

Promoting achievement, valuing success: a strategy for 14-19 qualifications

Response by the Association of Directors of Children's Services

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) is pleased to submit this consultation response. ADCS is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services appointed under the provisions of the *Children Act 2004* and for other children's services professionals in leadership roles. The Association provides a national voice as a champion for children, with local and central government, and with the public.

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Introduction

The Green Paper '*Promoting achievement, valuing success*' sets out the government's intentions with respect to developing the qualification framework, as part of the larger transformational agenda set out in the 2005 White Paper '14-19 Education and Skills' and the 2007 Children's Plan.

The ADCS fully supports the principles of the transformation agenda for young people aged 14-19 and in particular the intention of the DCSF to transfer strategic commissioning and funding responsibility from the LSC to local authorities, to transfer responsibility for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to local authorities, to raise the participation age to 18, to review alternative provisions, and to ensure that the curriculum is fit for purpose; both from the point of view of young people, and of employers and providers of higher education.

The ADCS supports the development of the four key pathways for young people, and the intention to bring all qualifications within these pathways unless there is an over-riding reason not to do so.

The ADCS believes that the qualifications system should be made as simple as possible for young people, employers, and further and higher education users, with clear statements as to the meaning of the various qualifications, comparabilities between qualifications, and the currency of the various qualifications.

The ADCS supports the creation of a single body to advise the Secretary of State on whether qualifications meet the criteria set out, but believes that the proposed new body, the Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval, should be given a remit that causes it to avoid generating complexity, under the guise of sophistication, at all costs.

Diplomas

The ADCS fully supports the development of Diplomas, and believes that these are already taking shape with the active engagement of schools, colleges and local authorities. Much more work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the 2013 entitlement is met, and the ADCS cautions against over-estimating the capacity in the system at institutional or local authority level, at a time when there are already many other development activities underway. This is not to say that Diplomas cannot be effectively developed and delivered, but to ensure that the introduction is successful, schools, colleges and local authorities need to continue to be funded at an appropriate level for the development work to be undertaken.

The ADCS supports the bringing-in to the Diploma structure a number of existing vocational qualifications, as this leads to the desired simplicity, but care needs to be exercised to avoid implementing too rigid a framework thus imperilling the future of valuable and effective qualifications.

The ADCS absolutely supports the intention to give equal value to vocational and academic qualifications, and believes that this must be the central core of the new framework.

GCSEs and A levels

The ADCS supports the continuation of GCSEs and A levels until the full review of the whole framework in 2013. At that time, however, the ADCS believes that a single, unified, system should be introduced that genuinely ends the 'academic / vocational divide' and meets the needs of young people and their parents, employers, and higher education.

Apprenticeships

The ADCS believes that apprenticeships are capable of being a powerful, motivating and effective route to learning for many young people. The ADCS supports fully the notion of portability of qualification between the various key themes, for example, enabling an apprentice to progress to higher education.

The ADCS is concerned that the local availability of apprenticeships may be limited and that the types of apprenticeship available may be skewed to certain sectors; a national campaign by the National Apprenticeship Service would therefore be supported. The matching service will prove a logistical challenge, and again the ADCS counsels towards simplicity, with a single contact with young people as far as possible, ideally through schools and colleges rather than through a separate local agency.

The ADCS notes that, together, the employers sitting round the local Children's Trust table represent the largest employment sector in many areas, and that Children's Trusts will therefore have an important rôle to play as employers in providing apprenticeships.

The ADCS recognises that commissioning apprenticeships is not simply to do with the qualification and raining issue, but also the other ECM outcomes, and would counsel the National Apprenticeship Service to ensure that health, safeguarding, and participation are included in the commissioning framework, for example

The Foundation Learning Tier

The ADCS fully supports the intention to deliver the Foundation Learning Tier for those young people working below Level 2.

Ofqual

The key to the successful work of Ofqual is the development of '*a clear and transparent qualifications framework*', and ADCS supports the view that '*moving to a single credit-based framework for all 14-19 qualifications*' by 2013 will have significant benefits for all users.

The ADCS believes that local authorities should be effectively represented on Ofqual and that ADCS, as the representative body for statutory directors of children's services, has a rôle to play.

IAG and support

The ADCS supports the contention that high-quality IAG is critically important, and believes that the transfer of Connexions to local authorities, backed up by the requirement in the Learning and Skills Bill that advice be institutionally-neutral and geared solely to the needs of the young person, will support the development of excellent IAG provision.

The ADCS agrees fully that some young people need financial and other support, including for example mentoring and ongoing guidance, and that availability of such support is a key determinant of success.

The ADCS believes that there are important workforce and institutional development issues, and again raises the concern that these must be resourced properly in order to ensure effective implementation.

Remaining issues

The ADCS is concerned that unnecessarily early specialisation is avoided, and that young people should, so far as is practicable, be able to change track without undue bureaucracy and difficulty.

Specific questions

Chapter 2

Q1 Yes

Q2 Yes

Chapter 3

Q3 Yes

Chapter 4

Q4 The Extended Project is a potentially extremely powerful means of both promoting and assessing integrated learning. However, there will need to be sensitive means of ensuring that plagiarism and other forms of cheating enabled by the Internet are not allowed to develop.

Q5 a) Yes and b) Yes

Chapter 5

Q6 Both functional and other skills should be assessed in a way that is portable between Diploma and Apprenticeship routes, for example by credit units.

Chapter 6

Q7 Yes, this is critically important for these young people.

Chapter 7

Q8 Unequivocally yes; ADCS believes that this is an absolute requirement of a 'clear and transparent system'.

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