance and realistic projects and work-placements from age 14 which promise attractive and rewarding career prospects for young learners and their parents or carers. Strong links with local business and employers will again be crucial in ensuring this relevance and facilitating worthwhile work-placements for both teachers and pupils.

## **Chapter 2: Early Years**

### **Better support for families and more integrated provision (paras 2.16 to 2.23)**

4. We strongly support the proposals to extend Sure Start, family learning and early education provision, and particularly value the adult learning offered by the Sure Start programme. The Green Paper shows that there is clear evidence of the benefits of family learning for the child and parents. The evidence from research within and outside the Agency supports the view that learning initiatives involving families are particularly effective in changing inter-generational patterns of expectation and achievement. Family learning improves the motivation and the achievement outcomes of children and parents, and promotes active learning. When the will to succeed is shared by families and communities, the learning experience is much more likely to be engaging and effective.
5. We also strongly support the National Childcare Strategy and the aim to ensure that affordable, accessible, high quality childcare is available in every neighbourhood for working families and their children. Emerging findings from our current evaluation of childcare in FE colleges indicate that the availability of inexpensive childcare is significant in enabling parents to take up learning opportunities. Our research suggests that without available childcare provision a considerable number of potential learners are not able to participate. Feedback from parent learners also suggests that they feel their role, as educators in the home would be enhanced if the educational content of childcare provision were improved.

### **Raising standards (paras 2.24 to 2.28)**

6. We strongly support the proposals to raise standards in early years. Our particular interest here is in the proposals for better and more integrated training for those involved in early years care and education settings. It is of critical importance that those working with young children receive training to a high professional standard. They have a key role to play in sustaining and developing early learning skills and enjoyment.
7. FE colleges have been heavily involved in the provision of programmes leading to initial and continuing professional development awards. Many have established innovative partnerships to promote the development of childcare workers.

## **Chapter 3: Primary Education**

### **Support to overcome social problems (paras 3.37 to 3.40)**

8. Our particular interest in this section is the proposal to promote Family Focused Schools in areas of high disadvantage, which we strongly support. Our work identifying successful learning provision for disaffected young people<sup>1</sup> indicates that teaching and learning needs to be supported by a framework of multi-

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<sup>1</sup> Back on Track: successful learning provision for disaffected young people, Sue Taylor, LSDA, 2000

disciplinary support in such areas. Schools need access to a package of multi-agency support to assist them in helping disaffected young people through the range of problems they might face.

9. We are aware of good examples of schools which could be termed as learning communities, such as the Sutton Centre in Nottingham which describes itself as a neighbourhood comprehensive working in an area of multiple disadvantage. Although operating at the secondary level, it is of interest as an example of a school which serves as a community resource. The campus houses a school for 11-18 year olds, significant adult education provision, a crèche, a recreation centre, youth services, social services and a health centre.

## **Chapter 4: Transforming Secondary Education**

### **Extending diversity and autonomy (paras 4.9 to 4.26)**

10. We broadly support the proposals to encourage every secondary school to develop a distinctive mission and ethos and to enhance the diversity of provision within the secondary system, with the aim that all children should receive a high quality education wherever they go to school. We suggest, however, that further research into the relationship of specialisation to standards would be valuable.
11. We particularly welcome the emphasis placed on schools making a contribution to the wider community and to the education system, and were pleased to note the recognition to be given to work with the community in the awarding of Beacon status. Sharing good practice will be a crucial characteristic of the future schools system and we suggest that schools will achieve much more by working in partnership with others.
12. We support the notion of playing to one's strengths as an important basis for schools developing their mission and ethos and agree that all should be effective at delivering a sound secondary education and the full National Curriculum. Such schools should be as inclusive as comprehensives have traditionally been.
13. We support the extension of school specialisms to include the more vocational areas of engineering, science and business and enterprise. We were interested to note at paragraph 4.50 the suggestion that close links might be established between a school with an emphasis on vocational pathways and one of the Centres of Vocational Excellence in FE. The extent to which there would be compatibility and progression between the two sectors should be carefully considered. The curriculum specialisms in schools will not have the direct correlation with the occupational specialisms of Centres of Vocational Excellence. Schools should be concerned to draw on relevant examples from the world of work – to add a contextual backcloth to children's studies – and there will potentially be a link to vocational disciplines. However, too close a link may limit young people's aspirations and encourage specialisation at too young an age.
14. Based on the experience of the majority of the FE sector, the Agency also supports the proposals to extend the autonomy of successful schools who have demonstrated sustained excellence. On the whole more autonomous institutions have demonstrated greater responsiveness and levels of innovation.

