

MEETING INDIVIDUAL TALENTS AND ASPIRATIONS AT 14-19

(PAPER PREPARED FOR THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS NATIONAL ADVISORY GROUP, SEPTEMBER 2001)

1. Over the last year the Government has been developing proposals for a more coherent phase of education for 14-19 year olds. This should:

- Provide a range of options that will appeal to more young people, increasing participation and attainment post-16;
- Increase the availability and take up of high quality vocational options;
- Equip young people with the skills that will meet the needs of employers.

2. This paper gives a short history of these ideas, summarises the current position and the principles that will guide us forward and seeks to encourage discussion on how local stakeholders – in particular Learning Partnerships – can best make the Government's vision a reality.

Background

3. The proposals in the White Paper "Schools Delivering Success"¹ for the 14-19 age group (chapter 4) builds on the recent schools Green Paper and two speeches by the previous Secretary of State.

4. The first was his speech to the Association of Colleges² on 21 November 2000, which set out for the first time the idea of a vocational ladder starting at Key Stage 4 and reaching ultimately into higher education. This was set in the context of a wider programme of reform of the FE sector, which would see it return to its roots at the forefront of the provision of high quality technical and vocational education, including the creation of specialist Centres of Vocational Education. Some funding has been made available to the Learning and Skills Council for these purposes (the relevant extract is paragraphs 34-59.)

5. The second was his speech to the Institute of Economic Affairs³ on 23 January 2001. This largely repeated the concept of the vocational ladder but with three important further commitments. The first was that all who had the aptitude for work related learning would be guaranteed a Modern Apprenticeship. The second was that the Modern Apprenticeship should become the norm for those not in full-time education. For those who needed catch-up provision, the Learning Gateway provided by the Connexions Service and its partners would provide pre-apprenticeship programmes. All residual provision – known as "Other Training" – would be phased out. The third was that £38 million would be made available in 02-03 and 03-04 to support the extension of work-related learning (the relevant extract is paragraphs 33-53.)

6. The Schools Green Paper "Building on Success"⁴ set the vocational route in the context of a vision of learning tailored to individual needs. Young people should be offered a range of equal status, high quality academic and vocational learning opportunities to meet their individual aptitudes and aspirations from age 14. There must be clear pathways through to higher education; and interchangeability between the routes as the individual progresses and

¹ See <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/achievementsuccess>

² See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/dfes_speeches/21_11_00/index.shtml

³ See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/dfes_speeches/24_01_01/index.shtml

⁴ See <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/buildingonsuccess/>

develops. The express aim is to end the culture of leaving learning for good at the end of compulsory schooling (the relevant extract is paragraphs 4.42-4.50.)

Recent Developments

7. The Government's Manifesto included a commitment to open up a wider range of learning opportunities for young people, including vocational learning in schools. This is designed to tackle underachievement and lack of motivation in the teens.

8. Since she was appointed Secretary of State, Estelle Morris has been keen to pursue "14-19 policy." In her speech to the QCA annual conference⁵ she announced her intention to create a new overarching award at age 19, which would recognise achievement in high quality academic and vocational options, as well as other activities including voluntary work.

9. The White Paper signals our broad intentions and our desire to start a national debate on the best way forward. We will publish a consultation paper in the coming months to set out more detailed proposals. The paper will retain the three key components that the Government has developed and articulated over the last year:

- Recognition of achievement in both academic and vocational subjects and in other activities, perhaps through an overarching award at age 19;
- Creating space in the 14-16 curriculum to allow students to pursue their talents and aspirations, while maintaining a strong focus on the basics;
- Making high quality vocational options available to all students – through schools, colleges and work-based learning – which are widely recognised, valued by employers and offer the opportunity of entry to higher education and other lifelong learning.

Next Steps – Implementing the Vision

10. Any reforms we put in place must build on existing good practice and policies currently being implemented: vocational GCSEs, reforms to Modern Apprenticeships, the Connexions Service and more work-related learning projects for 14-16 year olds. The model developed will necessarily differ from area to area, depending on the provision already in place and the challenges faced locally. Providing a range of high quality vocational provision and encouraging young people to take advantage of it will pose different problems in affluent or deprived, rural or urban environments.

11. Nonetheless, it is clear that in every area, the success of 14-19 policy will crucially depend on collaboration between local partners. Some institutions may be able to deliver a wide range of vocational and academic options to the whole ability range, but many will need to work with others to do so. Local LSCs, Learning Partnerships, Education Authorities and Connexions Partnerships will have an essential role to play in ensuring that schools, colleges and other providers are able to meet the needs of young people in the area.

12. To encourage take up of vocational options, performance tables must recognise achievement in the full range of vocational and academic qualifications. We are also moving towards publishing value-added indicators from 2002. Local learning targets will need to take account of these changes and incentivise institutions (and therefore young people) to take up, and achieve high standards in, the full range of options available.

⁵ See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2001_0285

13. We plan a number of further reforms to enable and encourage greater choice and an increase in vocational provision. These include:

- Encouraging the expansion of high quality provision (sixth forms and dedicated 16-19 provision) by streamlining the procedures for the planning and organisation of post-16 provision;
- We will also give the LSC the power to put forward proposals to improve 16-19 provision in localities where it is unsatisfactory, subject to independent decision-making arrangements;
- Ensuring that the Connexions Service and other advice and support services can work in partnership to help young people make the right choices;
- We will also look at other structural barriers to a coherent 14-19 phase, including organisation, funding and inspection by extending the focus of area inspections to cover 14-19 provision.

14. Together these proposals should allow us to achieve two key goals:

- To enable all 14-19 year olds to fulfil their potential, by providing a range of options which will engage more young people, increasing participation and attainment to age 19 and beyond and thus ending the culture of leaving learning at 16. This is the vital step that will ensure we meet our target that by 2010, 50% of young people under the age of 30 should progress to higher education;
- Addressing the needs of employers and the economy. High quality vocational options will increase young people's employability and help to bridge the skills gap. They will drive the 21st century economy and provide access to fulfilling careers.

The Local Challenge

15. We are clear that only through the collaboration of local stakeholders can an improved 14-19 phase become a reality. The means implementation and operation will necessarily vary from area to area to suit local circumstances. However, we want to develop a number of broad models, which will between them be appropriate to any area. These should give local partners a firm starting point and ensure that the quality of provision is consistent from area to area.

Young Peoples' Policy Division: 14-19 Strategy

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