

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO CHOICE, VOICE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Supplementary Evidence from Minister of State for School Standards to Support Joint Memorandum from Minister of State for Department Of Health, Minister of State for Local and Regional Government and Minister of State for School Standards, 'The Case for User Choice in Public Services'

1. The DfES is proud of the way it has placed choice and voice at the heart of its policy making and service delivery. The recently published '*Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*' (www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearstrategy/) sets out the Department's plans to radically reshape the system for delivering education and children's services so that its central characteristic will be personalisation – a system that fits the individual rather than the individual fitting the system.

2. We want to continue to mould our services around the needs of individuals as they learn and develop through life. The system of the future will pivot on:

- Empowered learners: a strong confident voice for children, young people and adults to articulate their personal learning needs.
- Responsive providers: schools, colleges and universities that are uniformly excellent but can design their offering around the needs of individual learners.
- Engaged communities: a role for parents, employers, experts and volunteers to work together in support of children's learning.

3. For learners, empowerment will mean more diversity, greater choice and a decisive shift toward personalisation. People learn in different ways and at different paces, so their learning experience should be bespoke: with individual assessment, tailored teaching and learning and personal tracking of performance. And alongside this commitment must go another to personalised support – the essentials that put education within everyone's reach, from protection for the vulnerable child to career advice for teenagers and financial packages for adults wishing to acquire new skills.

4. For the many thousands of separate providers up and down the country there can be no centrally dispensed prescription. But the strongest institutions and services are already acutely alert to the needs of users, and they have important characteristics in common. They are strongly, imaginatively and sensitively led, with a powerful sense of mission to serve the public. And they exploit the freedom to re-think their services in response to changing needs.

5. The wish to harness a wider range of people and resources again reflects the example of the best schools and colleges. These are institutions at the heart of their communities, engaging parents and families in their children's education; linking with health, housing and other organisations to influence and improve life chances; drawing in sports stars and coaches, local broadcasters and artists to enrich the process of learning and development.

6. The Department will apply the same principles across the system as a whole, while

recognising that each part of the system is at a different stage of evolution, and each institution different to the next. Our aim throughout is services that are fair for all, personal to each.

7. For example, in response to broadening **choice and personalisation**, the Department:

- is developing Children's Trusts which bring together local partners – education, social care, health, Connexions, Sure Start, Youth Offending Teams, and the voluntary and community sector – so that they can work better to meet the needs of children, young people and families, and at the same time, responding to the current fragmentation of responsibilities for children's services;
- revolutionised the early years provision in deprived areas by introducing Sure Start which brings together health, learning and parenting support to meet the need of local parents, their children, and the community they live in;
- has begun to engage with individual families and communities through the promotion and development of extended schools (before and after school hours, at weekends and during school holidays, helping parents to juggle their busy lives). Schools that have already adopted this approach have found that extended schools impact positively on pupil attainment, behaviour and attendance, offering activities and facilities to increase engagement and motivation. Involvement in extended activities may also have a positive impact on the culture of schools and their communities, particularly in terms of how learning is viewed. There are currently 119 'full service' extended schools in England. There will be 240 'full service' extended school models by 2005-05, offering a prescribed core range of services;
- has increased diversity in the secondary school system by expanding the number of specialist schools. Over half of all maintained secondary schools now have specialist status. Their plans reflect key principles for personalised and effective teaching and learning;
- provides targeted capital funding that faith communities can bid for via their LEA, in response to parental demand for places. The Code of Practice on School Admissions allows faith schools to admit pupils on the basis of religious affiliation but it also encourages them to give priority for at least some places to local children of other faiths or none;
- has included, in its *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, proposals (for secondary schools only) for increasing the number of places in popular and successful schools; allowing high-performing specialist schools to add sixth forms; and making it easier for new promoters, including parents' groups, to open schools in response to local demand. This should allow schools to strengthen their individual ethos and develop in the direction they think appropriate, and to better meet local needs as part of the drive for higher performance in the local system;
- has extended the arrangements (via the Education Bill currently before

Parliament) for inviting proposals for new secondary schools so that it is easier for new promoters, including parents' groups, to open schools in response to local demand;

- has allowed schools, through improvements in performance data, to compare individual pupil results against expectations – pinpointing areas for improvement and allowing more targeted teaching;
- has empowered young people to help to design the Connexions Service so that it responds to their needs and from which they can access information, advice and guidance in a variety of ways, at times and places that suit them;
- has initiated a fundamental review of 14-19 education, with the ambition of creating a system of personalised learning for every student, with the opportunities for the less able and underachievers to enter the national framework of qualifications. Sir Mike Tomlinson's report constitutes a substantial longer term agenda which will not distract from medium term objectives to introduce greater flexibility into the current system. Delivery of a future 14-19 curriculum and qualification structure will need to address the issues of too much assessment, a poor vocational offering, and being sufficiently challenging for the most able;
- has implemented 14-19 pathfinders which led to the development of broader curricula, offering greater choice and flexibility, especially for 14-16 year olds;
- has planned, in the context of the Skills Strategy, for a reform of qualifications which will create a more flexible framework for recognising achievement: one which measures and values learning, welcomes diversity in provision and equips individuals for work and life;
- has developed a package of reform of higher education that will lead to a financially secure and diverse system which is more responsive to the rising demands of students and business. Raising achievement in schools and colleges will lead to more students from non-traditional backgrounds aspiring to enter higher education. The reform will also abolish up-front payment of tuition fees and allow every full-time student to defer their contribution to the cost of their course until after they have graduated.

8. In terms of **voice**, the Department:

- has extended the opportunities for young people to shape policy. A young person's version of the two consultations: *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19) and *Every Child Matters* (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/) were created. Both consultations were extensive and inclusive, including events to discuss proposals with young people face to face with Ministers and senior officials;
- is involving key stakeholders in various ways: the use of critical friends (such as the Implementation Review Unit), particularly in shaping secondary school policies, wider qualitative involvement in key dimensions of policy formulation and the execution of communications and regular quantitative surveys of

stakeholder opinion;

- has implemented a national programme of strategic area reviews over the past two years that has engaged many stakeholders in discussion about the further education and training in their local areas;
- moved its service personalisation beyond a focus on an individual making complaints or having an involvement in formal governance arrangements, to learners having a key and active role in helping to design their provision. This gives them more say in how they use services once they access them by making them co-producers of services. A good example of this is the Connexions Service;
- promotes the representation of parents and other members of the community on the Governing bodies of schools. For 16-19 provision governing bodies involve representatives of the local community, parents and young people themselves in the management of their institutions;
- has developed a strategy for increasing parental involvement in children's education. This includes an element of 'giving parents a voice' for example through the introduction of home-school agreements. A study, carried out by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) and published by the Department in 2002, found that 85 per cent of parents say they are either very involved or fairly involved in their child's education;
- has promoted citizenship as part of the school curriculum. This helps to develop pupils' formal knowledge of how political processes work, how decisions are made and how individuals can play a part. It also provides opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and action in their neighbourhoods and communities to change things for the better.
- has encouraged the setting up of school councils to give pupils a greater voice in the running of their schools;
- has set up the participation programme which ensures that children and young people have more say by engaging them in decision-making, influencing Government departments, supporting mechanisms through which their voices can be heard, encouraging their participation as full members of society, modelling good practice and funding the development of innovative approaches to participation.
- Sector Skills Councils are being established in each major sector to provide a voice for employers. These Councils will develop Sector Skills Agreements in consultation with the employers in their industries. They will provide a means by which the Learning and Skills Council, Regional Skills Partnerships and Learning providers can focus their resources and energies on delivering the skills that employers and the economy really need.