



NUT statement on 14-19 education:
meeting the needs of all children and young people in England

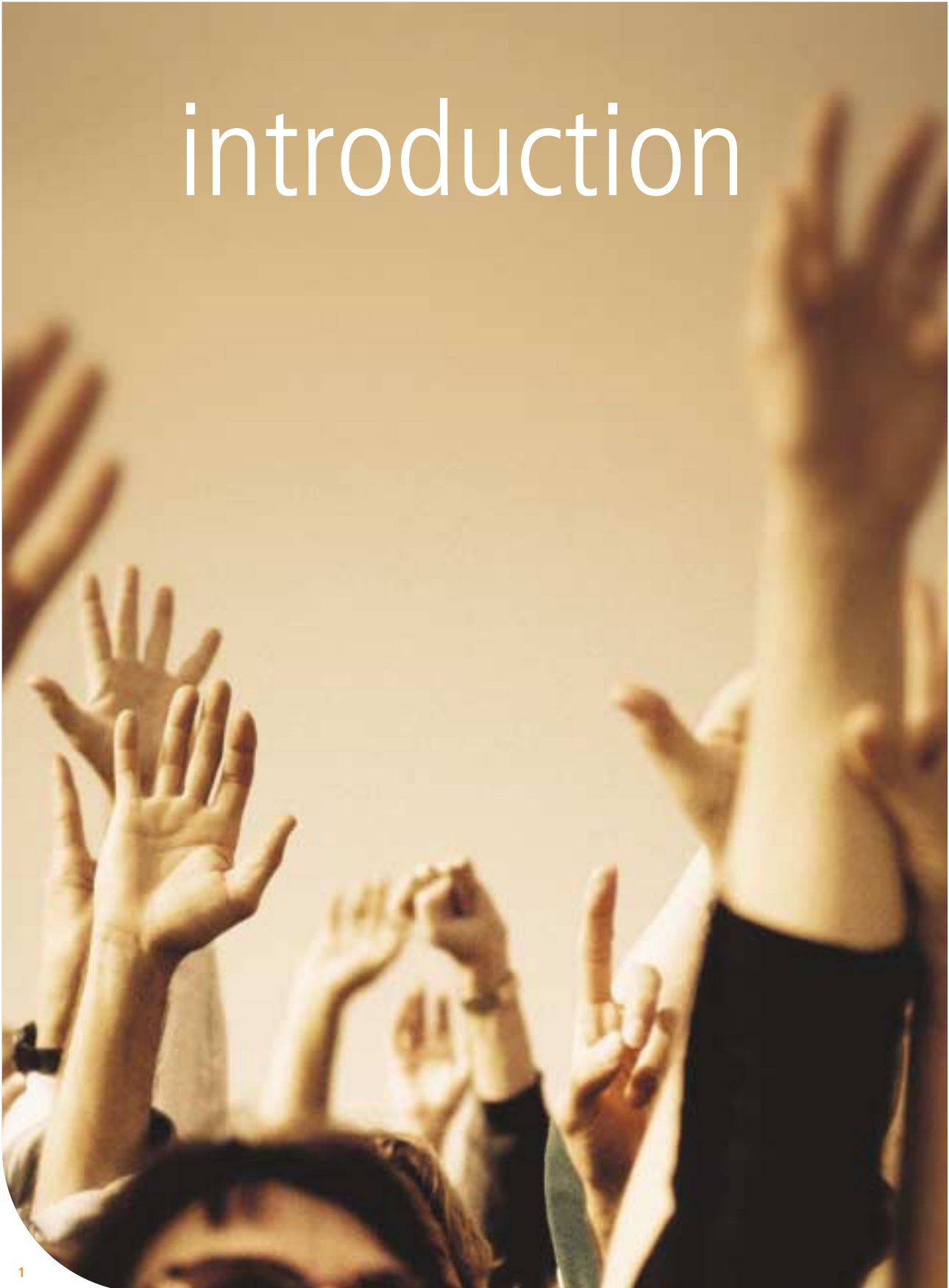
14-19

bringing
down
the barriers



bringing down the barriers to 14-19 education
introduction

introduction



Steve Sinnott,

General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers

Lifelong education is vital to both our society and the economy. It is central to the personal development and health of young people. Indeed, education plays a central role in the elimination of poverty. Globally many economies are developing exponentially. China and India, for example, are developing rapidly into major manufacturing powers. This is both a challenge to and an opportunity for our country.

