



# 14-19 Education and Skills Summary



# Executive Summary

1. Our aim is to transform secondary and post-secondary education so that all young people achieve and continue in learning until at least the age of 18.

2. Since 1997, we have carried through far-reaching reforms to raise standards, made possible by substantial new investment in schools and colleges. Primary school standards are at their highest ever level – and in international comparisons, our primary schools match the best anywhere. Results at secondary school are also at their best ever level: in 2004, over 53% of young people achieved 5 or more A\*-C grade GCSEs (or equivalent), compared to around 45% in 1997. We have also put in place a range of measures to tackle barriers to learning. Education Maintenance Allowances provide a strong incentive for 16-19 year-olds to stay in education and have a proven track record in increasing participation.

3. But the challenges ahead remain considerable. Numbers staying on post-16 have improved but are still too low – far down the international

league table. Many employers are not satisfied with the basic skills of school leavers going directly into jobs. Some young people drift outside education, employment or training between the ages of 16 and 19. The most able young people are not as fully stretched as they could be.

4. We propose therefore a radical reform of the system of 14-19 education – curriculum, assessment and the range of opportunities on offer. The Working Group on 14-19 Reform, chaired by Sir Mike Tomlinson, reported in October last year. This White Paper is our response.

5. In it we set out our proposals for an education system focused on high standards and much more tailored to the talents and aspirations of individual young people, with greater flexibility about what and where to study and when to take qualifications. These proposals will:

- tackle our low post-16 participation – we want participation at age 17 to increase from 75% to 90% over the next 10 years;

- ensure that every young person has a sound grounding in the basics of English and maths and the skills they need for employment;
- provide better vocational routes which equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need for further learning and employment;
- stretch all young people; and
- re-engage the disaffected.

## A strong foundation at Key Stage 3

6. Our first step is to make sure that Key Stage 3 – 11-14 education – provides a stronger base of knowledge and skills. By the age of 14, we want young people to have achieved higher standards in the basics and to have acquired a sound education – and an enthusiasm for learning – across the curriculum. That will be the platform for the increased choice teenagers will have between the ages of 14 and 19. In order to achieve this, we will:

- retain all of the core and foundation subjects within that phase, but review the curriculum to improve its coherence in subjects where there are problems. We will reduce prescription so that schools have space to help those below the expected level to catch up and to stretch all their pupils;

- support and challenge schools through the Secondary National Strategy and the New Relationship with Schools to use the new flexibility well;
- strengthen the emphasis on English and maths, in particular by expecting schools to focus systematically on those who arrive from primary school without having reached the expected standard in the Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy tests, continue to publish national test results and introduce a new on-line test of ICT skills;
- introduce models of moderated teacher assessment in the other compulsory subjects, providing professional development for teachers to support their skills in assessing young people, which will help to raise standards across the curriculum; and
- emphasise the importance of achievement at age 14 by recording in a 'Pupil Profile' for each young person and their parents, achievement across the curriculum.

7. By doing so, we will ensure that more young people achieve National Curriculum level 5 in English, maths, science and ICT; and that all young people are stretched to achieve across all subjects.

## A strong core 14-19

8. Achieving functional skills in English and maths must be at the heart of the 14-19 phase. These skills are essential to support learning in other subjects and they are essential for employment. Achieving level 2 (GCSE level) in functional English and maths is a vital part of a good education. In order to ensure more young people achieve that grounding:

- we have already reduced the amount of prescription in the Key Stage 4 curriculum, providing more scope for schools to support catch-up in English and maths;
- we are extending the Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve classroom practice, so that it provides support across secondary schools;
- we will expect more teenagers to achieve 5 A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and maths and we will introduce a general (GCSE) Diploma to recognise those who achieve this standard;
- we will toughen the GCSE Achievement and Attainment Tables, showing what percentage of young people have achieved the Diploma standard – ie 5 A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and maths. We expect to phase out the existing 5 A\*-C measure by 2008;

- we will ensure that no-one can get a C or better in English and maths without mastering the functional elements. Where a teenager achieves the functional element only, we will recognise that separately; and
- we will provide more opportunities and incentives for teenagers who have not achieved level 2 by 16 to do so post-16 and support them in achieving level 1 or entry level qualifications as steps on the way.

## Routes to success for all

9. Building on that core, we will create a system better tailored to the needs of the individual pupil, in which teenagers are stretched to achieve. We will:

- introduce greater choice of what and where to study and make it easier to combine academic and vocational learning;
- retain GCSEs and A levels as cornerstones of the new system;
- introduce new specialised Diplomas, including academic and vocational material, covering each occupational sector of the economy. The Diplomas will be available at levels 1 (foundation), 2 (GCSE) and 3 (advanced);
- require that anyone achieving a Diploma at level 2 must have functional English and maths at level 2;

- put employers in the lead through Sector Skills Councils, in designing specialised Diplomas which provide the right grounding for work and further study, supported by higher education and the QCA; and
- challenge and support schools and colleges to ensure that young people take qualifications when they are ready, not at a fixed age, encouraging acceleration to level 2 and ensuring early achievement at advanced level is recognised in Achievement and Attainment Tables and elsewhere.

10. We understand and appreciate the argument that we should challenge our A level students further, by demanding more breadth. But there is no clear consensus amongst pupils, parents, employers or universities on whether and how it should be done. We also believe that so soon after the introduction of Curriculum 2000, stability is important. We will therefore work with employers and universities to see if we can identify what, if anything, would add value to existing courses and we will review progress in 2008.

