

FUTURES THINKING FOR EDUCATION:
Policy, leadership and the teaching profession

Schooling for Tomorrow England

SUMMARY REPORT OF PHASE 3 *Futures Thinking in Action*

Futures Thinking for Education: Policy, Leadership, and the Teaching Profession

Introduction

The continuing reform of the English School system is one of the most sustained efforts by a national Government to bring about lasting and sustainable change in its schools and to the life chances of its young people.

At no time in the history of state education in England has the business of education been so clearly the Government's acknowledged top priority. Neither has such personal interest been shown by the Prime Minister of the day over such a long period. The present Government came to power in 1997 with education as its stated major priority and has had its mandate to continue the process of reform endorsed at the two following subsequent national elections in 2001 and 2005. Indeed, there has been substantial and sustained investment in education – spending has increased from £35 billion in 1997/98 to approximately £60 billion in 2006/07, which represents a *real*-terms increase of nearly 50% in funding per pupil.

We are now in year nine of a process of change. This is a journey of reform and whilst there is a strong and well documented sense of achievement, there is a need for more to be done and a commitment to making change and the achievements to date irreversible.

As is with all western economies, there is both a need and a duty to respond quickly to the pressures and opportunities of globalisation and the knowledge economy. The Ministry (Department for Education and Skills, or DfES) aims to help build a competitive economy and inclusive society by:

- Creating opportunities for everyone to develop their learning;
- Realising potential in people to make the most of themselves; and
- Achieving excellence in standards of education and levels of skills.

The DfES's objectives are to:

1. Safeguard children and young people, improve their life outcomes and general well-being and break cycles of deprivation
2. Raise standards and tackle the attainment gap in schools.
3. All young people to reach age 19 ready for skilled employment or higher education
4. Tackle the adult skills gap
5. Raise and widen participation in higher education.

The early stages of reform by the present administration are well documented; for example, there are: National Strategies (initially for Numeracy and Literacy, but now covering other aspects of pedagogy also); National Testing at each key stage; workforce reform; restructuring of the pay system in schools and a performance related award scheme for experienced teachers; the introduction of three-year budgets for schools; a programme to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school in the country; the expansion of 'specialist' schools at secondary level; increased resources available to schools coupled with simplification of the bureaucracy associated with their distribution; strong centrally-led intervention when schools are deemed to be failing; the establishment of a

National College for School Leadership; and plans to introduce more vocational provision through a new set of specialised diplomas.

The present stage of reform can be characterised by four interrelated themes: Accountability, Autonomy, Diversity, and Collaboration.

Accountability

This is a central driver. Information is collected on the progress and achievements of every student in the system. There is a strong and continuously developing national assessment framework at ages 5, 7, 11, 14, 16 and 18. National tests and exams are designed to be accessible to all pupils; special arrangements cater for special needs. The National Strategies encourage formative and diagnostic assessment as part of teaching and learning.

National targets are agreed between The Treasury and the DfES. Local authorities agree their targets with DfES. Schools agree their targets with School Improvement Partners, who work closely with, and on behalf of, Local Authorities. All schools' results are in the public domain. Achievement against targets is monitored by the national inspection system and School Improvement Partners. The School Inspection system has independence from the delivery of education and School Improvement Partners (drawn mainly from the cadre of Head Teachers) receive standardised national training.

Each part of the system is aware of its responsibility and how it will be held accountable at school, local and national level.

Autonomy

It is acknowledged in the reform programme that the ambition of uniformly good outcomes is not necessarily achieved by uniformity of provision or style of provision. Needs and contexts vary. Best performance is achieved by the right balance of school freedom and school accountability. Schools in the English system are self governing, select their own staff and manage their own budgets. They have maximum operational freedom in the deployment of the resources available to them in order to meet the targets they have agreed with their School Improvement Partner. This autonomy is only at risk if a school is judged by the inspection system to have seriously failed in its educational duty to the children in its care. One of the roles of the School Improvement Partner is to mentor and advise the school over time to ensure that assistance can be found if there are serious issues developing.

Diversity

In addition to autonomy, there is an effort to offer greater diversity and choice of educational provision. Parents have choice in placing their child in a school and there is increased effort at creating diverse types of schools. Community, Specialist, Faith, Foundation Schools, City Academies, and Extended Schools (those which offer extended services) are all being encouraged and developed.

Collaboration

As the self governing nature of schools develops there is very substantial evidence that strong institutions have the confidence to collaborate with each other and to work together where appropriate. Schools increasingly are creating networks both within and

beyond their local authorities in order to deepen work on areas of mutual interest and in order to bring collective energy to the solution to common problems. There is also a mechanism that enables schools to federate together sharing leadership and governance arrangements therefore formalising cooperation. Collaboration with colleges of Further Education, Universities and Business is also a feature of this confident school led feature both at individual school level and by groups of schools. The latest legislation going through Parliament also enables Trusts to be formed which work with one school or a group of schools to bring further partners to the mix.

