THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN: RECONCEPTUALISING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Paper presented by Professor Michael Barber to the OECD, Schooling for Tomorrow Conference

1-3 November 2000

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Hebrews, Chapter 11, Verse 1.

THE CHALLENGE OF RISING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS

The public education systems which became woven into the fabric of 20th century welfare states were the product of the two decisive forces of the 19th century: industrialisation and the nation state. They prepared populations to contribute to industrial society and shaped national identity.

As the 21st century begins and we peer into the future through mists of complexity and uncertainty, our principal task is surely to justify the continued existence of public education systems. After all, both the industrial society and the nation state which prompted their existence have had their day. The new economy and globalisation, both the products of the extraordinary technological revolution in which we are engulfed, define the new era.

Without a clear rationale, public education systems could be blown away by these powerful new forces. Just as religion became a matter of private choice and individual conscience in the two centuries after the Enlightenment, education could head in the same direction as the economies of the developed world continue to grow through this prolonged boom. More and more parents have ever greater disposable income: might they not as a lifestyle choice decide they want to spend that income on their most treasured possessions, their children, buying an education tailored to their view of the world? And if they did, how easy then would it be to persuade them to continue to pay taxes to provide, among other things, for the education of everyone else’s children? These dilemmas are already acute in American cities such as Philadelphia.

The case for public education, therefore, cannot be assumed as it was in the 20th century. It needs to be restated for the new century. In restating it, we will find we are describing a radically new conception of public education.

The first part of the argument for public education in the 21st century is an intensification of an old argument. A good education system is increasingly important not only to the success of a modern economy but also to the creation of a socially just society. In the 20th century, most educators believed this to be true but few, if any, education systems delivered the universal high standards it implied. In practice, achieving the ideal was not essential. Extensive unskilled and semi-skilled work was available. There was therefore employment for those without high standards of education. This is no longer true. Moreover, the pace of social and technological change has become so much more rapid that any citizen without a good education who is fortunate enough to find work today cannot have confidence that they’ll still be in work tomorrow. In the global market which is emerging, every country will seek to match standards elsewhere as a means of attracting business as well as enabling its citizens to
succeed in life. Anyone who doubts this only needs to glance at a recent advertisement in the Economist: “What makes the Czech Republic the MODEL LOCATION for foreign investors?” it asks. Answer: “Czech 13 and 14 year olds achieved the best mathematics test results in Europe.”

Meanwhile, the distribution of good education in a population also crucially affects the distribution of income and the degree of social cohesion. Those societies which in the second half of the 20th century had the most successful education systems - Denmark or Germany for example - tend to have narrower income differentials now. Those with the most divided or inefficient school systems in the second half of the 20th century also tend to have the greatest income differentials now.

As the Economist survey of the new economy put it:

“Static wage differentials in continental Europe are usually explained by factors such as powerful trade unions and high minimum wages. But it is possible that faster expansion in the supply of well-educated workers is more important. This suggests that the real culprit behind rising inequality in America is … the government’s failure to improve education and training.”

(Economist, 23 September 2000)

In short, the success of our education systems in this generation will determine equity in the next. Certainly in England, the current extent of social inequality and a relative lack of productivity can be attributed in large part to the weakness of the school system in the 20th century. Being aware of the problem is only the beginning.

A central question for anyone seeking to prioritise education reform and correct the failings of a 20th century school system is where to look for evidence on how to proceed. There is plenty of evidence available of what worked in the past but very little evidence of what will work in the future. The explosion of knowledge about the brain and the nature of learning, combined with the growing power of technology, creates the potential to transform even the most fundamental unit of education: the interaction of the teacher and the learner. Moreover, huge social changes, such as growing diversity and population mobility, present educators with new and constantly changing circumstances. As a result, the characteristics which defined the successful education systems of, say, 1975, are unlikely to be those which will define success in the future.

The era of the large, slow-moving, steady, respected, bureaucratic public services, however good by 20th century standards, is over. In the new era, public services will need to be capable of rapid change, involved in partnerships with the business sector, publicly accountable for the outcomes they deliver, open to diversity, seeking out world class benchmarks and constantly learning. Indeed, they will share the characteristics of the most successful business organisations which mobilise all their available resources, human and otherwise, around the achievement of their goals and which are prepared to take risks in an increasingly complex world. In addition, though, they will have to convince an often sceptical and always impatient public that they are delivering high and rising standards. This is a challenge not just periodically, say at election time, but every day of every week.

