VOLUME ONE

EDUCATION AND LIBRARIES POLICY OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

A STANDARD SCHOOL YEAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APRIL 2002

Education Overview and Scrutiny

The Local Government Act (2000) altered the way that local authorities are structured and discharge their business through the democratic process. In Kent the County Council resolved on 18 June 2001, to adopt a constitution establishing a Leader and Cabinet Executive with Cabinet Scrutiny and Policy Overview Committee. The Policy Overview Committee has the power to appoint a Select Committee (a small sub-committee) to look at policy issues in depth.

In 2001 the Education Policy Overview Committee appointed a Select Committee to consider the pattern of the school year. Debate over the pattern and number of terms within the school year had been developed nationally through an independent commission. The commission established by the Local Government Association in 1999, was 'to examine the organisation of the school year with particular reference to the LEA responsibilities for setting terms and holidays' (LGA 2000). The Select Committee responded to the detailed recommendations made by the Commission in their report 'Rhythms of Schooling' (LGA 2000).

Rhythms of Schooling

The Independent Commission consultation document was first made public in July 2000. The 'Rhythms of Schooling Report' recognised the difficulties that single LEAs had experienced when they consulted parents and teachers on the possibility of change. National government has remained clear that decisions about term/holiday times have long been, and continue to be, the responsibility of the LEA and individual admissions authorities. The Commission recommended a 'voluntary framework for adjustments in term times and holidays' rather than legislation and urged LEAs to co-operate with stakeholders to consider the issue of term time rationalisation.

The Commission identified a six-term year as its preferred model for change and this model has been endorsed by the LGA. Standardisation of term times aims to "reduce pupil and teacher stress, reduce social exclusion,

especially in the transition from school to higher education and a smoother process of learning, assessment and transfer." The model identified by the Commission proposes that assessment should happen in term 5 (April) of the new school year. Term 6 would be used to prepare for transition and counter learning loss ahead of the summer break.

Key Issues

The remit of the Select Committee appointed to consider whether there is a case for change to the pattern of term times in Kent was informed by, but not restricted to, the recommendations made by the Independent Commission. The Select Committee was asked to assess "whether any change should be considered for Kent and what form the change might take". Within that remit, no change i.e. maintenance of the status quo was considered as an option.

In January 2002, the Select Committee drafted a topic review programme to collect evidence from a comprehensive range of sources. Evidence was gathered orally, in writing and through a questionnaire sent to Head Teachers. This process identified a number of key issues that inform the debate about change.

Pupil and Teacher fatigue: it has been suggested that the three-term year pattern contributes to fatigue particularly toward the end of long terms and where half term breaks are unevenly spaced. Most notably this phenomenon is observed in the Autumn and Summer terms.

Planning and rationalisation: the irregular pattern of term times that leads to terms of varying lengths, and a holiday, Easter, that shifts in the calendar from one year to another. This can cause inconvenience and uncertainty for pupils, teachers and parents.

Learning loss: this identifies a tendency for pupils to regress or at least forget learning that has already taken place after the interruption of the long summer holiday. Data on this is inconclusive.

Long summer holiday: the existing 6 week summer holiday has a historical rather than educational basis. This may contribute to learning loss (above) but teachers argue that it is a necessary period of recuperation.

Recruitment and retention: teacher stress is a contributory factor to difficulties in teaching staff recruitment and retention. Changes to the pattern of the school year could improve working conditions for pupils and teachers. Teachers and union representatives are concerned that changes would involve an erosion of existing holiday entitlements. It should be made clear that the Committee has considered a reorganisation of term times *only*. There would be no reduction in teachers' total holiday entitlement, and this issue, although of concern for teachers, was never under consideration. It is, in any event, a matter which relates to national conditions of service for teachers.

Term time holidays and tourism: Head Teachers report that there is an increase in pupil absences during term times due to family holidays. Changes that spread holidays more evenly through the year could create more opportunities for family holidays. However there is a concern that tourism sector will simply adjust pricing policy to meet new peaks. An alternative view would be that a major reduction in the length of the summer holiday (as in the five term year) would reduce the peak time opportunities for families to holiday together, and could increase term time absence.

Primary phase pupils: younger pupils cope better with shorter term lengths compared to secondary phase pupils because of tiredness. However different patterns for primary and secondary phase pupils would cause unacceptable inconvenience for parents.

Regional Change: if change was applied across Kent but not adopted by neighbouring LEAs this could cause difficulties for parents, schools and teachers in regions that bordered other local authorities. Kent could take the lead in the region.

Recommendations

1. After receiving positive evidence from a variety of stakeholders and an enthusiastic response from Head Teachers in favour of change, the Committee has decided to recommend that Kent adopts a six-term year (or six half terms). The most notable differences are that there will always be a two week break in the autumn term and the date of the Easter holidays will be fixed. This would cause far less change than a five term year.

2. The Committee considered the five term year as an option but found few benefits in this model that could not be achieved through change to a six term pattern. The Committee felt that the six term pattern offered the best opportunity to standardise term times. Evidence indicates that this will reduce fatigue and improve curriculum planning. A long summer break will be retained.

3. The Committee recognised that the LEA would have to consult more widely before a final change to term times could be agreed. The evidence in favour of change indicated a direct link to an improvement in conditions for pupils and teachers, and there should be no delay in adopting a new pattern. Therefore the Committee recommends that the new pattern be adopted in 2003/4 or as soon as possible thereafter.

4. Further consultation should identify the views of parents, teachers, and governors specifically.

5. Kent should take a lead in the debate and lobby for change on a regional and national basis.

VOLUME TWO (*draft)*

EDUCATION AND LIBRARIES POLICY
OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

SELECT COMMITTEE TOPIC REVIEW

A STANDARD SCHOOL YEAR

April 2002

Education and Libraries Policy Overview Committee
Select Committee - A Standard School Year

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1. Introduction

This Select Committee to review the organisation of the school year in Kent referred to the ongoing national debate about change. The LGA report "Rhythms of Schooling" made a significant contribution to this debate. Many organisations have released policy documents and positional statements in recent years on this issue and there are links to the Year Round Education movement in the USA. However the LGA has recognised that the debate in the UK requires co-ordination at a national level if a coherent model of change is to develop.