It is vital therefore, that all the stakeholders in education develop and implement an effective policy for securing high quality 14-19 education arrangements. For any system of 14-19 education to be successful it must meet the needs and aspirations of all young people. In order that such arrangements guarantee equality of access to high quality education they must be provided within a publicly funded comprehensive education service.

The NUT supported the broad approach of the Tomlinson Report on 14-19 Education. The Union believes that Tomlinson outlined an opportunity which, while it has been missed for the moment, could yet be taken up by this Government or future governments. It is essential, however, that all those involved in, or who have an interest in education, evaluate the Government's post 14-19 arrangements and seek to ensure that those arrangements do not have the affect of disadvantaging any group of young people.

'Bringing Down the Barriers to 14-19 Education' sets out a range of proposals which the NUT believes will benefit young people in schools and colleges and to which the Government in England must give serious consideration. If adopted, these proposals would be supportive of an economy that was well placed to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the early 21st century. The NUT's proposals do not apply to Wales where the Welsh Assembly Government is developing its own 14-19 arrangements including a Welsh baccalaureate. The NUT fully supports such an approach.

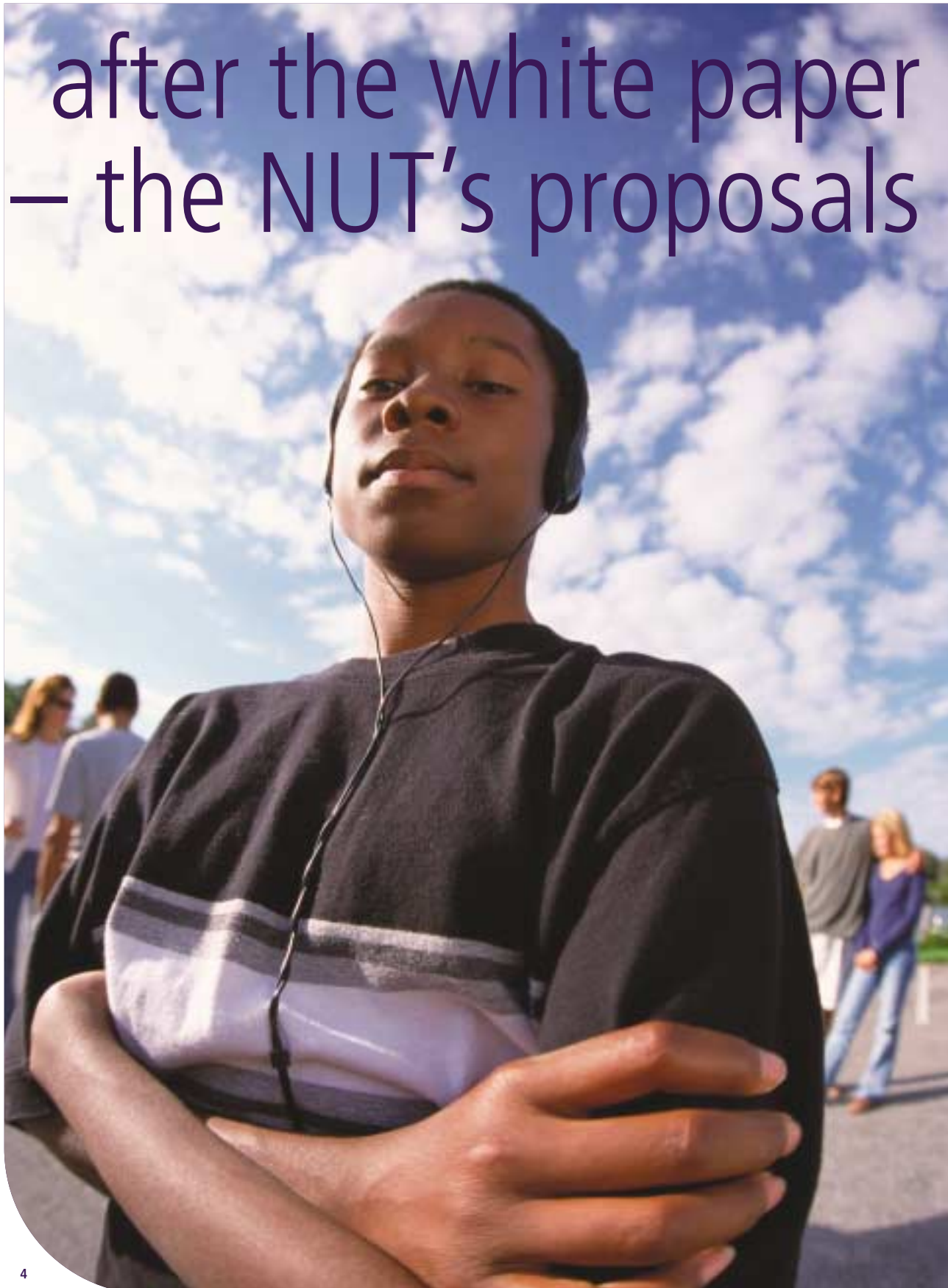
'Bringing Down the Barriers' emphasises that 14-19 reform cannot be bought on the cheap. One of the strengths of the Tomlinson Report was that it recognised that if effective 14-19 reform is to go ahead it requires an audit of training and staffing needs and also an audit of facilities. Like Tomlinson, the NUT believes that such an audit would necessarily mean a major commitment by the Government to increase investment in 14-19 education.