The challenge of reforming public education systems is therefore acute. Those responsible are in no position to deal in certainties. What they can do is manage and transfer knowledge about what works effectively (as our National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies do), intervene in cases of underperformance, create the capacity for change in the system and ensure that it is flexible and adaptable enough to learn constantly and implement effectively.
These dilemmas of reform face every system, whatever their performance in the past. We recently undertook an internal DfEE study in which we attempted to benchmark our education system against a dozen or so others and arrived at the following categorisation.

![System performance diagram](image)

The central question for us in England is whether we can maintain the flexibility and capacity for transformation which has been built into our system while simultaneously improving student outcomes. The evidence of the last two or three years suggests we can. For other systems, such as Bavaria, the dilemma is the other way round: can they create the flexibility necessary for the future while continuing to deliver high standards? Adapting the previous diagram, it is possible to illustrate the challenge of meeting rising public expectations as follows.

![Rising public expectations diagram](image)

The lessons of a decade of controversial and often intense education reform in England, examined alongside efforts at reform elsewhere in the developed world, provide a number of insights into how systems of any kind might rise to this challenge. None of us can be sure, however. We rely to some extent on faith, the evidence of things not seen.

This paper looks, in the first section, at the goals for 21st century education systems and, in the second section, at the strategic challenges those goals present.
FOUR DELIVERABLE GOALS

Deliverable Goal 1: Achieving Universally High Standards

In the 20th century, the rhetoric of “success for all” was often used but the reality was very different. Some countries did better than others but all tolerated a substantial degree of failure or underperformance. The challenge for the 21st century is to make success for all a reality. This demands both that educators believe in the possibility of high standards for all students and that policies are designed to deliver this outcome across entire education systems. In short, the new century imposes a much more ambitious goal on education systems than ever before. This explains in part the growing pressure on teachers and others who work in school systems.

As the standards drive intensifies, the logic of 20th century education policy will be turned on its head. For most of the 20th century, education policy-makers concentrated on controlling or standardising inputs - numbers of school places, qualifications of teachers, the content of the curriculum, class sizes, hours of teaching each week, days in the year and provision of books and materials. In other words, the constants in policy were the inputs. Not surprisingly, given the diversity of our societies and the varying backgrounds of students, the consequence was that the standards achieved - the output - became the variable. The new challenge - high standards for all - means the output must become the constant in which case, necessarily, the inputs become variables.

Some students need more learning time to achieve high standards than others; that time should be provided. Some need intensive individual tuition; that should be provided. As they get older, some students learn better in workplaces or communities than they do in schools; they should have those options. Different approaches to teaching and learning suit different students; teachers should therefore tailor their pedagogy. To achieve common outputs, the inputs need to be varied. Whatever it takes.

In other words, the new challenge of high standards for all will demand that we question many of the assumptions that underpinned educational thinking in the 20th century. “If standards are a constant, then everything else must be a variable” will become our slogan. The next two deliverable goals follow directly from it.

Deliverable Goal 2: Narrowing the Achievement Gap

We have learnt a great deal over the last two decades about school effectiveness and school improvement and the policies which will promote them.

In England, the present government, building on the reforms of previous governments, has put in place a framework for continuous improvement which puts this body of knowledge at the heart of policy. The diagram below shows how it works. (The detail is provided in the table in Annex 1).
The evidence that this approach works is accumulating. It encourages the improvement of all schools and, as a result, the key performance indicators in England are all moving in the right direction. To take just one example, every case of serious underperformance is now identified and tackled. Since the framework was put in place, over 600 formerly failing schools have been restored to health and have continued to improve. Evidence from other systems with a similar approach - Texas or Kentucky in the United States for example - is also positive.

However, the “high challenge, high support” model is necessary but not sufficient. It will not raise standards fast enough to satisfy a sceptical public. Nor will it on its own do enough to narrow the achievement gap between schools in disadvantaged areas and those elsewhere. Some countries have done reasonably well in the past in minimising variations between areas but in others, including England, this challenge is acute, given the historic levels of social and economic inequality. Moreover, even in countries with fewer social divisions than England, recent immigration from, for example, North Africa or the Balkans, means that the need to address emerging social divisions is a growing challenge across the OECD. This would be true, for example, in the city of Stockholm. All systems therefore need to give constant priority to narrowing achievement gaps between different areas or groups of students.

It is for this reason that, in addition to putting the framework for continuous improvement in place, the government in England has implemented the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies which have fundamentally changed teaching and learning in all 20,000 primary schools and dramatically improved the performance of primary students. Over 125,000 additional eleven year olds achieved high standards in each of literacy and numeracy this year compared to four years ago, as the following graphs illustrate.
Crucially, the evidence shows not just a general rise but also a narrowing of the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, as the following graph reveals. A similar story is true for mathematics.
Remarkably, the local education authority with the lowest levels of performance in the country now exceeds the average performance of the system as a whole four years ago. These strategies are laying the foundations for social inclusion in the next generation.

