

Department for  
**Innovation,  
Universities &  
Skills**



**National Council  
for Educational  
Excellence  
Higher Education  
Mobilisation  
strand –**

Implementation  
Plan



department for  
**children, schools and families**



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# Foreword

The publication of the NCEE recommendations in October has provided a focus on what businesses, the HE sector and schools and colleges can do to help improve achievements and aspirations for young people. This document looks at how we can implement the Council's recommendations on promoting links between Higher Education Institutions and schools and colleges.

This implementation plan is only the beginning of the process. It aims to outline developments that are already underway or being planned that will help meet the recommendations. It also indicates our wider ambitions and future direction. This is a challenging agenda and to achieve our goals we will need the continued engagement of the HE sector, schools and colleges. The Government is committed to supporting these recommendations but we can not meet them alone, indeed many are not directed at Government but at the sector itself.

It is for this reason that we are so grateful to Professor Steve Smith who has agreed to continue his engagement with the NCEE through his chairmanship of the HE Ambassadors Group. Professor Smith's work with the HE sector since the establishment of the NCEE in June 2007 has been invaluable and his continued support and enthusiasm will promote this important work still further .

The Departments for Innovation, Universities and Skills and Children, Schools and Families have welcomed these recommendations and will work together with the Ambassadors Group and the higher education sector, to make rapid progress against these recommendations. Of course we recognise, and do not underestimate, the challenges, but by the next full NCEE meeting in July this year we expect to be able to report real progress as a result of this ambitious collaborative effort.

Finally, we wish to extend our thanks to all those who have contributed their time and talents to the work of the NCEE and to the HE Ambassadors Group and look forward to working in partnership with you as we move into the implementation phase.



A blue ink signature of David Lammy MP, written in a cursive style.

David Lammy MP



A blue ink signature of Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP, written in a cursive style.

Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP

# Introduction

## The National Council for Educational Excellence

The National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) was set up by the Prime Minister in June 2007 to act as a sounding board to Government and provide advice on measures to help create a world class education system. Since then, the Council has worked to develop recommendations about where we should turn our efforts – what the business and Higher Education (HE) sectors can do, and what schools and colleges can do themselves to improve outcomes for young people. The Council presented its conclusions and a small number of priority recommendations to the Prime Minister in October 2008. Identifying a short list of priorities is a significant and important development and over the next period the Council will work alongside Government to mobilise businesses, universities and the wider education sector around these priorities.

This document puts forward Government's initial responses to the Council's seven recommendations. It identifies work that is already underway to address the recommendations and sets the direction for future developments that would see schools, colleges and universities extending their collaboration.

## Engaging the HE sector

The National Council recognises the many ways in which the HE sector already collaborates with schools and colleges to the benefit of young people who can aspire to higher education. The recommendations from the Council are intended to build from that solid base and involve further exploration and partnership to exploit opportunities to:

- consider what information could be made available to schools and colleges to enable them to benchmark their performance with others;
- start aspiration-raising in primary schools;
- promote participation in science, technology, engineering, maths (STEM) and modern foreign languages;
- support improvements in schools in providing HE-related information, advice and guidance;
- require all HEIs to produce comprehensive strategies for their widening participation work;
- publish university admissions policies;
- establish base data on the predictability of the new A level and Diploma A\* grade prior to predicted A\* grades being used in the applications and offers processes.

To assist us with implementation and mobilise widespread support for the recommendations, Professor Steve Smith, who led the NCEE work to develop them, will chair a new **Ambassadors Group** to test ideas and suggest practical ways for higher education institutions, schools and colleges to work together and take forward the recommendations in imaginative and innovative ways. The Ambassadors Group started work in November when it met for the first time and has members from key stakeholders including: Universities UK, GuildHE, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Association of School and College Leaders, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, the Association of Colleges, the National Union of Students and the Sutton Trust. Professor Smith will also involve fellow National Council members in the work of the Ambassadors Group to provide leadership and advice in the HE sector.

# NCEE HE Strand

## Recommendations and Implementation

### **Recommendation 1:**

It is important that schools and colleges offer the fullest possible support and advice to students with the ability to enter higher education, including appropriate advice for those with the ability to apply for the most selective institutions. Our recommendation on IAG will go some way to address this issue. In addition we believe the Government should consider asking Ofsted to make the quality of this support an explicit and published part of the inspection process. We also believe Government should consider what information could usefully be made available to schools and colleges to enable them to benchmark their performance with others.

