

Department for Children, Schools and Families: **Time to Talk**

Response from the General Teaching Council for England

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of issues that concern teachers and teaching and learning. The Council acts in the public interest to contribute to raising the standards of teaching and learning.
2. The GTC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) consultation on *Time to Talk*.
3. The GTC is submitting some reflections principally on the contribution of schools and teaching to improving outcomes for children and young people, and support for families. What follows therefore addresses some, but not all, of the questions posed by the consultation.

Overarching comments

4. The GTC welcomes the establishment of the new Department for Children, Schools and Families, which provides an opportunity to achieve greater synergies between education policy and other policies closely affecting children and families. The Council is particularly pleased that there has been an early focus from the new Department on the extension of opportunity and good outcomes for all. In this context, the GTC can see the case for a unifying Children's Plan, but cautions against the creation of a new document that does not relate to the many other plans and frameworks already in existence. In our view, what is needed is a clear and persuasive vision for children and families, which is clear about desired outcomes. If such a statement secured the support of the various partners with whom Ministers' aspirations will be realised, it might then provide a valuable framework with which more detailed planning should be aligned.

Q1. The best support for children, young people and their families

Every Child matters and services around the child

5. The GTC is committed to the objectives of *Every Child Matters*, and believes that children, young people and their families experience the best support when services are organised around and responsive to their needs. The GTC is playing its part in promoting the idea that teachers contribute their distinct pedagogic expertise, *and*

play a significant role as universal frontline practitioners in identifying children with additional needs, and helping to secure appropriate support to meet them. It is clear from the Council's work with teachers that they do have regard for children's wider well being and development, hold strong views about their own development needs in relation to ECM, and about what schools need from other services to realise the ECM objectives for all children and young people.

Resources following needs

6. The GTC welcomes the recognition that additional needs require additional support, as in initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and Sure Start. It is clear that additional resources do not on their own narrow gaps in opportunity and achievement, and Sure Start is a good example of a sound initiative where there is still much to be learned about how to have an impact with families experiencing the greatest challenges. Schools are best placed to meet additional needs on the part of children and young people when the real cost of doing so is recognised and met.

Targeted support for groups at risk

7. The GTC also particularly welcomes the sharper focus on the needs of particular children vulnerable to disengagement or under-achievement, such as children in care and children with disabilities. There is a perceptible determination to find the right solutions for children at risk for different reasons, and to confront fatalism about these children's life chances. The GTC hopes that the Children's Plan can address the needs of other children at risk who would benefit from more and better attention, such as young offenders and young carers.

Narrowing gaps

8. The GTC welcomes the increased recognition that the important drive to raise educational standards has not addressed the indefensible gaps in opportunities and outcomes between children. The focus, for example, on the distribution of pupil outcomes in the school context is welcome.

Listening to children and young people

9. The GTC recognises that children's engagement in education is key to their achievement, and that they are most likely to be engaged if their views are heard and used to shape their learning. We therefore welcome the increased emphasis on what in the education context might be termed 'pupil voice' initiatives, or 'user voice' in the context of wider services to children and young people. As children's services work more closely together they have much to learn from the different ways in which children and young people are perceived, and consulted and involved in the design of various services.

Parenting support

10. Teachers are acutely aware of the impact of the family on children's well-being in general and learning in particular. The GTC welcomes the emphasis on parenting support, as good parenting is essential to children's life chances. Research into parental support for education suggests that parental engagement can contribute to good outcomes for children whatever their wider circumstances, so it is also a good strategy for closing achievement gaps.

Q2 What needs to stop or be improved

Continuing focus on the quality of provision

11. Every Child Matters has rightly focussed attention and energies on the co-ordination of services to children and young people. Service integration needs to be accompanied by a continuing focus on the quality of individual services to children, such as there has been in early years, foster care and further education in the recent past.

Sufficiency of services to children and young people

12. There is still more to be done to ensure the sufficiency of targeted and specialist services to meet the demand. We still hear too often that universal services such as schools and health visitors cannot get problems or additional needs addressed when they first arise – in other words, when prevention is still an option. We know it is neither effective nor cost efficient to address need only when it becomes acute.

