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Press Release from Comprehensive Future 1 December 2006

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## The consultation on the School Admissions Code ends today.

Margaret Tulloch Secretary said - *'The new Code should go a long way to end covert selection, although it remains to be seen if Admission Forums can do the job of ensuring fair play.'*

*'This determination to ending covert selection makes it even more ridiculous that the Government continues to allow children across the country to face overt selection on ability and aptitude.'*

Comprehensive Future's full response is on our website <[www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk](http://www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk)>

Below are some main points made in our response.

### Some of the General points made in our response

We welcome the stated aims of the Draft Code as described in the foreword from the Secretary of State – that of ensuring *a fair system that promotes social equity, with children and families at its centre; the need to be confident that children from all social, cultural or religious backgrounds are equally able to have their preferences met in the school admissions system and the need to have an admissions system which is clear, fair and easy to understand.*

Selection on aptitude and ability should be ended as quickly as possible. Removing any facility to select on ability and aptitude would give parents more choice and reduce the burden of testing on children. The Code would be much simpler, fairer and shorter if selection by ability and aptitude were abolished.

We welcome the possibility that the report of the Schools Commissioner based on Admission Forums reports will provide information on the broader picture of admissions including the effect on social cohesion. We believe many children face tests for entry into secondary education both by ability and 'so called' aptitude. Official figures are not collected. We want to see more information on this collected and made public.

We recognize that the Code goes much further than previous Codes and the recent Draft in trying to end covert selection. However too much depends on the willingness of admission authorities, admission forums and local authorities to bring this about. There are several parts of the Code which we would like to see strengthened, changing comments from 'should' to 'must'.

There is a need in places for greater clarity. Most importantly in all sections it should be clear what is meant by 'schools' or 'admission authorities'. At times in the Code there is reference to 'all schools'. This is unclear, unless all schools includes maintained schools, CTCs and Academies. The Code must make clear how good practice over admissions to academies and CTCs can be ensured, including the means by which complaints can be made. A specific section is needed on academies and CTCs. We wish to see all provisions apply equally to maintained schools, Academies and CTCs. For example the duty of the Local Authority to promote fair access and to ensure that school admission arrangements comply with the Code should extend to all schools within the Local Authority. Provisions related to looked after children, children with SEN and hard to place children should apply to CTCs and Academies in the same way as to maintained schools.

There is clearly a need for an independent system to monitor and intervene on admissions. Therefore the role of the Adjudicator should be extended to promote fairness by monitoring and intervention. It remains to be seen whether Admission Forums will be able effectively to police what happens locally.

The Regulation Education (Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) Secondary Schools and Primary schools will mean it will be possible for the administration of all admissions ie deciding if an applicant meets the admission criteria, can be carried out by the local authority. This should be set out clearly and encouraged within the body of the Code. If admission criteria set by the school are objective, fair and clear why should a school object?

Contrary to Adjudications, High court decisions and the current Code, the draft Code says schools who select by ability or aptitude should ensure parents know the outcome of the test before they have to express a preference. Entering a child for a grammar school entry test is an expression of preference, why should parents who do this have two opportunities to express a preference? Other parents who might want single sex education, co education or comprehensive education are not able to know their chances of success before expressing a preference. **We strongly object to this change.**

The Code discourages giving priority to applicants who put the school first (first preference first). The Code goes further to prohibit it if there is *an element of selection by ability or aptitude in the area*. Many all ability schools in selective areas have given priority to parents who put them first to maintain an intake supportive of comprehensive education.

The Code will need to be revised in light of the new duty on governing bodies to promote community cohesion.