



House of Commons Education and Skills Committee

Government Responses to (1) the Committee's Fifth Report, *14-19 Diplomas*, and (2) Eighth Report, *The future sustainability of the higher education sector: international aspects*; and Government and Ofsted Responses to the Committee's Sixth Report, *The Work of Ofsted*, of Session 2006-07

Fifth Special Report of Session 2006–07

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 8 October 2007*

HC 1033
Published on 15 October 2007
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Education and Skills Committee

The Education and Skills Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Education and Skills and its associated public bodies.

Membership at time Report agreed

Mr Barry Sheerman MP (*Labour, Huddersfield*) (Chairman)

Mr Douglas Carswell MP (*Conservative, Harwich*)

Mr David Chaytor MP (*Labour, Bury North*)

Jeff Ennis MP (*Labour, Barnsley East & Mexborough*)

Paul Holmes MP (*Liberal Democrat, Chesterfield*)

Helen Jones MP (*Labour, Warrington North*)

Fiona Mactaggart MP (*Labour, Slough*)

Mr Gordon Marsden MP (*Labour, Blackpool South*)

Mr Andrew Pelling MP (*Conservative, Croydon Central*)

Stephen Williams MP (*Liberal Democrat, Bristol West*)

Mr Rob Wilson MP (*Conservative, Reading East*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/edskills/

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Lloyd (Clerk), Sarah Thatcher, (Second Clerk), Nerys Roberts (Committee Specialist), Katie Phelan (Committee Assistant), Susan Ramsay (Committee Secretary), and John Kittle (Senior Office Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education and Skills Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6181; the Committee's e-mail address is edskillscom@parliament.uk

Fifth Special Report

The Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2006–07 (14-19 Diplomas) on 17 May 2007.¹ The Government's response was received on 26 July 2007, and is published as Appendix 1 to this Report.

The Committee published its Eighth Report of Session 2006–07 (The future sustainability of the higher education sector: international aspects) on 5 August 2007.² The Government's response was received on 3 October 2007, and is published as Appendix 2 to this Report.

The Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2006–07 (The Work of Ofsted) on 12 July 2007.³ The Government's and Ofsted's responses were received on 11 September 2007, and are published as Appendices 3 and 4 to this Report.

1 Fifth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07, *14-19 Diplomas*, HC 249.

2 Eighth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07, *The future sustainability of the higher education sector: international aspects*, HC 285-I and II.

3 Sixth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07, *The Work of Ofsted*, HC 165.

Appendix 1

Government's response to the Fifth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07

The Committee's conclusions and recommendations are in bold text. The Government's response is in plain text.

Recommendation 1 and 2 (grouped)

1. The disappointment many expressed after the Government decided not to fully implement Tomlinson's proposals—which had strong support—has not yet dissipated. Like others at the time, we felt that the creation of the unified, overarching Diploma award proposed by Tomlinson held the promise of a less hierarchical, less complex, and ultimately more coherent qualification system for young people. We remain concerned that the Government's decision to introduce 14 new discrete Diplomas, each at three different levels, has the potential to compound existing problems of over-complexity and stratification of qualifications, and may just cement existing hierarchies.

2. One of Tomlinson's achievements was establishing a large and pressing consensus for change. This still exists. Now the Government has embarked on its chosen route, most appear to be taking the pragmatic and positive stance that what is important is ensuring the Diplomas are of a high quality, and are a complete success. We understand and welcome that approach, but we believe that the changes to the 14-19 curriculum would have been better structured and more coherent had Tomlinson's proposals been adopted.

We fully acknowledge Sir Mike's achievements, and have built on his major recommendations, such as need for a strong core to all young people's learning, increasing stretch and challenge at all levels and a radical transformation of the vocational pathways available to young people. Whilst Sir Mike Tomlinson himself would acknowledge his disappointment that we did not implement in full his proposals, he recognises that we are implementing the majority and have gone further in some respects e.g. reform of KS3.

We believe that far from compounding over-complexity, Diplomas will provide a coherent and clear set of choices for young people alongside the A Level and apprenticeship routes.

3. There is an enduring risk that a programme as complicated as Diplomas could face problems and it would have been disingenuous for the Minister to pretend that this was not the case. However, having made the decision to pursue the line it has taken, the very least that can be expected is for the Government to invest its full energy into making the reforms work. It is now imperative that ministers deliver strong leadership, by displaying the courage to intervene swiftly to address identified problems and showing public commitment to producing programmes of the highest quality.

The Government is fully committed to the Diplomas initiative. And the Government is not alone—a great many people across the spectrum, from employers to teachers, support the Diplomas and want to make them work. Involving so many people in different ways makes for a major, complex and radical reform. We were, and are, under no illusions. Changing

the face of 14-19 learning in this way was never going to be easy, but despite the scale, we are on track to deliver.

We should also reflect on how far we've come in such a short time. Qualification development is not easy. Despite tight timescales, all qualifications have been delivered on time. This is a testament to the dedication and expertise of all partners who have worked effectively together to endorse, submit and accredit them so that we will soon have real qualifications that people will be able to see and a real programme of development to support delivery.

Ministers keep a constant check on progress, taking account of all aspects of the work, so that I can be confident that it is coming together in the right way. We have systems, operating across our partners, to constantly review our state of readiness and assess the level of risk associated with first teaching in 2008.

The size of the task shouldn't deflect us from the goal—a uniquely coherent qualification, designed by employers—which will improve the life chances of many learners.

4. Our view is that the Government's decision to consider A levels in isolation in its 2008 review is a missed opportunity. More would be gained from considering A levels in their wider context, and in particular, in the light of experience of the Diplomas, which will have just started in September 2008. We would urge the Government to consider rescheduling the review and changing its terms of reference so that it can consider A levels in their wider context and after more known about how Diplomas are working in practice.

We are aware of the issues in relation to the proposed A level review and will take account of the views reflected in the Select Committee's report as we take the review forward.

5. It is far from clear that those in charge of developing the different Diplomas share a common understanding of the kinds of learning they will demand and the purposes they will serve. We welcome the introduction of more practical learning into the curriculum but there is a risk that the pressure over time will be to introduce more and more desk-based, theoretical material into practical, vocational curricula in pursuit of parity with academic qualifications. It is important that this is guarded against in the case of the Diplomas, and we will be looking for evidence that the new programmes contain sufficient practical content to motivate and appeal to learners who may be ill-served by academic courses.

We are confident that those in charge of developing the Diploma share a common vision of Diplomas. Diplomas will be a unique blend of theoretical and practical learning that gives young people the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge which are truly relevant and really valued by employers, and which will help them continue in learning to the highest level they can achieve.

The mandatory principal learning component of the Diploma states that at each level, a minimum of 50% must be concerned with the application of skills and knowledge through tasks, problems and situations that are related to work in that sector. Assessment approaches must reflect the applied.

6. The DfES must ensure there is a real, shared understanding of the kinds of learning and teaching that Diplomas will involve among those responsible for their design, development and delivery. Consensus on this should have been established at the outset and the failure to do this it is a matter of deep concern to us. Secondly, and with some urgency, the Department must decide on a coherent and easily communicable definition of Diplomas. Communications must not further complicate what is already a complicated award, and must encapsulate what is different and distinctive about Diplomas, compared to existing routes.

The Government recognises the importance of developing a clear shared understanding of what is distinct and different about the applied learning route that Diplomas offer. We have been working closely with a range of partners in developing the Diplomas to make sure that Diplomas will offer a genuine and attractive alternative to traditional learning routes for 14-19 year olds.

There has been a lot of good work done already to inform and raise awareness amongst all audiences, using various innovative methods. These include appearances on Teachers TV which have been very well received, and excellent work by the DDPs, such as the DVD produced for the Construction and Built Environment Diploma. We are sending monthly newsletters to partner organisations, delivery consortia and HE institutions. We also provide updates on our website. We have held nationwide and regional conferences to get our message across, and we have core messages agreed by all partners and used in communications and presentations.

Inevitably the language of qualification development has been technical, but now that we are a stage where it is appropriate to communicate more widely about Diplomas, particularly to young people and their parents, we will bring the Diploma to life through illustrative case studies and clear examples of progression routes. We have already produced a short leaflet on Diplomas that has had widespread coverage, and materials for schools and colleges to use in their own marketing. At national level we will reinforce local activity with national and regional marketing.

We will be monitoring awareness and understanding of Diplomas through a tracking survey every six months.

7. It is absolutely essential that the first Diploma cohort is very limited in size, and that thereafter expansion takes place at a slow and controlled rate, with sufficient time for development and assessment. Too often in the past, initiatives have been rolled out too quickly, with serious negative effects on quality. The Government says it will place quality above all other considerations, and intends to take a measured approach: we very much welcome this, and will look for evidence that this is happening in practice.

A key element of the Diplomas is the planned management of the roll-out in a gradual way, ahead of full delivery in 2013.

The Department is committed to securing the highest quality consortia to deliver the Diploma from 2008.

In the first phase, announced on 28 March, there will be 145 consortia across 97 Local Authorities, delivering 250 diploma lines from September 2008. The number of forecast

learners is 38,000. Ten consortia will be delivering all five diploma lines from 2008. This represents less than 25% of the bids submitted. A further 112 consortia were recommended for deferred approval to deliver in 2009. The remainder, representing around half the bids, would need to reapply. The applications were subject to a thorough assessment to ensure that only the highest quality were successful. The Department is providing extensive support and training to consortia to ensure that they deliver the highest quality from day one.

We will also be evaluating the first year of the Gateway process in designing arrangements for future years. At present we envisage further Gateway exercises, although the details will be dependent on the results of the evaluation and the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. We are looking at options for staging the rollout arrangements up to 2013.

8. The Diploma development process has clearly been frustrating for many of those involved, and it is commendable that progress has been made in spite of this. The new Diploma development partnership approach—with Sector Skills Councils and employers in the lead—has been experimental, and also highly complex, on account of the number of players involved. At the same time, we are concerned that there appears to have been too little direct involvement in or feedback from small and medium-sized employers who have an important part to play in setting a climate of business acceptance of the new Diplomas. We recommend focused attention is given to involving them more prior to the launch of the pilots.

The Government recognises the importance of involving SMEs as we move forward with Diplomas. Involving and engaging SMEs is key to both business acceptance of the Diplomas and delivery of work-related learning elements within Diplomas.

SMEs have been engaged through the DDPs, have responded to consultation questionnaires and attended events, and are represented individually or through various professional associations. Phase 1 and 2 are in the process of developing and delivering employer engagement strategies and SMEs are a key target group.

9. The question remains as to whether more use could and should have been made of existing ‘tried and tested’ qualifications such as BTECs at the outset. What appears to have happened is that a ‘blank slate’ approach has been adopted, with the promise that convergence between the Diplomas and other awards would occur at a later stage. While we appreciate that the aim was to create something new and radical, this nevertheless seems wasteful to us and makes it likely that old lessons will have to be learned again. We urge DfES and the awarding bodies to develop urgently a strategy to make clear how existing qualifications can fold into and relate to the new Diplomas, and to spell out the equivalence and transfer possibilities of existing qualifications.

