

# Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Green Paper: Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16

## The Response of the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)

### Introduction

1. The GTC is the independent professional body for teaching. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of issues that concern teaching and learning. The Council acts in the public interest to help to raise standards in education.
2. The GTC welcomes the debate initiated by the *Raising Expectations* Green Paper and supports the arguments developed on the need for greater participation in education and training post 16. In particular, the emphasis on participation taking place across school, college and in the context of work place settings is positive; this is not a discussion purely on raising the school leaving age as implied by its coverage in some sections of the media.
3. This debate must also be about the need to promote and develop society's aspirations and those of children and young people in particular, concerning lifelong learning. The Council fully endorses such an agenda, its vision originating from this Government's 1998 Green Paper, *The Learning Age*.
4. As the document stresses, the target to increase the existing 76% of young people participating in education and training until the age of 17 to 90% by 2015 will not be sufficient to enable the UK to compete globally. The momentum for change is therefore needed. However, the underlying assumption that greater participation will necessarily result in higher achievement and skills levels needs is not well founded (justified in the paper).
5. The GTC believes that the compulsory nature of the proposals and the associated criminal sanctions against those young people who do not comply with this proposed requirement could be counter productive and need further consideration.
6. The GTC also has concerns about the nature of the education and training provision on which these proposals are based. The quality, relevance and diversity of the offer will be paramount.

7. The arguments and evidence which underpin the GTC's position are outlined below.

### **Making sure that young people participate**

8. Where possible, in the context of a requirement for all young people to continue learning in education or employment settings, the GTC believes that the focus should be on developing incentives to participate and tailored support measures rather than sanctions. A much higher level of voluntary participation is essential before the consideration of sanctions becomes appropriate.
9. A recent Learning and Skills Networks survey<sup>1</sup> of teenagers and parents of teenagers aged 13-18 year-olds found that although 71% of parents supported a raised education leaving age, only 15% of them agreed with criminal sanctions for those who drop out. Only 51% of the young people involved supported a requirement to participate. These figures suggest that the Government needs to articulate the benefits of continued learning participation to parents and young people far more clearly and persuasively than it has already done and their argument will need to be made on the basis that all parts of the system will be able to offer young people comparable quality of learning opportunity. The GTC supports the development of a campaign to involve the voice of young people and parents in developing 14-19 reform.
10. While the GTC appreciates that the financial sanctions proposed and the threat to criminalise those young people who do not comply would involve a small number, it believes that these punitive approaches and the threat of using them could alienate and undermine any motivation from a wider group than the most disaffected.
11. For these young people, the issue of improved 14-19 provision remains critical, but the Council also believes that it is vital that support is targeted towards the individual needs of the young person, and that practitioners work closely with them to develop creative solutions such as online learning programmes and enterprise opportunities and internships.

### **A suitable route**

12. The Green Paper highlights four pre-conditions for implementing a requirement on participation of young people. The first is a suitable route for every young person, involving the opportunity '*to undertake a programme of learning that is engaging and valuable*'. The GTC affirms that any proposed requirement must be supported by access to worthwhile and appropriate programmes of learning.
13. The quality of the new Diplomas as they develop from 2008 are, as yet, unproven. The buy-in to the new qualifications and a commitment to the crucial change agenda involving school, further education (FE) and workplace settings

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<sup>1</sup> Villeneuve-Smith F., Marshall L. and Munoz S. *Raising the leaving learning age are the public convinced?*, Learning and Skills Network, 2007.

is yet to be developed amongst teachers, employers, parents and higher education (HE). There needs to be a longer lead-in time to ensure that the 'Gateway' partnerships spearheading these reforms are able to develop the diplomas as part of a coherent offer for 14-19 year olds which are as valuable and engaging as those more established qualifications.

14. Our schools and colleges will offer two distinct routes to students from the age of 14; one via GCSEs and A-levels and one via Diplomas. While the credibility of GCSEs and A-levels is already established in the minds both of participants and end-users, there is absolutely no guarantee that Diplomas will achieve the same credibility. This will be a critical factor in the motivation of young people to participate.
15. Furthermore, based on the experience of the 14-19 Pathfinders, school/FE partnerships need considerable time to develop collaborative relationships and ways of working through professional learning opportunities for teachers, lecturers and others involved in delivering a wider range of courses across a range of settings. This is in addition to the development areas highlighted in the consultation such as preparing teachers for the introduction of the diplomas and functional skills and for the critical issue of motivating young people who would not have chosen to remain in education or training opportunities post-16.
16. Though 2013 sounds a realistic aspiration for required participation, the Diplomas will still be in the process of implementation and their impact being evaluated. The other measures that are listed in Chapter 1 of the Green Paper as being '*already implemented*' are also in their infancy. Though the GTC supports the spirit of the proposal for required participation post-16, it believes that the timing of this change should reflect the level of success achieved in the proposed changes in curricular provision.

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