I believe that developments in 14-19 education can be taken forward only through the establishment of a social consensus for progressive change. The road to equality can be travelled only when it is understood that the success of this country depends on its young people receiving the highest possible quality of education and on their continuing enthusiasm for learning throughout their adult lives. The gender stereotyping and the academic and vocational divisions that impinge on the education of young people must be well and truly consigned to history.

Steve Sinnott

bringing down the barriers to 14-19 education

after the white paper – the NUT's proposals



Students must be able to keep their educational options open throughout 14-19 education

The Government's rejection to the Tomlinson Report's core proposal for a single Diploma has not closed down the debate on the future of 14-19 education in England.

Indeed the Government's proposed review of A level breadth, in 2008, has been heralded by some as the opportunity to press again the arguments for a single Diploma. Such a review may well open up a wider and more fundamental debate about the future of 14-19 education. The NUT believes, however, that the debate on the future of young people's learning should not be put on the 'back burner' until then.

There are developments now which provide real opportunities for all those

interested in ensuring equality of access and entitlement to education for all young people.

The distinctions between 'academic' and 'vocational' education are becoming more and more invidious. In its policy document, 'Road to Equality' (1996), the NUT highlighted the fact that teachers themselves reject the divisions between 'academic', 'vocational' and 'occupational' routes and support a curriculum and assessment system with "closely integrated knowledge, skills and experience".

The message from the teaching profession now, as it was then, is that, "Students must be able to keep their educational options open

throughout 14-19 education...", and that, "there should be a common core of study for all students which focuses on further development of core skills".

The specialist vocational Diploma that the Government is now proposing contains learning lines which highlight just how artificial are attempts to maintain distinctions between the 'vocational' and 'academic'. How, for example, can such labels be attached to titles such as: "Creative and Media"; "Public Services"; "Business Administration and Finance"; and "Health and Social Care"?

