

## **Government consultation on prioritising schools for the school rebuilding programme**

### **Response of the Association of School and College Leaders**

#### **A. Introduction**

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 21,000 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 welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

#### **B. Key points**

3. ASCL welcomed the school rebuilding programme, with its intention to rebuild and refurbish 500 schools and sixth form colleges in England. However, based on the Department for Education's own reports, we are not convinced that the programme goes far enough in meeting the overall requirements for fundamental repairs and refurbishments. We believe that the government needs to develop a more strategic and sustainable approach to maintaining the school and college estate, and provide a less disparate approach to capital funding.
4. ASCL believes that the funding available through devolved formula capital allocations is insufficient to meet the intended function, and that the current distribution methodology does not accurately reflect condition. It is also the case that the lack of coherence between different strands of schools' capital represents a barrier to keeping some schools in a condition deemed fit for purpose. For example, the DFC allocation may be significantly below the minimum threshold for applying for condition improvement funding (CIF).
5. Children and young people's education has already been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementing a sustainable plan that addresses the building and fabric condition issues will help to minimise further disruption.
6. The Prime Minister has pledged £1.5 billion to fund a decade-long school rebuilding and repair programme. Based on the impact of large fires alone, commercial education insurance provider Zurich estimates that the repair for school fires could hit £320 million over 10 years – a significant portion of the government's planned investment.

7. The £1.5 billion funding pledge is also not enough to cover the highest condition need of 'electrical services' which the Department for Education's most recent report identifies an investment of £2.5 billion is required to fully repair or replace just this single element of building condition.
8. The National Audit Office report on [Schools Capital](#) in 2017 (based on data from 2012-2014) stated that deterioration of the school estate is a significant risk to long-term value for money. This report estimated that it would cost £6.7 billion to return all school buildings to satisfactory or better conditions, with a further £7.1 billion needed to bring parts of school buildings from satisfactory to good condition. At the time of the report, Sir Amyas Morse, head of the National Audit Office, advised that the Department for Education "must make best use of the capital funding it has available – by continuing to increase the use of data to inform its funding decisions and by creating places where it can demonstrate that they will have the greatest impact".
9. The Department for Education's May 2021 [Condition of School Buildings Survey](#) (based on data from 2017 – 2019) found that it would cost £11.4 billion to repair or replace all defective elements in the school estate. The highest need area is electrics (needing £2.5 billion), followed by items such as boilers and pipework, and then external walls, windows, doors, and roofs (needing £1.5 billion). It is completely unacceptable that children, young people and staff are working in learning environments that are not of a satisfactory condition. This means that many children and staff are learning and working in buildings which are not a conducive environment for education, and that schools face considerable ongoing costs for routine maintenance.
10. These two reports suggest a growth in need in the school estate over the period of the two data collection programmes.
11. Circa 60% of the school estate was built pre-1976. Many schools will have had multiple small and large retrofits and will not have been built to modern building standards and guidelines. There will be variation in lighting systems, window types and ventilation systems.
12. There are three key elements that ASCL members would like to see with regard to buildings and safety. Firstly, equality and equity of provision wherever schools and colleges are located in the UK and whatever the context of their site(s). Secondly, sufficient funding to implement appropriate safety measures to keep, pupils, staff and resources safe. Thirdly, clear guidance on the requirements on school and college leaders.
13. One of our members' key concerns is the presence of asbestos in many older school buildings. The government's solution to this problem has been to provide guidance on how to safely manage the presence of these materials. However, ASCL members do not think this is good enough and it is our view that the government should remove this risk entirely through the phased removal of asbestos from all school and college buildings.
14. The government's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) is marketed as an alternative to commercial insurance for academy and Local Authority schools. It is therefore in the government's own interest to improve the resilience and the risk profile of the UK education systems estate, fabric, and infrastructure.
15. Consideration should be given to whether sites identified for new or re-built schools and colleges remain fit for purpose, including monitoring of air quality and environmental

impact studies. It is unacceptable that new schools have recently been built in areas of very poor air quality, with high levels of pollution, and are not able to have opening windows as a result. With natural air ventilation cited as key recommendation of good practice in ventilation by the Department for Education and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), it would seem sensible to locate education provisions in areas with good air quality and provide supporting infrastructure, such as transport links, that would also support energy efficiency and minimise the environmental impact.