This process has taken place against a background of change and uncertainty in the teaching profession. Teachers' workload is still under review at a national level; teacher shortages continue to make the headlines in the local and national media alongside incidents of worsening pupil behaviour. In this context proposals to change the pattern of the school year are an emotive issue. Some have argued that further changes at this stage are at best a distraction from the 'real' issues affecting schools today, and debate should not take place until wider issues are resolved. That this debate *has* taken place does not indicate a disregard for the difficulties faced by teachers and schools. Changes to the organisation of the school year should pave the way for an improvement in standards and conditions.

2. Terms of Reference

The Select Committee is made up of seven County Council members and two Church Representatives. The terms of reference for this Committee are as follows:

- *To receive reports on issues related to the pattern of the school year in Kent and nationally, in relation to assessing whether any change should be considered for Kent and what form the change might take;*

- *To commission research in support of the above;*

- *To receive evidence and representations from a wide body of opinion on the pattern of the school year, whether change should be considered and the form any change might take;*

- *After receiving reports, evidence and representations to consider what recommendation should be made to the County Council for the future pattern of the school year, and the timing of any change which might be recommended.*

3. The Review Process

During the review process the Select Committee received evidence in person at hearings held throughout February and March 2002 (for a full list of witnesses see appendix 3). Written evidence was also requested from a wide variety of sources. The response to these requests have been mixed (for a full list see appendix 4).

Witnesses have been invited to have their say on the issues that affect them. All requests for evidence were accompanied by a summary of the debate and a provisional outline of term times(see appendices 3 and 5).

4. Background Issues

4.1 The Committee was clear from the beginning that the interests of pupils should be uppermost, and that this would be the over-riding justification for any change. The evidence of a clear link between the pattern of the year and standards in the UK and overseas is patchy. In surveys from other countries, the background circumstances may be so different from the UK that comparison is difficult, if not impossible. In the UK, relatively few schools have adopted alternative models to the three term year and those that have may have applied changes to the school pattern either very recently or as part of a raft of innovations.

4.2 There are two secondary phase schools in Kent that have recently adopted changes, one to a five term year and another to a six term year, and their experiences have contributed to this process. However evidence from both of these schools of an improvement in standards is insufficient in itself to "prove" that there is a direct link to standards. Until more schools have adopted change in the UK the hard evidence will not exist. The circularity of this argument means that the views and experiences of those engaged in the delivery and management of education are necessarily very important.

4.3 The Select Committee was asked to assess if any change should be applied in Kent. As a coastal county Kent may be fortunate that it does not share a border on two sides. But the county is bordered in the west and north by East Sussex, Surrey, Bromley, Bexley, and Medway. Kent can not presuppose what changes will be made, if any, by other local authorities, and the Committee has had to decide whether or not Kent should lead the way or lobby for wider regional change.

5. Overview of Proposals

5.1 The consultation that took place did not assume a preference for a particular model. Participants were asked to identify whether or not they advocated change and if so what form that change should take. The Committee chose to highlight three main options in their requests for written evidence and in the survey of Head Teachers.

These were:

- a continuation of the status quo
- a five term year
- a six term year

5.2 The retention of the three term year as an option indicates that Members were first interested to identify if there was a need for change at all. The focus on current difficulties identified a variety of problems caused by the current irregular pattern of term times; foremost among these were tiredness among pupils and teachers, and issues related to curriculum planning difficulties.

5.3 The five term year has received much support. In Kent this model has been adopted by Homewood School in Tenterden. For many the appeal of the five term year is its apparent consistency; five terms of eight weeks each divided by two week holidays with four weeks in the summer (see appendix 5). Its proponents argue that even term lengths and regular substantial breaks would improve planning and reduce stress.

5.4 The six term year, as recommended by the Independent Commission, and already adopted by Leigh City Technology College, is viewed by some as a less radical, more achievable alternative to the five term model. Others have criticised the six term year as an insubstantial change that is not very different from the three term year. This model produces shorter terms of 6 - 7 weeks (see appendix 5), allows for two week breaks between most terms but maintains a traditional long summer break.

5.5 In both models of change the Spring holiday would no longer be fixed to the Easter Holiday. The date of Easter changes annually; this can result in very long or very short Spring terms. Good Friday and Easter Monday remain as Bank Holidays in the new models but the school holiday period would occur at a fixed and predictable time each year.

5.6 There is room for local interpretation around each of these models. Pupils must be in school for 190 days per year, while teachers are contracted to work 195 days (the extra five are Staff Development Days).

The five term model of five terms, each eight weeks long, actually totals 200 days; therefore 10 days need to be trimmed off across the year to achieve the necessary amount. This belies the five term years' apparent advantage of consistency; Bank Holidays and staff development days interrupt the even pattern.

5.7 In the six term model proposed by the Independent Commission there are only 190 days, therefore five *extra* days need to be found for staff development days. This affords some flexibility as individual schools can decide when these are taken. Indications are however that a 195 day six term pattern can be achieved without pushing the start of the autumn term in to August, and still maintaining a five week summer break.

5.8 Few other models emerged from the consultation process. A very small number who favoured change suggested a four term year, while others who proposed no overall change suggested simply fixing the date of Easter while continuing with the three term year. Neither of these suggestions gained a significant level of support.

6. Survey

6.1 As mentioned above the views of those engaged in the management and delivery of education are crucial if the county is to make an informed change. Head Teachers of all 621 schools in Kent were sent a questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

6.2 The results were surprisingly conclusive and revealed a support for a change to the pattern of the school year. The amount of responses (61.6%) indicates that this is a very important issue for schools in Kent.