- 1) Government acknowledge the importance of timely and age appropriate information, advice and guidance as young people assess their choices and make their decisions. We are committed to ensuring every young person has access to high quality Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services, particularly at those key decision points in their lives. Quality assurance processes are important and the Ofsted inspection is one mechanism by which IAG can be integrated within wider quality arrangements in each school.
- 2) DCSF are discussing with Ofsted how best to ensure that the inspection process – which currently includes IAG as an important element – focuses effectively on advice and support for young people. It is important that the focus should be on encouraging creative, imaginative and unbiased IAG for all young people, including those with the ability to apply for the most selective courses, and to drive up aspiration throughout the secondary phase. A revised draft Ofsted inspection framework and supporting guidance will be issued shortly.
- 3) In respect of information that schools and colleges may find helpful to them, DCSF and DIUS are looking at options and will keep the Ambassadors Group informed as work progresses. It is important that schools and colleges look to measure their performance in terms of high quality outcomes such as progression into good quality post 16 and 18 education or training, higher education and/or employment. We are minded to pilot, through the London Challenge's Families of Schools resource, the availability of school-level post-16 and post-19 progression data alongside the other school attainment and characteristic data that are already presented in the resource. But final decisions on a coherent way forward for schools will be taken as part of the wider review of accountability flowing into the Spring White Paper on Twenty-First Century Schools.



### **Recommendation 2:**

Every primary school should devote time to work on raising student aspirations to take up a place in higher education. Schools and HEIs should try to ensure that every pupil visits a higher education campus either during primary or early secondary education, concentrating initially on schools in low participation or deprived areas.

- 4) There is clear evidence that children can form opinions about their potential futures when still very young and consequently the earlier you can introduce the idea of progressing to higher education the better. This recommendation aligns with the plans that Aimhigher partnerships are developing to raise aspirations to higher education and with the activities organised through the Gifted and Talented Programme, the City Challenges and the new Aimhigher Associates scheme as well as universities' own outreach programmes.
- 5) We will continue to build on these developments, working with Action on Access which provides support for the Aimhigher network, to identify the degree to which Aimhigher Partnerships are currently working with primary schools and to what effect – and undertaking a wider-ranging mapping of current provision. The outcomes of this work will be submitted to the Ambassadors Group.
- 6) Given the practical and logistical issues arising from the large number of primary schools, we will look to the Ambassadors Group to advise on implementation issues. This may include: considering the merits of a brokerage arrangement; developing targeted long term strategic partnerships with schools facing disadvantage; and the nature of the engagement, such as events or using role models for example.
- 7) In addition, the newly established Council for Learning Outside of the Classroom will explore opportunities for using a visit to a higher education campus as a planned learning experience within the curriculum, working closely with Universities UK and school workforce partners. We expect the Council to come forward with a proposal by September 2009.

### **Recommendation 3:**

Government should ensure that primary, secondary schools and colleges are enabled to provide better STEM (particularly maths) skills to pupils to ensure that take-up of STEM courses at a higher level is not constrained by lack of capacity or inappropriate IAG. Schools should continue to develop dedicated activities to promote participation in STEM subjects and modern foreign languages and HEI links with schools and colleges should support this.

- 8) STEM subjects can be some of the most inspiring and magical if taught with enthusiasm and imagination. Many people will remember all their lives the wonder of an exciting chemistry experiment. It is equally true that studying STEM subjects to age 16 and beyond can open doors to many varied career paths which will otherwise be closed to you from ages as young as 14.

- 9) A campaign, launched in January and backed by Government, aims to create a more science literate society, highlighting the science and technology based industries of the future. Science [So What? So Everything] aims to show people how science benefits them in their everyday lives. Science [So What? So Everything] is aimed at people of all ages but supports and complements work funded by DCSF such as the websites [www.futuremorph.org](http://www.futuremorph.org) and [www.scienceandmaths.net](http://www.scienceandmaths.net) designed as a resource for young people and schools to show just some of the amazing and unexpected careers that studying science, technology, engineering and maths can lead to.
- 10) Evidence, including the DIUS/RCUK (Research Councils UK) Public Attitudes to Science 2008 and work carried out by Shell and York's Chemical Industry Education Centre, suggest that younger people are interested in science and technology use in their daily lives but not inspired enough to see these subjects as career or subject choices. While employers report that many young people lack the right blend of skills and experience.
- 11) To address such issues DCSF and DIUS have established the STEM Framework, including a high level governance structure, a new National STEM Director and a set of 11 coordinated action programmes, bringing a greater sense of cohesion and partnership to the work of DCSF, DIUS and their partners. The Ambassadors Group will also look at a report from the Vice Chancellors of the Universities of Derby and Kent, commissioned by John Denham last year, to inform their work in this area.
- 12) Across Government there is already a huge amount of activity underway and planned to support STEM subjects in schools and colleges; in the wider community; and through general awareness raising. We will work with the Ambassadors Group on the next phase of work.