The new hybrid GCSEs will not succeed unless their mix of "vocational and academic

units" contains the continuity of a single discipline with a meaning, rationale and depth of learning, which makes taking these GCSEs worthwhile. In other words, it is precisely the fact that 'vocational' and 'academic' elements are distinct, that could undermine their credibility.

Yet the 'academic' and 'vocational' divide seems to be encouraged by the Government's decision to award the lead responsibility for diploma development to the Sector Skills Councils. The commitment by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to consult with teachers' associations on the Diploma content is welcome, but much more is needed. The introduction of the specialist learning lines

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themselves should have been subject to consultation with the teaching profession. As it is, the Government’s determination to put “the employers in the lead” within the Sector Skills Councils, can only lead to the conclusion that the teaching profession will play second fiddle in curriculum development to the employers.

It must be a key aim of all those who believe in the elimination of the academic/vocational divide to secure a genuine partnership between the teaching profession, Awarding Bodies, employers and the Government in the development of a framework of diplomas.

Despite the Government’s decision to lay down as non-negotiable the proposed specialist vocational Diploma, the discussion on the content of their learning lines and the related proposals for developing extended projects at AS probably represent the most fertile possibilities for productive discussion in the short-term.

Despite the attempts by Government to shift the ‘centre of gravity’ towards the employers in developing vocational qualifications, the fundamental fault line in the Government’s proposals lies elsewhere.

Tomlinson’s key aim in the Diploma was to provide a ladder of achievement for young people with each step accrediting their achievements. The purpose of the Diploma was to address the needs of all those young people whose achievements were below the 5 GCSE A*-C threshold by awarding a single meaningful qualification and opening up a range of routes for further learning. The aim of the Diploma, in short, was to prevent the haemorrhaging of young people, at 16, into the group known as the NEET; ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’.

The creation of a general GCSE Diploma, as part of the ‘14-19 Education and Skills’ White Paper, requiring the achievement of 5 A*-C grade GCSEs, including English and

Maths, flies in the face of that aim. Many youngsters will look at this rigid threshold and conclude that if they want a Diploma, their only route is through the specialist vocational route since that is the only route with a Foundation Level. Their attitude could be compounded by new and rigid functional literacy requirements for GCSE English. Many others could give up on GCSEs which they may have taken, such as those in the Arts or Humanities, because of their belief that they may not be able to achieve English and Maths at grade C or above.

Further, the conversion of the GCSE 5 A*-C baseline for school performance table purposes into a Diploma will mean that the cornerstone of secondary school examination performance tables is likely to be based on the number of general GCSE Diplomas achieved in each school. This may leave the needs of those likely to enter the ‘NEET’ – (Not in Employment, Education or Training) group in the same,

if not a worse, position than they were before.

Many young people with special educational needs; and those who experience real pressures to leave school at 16; or who have a specific interest in areas of learning not recognised by the new specialist Diploma, will not have a system configured around their needs, as the Government’s 14-19 proposals claim.

The solution to this problem is, of course, a diploma framework with integrated learning lines and a core curriculum entitlement. Given the Government’s response to the Tomlinson report, the short-term solution should be to consider the award of a Level 1 Foundation Award within the general GCSE Diploma. The NUT believes that the Government should combine this approach with an examination of the 14 proposed learning lines in the specialist Diploma. Such an examination would explore the extent to which those likely to be in the NEET group might face gaps in the

curriculum as a result of the Government's current proposals.

The NUT believes that the Government should set up a specific Working Group to examine the needs of youngsters who could face learning dead ends. The Working Group would examine also the feasibility and coverage of a level 1 foundation award for the General GCSE Diploma. Membership of this group should include teachers' associations, teaching support staff unions, the Learning and Skills Council, the Training and Development Agency, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Employer Organisations.