We did not start out by requiring or expecting that all Diplomas would be designed from scratch as wholly new programmes, rather than utilising existing qualifications. Indeed, it was our expectation that DDPs in at least some sectors would want to make considerable use of units and content from existing qualifications. The first five DDPs reached the conclusion that starting from scratch was the right thing to do in order to make the most of

the opportunity, and we warmly welcome the innovative and engaging content that has emerged as a result on the Principal Learning component of the Diploma.

We recognise that many employers, providers and young people value some existing vocational qualifications. While it is essential to retain the purpose of Diplomas as education programmes, we do not want to lose the characteristics of those vocational qualifications which make them motivating for young people and valued by employers. So we are currently working with the QCA to map the current qualification offer against Diplomas to consider how we may retain those positive features and elements of vocational qualifications within the Diploma structure.

10. It is a matter of concern that awarding bodies have been given such little time to turn the specifications from the first five Diploma Development Partnerships into workable qualifications which are tied to coherent learning programmes. As with teachers and lecturers, awarding bodies should have been more consistently involved in development work from an early stage; had they been, it is possible that some of the problems that later arose—for example, the unexpected reworking of Diploma content which was undertaken in order to bring about consistency across Diploma lines—could perhaps have been avoided.

We have always listened carefully to what the awarding bodies, alongside other partners, have to say. In the development process we have brought them into the programme structures, addressing many of their concerns, and we will continue to engage in discussion with them, to maintain their commitment and maximise our chances of getting the reforms right.

11. As it stands, very complicated and detailed work has, in the case of the first five Diploma lines, been uncomfortably compressed. We very much hope that the learning programmes and qualifications which emerge will be of a high-enough quality to be accepted by the groups that matter: students, employers, HE and, of course, those who will deliver them—teachers and lecturers. Understandably given that awarding bodies began qualification development so late in the day, awarding arrangements and longer-term quality assurance procedures are not yet well developed.

QCA has played a key role in making sure the essential high quality of learning programmes and qualifications is delivered for the first five Diploma lines by instigating a rigorous quality process with awarding bodies.

This has involved QCA in early and on-going dialogue with awarding bodies to provide support and guidance during the qualification development process. To make sure this guidance was robust; subject sector experts were engaged via the Association of Colleges. This dialogue has been further supported by a review panel for each line of learning which included individuals experienced in the delivery of qualifications, QCA and the Diploma Development Partnerships. QCA have also taken views from the HE community to make sure that the Diploma will enable progression to an HE programme of study.

12. It also appears that although full pilots for certain elements of the Diplomas—such as the functional skills units—will have begun in September 2007, the full evaluation of the pilots will not be complete before first teaching begins in September 2008. This is a matter of concern given previous commitments the Government has made to this

Committee about ensuring qualifications are properly piloted and evaluated before implementation. We would urge that when the evaluation of the pilots is complete, urgent consideration be given as to whether the current split of the proposed 14 Diplomas into three sub-sets of qualification level, making 42 in all, is likely to prove unduly complex and jeopardise acceptance by employers, universities and others.

Each of the Diplomas will be evaluated over three academic years following their introduction, that is, from 2008–11, 2009–12 and 2010–13. Schools and colleges will need to decide at what point they will be ready to offer Diplomas. Those institutions wishing to offer one or several of the Diplomas in the pilot phase will need to pass through a gateway process, which will assess their readiness to do so and help them plan for the full introduction of Diplomas across their area

The Department has prepared a comprehensive evaluation framework to encompass the design, implementation and delivery of the Diploma. The evaluation will be carried out by independent researchers and will inform the roll out of Diplomas in readiness for the introduction of the national entitlement in 2013. The Department's 14-19 implementation plan set out the commitment to a three year programme of evaluation for each implementation phase of the Diplomas to allow analysis across each Diploma line of learning.

The evaluation will consider the policy impact of Diplomas: the extent to which the implementation of Diplomas succeeds in achieving progress towards key targets of participation and attainment as well as providing an appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of young people and contribute to improving their ground in English, maths, ICT and skills for employment while also supporting progression to higher education. The other areas for evaluation include: considering the effectiveness of the Diploma design as a new type of qualification that will provides the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of young people, industry and higher education; assessing the implementation processes and understanding the factors that contribute to the outcomes associated with Diplomas; and the value that key stakeholders, including employers, higher education and young people and their parents come to place on the Diploma.

Although the evaluation is required to capture the impact of Diplomas from development to national entitlement, it will be phased so that regular reporting will inform both the development and implementation of subsequent phases and full roll out.

Functional skills will be piloted from 2007–09, but these qualifications have been trialled and evaluated and are accredited qualifications.

13. We are concerned that in relation to some aspects of Diplomas—for example, on the issue of grading—there does not yet appear to be consensus between partners on the approach which should be taken, or even what still remains to be done. We believe it is important that the higher education sector should be more closely involved in this process, so that the acceptance of diplomas as an alternative pathway for some into HE is not compromised.

All partners are agreed that learner achievement in the Diploma will be graded. Once all the requirements have been met—i.e. all components have been achieved—a final grade

will be calculated from the evidence of the principal learning and the project. In some cases there may be appropriate prior achievement of components.

QCA published a document in March, *Assessing and grading of the Diploma*, which set out the assessment principles for all levels of the Diploma.

HEIs are an integral part of the development of Diplomas. Each Diploma Development Partnership has had representatives from HE working with them as they have developed the content of the Diplomas and to ensure that the qualifications are designed with progression from Level 3 into higher education.

The HE Engagement Board is sponsoring a number of projects that will examine in some detail the progression from Diplomas to HE programmes. For example, the 1994 Group has a 12 month project to map Diplomas against HE curricula to identify gaps and changed skill sets, and to inform HE curriculum change. The information on the full Diploma qualification will be available in September 2007. HEIs will then be in a position to publish their indicative admissions policy in principle with regard to Diploma applicants for 2010 entry, and UCAS will commence the process of determining the tariff points for the Diplomas, the result of which will be known in early 2008.

14. It is unfortunate that, given the obvious scale and complexity of the Diploma programme, coherent end-to-end management, governance and reporting arrangements were not established within the DfES from the outset. We believe that there was a failure to appreciate the sheer scale and complexity of the challenge in hand. Our understanding is that now—five months from the point where the awards should be ready and workforce development is due to begin—a permanent project manager for the Diplomas has finally been appointed, who will have oversight of all management aspects. We also recognise that new arrangements have been put in place at the senior strategic and governance level, whereby Chief Executives of all the relevant agencies—including awarding bodies—meet regularly. It is crucial too that regular ministerial input and oversight of the new management arrangements should remain at the strongest and highest level possible, to ensure that the priority and delivery of diplomas within the Department’s overall workload does not slip.

We did not underestimate the scale of the challenge involved in delivering a programme of this nature successfully. This was a new and unprecedented programme of work when it was started. The initial set up was logical and sensible. As with any new programme, we kept the arrangements under review.

There has always been a senior civil servant in charge of Diploma development. Management has always been part of a coherent end-to-end 14-19 programme. We have adapted and will continue to adapt our governance arrangements in the light of lessons learned.

We have always had robust plans and governance arrangements for the programme—and for Diplomas in particular—and we keep them continually under review. We adapt our approach where we identify gaps, and to ensure it is fit for purpose as we move through the phases of the programme.

We are confident that we have management structures in place which deliver good quality qualifications and an effective delivery infrastructure for the introduction of the Diplomas in 2008. We have a senior Project Manager with the authority to set work requirements across any part of the delivery chain, oversight by my officials at the highest level, and, most critically, genuine commitment from all partners to make this reform work.

15. Given all the concerns that have been expressed to us about whether the Diplomas are ready to be introduced, and the uncertainty about what the Diplomas are designed to achieve—whether they are vocational or practical or academic—the initial phase is vitally important. The Secretary of State said in evidence that 2008 is the “pilot stream.” The Government needs to ensure that it is genuinely a pilot, and if problems are not resolved, or if further problems emerge, then the wider roll out should be delayed or reviewed in order to prevent the failure of the Diplomas.

Each of the Diplomas will be evaluated over three academic years following their introduction, that is, from 2008–11, 2009–12 and 2010–13. Schools and colleges will need to decide whether they want to offer any Diplomas during roll out phase and at what point they will be ready to do so. Those institutions wishing to offer one or several of the Diplomas will need to pass through a gateway process, which will assess their readiness to do so and help them plan for the full introduction of Diplomas across their area.

16. We have been impressed by the dedication and commitment shown by those who are already well advanced with collaborative work. It will be extremely important that the lessons of areas already working in this way are fully absorbed and effectively disseminated if Diplomas are to be successful. What is more, it is preferable that only those areas with significant experience of joint working to date are involved in the early stages of implementation.

It is good that the Committee has recognised the importance of collaboration so young people can be offered a good range of high-quality programmes. We have made available a good deal of good practice on partnership and collaborative working. The Committee referred to the popular programme of Learning Visits where those who are less well advanced can learn from those that are. We are extending this programme with those who have the most to do to be ready being prioritised for support.

The Gateway process has proved an effective way of ensuring that those institutions that are most experienced at working together to deliver quality applied education will go first. We have set up a Twinning Project between 2008 consortia and the Department which will help to further facilitate learning across the system. Lessons learned in the first years will be shared across all areas.

17. While good practice exists, it is clear that many local areas are some way away from the kinds of working that will be required to successfully deliver Diplomas—especially, those which have not been involved in 14-19 Pathfinders. The National Audit Office is currently undertaking a review to establish the scale of preparedness and the barriers to implementation in local areas. This is extremely welcome and we would encourage the LSC and the DfES to take full heed of the findings in planning for Diploma implementation.

Like the Committee, we welcome the work that NAO are doing in this area. We have had initial conversations with NAO about their work, and have provided background information as requested. We will continue to support their review over the coming months and we look forward to receiving their report later in the year.

18. It is vital that as many providers as possible in an area are actively and meaningfully involved in local 14-19 partnerships. The statutory requirement in the Education Act 2006 for schools to collaborate is very welcome for that reason. However, the effect of some other policy levers is contradictory. In particular, it is hard to see how individual institutional performance tables will offer a meaningful measure in a collaborative system, or immediately reward those that adopt a collegiate approach. If collaborative approaches to 14-19 provision are to become the norm, the Government needs to look again at the mechanisms for recognising achievements in collaborative provision. Existing tensions need to be resolved, or they risk seriously undermining the welcome messages in recent rhetoric about the importance of collaboration and the adoption of shared responsibility.

