

The General Teaching Council for England's response to the DfES consultation on the Green Paper: 14-19 – *Extending opportunities, raising standards*

Introduction

The GTC's response to the *Green Paper* is concerned with the kind of support mechanisms that need to be in place for teachers to manage the process of change in terms of 14-19 teaching and learning. What is proposed has fundamental implications for teachers' approaches to addressing individual learning progress and their relationships with pupils and parents as well as with the new group of learning advisers coming into schools, colleges and work-related settings.

A further layer is the local collaborative institutional arrangements being promoted in this consultation. New relationships and the use of collaboration will require training and development support for teachers as well as the time for working approaches and professional trust to be fostered.

The GTC believes that these new approaches should be underpinned by more trust from the government firstly in teachers' professionalism in relation to assessment and secondly in the capacity of schools and other local partners to meet the diverse learning needs of their young people.

Chapter 1: The vision and objectives for the 14-19 phase

The GTC firmly supports a more inclusive vision for post-14 education that the *Green Paper* advocates. For too long, academic and vocational education have not shared parity of esteem, and the *Green Paper* itself supports this by citing research showing the poor standing of vocational and general education held in the UK compared to other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries.

This divide is at the heart of social exclusion, because the two routes have been perceived as far too much the respective domains of more able and less able learners with vocational courses often being perceived as being poorer in quality. The resulting gap between higher and lower attainment as well as socio-economic background remaining a barrier to educational success in the UK is reflected in the OECD PISA Report quoted in the *Green Paper*. The GTC also welcomes the emphasis placed on a 14-19 system as part of a vision for lifelong learning and the resolve to end the break at 16.

The GTC broadly supports the government's aims for 14-19 as set out in 1.4, but takes issue with two of them. Raising 'the levels of achievement of all young people in both general and vocational qualifications' is important, but so is ensuring that both routes are seen as having equal status and are attractive to students with different strengths, including high-achieving students being encouraged to take up vocational opportunities. The latter is crucial if the cultural divide between courses with different content and purpose is to be eroded. The GTC is also aware that among the profession there continues to be different notions of 'difficulty' associated with particular subject choices of students.

The GTC favours the proposal to deliver 14-19 education and training 'through flexible, integrated and innovative networks of collaborative providers' as referred to in the fourth aim in 1.4, providing opportunities for young people far more tailored to individual need. However, if post 14 students are to move between school, FE (further education) and workplace learning opportunities they should be entitled to common standards of teaching expertise in all settings. However, students going into FE and the workplace will be taught by teachers without QTS. The GTC believes that the government needs to consider the implications of this and would be prepared to develop advice on the issues raised.

The GTC recognises that to successfully deliver on the vision of greater inclusion, potential issues of inequality within the proposals need to be addressed from the outset. Statistical evidence shows that currently pupils' early vocational choices are influenced by gender and that choices made at 14 are mirrored in later choices. Proposals for greater and earlier vocationalism within the school curriculum, without mitigation, could lead to more sex-stereotyped choices and differentiated route ways and turn the clock back on equality.

It is essential that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the new learning opportunities do in practice extend opportunities for all and do not promote greater stereotyping in option, subject and career choice. The GTC would like to see a focus on developing parity of esteem within vocational education so that pupils are not disadvantaged by the vocational choices they make. GTC also recognises the need for improved and enhanced guidance for young people so that the implications of early choices for opportunities beyond school are clear.

The success of the proposals in promoting equality and inclusion will depend largely on the extent to which teachers, with Connexions and other partner agencies, will be enabled to provide the necessary enhanced advice and support to young people, facing a wider range of choices earlier.

Chapter 2: 14-19 – marking the start of the phase

The 14-19 proposals are based on the premise that the Key Stage 3 strategy designed to stretch all pupils 'will provide a firm platform from which to launch significant improvements to the experiences of young people after the age of 14'. The *Green Paper* advocates a programme of support for young people towards the end of Key Stage 3, helping them plan and review their post-14 learning options. No single model of practice to support young people at the increasingly significant Key Stage 3 and the 14-19 transition is recommended as such, but the term 'individual learning plan' is adopted by the consultation.

What is being proposed in this short chapter is highly significant for the role of teachers working with this wide range of adults and in them working more individually with students, the majority of whom currently have little room for making such decisions. What is needed is a considerable commitment by government to training teachers, Connexions advisers and other adults for their various roles and to ensuring that the Connexions service in particular is resourced sufficiently to provide students the level of support appropriate to their particular needs. There has already been a lot of development work and guidance about how Connexions should interact with other professionals, but the GTC is convinced that training must be a two way process between teachers and other support roles involved.

Chapter 3: The content of the 14-19 curriculum

The GTC welcomes the emphasis in the consultation document, on less assessment driven learning, with the proposed reduction of 80% down to 50%, and hopes that this will create space to accommodate more individual choice and to promote the importance of areas of development that do not necessarily result in external assessment. GNVQs have been successful in schools and colleges because the double accreditation gives students greater space and time and has been able to respond to different learning styles. It would be a great pity if parity loses this, as it has been a great motivator.

The new curriculum flexibility proposed and the abandonment of the 'one-size-fits-all' model does mean a loss of some of the consistency of provision that was seen as one of the benefits of the national curriculum introduction in 1988. It is therefore crucial that the new curriculum flexibility is carefully monitored to ensure that students are accessing equitable learning opportunities in whatever education/training setting they find themselves.