Moreover, the strategies are also narrowing the achievement gap in English between boys and girls, and areas with high concentrations of students from ethnic minorities are making faster progress in both maths and English than the population as a whole. These outcomes appear to be a consequence of consistent high expectations of all children and schools, of serious and sustained investment in high quality professional development for all teachers and of implementing a strategy which is universal, and therefore includes every school, but also targeted, and therefore provides extra support to those schools which face the greatest challenge. This is a radical shift from the largely disappointing attempts to challenge inequality in the past through well-meaning programmes for particular groups which, unintentionally perhaps, ended up separating them from the mainstream and lowering expectations.

We are now embarking in England on the secondary level strategies which will build on these important successes at primary level. A new programme, due to become universal next year, is currently being piloted in 204 secondary schools aimed at raising standards of performance of 11 to 14 year olds in English, mathematics and science. In addition a targeted programme, Excellence in Cities, is providing additional support to secondary schools in the most challenging areas. It is too early to be sure that these developments will narrow the achievement gap at secondary level but the early vital signs allow cautious optimism.

Only by sustaining the primary reforms for several further years and completing the implementation of the secondary reforms will we be able to ensure that this encouraging early progress becomes irreversible. Other countries with different starting points and social histories will adopt different strategies but narrowing the achievement gap will be a challenge for everyone in the decade ahead.

**Deliverable Goal 3: Unlocking Individualisation**

The ultimate destination of making standards the constant and varying the inputs would be to tailor provision precisely to meet the needs and aspirations of each individual student. This may sound a highly ambitious goal but, unless it is achieved, universally high standards will never become a reality. Moreover, as other sectors of the economy have shown, the application of modern technology enables individualisation that was previously unachievable. To take just one example, Dell do not sell you a computer off the shelf: they build precisely the computer you order to your specification. Only with this kind of thinking will education systems become sensitive and responsive enough to remove the barriers to learning both inside and outside school which prevent some young people from achieving high standards.

A number of examples from the policies we are beginning to put in place in England illustrate the point. In around 1000 secondary schools in large urban areas, learning mentors are being appointed to provide targeted individual support to those students whose complicated home circumstances stand in the way of their academic progress. As a direct consequence, behaviour, attendance and achievement are beginning to improve, not just for those individuals but for other students in their classes too.

Similarly, for students whose emotional and behavioural difficulties prevent them from learning well in the school environment, individualised full time programmes are being designed. One experiment established as part of this provision is Notschool.net, an online virtual learning community of around 100 teenage students who have been placed out of school for a variety of reasons. The students are supported both electronically and by periodic one-to-one, face-to-face tutorials with teacher-facilitators. The BBC and the National Science Museum are
partners in the project. It is too early to say what the outcomes of the experiment will be but a
similar project organised by the University of the First Age in Birmingham has already achieved
some startling results. Interestingly, the unit costs of providing this kind of education are not
significantly higher than for traditional education and, of course, they are a great deal lower
than the social costs of not providing education at all for students in these circumstances.

Individualisation is also the key to meeting for all students those diverse aspirations which go
beyond their learning in core subjects. Whether it be playing jazz piano, dominating midfield on
a soccer pitch or painting a vase of sunflowers, education systems need to offer the opportunity
for individual students to excel, not just because these are valuable activities in their own right
but because, through them, young people can develop the confidence, self-efficacy and
engagement which enable them to succeed across the entire curriculum. For these reasons
new provision is being made available in our large cities for gifted and talented young people
and everywhere there is a vast expansion of out-of-school learning opportunities.

One challenge for the next phase of reform is to bring coherence to this wide range of
developments. The key to doing so will be for each school to set individual, challenging,
progress targets each term for each student, involving the students and their parents in the
decisions. In our best primary and secondary schools, this is already firmly established
successful practice. Through the dissemination of best practice and the professional
development programmes of the next two to three years, it is likely to become universal. Then,
for the first time, in addition to the national and school curriculum, each student will have an
individual curriculum, designed to make the most of the array of learning opportunities available
to them at school, out of school and at home. Instead of fitting individuals into a system as we
did in the 20th century, we will have a system designed around the needs and aspirations of
individuals.

**Deliverable Goal 4: Promoting Education with Character**

So far, my argument has been about achieving high academic standards for all students.
Academic standards are not yet high enough anywhere and will therefore remain front and
centre, but all the evidence from employers (and indeed all our experience of life) suggests that
the foundations of success for both individuals and communities involve a wider set of
attributes, over and above academic achievement. The Dutch refer to “social competence”,
Americans to “habits of the mind and habits of the heart” and Gandhi to “education with
character” but all are referring to a similar set of characteristics. The result of growing interest
in these themes will be a broadening of the definition of standards over the next decade.