Avoiding mixed messages to practitioners

13. The GTC welcomes the recognition that there is more to do in terms of clarifying messages to frontline practitioners, including teachers and other school staff, about the implications of Every Child Matters for their practice. Concepts that are central to the realisation of ECM goals, such as integrated working, have been articulated in general terms and not always helped practitioners including teachers to grasp and shape what is expected of their specific sector and expertise. The GTC hopes that the forthcoming Children's Workforce Strategic Action Plan will set a framework within which government and others, including bodies such as our own, can provide children's practitioners with a more tangible sense of their potential role in new ways of working.

Tackling the public image of young people

14. The public perception of young people is an issue for society, and not a matter we can look to the government to resolve on its own. However, we believe it is harder to meet the needs of children and young people, particular some of those who are most vulnerable, if they are demonised and their behaviour unduly criminalised to the extent that they arouse fear and mistrust among their fellow citizens. This is not to suggest that criminal behaviour should go unchallenged or unpunished. We welcome

those aspects of *Youth Matters* that address the need to improve young people's experience of and involvement with their localities and local facilities, and their access to high quality youth services.

Q3 Tailoring support to meet individual needs

Support based on the needs of the child, not the service

15. We have noted above the GTC's support for responsive integrated services organised around the child, and wish to make some further observations about individual needs in education in response to this question.

Personalised learning

16. A wide range of policies, including reductions in class sizes and the introduction of planning, preparation and assessment time, help teachers better to support the individual needs of their pupils. Assessment for learning is particularly valued by teachers as a vehicle for tailoring support for pupil learning, and curriculum flexibilities are also welcome. The GTC has been active in the debate about what personalisation means in practice and a summary of its advice to the Gilbert Review on personalised learning is attached as Appendix 1.
17. The GTC supports the principles underpinning the proposed 14 -19 reforms and the government's aspiration for young people to remain longer in education and training. The Council regrets the government's decision not to implement the recommendations of the Tomlinson Review as regards the A level. This is critical to the objective of creating parity of esteem across the education-training spectrum.

Q4 The role of teachers and schools in supporting children to be happy, healthy and safe

Schooling and well-being

18. Teachers know better than most that children who do not feel happy, healthy or safe are unlikely to learn. Among their concerns about schooling and well-being are pupils' access to a broad curriculum, and the impact of the present assessment regime on their self-esteem and stress. A summary of the GTC's proposals for the reform of assessment are attached as Appendix 2.

Safeguarding

19. As a regulatory body the GTC has been closely involved in the reforms to safeguarding, and welcomes the plans for comprehensive training to assist teachers and other school staff in effective implementation. The Council is in discussion with the DCSF about the greater role registration might play in safeguarding and upholding high standards of teaching practice.

Schools and wider outcomes for children

20. As regards the wider health and safety of pupils, the GTC believes schools have much to contribute to the five ECM outcomes, and welcomes initiatives to improve the nutritional value of school meals, to increase pupil participation in sport, to encourage pupils to walk or cycle to school, and so forth. Schools and teachers have become very adept at evaluating the relationship between educational interventions and attainment outcomes; we do not yet have a similarly sophisticated framework within which to evaluate interventions relating to wider goals. The GTC has no wish to see schools subjected to greater burdens of external accountability. The Council believes that evaluations of schools' contributions to wider goals for children need to avoid superficiality. This will enable teachers and others to take a meaningful view of what they are doing, how they are doing, and what further they might reasonably do in conjunction with others. Schools can only be held to account for a *contribution* to wider goals – and that contribution relies on sufficiency of resources and of support from other services.

Q8 Keeping children and young people out of trouble

Absence from school

21. Statistics on offences committed by children absent from school starkly illustrate a key contribution schools can make to keeping children and young people out of trouble. Truancy is in part, as OFSTED recently identified, about teaching quality – but it is also about parental attitudes to education, the identification of special needs, strategies for tackling bullying, the deployment of support staff, and other factors.
22. The GTC recommends a continued focus on reducing exclusion from school, and on improving the quality and funding of off-site provision for excluded pupils. Not all exclusions are the consequence of a deteriorating pattern of behaviour, but in many cases early intervention with those at risk of exclusion is more effective and cost effective than reintegration or alternative provision. The Council recognises the legitimate concern of head teachers and governors to send clear messages about acceptable behaviour, and to have regard to the safety of staff and pupils, and the quality of the learning environment.