- Total Responses: 383
- 61.6% of all schools in Kent responded
- 275 Primary School responded (57.7%)
- 67 Secondary School responded (63.8%)
- 84.6% of Head Teachers agreed with the statement:
- *"shorter terms would be less tiring for pupils and teachers."*
- 83.02% of Head Teachers agreed with the statement:
- *"shorter more regular terms would aid curriculum planning"*
- 100 (26.1%) schools indicated a preference for the 5 term year
- 214 (55.8%) schools indicated a preference for a 6 term year
- 25 schools were in favour of a change to either model
- 25 schools (6.1%) felt that there should be 'no change at all'
- 78.85% agreed that "there is a case for a change to the pattern of the school year." 15.14 % were undecided, 6% disagreed.
- Respondents were clear that change should be applied across the county - 84.5%
- A majority felt that change should happen in 2003/4 - 9.86%

- A significant minority felt that change should not happen until 2004/5 - 34.2%

6.3 Although the survey was anonymous, schools were asked to indicate their phase and status. This is important because while Community and Voluntary Controlled schools have their term dates set by the LEA Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools are able to choose their own pattern. The survey revealed no significant distinction between the schools of either status and their views on change.

7 Key Issues

7.1 *Maintaining the status quo*

The Committee received the views of a minority who favoured the retention of the current system. One Head Teacher said

> **"The three term year (or six half terms) is ideal for good school organisation. All curriculum planning is confined to the current pattern…This allows for the correct proportion of teaching, learning and assessment. Terms of a shorter length would not enable the momentum of the learning process to be fully implemented."**

This view was echoed by another Head Teacher who said

> **"There are clearly some advantages in changing but there will also be disadvantages. If we change to 5 or 6 terms with longer holidays generally we will constantly be winding up and winding down and have no consistent periods of working"**

Evidence from Homewood School suggests that they have countered any loss of momentum by reorganising the delivery of the curriculum. Pupils begin their "next" year at the end of term 5**; "this maintains momentum and reduces summer learning loss"** (Mr W Cotterell, Vice Principal Homewood School)

In addition to this argument against change the NASUWT representing around 4500 teachers in Kent said that there is no evidence that teacher stress would be reduced by a change. Nor would it raise standards in the view of the NASUWT.

Additional comments returned with the Head Teachers survey revealed some instances of a difference of view between Head Teachers who favoured change and their staff. Many Head Teachers did indicate that they had consulted their governing body and staff on this issue but to date there has been no formal ballot of staff opinion carried out by the teaching unions.

Most criticism of the existing system identified the lack of an educational basis for the 3 term pattern

> **"Currently the three term year pattern is based on the phases of the moon as it is these that dictate the Jewish Feast of Passover and hence Easter. So school terms are based on a 4000 year old religious festival. OK but shouldn't we take a more rational approach." (Primary Head Teacher)**

As well as the mobility of the Easter festival most research on the subject identifies the agrarian origins for the current pattern. Wider social change has not been reflected in changes to the pattern of compulsory education.

The NASUWT have published a paper (The Six Term Year: Advice for Members) this identifies other reasons for the existing pattern of the school year; "church festivals, university terms and parliamentary sessions". However, they do not demonstrate that the current pattern has an educational basis.

Professor Brent Davies of the University of Hull, in article for the Times Educational Supplement, bemoans the lack of research in to optimum learning periods.

> **"There should be evidence that, say, seven year olds learn best in a period of X weeks or that 14 year olds learn best in a period of Y weeks? Sadly it is missing." (TES 08/02/02)**

7.2. *Teacher and Pupil Fatigue*

Teacher and pupil fatigue has been identified as one the key justifications for a change in the pattern of the school year. In the survey of Head Teachers (see Appendix 1) 84.6% of Head Teachers agreed with the statement "shorter terms would be less tiring for pupils and teachers." Their additional comments add weight to this view

> **"No change will result in continued wasted weeks at the end of long terms when the children are too tired to be receptive" (Primary Head Teacher)**

> **"All (staff) agreed that the autumn term was too long and encouraged illness and fatigue amongst pupils and staff" (Secondary Head Teacher)**

There is some evidence to suggest that fatigue particularly affects pupils who have special educational needs or come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Each of the 18 Special schools that responded to the survey of Head Teachers supported change. One Secondary Head Teacher said

> **"This school has a disadvantaged intake, these pupils are least well served by the long intensive terms and long holidays."**

In evidence from the Head of the Educational Welfare Service, Carole Bowes says

> **"The three term school years affect children's learning and particularly vulnerable children who encounter difficulty in returning to school after long summer breaks."**

These statements support the Committee's prime concern that change should improve conditions for children

7.3. *Learning Loss*

Learning loss is the phenomenon observed by some, that pupils either fail to progress or actually regress in their learning after a lengthy break. There may be a particular impact here on pupils with who have learning difficulties (Kerry and Davies 1998 "Support for Learning Vol 13 No. 3). Much research on this topic has been carried out in the USA by the Year Round Education (YRE) movement. Far less has been done in the UK. Evidence was received from Homewood School in Tenterden that learning loss was a consideration in their move to a five term year.

> **"for some students, not all, there is some evidence that they lose the learning benchmark." (Mr W Cotterell Vice Principal Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre)**

Mark Croly from Luddenham Primary School said at Hearing 5

> **"The evidence in my school suggests that there is a regress** (sic) **over the summer"**

This was supported by some respondents to the questionnaire

> **"For pupils with learning difficulties lengthy periods out of school have a major affect on learning" (Special School Head Teacher)**

However current understanding of learning loss has been brought in to question, notably by Caroline Sharp from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Sharp (NFER 2000) says that very little research has been done and some projects have either been regarded as statistically flawed or carried out in circumstances radically different from the UK.

Other respondents to Head Teachers survey commented that

> **"Learning loss is a myth in my opinion. A week after the summer term break the children are fully operational." (Primary Head Teacher)**

They also make the point that children may not be engaged in activities which support or maintain development during the summer holiday.

> **"Social patterns have changed. (There are) many working parents, often children are not stimulated during the long summer break - many watch TV etc. and have an unhealthy pattern." (Primary Head Teacher)**

7.4. *Curriculum Planning*

In the survey of Head Teachers there appeared to be clear evidence that a change to the current model would improve planning. 83.02% said that "shorter more regular terms would aid curriculum planning."