## **Raising standards for 11-14 year olds (paras 4.27 to 4.39)**

15. The Agency supports the emphasis placed on Key Stage 3 and particularly the proposals to consult and run pilots exploring the possibility of shortening the current three year period to two. We recommend that during this process consideration be given to the implications of this measure for post-16 learning providers who will be taking on students with more varying levels of achievement. We believe that guidance and models of good practice should be developed to ensure that young people can sustain progress effectively – including through to higher education.
16. As the paper suggests, there is general agreement that 11-14 is a critical age to inspire and motivate pupils. This is the stage at which some young people can become disaffected and our work has indicated the importance of developing a varied and motivating curriculum with goals that can inspire all pupils. We would suggest that a motivating curriculum needs to be supported by a school ethos and styles of working that place the learner at the centre and ensure that young people are actively engaged as partners in the process of effective learning and raising achievement.
17. We also welcome the specific recognition of pupils with Special Educational Needs within the strategy for enabling all pupils to achieve their full potential. We strongly support the view that we need to have high expectations of these pupils and tailor the curriculum to their needs, which must be identified and met effectively. We are concerned, however, that the proposed summer schools should not be seen as a deficit model, as a form of punishment for pupils who need extra help and assistance. All learners should be supported throughout their programme to enable them to achieve their very best.
18. We note the reference in the proposals to helping those children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This must apply equally to learners who are quiet and passive, opting out or not attending. We agree that ICT can play a significant role in helping pupils with learning disabilities, but would suggest that this is only one of a number of potential strategies.
19. We strongly support the vision that learners should reach the 14-19 phase with some foundation skills in self-management and learner autonomy to enable them to manage the more individual and varied programme now to be available at this level.

## **New pathways 14-19 (paras 4.40 to 4.50)**

20. We strongly support the overall proposals for increasing choice and focusing on the individual talents and aspirations of pupils from age 14. We strongly support the status given to vocational learning in the paper, and the explicit goal of achieving parity of esteem for vocational, work-based and academic pathways.

## **14-19 continuum**

21. We very much welcome the recognition of the 14-19 continuum of learning and the inferred recognition of the false break at 16. The curriculum flexibilities envisaged and the expectation that young people will take GCSEs on a 'when-ready basis' will enable individuals to develop multi-level learner profiles. It will be important to clarify whether those learners who progress to this level early will remain in the school sector or whether they will be able to move to post-16 providers at a younger age. There are clearly significant implications for both the FE and HE sectors.
22. We have some concern, however, that mention is only made of GCSEs here, with no reference to equivalent level 2 qualifications, which has the effect of sidelining NVQ or Modern Apprenticeship routes. In fact, the presentation of GCSEs as a 'progress check' at the mid-point of the 14-19 stage may add weight to current questions about the worth or necessity of GCSE qualifications. There are few young people who now do not continue their education or training post 16 yet a great deal of time, effort and money is spent on what is no longer the graduation stage for the majority.

