

Institute for Apprenticeships: Draft Operational Plan

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,500 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
- 2 ASCL is supportive of the increased focus on increasing the availability and quality of apprenticeships and also supports the government's ambition to raise the status of vocational and technical education. However the IfA's operational plan concentrates far too much on how the IfA will involve employers at all levels and on the substantial support for employers that it will offer. The operational plan describes the IfA as an "employer-led regulator", led by a Board, made up primarily of employers, enshrining the employer-led nature of apprenticeship reforms. Whilst ASCL welcomes the involvement of employer-led bodies in designing content and standards it believes that there is a lack of due regard for the role that colleges will need to play in the delivery of apprenticeships. Colleges have had a long and successful history of working with local and national employers in designing apprenticeship programmes and the operational plan does not seem to show how this relationship will be encouraged to grow and thrive. Failure to properly involve colleges and other training providers in the operational delivery and planning of the apprenticeship programme will seriously reduce the effectiveness of the whole apprenticeship programme.
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- 4 The IfA is also likely to have its remit extended to include classroom-based technical education from 2018, through the government's Skills Plan, which builds on the recommendations of the Sainsbury Review. The role of colleges is crucial to successful delivery yet there seems to be little appetite to involve educational bodies in the operational planning as evidenced by the poor representation of educational-based appointments at IfA board level. In addition the role of schools is very unclear, sending out confused messages about whether schools will even be entitled, let alone encouraged, to deliver any components of the 15 technical routes.
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- 6 Within the strategic guidance, a section is dedicated to why 'Putting Employers at the Centre of Apprenticeship Quality' is necessary and how this will happen through the IfA. The quality assurance role of the IfA is crucial in ensuring standards and "currency" of both the new apprenticeships standards and the qualifications within the technical routes (including proposals for the "transition year"). Yet the role of the IfA in possibly "contracting out" quality assurance arrangements, or co-ordinating all the QA partners, is still very uncertain. Educational organisations, including Ofqual, need to be central to this planning process, particularly if the IfA end up procuring external quality assurance (EQA) as seems to be implied in the operational plan.

- 7 ASCL's concern, in summary, is that in contrast to employers the further education workforce, (with the exception of the new National Colleges), are not mentioned at all in either the draft strategic or operational plans for the IfA. The IfA is ignoring the decades of experience of delivering apprenticeship learning within the FE sector, as well as many of the key recommendations in the 2012 report "Richards Review of Apprenticeships in England". The need to fully involve the colleges' sector is crucial to a successful implementation of the IfA's operational plan and ASCL remains concerned that this has not been given due regard. I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.
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Martin Ward
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3 March 2017