

summary

14–19: opportunity and excellence



department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

This document is a brief summary of the 14–19 next steps document, *14–19: opportunity and excellence*, which builds on the proposals outlined in the February 2002 Green Paper, *14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards*, and the extensive responses to the Green Paper consultation.

Why Reform 14–19?



14 to 19 marks a critical phase in young people's lives. It is the period when they build on their earlier learning and prepare for adult life and employment. Many young people make this transition well – but too many do not. Too many young people lose interest in learning before the age of 16. As a result, too many of them drop out of formal learning at 16. Moreover, too many of those who remain fail to reach their full potential.

This disengagement from learning is often just the beginning of a cycle of low expectations and disaffection, with consequences felt not only by individuals, but by local communities and wider society. The consequences are not only social: they impact on the whole economy. In today's world, if we want a competitive economy, we need more young people to gain higher-level skills and qualifications.

Our current system has its strengths. The GCSE has encouraged more young people to stay in education. Over half of 15 year-olds gained 5 A*–C grades last year, compared with 37% a decade ago. These strengths are underpinned by the professionalism of teachers, the increasing diversity of post-16

provision and the extensive choice of subjects available for advanced study.

But the system also has significant weaknesses. Nearly half of young people still do not achieve five good GCSEs at school. More still do not reach that standard in English and mathematics. And one in twenty leaves without a single GCSE pass.

One of the most persistent shortcomings of our education system is the weakness of our vocational offer. While there has been progress – such as better co-operation between schools and colleges on work-related learning – learning a trade has still to become a truly valued option.

And where young people follow the academic track, what they learn is often too narrow. Until Curriculum 2000, A Level students typically studied three specialist subjects. Many now take at least four. But advanced level students in other countries typically study six, including their native language and mathematics. Such breadth is increasingly sought by universities and employers.

The Government now faces a dual challenge. We must:

- give assurance to students and the wider community that the existing system is stable and effectively managed. In particular, those taking or coming up to A Levels must be confident that their work will be properly marked and graded.
- also address the question of reform for the longer term. Our extensive consultation confirmed our view that we need to create a clearer and more appropriate curriculum and qualifications framework for the 14–19 phase – one that develops and stretches all our young people to achieve their full potential, and prepares them for life and work in the 21st century.

So we intend to adopt a twin-track approach. We will take some action now to introduce more flexibility into the system, building on the momentum and commitment of schools and colleges that is already changing the landscape for 14–19 year-olds. And we will set about building a consensus about the longer term structural reform that is needed.

Other reforms are creating a strong underpinning on which we can build. In primary schools the strategies to improve teaching mean that 11 year-olds begin their secondary education with a sound understanding of the basics in English and mathematics. Ambitious targets for 14 year-olds are focusing attention on the early part of secondary education. We are seeking major changes in secondary schools, supported by sustained investment and driven by powerful and effective leadership, reform of teaching and learning and new partnerships beyond the classroom. We have recently announced plans for improving the quality of further education and training which will generate a similar transformation in the learning and skills sector.

Our Vision



We want to transform the learning experience for young people, so that they have a commitment to continued learning, whether in school, college or the workplace. Our vision for the 14–19 phase is one where:

- all young people can choose from a range of courses and qualifications covering a wide range of subjects and skills from 14;
- they can start to develop their own mix of subjects from 14, combining a broad range with more specialist choices that meet their interests and aspirations. This should help them to move on to more advanced courses at sixteen;
- they can easily see how their studies will lead to further education and employment, whether they are involved in general education or more specialised vocational courses. Students must be able to switch courses too;
- all young people can develop essential practical skills for life and work. Additionally, the curriculum and assessment arrangements must emphasise and promote competence in analysis, problem-solving and thinking, so that young people have the confidence to explain and defend their conclusions;
- those with special needs or those facing difficult personal, family or social circumstances are helped to overcome any problems these present;
- regardless of where they learn, young people have access to different types of provision, centres of excellence and other relevant expertise; and
- schools and colleges are working in partnership and innovatively to meet the needs of all learners.

Our Plans



NEXT STEPS

Curriculum change for flexibility and opportunity

Having greater freedom to choose programmes of study will allow students to follow programmes that better meet their needs and strengths. We propose practical changes to the curriculum for 14–16 year-olds to combine breadth of study with more flexibility for schools and colleges to tailor programmes to individual needs and aptitudes.

Under our proposals for 14–16 year-olds:

- English, mathematics and science remain compulsory. All students will also continue to be taught citizenship, religious education, sex education, careers education and physical education;
- Information and Communications Technology will remain compulsory for now, although such skills will increasingly be taught through other subjects;

- all students will learn about work and enterprise;
- all students will be entitled to study another language, a humanities subject (such as history), an arts subject, and design and technology.

Young people will also be entitled to study literacy, numeracy and computer skills until 19 to level 2 standard (GCSE or equivalent). And schools and colleges will be encouraged increasingly to enter pupils for exams when they are ready.

We proposed to introduce an A 'with distinction' grade at A Level to stretch the most able. Higher than expected take-up of Advanced Extension Awards and concerns in the consultation have persuaded us that we should not go ahead with this measure for the present.

The curriculum changes will require further consultation and approval from Parliament and will not take place before 2004/05 at the earliest.

Improving vocational options

To increase the range of options on offer we have already introduced GCSEs in eight vocational subjects. We will introduce new 'hybrid' GCSEs that will allow students to study on either academic or applied tracks, depending on their preference and aptitude. We will improve the standards of Modern Apprenticeships and expand their numbers so that by 2004, 28% of young people will be able to enter them. We will discard the unhelpful distinction between 'vocational' and 'academic' GCSEs and A Levels.

