

16-19 participation in education and training

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is the professional association for the leaders of secondary schools and colleges. ASCL represents over 15,000 members of the leadership teams of schools and colleges throughout the UK.
- 2 ASCL school and college leader members have contributed extensively to this evidence to the Education Select Committee and their views are reflected here.

EMA

The impact of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) on participation, attendance, achievement and welfare of young people and how effective the Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLS) will be in replacing it.

- 3 Many school and college leaders consider that EMA has had a considerable impact on provision. Young people from households with an income of less than £20,800 per year currently receive £30 per week, which is of great significance to many families and influences choices post-16.
- 4 For example, at Birkenhead Sixth Form College, over 55% of students receive EMA. Of the 680 students doing so in 2010/11 so far, 83.8% receive the full £30 allowance, which clearly indicates the importance this income must have on low-earning families in the area.
- 5 Members are keen to establish that EMA funding contributes to many family budgets, pays individual travel to get to college and provides funding for additional study materials. It is likely that many young people will not be able to continue with their education without this support. ASCL can provide case studies to support these points.
- 6 Those students with learning difficulties and disabilities in receipt of EMA are particularly vulnerable to being kept at home by families who may not appreciate the value of education and training in stretching their son or daughter to achieve their potential and prefer the services of a free baby-sitter to the costs of transport and equipment.
- 7 The University and College Union (UCU), in conjunction with the Association of Colleges (AoC) published in February 2011 the results of a survey of 700 learners, indicating that 7 out of 10 young people would seriously consider dropping out of college if they no longer received their EMA
- 8 Whilst many members believe that EMA is a contributory factor to post-16 enrolment initially, they feel that by far the most significant impact it has had is in encouraging high attendance levels (with resulting benefit to individual and institutional success rates) and is a key factor in preventing drop-out.
- 9 The result of EMA withdrawal is likely to impact on figures of young people not in education and training and will provide another cohort of young people who have

missed life chances at a time when they are receptive to education and training and can study and train in order to contribute to future national wealth.

- 10 It is likely that those students who do manage to stay on in education and would have been eligible for EMA will have to seek part-time work in order to sustain learning. In the past, students often undertook long hours of poorly paid work and this inevitably had a detrimental effect on their studies.
- 11 The details of the way in which the government is going to replace EMA with 'more targeted support' are not yet available. Many students in years 10 and 11 already doubt that they will be able to continue in education, and no real reassurance has yet been given to them on this point as schools and colleges do not yet know how the money will be allocated.
- 12 In 2010-2011 the amount allocated to EMA nationally is £560m. The DLS national allocation proposal is to raise it from £50m to £75m. The increase in DLS will be less than 5% of the support currently available. DLS is not perceived as a realistic means of ensuring that support reaches the most vulnerable learners, if the same methodology used at present is applied.
- 13 DLS is allocated to all providers. Historically it was the amount of money paid directly to providers to give support to young people experiencing financial hardship. However, DLS is not allocated to providers based on means testing of their cohort.
- 14 For the first time in 2010/2011, DLS was calculated using a formula to link with disadvantaged cohorts by using weighted Standard Learner Numbers (SLNs) as the basis of calculating an allocation. This was not fully implemented and allocations were restricted to a 10% upwards or downwards variation on the previous year. Therefore, current allocations do not reflect the relative levels of disadvantage in institutions.
- 15 If the methodology for calculating DLS is not transparent and based on genuine disadvantage then it is clear that it cannot provide targeted support for those facing genuine barriers to continuing in education.
- 16 The proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds varies widely between providers. DLS allocations do not vary so widely. This means that some institutions will be able to support some young people who are less disadvantaged while others will struggle to support students facing extreme poverty.
- 17 The government should recognise the inequality that is currently built in to the system. Students from low-income households in one area will not be able to access support because there will be many others who are eligible for the limited funds, but could have accessed support in a more affluent setting.
- 18 If a provider has a very high proportion of disadvantaged students it will be extremely difficult to distinguish who is the most needy
- 19 There is as yet no guidance on how DLS is to be used and there is a high risk that providers in different circumstances may apply very different criteria, leading to competitive use of funds (for equipment or bespoke transport) in order to encourage student choice of their particular institution.
- 20 ASCL members acknowledge the fact that funding will be limited but believe that limited resources should reach those most in need.

Preparation

Preparations necessary, for providers and local authorities, for the gradual raising of the participation age (RPA) to 18 years and the current state of readiness.

