

## CLIE comments to the Tomlinson Committee, 10/05/2004

Our principle comments concern the proposed separation of **communication skills** from the **subject English**. However we should also like to underline the crucial importance of **foreign languages** at this age, so we ask you to ensure that any structures make it attractive to include some element of foreign language learning, however varied this provision may be.

- a. We agree that communications skills are vital and that those who have not reached the target level at KS3 should have further support. However we see a contradiction between accepting a GCSE grade C as a relevant criterion (para 133) while denying that GCSE is "a good proxy for communication skills" (para 45).
- b. We are concerned at the idea of separating skills training from "theoretical, critical and conceptual" study. The thrust of the Literacy Strategy at KS1-3 has been to base literacy skills on understanding, and we believe this is the right approach. According to the Strategy, the best way to develop writing skills is to help children to develop explicit understanding of the linguistic tools that they are using. Your Interim Report seems to suggest a very different approach in which skills are divorced from understanding. This may not in fact be your intention, but it will almost certainly be the result unless you spell out more clearly how theory is to be subdivided into those parts which are relevant to skills and those that are not.
- c. We are concerned that your proposed division between communication skills and English could align "skills" with active learning and "subject English" with passive study; or could even leave all of language on the "skills" side and nothing but literature on the "English" side. Either of these splits would be against the spirit of the Literacy Strategy, which emphasises the importance of active learning and of careful reading in the development of writing skills. Again this may not be your intention but we hope you will be able to exclude it explicitly in your final report.
- d. We see three different ways in which communication skills could be separated from the subject English more satisfactorily than in your Preliminary Report.
  1. In terms of **level**. Communication skills training is just for those who haven't yet reached the target level, so it uses whatever teaching methods are appropriate, including approaches that you might call "theoretical". English teaches both "theory" and skills at a higher level, as it does in the present GCSE pattern.
  2. In terms of **content**. Communication skills training applies to everyone, and, just as in the current KS4, it aims to bring everyone to an even higher level using whatever methods, theoretical or otherwise, are appropriate. English is a more academic and less skills-oriented study of language similar to parts of the current A-level English Language.
  3. An even bolder proposal would be to replace the subject "English" by "**Language**", which would cover not only English but other languages as well, and would provide a bridge between English and foreign languages. Communication skills could remain as in 2, though logically they should include skills in foreign languages as well as in English.