16. It has recently been announced that the Department for Education is planning to provide £25million for portable CO<sub>2</sub> monitors to state-funded schools. It seems highly likely that the monitors will identify that some school and college learning spaces, blocks or buildings are unsuitable for occupation of standard class sizes. It appears that information relating to air quality was not collected in the condition surveys. Other jurisdictions are going further. The Isle of Man, for example, is [reportedly](#) providing devices that will not only monitor CO<sub>2</sub>, but also heat, humidity and light. In light of this new challenge, and the inherent high risk to health and wellbeing of pupils and staff, additional capital funding should be allocated by the government to address remedial works. The government must also recognise that fitting systems may mean increased utility and inspection costs, for which additional revenue funding will need to be provided.
17. Any new or revised policy requirements which will incur material capital expenditure must be funded and not come from existing school budgets.

## **C. Answers to specific questions**

### ***Defining rebuilding need***

#### **1. To what extent do you agree with the department's proposed definition of rebuilding need?**

18. ASCL supports the aim to identify and repair or replace buildings or blocks where fabric or construction condition poses a threat to health and safety of the occupants, or the ability to stay open. We agree that rebuilding or refurbishment should take place after assessment of value for money principles, and with expert advice as to the most cost-effective way to address need and re-invest public money back into education.
19. ASCL also supports the intention to ensure that school buildings will be net carbon zero in operation and built within rigorous technical building safety standards. ASCL also calls on the government to go beyond the requirements consulted on within the Building Bulletin B100 Fire Safety Design for Schools consultation, and to fit fire suppression systems in all the projects in this programme.
20. It appears reasonable that delivering larger projects, or amalgamating projects, could secure better value for money in this programme. However, we have questions about how this approach would operate in practice. For example, if the Department for Education is setting a definition of what would constitute a larger project that could be evaluated in any impact or value for money assessment, would this be based on floor area or a minimum £ value?
21. Considering building characteristics and condition factors, such as the building's structure and structural integrity, would seem to be sensible assessment factors. However, in assessing projects as carbon net zero, we would recommend that environmental factors should be considered in the rebuild and redesign, such as air

quality, emissions, pollution, flood risk. Taking air quality as an example, the use of mechanical or natural ventilation systems would have very different impacts, which should be considered.

**2. In your view, should the programme target buildings of specific construction types or designs?**

22. We are unsure. We would suggest the government considers the evidence carefully particularly in relation to specific construction types and design, whilst also considering the presence of potentially harmful factors with a risk to life, such as asbestos, air quality and cladding.

**3. In your view, should the programme target buildings of specific ages?**

23. We are unsure. We would suggest the government considers the evidence on specific ages of building and blocks, including where sites have been extended over time. This, if considered alongside construction types and designs used in specific time periods, may identify groups of schools or blocks which are more in need of being rebuilt or refurbished due to intrinsic factors.

24. The government's latest evidence base available in the public domain is the May 2021 [Condition of School Buildings Survey](#). This report states that, of the teaching blocks still being used in the school estate, the 1960s is the decade with the largest representation in terms of floor area. 23% of the estate's condition need is in blocks from the 1960s, making it the highest source of condition need, followed by the two decades either side. The 1960s sees the peak of condition need per m<sup>2</sup> and condition need per block. Condition need per m<sup>2</sup> then falls every decade through to 2020. Condition need per block rises slightly in the 2000s compared to the 1990s. Schools from before 1900 have a condition need per block less than half of the peak, and a condition need per m<sup>2</sup> similar to the 1980s, suggesting that these buildings are in excellent condition for their age.

**4. Are there any other factors that should be included in the definition of rebuilding need, or targeted by the programme?**

25. Along with value for money principles, the government could also consider local rationalisation of site and space allocation, capacity and usage. For example, using local knowledge to see where it could potentially be beneficial to co-locate provisions, in areas where sites could support higher numbers, multiple phases, and multi-service providers, with appropriate buildings and infrastructure. It is important that this programme takes a longer-term view and provides buildings that are fit for purpose for many years to come.

***Comparing rebuilding need across schools of different sizes***

**5. To what extent do you agree that we should prioritise schools based on intensity of condition need rather than total amount of condition need?**

26. ASCL does not have the expertise to comment on the appropriateness of these suggested methodologies, but we would suggest that the government engages with building experts with knowledge of the education and public sector estate.

**6. To what extent do you agree that we should compare sites based on the intensity of condition need across the same surface area of their buildings (GIFA), considering the buildings in the poorest condition on each site?**

27. ASCL does not have the expertise to comment on the appropriateness of these suggested methodologies, but we would suggest that the government engages with building experts with knowledge of the education and public sector estate.

