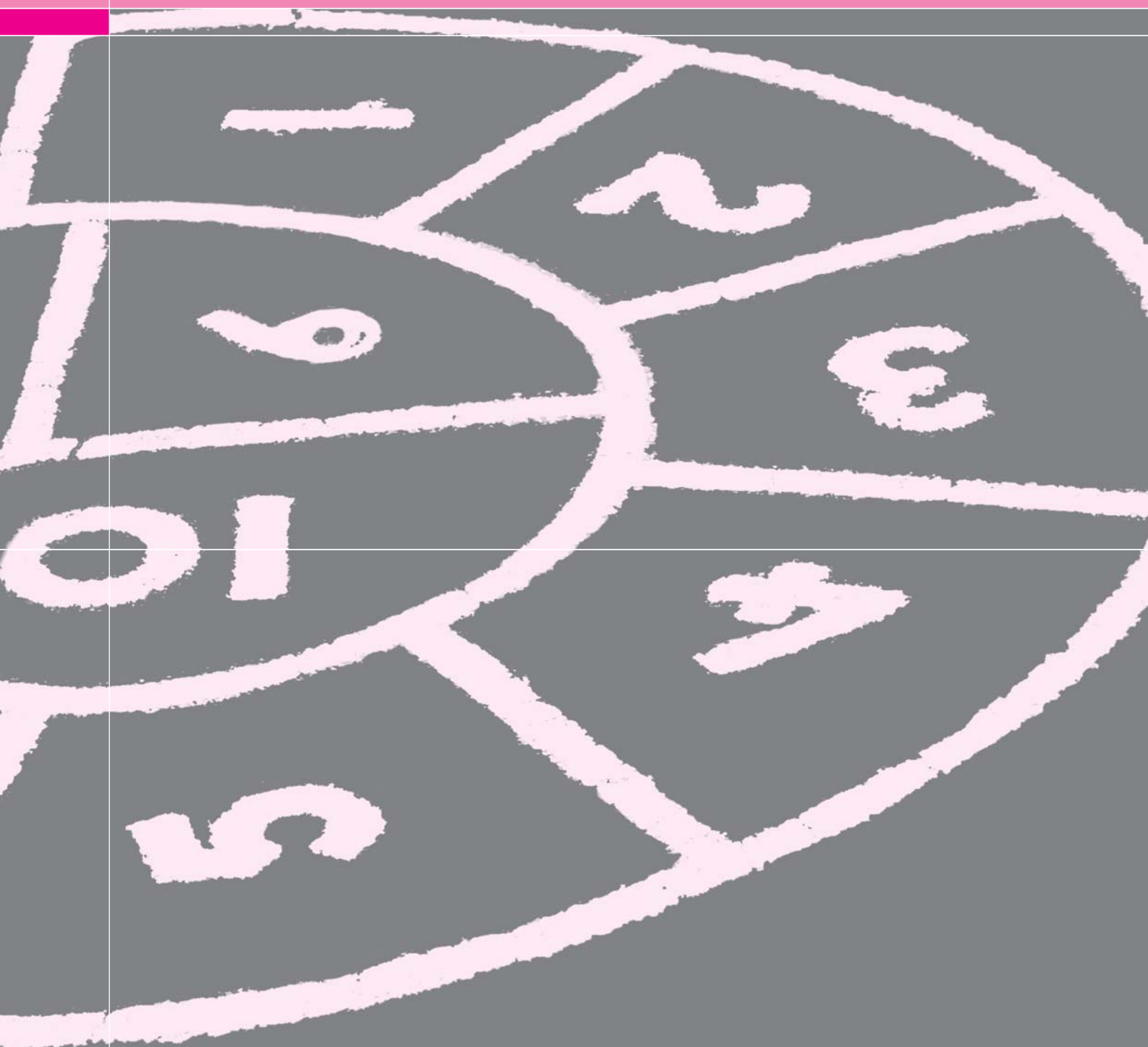


Local Government Association

the standard school year

a national framework introducing the 'six-term year'



The standard school year: a national framework introducing the 'six-term year'

As local education authorities (LEAs) enter the next round of decision-making for setting term and holiday dates for 2005-06, the Local Government Association (LGA) has produced this 'e-package' of information to explain its proposals for standardising the school year across LEA boundaries in England. The LGA has been working with the network of member authorities for some four years now and together we have found very high levels of support for our recommendations among a significant majority of stakeholder groups. We firmly believe that these proposals will assist schools and LEAs in their joint endeavours to raise standards and boost levels of attainment, as well as introducing more consistency and predictability for parents and carers to plan family time.