New Policy Developments

The latest piece of legislation which is currently before the Upper House of Parliament having passed through the House of Commons has the ambition to drive previous reforms further forward. It is clear that government has a mandate to ensure that the national ambition for education is achieved. It is clear what the role of the self governing, well resourced school is for its own student body. The new legislation has ambition to give parents a greater sense of ownership of the system, to generate a more personalised offer for young people and to encourage local authorities to move from a role of provider of services to that of commissioner of services.

Step one in this process was taken by the Children Act 2004 which gave local authorities the lead role with local partners in setting up children's trusts, focused on improving the well being of all children and young people and integrating services around their needs. A single Director in each local authority will be responsible for leading the partnership across education and other services. This forms part of the programme entitled *Every Child Matters* which aims to ensure that every child and young person is healthy, stays safe, enjoys and achieves, makes a positive contribution and achieves economic well-being.

The new legislation before Parliament now seeks to ensure that the local authority becomes a powerful champion of parents and pupils in their area, commissioning rather than providing education. Local authorities have new powers and duties to enable them to undertake their commissioning role through which they will:

- Promote choice, diversity and fair access as well as high standards
- Map what is needed in their area, looking at demographics, diversity and demand for children's services,
- Help all schools improve their standards, through the support and challenge of School Improvement Partners – and intervene decisively in schools that are falling below expectation.

SECTION 2: FUTURES THINKING IN ACTION

England has been involved in the *Schooling for Tomorrow* project since its inception. In parallel with work in the Netherlands and Canada, our purpose as a 'core country' in the early stages was to contribute to the international development of a toolkit of collaborative processes which policy-makers and school leaders could use to explore the OECD/CERI scenarios, and thus further inform their thinking.

Launched in England in 2002, the project offered the potential for policy-makers and educational leaders to step outside the intractable problems of the present at school and system level to see the future of learning in new, challenging and exciting ways.

The project in England has been characterised by:

- the support and active involvement of national agencies;
- a commitment to collaborative learning processes which bring together and challenge a range of perspectives through the involvement of senior policy makers, innovative headteachers and students.

Led by a study group drawn from the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the DfES Innovation Unit, the independent think tank DEMOS and the OECD, an interactive process entitled *FutureSight* was developed, which was eventually published and marketed by the NCSL. It incorporated a conceptual framework and shared vocabulary to help users understand the relationship between their current reality, the worlds of the scenarios and the future they wish to create together. *FutureSight* has been widely utilised by school leaders, Local Authorities and other bodies in developmental programmes, and its approach adapted for use in a wide variety of contexts.

Now, in Phase 3 of the project, the application of futures thinking in England is both more diffuse (distributed across a range of policy areas, and undertaken by a variety of agencies), and more directly consequential, in terms of discernable innovation.

Two specific policy areas have been singled out for exploration in the context of the 2006 Japan seminar: those of the development of *system leadership*; and of *workforce remodelling*.

Part 1: SYSTEM LEADERSHIP OF THE FUTURE

The context described above indicates the need to develop new forms of leadership for the emerging system. This is further framed by analyses of national and global trends, which point to the need for more customer-focused forms of leadership and governance, linked to the rise of networked services. In England this is taking shape in a number of ways. It includes the establishment of a nationally recognised category of *National Leaders of Education* who, in return for national recognition, agree to take on certain roles for the system as whole (including the responsibility of contributing to the improvement of failing schools). However, the OECD *Futures Thinking in Action* project has assisted in the development of a focussed programme to incubate and accelerate new models of leadership and governance of schools. We call this work the creation of **Next Practice in System Leadership**.

There are a number of reasons why schools, local authorities and the government are looking to evolve new forms of leadership. New leadership and governance structures are being sought:

- to support a school or schools ‘causing concern’.
- to spread high quality leadership across schools and deploy it more effectively
- to overcome falling rolls linked to rural isolation whilst maintaining the quality of teaching and learning

- to deliver all-age learning
- to resolve issues around headteacher appointment or succession: how is excellent leadership in all 18000 primary schools to be secured for example, in the face of the expected retirement of 40% of primary heads in the next 7 years?
- to deliver personalised learning offers (especially for the age range 14-19) which no single institution acting alone could do
- to develop services, such as early years, special needs or community-based learning in radically new 'customer focused' forms, which might lead to the integration of existing institutions into 'learning centres' serving children, young people, their parents and other adults.