- 21 The government's proposal to extend the participation age is welcome, but there is concern that the ability to deliver the government's commitment to universal participation whilst massively reducing the associated level of resourcing will damage this initiative.
- 22 Apart from the well-rehearsed points made above on the absence of EMA as a means of supporting RPA for those that require financial support and the concerns associated with the distribution of DLS, members have also already met difficulties in maintaining and creating partnerships with local businesses in order to establish opportunities for apprenticeships.
- 23 At a time when commerce and industry are shedding jobs, it is difficult to persuade small businesses to accept young people as employees who will also be obliged to receive training.
- 24 Unemployment jumped by 44,000 in the final three months of 2010 to just under 2.5 million, meaning that 7.9 per cent of workers were out of a job. But the youth unemployment rate reached 20.5 per cent, following a 66,000 increase to 965,000, the highest figures since records began in 1992.
- 25 Whilst completely supporting the removal of any idea of penalties for enforcing RPA, ASCL members feel that the voluntary nature of its proposed format may well lead to increased numbers of young people who are in neither education nor training.
- 26 ASCL members in rural schools, for example in Suffolk, are concerned that the relatively small 16+ cohorts that require extensive partnership arrangements to function at present will be further stretched to provide for extended cohorts under RPA. There has been little financial support for the establishment of existing partnerships over the past five years, so resources are already severely stretched.
- 27 RPA will cause severe problems in rural communities where the cost to students of school transport can exceed £400 per year. In the example provided by a member based in rural Northamptonshire, there is no public transport available and these costs lead to severe financial pressure for some families.
- 28 Where many current students use their EMA to finance their individual bus pass, there is no local authority plan in Northamptonshire, for example, to replace this by free transport for over 16 year-olds. It is unlikely that the DLS will match the need and this situation is seen as a severe inequality of opportunity between urban and rural provision.
- 29 ASCL members are committed to partnership working between schools, colleges, training providers and employers and perceive this as an important part of preparing for RPA.
- 30 Current changes in the roles of local authorities, cutbacks in careers services through Connexions and different approaches in different parts of the country will create problems for the continuance of established partnerships and the creation of new initiatives.

- 31 Many school and college leaders believe that it would be better to protect front-line services as promised and postpone the extra participation target until funding is less constrained. However, in areas where there is a demographic decline in the total number of 16-18 year-olds this gives an opportunity for an increase in participation rate to offset the decrease in total numbers, which would allow a more efficient transfer. Reducing service and staff numbers in one year only to increase them again the next is not an efficient use of limited funds.

Impact

The impact of RPA on areas such as academic achievement, access to vocational education and training, student attendance and behaviour, and alternative provision.

- 32 Access to vocational education and training depends on the ability of different providers to work together. Points made above on the difficulties experienced by ASCL members in maintaining and creating such opportunities are also relevant here.
- 33 It is widely accepted that the curriculum offer designed to attract and retain those who might otherwise not have stayed in education and training post 16 should be carefully designed to stimulate individuals and meet their needs and those of prospective and actual employers.
- 34 The new Specifications of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) provide guidelines requiring a minimum of 280 Guided Learning Hours (glh) of which 100 glh or 30% (whichever is the greater) must be delivered off the job and clearly evidenced.
- 35 The practicalities of ensuring that these guidelines are met will be very difficult for some providers, where local employment is lacking, where travel is difficult and resources, including specialist workshops and laboratories and the finance to run them are limited.
- 36 Additional funds will be needed to provide a stimulating and relevant experience for those who are attending as a result of RPA, whose needs will be to some degree different from, and often greater than, those of the existing student body. If these needs are not met there may be an impact on behaviour and discipline within the school or college as a whole, with adverse repercussions on the learning of other young people in the institution.
- 37 Foundation Learning may provide the most suitable programmes for many of the young people who will be attending school or college as part of the RPA programme. Whilst there have been some successes related to this new curriculum initiative, there have also been difficulties in its implementation and recording. There are still lessons to be learnt from the pilot.
- 38 Schools and colleges are finding long-term curriculum planning extremely difficult within the context of the curriculum review, the Wolf review of vocational learning and the unexpected introduction of new performance measures such as the E-bac.
- 39 All these potentially threaten the ability of schools and colleges to offer the sort of personalised curriculum plans that they have been developing successfully over recent years and which would be tailored to suit the needs of young people who may stay in education and training through RPA.
- 40 Without RPA compulsion, schools and colleges will need to work harder on their curriculum design, advice and guidance. ASCL members are willing to do this, but need time and effort and people – and funding – if they are to be successful.

- 41 From the point of view of provision of stimulating and supportive learning experiences at a time of financial shortage, ASCL members are again concerned that RPA is being introduced at an unsuitable time.

Conclusion

- 42 ASCL members believe strongly in equality of opportunity and recognise the limitations of funding available to support students.
- 43 We have access to case studies that can demonstrate points made in this submission and would be pleased to have the opportunity to expand on them or to answer questions on details.

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