One excellent summary of this area is in the work of Michael Bernard, the Australian
psychologist, currently based in California and founder of the “You Can Do It!” education
programme. His approach is depicted below.
What he describes as the foundations are often left to chance. Most schools concentrate on teaching the “academics” and assume students will pick up the necessary habits of mind as incidental benefits. The result, not surprisingly, is that some do and some don’t. In fact, there is powerful evidence that these foundations can be taught systematically and effectively, not separately from the academic curriculum, but through it. Moreover, when they are taught, academic standards rise.

In England, we are just beginning to consider how to give greater prominence to education with character. Through the recent review, the teaching of thinking has been included in the National Curriculum. In addition, citizenship, including not just knowledge but also active involvement in the school and the community, will become a compulsory element of the curriculum from 2002. Also, through professional development programmes for secondary schools in the next three years, teachers will learn strategies both to improve the motivation of students and to teach higher order thinking.

Some of these changes, such as the introduction of citizenship, merely bring England in line with what other countries have done for years. Others will advance us to the forefront of thinking.

Every country, though, will need to give greater attention to how we measure the performance of pupils, schools and the system as a whole in this area of social competence. Potentially, the independent Office for Standards in Education, which ensures all schools in England are inspected over a 4-6 year cycle, provides a model for others. The framework for school inspection, for example, already requires inspectors to examine how schools develop the social, moral, spiritual and cultural attributes of their students. This provides vital system level information on these issues. There is also a growing field of research into student attitudes to and involvement in school. Work such as that by Mike Johnson and others at Keele University and Jean Rudduck and others at Homerton College, Cambridge, is having a significant impact at both school and system level in England. There is similar work in Europe and the United States. These developments, alongside major international projects such as PISA, will provide us with the basis to develop the sophisticated measurement systems and performance indicators for “education with character” that we will need in the decade ahead.
FIVE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

Strategic Challenge 1: Reconceptualising Teaching

It follows, as night follows day, that if the goals of education systems change as radically as I have proposed in the previous section, then the education workforce - especially the teaching profession - will need to change radically too. The necessary changes will encompass everything from attitudes to pedagogy and will be nothing short of revolutionary.

The shift from holding inputs constant to holding standards constant requires a wholly new mindset for teachers. It requires, first of all, that teachers believe, really believe, that all students can achieve high standards. As the title of this paper implies, this is a matter of faith as much as hard evidence but no less important for being so. Indeed, because high expectations are crucial to delivering high standards, this act of faith can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, just as its depressing opposite was in the 20th century.

No-one should underestimate the difficulty of achieving this shift, day to day, classroom to classroom across a country. When a student fails, for example, it means teachers asking not what’s wrong with him/her? but what do I need to do differently to ensure he/she succeeds next time? In short, it means teachers who are prepared to stand up and be held to account for the results their students achieve.

This in turn implies teachers who are constantly searching out best practice and refining and developing what they do. It means teachers who work in professional learning teams not just within their schools but also outside. It means teachers who have the time and inclination to examine systematically in teams the students’ work which emerged from a course of teaching, discuss the standards achieved and consider the pedagogical implications. It means teachers who accept the need for their teaching to be monitored and welcome opportunities to see best practice modelled by their peers. As part of our numeracy strategy, for example, over 2000 primary teachers have been appointed as leading maths teachers and provided with the opportunity to spend several days a year modelling good mathematics teaching for other teachers. The Japanese approach to professional development, known as “lesson study”, through which a small group of teachers design, deliver and refine a particular lesson to ensure it is the best it can be, is also instructive.

Accepting accountability and the need for continuous professional development, though, are only the beginning. A much more dramatic revolution in teaching is not far ahead. The technological revolution which has transformed so many sectors of the economy will shortly reach critical mass in education systems. Steady investment in hardware in many countries will increasingly be matched by investment in connectivity, system maintenance and teachers’ skills in the use of Information and Communications Technology. Moreover, business investment in educational software of real quality is also rapidly growing. Furthermore, in the last two decades, there has been huge growth in our understanding of the human brain and how people learn. This combination of new technology and new knowledge is the key to individualisation and the achievement of high standards for all.