Taken together, these are compelling reasons to devote focused capacity on the development of leadership models explicitly designed to facilitate solutions to these challenges.

The Innovation Unit was established in 2002 to promote practitioner-led innovation. It has focused its work since 2005 on the concept of developing 'Next Practice' (as distinct from transferring or disseminating acknowledged 'best' or 'good' practice) by means of a methodology centred on releasing practitioner (and user) creativity, informed by research, environment scanning, and forms of future thinking, including trend analysis. This methodology is being employed across a range of content areas. The first of these focuses on system leadership - defined as 'leadership beyond a single institution'. Three other Next Practice being supported by the Innovation Unit are concerned with: personalising learning; further developing advances in workforce reform (see below); and the deeper engagement of parents in their children's learning.

It is fundamental to this approach that the problems – and solutions – should be those of the schools themselves, rather than identified by others, be they academics, policy thinkers or theorists. Schools and local systems were identified therefore which were already pushing at the boundaries of current leadership, governance and accountability structures. The Next Practice Project on System Leadership, which is being run in partnership with the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), has identified 16 'field trials' sites, comprising collaborations of various types. Examples include:

- Town-wide governance and leadership of 14-19 educational and vocational provision.
- New district-wide governance and leadership models designed to ensure coherent services and strong community leadership and engagement.
- New leadership models for a 0-19 federated school serving a deprived community.
- New leadership models and flexible leadership deployment across a federation of six Academies.

The programme will support, challenge and assist in the development of the field trials' thinking and practice over the period September '06 until March '08. The project will also work closely with a much wider Community of Interest (comprising other sites from which the 16 were chosen; together with other schools engaged in similar innovative work). This Community of Interest will connect with the work through the best developed knowledge management techniques: actual and virtual. The power of this work must lie

well beyond the 16 field trials themselves. And it will extend also beyond their successes, for it is likely that – as in most innovation – powerful learning will be had from failures as well as successes.

More information on the Next Practice project on System Leadership can be found on www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit

Part 2: WORKFORCE REMODELLING

In January 2003 the UK Government, school workforce unions and the employers signed a historic agreement designed to raise standards and tackle unacceptable levels of workload for teachers in England and Wales. The agreement introduced a series of significant changes to teachers' conditions of service. These changes were to be phased in over three years.

Significantly the agreement did not focus solely on teachers as it acknowledged the vital role played by school support staff. This has led directly to the establishment of higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) standards and to the certificate in school business management (CSBM). The agreement has also helped create other new roles in schools for adults who support teachers' work and pupils' learning.

The signatories to the 2003 Agreement realised that a cultural change on this scale that has led to the remodelling initiative. Remodelling is a proven approach to managing a process of change that encourages and enables positive and lasting transformation. It embeds a proactive culture where staff have the skills, experience, confidence and commitment to apply an effective remodelling approach to all significant challenges at all times.

Schools that are remodelling:

- have teaching and learning as their main focus and improve their performance by raising standards of professionalism and building core competence throughout the workforce
- involve all the school workforce (or their representatives) and other relevant stakeholders in making decisions, and apply remodelling approaches to all key challenges
- have change management as part of school life, make speedy and effective strategic decisions and implement new initiatives quickly, enabling staff to focus on their core responsibilities
- share their experiences, expertise, resources and learning with other schools, agencies and stakeholders, and understand, establish and absorb examples of effective practice from within the education sector and beyond
- ensure their staff have a reasonable work/life balance and that tasks and activities are carried out by appropriate people within flexible working patterns, and
- attract and retain the best available talent through creating a highly motivated and positive working environment.

Since its introduction in 2003, remodelling has also been used in England to progress the extended schools programme, the key driver behind which is the *Every Child Matters* agenda. An extended school is one which provides access to a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day and in some cases all year round, to help meet the needs of children, families and the wider community. Consistent with the aims of

workforce remodelling, schools must ensure only the most appropriate people develop and deliver extended services; support staff may want to be involved, as well as external staff such as health and social workers and those in local sports and arts organisations.

Thus remodelling, its principle and its processes, tools and techniques have quickly become a fundamental part of the school management system – and is clearly set to play an ever-important role in school-related change programmes of the future.

The program of Next Practice is described at <http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/education-experience/next-practice/background-to-next-practice.html>

More information on Next Practice is available from the 2007 report at http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/files/pdf/nextpractice_in_education.pdf

The latest diagram illustrating Next Practice is available at http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/triple_diamond_model_-_with_strapline.pdf

CONTACTS

Next Practice in Leadership: Valerie Hannon, Director, The Innovation Unit
(valerie.hannon@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)

Workforce Remodelling: Dame Professor Pat Collarbone
(pat.collarbone@tda.gov.uk)