Alongside this approach, the NUT believes that there must be an urgent review of the curriculum offer currently available to young people at Key Stage 4. The NUT welcomed the current review of the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum. Its response has emphasised the importance of providing the right balance of flexibility of learning with

an entitlement to a balanced and broadly based curriculum. Currently, the Government envisages no such review at Key Stage 4.

The most obvious curriculum casualty of previous piecemeal reduction in the statutory curriculum at Key Stage 4 is Modern Foreign Languages. The disastrous dip in the take up of Modern Foreign Languages by youngsters at GCSE bodes ill, not only for Britain's future role in the European Union but also for Britain's place in the global economy and society.

Nowhere do Modern Foreign Languages or Community Languages appear in the proposed specialist Diploma learning lines. Modern Foreign Languages and Community Languages remain just another option amongst the range of GCSEs.

It is vital that the Government conducts a review of the curriculum at Key Stage 4, combined with an evaluation of the consistency, continuity and effectiveness of initiatives to

promote the learning of Modern Foreign Languages, including Community Languages, throughout the statutory curriculum.

Personalised learning has a long history based in part on child-centred learning and the need to differentiate teaching according to needs. Meeting the individual needs of each young person is an aspiration to which all those involved in education are committed. Young people need to be able to experience, and teachers need to be able to provide, much more one-to-one teaching.

As part of the development of personalised learning the Government should fund and pilot in schools and colleges personal tuition arrangements for students. This would involve enhancing the number of teaching and support staff. Personalised tuition has been shown to have a tremendous positive impact on the achievements of young people.

The concept of a guaranteed funded entitlement for all students should be included

within the pilot. Personal entitlements would also include, for example, a range of experiences and activities outside schools and colleges. Linked to work in school, these should include a minimum number of visits to museums, galleries, theatres, concerts and residential study in outdoor centres and visits abroad.

Any reform to the 14-19 phase would face a number of major operational challenges; not least the teaching professions' weariness with imposed reform. Since 1997, the post-16 examination system has been through almost continuous upheaval. The Curriculum 2000 reforms were controversial and the result of an uneasy compromise by an incoming government which did not adopt the more radical reforms proposed by Sir Ron Dearing. Other reforms have included the introduction of: apprenticeships; 'vocational' GCSEs; a revised Key Stage 4 Curriculum; and a new funding mechanism through the Learning and Skills Council for post-16 education.

after the white paper – the NUT's proposals

For these reasons, the NUT has argued consistently that a set of principles should govern any further examination and qualification reform. The NUT believes that the adoption of such principles cannot be optional or subject to 'cherry picking'. They were submitted to the Tomlinson review.

The NUT urges that the Government adopts the following principles prior to the roll-out of further 14-19 reform.

- The teaching profession should be leading partners in the reform process.
- There must be a proper, thorough, piloting period prior to the introduction of a new qualification.
- There must be sufficient funding for the preparation and introduction of a new qualification.
- There must be proper training for teachers which should not involve additional workload.

- Existing examination specifications should not be discarded wholesale.
- There should be a minimum ten-year lead-in period for the introduction of any new qualifications.

Both the Tomlinson Report and the Government have accepted the proposal for a ten-year lead-in time for examination reform. Without the adoption of all the above principles, however, the success of any reforms will be seriously jeopardised.

Within the Government's proposed timetable for its 14-19 reforms, the changes facing schools and colleges in 2008/09 appear particularly dramatic. Key amongst the Government intentions for that year, are the introduction of:

- the first tranche of the specialised Diploma to be taught in secondary schools and colleges;
- the implementation of the revised Key Stage 3 National Curriculum;

- the new English GCSE with functional skills;
- the introduction of the pupil profile; and
- the new extended project.

In addition, it appears that the Government's timescale does not include piloting prior to the introduction of the first tranche of the specialist vocational Diploma.

The 'bunching' of reforms facing secondary schools and colleges during the academic year 2008-09 is unacceptable.