## **Ensuring genuine flexibility**

23. Effective delivery of this flexible system for 14-19 year-olds will be dependent on some key shifts in provision:
- Young people are likely to need access to more than one institution/organisation in any one phase if the level of choice envisaged is to be offered in practice
  - Greater collaboration will be needed in localities, including joint planning of the curriculum offer
  - This will impact on organisational structures and systems and raise issues about transfer of information, tracking of progress, ownership of the learner and pupil mobility.
24. Schools will need to work much more in partnership with other providers (colleges, private training providers, employers, community groups) to deliver an engaging and progressive curriculum and an entitlement to work-related learning experiences over the 14-19 period. The role of the local LSCs will be crucial in this; they will be determining the needs of the local communities and employers and will need to facilitate links between providers to enable the types of exchanges envisaged in the Green Paper to occur. Learning partnerships and local LSCs will have a role in ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to enable schools and colleges to draw on respective expertise, equipment and other resources. Partnerships between providers must be based on offering genuine positive choices for learners.

## **Supporting continued participation**

25. To ensure continued participation the curriculum must be stimulating, demanding and relevant. The options available will need to be clear to young people and the system of provision obviously recognisable. All staff involved, including headteachers and governors, need to be well informed about the different progression pathways and will need regular updating to ensure the parity of

esteem of the three routes. It is helpful for teachers to undertake placements with employers and training providers to enable them to further appreciate vocational training provision. An extension of education business partnerships and teacher secondment schemes could be valuable here.

26. To be workable, the new options will also need to be accompanied by clear support mechanisms, including more effective guidance, support and tutorial systems. Connexions will have an important role to play, but there are also significant training implications for guidance and teaching professionals. Young people need to be ensured of a genuine choice, based on the accurate identification of their aspirations and learning goals.
27. Transition will remain an important issue for young people. Our research has identified a number of key changes that young people face at transition points in the education process. For example, changes such as in the structure, size, and culture of different organisations, the forms of assessment used and skills required for different types of courses, and the amount and type of support available. In the new flexible 14-19 system, the time when these changes are met and the context in which they will happen could well be different. However, they will still need to be managed by those involved in delivering and supporting provision.
28. As recognised in the Excellence Challenge initiative in relation to HE, in some cases there are cultural issues that act as barriers to continued participation in learning. Some young people will need particular support if they are to move away from friendship groups and overcome potential travel difficulties to move to another institution to pursue their chosen vocational specialism. In other cases, where there is a family history of leaving school early and no culture that values staying on at school, support mechanisms need to be put in place.

### **Vocational relevance**

29. To achieve parity of esteem, the vocational route from 14 will need to have clear vocational relevance, offering quality programmes with realistic projects and work-placements.
30. To ensure vocational relevance schools will need to establish strong links with local business and employers and assistance from NTOs, through their regional structure. There needs to be sound resourcing for teacher placements in industry to enable them to teach vocational subjects in an interesting and motivating way. Employers' organisations must be engaged and encouraged to co-operate with schools, including offering more opportunities for pupil work experience and teacher placements. However, it should be recognised that in some occupational areas Health and Safety constraints will preclude pupils under 16 from undertaking work experience.
31. It is also vital that, as the paper proposes, vocational options are of a genuinely high quality. This will be assisted by the above suggestions. In addition, inspection arrangements need to be clear. The paper is not clear about who will inspect vocational provision for 14–16 year-olds. We recommend that consideration be given to supporting Ofsted inspectors who inspect vocational

work and the Adult Learning Inspectorate may be a useful source of expertise. There is also a need for a review of performance reporting systems to enable parity of the vocational and academic qualifications. This is currently undermined by the difference in the points scores given for each.<sup>2</sup>

32. It is important that vocational learning should be encouraged for pupils of all abilities and talents. Schools should not be tempted to offer vocational courses only to pupils of modest attainment. This would have the effect of reinforcing the existing lack of parity of esteem of the routes and would not address the national problem of the low perception of certain professions which the Green Paper identifies.