The greatest incentive to collaborate is the commitment to providing a clear choice of appropriate and high quality learning routes for young people. As the Committee has highlighted, lots of good collaboration exists already under the current arrangements. This is underpinned by the legislative entitlement, which places a duty on schools to provide access to the Diplomas and provides a further driver and guarantee for young people.

14-19 Partnerships will be made up of individual, autonomous institutions working together. Collaboration between such institutions will not be impeded by being held accountable for learner performance in the Achievement and Attainment Tables.

We believe that Diplomas will raise standards by providing a coherent learning programme that will engage a wide range of learners. Therefore schools and colleges will be incentivised to engage in collaborative arrangements to ensure their learners follow the most appropriate course; which will increase learner choice meaning better outcomes.

Results achieved by pupils will still be reported against the 'home' institution. In retaining individual institutional accountability, the home institution will be encouraged to ensure other provision within its consortium is of a high quality and raises standards. We are also looking at methods to ensure consortia based performance is of a high quality and consortia take collective responsibility for learner outcomes.

We are also developing the post-16 progression measure as a way of recognising schools for supporting their students to make good choices of post-16 courses and helping to make sure the whole cohort receives full and impartial information and guidance about their post compulsory options. This will encourage partnerships to think collectively about all the young people in their area, and work together to ensure they have access to the right provision and the support to make a good decision.

19 and 20 grouped

19. We are pleased that the Government is actively consulting on aspects of the funding arrangements for Diplomas, and has explicitly recognised that the current systems are unlikely to be sufficiently robust to support successful Diploma delivery. We are also

pleased that the proposals to use a common funding model for 16–18 learners whether in schools or in colleges are being taken forward. We look forward to the outcomes of these consultations.

20. Given the emphasis being placed on 14-19 as a distinct phase, and the centrality of funding in driving provision, we were initially disappointed that the option of creating a single 14-19 funding system appeared not to be being considered further. The creation of a single funding system for 14-19 learners may indeed present significant legal and practical challenges, as the Government asserts, but the potential rewards of a single system could also be very significant indeed. We therefore welcome the Secretary of State’s later clarification that a single 14-19 funding system may still be considered in the medium-term, after the next Comprehensive Spending Review period and recommend that they make an explicit commitment to analysing the likely benefits and costs of such an approach.

We welcome the positive response from the Committee to our consultation on changes to pre and post 16 funding systems to support the delivery of Diplomas.

The fundamental challenge is to ensure that funding systems create the environment for the collaboration needed at area level and between schools and partner providers to deliver the Diploma entitlement to a consistent standard of quality, and making optimum use of the learning resources within an area.

We will be carefully evaluating the impact of the new funding arrangements for 08-09 to ensure that they are facilitating collaboration as intended.

Any longer term changes to 14-19 funding arrangements will be considered in the context of the transition of funding for 16-18’s in School Sixth forms and colleges to LAs announced as part of the Machinery of Government changes. This will be subject to consultation, ensuring there will be no disruption to schools and colleges and the introduction of Diplomas, and the passage of the necessary legislation.

21. We remain unconvinced by the Government’s argument that the ‘choice’ and self determination agenda gels completely with the more co-ordinated and planning-led approach necessitated by Diplomas.

Encouraging quality and encouraging greater diversity of provision is fully compatible with the development of effective local partnerships and planning for the needs of an area. Since institutions cannot individually offer all the opportunities that 14-19 year olds need, there is a strong incentive for institutions to pool their strengths for the good of all young people in the area.

Our “presumption” policies allow high performing institutions to expand, adding to the high quality resources available to partnerships. It is therefore important that discussions about new provision are carried out within the local planning framework. As part of our guidance to institutions qualifying for the sixth form and FE presumptions, we encourage them to enter into early discussions with the local authority, LSC and local partners to ensure that new provision fits with the local pattern of provision.

22. The DfES says it will be up to local authorities to ensure a joined-up approach, and that they have the strategic responsibility for ensuring coherence. Some have leapt at the challenge, and are effectively supporting joint working in their area. However, our evidence suggests that not all local authorities currently see themselves as having this role. The DfES needs to send a clear message that local authorities have the responsibility to co-ordinate local provision, and crucially, ensure they have the means to do so. We have said above that incentives in the system which promote competition must be revisited: it should not be up to local authorities, or a few particularly enthusiastic institutions, for that matter, to ‘square the circle’. The DfES also needs to monitor the effectiveness of LSCs in supporting partnerships, given its recent restructuring.

Local authorities, LSC, Schools, colleges and training providers will all be accountable for their contributions to delivery but Local Authorities play the role of strategic leader. Their role is critical as the integrators of services for children up to the age of 19. We have set out in guidance the role we expect local authorities to take—as strategic leaders within their areas—and reinforced this through local government performance discussions.

Through the 14-19 Progress Checks every LA is undertaking a self assessment which helps them to think through what they need to do to prepare. Areas that have the furthest to go to get ready for the 14-19 reforms are being prioritised for support—particularly with collaboration.

The LSC’s organisational restructuring is designed to provide local LSC teams at partnership level who will work closely with Local Authorities and 14-19 partnerships to help their development and success. The LSC will continue to provide support to Consortia as they prepare for 2008 delivery. Following Machinery of Government changes announced on 29 June and subject to consultation, funding for school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and the contribution of FE colleges to the 14-19 phase will transfer to local authorities’ ring fenced education budgets. We will be taking this forward in consultation with the LSC and ensuring no disruption to Consortia.

23. The multi-site, multi-institutional nature of Diploma delivery inevitably raises significant management challenges around timetabling, transportation, and the monitoring of a mobile student population. These challenges should not be underestimated—particularly in rural areas where institutions may be located considerable distances apart and travel between multiple institutions may be prohibitively costly, or impractical. However, some areas—and particularly those which have been involved in the Increased Flexibility and 14-19 Pathfinder programmes—now have significant experience of dealing with these challenges in constructive ways. It is vital that their experience is built on, and we see some positive signs that the DfES is doing this—for example, by facilitating ‘learning visits’ and the publication of best practice materials. We also hope the National Audit Office’s report will suggest ways in which best practice from more advanced areas can be more effectively shared.

In general Diplomas will be delivered collaboratively by schools, colleges, and work-based learning providers in consortia. This collective approach inevitably calls for considered and innovative management across any consortium in order to ensure that young people can access Diplomas, taking into account the best approach for the local circumstances. What

the best approach might be will, of course, vary from place to place. There are obvious differences between the way in which an urban area with a small geographical spread of institutions and a rural area with highly dispersed institutions and population might approach the transportation of young people—for example through different decisions about timetabling, e-learning, or peripatetic teaching staff.

We know that many local authorities are now developing their plans and strategies for the roll out of Diplomas in 2008 and beyond. Many—including those from the Pathfinder programme—have mature, developed partnerships; others are developing quickly in response to the need to develop better routes for young people. As the Committee acknowledges, the recognition of this distinction has led us to set up the very successful Learning Visits. We also know that other areas are sharing practice informally without going on a formal Learning Visit. The Department will continue to facilitate the sharing of good practice in this area, so that local areas can develop bespoke solutions that respond to the particular circumstances of each consortium.

24. The Diploma Gateways, in principle at least, look likely to play an essential role in the success of the reform programme if they set consistently high standards which are independently applied, and they should also provide a safeguard against an overly hasty roll-out. We welcome the Minister's emphasis that the Diploma Gateway process needs to be rigorous, and set high quality thresholds. At the time of writing, the results of the application process have only just been announced. It is therefore still too early to speculate on the effectiveness of the Gateways as arbiters of quality, but this is an area over which we intend to keep a watching brief.

An evaluation of the first Diploma Gateway has taken place, and the lessons learned are being fed into the preparations for the next Gateway. The Department is keen to ensure that quality is maintained and has set up support and monitoring arrangements to ensure that consortia continue their preparations to deliver Diplomas to the highest standard from September 2008. Where preparations are falling behind, or the necessary quality is not guaranteed, the Department will agree remedial action with a consortium.

25. After the announcement of decisions on the first round of applications to the Gateway, the DfES committed to giving detailed feedback to particular areas on the reasons for their success or failure. We understand that this has now taken place. This is welcome, but more publicly available information on the criteria and standards which Diploma Gateways are applying would be welcome, both to help potential applicants, and also to provide reassurance that gateways are setting consistent, and consistently high, benchmarks.

The Department has published the features of successful self-assessments, and this document was also given to consortia as part of their feedback. It gives examples under each of the five criteria (collaboration; facilities; workforce; information, advice and guidance; and employer engagement) from successful applications. It is also available on the Department's website. Evaluation of the first gateway has also highlighted a general wish for more transparency in the assessment process along with more comprehensive guidance. The Department is considering how best to do this for Gateway 2.

It should be said that the feedback from the first Gateway process has been almost universally positive, with a very low number of appeals. The process and communications of outcomes have all worked well, and we have on the whole retained the engagement of those who did not get through the Gateway as well as those who did.

26. The DfES needs to make clear what plans are underway to develop the capacity of those responsible for guiding young people through the many different options which will be available to them from the age of 14. It also needs to demonstrate that any programme of improvements to information, advice and guidance services planned as part of the wider 14-19 reforms is explicitly tied to the introduction of the Diplomas.

A wide range of activities are in hand and planned to help providers of information, advice and guidance to young people to advise on the implications of the 14-19 reform programme.

Messages about the reform programme are being communicated to information, advice and guidance providers (IAG) through various relevant specialist websites and publications.

These messages are being reinforced by continuing professional development support aimed at developing the skills and competences of the IAG workforce in schools and elsewhere. A web-based CPD resource “Improving Choices for Young People—Developing the IAG Workforce”, was published on the DfES-funded CEGNET website in June, with links through to the Department’s 14-19 website. We are also working through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) to recruit 9 regional ‘Lead Practitioners’ in IAG, who will provide a regional focus for generating and sharing good practice in IAG delivery in schools in the context of the introduction of Diplomas.

These activities will be underpinned by quality standards for young people’s IAG which will be published in July following extensive consultation with external stakeholders. These will be used by local authorities and organisations providing IAG services to check that the expected standards are being achieved and to review the quality of services. We will expect 14-19 consortia submitting diploma gateway proposals to include evidence of how they will provide IAG that meets these standards.

27. The DfES says the essential package of workforce development will initially consist of three days’ face-to-face training. This seems to us—and to many of our witnesses—inadequate. It is true that the workforce is not a blank slate, insofar as there are skilled and experienced staff in both schools and colleges with relevant teaching expertise. However, we remain to be convinced that the workforce development requirements for the Diplomas have been effectively costed and that sufficient resources have been allocated on this basis. We ask the Government to supply us with information which proves this sort of underpinning analysis has been undertaken or is in progress.

The 3 days training form the basis of the face-to-face element of a wider continuing professional development package. The three days will be spread through the course of the 2007–08 academic year and over this time, Diploma teachers and lecturers will be able to access a large range of supporting materials provided by the QIA and Specialist Schools and Academies Trust according to their development needs.

