

Report to: **Scrutiny Committee for Education**
Date: **17 September 2003**
By: **Chair of the Scrutiny Review Board**
Title of report: **Scrutiny Review of Six Term Year Consultation – Update**
Purpose of report: **To inform the Committee of the outcome of the consultation process**

RECOMMENDATIONS-

1. **The Scrutiny Committee notes the consultation process, recognises the thoroughness of the approach and the savings made against the budget; and**
 2. **The Board requests a report on the e-mail consultation with headteachers and governor representatives.**
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1. **Financial Appraisal**

1.1 The consultation process was achieved well within the budget allowed.

2. **Supporting Information**

2.1 The review board has been monitoring the progress and outcomes of the consultation process and this report is based on the department's analysis of the responses.

3. **How the consultation was conducted**

3.1 East Sussex LEA conducted a consultation exercise involving parents, teachers, school support staff, governors, local businesses and other key stakeholders in the education process on the national proposals for a six term or standard school year. The consultation period was from 19 May until 18 July 2003. The consultation was conducted through an information leaflet with a questionnaire attached. Further information was available on the ESCC website and electronic responses could be made through an electronic form. The same questionnaire was completed anonymously by all respondents but included questions to allow analysis by type of respondent, by geographical area and to report on equalities issues relating to gender, ethnicity and disability.

3.2 The paper returns were analysed by a private company, Qualasys Ltd, with the results of the analysis being returned electronically. Responses received through the website were analysed in-house and added to the summary. It was not considered possible to identify and remove duplicate responses. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is difficult to state categorically that there were none, it is estimated that the number was sufficiently small for their effect on the final analysis to be negligible.

4. **Recommendations**

4.1 The Committee notes the consultation process, recognises the thoroughness of the approach and the savings made against the budget.

4.2 The Board requests a report on the e-mail consultation with headteachers and governor representatives.

JOY WAITE
Chair of the Scrutiny Review Board

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RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

1.1 5,195 responses to the consultation questionnaire were received, of which about 500 (10%) were received electronically through the response form on the website. 23 letters and emails expressing views on the proposals were received.

1.2 A majority of 48% of respondents said that they were in favour of introducing a six term year, 37% were in favour of keeping the current three term pattern and 15% of respondents did not express a preference.

1.3 A majority (14%) of parents and carers were in favour of adopting a six term year (by 50% to 36%). Similarly a majority of 19% of pupils that responded to the consultation expressed a preference for the six term year (48% to 29%).

1.4 A majority of 11% of those respondents that identified themselves as working in education, including governors, expressed a preference for the six term year (49% over 38%). A preference for the six term year was most strongly expressed by respondents from the primary phase with a majority of 20% (54% to 34%), and those from the 16-19 sector with a majority of 16% (51% to 35%). The exception to this rule was the group of respondents from 11-16 schools, albeit with a majority of just 1% favouring maintaining the status quo.

1.5 Teachers were the group most strongly in favour of the six term year with a majority 22% (56% to 34%) expressing support for the proposals, followed by governors with a majority of 19% (53% to 34%). The picture for school support staff was more evenly balanced, with a majority of 4% in favour (48% to 44%). Headteachers as a group came out most strongly against the proposals with a majority of 41% expressing a preference for the three term year (59% in favour of a three term year, 18% expressing a preference for the six term year). However, the number of responses identified as having been completed by a headteacher (235) is greater than the total number of schools in the authority. This in itself may not call the result into question, as a resident could be a headteacher in another authority, but it does point to a need for further discussion with East Sussex headteachers.

1.6 A majority of residents living in each geographical area expressed a preference for the six term year, with this preference most marked in the areas of Hastings, Lewes and Wealden. Likewise, a majority of residents in each type of area expressed a preference for the six term year; this was most strongly marked in urban and semi-rural areas.

1.7 80% of the completed questionnaires were received from female respondents, 18% from male respondents and 2% gave no response to this question. 1.9% of returns were received from members of the black minority ethnic community (compared with a proportion of 2.3% of all residents of East Sussex), while 4% made no response under the ethnicity section of the questionnaire. 3% of returns were received from respondents identifying themselves as disabled.