Comments made generally supported this view

> **"Consistent length of terms aiding our assessment of pupils progress. School management and administration (e.g. reports) could be more evenly spread aiding staff workload." (Secondary Head Teacher)**

The first point made here regarding the assessment of pupils' progress was clearly cited by Frank Green (Principal Leigh City Technology College) as one of the main benefits of change to a six term year pattern. He said that the six term pattern was instrumental in the demonstrable improvement in standards at Leigh CTC. Each child receives a report every six weeks therefore any problems are identified before they become too extreme. When asked what advantages the six term year had over the five term year Mr Green replied that the six term option offered **"six bites at the cherry",** i.e. more, clearly defined parcels of time within which effectiveness can be monitored and necessary adjustments made.
Evidence from the County Council's Secondary Schools Development Officer, Philip Dean, indicated that change would improve curriculum planning; the KS 4/5 curriculum is divided in to modules of 6 - 7 weeks in length and this would fit with a six term pattern.

This was supported in the primary sector by evidence from the Head Teacher from Rolvenden Primary School who said

> **"the curriculum comes to me in blocks of three therefore it is easier to divide in to six terms."**

Some respondents felt that a standardisation of term lengths would be beneficial irrespective of the pattern

"I believe we should have equal term lengths whether three, four, five or six terms per year I have no doubt this would positively help teachers with planning, reduce fatigue levels with pupils and overall reduce bureaucracy." (Primary Head Teacher)

Others favoured five terms

"5 terms provides sufficient length to enable work in depth and opportunities for assessment, exams etc."

The Homewood consultation document sent to parents in 1999 says that the five term year will allow for "modular curriculum planning, breaking the curriculum in to manageable sections with regular sign-posted assessment points."

Some other schools agree

"If change is necessary the 5 term year looks better with fixed terms for planning and longer breaks between for recovery." (Primary Head Teacher)

Most typically however respondents felt that six terms would offer the best conditions for curriculum planning partly because of the ease of transition from the existing pattern.

"six terms would make it easy to adapt current curriculum planning" (Primary Head Teacher)

7.5. *Recruitment and Retention*

As identified above, many Head Teachers feel that the current pattern contributes to teacher stress and fatigue. Change would help alleviate some of the pressures on teaching staff. However a number of union representatives expressed a concern that proposals would either reduce the overall amount of holiday entitlement (which is not the case) or diminish the traditional long summer holiday.

Nigel de Gruchy General Secretary of the NASUWT responded to the proposals outlined in the "Rhythms of Schooling" responded by saying **"They are taking away the last perk of teachers." (TES 21/12/01)** This view was echoed by the County Secretary of the NASUWT who said at Hearing 4

"Teachers don't have many perks and the summer holiday is one of the few we have left."

And another Primary Head Teacher

> **"One of the last remaining perks to this profession is the long summer break. With recruitment and retention in crisis why remove this long summer break?"**

Many responses to the survey of Head Teachers identified that they and their staff needed the long summer holiday to "re-charge their batteries". Another identified the workload that teachers often carry over in to the summer break making the break shorter for staff than it is for pupils.

> **"The big issue (for staff) was losing the long summer holiday. Most staff work one week at the end of term and one week before school returns. To have a reduction in this would mean that staff would not have time to sort and organise" (Primary Head Teacher)**

Other teaching unions were also reluctant to see a reduction in the length of the summer holiday

> **"Any suggestion which shortened the summer holidays would not meet favour with teachers" (NUT County Secretary)**

Some respondents to the survey of Head Teachers identified positive aspects of change

> **"This is an urgent issue to make teacher recruitment easier and the job less stressful." (Special School Head Teacher)**

In written evidence to the Committee John Caperon (County Representative for the Secondary Heads Association) said

> **"We consider that a change in the pattern of the school year would be conducive to greater retention, and would reduce wastage from the profession."**

Undoubtedly the five term year pattern depends on a radical reorganisation of the school year, and a significant reduction in the length of the summer holiday is part of this. Some respondents to the schools questionnaire felt that the five term model with regularly spaced two week breaks may reduce fatigue and stress across the year to such an extent that teachers no longer require such a long break at the end. However evidence for this is scant (Davis and Kerry "Making a Break" The Report on the Tardis Project - study of a CTC operating a five term year 1998).

The six term model offers the potential for transition from the three term pattern while retaining the majority of the existing summer break. Many Head Teachers indicated that a rationalisation of term times is necessary but were concerned that the summer break should be maintained to allow teachers sufficient time to recuperate. The six term pattern enables schools to improve planning, while teachers can retain a lengthy summer break.

7.6. *Term Time Holidays and Tourism*

The impact on tourism and the ability of tourism sector to respond to changing patterns of demand was identified as an area of concern. Responses from the tourism sector have raised no particular objections. Some local tourist departments have indicated that individual companies will need plenty of advance notice.

A letter from Leeds Castle - a significant figure in Kent tourism - indicated that they had already experienced problems when Kent half terms were not the same as other counties

> **"we would seriously need to reconsider our special offerings in the event that changes are made, particularly if those in Kent differ from the rest of our regional catchment." (Paul Sabin, Chief Executive Leeds Castle)**

Other indications are that change could have a positive impact

> **"The current trend in Holidays is to take short breaks and the five or six term year would lend itself to this practice." (Borough Tourism Officer)**

> **"From a tourism point of view the extra break in the spring would give more opportunity for short breaks and therefore stimulate the tourism economy earlier." (Borough Tourism Officer)**

However Head Teachers have expressed concern that change could have an impact on term time absence

> **"If holidays are made shorter concern is that absence could increase as parents find that taking holidays during school breaks is more difficult" (Primary Head Teacher)**

Teachers are also concerned that staff whose children have holiday periods at different times from their parents would be unduly inconvenienced. If change were applied across the county then this would affect teachers whose children went to school in another LEA that had not adopted change. This may be particularly troublesome in areas that border other local authorities. The County Council is engaged discussions with neighbouring LEAs over their plans for change.

7.7 *Primary Phase Pupils*

As identified by Professor Davies in the TES (above) there is no research available which indicates the optimum learning period for children of any particular age. In this context the evidence of over half of the Head Teachers in the country's largest LEA is significant.

There is strong evidence to suggest that a five term year with eight week terms would be too tiring for primary phase pupils.

