

KEYNOTE TO LONDON REGIONAL G&T CONFERENCE 11 JUNE 2009

Good morning

I was appointed National Champion for G&T by Lord Adonis, predecessor to Sarah McCarthy-Fry, to promote and champion the interests of G&T learners across all phases of education and to provide advice to the DCSF on the delivery of its G&T policies. As such, I am strongly committed to the Government's priority but maintain my position as an independent voice. I also have a strong commitment to London where I lived and worked for a large part of my career, and to the Early Years and primary schools, whose needs and potential impact are easily under-estimated in high level discussions about policy and its delivery.

As you know, G&T pupils are identified as an important group in the Children's Plan, and I am sure that you share the view that effective schools must meet the needs of all learners regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Yet, we all know how easily G&T can slip down the agenda of priorities at every level, in the face of pressures to meet competing needs. It is particularly important for me, therefore, that this conference is happening (despite disruption on the tubes), partly because it brings together colleagues who are committed to G&T but also because it provides a voice and a presence in London to keep Gifted and Talented learners in everybody's sights.

This matters for two reasons. Firstly because of the imperative to meet the needs of individual G&T learners, many of whom we know may not be identified by their schools, or simply disappear from sight in the course of their journey through the system.

But secondly because there are big collateral benefits to schools as a whole from a systematic focus on providing successfully for Able Gifted and Talented learners. You know the story. Much of the evidence for this comes from the successful practices developed through Excellence in Cities and Excellence Cluster initiatives, especially in London where there was a major concentration of these funded projects. The benefits, when articulated, provide a persuasive case for positioning G&T as a leading edge of a wider school improvement policy at school and local authority level – the 'rising tide' metaphor i.e. These benefits include:

- lifting standards and expectations for all
- more optimistic and challenging learning and teaching
- increased opportunity through curriculum enrichment
- positive and creative impact on school climate
- increasing parental commitment

A curriculum pitched only at the average, in the hope that it can be differentiated 'up' is unambitious and unlikely to serve anyone's interests very well. What able children can do is a good guide to what, in appropriately differentiated forms,

should be an entitlement for everyone.

I have been asked to provide a brief outline of the national policy development for G&T. To start, I want to remind us about the current arrangements for support, then I will say something about how they are evolving.

You will be aware of the support the Government has put in place over recent years:

- The identification of leading teachers in schools
- Training, guidance and quality standards provided through the National Strategies
- A national Learner Academy for all G&T learners - - giving access to additional learning opportunities and support to students
- The establishment of regional partnerships – supporting LA collaboration across each of the 9 Government Office regions – and Excellence Hubs – HE-led partnerships providing outreach opportunities – linked to each partnership
- Confirmation by schools of identification of G&T pupils through the School Census – demonstrating progress towards a national G&T population of one million - and analysis of that population through the National Register of G&T Learners
- The G&T strand of the City Challenges – City GATES – providing support for disadvantaged gifted learners aged 14-19, helping them to secure places at competitive universities
- The new National Challenge G&T pilot, working with around 140 National Challenge schools to develop 'excellence for all' school improvement strategies led by G&T practice
- The emergence of a network of some 150 High Performing Specialist Schools pursuing a G&T option – intended to provide support to other schools in the system

This represents a major effort and a significant achievement – often unrecognised relative to other reforms – and not celebrated as much as it should be. As a result, there is significantly greater awareness of G&T in all phases of education; provision is improving and becoming more systematic. Nevertheless, it remains patchy and more needs to be done to raise its profile and get it on the mainstream agendas in LAs and schools. This is especially true in London where school and LAs are so numerous and diverse.

The DCSF has now reviewed the effectiveness of its provision in the light of evidence about its impact, and what is known about likely future conditions. The review concluded that, while G&T policy needs to develop, it should also be more closely aligned with the broad direction of travel in schools policy overall. As you might expect, this conclusion brings a greater emphasis on the responsibilities of schools to provide effectively for their G&T learners and recognition of the twin

benefits (a) to the learners themselves and (b) more widely to the improvement of education for all pupils.

