

EMBARGOED

10.30am 18 October 2004

TOMLINSON REPORT IS ALREADY 'OLD NEWS'. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE IS THE CRUCIAL ISSUE SAYS NASUWT

Commenting on the Tomlinson Report on 14-19 Education, **Chris Keates**, Acting General Secretary of NASUWT, the largest union representing teachers throughout the UK, said:

"I welcome the fact that such a comprehensive review has been undertaken.

"It is particularly pleasing to note that underpinning the Report's recommendations is an understanding that any changes must be introduced over time following thorough preparation, staff training and supported by appropriate investment. Clearly due cognisance has been taken of the chaos and confusion which has accompanied previous changes to the exam system.

"Implicit in the Report is the recognition that the current system of restrictive accountability stifles teachers' confidence to exercise their professional judgement. Teachers will welcome this vote of confidence in their professionalism, skills and ability.

"At the heart of the proposals is an overarching diploma. It does not seem to indicate the end of the GCSEs and A levels but recognises that a coherent 14-19 phase would be difficult to achieve with a public exam in the middle.

"The recommendation to retain the AS levels and to introduce starred A level are unnecessary and sit uneasily alongside the other provisions.

"However, at the point of publication, the Report will become 'old news'. The crucial issue now is not the Report but how the Government responds to it.

"The Report outlines an agenda of enormous curriculum and organisational change which will need to be considered carefully and pursued with extreme caution.

"Proposals to abandon externally set and moderated coursework are attractive, providing they do not lead to the introduction of internal assessment arrangements which are equally workload intensive and bureaucratically burdensome.

"An expensive external public examination system cannot be replaced by internal assessment on the cheap.

"The extensive consultation with teachers that NASUWT conducted during the Tomlinson Review demonstrated support, in principle, for the idea of an overarching diploma but this was on the basis that it must help to address the

serious problems of pupil disaffection which prevents pupils achieving their full potential, blights the professional lives of teachers and thwarts schools' efforts to raise standards.

"The whole exercise will have been a wasted effort if the ultimate outcome is not parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications and young people who choose a so-called vocational route continue to feel that they are perceived as second class.

"The introduction of an inclusive diploma which values all learning equally will be undermined if the Government does not make it a requirement of entry into Higher Education and allows the opportunity for any school to opt out on the basis of elitist assertions that it lacks academic rigour and excellence.

"Clearly the qualifications will also need to have currency in the job market but the Government should guard against allowing the CBI to have undue influence on curriculum content and the qualifications structure.

"A once in a generation opportunity now exists to remodel the public examination system to ensure it is fit for future purpose.

"A critical factor in achieving this will be constructive dialogue and detailed consultation at every stage between the Government, NASUWT and other social partners."