> **"Although initially even terms as in five terms seems attractive, an eight week block for primary children is probably too long." (Primary Head Teacher)**

Many other teachers felt eight week terms would be too long particularly for very young children

> **"I feel that eight weeks is far too long between breaks especially for KS1. Five to seven weeks would be more realistic. (Primary Head Teacher)**

Some primary teachers feel the 5 term model to be more appropriate for secondary schools

> **"We think the five term year would be more appropriate for adults and older students, however we have opted for the six term year to ensure our children do not have more than 6/7 weeks in school without a break." (Primary Head Teacher)**

Although two secondary schools in the county have changed the pattern of their year, no primary school has made a similar change. This pattern appears to be matched across the country and has led some to describe the debate about change as a "secondary led agenda." The support for change from primary schools in Kent contradicts this.

Research has identified one primary school in the country that has changed to an alternative pattern; Woodlands Primary School in Grimsby. This school changed to a five term year in September 1999. Quoted in the TES in September 2000 the Head Teacher, Mr Beel, said of the school's first full year under the new system

> **"By the end of the summer term pupils and teachers were less fraught and tired than usual. We were able to give more for longer. The new structure of the year is terrific." (Head Teacher Woodlands Primary, TES 01/09/2000)**

This statement is at odds with the views of many primary teachers in Kent who favour change but prefer an alternative model. Some evidence suggests that the five term model may meet resistance simply because it is too different. One Head Teacher said **"since I was 5 years old I have been doing this system (3 term year)."** This underlines how culturally embedded the three term model may be. Having gone through school and higher education on a three term model and then continued to work to the same pattern some may be reluctant to consider radical alternatives.

7.8 *Youth Crime*

School holidays were identified as a crucial period for play and personal development. There has been a concern however that the longer breaks, and the long summer break in particular may lead to boredom and petty and crime such as vandalism. Kent County Constabulary prepared research to identify any possible link between school holidays and a rise in youth crime.

The study looked at the criminal damage offences committed in separate periods during term time and during holidays. The evidence indicated little significant difference

> **"from a criminal damage perspective a change in the pattern of the school year would not greatly impact on these figures." (Sgt Taylor, Strategic Crime Reduction Department)**

Sgt Taylor went on to add that the overall crime picture reveals that when children are in school they do not tend to commit crime. Their figures suggest that most crime is committed between 6.00 pm. and 6.00 am. However during half term there was more damage between the hours 8.00 am to 4.00 pm. From this statement it would appear that a change in the pattern of holidays would have a minimal impact on youth crime.

Inspector Ray Carver from the Canterbury District indicated the concerns of working parents at the lack of stimulating out-of-school activities for children during holiday periods. Inspector Carver advocated the development of multi-agency programmes to combat boredom and nuisance during holidays.

There is some evidence from Head Teachers of disaffection and boredom during holiday periods. Mr Cotterell from Homewood School said that anecdotally he perceives that their adoption of a five term pattern has reduced disaffection among pupils during holidays. Daniel Northcott, member of the Youth Parliament and a pupil at Walmer School said that the **"summer holidays are too long"** and estimated that 70% of students would prefer more, shorter holidays.

Overall the inter-relation between youth crime, disaffection and holidays remains unclear. Whether any change is adopted or not, schools and other agencies have a role to play in providing constructive opportunities for children during their holiday periods.

7.9. *Schools and Further and Adult Education*

Links between Secondary and Further education are increasing. As schools attempt to accommodate greater diversity many more children attend further education colleges and participate in vocational courses that could not be delivered on school premises. At South Kent College, for example, 360 school pupils will attend a two and a half hour session at college once per week from September 2002.

While a difference in the pattern of school and college years would not be insurmountable some co-ordination is necessary. Proposals in the recent Green Paper for a 14 - 19 curriculum may mean that FE would need to match their year pattern to that adopted by schools.

Colleges are also concerned about exam dates. If exam dates were to change then colleges would have to alter their pattern accordingly. If exam dates remain the same but the pattern of the school year changes then some of the benefits of change are diminished. The pattern of examinations is becoming increasingly complex and change would have to reflect the fact that exams no longer solely take place in the summer term.

There appears to be little chance of a change in the dates of Key stage tests and exam dates for GCSE unless or until there is wider national change in school terms. Angela Hopkins from the Qualification Curriculum Authority (Principal Officer, Test Support with QCA Statutory Assessment Team) said

> **"There needs to be joint dialogue with senior decision makers about testing and examinations before change can take place"**

Some colleges have indicated that they would seek to change their pattern if changes were made

> **"Mid Kent College has at times looked to see if we can make our year more effective and have found the school year a barrier. I believe we would look to change our year to fit with any new arrangement if at all possible" (Jon Pink, Director of Curriculum Mid Kent College)**

West Kent College would also seek to adopt a pattern as close as possible to the school year. There is further evidence here that the five term pattern may be better for older children and young adults

> **"On paper the five term year appears to be more attractive. The terms are good lengths for substantial blocks of learning and the reduced holiday period in the summer offers a greater advantage compared with current terms." (Sue Buss, Deputy Chief Executive Curriculum and Quality West Kent College)**

Further and Adult Education providers also expressed concern that adult learners would be inconvenienced by change if their learning pattern did not match their children's.

> **"We are concerned that younger learners with school age children may be inconvenienced" (Ian Forward Operations Manager, KAES)**

Kent Adult Education Service expressed an additional concern that changes might affect existing arrangements to share use of school facilities. KAES offer evening and weekend classes in 17 schools across the county. Change

would have an impact on running costs if school premises were to be used out of term times - an estimated increase in costs of up to 10% if a five term year was introduced.

7.10 *Faith Groups*

There was some concern that proposals to remove the link between the date of Easter and the spring holiday would be source a dissatisfaction in Church schools. There was also a concern that the views of other faiths should be recognised and if possible accommodated within any changes made to the existing pattern.

Written responses from the Canterbury Diocese and the Archdiocese of Southwark have allayed some of the concerns over Easter.