Underpinning this review will be the new Schools White Paper, to be published shortly. I cannot anticipate the content of this, of course, but we should expect three broad themes to have a bearing on G&T policy:

- continued emphasis on personalised support for learners of all ages, abilities and backgrounds driven through the school and through stronger collaboration between schools
- renewed emphasis on supporting schools to narrow achievement gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged learners
- a strengthening of accountability to secure these outcomes, with the new school report card as the centrepiece.

The DCSF review has a number of practical implications which underline the need to place the school at the centre of its delivery model. All schools must take AG&T provision seriously; understand that it is not optional. It is they who must provide for their pupils; and while high quality external support should be available to supplement this effort, it can never be a substitute. That is the only way we will achieve universal personalised provision for all G&T learners.

Three further implications of the review cover:

- the future of the learner academy
- the developing FW of expectations and accountabilities for schools
- targeted support for 14-19 yr-olds

I will comment briefly on each of these and, in conclusion, I'd like to touch on some possible strategies for implementation:

1. The learner academy The Young Gifted and Talented (YG&T) Learner Academy has provided access to ambitious online, blended and face-to face opportunities. The Learner Academy has brokered the relationship between learners and providers, and commissioned providers to fill gaps in the market. But the effort to do this can have unintended consequences. It can be perceived as by-passing schools; going directly to learners. In some cases, it may inadvertently encourage schools to displace their responsibility for G&T pupils to the Academy. More importantly, from a practical standpoint, the evidence shows that, in its present form, the Academy cannot be scaled up to meet the needs of learners nationally and that it is unlikely to be either efficient or sufficiently effective to justify the cost.

For these reasons, Learner Academy is to be scaled back to a more manageable level and redesigned to provide a more straightforward catalogue of opportunities available G&T learners across LAs, regions, and nationally. As I said, it is intended to supplement, not to substitute for, the mainstream provision in schools

and should be designed to help schools:

- import people, resources and capacity to enrich the curriculum,
- generate curriculum extension opportunities and, as now,
- provide an increasing range of extra-curricular opportunities for particular groups of learners to come together for courses, projects etc.

It will no longer provide opportunities directly to learners, nor will services be commissioned directly from providers. Instead, the catalogue will be used to attract providers from the widest possible range, emphasising the contribution to be made by schools themselves, but also encompassing - in the spirit of the existing learner academy - universities and higher education, industry and the professions, arts organisations, professional associations, third sector and work related opportunities etc.

The catalogue will be available to schools and colleges, who will be the main 'brokers' of these services to learners. Schools, local authorities and G&T regional partnerships will be encouraged to take this seriously and contribute to it so that it stays live, is progressively refined and covers an increasingly wide range of opportunities.

The DCSF plans to develop two dimensions to this catalogue:

- a directory of externally provided opportunities approved by the regional partnerships and
- a collection of exemplars, templates and tools to support activity provided by schools, either individually or collaboratively

This development is at an early stage with a transition to be managed from the current Learner Academy. But it has significant potential. The DCSF will be looking to leading teachers and their LA lead colleagues in the regional partnerships to help shape and develop this.

2. Strengthening expectations for schools: the Department is also developing a stronger, simpler set of expectations for schools. Ideas being explored include:

- Defining an offer that would be available to all G&T learners, to include clarity from schools about the support they themselves are providing inside and outside the classroom
- Providing clearer, simpler guidance for schools on identification and support for gifted learners based on a broad definition of progression, illustrated with expected progress trajectories across Key Stages 1-4 for those achieving beyond national targets
- Asking schools to complete an annual online self-assessment against the

whole school quality standards to provide a basis for judgements about national, regional and local progress, backed up by monitoring through SIPs and the emerging network of leading schools

- Simplifying the census requirements for primary schools so that they are asked to report the number of identified G&T pupils in KS1 rather than their identity – and retaining the national register as a database of aggregated information at LA and regional level
- Continuing to strengthen guidance and support for SIPs through inspection. We are in continuing and constructive discussions with Ofsted about how to get more focus through the school and LA inspection processes, and through additional studies and surveys they undertake from time to time.