Young offender education and training

23. The GTC has welcomed the review of young offender education and training, and hopes that the government will take the opportunity for radical reform to the delivery of young offender education, and set ambitious expectations for outcomes.

Wider support and opportunities for young people

24. The GTC has welcomed the Youth Matters proposals, particularly where they address the need to provide constructive and attractive alternatives to boredom and anti-social behaviour. We know the government is focussed on the need to ensure that Every Child Matters is understood to be a framework for children and young

people, and the DCSF's new duty to co-ordinate ECM implementation across Whitehall should help with this message. The forthcoming Children's Workforce Strategic Action Plan might usefully address the integration of the children's and young people's workforce, where this is perceived to need further attention.

Concluding remarks

25. The GTC welcomes the advent of a new Children's Plan as an indication of the government's intent that the aspirations set out in Every Child Matters represent the framework within which services to children and young people will be delivered, and not a separate initiative. Our work as members of the Children's Workforce Network, established by the GTC, and our work on inter-professional values with other children's workforce regulators, has highlighted the importance of moving beyond agreement in principle that certain outcomes are desirable, into detailed exploration of implications for service organisation and delivery. The GTC looks forward to playing its role in articulating and supporting a concept of teacher professionalism that captures the particular contribution of teaching expertise to the lives and life chances of children and young people, and the role of teachers and schools in the realisation of wider goals alongside colleagues and services with distinct and complimentary forms of expertise.

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APPENDIX 1

Summary of GTC advice to the Gilbert Review on Personalised Learning

This paper was distributed at the GTC seminar 'Personalising learning: engaging all pupils' on 6 July 2007.

In April 2007, the General Teaching Council (GTC) provided its first advice to the Government on personalising learning in schools.

This seminar will inform the GTC's future advice, enable participants to share their experiences and provide an opportunity to hear from leading speakers.

The General Teaching Council has a statutory remit to advise Government and others on a wide range of issues which have a direct impact on standards of teaching and the quality of learning.

Personalised learning has become one of the most debated concepts in education in recent years and the GTC believes it is increasingly important to ensure that the concept is coherent, universally understood and has a positive impact for all pupils.

The GTC's advice responds to recommendations made in the 2020 Vision report in January. This independent report was commissioned by the Government to create a vision for personalised learning, and was led by Christine Gilbert, who is now Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools.

The Council developed its advice based on its analysis of research evidence and its work with teachers, researchers and national policy organisations. The following paragraphs summarise the GTC's main areas of recommendation to Government.

1. Following the needs and interests of pupils

Personalising learning will involve changes to the roles of teachers and learners, to enable greater pupil participation and to reflect pupils' needs and interests. Schools are showing that this can best be achieved through a combination of assessment for learning, dialogue with pupils ('pupil voice') and the effective use of technology.

The Council recommends better support for teachers in understanding and using these approaches. This support should be available through improved resources and enhanced teacher learning.

2. Overcoming obstacles that prevent the personalisation of learning

The education system needs to separate assessment for national monitoring purposes from assessment that supports pupil learning. The current attempt to combine both assessment purposes through end of Key Stage testing is not only detrimental to pupil learning but also unsophisticated and inefficient in monitoring achievement nationally.

The GTC recommends a system that supports pupil learning and helps parents and teachers. The Government should shift the balance of schools' accountability towards parents and pupils, enabling improved dialogue with parents and less undue focus on national performance measures.

Teachers should have more flexibility in applying the curriculum, and schools should receive incentives to use existing flexibilities in the curriculum.

3. Addressing inequalities and meeting the needs of all pupils

Greater consideration should be given to each of the outcomes of Every Child Matters – a child's enjoyment, health, safety, positive contribution and economic well-being – alongside the academic achievements of pupils and schools.

Personalised learning should benefit all pupils and not just the 'gifted and talented' and those falling behind. Equally, the government and schools need to target teaching and resources towards early intervention for those at risk of underachievement.

The Government should support schools to implement their duties under equalities legislation, and teachers should have more opportunities to build their expertise in working with pupils with special education needs.