SSAT are also setting up networks of coaching and support that may be accessed at any time.

We now have information from the first Gateway consortia which gives us actual figures on how many practitioners need to be trained. We and partner agencies are analysing this data in order to ensure appropriate coverage of the training.

We are also using the results from the first Gateway to analyse teacher supply and the demand for continuing professional development and initial teacher training. We are working closely with the TDA and LLUK to ensure an adequate supply of new members of the workforce to reflect the demand for teachers and lecturers to teach Diplomas.

28. The workforce development needs relating to Diplomas go beyond obvious technical knowledge-base and pedagogy, and are especially acute around collaborative, cross institutional working. We see little immediate sign of this being reflected in current workforce development strategies or plans, and would like to see this rectified.

For the most part, collaborative working across partnerships will be something for leaders in a consortium to continue to lead locally, rather than for the DfES or its partners to provide formal training to those teaching Diplomas, centrally.

The National College for Leadership and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership are developing a programme to support leaders in collaborative cross-institutional working.

This includes:

- a) A collaborative leadership learning module.
- b) Coaching adaptable to a consortium's needs.
- c) Action learning sets.
- d) Organisational development and change management consultancy tailored to the specific needs of an individual consortium.

29 and 30 grouped

29. It is unfortunate that the delivery of formalised workforce development activities in support of the Diplomas cannot be started in the natural window which will be present at the end of the summer 2007 term. It is now imperative that the plans for workforce development delivery arrangements are clearly communicated, and information about when training will be available is communicated to those who will be expected to undertake it.

30. Initially, the DfES implied that workforce development support would be focused on successful gateway applicant areas. Subsequently, they have confirmed that support will be extended to those due to begin offering Diplomas in September 2009. This is very welcome. However, it is less certain what support will be extended to those areas with the furthest to travel—and the risk is that they could fall even further behind in relative terms. The DfES and partners need to produce, with some urgency, forward plans for specific, costed, and time-tabled actions to address the staff development needs in the least advanced areas if the entitlement in 2013 is to be deliverable.

Consortia have a year's lead-in to build capacity and train the workforce for Diploma delivery in September 2008. We also do not want to overburden schools and colleges that are taking part in the functional skills pilot. Workforce development for that is taking place in the summer term 2007.

However, some workforce development support is already in place. We have a monthly delivery e-update to Gateway 1 consortia that provides them with important information to support their planning. Information about workforce development opportunities have been included in this email. We have also held regional planning events with consortia in June 2007, at which we dedicated a session to workforce development planning. Our workforce partners were involved in these events.

31. We agree that in principle the appointment of the Diploma champions is a sensible step, and it is to be hoped they will play a positive role. Clear, consistent and timely communication will be a significant factor determining acceptance and uptake of Diplomas. This said, clever marketing cannot and should not be expected to make good any shortfalls in the quality or integrity of the Diploma programmes themselves. Ultimately, Diplomas will stand or fail on the quality of the awards, and the partnerships that deliver them. Diplomas, to some extent, need to 'sell themselves'. Publicity campaigns—and also the appointment of the Diploma Champions—therefore only make sense in the context of a prior focus on rigorous quality assurance and exacting project management standards, to ensure a high quality product emerges.

We agree wholeheartedly with this recommendation.

And yes, the development of Diplomas requires unprecedented collaboration between those inside the education system and those who are outside it, like employers, but who rely on what it produces. All have worked very hard to get us to the position we are in now, uniquely placed to deliver a qualification that will give young people opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge which are truly relevant and really valued by employers, and which will help them continue in learning to the highest level they can achieve.

Appendix 2

Government's response to the Eighth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07

The Select Committee's recommendations are in bold text.

The Government's response is in plain text.

Some of the recommendations and responses have been grouped.

1. We agree that increased internationalisation of higher education potentially brings great benefits, both economic and otherwise, for the UK and its universities.

The Government agrees entirely. Internationalisation can take many forms and brings many benefits. It includes the increased cultural richness of our campuses through the presence of international students and staff, the expansion and diversification of curricula to encompass the knowledge of other parts of the world, it is the contribution that research collaboration across country boundaries can make to advancing knowledge and the development of goods and services. Education exports make a significant contribution to the economy. A report⁴ published in September by the British Council estimates that the value of education exports to the UK in 2003–04 amounted to more than £8.5bn. When private sector training, consultancy and education-related goods and services are included that figure rises to nearly £28bn.

2. We agree that collaboration and partnership working are vital for the future development of the international dimension in higher education. We welcome projects such as the UK India Education and Research initiative and recommend that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the British Council and their partners in the university sector explore the possibility of developing similar arrangements for China and other countries. Joint ventures are likely to involve the development of joint courses and undertaking joint curriculum development, as there will be no further approvals of joint campuses until the Chinese government has assessed the success of those established so far.

3. We recommend that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the British Council explore with institutions in China and in the UK how best to build on initiatives already taken to improve collaboration in higher education, including vocational education and the development of pedagogy. As part of that exercise, the Government should provide funding to facilitate collaboration, including the establishment of a major, prestigious foundation, in partnership with the private sector, to provide scholarships and fellowships. These are issues which should be discussed at the high level UK/China summit which we understand is to be held in China in September.

The Committee draws an interesting comparison between the UK's education initiatives with India and those with China. The UK Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) was

⁴ The value of UK education and training exports: an update—Dr Pamela Lenton, University of Sheffield.

developed in response to a worrying decline in UK-India education links. UKIERI received strong endorsement from both the UK and Indian Prime Ministers that enabled it to gain widespread financial support from within government, the education sector and business which has helped maximise impact.

In contrast, UK-China links started from a much lower baseline and have developed in a more piecemeal fashion. That has not prevented many UK institutions developing links in China outside of a formal government framework. However, fresh impetus to government to government links has been provided by the establishment of annual Ministerial education summit meetings between the UK and China. These summits have produced a more coherent framework for joint action including: mutual recognition of degree level qualifications; cooperation on raising the profile of China Studies in the UK (including Mandarin Teaching); the establishment of a jointly funded PhD and post doctoral scholarship scheme in science and technology; and a Graduate Work Experience programme. The second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative on International education also includes a funding strand for developing collaboration and partnership working between UK and Chinese education institutions.

We accept the Committee's analysis that we should move existing initiatives under a more recognisable UK branding along similar lines to UKIERI and will raise this with the Chinese at the next Education Summit meeting scheduled in October. The development of a more coherent UK education strategy for China and mechanisms for engaging with China's education sector, with clear deliverables, is something that both the Government and the British Council fully supports.

The Government will consider the Committee's recommendation for a scholarship scheme but it should be noted that there is already a plethora of UK scholarship schemes available to talented Chinese students, including the DIUS sponsored UK-China Scholarship for Excellence and the Dorothy Hodgkin programmes. Some UK universities also offer exclusive access to scholarships for Chinese students. Although the UK cannot hope to compete against the financial muscle exercised by the United States in attracting high calibre Chinese postgraduate research students, the time may be ripe to undertake a strategic review of the UK's total scholarship provision under a common UK brand. It should be noted too that there are opportunities for the private sector to support the Chevening scholarships, which are already a well known and prestigious brand in China.

4. The provision of high quality post-graduate education is essential to enable the HE sector to thrive. If the UK higher education sector is to succeed in attracting the most highly qualified students to study here at post-graduate level, it needs to work with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to provide more systematic support.

The Government recognises the importance of attracting high quality postgraduate students and researchers and works closely with the HE sector to maintain the UK's reputation as an excellent place to study at postgraduate level. We support RCUK work to encourage mobility and address any barriers that exist.

It is important that HE institutions do all they can to ensure that international students have a high quality experience whilst studying in the UK. This is one of the major themes

of the Prime Minister's international education initiative (PMI) on which the Government is working closely with the sector. One issue where institutions are seeking to do more is to ensure that international students are fully integrated with home students to the benefit of both.

The Global Science and Innovation Forum (GSIF) strategy⁵ noted that the support for international mobility provided by the UK is comparable with that of its competitors and that, in the broadest sense, UK support in this area is having a positive impact. It also proposed the creation of an alumni network of fellows who have been working in the UK to ensure that in the longer term potentially valuable collaborative relationships are not lost. GSIF works across government and more widely on issues of international scientific collaboration and mobility and consideration is being given to the development of a more systematic dialogue with the HE sector.

The Research Councils are taking action to raise the visibility of their support for International holders of research fellowships as a priority. RCUK have launched an International Fellowship Association for overseas nationals holding Research Council fellowship awards as a pilot for a single UK scheme, including fellows of other funders. The intention is to consult and work with these fellows to build the association based on their priorities with regard to mobility and maintaining connections with the UK, in particular the provision of relevant information on funding opportunities. We will also consider extending membership of the association to UK nationals who intend to work overseas.

5. The problem of students' unwillingness to study abroad can be addressed in a number of ways. One is for the HE sector to be more strategic, to decide as a matter of policy that more students should spend time in another country and aim to facilitate that. Another is flexibility. Many students would welcome the opportunity to study abroad for shorter periods—3 or 6 months—rather than a whole year. Having a proper credit transfer system would clearly also be of great benefit. The situation needs to be addressed rapidly to ensure that the UK does not lose out in both cultural and economic terms.

The Government is clear that a period of study abroad can provide real benefits and agrees with the Committee that there are several ways in which more could be done to encourage students to take up such opportunities. For instance, the Government continues to work with the British Council and other stakeholders in promoting mobility and addressing real or perceived barriers to mobility, with a view to increasing participation. There are encouraging signs that demand for Erasmus places has gone up. The Government has also consulted with a number of Vice-Chancellors on what more might be done to help students take up mobility opportunities, and how good practice might be spread across the sector. This resulted in the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills working with the Council for Industry and Higher Education to put together some examples of best practice in the way in which higher education institutions are internationalising their provision and promoting outward student mobility. The ensuing report "Global Horizons for UK Students" was published on 18 July 2007 and provides a guide to what some of the most outward-looking institutions are doing and to how the perceived barriers to overseas study can be overcome. The Government would encourage institutions to be imaginative

⁵ <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file34726.pdf>

and consider how they can support mobility, including shorter periods of study abroad and making use of some of the additional revenue that they gain from variable fees.

The Government also agrees that credit can be a useful tool to enable transfer between programmes or institutions and that it can assist in removing obstacles to academic mobility. The Government commends the work of the Burgess Group and welcomes its recommendation that the higher education sector should work towards a national credit framework for England. The sector has now begun the process of producing such a framework and the Government is encouraging all institutions to credit rate their programmes as soon as possible in line with the Burgess recommendations.

6. Underlying all of these issues is the need for a concerted drive to improve foreign language capacity. This will require action in schools, but universities should also provide intensive short courses to enable students to undertake study abroad. Some languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, should continue to be treated as strategically important subjects to ensure that capacity in them is retained.