### **Greater equality (paras 4.61 to 4.75)**

33. Our particular interest here is the proposal to pilot more individualised support for pupils, through the Pupil Learning Credits. We support this proposal since Pupil Learning Credits have the potential to give disadvantaged pupils access to opportunities for enrichment which more affluent parents can and do provide for their children. Such experiences could enhance both motivation and pupil achievement. However, while a full response to the initiative must await publication of the detailed proposals we are less convinced that they represent a potential mechanism for funding education more generally, as is suggested in paragraph 4.64. This states that, if successful, the use of Pupil Learning Credits would have '*important lessons, both for tackling disadvantage and for funding education*'.
34. There are simpler methods than learning credits for directing extra resources towards pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The disadvantage uplift applied to funding in the FE sector is a good example. If the new credits identify specific sums available for individual pupils, and those pupils or their parents have a significant say in how they are spent, the mechanism could potentially enhance engagement. Use of the credit might for example be linked with adherence to a learning agreement as piloted with Education Maintenance Allowances. If however the credit is a notional allocation over which the individual has no influence it risks becoming simply a more complex distribution and accountability mechanism adding to schools' burdens for no real benefit.
35. Those characteristics of an individualised learning credit which might make it more effective than simpler, more general, mechanisms, militate against its use to provide support for additional learning needs within the core curriculum. Individual needs for additional support vary significantly. The best response to some aspects of disadvantage is collective rather than individual provision – smaller classes or the use of teaching assistants for example. In such circumstances a credit would have to be a notional representation of an entitlement and would introduce extra administration for negligible benefit.

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<sup>2</sup> This point is covered more comprehensively in the LSDA response to the 2001 Secondary School and College Performance Tables, available on our website at [www.Lsagency.org.uk](http://www.Lsagency.org.uk)

36. The use of learning credits to fund the whole of education raises similar objections. The credits could not be tailored to individual pupil needs on a national scale. There would be no practical way of involving pupils and parents in real decisions over how the credits were spent. The exercise would risk being seen as wholly cosmetic.
37. The role of Pupil Learning Credits is therefore likely to be restricted to providing disadvantaged pupils with access to the 'extras' that others take for granted. If such a credit could represent a real cash figure, and could allow the pupil to participate in decisions on how it is spent, it would offer a genuine addition to schools resources for combating disadvantage.

### **Promoting 'education with character' (paras 4.76 to 4.81)**

38. We strongly support the plans to promote 'education with character' through a return to offering a range of activities which emphasise not only academic qualifications but also skills and attitudes through participation in music, art, sport, activities which support creativity and involvement of pupils in school decision-making processes.
39. We welcome the proposals to discuss with Ofsted how inspection might give greater recognition to the importance of the ethos of a school in improving standards and discipline. In addition, we would suggest that performance tables based purely on GCSE results do not necessarily emphasise 'education with character' and that recognition should be given in performance tables to school ethos which can contribute to raising self-confidence and esteem and providing opportunities for self-expression and community involvement.
40. We also welcome the introduction of Citizenship into the National Curriculum from September 2002. The Agency is pleased to be involved in the developmental projects exploring the possibility of introducing an entitlement to citizenship development for 16-19 year olds. This will enable young people to participate in a variety of enrichment opportunities, promoting active citizenship and political literacy. It will be important that the post-16 programme complements the Curriculum being developed in schools. The emotional and personal development needs of those who take GCSEs at an earlier age will need to be considered and co-ordination of the National Curriculum and post-16 Citizenship programmes will aid this. Post-16 providers will need to work with schools to ensure the all-round development of the young person.

### **Chapter 5: Teaching a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Profession Reforming initial teacher training (paras 5.7 to 5.15)**

41. We support the proposals to increase the range and flexibility of initial teacher training. However, we are concerned that the focus of secondary school teacher training is currently on academic disciplines. We would suggest that, with the introduction of high quality vocational curriculum options post-14, a different approach will need to be developed for those training to teach vocational subjects at secondary level. This approach could be modelled upon the initial teacher



training methods currently used in FE and amongst private training providers. This model of training is less subject-based. It is important that teachers are trained appropriately to deliver a high quality vocational curriculum at school level.