### **In Schools:**

- A vast array of exciting and engaging after school science and engineering clubs. Activities can now be easily accessed by schools through the recently published STEM directories of enhancement and enrichment activities covering science, mathematics and engineering.
- DIUS-supported Science and Engineering Ambassadors (SEAs), managed by STEMNET are role model volunteers, primarily from business and scientific industry, who work with schools and their children to raise awareness of career choices and help bring the curriculum alive.
- STEMNET's STEM Access Grants are designed to tackle a key area of under-representation of those studying these subjects at higher levels, namely boys of Caribbean origin and girls of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.
- DCSF are developing materials for STEM Careers Workforce resources (via the Centre for Science Education at Sheffield Hallam University).
- The Centre for Industry and Education at Warwick University are piloting a STEM Careers Awareness Timeline at KS3. The project began in July 2008 and includes 30 schools. It will culminate in 2011 with a 'STEM Careers Awareness Timeline at KS3' conference, followed by national dissemination and publication of a report.

- The DCSF appointment of a national STEM Careers Co-ordinator who will bring together a range of initiatives to ensure that all young people are aware of the fulfilling and attractive careers available to them through further study of science and maths.
- Since September 2008 we have been making GCSEs in the individual sciences of physics, chemistry and biology (triple science) more accessible to pupils who will benefit. To achieve this we have introduced an 'entitlement' to triple science for all pupils who achieve Level 6+ in Science at key stage 3 and will benefit from studying the three separate sciences. This is not a statutory entitlement, but specialist Science Colleges will be expected to deliver triple science from 2008 both in their own schools and in their families of schools (and similarly specialist engineering and technical colleges from September 2009, and specialist mathematics and computing colleges from September 2010). All other maintained schools will be encouraged to offer the 'entitlement' to pupils achieving Level 6 or above at Key Stage 3. However, not all schools are expected to deliver triple science, but many may still choose to offer the 'entitlement' by working in collaboration with other local schools or colleges.

## In Colleges

- DIUS has transferred £4.3 million to the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) specifically to support the quality improvement of STEM materials during 08/09. The outputs from this money includes:
  - a) A menu of activities for STEM Subject Learning Coaches that includes the opportunity for Knowledge Transfer, professional development and updating in their subject area;
  - b) Developing and producing teaching and learning resources in priority areas to support STEM in the FE system;
  - c) A STEM web portal for FE hosted by LSIS via the Excellence Gateway;
  - d) Subject based networks and peer and community activities for Science, Mathematics and Engineering with discrete STEM activity;
  - e) Action based research projects with sharing of outputs via the STEM portal on the Excellence Gateway; and,
  - f) Practitioner produced learning objects, using local grants to encourage partnerships at local level to develop creative teaching resources locally.

## Wider Community Awareness:

- DIUS activities focus on provision of enrichment and enhancement opportunities to enthuse young people, and a funding regime to ensure that our brightest talent can pursue STEM to the highest levels. These include support for STEMNET and their Science and Engineering Ambassadors Programme, WISE (Women into Science and Engineering), National Science and Engineering Week and the new National Science Competition, to name just a few examples.
- The Higher Education Funding Council For England (HEFCE), as part of their strategically important and vulnerable subjects programme, are funding four projects aimed at increasing and widening participation in engineering, mathematics, physics and chemistry at HE level by increasing demand for these subject at school level whilst also looking at the effectiveness and attractiveness of the STEM provision at HE level.