As the revolution occurs, new combinations of teachers, other paraprofessional staff, experts beyond the school boundaries and technology will enable new and powerful pedagogies. Already in some of our specialist schools and education action zones, teachers in one school are able to teach pupils in others through broadband and whiteboard technology. Students are able to pursue investigations into, for example, medical ethics by contacting academic experts in the field directly by email. Interactive video-conferencing enables students to work collaboratively with their peers in other countries. Computer programmes such as RM
Successmaker provide individual tuition, rapid feedback and positive reinforcement for pupils working alone. Specialist language teaching becomes economic and tests and examinations, increasingly computer-based, can become much more imaginative and provided just-in-time, rather than only at set times of year.

These are a few examples of the changes that lie ahead. For teachers, if they remain wedded to old ways, the revolution will, of course, present a threat. But if they embrace and shape it, it will become a huge opportunity: to enhance their pedagogy, to build new teams, to innovate, to find more time for better quality professional development and above all to enable their students to achieve higher standards. Indeed, the technological revolution is the key to the individualisation which I’ve already described. The choice facing teachers and their representatives is whether to ride the wave of change or sink beneath it. Much the same challenge faces public education systems as a whole.

**Strategic Challenge 2: Creating High Autonomy/High Performance Schools**

The pace of change is quickening all the time. It took almost 40 years before 50 million Americans listened to the radio. It took just four years before 100 million people worldwide were using the Internet. Traffic on it doubles every 100 days. A major strategic challenge for every government is how to create an education system which is not only responsive to rapid change but also able to anticipate it. In England, we are seeking to do so by devolving more and more responsibility, including the employment of staff, and funding to the front line: schools. This mirrors developments in the business sector which has also largely devolved responsibility to front line units. Our own internal analysis suggests we have gone further in this direction than all other education systems, with the possible exception of the Netherlands.

In accordance with the policy principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success, we expect to delegate still further responsibility to schools as the system improves. In a recent policy paper, we have set the goal of delegating 90 per cent of funding to schools. Currently, we delegate 85 per cent.

The autonomy this offers to schools is not unconditional. It depends on schools demonstrating their performance through the accountability systems. Where there is underperformance, the local education authority, or in the last resort the national government, will intervene on behalf of the pupils. As the school system improves, the need to do so should be steadily reduced.
Meanwhile, schools that make exceptional progress or achieve sustained excellence will be rewarded both with salary bonuses for the staff and with the opportunity to become beacon schools, which have a responsibility to contribute to disseminating best practice. There will be 1000 such schools by September 2001. This process of delegating responsibility to the front line will almost certainly become much more widespread across the OECD in the next decade because centralised bureaucracies will not be capable of changing fast enough. There will, of course, be a variety of models for doing so and in some cases a community or school district rather than an individual school may be seen as the front line unit of delivery.

It remains to be seen how this process will affect the nature of relationships within the education service. Old-fashioned 20th century bureaucratic systems had a tendency to create a dependency culture. When a problem arose, those in the school system asked themselves what the government would do about it. Once 90 per cent of all funding, as well as much of the responsibility, lies with schools, this becomes inappropriate. It ceases to be the responsibility of government to regulate, for example, class sizes at secondary level. Once government has provided the funds, it becomes the task of the school to decide what size classes to have. After several years of extensive delegation, only now are we seeing the signs of a shift in the relationships between school principals and government. There are signs now that principals are beginning to see that the response to a problem is not what will government do about it? but what can we together do to solve it? This may be the reason why, in a survey undertaken in September 2000, around 75 per cent of principals were quite or very optimistic that standards would continue to rise in future.

Whether this shift of the relationship from dependency to partnership matures will decide the success of our education reform and no doubt of others too. The aim should be the creation of a culture in which everyone, the Secretary of State included, accepts both their responsibility for student outcomes and their part in solving the problems that inevitably arise in any fast-changing service.

**Strategic Challenge 3: Building Capacity and Managing Knowledge**

There is a paradox about the concept of high autonomy-high performance schools which becomes rapidly apparent in any conversation with a successful school principal: the high autonomy school can only achieve high performance through collaborating with other schools and through voraciously consuming the knowledge generated by the educational infrastructure, such as university research departments. In other words, all schools, however autonomous, depend ultimately on joining self-confident partnerships. This paradox too is precisely
paralleled in the modern business world.

The research on school effectiveness and school improvement over the last generation taught us to look at what could be done within a school to improve student outcomes. This was important but not enough. As David Hargreaves argues convincingly in a recent, unpublished paper:

“… schools, like businesses must find new ways in which to manage and exploit their intellectual assets, especially the teachers. Since teachers have a weak knowledge base on how to develop the new knowledge and skills required by pupils, they will have to learn how to create this professional working knowledge and then transfer it rapidly and effectively through the teaching force … A model of school improvement thus requires concepts of knowledge creation, innovation and transfer as a means of generating new forms of high leverage.”