While recognising that the most effective way of delivering on this important agenda is for LEAs to work together collaboratively, we are also pleased to have received public support for our work from Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and David Miliband, Minister of State for School Standards.

The 'e-pack' contains:

- a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) explaining the background and reasoning behind the proposals;
- a calendar proposed for introduction in 2005-06 agreed by the LGA Standing Committee on the School Year;
- draft calendars for 2006-07 and 2007-08; and
- a copy of the Secretary of State's letter to the LGA expressing his support for the proposals alongside other positive and helpful comments from the DfES.

We should be grateful if you and your network neighbours would ensure this work is now given very serious consideration for implementation in 2005-06. We should also be pleased if you could ensure the information reaches your schools and their governing bodies. Many thanks.

If you need any further information please visit our website www.lga.gov.uk or contact info@lga.gov.uk

The standard school year - some frequently asked questions

What are the standard school year proposals?

These proposals state that in each LEA in England, the school year should consistently and predictably be divided into six blocks of roughly even length which are more evenly distributed throughout the year: two, approximately seven-week learning blocks before Christmas followed by four, approximately six-week blocks afterwards. The spring break is fixed and taken around the first two weeks of April irrespective of the timing of Easter. The long summer break remains.

What is wrong with the present arrangements?

The current pattern of the school year was established over a century ago and has long been considered inappropriate to learning in the 21st century. There are no consistent arrangements in England - different summer holidays, Easter holidays, half terms and professional development days are set by different LEAs and schools. The length of the spring and summer terms are determined by the timing of Easter, which can fall anywhere between 22 March and 25 May. Terms of uneven length disrupt curriculum planning and delivery. Pupils deserve a consistent and predictable framework within which the national curriculum can be properly delivered and assessed. Because of varied holiday patterns parents increasingly take their children out of school on holiday in term time.

The City Technology Colleges which started from scratch some twelve years ago, established standardised terms of consistent length and attribute much of their improved achievement to this factor.

Where did the proposals come from?

Aware of the disruption the inconsistencies were causing, a number of LEAs went out to consultation during the 1990s and received the identical response that because so many pupils move across LEA boundaries to go to school, only a national scheme would command assent. The LGA, as the national representative body, decided to establish an Independent Commission to examine all the issues in depth. The Commission reported in September 2000 and recommended a framework which has subsequently been refined into the proposals as they are now, in response to feedback received through intensive national and local consultations.

Are there any *radical* changes?

Yes, two. The period in the run-up to Christmas was identified as showing marked increases in the signs of stress including increased rates of sickness (among teachers and pupils) and exclusions. To relieve this stress, an extended holiday in October is proposed. Also, when Easter occurs particularly early in March or particularly late in April/May, time available for the teaching period between half term and the Easter holidays becomes either very short or unduly long. It is recommended that when this happens Good Friday and Easter Monday (which remain holidays) take place during term time to achieve consistently even term lengths. Our research has shown that the Easter festival will stand outside the spring break two years in every ten-year period.

Why not a more radical five-term year?

Seven City Technology Colleges and two foundation schools in England have adopted a five-term year and will keep it. This framework provides for five, eight-week terms with two-week breaks in between except in the summer where the break is four weeks. Many commentators have confused this with the standard

school year proposals. The Commission decided that a five-term year would be unlikely to command wide-scale support among LEAs, schools and teachers; that it would probably require the government to introduce legislation; that it would not bring benefits to compensate for the disruption it involved; and that a model based on six teaching, learning and assessment blocks would achieve the same benefits with minimal disruption.

What are the advantages to parents?

Parents, unlike teachers and schools, have not been consulted over the setting of school terms and holidays in the past. The LGA and the LEA network have consulted parents in depth over the past three years. The results confirm that standardisation, consistency and openness about school terms and holidays makes the planning of holidays and child care easier, and helps to reduce the incidence of parents removing their children from school during term time.

What are the advantages to teachers?

Curriculum planning will be smoother and easier with consistent term lengths from year to year. Teachers who are also parents will get the same benefits as other parents. Teachers say very young pupils in particular cannot cope with very long terms and behaviour management becomes much more difficult.

What do young people think of the recommendations?

The views of young people have been sought at LEA level through local consultations and at national level with the help of the UK Youth Parliament. The majority have come out in favour of the recommendations. Many respondents highlighted frustrations when teachers, at the end of short spring terms, announce that pupils will have to cover the rest of the syllabus on their own during the holidays in order to go into the public exam season fully prepared.

Are there any other advantages?

