

DCSF CONSULTATION

UCET Response

Question 1

What have been your best experiences of support for children, young people and their families?

In our view the most rewarding experiences for children, young people and their families are to be found when services are mediated by professionals who meet three requirements: they possess the necessary skills and knowledge; they demonstrate high levels of commitment to their work and to those they serve; and they have the professional resourcefulness to adapt their support strategies and approaches to take account of the particular circumstances and needs of individual children and families.

For UCET, therefore, it is vital for the effectiveness of the services which DCSF exists to oversee and to champion that these three conditions are fully met. Teachers and other professionals need systematic professional preparation and opportunities for continuing professional development; they need to be adequately resourced and supported in their work, and have their efforts properly and publicly recognised; and they need to be granted sufficient scope for the exercise of professional discretion that they can bring their judgement to bear on the challenges they face.

Question 2

What would you stop or improve about support for children, young people and families?

Over the last decade there have been a host of initiatives to improve provision for children, schools and families. Many of these have been coordinated to form the ECM agenda, which UCET considers to be one of the most important programmes for social amelioration and individual flourishing across the whole range of government policy. ECM, with its focus on the mobilisation of skill and resources to meet the needs of children and young people, its network of children's centres and extended schools, its appreciation of the inter-relatedness of children's needs and therefore of forms of professional support, its infrastructure for professional collaboration, and its commitment to the careful monitoring of provision and its continuous improvement, holds one of the keys to the future wellbeing of children and young people. It is vital that that central initiative is maintained with the full support of DCSF. We would suggest that there is perhaps a need for even greater investment in the provision of support and in intervention strategies in the early years, given the evidence that young children's development can be blighted by their experience in these years.

Question 3

What needs to happen so that support is tailored to meet the needs of individual children and young people?

Schools and other agencies need to enjoy a level of staffing which allows the needs of individual children and young people to be carefully and professionally identified; in addition, the progress of individual children and young people needs to be carefully monitored, and the effectiveness of interventions established, as the Common Assessment

Framework requires. More broadly, there is a need for schools and other settings to be responsive to the “voice” of children and young people, so that they are able to contribute to an assessment of the effectiveness of the support they are receiving. In addition, the personalisation of learning has to be maintained, with learners afforded much more scope to choose lines of study and with teaching strategies made sufficiently flexible to permit learners to manage their own learning at a pace that is appropriate for them.

Question 4

What do you think your role is and what more could you do for children to be happy, healthy and safe?

The role of UCET’s member institutions is clear: it is to provide strong programmes of initial professional education for those entering teaching and related professions, and to continue to offer forms of professional support through postgraduate programmes and in other ways to enable these professionals to extend their professional range, to enhance their capacity to nurture the development of children and young people, and thereby to contribute to the increased effectiveness of schools and other settings. In all of their work UCET institutions are seeking to enable the undergraduate and postgraduate students to acquire more responsive, more sensitive and more sophisticated ways of addressing the needs of children and young people.

As the body which represents the teacher education institutions in higher education UCET has an important contribution to make to the policy debate on the education and professional development of teachers and others and indeed to the future direction of educational policy.

Question 5

What is the role of parents and what more support do they need?

It has been claimed that parents are the child’s first educators and that their influence both reinforces and is reinforced by that of teachers and other professionals. They need to be fully involved in the education of their children; they need to be direct participants in the judgements that are made about forms of support for individual children; and they need to be encouraged to feel that the schools and settings their children attend are places where they are welcomed and where they can share in the services provided.

It is recognised that there are families that are so stressed and at risk of breakdown that more direct forms of support are required to maintain the family as the context for children’s development. Direct support, financial and otherwise, is essential to enable parents to become aware of their crucial contribution and to be able to make it.

Question 6

What is the role of the local community and what more could they do?

The services which support the educational progress and wellbeing of children and young people are local services and could not conceivably be otherwise. These local communities certainly need to sense that they are operating within a national policy framework; that they are adequately resourced to discharge their responsibilities; but that they have the freedom to relate provision to their perception of local needs. Increasingly, through integrated children’s services, through children’s centres and extended schools, the barriers between educational settings and the communities within which they are embedded are becoming more porous, enabling an even stronger degree of coordination of service provision and continuity of care and support. Local communities need to see themselves not as the mere agents of national government but as key front-line champions of children and young people, transforming the lives of those under their care and in the process transforming themselves.

Question 7

What is the role of government and what now could they do?

The government's role is to set, after consultation, the strategic direction for DCSF, to ensure that necessary standards of provision are maintained across the country, and to provide local communities with the funds they need to enhance the quality of the service they offer. The question asks, what more could the government do? While appreciating the need for a new department to demonstrate that it is carefully listening to what the public and others have to say, and suspecting that it may be preparing itself to release an avalanche of new measures, we suggest there may be value in refraining from immediate and ill-considered action in favour of allowing the lapse of sufficient time to undertake a full evaluation of the impact of ECM, which would indicate, more than a hurried consultation, what changed lines of government action were required.

Question 8

What more needs to happen to keep children and young people out of trouble?

We hesitate to suggest that further action is required in a field that has witnessed a plethora of initiatives over the last decade. What evidence does the DCSF have before it about the effectiveness of recent interventions within its sphere of government? The answer to that question should provide an indication of what now needs to be done.

Question 9

Do you have any further comments?

UCET appreciates the opportunity to contribute to such an open form of consultation and very much hopes that it will have the opportunity to comment on the proposals for action that will flow from the consultation. We offer one concluding comment. There is a view, which we share, that many of our most pressing and intractable difficulties are rooted in poverty and in forms of disadvantage which crush the aspirations of too many of our children and young people, and which result in a widening gap between those who are successful and those who are not.

The excellent report recently published by DCSF, *Contribution of Schools to Every Child Matters Outcomes*, maintained that

Schools have a leading role to play in implementing the ECM agenda. However, they do not have full control of every outcome. Many of the ECM outcomes and the indicators associated with them are not the sole responsibility of schools, nor could schools be expected to have a large impact on them.....There are other areas of government activity which also have an impact on the ECM outcomes.

The establishment of the DCSF, bringing under the same ministerial responsibility a wider range of related services, offers some hope that these major factors which affect children's progress and wellbeing will now be addressed in the round. However, UCET maintains that there is still a need for a major cross-departmental initiative that will confront the roots and results of poverty and disadvantage. A key indicator of the effectiveness of the new department should be the extent to which it stimulates and participates in just such a coordinated government initiative.

Gordon Kirk,
Academic Secretary.

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