There are two consequences of this line of argument. The first is that, within any school, high levels of trust and a collaborative professional culture become essential. The second is that schools need access to knowledge about best practice created elsewhere and incentives to share their knowledge with the rest of the system. This is the argument for thinking radically and imaginatively about the intermediate tier in an education service, the tier between individual schools and the central authorities.

This has been the rationale behind England’s reform of the role of local education authorities. They now have clear responsibility for the planning of school places, for monitoring performance of all schools, for intervening where a school is underperforming and for encouraging the dissemination and adoption of best practice. There is growing innovation among them on how to carry out their role. Some are working in partnership with business to improve the quality of their services and many are facilitating partnerships of schools to enable them to work together to share the problems they face.

In addition many schools, encouraged by central government, are building networks and partnerships of their own. Secondary schools in England’s largest urban areas are collaborating to implement the Excellence in Cities programme, for example. Over a thousand schools are in Education Action Zones. The beacon schools are rapidly creating best practice networks. The National College for School Leadership, to be launched later this month, will do the same. New research networks involving schools and universities are developing.

Government’s role has been to design and trial the various models of collaboration and to provide incentives to schools to participate. The quasi-market put in place by previous governments in the late 1980s and 1990s has been radically reformed to ensure that collaboration, knowledge-sharing and the contribution of the individual school to solving the problems of the system as a whole are all valued and recognised. Government has also invested extensively in professional development for teachers to ensure that best practice is not only disseminated but also adopted.

In these ways, we have taken the early steps towards the kinds of knowledge creation and transfer systems envisaged by David Hargreaves. There are many other examples worldwide. One of the most successful is the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence in a far-flung corner of Texas, which has brought together a national foundation, a local university and three school districts with dramatic impact on student outcomes. The goal is to create what Michael Fullan describes as “capacity” - the ability to learn and bring about successful change - at every level in the system. The old hierarchical, bureaucratic models of the past will not prove capable of doing this in the future. Nor will any single alternative model. Building capacity will involve providing a variety of sources of knowledge and expertise from which teachers and schools can
select the range most appropriate to solving their particular problems.

**Strategic Challenge 4: Establishing New Partnerships**

As the previous section makes clear, building capacity in the school system requires new partnerships among schools, local authorities and universities. The next decade, however, will also demand new partnerships which go far beyond the school system and which link education both to other public services and to the community and business sectors.

For many individuals and families, especially in disadvantaged areas, the education service is one of a number of public services on which their lives depend. If these services at local level do not collaborate or, still worse, if they run contradictory policies, far from solving people’s problems, they can end up simply exacerbating them. Reducing social exclusion, therefore, requires problem-solving collaboration between various aspects of the public service. A number of initiatives developed in the last two or three years are designed to explore how best to do this. In Hertfordshire, the local authority has brought together its social and education services to address the problems of children and their families. Some education action zones, such as that at Wythenshawe in Manchester, involve health, social and police services alongside education in tackling the problems of specific localities. New creative partnerships in large cities will bring education and cultural organisations together to improve access to theatre, music and the arts in disadvantaged areas.

In addition, schools are being given both the responsibility and the means to address some of the wider problems of their students. For example, instead of teachers being distracted from their core task of teaching well by social problems, full-time professional learning mentors are assisting them. In nineteen education action zones, over 800 undergraduate students from local universities are working with disaffected 14 and 15 year olds to raise their expectations and attainment. In addition to their intrinsic merit, initiatives such as these have another immensely important benefit. They build the public will for high quality public education by giving a far wider range of people a stake in the system.

The same argument applies to the growing involvement of business that we will see over the decade ahead. The business sector has always been one of the “consumers” of the “products” of the education system. In the highly competitive global market, access to highly educated staff has become crucial. Potentially, therefore, businesses are powerful advocates for public education but only if it achieves high standards and is reasonably cost effective. Especially in the United States, but also elsewhere - Hong Kong for example - business leaders are often at the forefront of reform efforts. Where they are, they not only help to give reform a radical edge, they also contribute to greater public confidence. Most crucially, they can help to sustain a reform effort over the long term, regardless of the vagaries of the political process. One fine example of this is the 15 years of commitment of the Pritchard Committee to radical reform in Kentucky.

