Working Group on 14–19 Reform

# Comments Form

We welcome your comments on any aspect of the Interim Report, and particularly on those issues outlined in the next steps chapter, chapter 9.

The information you send to us may be shared with colleagues within the Department for Education and Skills and selected organisations involved in the development and implementation of our proposals. It may be published as part of a summary of comments made on the Interim Report. We will assume that you are content for us to do this. If you are replying by email, your consent overrides any confidentiality disclaimer that is generated by your organisation's information technology system. If you do not wish for your comments to be published as part of a summary, then please request this in the main text of your response.

We may, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, make available on public request, individual responses. This does include your comments unless you tell us that you wish them to remain confidential.

**Please insert 'X' if you want us to keep your response confidential** [ ]

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Please insert 'X' in **one** of the following category boxes that best describes you as a respondent.

| | | | |
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| [ ] | National organisation | [ ] | Sectoral organisation |
| [ ] | Regional organisation | [ ] | Local organisation |
| [ ] | Subject association | [ ] | Representative body |
| [ ] | Educational institution | [ ] | Training provider |
| [ ] | Individual | [X] | Other |

Please use this space to provide a more specific description.

Professional Body and Learned Society

**Comments:** (You can continue on additional sheets if necessary)

The RSC welcomes the proposals set out in the Interim Report of the Government's Working Group on 14-19 Reform as a potentially bold and imaginative approach to meeting the needs of young people, employers and Higher Education.

In particular the RSC welcomes the Working Group's proposals to continue with the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 4 and with components of current provision post-16. This should provide teachers and learners with a some degree of familiarity and expectation of standards during the transition phase.

The RSC welcomes the proposal for interlinked diplomas but considers that special attention be given to the standard required for success in individual components within a diploma at a particular level. This is in order to provide currency of equal worth at the level for employers, HE etc in respect of candidates who have taken different progression routes. Measurements such as matched-pair analyses of individual components should show in a transparent way, that individual components are of equal difficulty.

The proposal to reduce the burden of assessment is also welcomed, both for teachers and learners.

Three of the Working Group's proposals for tackling weaknesses in the present system are especially welcome:-

- The proposal to introduce so-called 'Specialist Diplomas' which would include both subject-based programmes in areas such the Sciences & Mathematics and sector-based programmes, designed to develop the necessary skills and knowledge for employment or further study, such as Engineering, Technology & Manufacturing

The distinction between academic, vocation and occupational courses has long been acknowledged as a serious weakness in our system of education.
The Working Group's efforts to tackle this problem are most welcome and its proposals for new 'Specialist Diplomas' that would embrace all such programme is a positive step in the right direction.

The proposal to involve a wide range of bodies in the design of specialised diplomas is welcomed and the RSC looks forward to contributing fully to this process. We would hope that specialised diplomas would contain a range of teaching and learning contexts, and hence specifications in chemistry post-16, no less than there are now. However the RSC would caution against too much involvement in design of these diplomas by particular end users (the 'top down' approach) in order to preserve flexibility.

- The proposal for all 14-19 year-olds to develop their mathematical skills, communications, ICT and other common skills as part of the new diplomas

Most jobs in science, engineering and manufacturing technologies demand a good standard of mathematical skills, communication and ICT, as well as the ability to solve problems and to work together as part of a team. Too many young people leave school without having developed these vital skills for employability and the Working Group's recommendations will, if implemented, help to raise standards and provide a more effective foundation for subsequent development.

The RSC also welcomes the proposals for introducing an 'extended project' as part of the core of the diploma for all 14-19 year-olds. As well as helping to reduce the level of coursework in school and college programmes, the RSC believes that it will prove especially valuable for work-based trainees. It would offer scope for an in-depth research or development project of direct relevance to their work and their employer, demonstrating skills of real value in the workplace, while contributing to the award of their diploma. However moderation of standards will be a real issue.

- The commitment to work towards the full integration of Modern Apprenticeships within the proposed diploma framework

Science, engineering and manufacturing technology attracts some of the most able young people who choose to follow the work-based route, rather than remain in full-time education at school or college. Those who successfully complete a 3-4 year Advanced Modern Apprenticeship deserve at least as much recognition as students with two or three A-levels. Integrating Modern Apprenticeships within the diploma framework will enable apprentices to compete for university places on equal terms with other similarly qualified learners and this will help encourage many more young people to consider the work-based route.

Finally, the RSC shares the Working Group's concerns regarding the provision of informed, impartial and effective advice and guidance for all young people throughout the 14-19 phase of education and training. Without effective advice and guidance in Years 8 and 9, young people will be ill-prepared to take full advantage of their options, and understand the wide range of options that science can provide. This is a problem worthy of a short term solution as recent work shows (*The Right Chemistry*, Nick Jagger for the RSC, in the press).

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not normally acknowledge receipt of individual responses unless you put an X in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply** [X]

Please send comments to the address shown below by **11 May 2004**

Send by post to: **Consultation Unit, Department for Education and Skills, Level 2a, Castle View House, Runcorn, WA7 2GJ.**

Or by email to: **14-19reform@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**