

GIFTED AND TALENTED STRAND OF THE CITY CHALLENGES

1. The gifted and talented strand of the City Challenges will:
 - narrow achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged gifted and talented learners by improving the achievement of the disadvantaged; and
 - improve progression to higher education, so that gifted and talented learners in comprehensive schools and colleges – especially the most disadvantaged – are better represented in our most competitive universities.
2. By developing the unfulfilled potential of many of our brightest students from urban and poor backgrounds, we will reduce inequality of opportunity and contribute to improved social mobility
3. While we have made good progress in improving gifted and talented education over the last ten years:
 - relatively few comprehensive schools can yet compete with the outcomes achieved in selective schools or in the independent sector;
 - the gifted and talented populations identified by schools are not fully representative of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in line with Government guidance;
 - there is scope to further improve partnership and collaboration between sectors - between 11-16 schools and the post-16 settings to which students transfer, and with higher education;
 - significant underachievement remains, particularly amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is typically masked, because such students are achieving national benchmarks and securing places in higher education. But few are achieving the highest grades and competing successfully for places at the most competitive universities.
4. The gifted and talented strand will build firmly on existing good practice, which is strong in places with pockets of excellence, but not yet universal. It will draw heavily on existing programmes, filling gaps and securing quality. It will tackle simultaneously the main obstacles to underachievement and progression by:
 - **Strengthening partnership and collaboration**

Starting from a review of current partnership, we will create and support a Challenge-wide network of partnerships involving every

comprehensive school, post-16 institution and university. The network will strengthen existing partnerships and co-ordinate and extend large-scale partnership activity, including university-led outreach activities. It will hold a funding pot, to which partners will be encouraged to contribute, to meet development costs and provide additional support to the neediest students. We plan to draw more distant, prestigious universities into this network, to link across to the networks in each of the Challenges and to encourage academies and independent schools to join, as well as other local organisations that can make a contribution.

We will extend the Families of Schools service so that schools can work with their statistical neighbours on gifted and talented education and progression to university – and we will explore ways of extending this service to post-16 settings. Local authorities within each Challenge will pool their resources and expertise and will work closely with secondary school centres of excellence for gifted and talented within the High Performing Specialist Schools programme.

- **Raising aspirations**

For many disadvantaged students, poverty of aspiration is the biggest obstacle. Academic achievement is not valued and there may be financial pressures pushing them towards early employment. Typically, those students who do choose to attend university do not set their sights high enough. Depending on their background, negative perceptions or low-level ambitions may be reinforced by students' families and the local community.

Our flagship project, currently being piloted in London, will deploy Teach First teachers and ambassadors as mentors and provide linked university-led events. Teach First is also developing aspirations-raising activities for larger groups, as well as family learning opportunities, and is mainstreaming aspirations-raising support into Teach First training. A feasibility study is under way to design a scaleable approach to raising aspirations with the target population across the three City Challenges.

- **Raising attainment**

The Teach First programme will complement and become integrated with a programme to improve the attainment and achievement of identified gifted students in Years 10-13 who are eligible for free school meals. From academic year 2008/09, eligible students in Year 10 will complete a brief needs assessment process and then undertake a tailored 4-year support programme to equip them with the knowledge and skills they require to secure a place on a course at their target university.

This programme will continue through transfer between 11-16 and post-16 institutions and will combine in-school/college support with

externally provided activities, including university outreach. In return for continued progress against challenging termly targets, students will receive an entitlement to £400 a year to spend on relevant external activities which carry a cost, including opportunities provide through the Young, Gifted and Talented (YG&T) Learner Academy.

- **Improving the quality of provision**

We will work with all maintained schools – primary and secondary - and colleges within the Challenges to secure stronger gifted and talented education. Through the National Strategies, networked support for leading teachers in Challenge areas will be strengthened and focussed more explicitly on the needs of disadvantaged learners. We will extend support into post-16 institutions so that students can enjoy continuity of service if they transfer.

Using the National Quality Standards as a template for whole school/college improvement, we will concentrate particularly on: improving identification of underachieving students; securing consistent challenge and support in classroom settings; sustaining a culture of high expectations and on strengthening information, advice and guidance on progression to university to rival the service provided in many independent schools.

5. There is flexibility within the gifted and talented strand to accommodate additional support customised to the particular needs of each Challenge. At national level, the strand is positioned to test out in practice additional recommendations emerging from the review of higher education progression undertaken by the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE). It has been developed in close consultation with DIUS and we shall want to ensure the closest possible fit with Aim Higher and new developments on fair access to higher education.

6. Discussions are ongoing with national and regional providers and initiatives to establish the added value they can bring to each Challenge, for the benefit of gifted and talented learners of all ages, including those with talents in sports, creative arts, leadership and vocational fields, so that each Challenge is fully inclusive in this respect.

7. The gifted and talented strand is an ambitious programme that is tackling some of the most intractable issues we face. To be successful, it will require dedication, commitment and close collaboration across the entire education sector and beyond. Success will also depend on sustaining this effort way beyond the horizons of the current Challenges. But, by 2011, we expect to have made measurable progress in:

- Improving the attainment, aspirations, motivation and self-esteem of gifted and talented students in our comprehensive schools and post-16 institutions, especially those eligible for free school meals
- Improving the attainment of those eligible for free school meals at a

faster rate so that we begin to narrow the achievement gap between them and their peers;

- Improving progression to the most competitive universities from this group of students, including those eligible for free school meals.

We will evaluate our progress and will adjust our strategy if necessary so that it can better achieve these objectives.