3. *Targeted support*: building on the experience with City GATES and the National Challenge pilot, DCSF also plans to evolve a support model for gifted disadvantaged 14-19 year-olds that can be rolled out to all nine regions from 2010

City GATES, which is a 4-year programme for FSM-eligible gifted learners in the City Challenges, is completing its first year. The programme is designed to take them through to HE entry and improve their chances of securing a place at a competitive university. City GATES is built around three core elements:

- a needs assessment process
- an annual scholarship or bursary for each student and
- progression academies, providing a core entitlement to support in acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to achieve the programme's outcome

There is similar provision in the National Challenge G&T pilot, A more generic version of these two programmes is under consideration for all eligible students nationally which will make use of the needs assessment tool, and be available for all gifted learners aged 14-19, whether disadvantaged or not. It is expected that learners will undertake the needs assessment annually. The report generated will, where possible, refer them and their school to suitable opportunities in the catalogue of learning opportunities. It is further expected that matched scholarships will be available for a significant proportion of these learners. The value of these scholarships will be determined shortly. Progression academies could also be available - not as a compulsory part of the offer - but as an option that a region may choose to offer alongside other provision in its catalogue

A focus on implementation

Funding for G&T is expected to shift increasingly to the schools, rather than being paid centrally through a national provider, underlining the schools'

mainstream responsibility I emphasised earlier. At the same time, we should expect to see the framework of expectations, accountabilities and support strengthened. In the implementation of any policy, a balance has to be struck between pressure and support. Increasing clarity about compliance and accountability will help secure implementation. But compliance alone is not a solution. Pressure to comply should generate a growing demand for support but it may also encourage schools to do only what they must, and can result in tokenistic superficial responses.

To strengthen the support side, the National Strategies have already developed a substantial raft of tools, materials and resources. As CfBT's contract expires the Strategies will continue this work in 2010-11, taking over the residual functions, including the management of the Learning Opportunities Catalogue, mentioned earlier. The Department will look to the Strategies, alongside the regional partnerships in London and elsewhere, to create and deliver an increasingly practical and coherent framework of support so that every school will have access to a clear package of support for professional development and for their G&T learners.

Also, we see considerable potential in developing a national network of leading schools. There is no plan to create new structures or reinvent wheels but there is much potential in exploiting, for example:

- the growing SSAT/HPPS networks of G&T specialism in secondary schools, I mentioned earlier;
- the existing and well organised structure of the Youth Sports Trust with leading sports colleges in hubs with affiliated secondaries and primaries covering every school in the country
- the potential within LAs of identifying and networking successful primaries, exploiting where possible existing structures to help schools help one another

We are also interested in the notion of leading LAs. While the ultimate responsibility for G&T support must be located in the school, commitment and support from the LA is essential. If whole LAs, through their Heads of School Improvement or Directors of Children's Services can be persuaded of the benefits of a system-wide focus on improving G&T as part of their overall school improvement strategy, we could see some real momentum.

Such LAs would be leaders in the sense that, over a limited period, we could support them, evaluate strategies and their impact, and use this evidence to persuade others to follow. Such a commitment would need to involve the SIPs, a strong role for the G&T lead, a systematic focus on support for lead teachers and school leaders, and a continuing commitment to the regional partnership which,

particularly in London, should continue to be a key resource, and a significant voice for the interests of G&T learners. In London, where there are so many small and diverse authorities, the effort to strengthen LA-wide policy should have merit. I would be interested to know your views on this.

Finally, I want to stress the importance that I personally attach to this developing policy which I am sure also reflects the views of Ministers. We have presented a clear policy framework, though some elements are still at an early stage of development and I know that my colleagues in DCSF are keen to have your reflections and feedback as part of their wider consultations on the new direction of travel and its implications.

John Stannard
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