

Cabinet Office
Transformational Government Enabled by Technology
19 January 2006

1. NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Office consultation on Transformational Government Enabled by Technology.
2. NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and headteachers throughout the UK.
3. NASUWT's response focuses on some of the general principles on which the Cabinet Office's proposals are based and gives the Union's views on some of the specific issues raised in the consultation document.

GENERAL COMMENTS

4. NASUWT agrees that the effective use of technology in the public sector can help to transform public services for the benefit of citizens, businesses, tax payers and frontline staff. However, in relation to the work of professionals in the public sector, it is essential that the vision which guides the use of technology within Government makes clear that the role of technology should be to enable frontline professionals to work more effectively and not to cut costs or constrain resources in a way which not only affects the quality and scope of public services but which also risks Policy in the public sector being driven, rather than supported by, technology.
5. In relation to schools, the use of technology has the potential to support the achievement of important policy goals. Used creatively, information technology can support the National Agreement, Raising Standards and

Tackling Workload, which aims to reduce workload burdens on teachers and other frontline school staff and to allow professionals to concentrate on their core responsibilities for teaching and learning through workforce remodelling. As the remodelling agenda becomes more embedded within schools, the innovative and purposeful use of information technology to support workforce remodelling is becoming more apparent and it is therefore important that the gains secured by the National Agreement are reinforced by policy which seeks to develop more effective approaches to the use of technology in schools.

6. In particular, it is important to acknowledge that teachers and head teachers should not be responsible for the management, administration or maintenance of ICT in schools and colleges, but should be supported in this respect, by developing the skills and capacity of the wider school and college workforce

7. Technology is also becoming an increasingly important learning resource within schools and colleges. The approaches advocated by the Primary and Secondary National Strategies have encouraged the integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) across the wider curriculum and the use of innovative curricular technologies, such as the internet and interactive whiteboards has, through the skill and expertise of teachers, enhanced the quality of learning in schools and colleges. NASUWT also acknowledges that the Government has invested significant amounts of money into improving the ICT facilities available to schools and teachers and the Union believes that the improvements in the quality and reliability of ICT resources that this investment has generated have benefited the work of teachers and learners.

8. However, in planning future technology policy in education, it will be important for the Government to acknowledge that schools and colleges must be able to continue their investment in developing ICT capacity if practice in schools is to continue to reflect technological change and

progress in wider society. The expectations of parents, pupils and teachers have been raised significantly by the improvements in the quality and scope of ICT resources made available to schools and the Government must ensure that these expectations can continue to be met in future.

9. NASUWT shares the Government's view that technology can enhance the experience of public services by those that use them. However, NASUWT believes that technology should not be used to develop crude mechanisms to support an inappropriate consumerisation of public services, including education. NASUWT believes that, rather than viewing service users as passive consumers of public services, policy on the use of technology in the public sector should seek to support the establishment of a collaborative and constructive relationship between service providers and users. Neither should technology be used in ways that extend the working time of teachers through expectations that they will make greater use of mobile technology during personal and family time to communicate with pupils, parents and others.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***The Government's overarching vision for the use of technology in Government should promote the enabling potential of technology to tackle workload and allow public service professionals to concentrate on their core responsibilities;***
- ***In relation to schools, the Transformational Government agenda should not only take full account of the provisions and principles of the National Agreement, Raising Standards and Tackling Workload, but should also seek to develop ways in which the remodelling agenda in schools can be supported through the use of technology;***
- ***The Government should set out its clear commitment to continue to support investment in ICT resources within schools and colleges so***

that the use of ICT in education can continue to reflect technological developments in wider society;

- *Technology should be used to support and promote a collaborative and constructive relationship between providers of services in the public sector and those that use and rely upon such services.*

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Citizen and Business Centred Services

10. The Government is right to acknowledge that, in terms of the development of technology-related infrastructure, the needs of frontline staff have often not been at the centre of policy development.

11. In respect of schools and colleges, government policy from the point at which ICT was included in the National Curriculum, led to a significant heightening of public expectations. However, little thought was given in the development of policy about the ways in which ICT could be incorporated effectively into programmes of study for children's learning, how ICT could be used to remodel and improve the working and professional practices of teachers and what quality of technology-related resources, support and training would be required to meet growing expectations. This disparity between expectations in relation to ICT and the poor quality of resources available to meet these expectations created a great deal of professional frustration within education.

12. While this situation has improved significantly as a result of the significant investment in ICT in schools, it is important that the increased capacity now in place to meet ICT-related expectations is sustained and that there is no return to a situation where schools are not given the resources and

support they need to meet the legitimate aspirations of all stakeholders in respect of ICT.