But business will also increasingly become a partner as an investor and provider of services in education. It will simply not be possible for governments to provide all the necessary services for successful education systems in the next four years. For example, the explosion of the internet and other new technologies demands investment in new software products. Businesses, not governments, will largely make that investment. The rate at which computers become obsolete presents a funding challenge which governments on their own will not be able to solve. Maintaining and developing a stock of school buildings fit for the new century will demand huge capital expenditure. In each of these fields, the question will not be whether there is business sector involvement but on what terms. Our Private Finance Initiative and National Grid for Learning are different means of building the necessary public-private partnerships.
Increasingly, too, we can expect to see business expertise being applied in areas more traditionally reserved for public sector provision. This will happen not just because of the investment it will bring but because of the capacity for effective delivery it will enable. Hence the new roles government has encouraged business to take in the provision of advice and services to schools, especially in those places where traditional local authority services have been demonstrably inadequate.

Each of these developments is an illustration that the old public policy question of who provides? is being replaced by a new one: how is the public interest to be secured? As this shift occurs, there will be those working within public education systems who feel threatened or even offended, but this is to look backwards at a time of rapid change. The shift is better perceived as opportunity to improve provision and strengthen public support for public education.

**Strategic Challenge 5: Reinventing the Role of Government**

In an education system of the future, with the kinds of characteristics I have described, the role of government - whether at state level (in Australia, Germany or Canada for example) or national level (in England or the Scandinavian countries) - will need to change radically. I want to attempt briefly to map out the key tasks for a government in relation to public education in the future. I start with the necessary assumption that education reform, like any other reform, requires a sound macro-economic context and accountable, open, democratic government.

**VISION**

Given the increasing importance of education to the success of societies in the future, governments need to ensure education is a high priority politically, socially and economically. They need to spell out a compelling vision of the role education can play in fulfilling a society’s ambitions and meeting the aspirations of citizens. They need to anticipate trends and open up discussion of the future so that it becomes a central aspect of public discourse. They need to celebrate success and provide a commentary on progress. They need to take on in public argument those who defend the status quo or seek a return to the past.

**INVESTMENT**

If governments will the ends, then they must also will the means. Successful public education systems in 21st century will be expensive. Business will invest and individuals will be increasingly willing to contribute but these extra sources of funding will not substitute for investment by government. On the contrary, if all students from whatever background are to achieve high standards, then governments will have to invest more in the future, not less. Within overall rises in expenditure, to ensure a universal service they will need to target additional resources to the areas of greatest need in order to promote equity. They will need to link the greater investment to the delivery of improved outcomes so that it buys change rather than reinforcing the status quo. They will need to invest steadily rather than haphazardly, so that schools can think ambitiously and confidently about the future.

For some governments, this may have been normal practice for some time. In the UK, the switch to three-year instead of one-year expenditure planning is relatively recent and the linking of investment across all services to Public Service Agreements between spending departments and the Treasury is still in its infancy. The promise of real growth in education expenditure of over 5 per cent per year for each of the next three years has given the education service new confidence. Already, these changes have brought a new sense of priority within each service and a greater focus on effective delivery.
STRATEGY

Turning the vision into practice involves more than investment: it also requires strategy, the third key role for governments. The history of education reform in England and elsewhere is littered with promising initiatives which were abandoned or neglected before they had had the time to have a deep and powerful impact on student performance. Given the pressure on education systems to change and keep changing, the impatience of citizens for improved performance from public services and the limits of their tolerance to pay taxes, inadequate implementation is simply no longer acceptable. This means that governments need a clear sense of priorities and a profound understanding of how to implement successful change. This in turn demands that governments learn from other organisations and other countries the lessons of successful change. Just as schools need to learn from best practice wherever it is to be found on the planet, so do governments.

The best examples in England are the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies for primary schools, to which I referred earlier. These have been described by Michael Fullan, the independent Canadian evaluator of them, as “among the most ambitious large scale reform strategies in the world”. The government has already invested in them for three years and has detailed plans to continue to do so for a further three, at least. Seen from the point of view of the school system, only three years ago they looked excessively ambitious and impossibly demanding. Now they are warmly accepted. They really have changed practice in every classroom. As one educator put it: “We thought you were mad and it would never work. Now we think it will work but we still think you’re mad!” We also know from independent surveys that primary teachers now get real pleasure from teaching English and mathematics, not least because for the first time they have been given the opportunity to learn systematically pedagogies that actually deliver results. The key to this progress has been what Fullan describes as their “explicit and comprehensive attention” to what is required for successful reform.

LEARNING

A fundamental challenge for successful governments in an era of rapid change is to know how well their policies are working at any given moment. In addition, governments need to be open to new ideas and capable of learning. Just as knowledge creation and transfer are vital for schools, so they are for governments. These processes do not occur by chance: governments need constantly to build the means of learning rapidly and accurately about both what is good and what is new.