Consistency and excellence in teaching and learning

We need a consistent approach to teaching and learning across the whole 11–19 age range in schools, colleges and workplaces. Heads and principals need to create an environment where high expectations, consistent teaching practice, good

behaviour and regular attendance are the norm in every part of their school or college.

We want to break down barriers between schools and colleges. The proposals for teaching and learning in both *Schools: achieving success*, and in *Success for All*, should offer young people more choices and a better learning experience. They also allow us the opportunity to open a debate with providers about how to bring together the best teaching from schools, colleges and work-based provision, making the most of increasing e-learning opportunities. Some new materials and training programmes will be piloted in summer 2003 and we hope to pilot more widely in 2004.

An emphasis on local innovation and partnership

We will not seek to impose a single national blueprint of our vision. An effective 14–19 system will reflect local differences, such as the labour market, the pattern of existing educational institutions and the increasingly distinctive specialisms of local schools and colleges.

It would not be possible for every individual school, college or workplace to deliver every aspect of the 14–19 curriculum. Therefore, we expect them to work together in new partnerships to provide students with their 14–16 entitlement, to provide more choice and to make it easier for young people to move from pre- to post-16 learning. Over the coming months, we will expect Chief Education Officers and Executive Directors of local LSCs to take an active lead in bringing partnerships together.

In particular, consistent partnerships between learning and business need to be developed quickly. Strong links between schools, colleges and employers are vital to support the greater emphasis on work-related and enterprise learning. The qualifications young people gain must have currency with employers. Employers in turn have an important role in championing the true value of vocational attainment. We will explore with businesses and their representatives new models to involve employers with young people. These will reflect the employer perspective more consistently and make it easier for employers

to be involved without diverting time and resources from their commercial priorities.

Support for local delivery

We will introduce measures to support the local delivery of our reforms. We have made available £10m this year, with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), to support 25 pathfinders, which we will use to assess different models of collaborative working and identify best practice which will inform the national development of the 14–19 phase.

Other measures include:

- the Increased Flexibility for 14–16 year-olds programme, which gives young people in over 2,000 schools access to specialist vocational teaching;
- development of initial teacher training and leadership programmes to include the requirements of the 14–19 strategy;
- LSC-led strategic area reviews of learning provision for learners from 16 up to higher education to ensure it matches the needs of the local community;

- reporting a wider range of qualifications in school performance tables and recording AS Levels taken early;
- area inspections by Ofsted/Adult Learning Inspectorate from this year to cover 14–19 provision (in place of the current 16–19 inspections);
- reflecting 14–19 objectives in LSC funding arrangements with scope for local education authorities to alter the weighting of funding for students attending more than one institution;
- policies for specialist schools, learning and skills beacon status and Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) will all take account of the developing strategy and have a part to play in implementation.

Raising aspirations

An effective 14–19 phase depends on young people getting the right support and guidance to help them make the best choices. Such help should also raise their aspirations and motivation, overcoming any barriers to learning. Therefore, we will encourage all schools to help young people from the end of Key Stage 3 to plan ahead

for the whole 14–19 phase. New guidance and supporting materials will help them put new arrangements in place.

Some young people face financial pressures to leave education early. In last year’s Spending Review we announced that Education Maintenance Allowances, which provide financial support to young people from poorer backgrounds to continue their studies, would be extended across the country from September 2004.

The Connexions Service, which provides access to impartial advice and support for all 14–19 year-olds, will be provided nationally from later this year.

REFORM FOR THE LONGER TERM

Taken together, these actions will build on the important steps forward we have taken in recent years to improve significantly 14–19 year-olds’ choices and opportunities. But they do not amount to a transformation of young people’s experiences and prospects. There is a strong and growing consensus that:

- there needs to be a much stronger vocational offer, with a strong underpinning of general education;
- assessment within programmes must be fit for purpose, must be manageable for students and teachers, and must accommodate recognition of a wide range of learning and achievement;
- the aims of breadth and stretch, raising the status of vocational provision and student motivation are best driven forward through a unified framework of qualifications. Any such framework must be suitable for young people across the ability range and promote progression through Foundation to Intermediate and Advanced levels.

Baccalaureate-style qualifications of this type work well in other countries, and we believe that this model, designed to suit English circumstances, could tackle long-standing English problems, giving greater emphasis to completing courses of study (and training as appropriate) through to the age of 18 or 19 without a heavier burden of examination and assessment.

A change to this type of model would be a long-term reform but one on which we are ready to embark if further work shows that such a unified system can prepare people for the varied needs of higher education and employment. This sort of reform needs to be carefully planned, and built on consensus, as recommended by Mike Tomlinson's second report on last year's A Levels. We are committed to work with all the partners interested in the future of 14–19 education to test whether we can achieve consensus on a workable model that can be developed for implementation.

We intend to appoint a Working Group for 14–19 Reform, under the chairmanship of Mike Tomlinson, to examine in detail how developments in each of these three areas might in the longer term contribute to the successful and lasting transformation of 14–19 learning. We expect the Working Group to issue an interim report of its findings by the end of 2003, with a view to finishing its work within 18 months.

FINDING OUT MORE

If you want to find out more, the full document, this summary, a version for young people, and an analysis of our consultation responses are on the Department for Education and Skills website: www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19.

Copies are also available, free of charge, from:

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quoting reference DfES 0744/2002Main
for the main document,
DfES 0744/2002Annex for the annexes,
DfES 0745/2002 for the summary.

Copies of the summary version will also be available in the most commonly used minority ethnic languages and in audio (ref: DfES/0745/2002Audio) and Braille (ref: DfES/0745/2002Braille) versions.

A summary for young people will also be available (ref: DfES/0746/2002).

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