- National Science and Engineering Week (NSEW) is key in involving all ages in scientific events and debates. 3,500 registered events attracted around 1.4 million people in 2008. A new and exciting curtain raiser to NSEW 2009 is the National Science Competition – the centrepiece of the Young Scientists’ and Engineers’ Fair. The Competition will identify a UK Young Scientist of the Year and a UK Young Technologist of the Year to inspire other students and reflect the talent within UK schools for science and engineering. Initially aimed at 13–19 year olds, the Competition will be rolled out to other age groups in 2010.
  - An integrated STEM communications campaign with TV, radio and cinema advertising started on 21 November 2008 and will run until February 2009, followed by further communications plans in 2009.
- 13) In respect of modern foreign languages, a joint DCSF and HEFCE project is supporting higher education institutions (HEI) engagement with languages in schools. A consortium of universities in each Government Office region is working with schools and colleges to encourage pupils to participate in language learning, developing programmes of activities designed to stimulate demand for language study, particularly from underrepresented groups. These include: student ambassadors visiting schools; short taster courses; summer schools, and activities relating to the Olympics.
- 14) A communications campaign launched in 2008 aims to raise the value of languages among 11–14 year olds by demonstrating their current relevance and future value. The campaign includes television adverts, a television programme, a website and PR campaign.

**Recommendation 4:**

Significant improvements are needed in the information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided in secondary schools:

- Schools should appoint a senior member of staff with responsibility for careers and education guidance, ensure that all staff have dedicated time to undertake HE-related CPD activities, and ensure that up to date HE related information, advice and guidance is provided.
- HEIs should ensure that the provision of timely advice and guidance to young people and teachers is incorporated in all strands of engagement with schools from primary school onwards.
- Schools should encourage ambition in students from lower socio-economic groups to study at the most selective HEIs, and should significantly improve the advice given to students about their 14–19 curriculum choices. The continuity and progression of IAG and support across the school-HEI interface is of critical importance.
- Government should work to promote within schools better IAG for students in order to help them make better choices (particularly of A level and Diploma subjects) and to inform them that if they get good grades then they can and will be considered by selecting HEIs, and for the most selective courses. Web-based mechanisms of offering IAG should be examined as complementary forms of delivery.
- There should be a stronger national publicity campaign, accurately targeted at under-represented groups of students, and funded by Government. The campaign should seek to highlight the financial and other benefits of higher education (including differential returns), the various routes into it, and the financial support packages on offer to support participation.

- 15) High quality, unbiased and timely IAG is hugely important for young people. It is a vital support as they make critical subject choices at age 14 and 16 that can impact on their future options. But as we have seen earlier in this document, young people form views about their future very early in life and these can be positively reinforced or undermined throughout their educational careers. Where IAG encourages a positive approach to future career options it can raise awareness, aspiration and attainment.
- 16) DIUS and DCSF are working together to improve HE-related IAG, as part of a broader programme of work leading to development of an IAG strategy in the spring. The strategy will set out how we will improve the information, advice and guidance that young people receive on careers, learning and personal issues – including information, advice and guidance on progression to higher education. We will back this up with statutory guidance for local authorities on the delivery of quality standards for information, advice and guidance and for schools we will set out the Principles underpinning the duty to deliver impartial careers education. The strategy is being developed at the highest level and we have set up a cross departmental Ministerial group on information, advice and guidance to ensure that the strategy sets in place actions that will raise young people’s aspirations, ensure seamless transitions at key stages in young people’s lives and help them to make the right decisions in all areas of their lives.

- 17) We announced in the New Opportunities White Paper that we will guarantee that those pupils from low income backgrounds that are roughly in the top 50% of performers, wherever they are located, have access to a comprehensive package of assistance to attend university. We will work with our national partners and with secondary schools and teachers, who are key to delivering this commitment on the ground, to make sure that no child falls through the gaps. To maximise the benefits of these new resources to provide pupils with the greatest awareness of the opportunities available to them, it is important that these activities articulate effectively with existing schemes. We will continue to target existing resources, including those within Aimhigher, Aimhigher Associates, and the outreach commitments of individual universities, so that more pupils from low income backgrounds receive this support.
- 18) We will provide £1 million for some National Challenge Schools to fund an HE experience at Key Stage 3 to raise young people's aspirations to attend higher education. National Challenge Advisors will judge which schools would particularly benefit from this focus on progression to higher education and will determine what will work best in each case. This experience could include visits to Higher Education institutions, meeting lecturers and students and inviting former pupil graduates to mentor current pupils. We will also evaluate the impact of this experience and, based on this, consider whether to build on it further.
- 19) Through the gifted and talented strand of the City Challenges – City GATES – we are continuing to roll out a holistic support programme to help academically gifted young people aged 14–19 to progress to a competitive university. In London, this will be complemented by a school and HE links programme, championed by Professor Malcolm Gillies, Vice Chancellor of City University to consider how best schools and HEIs in London can link up for the benefit of students. This will include undertaking a mapping exercise to explore the nature and impact of existing partnerships and report with recommendations by April 2009.
- 20) The effective provision of information, advice and guidance to young people is key to a school's success and the DCSF expects head teachers to pay a keen interest in its delivery. Decisions about staffing appointments are matters for individual schools; but DCSF believes that it is effective practice for responsibility for securing high quality, impartial IAG provision to be assigned to a member of the senior management team within the school. Statutory guidance linked to the requirement in the Education and Skills Act on schools to deliver impartial careers education will emphasise the importance of senior leadership of IAG and will set out the Department's expectation that schools will reflect the priority afforded to IAG in their management arrangements.
- 21) The National College for School Leaders (NCSL) has identified IAG advocates among school leaders and is working through them to identify and disseminate examples of effective practice. Case studies on effective IAG practice produced for school leaders will be published in May 2009 and a dedicated NCSL conference on effective IAG practice will follow in July 2009.
- 22) The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) have been commissioned to develop Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training resources for teachers to