## A new system of specialised Diplomas

11. The Diplomas we are proposing will work as follows:

- To achieve a Diploma, young people will need to achieve appropriate standards in English and maths, specialised material, relevant GCSEs and A levels and have work experience.
- We will introduce the Diplomas in 14 lines and make these a national entitlement by 2015. The first four Diplomas in information and communication technology, engineering, health and social care and creative and media will be available in 2008. Eight will be available by 2010.
- We will work with employers to offer more opportunities to young people to learn at work and outside school.
- We will continue to improve the quality and number of employment-based training places through Apprenticeships, bringing them within the Diploma framework.

## Strengthening GCSEs and A levels

**12.** We will keep both GCSEs and A levels, but improve both in those areas where there is a strong case for change. At GCSE we will:

- restructure English and maths GCSEs to make sure it is impossible to get a grade C or above without the ability to use functional English and maths;
- review coursework to reduce the assessment burden;
- continue work to reform maths as proposed by Professor Adrian Smith, improving motivation and progression to advanced level. This is likely to include a new double maths GCSE; and
- continue to promote science – including implementing the new science GCSEs – restating our firm expectation that young people should do two science GCSEs.

**13.** At A level we will:

- increase stretch for the most able by introducing optional harder questions into separate sections at the end of A level papers;
- introduce an 'extended project' to stretch all young people and test a wider range of higher-level skills;

- enable the most able teenagers to take HE modules while in the sixth form;
- ensure that universities have more information on which to make judgements about candidates, by ensuring that they have access to the grades achieved by young people in individual modules by 2006. We will also support those universities that wish to have marks as well as grades; and
- we will reduce the assessment burden at A level by cutting the number of assessments in an A level from 6 to 4 but without changing the standard or overall content of A levels.

**14.** We will ensure that there are natural progression routes both through the levels of the Diploma, and between GCSEs and A levels and the different levels of the Diploma. By doing so, we will secure for all teenagers routes that avoid early narrowing down, but provide real choice of what to learn and in what setting.

**15.** We believe that the current balance between internal and external assessment is essentially the right one to secure public confidence in the examinations system. We therefore do not propose major change here.

## Engaging all young people

**16.** Our reforms will create opportunities for all young people. For many, the curriculum choices introduced in this White Paper will provide the opportunities they need to develop their talents and so succeed. The vocational opportunities, including different styles and places of learning, will motivate many. Foundation and entry level qualifications will help put more young people onto a pathway that will lead to further opportunities and qualifications.

**17.** For young people who face serious personal problems, the proposals in the Government's programme, 'Every Child Matters', will be crucial in breaking down the barriers to achievement. In addition, we will develop a pilot programme for 14-16 year-olds, based on the post-16 Entry to Employment programme. This new route will:

- provide a tailored programme for each young person and intensive personal guidance and support;
- involve significant work-based learning, probably amounting to two days each week;
- lead towards a level 1 Diploma; and
- lead on to a range of further options including Apprenticeship.

**18.** We expect this to be available to up to 10,000 young people from 2007/8.

## A system configured around young people

**19.** We have designed these changes to the curriculum and qualifications to meet the needs of learners and employers. We will ensure that every part of the education system is configured to meet their needs.

**20.** We will increase the capacity of the education system to offer vocational education. We will do so by building on existing strengths – for example, extending the role of Centres of Vocational Excellence to making excellent vocational provision available for young people. We will also develop new Skills Academies as national centres of excellence in skills. We will strengthen schools' capacity to offer vocational education, through specialism. The best Specialist Schools will be able to become leading schools with additional resources to boost vocational provision. Significantly more post-16 opportunities will be needed to meet the objectives set out in this paper. Both schools and colleges will make additional provision. We will be consulting in detail on our proposals, set out in our 5-year plan, for a presumption in favour of high-performing 11-16 schools engaging in post-16 provision.



**21.** We will support the workforce to deliver. We will ensure that the right staff are in place, including those who have the necessary experience of the workplace to deliver vocational education, and that they have the professional development, qualifications and support that they need.

**22.** Schools, colleges and other providers will take the lead in each local area. A prospectus of options will be made available to all young people, setting out what is on offer to them. Where there are any gaps, it will be the responsibility of local authorities and the local Learning and Skills Councils to commission provision to fill them. Each school and college will be expected to make the full range of choices available to young people on its roll, though perhaps at other institutions. Inspection will ensure that this is delivered.

## An accountability framework which makes sure that we offer the best to young people

**23.** Finally, we need an accountability framework which supports and encourages the development of the new 14-19 phase. We will:

- include vocational qualifications in Achievement and Attainment Table measures and ensure that inspections challenge schools to offer the full range of curriculum and qualifications;

- focus on the basics through continuing to publish tables showing performance in English, maths and science at Key Stage 3; and toughening tables at 16 to measure the Diploma standard: 5 A\*-C GCSEs including English and maths;
- encourage stretch for all teenagers through giving schools credit in the tables when they achieve success in higher level qualifications. Through the New Relationship with Schools, we will hold schools more strongly to account for the progress of all their students; and
- encourage institutions to focus on improving staying-on rates by introducing progression targets; and crediting schools for the achievement of young people completing Key Stage 4 later than the normal age.

**24.** This major package of reform seizes a once-in-a-generation chance to transform 14-19 education and skills. Through doing so, we will seek to widen opportunity for all young people and take the next steps towards a more prosperous and fairer society.





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