> **"there is a groundswell of support from Head Teachers and clergy which welcomes the opportunity for Easter to fall within term time" (Rupert Bristow, Director of Education, Church of England Canterbury Diocese)**
>
> **"our teachers have, in general, welcomed the suggestion that their pupils should be in school at this time assuming that both Good Friday and Easter Monday remain as Bank Holidays, and that there is flexibility for Maundy Thursday to be taken as a holiday, should they so wish." (Dilys Wadman Director of Education, Archdiocese of Southwark**)

The Catholic Church and Church of England both favour the adoption of a five term pattern at a strategic level

> **"five terms would better meet the principles of predictability and standardisation" (Rupert Bristow, Canterbury Diocese)**
>
> **"On balance we would favour change to the five term, rather than the six term, as this would assist the planning of teaching and learning" (Dilys Wadman, Archdiocese of Southwark)**

However this appears to be at odds with our survey results where a majority of all schools favoured a six term pattern. There was no discernible difference between the views expressed by Voluntary Aided Schools and schools of other status.

Opinion was sought from other faith groups in Kent but response levels were low. The Jewish Board of Deputies and Kent Muslim Association told us that many of their festivals did not occupy a fixed point in calendar and were determined by phases of the moon. They accept that, as now, this would not be possible to accommodate within a standardised school calendar.

7.11 *Five or Six Terms?*

Throughout the Committee process it became clear that opinion broadly supported change but differences occurred over the form that this change should take; five terms or six. Although some anecdotal evidence from primary schools indicated that the five term year better suited secondary schools this was not borne out by our survey of Head Teachers. 33 out 67 Secondary Head Teachers favoured a 6 term pattern and 22 favoured a five term pattern.

In the Head Teacher survey those in favour of change supported the six term year by a factor of more than 2:1.

Those in favour of the five term pattern like its apparent regularity.

> **"A five term year with regular two week breaks and four week summer holiday would benefit children's learning and retention." (Primary Head Teacher)**

Detractors from the five term pattern were concerned about the reduction of the summer holiday and its impact on staff, parents and children with families overseas.

The Committee received evidence from Doug Kimber (Head Teacher of Maplesden Noakes Secondary School and chair of the Five Term Year Working Group). Mr Kimber strongly supported the adoption of a five term year and urged the Committee to "be bold". In a summary of the work of the Five Term Year Working Party Mr Kimber acknowledged that the important issue is to achieve a rationalisation of the curriculum. The six term pattern as identified by the Independent Commission may achieve many of the objectives set out by the Five Term Year Working Group.

The six term pattern received some criticism for not offering sufficient change to the current pattern

> **"A six term year appears to be a rose by any other name, hardly different from now." (Primary Head Teacher)**

But many recognised that it offered a change to the current system whilst retaining the long summer break

> **"the 6 term is a more balanced year and teachers must have at least five weeks holiday in the summer." (Secondary Head Teacher).**

The SHA also support the adoption of a six term pattern

> **"The SHA supports the proposals of the LGA, since we believe that change is essential and the modest initial change proposed**

by the LGA from three terms to six is most likely to commend itself widely." (John Caperon SHA County Representative)

The evidence of our survey which indicates that primary phase pupils would be disadvantaged under a 5 term model underlines the concern of the Committee to ensure that changes should be made that emphasise the needs of the children.

7.12 *When Change Should Happen*

A significant proportion of respondents to the Head Teachers survey recommended change in 2003/4 - 49.8%. Fewer recommended change in 2004/5, 34.2%.

"The sooner we move from this outdated three term year the better." (Primary Head Teacher)

When asked at Hearing 3 how much notice would schools need to prepare for change Mr Kimber indicated that the minimum notice required would be "a year and a term."

7.13 *Regional Change*

The issue of change in neighbouring LEAs has significant implications for Kent. Although it would be preferable for Kent to be in step with neighbouring LEAs many feel that the issue is of sufficient importance to justify Kent leading the way

"Kent should take the lead. Largest county should show true leadership in a decision that will take place in the next 10 years anyway." (Secondary Head Teacher)

The indications from neighbouring LEAs are mixed. East Sussex are monitoring developments in Kent as are Surrey and Essex. Bromley are publicly consulting on the recommendations from the Independent Commission.

Change in Kent alone will have an impact on parents and staff who live or work in areas that are not on the same pattern as Kent. There are no figures available to indicate how many staff working in Kent have children who are educated in other LEA areas.

Conclusions

The Decision of the Select Committee is to recommend that Kent should adopt a six term year from 2003/4.

The process identified significant levels of support for change and few who argued for maintaining the current arrangements. By undertaking a significant piece of research in to the views of Head Teachers across the county the topic review process gathered new evidence on a subject that previously was not available.

The Committee were concerned at all times to uphold the needs of children throughout the process. But, they were also mindful of the concerns of other stakeholders - teachers, and parents - who would be affected by change.

Altering the pattern of the school year has far reaching implications, and the Committee has endeavoured to consult as widely as possible. Again feedback from organisations indirectly affected has been favourable. The Committee recognises that wider consultation will have to be carried out before changes can be implemented. Their recommendation is that no time should be lost in implementing further consultation.

The six term pattern achieves the optimum outcome for all. Half of all Head Teachers in Kent recommended adoption of a six term pattern, an additional 6% favoured change to either the five or the six term year. Opinions from education professionals indicate that standardisation is long overdue and will have a direct impact on teacher and pupil fatigue and curriculum planning.

While quite popular the five term pattern did not have any demonstrable advantage over six terms. There was significant evidence from education professionals that the five term year would not suit primary phase pupils because terms would be too long and tiring. In addition to this a significant reduction in the length of the summer holiday may prove to be unacceptable to teachers and parents alike.

The six term pattern received support from both primary and secondary sector. There was some concern that research would reveal a split between the views of schools under LEA control and Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools. This was not the case; research has demonstrated that change adopted by the LEA would be followed by the majority of schools in the county.

The decisions taken by neighbouring LEAs will have an impact on the developments in Kent here, but the Committee felt that the educational benefits outweighed disadvantages of Kent going it alone.

Recommendations

1. After receiving positive evidence from a variety of stakeholders and an enthusiastic response from Head Teachers in favour of change, the Committee has decided to recommend that Kent adopts a six-term year (or six half terms). The most notable differences are that there will always be

a two week break in the autumn term and the date of the Easter holidays will be fixed. This would cause far less change than a five term year.