A revised Key Stage 3 curriculum and the new 14-19 specialist Diploma should not be introduced in the same year. Such an introduction could repeat the turbulence that affected the introduction of the Curriculum 2000 reforms. This time, however, any turbulence would be compounded by initiatives such as the introduction of functional English at GCSE and the Pupil Profile.

It is essential, therefore, that the introduction of the first

tranche of the specialist vocational Diploma is delayed for at least a year and for 2008/09 to be set aside for a voluntary pilot of the Diploma, accompanied by a full evaluation of the pilot involving schools and further education institutions alongside unions representing teachers and lecturers.

Piloting of the new Diploma is essential for other reasons. The needs of those who are likely to be in the 'NEET' group and those with special educational needs will become clearer in the years up to 2008, as a result of the QCA's continuing research and piloting. The NUT believes that both the general GCSE and specialist vocational Diploma will need to converge and address the current qualifications' gap for those in the 'NEET' group in the Government's current proposals. In addition the Government will need to examine ways of ensuring that Higher Education values and recognises any new qualifications.

A further factor that must be taken account of in planning, is the growth of the 14-19 population in England. This is projected to peak at 3.29 million in 2006 and then fall to 2.97 million by 2020. Falling rolls present major opportunities for improving the amount of practical personalised learning available to all students.

For all the above reasons, the NUT would propose the establishment of an Implementation Body, which covers the next ten years of 14-19 reform. This proposal is set out in the NUT's Education Statement, 'Bringing Down the Barriers', and the introduction of such a body is now as important, if not more important. The current two advisory groups envisaged by Government, the 'delivery' and 'stakeholder' groups, cannot take on the job of overseeing reform over a ten-year period.

As a result of the ten-year lead-in period, no single Government can have the responsibility for

implementing a ten-year programme of reform. It is essential, therefore, that 14-19 reform should have continuity over time. A broad range of representation from teacher and support staff unions, the TUC, Learning and Skills Council, Universities and Industry to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Government and representatives of the Parliamentary Parties in England should be included on its membership. Its job would be to provide a forum and sounding board for any potential problems arising from the practical implementation of change. Its purpose would be to assist in establishing a social consensus for progressive change.

bringing down the barriers to 14-19 education

'bringing down the barriers' – the road to equality

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There should be a **single framework** of diplomas covering **the 14-19 continuum**

This document now focuses on the NUT's long-term proposals for reforming the 14-19 curriculum and qualifications arrangements. The NUT believes that its proposals should act both as an objective to be achieved and as a benchmark against which current Government reforms can be evaluated. When published originally, in 1996, they had enormous influence on policy development and thinking in the run-up to the Tomlinson Report as well as on the Tomlinson report itself.

The NUT believes that the arguments for a framework of diplomas are neither out of date nor irrelevant. Indeed, the developments and proposals, outlined by the NUT in the first section of

this document, highlight the fact that the Government's current proposals can be only a transition to the achievement of a modern and integrated system of 14-19 education which meets the educational needs of all young people, both in the 14-19 phase and in adult life. They are set out below.

A Framework of Diplomas for the Twenty-First Century

There should be a single framework of diplomas covering the 14-19 continuum. A diploma would be awarded when students have achieved one of three levels: The entry level; the intermediate level; and the advanced level.

As far as possible, and necessary, existing qualifications and specifications should be retained or adapted to conform to components of the new framework of diplomas at each level. To do so, would help to ensure manageability for students and teachers, and would assist understanding of the qualification.

Retaining specifications would also help to ensure that, during transitional and developmental stages towards a new framework of diplomas, no student who undertook existing courses would leave education with a devalued qualification prior to the adoption of a new framework.

The development of new diploma components from

existing qualifications and courses would need to be an evolutionary process. Teachers would need appropriate professional development to adapt their teaching and schemes of work to the changes that took place. It is vital that teachers themselves have ownership of curriculum and assessment development.

The NUT's framework of diplomas would encompass six core dimensions, consisting of:

- moral and spiritual awareness, including human rights and global citizenship and personal, social and health education;
- economic awareness;
- careers education;

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- environmental awareness;
- equal opportunities, including race and gender issues; and
- work and community experience.

