

Pushing ahead to 2008

School leaders voiced their concerns about what they saw as a lack of communication and insufficient support for the new 14-19 agenda in a talk2learn hotseat with Jon Coles, Director of 14-19 Reform at the DfES.

The agenda's objectives were welcomed but the way it is being rolled out came under fire.

Julie Ricketts, an exams officer in a large Northamptonshire secondary school, said more information was desperately needed.

"As someone who will have to implement the changes to entries etc., I have received very little information so far - just a very brief outline from the National Assessment Agency," she added.

Jon Coles replied that there would be 'significant' communication before the first teaching of the new diplomas in autumn 2008 and that exams officers would receive full training.

A lack of guidance on timetabling and other practicalities worried Richard Baker in East Sussex.

"As I see it, all pupils will have the entitlement to all of the specialised diplomas. This means that, within a cluster of schools, they would all have to be provided. We would, therefore, have to accept pupils from other schools without the ability to say no.

"What is going to happen to GCSEs and how will pupils travel between schools and colleges?"

"I feel that this is being forced on us, without much thought about how it should be implemented."

Jon Coles said there were already working examples of how diplomas can be delivered – and timetabling can work – across a cluster of schools.



"People can still run different numbers of periods, of different lengths, still start and finish at slightly different times and so on, provided that they work to some common principles," he said.

GCSEs would stay, he added, although with the advent of diplomas, *the ways in which general qualifications are delivered will need to change.* There were also some good models of how transport between schools could work.

Another school leader in Buckinghamshire felt there could be job losses if staff were not able to provide all the required subjects and that all teachers had to be brought 'on board'.

"However, the new courses will be excellent for the disaffected students and those who wish to pursue a trade. These students currently cause disruption in the classroom and I feel offering them a more appropriate curriculum could reduce exclusion figures," she said.

Jon Coles said a national professional development programme was aimed at supporting teachers, starting with those who need to teach the diplomas first in 2008. There could also be significant implications for the balance of staffing in schools, he added.

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities