

14–19: opportunity and excellence

TALKBACK ON 14-19

Last spring, the Government came up with some radical new ideas to change the way 14-19 year-olds are taught in England. We set these out in a Green Paper called *14-19: extending opportunity, raising standards*.

Students were invited to share their views and opinions on the proposals. We wanted to know if you thought the planned shake-up to the educational system was on the right track. We had a great response, with over 4,000 of you responding to our questions. Thank you for taking the time and trouble to share your views with us.

This leaflet explains how you responded to our proposals. If you want to find out more, log on to our website at www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19.



WHAT WE WANT TO DO

Our goal is to make sure that education and training meets your needs. We want a system that will encourage everyone to carry on, and not drop out, after the age of 16. And we want to help you succeed, so that you can follow the careers you want and make the most of life's opportunities.

WHAT WE PROPOSED IN THE GREEN PAPER

We wanted to make sure that young people could choose subjects that interest them and help them get on. So one of our ideas was to increase the options that you can choose from. In particular, we wanted to increase the number of work-related options.

We also wanted to reduce the number of subjects that are compulsory at school between 14-16. That way, students would be able to concentrate on the subjects that would be most relevant to them. And to make learning even more flexible, we wanted to encourage schools to allow pupils to learn at a pace which is best for them.

We had a number of other ideas too.

We suggested the introduction of a new award for everyone, 'the Matriculation Diploma'. As well as rating students on how they do in their qualifications, this would also take account of their other worthwhile activities, such as citizenship, sports and work experience.



We proposed introducing harder questions into the A2 A Level papers, with an A grade 'with distinction' to recognise outstanding achievement.

And to help students decide what was best for them, we wanted to put a better network of advice and support in place, starting in year 7, to guide you through the maze of decision making.

YOUR REACTION – AND THE NEXT STEPS

We're pleased to report that most of you thought our plans would encourage more students to carry on with their studies after 16.

More freedom to choose

Most of you said that you would like more freedom of choice in what you study. You told us you'd like your choices to be provided in a more flexible way, with the chance to mix learning at school, college and work.

And a majority of you agreed that the core subjects we'd outlined were the ones you thought were important.

So we're going ahead with the changes to the curriculum that we outlined. We will change





the 14-16 curriculum so that only English, maths, science, ICT, citizenship, religious education, sex education, physical education, careers education and work-related learning are compulsory. (Of course, schools will still be allowed to make other subjects compulsory for their pupils). Doing this takes time, so we won't be able to change the curriculum before 2004 at the earliest.

If you want, you'll also have the right to study a modern foreign language, design and technology, a subject from the arts and a subject from the humanities. Nearly nine out of ten of you agreed that this was a good idea.

You also liked the suggestion that you should be able to work at your own pace in your year, so we're pushing ahead with plans to encourage this wherever we can.

More options to choose from

You told us you liked the idea of increasing your options to a wider range of subjects at GCSE. This year, we introduced these subjects at GCSE:

- Applied Art and Design
- Applied Business
- Engineering
- Health and Social Care
- Applied ICT

- Leisure and Tourism
- Manufacturing
- Applied Science

We're looking to add some other options in the future. You may already be able to study these ones at your school. By next year, they should be much more widely available.

We're also going to improve Modern Apprenticeships, which provide work-based training. We will introduce more of these schemes, so that by 2004 more than a quarter of you will be able to sign up.

We won't be introducing A grade 'with distinction' at A Level, though. That's because the current Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs), which have been up and running for a year, have gone down well.

OTHER CHANGES

Help when you need it most

Most of you agreed that you needed more support between the ages of 14-19 when you're making some major decisions about your education.

Education Maintenance

Allowances are grants that help out with hard cash to those who need it at this stage. They are already available in some parts of the country, and we'll extend them across the whole country from next year.



We also think that everyone should have the chance, at the end of Key Stage 3, to review their progress and start planning the next phase of their education. We think that drawing up an individual learning plan at this stage is a good idea for everyone, so you all have some idea of the direction you're taking. Of course, you'll still be able to switch track later if you need to.

Schools will be responsible for managing this process, with support from others – including Connexions Personal Advisers – where this will help. We'll also be introducing careers education guidance that schools can use. The Connexions Service will continue to provide access to advice and support for all young people throughout the 14-19 phase.

Different experiences

Schools and colleges will be working together to offer students aged 14-19 the wider range of options. This means you might do some of your learning in a college and even in the workplace as well as in school.

In fact, many students are already doing this. We have introduced an 'Increased Flexibility' programme that gives Key Stage 4 students at 2,300 schools the option to study one or two days a week at a college, or with a training provider. This has proved to be popular with many 14-16 year olds.

To help schools and colleges find the best ways of working together, we have set up pathfinders in local areas. You could check out our



pathfinders website
www.dfes.gov.uk/
14-19pathfinders to see if your area
is involved.

OUR LONG TERM PLANS

Most of you liked the idea of an overarching award like the Matriculation Diploma – though you didn't like the name. However, not everyone felt it would work in the way we suggested. For example, university professionals and employers weren't convinced by the idea.

So we won't introduce the Matriculation Diploma. Still, we had a lot of support for the idea of some kind of overarching award, so we're going to set up a think tank of experts to see if they can find a format that everyone agrees on.

The consultation raised some other issues about education that we also want the expert group to look at.

People's progress in different qualifications and subjects can be tested in different ways. We want to make sure we're keeping track of your progress in a way that makes most sense. It's about making sure that subjects are taught and tested as effectively as possible in the future. So we'll also ask the expert group to look at this issue. And because many of you made the point that the different routes you take through education weren't always easy to understand, we'll ask the group to look at how we can improve that, too.





WHEN WILL IT HAPPEN?

As we've already said, some changes are already underway or just about to happen. Others (like the changes to the 14-16 year-old compulsory curriculum) will take longer because there's more to organise. And some of the ideas being considered by the experts may lead to even more sweeping changes being brought in over the next five or ten years.

YOUR IDEAS

Now you've told us what you think, we'd like to keep the contact going.

This summary, a more detailed version which will tell you more, and our analysis of the consultation responses, can be found on the Department's website at www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19.

Although the formal consultation process is over, we're always happy to hear your views. You can let us know what you think of our plans by writing to us (at 14-19 Unit, Department for Education and Skills, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT) or e-mail us on 14-19@dfes.gsi.gov.uk.