4. Personalising teacher learning and professional development

All teachers and staff should receive an entitlement to resourced access and participation in personalised – i.e. effective, relevant and sustained – continuing professional development.

Teachers need opportunities to enquire into effective and creative teaching approaches, and to develop their teaching practice accordingly.

How to find out more:

The GTC's full advice to government on personalising learning is available at www.gtce.org.uk/policy/policypapers

If you would like to find out more about the GTC's policy work in this area, please contact Andy Hudson: andrew.hudson@gtce.org.uk

APPENDIX 2

Summary of GTC assessment recommendations

Theme 1

- In the shorter term, assessment for learning should be developed for formative purposes with teachers using a bank of nationally developed tests/tasks during and at the end of the key stage, as the basis of their summative assessment.
- Over time, reinforced by professional learning and support, the tests and tasks would become part of the evidence base for an integrated teacher assessment model with teachers responsible for all forms of pupil assessment.
- The development of a bank of nationally developed tests/tasks, led by NAA, QCA and the examination groups would take the form of a rolling process in terms of key stages and subjects.
- The bank of test/tasks would initially consist of a narrow range of materials, supported by guidance and professional development. Over time, a wider range of materials would be developed, including those online and involving those with assessment expertise within the teaching profession.
- Initially, the role of the tests/tasks would not be to directly confirm the teacher's own summative assessment but the teacher's use of the test and timing decisions would play a role in professional learning in preparation for working towards a more developed model of teacher assessment.
- Over time, teachers should become increasingly involved in the analysis of test/task outcomes in order for the tests/tasks to play a key role in teaching and learning. Teacher involvement in marking and analysis processes can also be structured as a professional learning experience
- Teachers would collect evidence from test/task outcomes during and at the end of each key stage in order for the information to be used formatively to adapt teaching as well as the basis of summative decision making.

Theme 2

- The GTC's proposals to extend assessment for learning in combination with the timely deployment of a bank of tasks/tests would provide the basis for greater personalisation and support an informed, continuing dialogue between parents, pupils and teachers.
- A new accountability relationship is emerging and needs to be pursued blending entitlement and engagement. Parents, pupils and others are entitled to be fully and

regularly informed about progress and attainment, whilst also being encouraged to engage with wider school improvement processes.

- The GTC believes that the school performance information that is part of the New Relationship for Schools (NRwS) framework (school self-evaluation documents, shorter Ofsted reports and the School profile) should result in regular and accessible information for all those working with a particular school. Parents, in particular, should have an improved information base.
- Also in the context of NRwS and a more contextualised model of school accountability, the GTC advocates more development for teachers in the use of performance data.
- In the longer term, the Council believes that teacher confidence would be enhanced by greater involvement in assessment processes and that school responsibility for assessment should be accredited as part of the NRwS framework.
- The GTC is arguing for schools to be given greater responsibility for communicating their progress and improvement plans to their stakeholders. The Council believes that the current publication of comparisons made between individual school and local authority performance has a decreasing role to play and that more localised forms of performance information would be more appropriate and useful in the context of 14-19 collaborative provision and the wider responsibilities of schools and local authority services from the Children Act 2004.
- The GTC remains convinced that a review of the future assessment framework and public information and accountability are both needed. Parents, pupils and teachers, as well as the wider public and the media, need to be drawn into a consultative process on the future role of performance tables.

Theme 3

- The universal summative assessment of individual pupils should be separated from the collection of summative data to be used for national monitoring.
- While schools would be required if necessary to provide summative information as part of system monitoring, it would involve a limited number of pupils in a cohort and the outcomes would not be related to individual schools.
- The tests would involve as wide curriculum coverage as possible and a range of practical skills and competences.
- The process of carrying out such tests in schools would involve teachers though external support could be called upon in relation to conducting more practical tests.
- The system should be as simple and understandable as possible for pupils, teachers, parents, and the wider public.

- Teachers should be developed and professionally supported prior to the introduction of such a system and in the course of its implementation.
- Longer term, such a system for national monitoring by pupil cohort sampling should replace the use of the current universal testing model for that purpose.
- In the shorter term a cohort sampling system should be piloted by QCA, which could initially take place at a particular key stage.