Languages are of crucial strategic importance to the UK. There is therefore a need to increase the number of people studying languages at all levels of the education system. This is being taken forward through the DCSF-led National Languages Strategy which has been given added impetus by Lord Dearing's review of languages published in March 2007. Over time these will deliver improvements in the number of school leavers with language skills, some of whom will continue with their language studies.

At the HE level, foreign languages and area studies remain strategic subjects. A successful bid for funding of a range of language related projects from the HEFCE Strategic Development Fund has been developed, with £4.5 million now available for these projects over the next four years. The projects, under the "Routes into Languages" banner, include the setting up of

- Regional consortia of HEIs, colleges and schools to stimulate demand for languages. Four so far have been established in the West Midlands, South East, North West and North East;
- National networks for translating and interpreting based at the University of Salford and University of Leeds respectively; and
- Three research projects on community languages; the role that languages can play in international events; and language and enterprise.

Following the review of languages by Lord Dearing, further funding has been made available to allow a further five regional consortia to be set up, enabling every Government region to have one. Four of these have been approved so far bringing the total of regional consortia up to eight.

7. International students bring academic, cultural and financial benefits, and the majority of universities have international strategies which recognise that. The HE sector needs, however, to guard against the risk that the recruitment of international students will be seen as driven by short terms gains in fee income by ensuring that the teaching and research offered are of high quality. Building genuine partnerships and

engaging in thoughtful collaborations will lead to more sustainable relationships with institutions and students from other countries.

8. Universities need to ensure that their partnerships in other countries are designed to provide high quality education in order to be sustainable for the long term.

We recognise that international students bring academic, cultural and financial benefits far beyond institutions' income from course fees, and that building genuine and lasting partnerships is crucial to securing the UK's position as partner of choice in international education. Launched in April 2006, the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative in International Education aims to secure the UK's position as a leader in international education and sustain the managed growth of UK international education delivered both in the UK and overseas. Whilst the first phase of PMI (from 1999 to 2005) concentrated on increasing the number of international students coming to the UK, the second phase has a different focus which emphasises the importance of high quality international collaboration.

The aim of the Strategic Alliances and Partnerships Strand of PMI2 is to increase the level of engagement and collaboration between the UK and designated priority countries in high quality research; grow the number of vocational, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes delivered collaboratively between the UK and other countries and increase the number of UK students studying overseas. It operates at a government and policy level, enabling the UK to engage pro-actively and collaboratively in addressing some of the global education challenges, and at individual institution level, building strong strategic alliances and partnerships which will jointly and creatively address these challenges in practice.

At a government and policy level, integrated programmes of activity will take place for each of the priority countries. Eight policy seminars will take place in 2007–08 in China, East Asia, Pakistan and Africa. Key themes identified for these are quality; leadership; Public-Private Partnerships; the role of HE/FE in knowledge economies and skills development; student and staff exchange programmes and international student mobility; internationalisation of HE and FE; research & research cooperation; and promoting social inclusion and mobility.

At an institutional level, the key tools for engagement will be collaboration projects targeted at promoting research collaboration, delivery of joint or dual awards, vocational programmes in target countries and outward student mobility projects.

Funds will also be available in 2007–08 to encourage UK institutions to develop international cooperative activities with potential partner institutions located in priority countries.

9. We recommend that the Government reviews as a matter of urgency the current arrangements for fee support payable to institutions for part-time students and the availability of support for part-time students themselves. For the future, we believe that students should be seen as one group with a variety of needs for support rather than being arbitrarily divided into categories of part-time and full-time.

The full and part-time student support packages are different because the needs of the students are different. Full-time students' first call on their time is their studies, which is not the case for part-time students, who must fit their studies in alongside their employment or caring responsibilities. Many of these students are in full-time employment, with many holding well-paid jobs, also in many cases their employers are contributing to support their study costs. The Government must ensure that the support provided is closely focussed to gain maximum benefit.

The part-time support package is based on grants, which the student does not have to repay, to contribute to both course fees, and the costs related to studying (e.g. books and travel). Our experience of part-time loans is that part-time students tend to be more debt adverse than their full-time counterparts, and take-up under the previous part-time loan system was low, which is one of the reasons we changed the package from loan to grant in 2004. A survey carried out by Professor Claire Callender for Universities UK and GuildHE, published November 2006, indicated that only 38% of the part-time students surveyed would be prepared to take out an income contingent loan if this was offered.⁶

The fee grant received by part-time students was increased by 27% in 2006–07, making it the most generous package the Government has ever offered part-time students. In addition to this more money was directed towards part-time students by increasing the amount allocated via the Access to Learning Fund in order that it will grow from £3 million as it was in 2005 to £12 million in 2007–08. This money is targeted so that higher education institutions can give hardship support to help secure participation from students facing the greatest financial difficulties. In 2005–06 DfES and HEFCE agreed to provide an additional £20 million each in institutional funding (£40 million); half of this was to cover 2006–07 and half for 2007–08. This money is intended to encourage participation and improve provision for part-time students from the most under-represented groups. This demonstrates the Government's continued support for part-time higher education.

10. We recommend that our successors on the committee that scrutinises the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills should continue our inquiry and report on the issues of the structure of the HE sector; university funding (including levels of investment in research in comparison with competitor countries); and the role of universities over the next decade.

This recommendation has been noted.

⁶ Part-time students and part-time study in higher education in the UK—Strand 3: a survey of students' attitudes and experiences of part-time study and its costs, 2005–06.

Appendix 3

Government's response to the Sixth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07

Continuing scrutiny of Ofsted

Recommendation 1⁷

The Committee, in its previous report on Ofsted, *the Sixth Report of Session 2003–04: The Work of Ofsted*, described its formalised arrangements for twice yearly sessions with Ofsted as resulting in “a sound and mutually beneficial system of scrutiny”. We echo this view and warmly acknowledge both the central role the Committee has played in ensuring effective Parliamentary scrutiny for the former Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate, and the way in which it has conducted its responsibilities.

Decisions about the future scrutiny arrangements for Ofsted are a matter for Parliament. Whilst recent changes to the structure and remit of the former Department for Education and Skills have resulted in some policy responsibilities moving to the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, we hope that the new committee structures will enable the continuation of the established arrangement whereby the work of Ofsted as a whole is scrutinised by a single committee.

The New Ofsted

Recommendations 2,3,4,5

The establishment, in April 2007, of new Ofsted as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills puts into effect a key strand of the Government's strategy to reform public services inspection, to refocus inspection around the needs of users of those services, to rationalise and streamline inspection and to reduce the burdens associated with inspection.

In bringing together the former children's services remit of the Commission for Social Care Inspection; the inspection remit of the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the remit of HM Inspectorate of Courts Administration for the inspection of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the former Ofsted's education and care remit into one inspectorate, we have, for the first time, a single coherent and authoritative voice speaking across the full range of services for children and learners.

New Ofsted's remit reflects changing patterns of local delivery, in which partners are increasingly working together to achieve better outcomes for users of public services. It enables the inspectorate to respond more effectively to developments brought about by, for example, the bringing together of the education and children's social care responsibilities of local authorities, the extended school agenda and changing patterns in post-14

⁷ This is the text of the Government's response printed as received. The full text of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations can be found from page 30 onwards as part of Ofsted's response.

provision. New Ofsted is well positioned to bridge the gap between education and social care and vocational and academic learning.

We note the Committee's concern about the increased complexity of the enlarged Ofsted's objectives and remit and agree that it faces substantial challenges. But there are very clear benefits in having a single inspectorate for children and learners.

We are aware that there has been a certain amount of concern in some quarters, particularly in the lead up to the establishment of the new organisation, about the creation of the new Ofsted and the possible lack of focus on key areas of work. We agree with the Committee that realising the full benefits of the single inspectorate will require careful management by Ofsted and a conscious recognition of the inherent differences in the sectors now within its remit. The fact that Ofsted now has a statutory duty to engage with service users and that the organisation has the benefit of the expertise built up by the former inspectorates will be very helpful in this respect.

Guided by principles articulated in *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services* and *Inspecting for Improvement* (Office of Public Services Reform 2003) and given statutory expression in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Ofsted is now in a strong position to reduce complexity, duplication and overlap, and promote co-ordination of inspection activity and wider identification and promulgation of best practice. It is also well placed to track the experience of users of services across service and institutional boundaries and to maximise its impact on service improvement, while at the same time delivering real value for money.

We introduced a statutory non-executive Board for Ofsted to provide modernised governance arrangements to coincide with the expansion of Ofsted's remit. The Chairman and Members were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills following open competition and bring with them a breadth and depth of knowledge and experience from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. We are confident that they will play an important role in setting the strategic direction of the inspectorate and ensuring that it is effectively and efficiently governed. The work already undertaken by Board Members, during the transition to the new inspectorate and in the first few months of operation, has been extremely valuable.

We believe that the new Ofsted is well placed, in terms of clarity of purpose, expertise of staff and strength of strategic leadership, to realise the potential benefits that a single organisation focused on the interests of children and learners should bring. We have every confidence in the Chief Inspector, Christine Gilbert, and the Ofsted Board headed by Zenna Atkins in meeting the challenges and driving the important work of the new inspectorate forward to the benefit of both users and providers of services.

We welcome the positive findings of Ofsted's recent capability review, commissioned by the Chief Inspector and referred to in Ofsted's response to the Committee, but share the Committee's view that it will be important for the new Ofsted to have demonstrated within its first year of operation, the value that its creation has added. We shall be reviewing progress with the Chairman and the Chief Inspector during the coming year.

The Strategic Plan 2007–2010 and the work ahead

Recommendations 6 and 7

We agree with the Committee that consultation on Ofsted's Strategic Plan has provided Ofsted with an excellent opportunity to engage with service users and providers, and to act on those views. We believe that Ofsted has positively embraced this opportunity and has been able to attract a good spread of responses from a wide variety of stakeholders. Ofsted's Strategic Plan presents an opportunity to show how the new Ofsted will become a powerful force for improvement across the whole field of education, children's services and skills.

We understand that a revised version of the plan, informed by comments obtained through the consultation, is due to be published at the end of September.

We strongly welcome the continued scrutiny, through the committee process, of the performance of the Chief Inspector and Ofsted's Board in meeting the targets that will be set out in the forthcoming plan.

Inspection and Reporting

Recommendation 8

Like the Committee, we welcome the reduction in burdens associated with the new approach to school inspection, adopted in September 2005 as part of the New Relationship with Schools. The move to less intrusive, more outcome focused inspection is aimed at directing the energies of schools towards excellence and improvement rather than compliance and defensiveness. It is not intended however that reduced burdens should be achieved at the expense of inspection rigour. We share the Committee's view that inspection must remain robust and reliable. It should help to unlock the potential in schools to deliver high quality, user focused, education and care. Our view is that these aims can be realised through a school inspection system which places self-evaluation evidence at its core.