Yes. The LGA believes that with only slight modification, the standard school year framework could help facilitate the introduction of post-qualification admission to higher education (PQA). The universities have been asked by DfES to study a number of 'access' issues to higher education, including PQA, under which pupils would apply to higher education with their actual A-level grades. This may involve moving public examinations slightly earlier in the year to make this possible, when hay fever sufferers would also benefit from not having to sit examinations at the height of the hay fever season. If examinations were moved earlier, the LGA would re-examine the **positioning (not the length)** of the summer holiday and could well recommend an earlier end to 'Term 6' and earlier start to 'Term 1' of the following year. This is unlikely to happen in the near future.

Won't the sixth 'term' be wasted?

In 'Term 6' time will be found amongst other things, for facilitating better transition and maintaining motivation and progress between different phases of education, especially in the transition between primary and secondary schools. It could also be used for improved careers advice on vocational options at age 14 and after GCSE for improved transfer to colleges and sixth forms. A number of secondary schools are already successful in using this period after assessment or public examinations, as the beginning of a new school year.

Why isn't the DfES making these proposals?

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 makes it clear that it is the job of LEAs and foundation, voluntary-aided and independent schools to set school term and holiday dates. The LGA has no wish to see that position altered and the DfES has made it clear no change to the legislation is in the offing. However, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, **Charles Clarke** wrote to us in February 2004 expressing his personal support for our work and said that he sees much positive merit in the proposals. He went on to repeat that support in the media.

Do LEAs and schools have to stick to these recommendations?

No. LEAs, together with foundation, voluntary-aided and independent schools remain free to set whatever pattern of terms and holidays they wish. However, consultations show a widespread demand for more standardised terms and a willingness to follow the recommendations. One sticking point to date has been how to inspire confidence in the LEA network so that it can move ahead in a co-ordinated fashion when individual LEA consultation and decision-making timetables are at variance. There are, however, an increasing number of authorities acting together as regional or 'extra'-regional groupings and we are hopeful that this trend will continue.

Why has the LGA recommended calendars based on the 190 pupil days and not the 195 teacher days?

Our research into the use and timing of teacher INSET days has shown a wide variety of practice in different schools and LEAs. Most commonly, it appears that the LEA 'determines' 190 pupil days and either 1 or 2 CPD days (the day before the beginning of the school year and the day after the New Year bank holiday) leaving either school governing bodies or more often heads to determine the other CPD days - which are sometimes described in 'hours' to enable flexible use outside the pupil day. The Secondary Heads Association has told us that 'disaggregation' into hours is found to be beneficial to both whole-school improvement planning and to individual teachers who are able to undertake training tailored to personal development needs.

The LGA believes that while school years need to be determined at least two years in advance, it is not desirable or appropriate that INSET/CPD is determined so far in advance. We also believe it sits better with the requirement placed upon head-teachers to '*specify teachers' duties and where and when these are to take place*' (para 64.3 of the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document).

The DfES is conducting a review of INSET which is scheduled to report in summer 2004. Taking all of these factors into account, we believe it more appropriate to standardise around the pupil learning year.

Does the Independent Commission still meet?

No. The Independent Commission was stood down in the summer of 2003. In its place we established the LGA Standing Committee on the School Year with much wider, more inclusive membership. A full list of the organisations represented on the Standing Committee is available on our website (www.lga.gov.uk/schoolyear). The Standing Committee meets annually in September and October to agree recommended standard school year term dates for two years ahead.

When will the changes to the school year take place?

The LGA Standing Committee on the School Year has made recommendations for term dates in 2005-06 and LEAs are being urged to plan for implementation of these proposals. A small number of authorities, including a group in the south-west of England, are trialling a slightly modified version of the proposals in 2004-05. The LGA has commissioned some research to evaluate the implementation in those areas.

What do religious groups think of the proposals?

The current school year does not cater for non-Christian festivals and few objections have been received from non-Christian religious leaders. The LGA has consulted extensively with Church of England and Roman Catholic representatives and found that most religious leaders involved in education are supportive of the proposals.

What does the tourism industry think?

The LGA has always put pupils and their learning needs at the centre of the proposals, and took particular note of the views of parents and teachers. On that basis, it also consulted the tourism industries. Most of them have been positive about the proposals. Tourism representatives have long argued that a fixed spring holiday will provide a regular and consistent start to the season and are pleased that the LGA is recommending the long summer holiday remains a part of the new structure. The LGA is also recommending an extended October break that will provide opportunities for tourism businesses (especially in rural areas) to capitalise on an extended season.

What about the idea of staggering holidays regionally and nationally?

The LGA believes any initiative of this sort is for the government and/or the English regions to initiate. The Welsh authorities have indicated they may support the English pattern. Scotland has its own arrangements.

Who has the LGA consulted about the recommendations?