2. The Committee considered the five term year as an option but found few benefits in this model that could not be achieved through change to a six term pattern. The Committee felt that the six term pattern offered the best opportunity to standardise term times. Evidence indicates that this will reduce fatigue and improve curriculum planning. A long summer break will be retained.

3. The Committee recognised that the LEA would have to consult more widely before a final change to term times could be agreed. The evidence in favour of change indicated a direct link to an improvement in conditions for pupils and teachers, and there should be no delay in adopting a new pattern. Therefore the Committee recommends that the new pattern be adopted in 2003/4 or as soon as possible thereafter.

4. Further consultation should identify the views of parents, teachers, and governors.

5. Kent should take a lead in the debate and lobby for change on a regional and national basis.

Background Documents

Amanda Kelly ‘A happier new school year’ TES (01/09/01)

ATL ‘Changing the Pattern of the School Year; Guidance for members’ (1999)

BBC News/Education ‘Action over term time holidays’ (22/02/02)

Biddy Passmore ‘Happy in the job, despite the hours’ TES (01/02/02)

Caroline Hendrie ‘Commission sets out its diary for a six term year’ TES (21/1201)

Caroline Sharp ‘The Learning Benefits of Re-structuring the school year: what is the evidence?’ NFER (2000)

Chris Lacey/ John Kenward ‘Should we switch to a five term school year?’ ‘Classroom Issues’ DfEE

Chris McDonnel ‘Nation needs to debate times; Letter’ TES (23/0799)

Chris McDonnell ‘Chance to reform should not be lost; Letter’ TES (05/02/99)

Christopher Price ‘Little and often is best’ TES (21/12/01)

Christopher Price ‘Slave to rhythm’ TES (01/09/01)

Claire Dean ‘Leisure Industry invited in to the school year debate’ TES (03/03/00)

Claire Dean ‘Primary pioneers five term year’ TES (02/07/99)

Croydon Borough Council ‘The Five Term Year - Debating the issues’ Education Committee (October 1999)

Croydon Borough Council Education Committee ‘Consultation on the Introduction of the Five Term Year’ (November 1999)

Dave Harvey NUT/Croydon Teachers Association ‘Why we oppose a Five Term Year’(October 1999)

David Budge ‘Short term Booster’ TES (09/06/00)

Director of Learning Services/Essex County Council ‘The Five Term Year’ (May, 2000)

Director of Learning Services/Essex County Council ‘Newsline … *for Schools*‘ (2000)

Essex County Council ‘Alternative arrangements for the school year’ Task Group (October 2000)

Gerald Haigh ‘The lazy days of summer’ TES (21/07/00)

Graham Lane ‘Why six terms are better than three’ TES (15/6/01)

Ian Hollingworth ‘Three term good, five term bad; Letter’ TES (29/01/99)

Independent Commission on the Organisation of the School Year/LGA ‘Rhythms of Schooling’ London (2000)

Institute of Education/ Press Office ‘Head Teachers to call for a national debate on the five term Year' (01/06/99)

Jon Slater ‘Week in perspective’ TES (05/05/00)

Josephine Hocking ‘Primary finds five new lives’ TES (01/09/00)

Julia Langdon ‘In certain terms’ Guardian Unlimited (08/01/02)

Julie Henry ‘Council finds illness peaks at end of term’ TES (19/05/00)

Julie Henry and Adam Coulter ‘Backlash to pressure for summer school’ TES (28/07/02)

Karen Thornton ‘Five term year badly planned says union’ TES (30/07/99)

Karen Thornton ‘Five term year is on the horizon’ TES (08/01/99)

Karen Thornton ‘Strike threat to August start’ TES (25/02/00)

LGA ‘Pattern of the School Year; Results from the Consultation Exercise’ Research briefing seven (2001)

Martin Littlewood ‘Worse still with five term year; Letter’ TES (22/01/99)

NASUWT ‘The Six Term Year - Advice for members’ (2002)

NCPTA ‘Organisation of the School Year’ (November 2000)

NIACE ‘The Independent Commission on the Pattern of the School Year - *A NIACE Response*’ (2000)

Nick Satchell ‘Parents rejected shorter holidays; Letter’ TES (23/07/99)
Nikkie Household ‘Fight for the long summer; mind and body’ TES (09/07/99)
Sarah Cassidy ‘MPs back calls for A levels in Spring” TES (09/02/01)

Steve Green ‘Avoid the heat of the summer months; Letter’ TES (23/07/99)

Susannah Kirkman 'Happy with a new Year' TES (11/01/02)

TES 'Holiday Hiatus' (21/12/01)

TES 'Papers 17.12.01' (17/12/01)

TES 'Papers 18.12.01' (18/02/01)

TES 'Papers 27.2.01' (27/02/02)

TES 'Quote of the week' (21/12/01)

TES 'Rays of Hope' (01/09/02)

TES 'What the teachers say… about the school year' (003/03/00)

TES' Six term Year backed in survey' (01/06/01)

TES' Summer School' (21/12/01)

Trevor Kerry '2 million students in the USA do it' in 'Primary School Manager' (May/June 1999)

Trevor Kerry 'Five term year will not cure all ills' TES (07/04/00)

Trevor Kerry 'Will children's education benefit; Letter' TES (23/07/99)

Trevor Kerry/Brent Davies 'Perceptions of the five-term year – Pupils, Parents and Teachers in English Schools' in *Making a Break: The Report on the Tardis Project*, Funding Agency for Schools, (January 1999)

Trevor Kerry/Brent Davies 'Prisoners … of time and Summer Learning Loss' in 'Forum' Vol 40 No 2 1998

Trevor Kerry/Brent Davies 'Summer learning loss: The evidence and a possible solution' in 'Support for Learning' Vol 13 No 3 (1998)

Val Woolven 'Talkback' TES (19/05/00)

Warwick Mansell 'Hopes of relief for stretched workers' TES (07/12/01)

Wendy Wallace 'Breaking up is hard to do. Do we want to do it five times a year?' TES (21/05/99)

Appendices

1. Head Teachers Questionnaire

To: All Head Teachers

Questionnaire : Pattern of the School Year

Evidence for Select Committee - Winter/Spring 2002

1. Please confirm the status of your school:

Primary	Community	
Middle	Voluntary Controlled	
Secondary	Voluntary Aided	
Special	Foundation	(please circle)

2. Has your school staff or governing body ever discussed the advantages/disadvantages of an alternative pattern to the school year

- YES
- NO

If YES what advantages/disadvantages did the school feel there would be?

