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**Diana Johnson MP**

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*Dear Ms Engel*

Thank you for your letter of 23 June, addressed to Tessa Jowell, about the social mobility agenda, following the publication of the Government's White Paper, 'New Opportunities' last November.

Firstly, in respect of Gemma, Toni's and Kayleigh's comments about increased access to careers advice. The Children's Plan outlines measures to present young people with more exciting careers education in schools. These include opportunities such as taster sessions and other experiential learning which will be used to improve decision making and widen young people's horizons, as well as challenging traditional learning and career routes. The Department will be encouraging more widespread and effective use of such innovative teaching of careers education through the provision, in spring 2010, of effective practice guidance on experiential learning.

Evidence suggests that limited aspirations are already fixed in young children. Pathfinder pilots beginning in September 2009 will provide young people in Key Stage 2 with exciting new experiences (including experiential learning) aimed at opening students' minds to new, hitherto unconsidered, opportunities, including higher education. The outcomes of the pilots will support the introduction of the new Primary curriculum in 2011.

We recognise the importance of mentoring and we will be producing peer mentoring guidance in spring 2010 which will support teachers in making more effective use of peer mentors, as well as providing mentors directly with better support.

Careers advice is available to young people in schools through career coordinators and career teachers. Young people are also able to access careers advice through Connexions Personal Advisers both within school and at local Connexions centres.



department for  
**children, schools and families**

Connexions Direct also enhances the services available locally and offers 13-19 year olds quick access to information and advice, either through the website or through contact with a Connexions Direct adviser. The helpline is open seven days a week from 8am to 2am, 365 days per year.

In respect of Daniella, George and Shabnam's concerns about young people not being able to enter education full-time because they risk losing out on benefits. I think it would be helpful if I explain that Part-time students are eligible to claim social security benefits just like anyone else. However, full-time students are, in the main, not eligible for these benefits. This is because they are not regarded as available for employment and the primary financial support for students comes from the educational maintenance system, which is designed for their needs, unlike the social security system.

Jobseekers undertaking part time study or training must be willing and able to re-arrange the hours of attendance or give up the course if employment is offered. Part time study can take many forms. Generally there is no hours rule by which part time study is defined.

Linda and Emily have suggested that sex and relationship education (SRE) should start earlier and include a focus on relationships, so I think it would perhaps be helpful to explain the current position of SRE in schools in England. Certain aspects of SRE, mainly the biological ones, must be delivered by schools across each of the four key stages as part of the statutory science curriculum (<http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>). Primary school children are taught about reproduction, puberty and how a baby is born. The DCSF does not recommend or endorse any resources or people for use in SRE lessons as this is left to the professional judgement of the teachers who are best placed to know the needs of their pupils.

Linda and Emily may also be interested to know that the DCSF has recently conducted a review of Personal Social and Economic Education (PSHE) including whether SRE should be made compulsory for all key stages age (5-16). In response to the review the Department have recently conducted a public consultation that invited views on the principle of whether PSHE education should become statutory, as well as on the changes to the legislation required to achieve that, and the programmes of study. The consultation ended on 24 July and all responses will be considered carefully. Further information can be found at: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/22256.aspx>.

Turning to Karine and Bianca's question as to why inappropriate incentives continue to dominate the provision of social housing and why there is not enough suitable accommodation for young people who have gained the skills and confidence to live independently. We recognise that these perceptions are strongly held. That is why, in "Building Britain's Future", published on 30 June, the Prime Minister announced that alongside investment for a further £1.5 billion in affordable housing, the Government would promote a new approach to social housing allocations which would be seen as fairer and more responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities.

Whilst we continue to ensure that priority for social housing goes to those who need it most, we want to see local authorities use the flexibility which the legislation allows to take into account local needs and priorities when determining their allocation policies. In different localities, this might mean giving more priority to people who have connections to the area, or giving more priority to people who can bring necessary skills to an area, as part of an effort to promote a stronger economy.

*Philip Carr*

PRIVATE SECRETARY

**APPROVED BY THE MINISTER  
AND SIGNED IN HER ABSENCE**

PP **DIANA JOHNSON MP**