The Entry Level Diploma – Level 1

This diploma would incorporate the achievements of all students who had not achieved five or more grades at A*-C at GCSE. Recognition of the achievements of those who are at Entry Level and, indeed, that are at Pre-Entry Level, would motivate young people to aspire to the Intermediate Level. The Entry Level diploma would be based on the same range of curriculum areas and skills as the Intermediate diploma and designed for the needs of individual students.

Intermediate Level Diploma – Level 2

The Intermediate Level would incorporate courses taken by 14-16 year olds who currently expect to pass a

range of GCSEs within broadly the A*-C range. This level would be an important step on the ladder of progression for the vast majority of students.

The Advanced Level Diploma – Level 3

As a qualification, the Advanced Level diploma would be a progression from the Intermediate Level. It would broadly encompass courses taken by 16-19 year olds.

The Advanced Level diploma would retain the core areas of knowledge and the integrated cross-curriculum skills of the Intermediate Level.

The framework of diplomas would be developed on an integrated basis. The distinction between the 14-16 and 16-19 age ranges would be solely an indication of when diplomas might be achieved by the majority of students. A minority of students could take Advanced Level modules pre-16 or study for the Intermediate diploma post-16.

Students would undertake three kinds of modules/units:

- **Core Modules:** these would represent a compulsory core curriculum. Students would select from each area, but would have a choice of modules/units.
- **Specialist Modules:** these modules/units would offer the possibility of an in-depth focus in one or more areas. Students would be able to choose their specialist modules.
- **Work/Community-Based Modules:** All students would undertake work experience or community modules.

Students would be free to choose a range of modules from the core areas. Teachers would encourage students to negotiate a coherent and integrated programme of theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as awareness and skills which cross the whole curriculum.

A modularised framework of diplomas would involve flexibility and allow achievement to be recorded in a modular form in one qualification. Each module would contribute to recognised achievement in other qualifications. The process of credit accumulation would contribute to the establishment of a stable balance between formative and summative assessment.

This approach would enable students with special educational needs to have the greatest possible access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Students with learning difficulties would have the opportunity to accumulate credits for qualifications without qualification barriers being in place.

Information, advice and guidance for students would be established in every secondary school in order that they could be given high quality advice on future education and career paths.

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There would be a key role in the development of better systems of advice and guidance for students that would be properly funded by Government. Quality guidance would be provided for progression routes from, for example the secondary sector into the further education sector.

Work experience would be an entitlement for all students. Vocational elements for 14-19 education would be integrated into the 14-19 Curriculum. There would be a common core of study for all students, which focused on the development of core skills.

A core curriculum and set of options should be developed which are designed to ensure that all young people retain an entitlement to a broad and balanced education which includes what are currently described as "vocational" and "general" elements. With more 14-16 year old young people undertaking Increased Flexibility courses in Further Education Colleges, it is important that the

effectiveness of these courses and work placements for students is evaluated. Sustainable funding should follow the planning and developing of Increased Flexibility programmes.

A Statutory Core Curriculum

The NUT believes that there should be six core curriculum areas as part of the diploma system. These areas, set in a global context and a human rights framework, should consist of:

- the linguistic and literary, including both English Language and Literature and Modern Foreign Languages including Community Languages;
- mathematical;
- scientific and technological;
- information and communications technology;
- aesthetic and creative, including art subjects and design, music, drama and expressive arts; and

- human, social and political, including humanities subjects, business, social care and political studies.

The curriculum would be defined in modules or units.

The development of high quality modular courses would ensure that a wide range of students, at different stages, will be able to take them up so that modularity reflected the maturity of students during the courses.

The modular approach would be curriculum-based and would be sufficiently flexible to enable students to progress and accumulate units of credit. The proposed modules or units would include the teaching of thinking and study skills.