We approached over 3,000 organisations and interested parties from the following groups - students, teachers, parents, LEAs, head teachers, tourism representatives, institutions of higher education, religious leaders of all creeds, the Department for Education and Skills, one-parent families, charities, community groups, youth workers, ministers, trade unions, and examining boards. Over 2,700 responses were received. Further consultation took place at LEA-level. Responses have shown very high levels of support for the proposals.

What happens in other countries?

In most European countries, governments or regions fix school terms and holidays.

Proposed calendar for 2005-06

2005-06	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Bank holiday Term time
July	18	19	20	21	22	
	25	26	27	28	29	
August	01	02	03	04	05	
	08	09	10	11	12	
	15	16	17	18	19	
Aug/Sep	22	23	24	25	26	
	29	30	31	01	02	
Sep	05	06	07	08	09	
	12	13	14	15	16	
	19	20	21	22	23	
	26	27	28	29	30	
Oct	03	04	05	06	07	
	10	11	12	13	14	
	17	18	19	20	21	
Oct/Nov	24	25	26	27	28	
	31	01	02	03	04	
Nov/Dec	07	08	09	10	11	
	14	15	16	17	18	
	21	22	23	24	25	
	28	29	30	01	02	
	05	06	07	08	09	
Jan	12	13	14	15	16	
	19	20	21	22	23	
	26	27	28	29	30	
	02	03	04	05	06	
Jan/Feb	9	10	11	12	13	
	16	17	18	19	20	
	23	24	25	26	27	
Feb/Mar	30	31	01	02	03	
	06	07	08	09	10	
	13	14	15	16	17	
	20	21	22	23	24	
April	27	28	29	30	31	
	03	04	05	06	07	
May	10	11	12	13	14	
	17	18	19	20	21	
	24	25	26	27	28	
	01	02	03	04	05	
	08	09	10	11	12	
May/June	15	16	17	18	19	
	22	23	24	25	26	
July	29	30	31	01	02	
	05	06	07	08	09	
	12	13	14	15	16	
	19	20	21	22	23	
Aug/Sept	26	27	28	29	30	
	03	04	05	06	07	
	10	11	12	13	14	
Sept	17	18	19	20	21	
	24	25	26	27	28	
	31	01	02	03	04	
	07	08	09	10	11	
	14	15	16	17	18	
Sept	21	22	23	24	25	
	28	29	30	31	01	
	04	05	06	07	08	

Draft calendar for 2006-07

2006-07	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Bank holiday Term time
July	17	18	19	20	21	
	24	25	26	27	28	
August	31	01	02	03	04	
	07	08	09	10	11	
	14	15	16	17	18	
	21	22	23	24	25	
Aug/Sep	28	29	30	31	01	
Sep	04	05	06	07	08	
	11	12	13	14	15	
	18	19	20	21	22	
	25	26	27	28	29	
	02	03	04	05	06	
Oct	09	10	11	12	13	
	16	17	18	19	20	
	23	24	25	26	27	
Oct/Nov	30	31	01	02	03	
	06	07	08	09	10	
	13	14	15	16	17	
	20	21	22	23	24	
Nov/Dec	27	28	29	30	01	
	04	05	06	07	08	
	11	12	13	14	15	
	18	19	20	21	22	
	25	26	27	28	29	
Jan	01	02	03	04	05	
	08	09	10	11	12	
	15	16	17	18	19	
	22	23	24	25	26	
Jan/Feb	29	30	31	01	02	
	05	06	07	08	09	
	12	13	14	15	16	
Feb/Mar	19	20	21	22	23	
	26	27	28	01	02	
	05	06	07	08	09	
	12	13	14	15	16	
	19	20	21	22	23	
	26	27	28	29	30	
April	02	03	04	05	06	
	09	10	11	12	13	
	16	17	18	19	20	
May	23	24	25	26	27	
	30	01	02	03	04	
	07	08	09	10	11	
	14	15	16	17	18	
May/June	21	22	23	24	25	
	28	29	30	31	01	
	04	05	06	07	08	
	11	12	13	14	15	
	18	19	20	21	22	
July	25	26	27	28	29	
	02	03	04	05	06	
	09	10	11	12	13	
Aug/Sept	16	17	18	19	20	
	23	24	25	26	27	
	30	31	01	02	03	
	06	07	08	09	10	
	13	14	15	16	17	
	20	21	22	23	24	
	27	28	29	30	31	
Sept	03	04	05	06	07	