1.8 Formal responses were received from two teaching unions. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) was of the view that there would be little definite educational advantage in moving to a six term year and that there was no strong evidence to justify the change. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) reported that while no survey of members opinions had been carried out it was likely that a range of views were held by its membership. The union therefore did not express a view one way or the other, save that if there were to be such a change it should be undertaken on a national rather than just a regional basis. This is in accordance with East Sussex stated policy.

1.9 The Diocese of Chichester (Church of England) has no objection in principle in moving to six fixed terms in each year. No response was received from the Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton.

1.10 The two transport companies (Eastbourne Buses and Stagecoach East Kent) that responded to the consultation were of the view that any change would make little or no difference to their operations. The Federation of Small Businesses would be happy to see a change to a six term year.

2. Respondents' views of related issues

2.1 Respondents agreed with all but two of the twelve statements listed in the questionnaire, and most strongly with the following statements (the figure in brackets represents the percentage majority of those respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement over those that disagreed or strongly disagreed):

The summer holiday should never be less than five weeks long	(47%)
We should operate the same term and holiday pattern as our neighbouring LEAs	(37%)
It is better for school term and holiday dates to be the same each year	(35%)
The first term should always begin after the August Bank Holiday	(35%)
Even though Good Friday and Easter Monday would still be holidays, they do not always have to be part of a two week holiday	(31%)

2.2 More respondents disagreed than agreed with the two following statements (the figure in brackets represents the percentage majority of those respondents that disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements):

A change to a six term year would improve family life	(14%)
Having a longer break than at present in October would help children's learning	(6%)

3. Position of neighbouring authorities

3.1 Kent prefers a six term year should the pattern of the year change, but does not wish to change unless or until the majority of Kent's neighbouring LEAs also decide to do so. Surrey LEA has decided to retain a three term structure, but to fix the date of the Spring holiday to provide more consistent and even length Spring and Summer terms. Medway has agreed to adopt a six term year but not before 2005/6 subject to a regional consensus if possible. Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Southampton have made in principle decisions to adopt a six term year. At the time of writing the consultations carried out by Brighton and Hove and West Sussex had not been completed.

4. Provisional Decision

4.1 On the basis that:

- the educational advantages of adopting a six term pattern for the school year outweigh the disadvantages;

- a significant majority of respondents to the consultation either support or do not object to the proposals; and
- a number of authorities in the region have made in principle decisions to adopt a six term year;

the authority should decide that in principle it will adopt a six term pattern for the school year, commencing in the school year 2005/6, subject to a majority of its immediate neighbouring authorities (Kent, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove) doing the same. The decision is also provisional on further investigation and consultation with headteacher steering groups, and those groups agreeing to the proposals following further consideration.

5. Decision making and further consultation with key stakeholders

5.1 The majority of respondents in all groups except headteachers (see paragraph 1.5 of this Appendix) expressed a preference for adopting a six term year, although in every group a significant proportion expressed no preference one way or the other. Responses to the “issues” statements indicate that as with the previous consultation exercise, having term dates in line with our neighbouring authorities is perceived as important.

5.2 However, as a majority of headteachers may have expressed a preference for retaining the three term year (see paragraph 1.5 of this Appendix) further consultation with this very important stakeholder group is required. The views of headteacher steering groups and governor representatives should be sought before proceeding to a decision.

5.3 The issue and decision on whether the Authority should move to a six term year is scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet on 21 October. Headteacher steering and governor representatives should be consulted by email as soon as possible with a deadline for responses of 19 September.

5.4 Chief Officers’ views should be sought by taking a report to the Chief Officers’ Management Team within the same timescale.

6. Costs of the consultation exercise

6.1 The cost of the consultation process to date, excluding the costs of officer time, is under £8,000 against an original budget allocation of £25,000, a saving of £17,000. The detailed breakdown of costs is as follows:

	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Unit cost</i> £	<i>Total</i> £
Printing of leaflets/questionnaires	90,000	0.04	3,859
Distribution (temporary staff)			500
Set-up of data file			70
Data entry closed questions	5,000	0.11	550
Data entry open ended responses	5,000	0.04	200
Coding of open ended responses	5,000	0.05	250
Output file of results			75
Carriage			200
Monochrome advertisements – Evening Argus, Sussex Express, Kent & Sussex Courier, Eastbourne Herald and the Observer Group (Hastings/Bexhill/Rye and Battle).			2,200
Total			7,904