13. Therefore, the Government must continue to demonstrate its commitment to work with the teaching profession, through NASUWT and other social partners, to ensure that future policy is developed on the basis of a clear understanding of the support and resources required by schools and colleges to use technology productively and creatively.
14. Future policy will also need to make sure that parents' expectations of what schools and colleges can be reasonably expected to deliver in relation to technology are managed effectively. Realistic expectations in this respect will enable schools and colleges to engage in constructive and effective dialogue with parents and pupils on the ways in which ICT can be used to support learning.
15. NASUWT notes the Government's proposal to appoint Customer Group Directors, each reporting to a single minister responsible for a key group of service users. NASUWT understands that the proposed role of Customer Group Director will be wide ranging but will be, essentially, to represent the interests of key groups of public service users and to inform Government policy in this respect, particularly in areas which are the responsibility of more than one Government department.
16. NASUWT recognises that the Government has yet to establish the precise areas of responsibility for Customer Group Directors and will seek to develop the role through the appointment of directors for a citizen group (e.g. older people), a policy group (e.g. offender management), and a business group (e.g. farmers). NASUWT further notes the Government's intention to use these initial appointments to help develop the role of the Customer Group Directors and, once these roles have been defined in more detail, the Government intends to move towards the appointment of Customer Group Director for parents.

17. Prior to a final decision to appoint a Customer Group Director for parents, NASUWT expects that the way in which this particular post might operate in the education sector will be the subject of full consultation with all social partners, including NASUWT. The Union will monitor the work of the three initial Customer Group Directors closely and will want to discuss with the Government whether the creation of a Customer Group Director for parents would be able to add any meaningful value in work towards in the Government's wider education policy objectives. NASUWT would have serious reservations about the creation of a Customer Group Director for parents without a clear understanding by all stakeholders of what contribution such a post could add to the work being undertaken by schools, colleges and teachers to raise standards and provide high quality educational experiences for all learners. A particular concern for NASUWT in this respect will be the role of the proposed Service Transformation Board, which NASUWT understands is to steer and coordinate the work of the Customer Group Director through the establishment of overarching service design principles and the promotion of best practice in respect of the use of technology.
18. As part of its technology strategy, the Government identifies the need to develop modern channels for citizen business access to services and to actively manage the shift in channels towards the most efficient and effective. NASUWT recognises that technology can support the development of constructive relationships between parents and schools and colleges. For example, NASUWT acknowledges the positive work done in developing the 'Directgov' website which has sought to increase parents' knowledge of the curriculum and of wider developments within education so that parents and teachers can have more informed discussions about learning, standards and pupil progress.
19. The internet is an increasingly important channel through which service users and front-line staff can gain access to support, advice and

information. Of the 2500 Government managed websites identified in the consultation, a significant number are designed specifically for use by teachers working within the maintained school system. NASUWT agrees in principle that rationalisation of the number of websites maintained by the Government could yield significant benefits, but the Union would be concerned by attempts to downscale or remove key Government websites which have helped to support and enhance the work of teachers, other members of the school and college workforce and governors. Websites that NASUWT would wish to see continued and enhanced further include the Teachernet site, the DfES Standards site and the QCA's Curriculum online, as well as the internet resources designed to support remodelling within schools.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *The Government must ensure that the development of future policy in respect of technology and education is conducted in full consultation with NASUWT and other social partners so that the needs and requirements of teachers and other members of the school workforce remain central considerations;*
- *The pilot of Customer Group Directors posts must be monitored carefully to determine whether the creation of a specific post in respect of parents would add any value to the work of schools, colleges and teachers in raising standards;*
- *Policy to rationalise the number of Government maintained websites should not undermine the continued provision of important information and resources for teachers, other members of the school workforce and school governors.*

Shared services

20. NASUWT believes that more effective cooperation between different Government departments, agencies and schools can be facilitated by the effective use of technology. In respect of data sharing between schools and other official agencies, NASUWT has highlighted the potential benefits that technology can offer in terms of tackling bureaucracy and reducing the workload burdens of cross-agency working on schools and colleges.

21. Nevertheless, NASUWT believes that there remains a need for those responsible for developing the use of technology in this respect to demonstrate a greater awareness of the impact upon workload and bureaucracy that inappropriately structured and designed technology-based systems can generate. NASUWT believes that all developments to support and promote cross agency working through the use of technology must be thoroughly audited to ensure that they contribute to rather than detract from the agenda established by the National Agreement to tackle workload and minimise the bureaucratic burdens on schools and colleges.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***All proposals to use technology to support the work of schools with other agencies must be thoroughly audited to ensure that they do not impose additional workload burdens on schools, colleges and teachers and increase bureaucracy within the education system.***

Leadership and governance of technology within the public sector

22. NASUWT agrees with the Government that effective use of technology in the public sector requires coherent leadership and governance to ensure that change is managed and delivered effectively. In relation to the education sector, NASUWT believes that the development of joined up policy requires the establishment of a strategy which sets out clear

leadership responsibilities at national, local and school level. NASUWT believes that the establishment of a coherent framework at national level is essential in order to ensure that effective decisions can be made by local authorities and school leaders on the use of technology and to make sure that school leaders are not distracted from their core responsibility for leading teaching and learning by the absence of guidance and support on technology-related issues. Coherent national frameworks for the development of technology in the education sector will also help to minimise excessive variation in policy and practice across schools and local authorities.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***The Government sets out a clear framework for the leadership of technology in the education sector which provides clear guidance and support to leaders of education at school and college level and within local authorities that allows leaders to concentrate on raising standards and which minimises the risks of excessive variation in practice across school and local authorities.***

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