3. Please give your reaction to the following statements

- Shorter terms would be less tiring for students and teachers

AGREE DISAGREE UNDECIDED

- Shorter, more regular terms would aid curriculum planning

AGREE DISAGREE UNDECIDED

4. Does your school have plans to discuss the matter in the light of the national report of the Independent Commission on the "Rhythms of Schooling".

- YES
- NO

5. If evidence gathered by KCC's Select Committee on the Pattern of the School Year suggests there are advantages in change to an alternative pattern would your preference be for:

- A five term year
- A six term year
- Some other pattern (please specify)
- No change at all

Please, very briefly, give reasons for the answer above.

6. Please give your reaction to the following statement:

- There is a case for a change to the pattern of the school year.

AGREE DISAGREE UNDECIDED

7. If you agree that there is a case for a change in the pattern of the school year, give your reaction to these statements:

- the changes should be applied across Kent?

AGREE DISAGREE UNDECIDED

- the changes should be applied across the whole of the South East region at least

AGREE DISAGREE UNDECIDED

8. If change were to happen what is your view on the timing of its introduction?

- 2003/4
- 2004/5

- Later (please state what introduction period you feel would be appropriate)

Please give any other comments

Please return to Brett McKay, Research Officer, Room 1.104, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ, by 8 March 2002

2. Outline Sent with Questionnaire

Summary of Debate Around Changes to the Pattern of the School Year

- Focus on the possible links between a rationalisation of term times and an improvement in standards.
- Changes to the pattern of the school year would apply to primary and secondary schools.
- Concerns that the current three-term pattern increases learning loss during the longer holidays and fatigue amongst pupils and teachers during the longer terms.
- Shorter terms with regular breaks could promote better attendance.
- Rationalisation of term times could assist curriculum planning.
- A five term year would shorten the summer holidays; 5 eight week terms divided by two week breaks in the autumn, winter and spring and a four week break in the summer In the opinion of the Local Government Association regional/national adoption of the more radical 5 term pattern would require government legislation.
- A 6 term year would move the summer holidays forward but preserve the existing 5 weeks to begin and end earlier to allow for a longer break in October. Term lengths would be roughly equal. No exams at the peak hay-fever season
- University admissions to be based on actual not projected results
- Do the benefits associated with change from a 3 term year justify the effort?
- Continuing with the three term year is an option, but are there disadvantages associated with maintaining the status quo?
- Standardising term lengths would mean that the Spring holiday would not be tied to the date of Easter, although Good Friday and Easter Monday would continue to be observed as holidays.
- Fixed and predictable holiday periods could allow parents and the tourism sector to plan further ahead and schedule appropriate activities.
- A change in the pattern of the school year is only one aspect of the improvement in the learning process.

1. *The Local Government Association Report The "Rhythms of Schooling"(LGA,2000),*
2. *Association of Teachers and Lecturers Report "Changing the pattern of the School Year"(ATL 1999)*
3. *The Five Term Year Working Party Survey of Head-teachers in Kent, 2001*
4. *Consultation on the introduction off the 5 term year, Croydon Borough Council - 1999*
5. *Reports and publications (various) Professors Brent Davies and Trevor Kerry.*

3. Requests for Written Evidence

The following were requested to send written evidence

- Adult Education Service *
- All Further Education Colleges in Kent *
- All local council tourism departments *
- Careers Service
- Children's University *
- Chinese Community Association
- Christchurch University College, College of Guidance Studies
- Commission for Racial Equality
- DCMS *
- DfES *
- Diocese of Canterbury Education Department*
- Diocese of Rochester Education Department
- Early Years and Child Care Unit
- Hindu Association
- Jewish Board of Deputies *
- Kent Association of Education Business Partnerships *
- Kent Police *
- Language and Traveller Achievement Service
- Learning and Skills Council
- Learning Support Service
- Muslim Association
- Sikh Association
- Sports Development Unit
- The Archdiocese of Southwark, Commission for Schools and Colleges *
- University of Kent
- West Indian Association

* Reply received

4. Witnesses Attending Hearings

Chris Price Chair of Independent Commission

Fleur Young LGA

Ian Craig Deputy Director School Effectiveness

George Teasdale Chair Kent Federation PTA

Frank Green Principal Leigh CTC

Mr W Cotterell Vice Principal Homewood School and Sixth Form College

Ms B Scott Head Teacher Rolvenden School

Douglas Kimber Head Teacher Maplesden Noakes School

Julia Seaward PTU

Daniel Northcott Youth Parliament

Peter Vokes NUT

Peter Walker NAHT

Alan Craig NASUWT

Andy Campbell UNISON

Julia Huckstep ATL

Mark Croly Head Teacher Luddenham Primary School

Hadrian Southorn Chairman of Kent Boards of Governors

Phil Dean (Secondary) Schools Development Officer

5. Comparison of Alternative Models

(Sent with Questionnaire and requests for written evidence)

SIX TERM YEAR											
Term 1 **7 Weeks** late Aug-Oct	2 Week Holiday	**Term 2** **7 Weeks** **Nov-Dec**	2 week Holiday (min)	**Term 3** **6 Weeks** **Jan-Feb**	1 week Holiday	**Term 4** **6 Weeks** **Feb-Mar**	2 week Holiday	**Term 5** **6 Weeks** **Apr-May** Exams/ SATS	1 Week Holiday (min)	**Term 6** **6 Weeks** **Jun-Jul** Transition planning, induction.	Summer Holiday (more than) 5 Weeks

FIVE TERM YEAR									
Term 1 **8 Weeks** **Mid Aug-Oct**	2 Week Holiday	**Term 2** **8 Weeks** **Oct-Dec**	2 Week Holiday	**Term 3** **8 Weeks** **Jan-Mar**	2 Week Holiday	**Term 4** **8 Weeks** **Mar-May**	2 Week Holiday	**Term 5** **8 Weeks** **May July**	4 Week Holiday

All dates approximate. Knowledge of the current model is assumed.