Self-evaluation is undoubtedly a key driver of school improvement—a school that knows its strengths and weaknesses is in a powerful position to achieve improved outcomes for its pupils. It is right therefore that a key aspect of an inspection should be the testing of the school's self-evaluation evidence.

In 2005–06, Ofsted judged self-evaluation to be good or outstanding in around two-thirds of the primary and secondary schools it inspected. This would seem to provide both the necessary assurance and the justification for using self-evaluation as an important part of the inspection evidence. But of course inspectors will also draw upon a range of other information including contextualised value-added and raw performance data, as well as first hand evidence such as analysis of pupils' work, observations of lessons, discussions with pupils and staff and parents' views, to help them reach sound and robust judgements.

The introduction of School Improvement Partners as a separate source of challenge and support to schools will help to ensure that schools' evaluation remains rigorous and that the quality of self evaluation continues to improve.

Recommendation 9

The introduction of inspection arrangements which vary the ‘weight’ of inspection according to the performance of schools is consistent with the Government’s commitment to the principle that public sector inspection should be proportionate to risk.

Reduced tariff inspections (RTI) for high performing schools were introduced in September 2006 and the proportion of schools undergoing these inspections now stands at 30 per cent. Given that Section 5 inspections began only a year before, schools undergoing RTI are unlikely to have experienced a ‘standard’ Section 5. However such schools will have been inspected under the previous more detailed Section 10 arrangements.

Successful implementation of a proportionate approach in this context requires a robust risk assessment system which draws upon reliable information from a variety of sources, including performance data and local intelligence. It also requires an approach which is responsive to evidence of increased risk enabling, for example, reversion to the standard tariff where issues emerge immediately prior to or during the early stages of a school inspection.

We agree with the Committee that procedures for selecting schools which are to be subject to reduced tariff inspections should be transparent, and welcome Ofsted’s decision, outlined in its response to the Committee, to publish a revised protocol on this matter.

Ofsted has been pro-active and thorough in ensuring that the impact of the school inspection arrangements introduced in September 2005 has been closely and independently monitored. We recognise, as does Ofsted, the continuing need to evaluate this impact as the system evolves to encompass new features such as RTI.

Recommendation 10

We welcome the Committee’s support for the Chief Inspector’s view that satisfactory schools should be encouraged to improve, and agree with the Committee that care should be taken to ensure that discussion on the quality of provision in schools is constructive.

In her 2005–06 annual report, the Chief Inspector reported that around six in 10 schools inspected during the reporting year were providing a good or outstanding education for their pupils. While this is encouraging, it is our ambition that every school should become a good school. That is not to say that schools judged satisfactory are failing—they are not. Rather, our ambition addresses the legitimate expectations of parents and pupils and the genuine aspirations of schools themselves.

We very much support the recent introduction by Ofsted of a monitoring visit for a proportion of schools judged to be satisfactory overall but with pockets of underachievement. Such activity focuses schools and the local challenge and support networks that surround them in driving forward improvement as well as reducing the risk of slippage. This targeted approach is an example of directing inspection resource to where it can have the most impact.

Recommendation 11

The arrangements for thematic subject inspections are consistent with a modernised risk-based accountability framework for schools. The programme of inspection, which involves at least 60 visits per subject per year, is designed to augment the evidence obtained through the routine cycle of Section 5 inspections. The inspections are conducted by HMI with specific expertise in the subjects they inspect and the evidence obtained is used in the context of other information, including evidence from Section 5 inspections and test and examination results, to identify strengths in the subject and barriers to improvement. A detailed assessment of each subject is published every three years.

We appreciate that these arrangements are very different to those which preceded them, particularly in terms of the sample size involved. However, we believe that the current arrangements are generally sufficient to provide Ofsted with the evidence it needs to produce reliable and helpful reports while keeping cost and burden of inspection at appropriate levels.

We agree that the Section 5 process should encompass an appropriate focus across the range of core and non-core subjects and are satisfied that the current arrangements achieve this. For example, the structure of the self-evaluation form encourages schools to think broadly about the curriculum offer for pupils and the inspection itself requires inspectors to evaluate the extent to which the curriculum meets external requirements and the needs of learners. The quality of teaching remains a central focus for inspection. The coverage of specific subject areas will be determined by the evidence and intelligence which the inspectors consider in preparation for and during each inspection.

Recommendation 12

Part of the rationale for creating a single inspectorate for children's services was to obtain a consistent picture about the performance of these services in relation to the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. We are now in a position where a single Chief Inspector can report on how the range of different services for children contributes to those outcomes.

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families has made clear that his department is the 'Every Child Matters Department'. We see Ofsted as the 'Every Child Matters' inspectorate, with its responsibility for inspecting the contribution made to ECM outcomes at both institutional and area levels.

In relation to the specific observations made by the Committee about the inspection of the contribution of schools to ECM, whilst we believe that the outcomes are properly reflected, we recognise that the contribution that a school makes will vary across the outcomes. Ensuring that pupils are safe and that they enjoy and achieve have always been core to school life and remain so. But these cannot be achieved in isolation from other aspects of children's wellbeing. Good schools recognise this interdependency and reflect this in how they meet the needs of pupils.

With 7,000 schools now offering extended service provision, many are well placed to demonstrate how the five outcomes support each other in meeting the needs of the 'whole' child.

A strong focus on behaviour contributes across the range of ECM outcomes which is why we have asked Ofsted to raise the bar in terms of its expectations of schools on behaviour.

We will continue to work with Ofsted in determining where to supplement core institutional and area inspection findings with targeted survey work to drill down into specific aspects of children's well-being.

Recommendation 13

Service improvement is one of the fundamental purposes of a public service inspection and regulation system. The Education and Inspections Act 2006, which established new Ofsted, made explicit for the first time in statute that its work should contribute to improvement within the services it inspects and regulates.

The contribution it makes however should be appropriate to its role as an independent inspectorate and regulator. Its improvement activity must not compromise its impartiality. For this reason, we believe it is important to maintain a separation between inspection and ongoing advice.

Ofsted's contribution to improvement manifests itself in a number of ways, some more tangible than others. This includes the fostering of high expectations and a culture of self-evaluation, the professional dialogue and feedback which occurs during inspection and the recommendations which follow, and through the identification and dissemination of good practice examples. It is perhaps most obvious in the impact that monitoring inspection visits have on underperforming providers.

Responsibility for ongoing support, challenge and advice lies with other agencies. For example, School Improvement Partners and the Quality Improvement Agency provide ongoing advice, support and challenge to schools and adult learning provision respectively. And Children's Services Advisers within Government Offices support the effective local delivery of the children's services.

We agree, and Ofsted acknowledges, that there is scope to make clearer the roles of Ofsted and other bodies in contributing to service improvement and we will work with Ofsted and other bodies to secure this.

Recommendation 14

Ofsted inspects each individual school within a "cluster" area. Where there is underperformance in a small cluster, but this is isolated within a local authority in which schools are generally performing well, any good local authority should have capacity to advise on improvement. Through the School Improvement Partners and the school improvement service, the local authority should be well placed to both pick up and act upon these areas of underperformance.

As Ofsted has indicated in its response, local managing inspectors monitor the performance of schools in a local area and will be engaging with the local authority to discuss both individual and systemic issues.

Ofsted also assesses school performance at local authority level, through its annual performance assessments (APAs) of children's services and, where these or other information indicate the need, within risk-based multi-inspectorate joint area reviews (JARs) of children's services. Systemic issues should emerge through these processes. APAs result in published letters identifying strengths and weaknesses, and JARs result in published reports with specific recommendations for improvement. They will identify instances of systemic underperformance across a local authority area. In any such cases, advice and support is available co-ordinated by the regional Government Office.

The October 2006 Local Government White Paper "Strong and prosperous communities" states that, from 2009–10, JARs and APAs will be replaced by a new inspection regime, the Comprehensive Area Assessment. It will be led by the Audit Commission, with the full involvement of Ofsted and other inspectorates. The inspectorates plan to consult in late 2007 on the new arrangements.

Appendix 4

Ofsted's response to the Sixth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07

Foreword

We are pleased to respond to the Education and Skills Committee's final report on the work of Ofsted. We welcome the Committee's recognition of the new Ofsted's potential to make a positive impact on the quality of services for children, young people and adult learners; and its endorsement, even at this early stage of the organisation's development, of the broad approach we have taken to drawing up our strategic plan and establishing strategic goals and targets.

The Committee's report followed two sessions of evidence from Ofsted. The first of these took place some months before the new Ofsted was established; the second just one month after it came into being. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Committee asked some questions about the development of the new inspectorate and its remit. We believe that Ofsted is in a very strong position to provide assurance on these questions, and the following response seeks to do so.

We look forward to further dialogue on these matters over the coming months with the Committee's successors.

Christine Gilbert

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills

Zenna Atkins

Chairman, Ofsted Board

Continuing scrutiny of Ofsted

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the scrutiny work that this Committee has carried out on Ofsted is continued by successor committees.

The Committee's recommendation that its scrutiny work should be continued by successor committees is of course a matter for the House of Commons. For both the former Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Committee's challenging but constructive public scrutiny was the centrepiece of our accountability to Parliament. We look forward to building a similar relationship with successor committees across the entire education, children's services and skills remit of the new Ofsted.

The New Ofsted

Recommendation 2

This is a time of great change for Ofsted and whilst we are sensitive to the challenges that this brings we are still concerned at the complex set of objectives and sectors that Ofsted now spans and its capacity to fulfil its core mission.

Recommendation 3

We welcome the potential for the new Ofsted to take a more comprehensive and strategic view of the issues affecting children, young people and adult learners but we are concerned at the increasing complexity of this large bureaucracy and the ability of its new non-executive board to rapidly grasp this complexity.

Recommendation 5

The new Ofsted has been operating only since April 2007. We will be interested to see what will be achieved in the first twelve months of the new Ofsted and what value has been added by its creation. We cannot disguise our concern as to the fitness for purpose of the organisation at the present moment. We will return to this issue in future meetings with HMCI.

The core mission of the new Ofsted was well stated in the Government's consultation paper on its proposals for a single inspectorate for children and learners (DfES, 2005): a single inspectorate would reflect the Government's commitment to integrate services around the experiences of children, young people and learners of all ages. It would mirror developments locally, where partners were increasingly working together more effectively to achieve better outcomes for users of public services. The Government wanted to build on the valuable joint working by inspectorates across traditional boundaries and realise the benefits that a body with the sole interest of children and learners at its heart could bring.