Specific skills would be fully integrated into a statutory core curriculum which would include literacy, numeracy, ICT, science and technology, the creative arts, the humanities, including a knowledge of global

development and Modern Foreign Languages including Community Languages.

Students would be expected to choose, at a minimum, one specialist learning line which included vocational elements.

All young people should be given the opportunity to achieve up to Level 2 in mathematics and communication skills by the age of 19.

Wider skills should be embedded into all 14-19 programmes. Such skills would provide young people with more general skills that can provide a basis for the development of specific occupational skills at work. Indeed, all young people should have an entitlement to develop skills which are of benefit to their adult lives.

Wider activities or "informal learning" would be recognised in the framework of diplomas. The design a diploma would enable wider activities to be recognised positively by employers, universities and others.

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Assessment of the Diploma

The entry level diploma would be awarded on the basis of modules from the five curriculum areas previously described. The assessment of the modular system would include teacher assessment and effective moderation.

There is evidence that coursework requirements are becoming formulaic in some areas of GCSE. In addition, coursework demands in different subjects often overlap and have become repetitive. In the NUT's study of coursework, in 2003, one of the key areas that teachers wanted addressing was the issue of excessive workload for both teachers and students triggered by coursework demands. Additionally, the NUT study highlighted concerns about the integrity of assessment whereby coursework could be downloaded from the internet.

There is a case for reducing overlapping assessment

requirements. Assessment by teachers of students' work as it proceeds, envisaged by the Tomlinson Report, provides a very real potential for development. Proposals for an extended project should be developed on the basis that such a project should show independent research and study skills. The practicality of teachers working together to assess a student's work across departments and faculties where a student undertakes a project or challenge which crosses several curriculum areas, would have to be addressed. Time and resources would need to be available to enable students to take multi-disciplinary extended project work.

The system of credit accumulation would award students for each learning module which had been assessed. The approach to assessment through three levels would combine an appropriate mixture of continuous and synoptic assessment. A system of credit accumulation would allow students mobility

between institutions and provide flexible entry and exit points.

The experience of developing and using assessments in learning units which have been designed to be synoptic within the Curriculum 2000 developments may provide some indications of how course content can be assessed to establish students' knowledge, skills and understanding, without the need for detailed formal assessments of each individual aspect of courses.

There are a range of assessment methodologies, including e-assessment, which are appropriate to particular courses or programmes of study. Ongoing teacher assessment, integrated with modules within each level combined with synoptic assessment would validate overall achievement at each level.

Developments in e-assessment could offer new opportunities for assessing students' work although they should not restrict the nature

of questions or tasks. It would be important to ensure that assessment methodologies do not distort the nature of a subject and to ensure also that students were not penalised in terms of their learning outcomes solely as a result of a lack of ICT technical skills. Schools should certainly be funded to ensure that deficiencies in the availability of computer technology at home do not count against learning at school.

School Performance Tables still have a fundamentally distorting affect on how student achievement is described. School Performance Tables are not an inevitability and neither can they be an accurate measure of the achievement of students collectively within each school. The existence of thresholds, such as five GCSEs A* - C, exclude, not include, students in defining achievement. As the NUT has emphasised consistently, parents have the right to expect fair and accurate systems of accountability. A system based on school self-

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evaluation, combined with external checks on the rigour and accuracy of that evaluation, is a much better approach than School Performance Tables. In this context, it is worth noting that Denmark, after a country-wide OECD review of its education system, has made school performance tables illegal.

The Way Ahead

The NUT accepted broadly the Tomlinson proposals for 14-19 reform, including the development of a diploma framework. The refusal by Government to accept key aspects of the Tomlinson Reforms, including the single Diploma, was a mistake. Nevertheless, the NUT believes that there is much to play for within the next ten years in securing effective 14-19 reform which serves the needs of all young people and indeed our country. It believes that the proposals contained within this document are both practical and will serve the needs and interests of young people about to enter adult life.

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