develop understanding of the importance of IAG. This will help embed information about progression opportunities into subject teaching on the grounds that motivation, and consequently attainment, improve if young people understand the relevance of their learning and the contribution that it will make to their future lives. A draft TDA CPD strategy (which is expected to prioritise IAG) will be published in March 2009. In addition, DCSF have asked the TDA to look at how they can develop support for all KS4 and post 16 teachers to include awareness of pathways for progression through the 14–19 phase of education.

- 23) We will help schools to raise young people’s aspirations by piloting the impact of early careers related interventions in Key Stage 2. Pathfinders, which will commence in September 2009, will incorporate an understanding of HE into their programmes. The Pathfinders will conclude in July 2010 with a view to embedding effective practice into primary schools from 2011.
- 24) We are developing new, high quality up to date classroom materials, resources and briefing (by spring 2009) to help teachers provide more effective inputs on HE as part of the DCSF’s Careers Education Support Programme.
- 25) Following the first annual report from the National Student Forum, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has agreed to lead a feasibility study with the National Union of Students and other key stakeholders looking at: how well existing national, publicly funded websites help applicants make their decisions; how effectively national websites link to, and complement the information on the websites of higher education institutions; how they may be enhanced and better co-ordinated.
- 26) On 3 November 2008, DIUS launched a national multi-media communications campaign, communicating the benefits of higher education and details of the student financial support package. The campaign also seeks to raise aspirations and challenge barriers perceived by those not traditionally considering higher education.

### **Recommendation 5:**

Building on the speech by the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills on 8 April 2008, all HEIs should produce for HEFCE comprehensive strategies for their widening participation work. HEIs should support schools, including arrangements for improving school performance in the light of the National Challenge, and be involved with supporting Academies, Trusts or other mechanisms for working with schools. HEIs should consider how best to balance their investments in widening participation and ensuring fair access according to their specific institutional missions. OFFA should acknowledge the full range of contributions made by HEIs in support of widening participation, particularly in relation to IAG, curriculum support/enrichment, student mentors, involvement with Trusts and Academies, and Governor engagement.

- 27) Government and the HE sector itself have a strong interest in maintaining public confidence in all aspects of the application and admissions process for entering university, and for the work that HEIs do to broaden the mix of people seeking to enter HE. In order to further support openness and transparency, HEFCE and Office for Fair Access (OFFA) were asked to look at, and advise on how an institution’s widening

participation and fair access policies, including transparent admissions, might be brought together into single document.

- 28) HEFCE and OFFA, having worked with colleagues from across the HE sector, have now produced guidance that will support HEIs as they develop their Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSA) for the first time this year. The WPSA will provide the comprehensive strategy put forward by this recommendation.
- 29) The WPSA will allow the institution to set out the full range of widening participation activities, particularly the links it has with schools and colleges and the work it undertakes with them. It will be in the interest of the university to be directly involved in shaping the vision, strategies and ethos underpinning the development of educational excellence in schools. The university will benefit from helping to identify and nurture the most talented young people as its future students, will understand better the skills and knowledge the students bring with them to university and can adapt and respond to curriculum changes accordingly.
- 30) DIUS and DCSF are working together with Aimhigher, Gifted and Talented, National Challenge and City Challenge partners to improve coordination, identify existing and emerging school-HE relationships and the potential for these to impact upon HE participation patterns.