There are a number of issues arising from proposals concerning the post-14 curriculum core that the GTC believes need further clarification and discussion. These include the government's silence on the importance of arts and humanities, an omission which the GTC believes is disappointing in the face of the work around the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education in 1998-1999. It also includes the reasons for science being part of the core for all pupils when it is part of the current disapplication arrangements.

The implications of the changes to modern foreign languages (MFL), including the proposed national languages strategy in primary schools, for the recruitment, retention and professional development of language teachers, will also need further consideration.

The GTC welcomes further opportunities to seek the views of teachers on the way that the proposed changes will impact on their teaching, subject specialism and professional development and career expectations, as further consultation on the detail of the proposals is developed. In particular, the GTC is aware of the concerns among teachers created by the current assessment regime that will need to be addressed and resolved.

On vocational education, 3.29 outlines the role of vocational GCSEs in helping to enhance parity of esteem between learning pathways. The GTC welcomes the government's decision to develop vocational courses under the GCSE umbrella rather than under a separate GNVQ route as previously. However, parity of esteem will only be achieved if the whole range of students, including the higher achieving, take up a mixture of courses.

The GTC argues that all students should be encouraged to follow a range of courses and that all should be involved in work-related learning beyond a token work experience core. The idea in 3.30 for new hybrid qualifications evolving to further bridge the gap between general and vocational options is innovative, but more work is needed now to begin to change the common mindset concerning vocational education.

In terms of post-16 learning, the GTC welcomes the proposal to implement from 2005 onwards, participation of all 16 to 19-year-olds in enrichment activities including active citizenship, wider interests and work-related learning. This again is an acknowledgement of the importance of the developmental aspects of learning. However in the shorter term, concerns remain about the problems around implementing AS and A2 with the increased demands of external examinations having adverse impact on students, teachers and schools. Curriculum 2000 was introduced to bring more curricular breadth into post-16 education but the increase of subjects has continued to carry the cost of assessment overload. The GTC concludes that these issues need to be radically reviewed before enrichment elements are implemented.

Chapter 4: Recognising achievement – a new award

The *Green Paper* puts forward two alternative models for the Matriculation Diploma proposed in chapter 4, an award 'that recognises and motivates young people towards three levels of achievement' or a simple leaving certificate. The GTC is concerned about a graded award representing a further layer of assessment on top of the differentiated qualification levels and another set of hoops through which too many young people could fail to jump. This is a vital issue, since one important aim of the *Green Paper* is about providing more inclusive provision, plugging the gap between higher and lower achieving students as reflected in the PISA report, and motivating less confident young people. A leaving certificate would be a more inclusive recognition of achievement over a wide range of 14-19 achievements.

Chapter 5: Pace and progression

The proposals for more individualised pupil pace and progression are consistent with the Key Stage 3 strategy. The GTC welcomes the emphasis on creating improved life-chances through better support and guidance tailored to the needs of each young person that avoid 'make or break' exam opportunities. Schools and teachers would again need the continued support of Connexions advisers and other adult roles explored earlier in this response, if these proposals were taken forward. The GTC emphasises that the proposals would be likely to result in considerable organisational issues for schools in timetabling and in accommodating flexibilities in the context of the demands of external examinations. Opportunity for further debate with the profession concerning the detail of support, training and resources needed would be welcome.

Chapter 6: Advice, guidance and support for young people

Chapter 6 recognises that with the greater range of options being proposed for 14-19, and the emphasis being placed on planning for progress throughout the phase, there is a need for additional advice and guidance, including impartial advice on careers and wider issues affecting learning. Connexions and partner agencies including the youth service obviously have a key role to play as was advocated earlier at Key Stage. The GTC would stress though that careers advice is only one part of the Connexions remit and the service needs to be sufficiently resourced so that local Connexions partnerships can support learning advisers in their responsibilities towards young people in danger of opting out and those with more complex needs as well as providing the careers and learning guidance. The GTC

reiterates that teachers need to be trained in working with Connexions advisers and for some teachers this could involve developing a professional specialism in careers education and guidance.

Chapter 7: Drivers and support for change

Chapter 7 proposes further additions to secondary performance tables such as the inclusion of vocational qualifications, but does also acknowledge the possible implications of the proposals made elsewhere such as accelerated and slower pupil progress for the compilation of the performance tables. The GTC believes that the government's commitment to greater individualism in terms of 14-19 learning, and more localised and responsive structures to support it, cannot be accommodated in national performance tables as currently configured.

The GTC's advice is therefore that the government should consider the idea of more localised 14-19 performance information that reflects area based collaborative provision and area based inspection, as that information comes on stream. The GTC is however committed to the area-based inspections involving institutional self-evaluation where appropriate.

The GTC believes that the *Green Paper* provides an opportunity for the government to begin the process of moving away from assessment for the purposes of quality control and accountability towards a model that is more diagnostic and formative. The government needs to develop a debate with the profession on ways in which over time some external assessment could be replaced with robust forms of teacher assessment. Such an approach would be in keeping with the notions of testing pupils when they are ready and assessment as a 'progress check', which run through the whole consultation document. This is particularly crucial for GSCE, since assessment at 16 would only be a midpoint diagnosis before young people continued their studies, instead of GSCE results representing the summative threshold that they do at present.

Chapter 8: Implementation

The GTC commends the government's staged approach to implementing the 14-19 changes, with further consultation proposed on the detail and curriculum and qualification changes introduced to a timescale allowing for sufficient planning and training of teachers in the new requirements. It is obviously important that the implementation timescale allows for proper evaluation of the progress and impact of the Key Stage 3 strategy and the support structures to be sufficiently in place as the baseline for ensuring that the 14-19 proposals can be effectively developed.