### ***Considering other school characteristics***

Please select your preference from the following two statements:

#### **7. As regards special schools and alternative provision:**

- **the department should allocate a proportion of projects to special schools and alternative provision with the most severe condition need to ensure schools of those types are included in the programme**
- **the department should allocate projects to schools with the greatest rebuilding need, not controlling for type**

28. ASCL's view is that any distribution of funding should be judged as fair and equitable across the education sector and assessed for any potential bias.

#### **8. As regards school phase:**

- **the department should allocate a proportion of projects to each school phase (e.g. primary, secondary)**
- **the department should allocate projects to schools with the greatest rebuilding need, not controlling for phase**

29. The Department for Education's May 2021 [Condition of School Buildings Survey](#) states that primary schools represent >75% and secondary 15%, but secondaries have the most internal space (nearly 4,000,000m<sup>2</sup> more available space in teaching blocks than primary schools). Unsurprisingly, secondary schools have the highest condition need per school, followed by 16+ establishments and all-through schools. These are the largest school types in the estate, so they are likely to have the highest need per school. Average condition need per m<sup>2</sup> is the truest measure we have for the condition of different types of schools. Pupil referral units have the highest condition need, with £170/m<sup>2</sup> of need, compared to the 'best' condition type of school which is all-through schools with £101/m<sup>2</sup> of need. Primary schools are, on average, in a worse condition than secondary schools when comparing on entire school level, with £157/m<sup>2</sup> of need compared to £139/m<sup>2</sup>. When comparing individual blocks, primary schools and secondary schools have similar distributions of need.

30. ASCL's view is that any distribution of funding should be judged as fair and equitable across the education sector and assessed for any potential bias.

#### **9. As regards school location:**

- **the department should allocate a proportion of projects to each region**
- **the department should allocate projects to schools in the country with the greatest rebuilding need, not controlling for location**

31. The Department for Education's May 2021 [Condition of School Buildings Survey](#) states that schools in the West Midlands have the highest average condition need per school and second highest condition need per m<sup>2</sup>. Others have similar need. The region with lowest condition need per m<sup>2</sup> are London and the South West.

32. ASCL's view is that any distribution of funding should be judged as fair and equitable across the education sector and assessed for any potential bias.

**10. Are there other school characteristics that the department should consider, when looking at the balance of projects?**

33. There are none that we can suggest at this time, but we would suggest that the government engages with building experts with knowledge of the education and public sector estate.

***Additional non-building factors that could be considered***

**11. To what extent do you think that educational performance, and the potential for capital investment to improve it, should also be included as one of the factors considered to prioritise which projects are included in the programme?**

34. The Impact of Schools Buildings on Student Health and Performance: A Call for Research Report (2012) provides information on available evidence and the further research required. The reports states there is strong evidence to support the concept that school buildings impact student health and their ability to learn. Specific examples include the impact of minimising background noise and allowing voices to be heard clearly, deprivation of natural light disrupting children's melatonin cycles impacting alertness, improved comfort when there is control of thermal controls, minimum ventilation standards improving test performance and prevalence of Sick Building Syndrome. The report gives the following examples of where further research is required:
- When prioritization is necessary, which building projects can be expected to have larger impacts on facility quality and student health?
  - What are the impacts of high performance school buildings, above and beyond an adequate (and potentially new) school building?
  - How do high-performance design features interact with each other? Relationships such as those between daylighting and acoustical design are understood less in terms of how they interact than in isolation
35. The Education Endowment Foundation teaching and learning toolkit, which analyses international evidence on teaching 5-16 year olds, states that the built environment has "very low or no impact for low cost", but is clear that this assessment is "based on very limited evidence". The toolkit says the following on this issue: "*The built environment is the school building and the physical conditions of the school. Related interventions include moving to a new school building and improving the design, air quality, noise, light, or temperature of an existing building or classroom. Overall, changes to the built environment of schools are unlikely to have a direct effect on learning except at the extremes: impact is minimal once an adequate building standard has been achieved.*"
36. It is clear that more research is needed into this question. ASCL would therefore recommend that the Department for Education undertakes a thorough review of available research, and considers commissioning further research if necessary.

***Objectives for the prioritisation process***

**12. To what extent do you agree that the objectives identified for the process are appropriate?**

37. The objectives seem reasonable and practical, including the primary objective to identify schools with the greatest need of rebuild for the purposes of distributing the funding available to the department via this programme. But this must not detract from the fact

that, for the reasons already outlined, this funding and refurbishment programme will not address many of the reparation needs of school buildings, which are required for them to be judged as a satisfactory standard.

