

**14-19 changes must avoid chaos which hit previous exam reforms**

The exemplary way in which Professor Mike Tomlinson has consulted on 14-19 reform must be accompanied by equally exemplary implementation, the National Union of Teachers, warned today in advance of publication of the report on post 14 provision.

To do that any new exams must be fully piloted and assessed before being introduced. Their introduction must be over a long time scale to enable teachers to be properly trained for the new exams and ensure that the necessary books and resources are available in our schools.

The NUT supports the principles of the Tomlinson proposals, particularly the idea of a core curriculum. But agreement with the teaching profession that any new qualification is the right one is essential. Existing examination specifications should not be discarded wholesale; many will require no adaptation and the benefits of existing examinations must be recognised.

Teachers' workload is already excessive and the introduction of a new qualification must not add to that burden. In addition, sufficient funding for the preparation and introduction of any new qualification is essential.

Steve Sinnott, NUT General Secretary, said:

“In the past exam reform has not been introduced at a sensible pace with the opportunity for good preparation accompanied by proper funding.

“Since 1997 post-16 examinations have faced almost continuous upheaval. The ‘Curriculum 2000’ reforms were controversial resulting from an uneasy compromise by the new Labour Government between A levels and more radical reforms proposed by Sir Ron Dearing. AS and A2 qualifications were introduced without piloting, and without evaluation of the start up and opportunity costs the change would incur.

“We soon saw the problems and confusion these failures caused.

“Even the introduction of the GCSE in the 1980s was done at a rush, without piloting and assessment. Too little time was allowed for teachers to prepare for the new exam and book publishers to ensure the necessary texts were available.

“Our young people deserve better.

2.

“Mike Tomlinson’s proposals have the capacity to increase equality of access to continuing education in a way that previous proposals have failed to do. They are intended to secure a 14-19 curriculum and examinations system that enables all young people to receive the best possible preparation for an adult life. That can only be achieved if the Government avoids the pitfalls that have beset exam reform in the past.

“But they must not become a political football. The TUC, CBI, QCA and the Learning and Skills Councils have to work with teachers’ organisations and the Government to make these plans practical reality.

“To achieve that, the proposed changes should be introduced in line with the following six principles:

- There should be agreement with the teaching profession that any new qualification is the right one.
- There should be proper, thorough piloting prior to the introduction of any new qualification.
- There should be sufficient funding for the preparation and introduction of any new qualification.
- There should be proper training for teachers which should not involve additional workload.
- Existing examination specifications should not be discarded wholesale; many will require no adaptation.
- There should be a minimum ten year lead-in period for any new qualification.”

E N D

PR.63/04

**For further information contact:** Olive Forsythe tel: 020 7380 4706 (office) or 07879 480061.