In England, we have attempted a number of radical experiments to improve our capacity in this respect. These range from the modest - ringing up school principals who write in complaining about policies in order to understand their complaint better - to the ambitious - arranging five conferences in different locations in five days with several hundred principals at each with the express purpose of encouraging them to comment on current strategy and debate future strategy. Both examples imply a shift from depending on intermediaries or representatives of teachers for feedback to the opening up of direct communication with the front line. Given the rapid pace of change, this has become essential and new technology will make it a great deal more effective. The leaders of Hong Kong’s education system are in direct email communication with every teacher. We have established, through our new National College for School Leadership, an online network of principals which ultimately will include all 24,000 of them. This will provide them with a means of learning rapidly from each other and government with a means of testing ideas and seeking feedback. Rapid, direct feedback enables constant refinement of policy and should greatly enhance the success rate of education reform efforts, which historically has been extremely low.
The means of generating new policy thinking has also altered. The committees or forums of representatives of the education establishment which used to determine policy thinking have largely been replaced by a range of different sources, including research organisations and think tanks. We ought also to be moving towards a situation where any team in government responsible for policy development asks, as part of the policy design process, what international best practice is in the particular field. International benchmarking not just of student outcomes but also policy approaches should become routine practice.

These reforms, however, will only work if civil servants are in touch with reality, highly knowledgeable about policy development, implementation and delivery and work daily with practitioners in the field. They need to be experts in change, rather than administrators of stasis. This is why the process of modernising government must go hand in hand with the modernisation of public services themselves.

CONCLUSION

In this brief paper it has only been possible to open up the challenges facing public education in the next decade. They are immense at every level, from the teacher-pupil interaction to the government. We have a great deal of research and experience on which to draw but even cumulatively it does not provide answers to all the questions. Certainly we should make as much use of the evidence base as we can but it will not be enough. We will also need to use the ingenuity and expertise of people in education systems and elsewhere who are committed to the future success of public education. In short, we need “faith, the evidence of things not seen”.

*Professor Michael Barber is Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and Head of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the Department of Education and Employment in England. He is also author of The Learning Game: Arguments for an Education Revolution (Indigo, 1997).*
### Annex 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMBITIOUS STANDARDS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• High standards set out in the National Curriculum</td>
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<td>• National Tests at age 7, 11, 14, 16</td>
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<td>• Detailed teaching programmes based on best practice</td>
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<td>• Optional World Class Tests based on the best 10 per cent in the 1995 TIMSS</td>
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<tr>
<th>DEVOLVED RESPONSIBILITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>• School as unit of accountability</td>
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<td>• Devolution of resources and employment powers to schools</td>
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<td>• Pupil-led formula funding</td>
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<td>• Open enrolment</td>
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<tr>
<th>GOOD DATA/CLEAR TARGETS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Individual pupil level data collected nationally</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Analysis of performance in national tests</td>
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<td>• Benchmark data annually for every school</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Comparisons to all other schools with similar intake</td>
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<td>• Statutory target-setting at district and school level</td>
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<tr>
<th>ACCESS TO BEST PRACTICE AND QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Universal professional development in national priorities (literacy, numeracy, ICT)</td>
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<td>• Leadership development as an entitlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Standards Site [<a href="http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk">http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk</a>]</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Beacon Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• LEA (district) responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Devolved funding for professional development at school level</td>
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<td>• Reform of education research</td>
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<th>ACCOUNTABILITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>• National inspection system for schools and LEAs (districts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Every school inspected every 4-6 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>• All inspection reports published</td>
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<td>• Publication annually of school/district level performance data and targets</td>
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<tr>
<th>INTERVENTION IN INVERSE PROPORTION TO SUCCESS (Rewards, Assistance, Consequences)</th>
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<tr>
<td>For successful schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• beacon status</td>
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<td>• celebration events</td>
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<td>• recognition</td>
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<td>• school achievement awards scheme</td>
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<td>• greater autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>For all schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• post-inspection action plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>• school improvement grant to assist implementation of action plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>• monitoring of performance by LEA (district)</td>
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<tr>
<td>For underperforming schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• more prescriptive action plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>• possible withdrawal of devolved budget and responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• national and LEA monitoring of performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• additional funding to assist turnaround (but only for practical improvement measures)</td>
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<tr>
<td>For failing schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• as for underperforming schools plus</td>
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<tr>
<td>• early consideration of closure</td>
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<tr>
<td>• district plan for school with target date for completing turnaround (maximum 2 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• national monitoring three times a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>• possible fresh start or city academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>For failing LEAs (districts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• intervention from central government</td>
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<td>• possible contracting out of functions to the private sector</td>
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