#### Recommendation 6:

HEIs should continue to use, and where possible expand the range of, all the information available to them to identify the best students with the greatest potential and ability to reach the highest academic achievement. In the interests of openness and fairness, institutions should publish their admissions policies and make them easily accessible to applicants, and equip all those involved in admissions to implement the policy consistently.

- 31) As we have set out above, openness and transparency are key in ensuring and maintaining the confidence of parents and pupils. The new requirement for HEIs to have in place a single Widening Participation Strategic Assessment, that includes its policy on admissions, will go some way to meeting this recommendation. Admissions are a matter for individual universities but by making these publicly available, institutions will help to avoid public confidence being undermined by uninformed and corrosive debate.
- 32) The publication of the SPA (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions) report on fair admissions (following up the 2004 independent review of admissions by Professor Steven Schwartz) on 10 December 2008, has helped to identify where progress has been made within the HE sector. We will look to the Ambassadors Group for their view on what more might be done to build on and promulgate the examples of good practice that have emerged across the sector and what additional support could be developed.
- 33) Additionally in the New Opportunities White Paper we announced that we would increase outreach work to identify the most academically gifted young people from



low income backgrounds. This work is already underway with a group of 11 research-intensive universities having agreed to pilot ways to identify talented students from groups currently underrepresented in higher education. These young people will be encouraged to aim high, to realise their potential. Other universities are in discussion to join this group and we expect all participating universities to be running pilots later this year, with a new scheme beginning in 2012.

### **Recommendation 7:**

Government should look to establish base data on the predictability of the new A level and Diploma A\* grade prior to predicted A\* grades being used in the higher education applications and offers processes. We fully support the introduction of greater stretch and challenge within the A2 syllabus and in order to achieve an A\* award, candidates will need to demonstrate much greater depth, breadth and understanding of the subject in their answers. We are concerned that there is no evidence yet upon which to assess whether the new A\* grade can be predicted with accuracy. Government should collect and review data on predictability over the first few years of A\* being awarded before it enters use in the HE applications process.

- 34) Significant changes have been made to the A2 syllabus of the A level, which will begin being taught from September 2009, and to the style and nature of the A level exam questions – the first awards, including the A\* grade, will be in the summer 2010. These changes have raised concerns within the HE sector about the predictability of the new A\* grade and particularly whether it will be sufficiently predictable to be used in the HE applications and admissions process.
- 35) Such concerns go to the heart of issues of fairness and openness, where an able and talented student can be sifted out of an application process on the basis of inaccurately predicted grades, and there are concerns that this could disproportionately impact on students from non traditional backgrounds. The HE sector itself having raised these concerns, we hope that members of the Ambassadors Group will help play a role in communicating with the sector and in taking this recommendation forward.
- 36) We will explore with UCAS and others how to evaluate the accuracy of A\* predictions against actual achievements during the first three years to enable the sector to judge whether there is sufficient evidence of accuracy to support the use of A\* predictions in the HE applications process. Scoping of the scheme and a proposal will be developed in early 2009, to facilitate data collection from the next application round.

# Progress and Implementation

We need to demonstrate that Government has listened and heard what the National Council has to say, and that it is prepared to take appropriate action – as set out in this implementation document – to progress the NCEE recommendations swiftly, capitalising on the momentum established and taking full advantage of the consensus and support that Council members have already generated. The Ambassadors Group will be an important stimulus for securing those objectives, acting both as a critical friend to Government as well as developing its own activities to assist HE institutions to deepen and extend their permanent relationships with schools and colleges.

DIUS and DCSF officials will work closely together to ensure that the Government response to NCEE's recommendations draws them together into a coherent policy, so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and the relationship between HE, colleges and schools is strengthened significantly. This will ensure better progression for all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to progress to our most competitive universities. They will benefit in particular from work across DIUS and DCSF to build a stronger relationship between support for gifted and talented learners in schools and colleges and the promotion of fair access to HE.

The Directors-General for Higher Education (in DIUS) and Schools (in DCSF) will act jointly to ensure that action is being taken forward and that progress is reported to the Ambassadors Group. Professor Steve Smith will also have discussions with Ministers from both Departments on behalf of the Ambassadors Group.

A comprehensive report on progress will be presented to the next full NCEE meeting in July 2009.



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