**13. In what order of priority would you place the stated objectives?**

38. ASCL's view is that they are all of equal value.

**14. Are there any other objectives for the prioritisation process that you think we should adopt?**

39. There are none that we can suggest at this time. We would suggest that the government engages with building experts with knowledge of the education and public sector estate.

***The range of possible approaches***

**Approach A: Base prioritisation primarily on CDC condition data analysis. Accept supplementary information from responsible bodies only where it evidences severe types of rebuilding need that CDC does not capture**

**Approach B: Invite expressions of interest from responsible bodies, nominating the schools they would like considered for the programme. We would then prioritise from this group, informed primarily by CDC data. For schools with significant need for rebuilding that CDC does not capture, we would accept and assess supplementary information from responsible bodies and prioritise severe cases.**

**Approach C: Invite responsible bodies to submit comprehensive evidence of rebuilding need and assess this evidence using a scoring system.**

**15. Which would be your preferred approach, in order of preference, from options A, B and C?**

40. The 'About' section in the government consultation suggests that Approach B strikes the balance between information and the burden on responsible bodies to engage with the process. ASCL agrees with this proposal, but we would ask the government to consider where this proposal may give rise to bias, such as disadvantaging smaller responsible bodies or the maintained part of the sector. It is important that this policy is not used as a level to encourage schools to become academies. There must be equal opportunity across the sector.

**16. Do you have any suggestions for other approaches that we have not identified?**

41. There are none that we can suggest at this time, but we would suggest that the government engages with building experts with knowledge of the education and public sector estate.

***Supplying evidence of rebuilding need***

**17. Do you agree or disagree that the proposed criteria for assessing severe rebuilding need are appropriate?**

42. ASCL does not have the expertise to comment on the proposed assessment criteria for assessing severe rebuilding need.

**18. Do you or your responsible body have access to evidence of rebuilding need, in the form of surveys completed by professional surveyors, available to share with the department? Please only answer these questions if you are answering as a body responsible for school condition:**

43. ASCL is a member representative organisation, not a responsible body as defined in the context of this consultation and we are therefore unable to answer this question.

**19. How many schools is your organisation responsible for?**

44. ASCL is a member representative organisation, not a responsible body as defined in the context of this consultation and we are therefore unable to answer this question.

**20. How many of them do you expect would meet the criteria for severe rebuilding?**

45. ASCL is a member representative organisation, not a responsible body as defined in the context of this consultation and we are therefore unable to answer this question.

***The timetable for prioritisation and programme delivery***

**21. In timetabling the selection process, would you prefer the department (please select one option):**

- **selects all remaining projects in a single selection round**
- **selects the majority of the 400 projects in a single selection round, but reserves a reasonable number for later in the programme's life**
- **selects 50 projects every year**
- **other [please state]**

46. ASCL believes that it would be most prudent to select and notify the schools where the projects are confirmed and funding is secured.

**22. In sequencing projects for delivery, should the department take account of (please select one option):**

- **urgency of condition need only**
- **batching projects by urgency of condition need, but also taking into account factors that would allow more efficient delivery, such as location, project size, school phase, or type of project**
- **other [please state]**

47. Based on value for money principles, ASCL believes the most prudent approach would include looking at opportunities for batching smaller projects or those in a similar location where resources could be shared, particularly in light of the reported shortages of drivers, material and workforce within the construction industry. The Department may want to look at elements that would be a barrier to this approach, such as where planning permission is required, which could delay the process.

**23. Do you have any further comments on the proposals for prioritising schools for future rounds of the school rebuilding programme?**

We would like consideration to be given to any conditions of funding and the potential for slippage or delayed delivery of capital projects, due to unforeseen or unexpected circumstances. This should include availability of resources (such as building materials and equipment), workforce, specialist services and planning permission applications/appeals. As an example of the impact of this, we are aware of a project in the West Midlands to build five



new classrooms during this summer which has been delayed and will not be ready for the start of term. This has required planning permission to be urgently sought for portable building structures, meaning an additional project cost and potential disruption to children's learning.

***Public sector equalities duty***

**24. Do you have any comments about the potential impact of our proposed approach to prioritisation in the School Rebuilding Programme on individuals, on the basis of their protected characteristics?**

48. ASCL's view is that any distribution of funding and resources should be judged as fair and equitable across the education sector and assessed for any potential bias.

**D. Conclusion**

49. We hope that this response 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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