We agree with the Committee that realising these benefits in full will require attention to the real and significant differences in the nature of the sectors within our remit. We are therefore building on the approaches to inspection and regulation in our predecessor inspectorates as we manage a careful transition to a greater coherence of approach in the new inspectorate. Some early examples of things we can and are doing differently include:

- **Looking in the round at services from the perspective of users:** For example, as a single inspectorate we are able to focus on the provision of both care and education services for looked-after children, and the relationship between standards of care and educational outcomes.
- **Continuity of provision and progression across phase boundaries:** The merged organisation gives us the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of work for different age ranges. For example, during this year we shall be surveying the quality of information, advice and guidance work at different stages, covering not just the services available to young people in schools and colleges but also the services on offer to adults through the *learnirect* helpline and *nextstep*. We shall look to see

whether there is good practice at particular stages that can be transferred, and whether provision for different age groups builds effectively on what has gone before.

- **Simplification for providers:** For settings with more than one type of provision (eg schools where there is childcare provision, or boarding schools) we have already begun to move to single inspection events—a unified inspection even where current legislation requires us to inspect under different regulatory frameworks.
- **Better use of inspectors' skills:** For example, schools and colleges work in partnership to offer 14-19 year olds a coherent curriculum for NVQ level 2 qualifications and above. In inspecting such provision we shall use the skills of inspectors of schools, colleges and work based learning.
- **Making connections:** One area of our work can shed light on another. For example, when we inspect work based learning where students are training to work in nurseries, we draw on our experience of what works in the early years settings we regulate.
- **Efficiency and reduction in cost:** For example, the administration and co-ordination of further education inspection now rests in one place, bringing both efficiency savings and increased coherence for the sector.

Like those we inspect, we will also regularly evaluate our effectiveness and the value for money we provide and we will continuously strive to improve the way that we operate. Over time we expect to make further changes to the way we do things in order to respond more fully to what service users tell us, and to make a bigger impact on the improvement of services.

The complexity of our remit is significant, but should not be overstated. Ofsted is medium sized in terms of government bodies; it is smaller than the local authorities we inspect, for example, and has a much more focused remit. In inspecting early years provision, children's social care, education in schools and colleges and work-based learning, Ofsted has four main areas of activity (many of them linked in our inspection of local authority children's services). Though there is a range of provision within each sector, and important differences between them, our basic responsibilities are clearly delineated.

In addition to staff from the former Ofsted and the relevant inspectors from HMI Court Administration (HMICA), 269 inspectors and inspector managers, together with 12 other professional staff, transferred from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI); and 116 inspectors and inspector managers, together with 19 other professional staff, transferred from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). The new Ofsted has in effect the same resource in terms of inspectors with relevant expertise as that deployed by our predecessor inspectorates for the work within our remit.

The appointments made by the Secretary of State have provided the Board with a high calibre membership. Members have had senior responsibility in major public, private and voluntary sector organisations, with directly relevant professional experience. Most have had close familiarity with one or more of our predecessor inspectorates. The Board has

already made important contributions to the inspectorate, through the development of our strategic plan and by further strengthening our corporate governance arrangements. The organisation has as a consequence a good deal of confidence in the Board's strategic guidance.

Like any new organisation, the new Ofsted faces challenges. We do not underestimate these. But we are in no doubt that the organisation is well prepared both for its present role and for the future: it has a clear remit, the professional staff and other resources it needs, and robust leadership and governance.

This has been confirmed by a capability review of Ofsted, commissioned by HMCI and conducted in July 2007. The report of this review, carried out by an independent team with wide experience at senior level in public and private sector organisations, will be available in October. Not surprisingly, it identifies some areas in which further development work is required in the new organisation. But overall its conclusion is that Ofsted is 'in a good place' to deliver on the new Ofsted promise: *Raising Standards, Improving Lives*. We believe that to commission an independent scrutiny of this kind is both a demonstration of confidence in the new Ofsted, and a tangible commitment to our continuous improvement as an organisation.

We agree with the Committee that it will be important for the new Ofsted to have demonstrated in its first 12 months the value that has been added by its creation. We look forward to reporting to the Committee's successors on this in 2008.

There are two matters of detail in the Committee's report which merit comment.

Paragraph 8 states that the 'Local Authority inspection function' has been transferred from the Commission for Social Care Inspection to Ofsted. The former Ofsted previously, and now the new Ofsted, have been responsible for coordinating inspection of local authority services through the programme of Annual Performance Assessments (APA) and Joint Area Reviews (JAR). CSCI, ALI and HMICA have contributed to APAs and JARs previously. The functions of these inspectorates are now of course unified within the new Ofsted, although it remains the case that Ofsted continues to coordinate input from other inspectorates as part of the current programme of APAs and JARs.

Paragraphs 16 and 17 of the Report comment on the transfer of inspectors from the ALI to the new Ofsted. As the Committee notes, all of the former ALI's permanent inspectors (other than five who retired) have transferred to the new Ofsted. It is our understanding that when the then Chief Inspector of the ALI referred to 'ALI inspectors' who had not gone to Ofsted, he had in mind a group of inspectors who were not full-time employees of the ALI, but were employed to supplement the ALI's permanent workforce. In fact, the great majority—some 430 of the pool of 500 of these 'associate inspectors'—have confirmed that they are available to work for the new Ofsted, and many of them have already been deployed by the new inspectorate.

Recommendation 4

However, a number of sectors which are now under the remit of Ofsted had expressed concern about the effect that the creation of the new Ofsted would have on them. It is clear that some of these reservations are still present. Ofsted have already expressed a desire to

engage service users and providers from all of the sectors they are responsible for. This is essential if Ofsted is to fulfil its potential and we encourage Ofsted to intensify their work in this area.

Engaging with service users is central to the statutory remit and the approach of the new Ofsted. We have therefore put users at the heart of work in the first four months of the new Ofsted to seek views on our strategic plan and to develop our engagement with stakeholders more broadly.

We know that some organisations had expressed concerns in advance of the establishment of the new Ofsted, as reported by the Committee. We recognise that there may be more to do to reassure the full range of our stakeholders. Nonetheless, we are very encouraged by the response we have received to the consultation on our strategic plan. For example, a major business organisation, while making clear that there remained some issues on which there was further to go, said in its response to the consultation that it was encouraged at the way the new Ofsted was responding to its initial concerns.

More generally, the independent capability review of the new Ofsted referred to above spoke to some 50 external stakeholder organisations and individuals, representing all the sectors within the new Ofsted's remit. Their conclusion was that the level of engagement between Ofsted and its stakeholders, and the positive response of the latter to this engagement, was exceptionally strong.

The Strategic Plan 2007–2010 and the work ahead

Recommendation 6

We welcome the work that Ofsted is doing to ensure that the targets it will be judged against are appropriate and await those targets with interest. Consultation on the Strategic Plan is an excellent opportunity for Ofsted to hear and act on the concerns of service users and service providers. We urge Ofsted to use the information gathered from the consultation to identify areas of good practice within the organisation and also identify areas that need improvement.

Recommendation 7

We will return to this issue in future meetings with HMCI to see both the progress that Ofsted is making towards the targets and priorities and also how successful the non-executive Board has been.

We agree with the Committee that consultation on Ofsted's Strategic Plan has been an excellent opportunity to hear and act on the views of service users and service providers. Consultation has taken place through formal written submission, web-based questionnaires (including two specifically addressed to children and young people), and through focus groups of users. In the course of this process we have had input from over 400 individuals and organisations, ranging from children in social care through youth parliaments to adult learners, parents and employers, as well as from institutional providers, local authorities and national bodies. Most responses welcomed our initial strategic plan; and a great many thoughtful contributions have been received, making

important and helpful suggestions for ways in which the strategic plan—and Ofsted’s performance of its duties—could be improved. Many of those commenting sought even greater emphasis on the voice of users. The comments received will be taken into account in a revised version of the strategic plan to be published at the beginning of October.

An important focus of the consultation process, and of continuing work within Ofsted, has been to refine the targets initially proposed. More sharply focussed targets will therefore be included in the revised strategic plan. HMCI and Ofsted’s Board stand ready to be held accountable for the performance of the organisation against these targets, and we look forward to discussing our progress with the Committee’s successors.

Inspection and Reporting

Recommendation 8

We welcome moves that reduce the burden of inspection on service providers but changes to the inspection system must ensure that a rigorous inspection framework that can identify under-performing schools is maintained. We recognise that self-evaluative work can be beneficial for schools, highlighting areas for improvement but we urge Ofsted to ensure that self-evaluations are of sufficient quality and accuracy to be relied on as part of an inspection.

In Ofsted’s experience, the ability of service providers to evaluate dispassionately their strengths and weaknesses, and put in place action that will develop the strengths and improve the weaknesses, is one of the most powerful drivers of improvement in all areas of our remit. For that reason, rigorous testing of the quality and accuracy of self-evaluation is a core part of our inspection strategy.

For both standard and reduced tariff section 5 school inspections, inspectors use the school’s self-evaluation form (SEF), along with other evidence such as the RAISEonline data report and parental questionnaires, to focus the inspection on areas of importance. These initial hypotheses are followed up and tested through discussion with learners, scrutiny of their work, first hand observations of the quality of the school’s provision, and discussion with school leaders, teachers and support staff.

The evaluation of the school’s capacity to judge itself and to put in place action which leads to improved outcomes for learners is a crucial factor in the inspection judgement on leadership and management and also in judging the school’s capacity to improve. Where the judgements in the SEF appear to be too generous, the inspection team will question the school leadership’s own knowledge of their school and consequently their ability to bring about further improvement. A recent report by the National Foundation for Educational Research—*Evaluation of the impact of Section 5 inspections* (NFER, 2007)—highlighted the work Ofsted has undertaken to develop self evaluation as an important driver of school improvement. Our evidence from inspection indicates that this is an aspect of the work of schools which is improving.

Recommendation 9

We are concerned that some schools could be eligible for reduced tariff inspections without undergoing a full Section 5 inspection. Ofsted should clarify whether schools are identified as

'high performing' on the basis of previous inspection, data such as exam results or a combination of the two. We urge Ofsted to monitor how successful reduced-tariff inspections are at identifying falling standards in schools. It is important that previously good schools which are either coasting or no longer performing at such a high level are identified early.

A reduced tariff inspection (RTI) of a high performing school is a section 5 inspection, using the same methodology but focusing more closely on specific elements of the school's self evaluation. Schools undergoing an RTI will normally have been inspected at least three times previously. As we are only just reaching the end of the second year of section 5 inspections, *all* schools that have been inspected recently have previously been inspected under the more extensive section 10 arrangements that came to an end in July 2005.

Schools are selected for an RTI following a detailed risk analysis which draws on a range of data summarising past performance in national tests and examinations as well as previous inspection reports and local intelligence. The precise range of data used is currently being reviewed, particularly in relation to schools which do not have national test or examination data. Where the risk analysis indicates that standards are falling or there are concerns about aspects of the work of the school, the inspection tariff is adjusted to take account of this. This approach is in line with the way risk assessment is used to determine the weight of inspection, not only in other Ofsted inspections but by inspectors and regulators more widely.