### **Enhancing professional development (paras 5.26 to 5.31)**

42. We support the proposals for enhancing the professional development of teachers and welcome the recognition given to its place in school improvement. We suggest that consideration be given to providing incentives to schools to link with local vocational education and training provision, so that teachers of vocational subjects at the secondary level can learn from the more specialist expertise of those in that sector.

43. Provision of continuing professional development for existing teachers will be one of the most critical factors in helping to ensure the successful implementation of many of the proposals outlined in the Green Paper.

### **Improving leadership (paras 5.32 to 5.33)**

44. We support the proposals for supporting school leaders. We welcome the recognition of the essential role of leadership in successful schools, and would draw attention to the other factors of success, highlighted in research in Scotland<sup>3</sup>, of high expectations and careful monitoring of pupils' work, and clearly communicated behavioural standards.

45. It will also be important that development training for school leadership includes both the skills of leadership and management. Again, research in the school sector has concluded that leadership without management is not an option<sup>4</sup>. Leadership is about long-term vision and strategy, whilst management is more concerned with the operational aspects of people and resources. Leadership cannot be delegated, whilst management can.

### **Building new career paths (paras 5.34 to 5.38)**

46. We support the proposals outlined in the paper for improved career paths for teachers, and welcome the notion of joint appointments between universities and schools and the scope for teachers to undertake research through a university fellowship scheme.

47. We are concerned, however, by the absence of the further education sector from these proposals. The proposed links with higher education suggest a recognition of the value of evidence-based action research. Within the FE sector there is an established active practitioner research network and we would suggest that secondary school teachers of the vocational curriculum could benefit from links with this work, and vice versus. Much action research in this area would benefit from collaboration between schools and FE.

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<sup>3</sup> John MacBeath and Peter Mortimore (ed), *Improving School Effectiveness*, 2001

<sup>4</sup> Day, Hars, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford, *Leading Schools in Times of Change*, 2000

## **Enabling teachers to teach (paras 5.39 to 5.55)**

48. We have particular comments to make here in relation to the potential of new technology and would like to extend our response to relate to the section on ICT in the final chapter.
49. As the Green Paper acknowledges, capital investment to provide equipment, learning materials and connectivity is alone insufficient to ensure the effective utilisation of ICT in the classroom. Training is crucial to enable teachers and headteachers to use ICT effectively in their day-to-day work. However, we are concerned that the difference is recognised between the skills required for using ICT at a personal level and those required for using ICT in the classroom.
50. We welcome the training offered to teachers by the New Opportunities Fund and the Teacher Training Agency's recent positive report about this training. We are, however, aware that during the initial and current phases of the training offered through NOF, some of the training provided supported the development of personal skills in using packages such as word processing, spreadsheets and databases. Whilst these are useful skills they do not provide the pedagogical and learner management skills necessary for teachers to support learning using ICT.
51. We are aware that the FE sector has considerable experience of using ICT/ILT to deliver learning and would be able to provide examples of good practice and development opportunities for schools. We are currently involved in supporting the development of the FENTO standards for ILT and it is possible that these standards could be adapted to meet the needs of teachers in schools and development programmes constructed around them which specifically meet the required skills to support learning using ICT.
52. Links between schools and the FE sector could be particularly beneficial to both. The ICT networks between schools should be extended to include FE colleges, businesses and other providers. The use of expensive and complex simulation software is a good example of where colleges are often well resourced and have something significant to offer schools. The concept of the ILT Champions programme could well be transferable to the schools sector.
53. City Learning Centres and other ICT learning centres are viewed as a high priority and support many of the current government initiatives. Our current learning centre projects offer an overview and analysis of learning centre developments, guidance for policy-makers and practitioners and direct guidance on the management of an ICT learning centre. An additional area of activity could include extending our current projects to consider how schools could link more effectively to the resources within learning centres, either physically or virtually.