Draft calendar for 2007-08

2007-08	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Bank holiday Term time
July	16	17	18	19	20	
	23	24	25	26	27	
August	30	31	01	02	03	
	06	07	08	09	10	
	13	14	15	16	17	
	20	21	22	23	24	
Aug/Sep	27	28	29	30	31	
Sep	03	04	05	06	07	
	10	11	12	13	14	
	17	18	19	20	21	
	24	25	26	27	28	
Oct	01	02	03	04	05	
	08	09	10	11	12	
	15	16	17	18	19	
Oct/Nov	22	23	24	25	26	
	29	30	31	01	02	
	05	06	07	08	09	
	12	13	14	15	16	
Nov/Dec	19	20	21	22	23	
	26	27	28	29	30	
	03	04	05	06	07	
	10	11	12	13	14	
	17	18	19	20	21	
Jan	24	25	26	27	28	
	31	01	02	03	04	
	07	08	09	10	11	
Jan/Feb	14	15	16	17	18	
	21	22	23	24	25	
	28	29	30	31	01	
Feb/Mar	04	05	06	07	08	
	11	12	13	14	15	
	18	19	20	21	22	
	25	26	27	28	29	
	03	04	05	06	07	
April	10	11	12	13	14	
	17	18	19	20	21	
	24	25	26	27	28	
	31	01	02	03	04	
	07	08	09	10	11	
May	14	15	16	17	18	
	21	22	23	24	25	
	28	29	30	01	02	
	05	06	07	08	09	
	12	13	14	15	16	
May/June	19	20	21	22	23	
	26	27	28	29	30	
	02	03	04	05	06	
July	09	10	11	12	13	
	16	17	18	19	20	
	23	24	25	26	27	
	30	01	02	03	04	
	07	08	09	10	11	
Aug/Sept	14	15	16	17	18	
	21	22	23	24	25	
	28	29	30	31	01	
	04	05	06	07	08	
	11	12	13	14	15	
Sept	18	19	20	21	22	
	25	26	27	28	29	
	01	02	03	04	05	



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Your Ref: E30/17a

February 2004

Thank you for your letter of 23 January about the LGA's proposals for a standard school year based on six terms of roughly equal length.

I am personally attracted to the arguments in favour of standardising the length of school terms, and the proposals that have been developed by LGA, and your Commission on the School Year chaired by Chris Price. I therefore very much welcome the work that the LGA has carried out and the debate you have stimulated on this important issue. I am grateful to you for keeping me in touch with progress.

We are agreed that there is no case for changing the current legal position whereby school term and holiday dates are decided locally, and there are of course practical issues that the LGA and its member authorities will need to address if they are moving in this direction, and to build consensus for change. For our part however we see positive merit in the proposals, and would want to lend our support to the debate. I hope that the continuing discussions among your members will take the debate forward, and I should be grateful if you could keep me in touch with progress.

Perhaps I could comment on two of the specific issues you raised. First, much time is lost to families taking holidays in term time and because of sickness, it would be interesting to learn more of the positive impact on school attendance that a six term year might bring. I was also interested to hear of the research on the seasonality of absence that you have commissioned and wonder whether that will also look at the issue of term time holidays.

Lastly you will be aware of the review of INSET that we are currently undertaking. This will give us a clearer idea of how INSET days are used and what steps need to be taken to ensure they are of maximum benefit. This is still in its early stages but I am asking officials here to continue to keep in touch with LGA officers about the progress of the review.

Charles Clarke



further DfES support

The LGA is pleased to have the backing of DfES in its proposals to implement a six term standard school year. Below are extracts from a letter by DJ Collins. The LGA is pleased to have the backing from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the standard school year proposals. This support from DfES has been reiterated in further correspondence, most recently by the head of the DfES press office: (quotes to follow)

'school terms and the six term year... technically this is a matter for LEAs to decide... But Mr Clarke has made it very clear that we support the move...'

'If LEAs see the Secretary of State supporting the six term year then I am sure that influences the decisions they make... It looks like it is already emboldening people.'

'On PQA, (Post Qualification Admission) officials in the DfES are continuing to look at this... We issued a paper on this last year. It's conclusion was on the lines of "good idea, but lots of issues around it...[But] if PQA happened, then the six term year would have a very significant bearing on it.'

LGA's school term database

As part of its work on the Standard School Year, the LGA's Standing Committee on the School Year has produced a complete database of school term dates for 2004-2005. The database provides a detailed easy-to-read guide to the school term dates of each local authority. It is unique in gathering together in one comprehensive document the varying term and holiday dates in secondary schools throughout England, and is available as a convenient PDF document. For further details on the database, contact LGconnect on 020 7664 3131 or email info@lga.gov.uk



school term database

2004-2005

education



For further information, please contact
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**or telephone LGconnect,
for all your LGA queries, on 020 7664 3131**

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