To respond to the important points made by the Committee, and to ensure that the selection process is transparent, Ofsted's revised protocol for selecting schools for an RTI will be published on our website.

In addition to the data, Ofsted's procedures include a further review of the risk of each inspection. In a small number of cases a school may appear to be performing well, only to become a concern when the inspector starts to review the school's self-evaluation form as part of the pre-inspection work before making a site visit. In a case such as this the inspection time is increased to take account of the circumstances.

A new judgement on using challenging targets to raise standards, being introduced this term, will also require schools to demonstrate that they are successfully continuing to raise attainment for all groups of learners.

Continuing external scrutiny of school inspection is being planned to follow up the NFER report referred to above. This will include all section 5 inspections, including those tailored to meet the needs of the best schools.

Recommendation 10

We fully support HMCI's view that satisfactory schools should be encouraged to improve and that a good school is preferable to a satisfactory one. However, statements suggesting that a satisfactory grading is in some way a failure are unhelpful. We urge Ofsted to ensure that they are clear that satisfactory schools are not failing. Care needs to be taken that the discussion on the quality of provision is constructive rather than accusatory.

We agree with the Committee that discussion on quality of provision should be constructive: our aim is to promote improvement in the interests of pupils. Ofsted would

never suggest that schools found to be satisfactory overall were failing, but we would suggest that they could do better. Our aim is for all satisfactory schools to improve and be judged as either 'good' or 'outstanding in their next inspection.

It is however the case that the satisfactory category of schools covers a wide range. Some are schools that were previously inadequate but are now improving rapidly, and show every prospect of progress to a good or outstanding standard: reports will celebrate this. Others offer a satisfactory standard of education but have not been able to raise overall achievement to a good level. Regrettably, some may be schools which have not maintained a previously good standard.

In the period September 2006 to March 2007, 416 schools (7% of those inspected) were found to be satisfactory overall but with one or more significant areas of weakness. In contrast, 790 schools (14% of those inspected) were graded satisfactory but had their capacity to improve graded as good or outstanding.

In order to give practical expression to constructive dialogue with schools, we have introduced a programme of monitoring designed to help some which are identified as satisfactory overall, but which have an area of weakness. By definition, these are schools whose provision for their pupils is patchy, with some aspects not coming up to the standard the school has shown it can achieve elsewhere.

The starting point is for any weakness and area for improvement to be clearly identified in the inspection report. A light touch monitoring visit will take place, usually by one inspector, to review whether the school is making progress in this area. We consider it important that schools do not deteriorate and ultimately fall into a category of concern at their next inspection. The evidence we have from these monitoring visits, and from the schools themselves, is that this process is supportive and helps the school to move forward by setting a clear agenda for continued improvement.

Recommendation 11

We are concerned that, while thematic subject reports may identify general issues in subjects they will not provide a reliable picture of the standard of teaching in that subject. We are also concerned that the lack of subject focus in school inspections will lead some schools to neglect non-core subjects in order to improve their grading. We urge Ofsted to review the size of the sample used to produce subject reviews. We also urge Ofsted to ensure that some observation of non-core subjects is included in all inspections.

Ofsted reports on teaching in each curriculum subject every three years. These reports provide high profile evidence, convey important messages about each subject and contribute to improvement nationally. Teachers tell us that they value and make practical use of these reports. In many cases—the recent report *History in the Balance* (Ofsted, 2007) is a good example—they stimulate significant national debate.

These reports are compiled on the basis of detailed visits by the relevant specialist inspectors to 60 schools (30 primary schools and 30 secondary schools) each year for most subjects. We believe that this provides a secure evidence base, and do not see a case for extending the sample size for subject surveys as a general rule. Moreover the reports are written by subject specialist HMI who are national experts in their field, and are able to

draw in depth on professional familiarity with the subject in the curriculum and in the classroom.

Many aspects of the ongoing section 5 inspections of schools are specifically designed to ensure an appropriate focus on the curriculum and the subjects within it. This starts with the self evaluation form, which requires the school to evaluate its curriculum. In the inspection itself, inspectors evaluate how far the curriculum, including subject provision, meets external requirements and the needs of learners; and how well teaching and resources across the range of the curriculum promote learning, enjoyment and achievement.

Lesson observation is central to this evaluation: inspectors aim for a good coverage during the inspection of core subjects and a proportionate sample of non-core lessons. But it is not the only technique deployed. For example, inspectors will also speak to pupils about their experience of subjects, including non-core subjects, and may scrutinise pupils' work in a range of subjects.

Recommendation 12

We urge Ofsted, when looking at the operation of the new, larger organisation, to explore ways to strengthen their monitoring of the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

Ofsted regards the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes as fundamental. All inspections of settings, institutions or providers, except those making provision solely for adults, are inspected using frameworks that have ECM outcomes at their core. These inspections currently contribute to the joint area reviews of local services and will in future contribute to the risk assessment within the proposed new comprehensive area assessment.

All provision for children's social care and early education and care is regulated against national minimum standards. The standards underpin the framework for inspection across these two sectors of our work. The standards are brigaded under the ECM outcomes so that inspectors make and report explicit judgements about the outcomes whenever they inspect. In the early years the evidence for economic well being relates to the amount of day care provision available to allow parents to return to work, but there is some reference to the early stages of children's development in this area. Evidence for staying safe is particularly strong in these two sectors as safeguarding young and vulnerable children is a key priority. In the inspection of Cafcass the ECM agenda is now much stronger and inspectors' judgements take account of the five outcomes.

We have conducted detailed surveys on individual ECM outcomes, resulting in reports on: staying safe (*Safe and sound*, Ofsted 2006), being healthy (*Food for thought*, Ofsted 2006), enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution (*Getting on well*, Ofsted 2007). In 2008 Ofsted will publish the third Chief Inspectors' cross-inspectorate report on safeguarding.

Schools and colleges are inspected using a common inspection framework. Inspectors have to report explicitly on the achievement and standards of learners in the five ECM outcomes and on the quality of provision within the institution within which they are being educated.

In schools, the evidence available both to inspectors and schools is strong for some outcomes, such as those related to economic well-being; for others, such as “being healthy”, it is relatively more limited. Inspectors nonetheless can, and do, provide an evaluation of what schools contribute to these outcomes through the *Care, guidance and support* section of the inspection report. Inspection briefings, provided for inspectors to help them judge the achievement of learners and the quality of provision in the five outcomes, are published through the *Inspection Matters* series, and may help schools and other providers to develop their understanding.

In further education inspections, the five ECM outcomes are formally monitored as part of the overall evaluation of the institution. All inspectors collect evidence for the delivery of the themes. This is assimilated on a record of inspection findings (RoIF); each outcome is separately graded followed by explanatory text to support the judgement. The completed RoIF is shared with the college to inform its quality improvement agenda. Ofsted will consider publishing an annual summary of ECM outcomes for FE colleges in order to improve the identification and dissemination of best practice.

In all phases inspectors have received training to ensure that they are clear about the ECM outcomes areas and how they relate to the criteria and standards against which provision is judged. Further work is currently taking place to ensure that the new Ofsted has as far as possible a consistent approach to inspecting and reporting the five outcomes across all our inspection regimes.

Inspection and improvement

Recommendation 13

While schools, in general, seem satisfied with Ofsted’s role—assessing quality but not working with schools on the improvement process—other sectors are used to an inspection service that also does active improvement work. It is important that Ofsted clearly communicates to all service users what it does and does not do. It is also vital that Ofsted continues to pass examples of good practice to improvement agencies to ensure that they provide the best help possible for service providers.

We agree that it is important for us to communicate clearly to service providers and users on what they can expect from Ofsted, and to share good practice.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires Ofsted to promote improvement in the services within our remit, reflecting the Government’s principles of inspection, set out in *Inspecting for Improvement* (OPSR, 2003):

There should be an explicit concern on the part of inspectors to contribute to the improvement of the service being inspected. This should guide the focus, method, reporting and follow-up of inspection. In framing recommendations, an inspector should recognise good performance and address any failure appropriately. Inspections should aim to generate data and intelligence that enable departments to calibrate the progress of reform in their sectors and make appropriate adjustments.

Ofsted therefore has an important role in the improvement of services it inspects; there is no doubt that the process of inspection can help those inspected to improve. Our evidence

on improvement in schools, for example, indicates that the professional dialogue which takes place during the inspection between inspectors and those being inspected, detailed feedback and high quality recommendations all make a substantial impact on school improvement. This has been brought into sharp relief through the methodology being used in section 5 inspections, based as it is on a challenging professional dialogue throughout the inspection. The NFER report mentioned above highlights all these areas, along with the development of self evaluation, as important ways in which Ofsted had helped schools to improve

As an inspectorate and regulator, Ofsted's contribution to improvement is naturally different from that of the agencies given specific responsibility by the Government for ongoing improvement and consultancy activity with service providers: School Improvement Partners, the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA), Government Offices and others. But there is an equally clear need for a good working relationship between Ofsted and these partners: we share the goal of improvement in the interest of service users. The Committee rightly identifies the provision of good practice case material based on inspection findings as one element of this relationship. For this reason, building on the work of the ALI, we have agreed to identify and prepare case studies of good practice in post-16 and skills provision, and make these available to the QIA for dissemination. At the same time, in other areas, we will also be disseminating good and interesting practice.

We agree with the Committee that, for some sectors, it would be helpful to clarify the different contributions to improvement made by the various Government bodies and agents of government. We shall work with our partners to do so. Ofsted's revised strategic plan (referred to above) will reflect the priority we give to partnership with agencies engaged in direct improvement activity.

Recommendation 14

It still appears that Ofsted has no capacity to give advice when a cluster of local schools suffer from systemic underperformance. This continues to be a weakness in the inspection system.

We agree with the Committee about the importance of local systemic issues. To some extent these are addressed through existing arrangements; but we will keep these under review in order to see how they might be further strengthened.

Within Ofsted's regional structure, each local authority area is allocated a 'local managing inspector' with responsibility for maintaining an overview of educational provision across the area by monitoring inspection reports and area-wide data. This information forms the basis of regular meetings with the local authority, in the course of which systemic issues will be discussed. It is also used to inform annual performance assessments and joint area reviews of local authorities.

This local approach is complemented at national level, where there are also regular meetings for example between school improvement HMI and staff of the DCSF; these meetings consider issues of systemic failure in particular areas—or, indeed, systemic recovery.

Nonetheless, we accept the implication of the Committee's recommendation: the impact of the former Ofsted on local systemic issues was not always as strong as it could have been.

Returning to a point made earlier in this response, we believe that the remit of the new Ofsted, alongside developments such as the comprehensive area assessment, provide significant opportunities to explore and encourage improvement in the provision within a geographical location. We propose to seize these opportunities, not just in relation to schools, but across the full range of services providing care, education and skills for children, young people and adult learners.