

April 1998

Ref:

## **Response to Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (QCA) consultation on providing opportunities through regulations to permit the wider use of work-related learning at Key Stage 4**

*9 April 1998*

The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on proposals to permit the wider use of work-related learning at Key Stage 4. We restrict our comments to a number of points of principle, with numbers in brackets referring to the questions in the consultation response pro-forma. Although the Society considers that the proposals have merit for the very small number of pupils for whom they are designed, (i.e. those disaffected pupils who attend school very irregularly in Years 10 and 11), it is concerned that the criteria as they stand would allow schools to apply the regulations to a larger, and inappropriate, group of pupils at Key Stage 4.

The Society shares the widely held view of Government, teachers and others that science and design & technology are national curriculum core subjects because they have something to offer every pupil within compulsory schooling. This is still true of the disaffected Key Stage 4 pupil. Therefore the Society considers it essential that any regulations allowing work-related learning to replace formal national curriculum subjects must ensure that appropriate science and design & technology experiences are built into the work-related scheme of learning. This must be stated *explicitly* in the criteria underpinning the regulations (1). In particular, we suggest that criterion four be amended to read '*a school must ensure that in-school and out-of school curriculum experiences complement each other effectively and include a significant amount of appropriate science and technology experiences.*' (3) The Society is pleased to see that criteria seven, eight and nine address the issue of monitoring any new arrangements put into place by schools. Careful monitoring, both on a pupil-by-pupil basis and at a national level, is essential if such arrangements are to be successful.

The Society is deeply concerned that the breadth and scope of the proposals as they stand may well be misunderstood by schools. The criteria should provide clear guidance as to the profile of pupils the regulations are intended to benefit. There is a real danger that schools will use these regulations, designed for a very small number of pupils, to exclude a much larger number from GCSE courses and the growing number of non-GCSE courses which certificate performance below GCSE grade G. Any such changes to provision should properly await the 2000 national curriculum revision. As part of the forthcoming national curriculum review, the Society would expect to see examined proposals for a broader range of course provision at Key Stage 4. This range of provision would include courses with a large proportion of work-related learning, with courses such as 'technology and work' or

'science for citizenship' providing relevant science and technology experiences for pupils of lower ability.

For questions regarding this response, please contact *nigel.thomas@royalsoc.ac.uk*