

Industrial Strategy

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 pleased to be able to contribute to the consultation in particular to the section within the Green Paper on “Developing skills”. ASCL’s members are principals, headteachers and senior leaders within schools, sixth form colleges and general FE colleges, and as such have a wealth of experience and expertise in the area of skills building for young people and in adult lifetime learning.

Apprenticeship Levy

- 3 ASCL welcomes the principle of encouraging employers to take a bigger role in apprenticeships training. However, we are concerned that the new more marketised approach inherent within the levy may mean that employers select apprenticeship providers purely on the basis of cost. Whilst cost-effectiveness is of course important it must not mean that new private providers squeeze out colleges who have years of experience (but a higher cost base). Examples of the dangers of this approach can be seen in some of the recent scandals where private providers have gone bankrupt leaving adult students with loan debt and no recourse to continuing their training.
- 4 There have also been well-publicised recent problems of colleges failing to get approved for the new register of approved training providers. The quality and long-term financial stability of apprenticeship providers is crucial to underpinning the growth in apprenticeships and colleges must not be excluded because of short term financial gains.

Adult Basic Skills

- 5 ASCL also agrees that there are significant deficiencies with the levels of adult basic skills, and applauds the ambition in the Green Paper to deliver a firm grounding in numeracy, literacy and digital competencies. In this respect the recent additional monies promised in the Spring Budget give cause for cautious optimism. However they do not go far enough in terms of addressing the huge cutbacks in adult skills funding and in FE funding in general, as evidenced by the recent Institute for Fiscal Studies report “Long-Run Comparisons of Spending per Pupil across Different Stages of Education”¹.

¹ www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8937

- 6 ASCL is also concerned by the uncertainty around the imminent devolution of the Adult Education Budget. Colleges within these geographical areas, and indeed those contiguous to the areas, are concerned about the presently unclear distribution mechanism for these substantial training funds. ASCL is not against the principle of value for money or indeed fair competition amongst providers, but again the possibility of colleges losing out on providing training opportunities to untested and inexperienced providers must be avoided.
- 7 The foundation stone for adult basic skills has been considered to be GCSE English and maths and ASCL has welcomed the additional funding available for students to resit these subjects where they fail to achieve a grade C or higher in year 11 at school. However the exclusion of an alternative programme of study in functional numeracy and literacy has been a serious mistake and has resulted in the branding of many young people as repeated failures – turning many young people off these subjects for life. ASCL therefore welcomes the review into functional skills and the recent public debate around allowing alternative functional skills qualifications to meet condition of funding rules.

Institutes of Technology (IoTs)

- 8 ASCL also supports the principle of having networks of providers with high quality technical education at higher skills levels. However if these are to be “Institutes of Technology” with new capital funding (£170M as per Spring Budget and Green Paper) then it must be clear as to how existing colleges are able to apply to convert/expand to become an IoT or to establish a brand new one. Presently there is a lot of uncertainty and conflicting information as to how these IoTs will be established. Clarity at the earliest opportunity and after due consultation with the sector is imperative.

Technical Education – “T levels”

- 9 ASCL welcomes the government commitment to reinvigorating vocational education at 16-19 with increased funding and a desire for parity of esteem with academic qualifications. In principle, therefore, the new “T levels”, arising from the Sainsbury Review, seem sensible and forward thinking. However there are a great many unknowns in terms of structure, assessment, qualification and quality assurance mechanisms. Full and detailed consultation as to their design and implementation must be undertaken. ASCL has already contributed to initial consultation but this must be fully ongoing and regular.
- 10 In addition the increased funding for the T levels is also welcomed. However this new money is earmarked solely for the comprehensive ambitious work placement element of the qualification (an additional 300 hours). There is a danger therefore that the government thinks it has solved “the 16-19 funding problem” with this top-up funding. In reality the core programme is grossly underfunded and this jeopardises not only the new T levels but also the ability of the existing schools and colleges to operate in a sustained way. It would be a tragedy if the new better financed programmes failed due to the existing provider mechanism collapsing around it from lack of adequate 16-19 funding.

Transition Year

- 11 The “transition year” at age 16 has been identified in the Skills Plan and the Green Paper as a crucial step in upskilling young people who are not yet ready for advanced study or employment. This is a crucial area to get right and there has been a worrying lack of consultation with sector experts in considering what should constitute a “transition year”. ASCL is extremely keen to participate in consultation on this and to harness the views of its experienced membership. An underlying principle must be to “trust” the sector on this and allow schools and colleges to build local models of curriculum and support that meet their students’ needs. Too much prescription and ill-thought-through accountability models will doom this initiative to failure – with the most vulnerable young people in our system as the ones who will be failed. However giving schools and colleges the freedom to be innovative and creative with the programmes, with student progression as the core aim, could act as a springboard for a fresh approach to education and training – and signal to a much beleaguered sector that the government believes and trusts in them to deliver on its skills agenda.

Workforce Planning

- 12 The workforce planning aspect to the staffing of T levels also needs careful thought. Training of the specialist staff needed to deliver the specialist component of the T levels needs to start now – in many cases existing salary levels are unlikely to be adequate, for example in some engineering specialisms. Therefore the new funds should not be ring-fenced too rigidly.
- 13 In addition high priority is quite rightly given in the Green Paper to addressing STEM shortages in English, maths and science areas. An ambition to make FE colleges the “centres of excellence” in teaching English and maths is welcomed but FE staffing does not operate in a silo separate from school teacher recruitment. The general shortage of teachers in key subjects across both sectors needs immediate action. ASCL has for some years been warning of an impending crisis in teacher recruitment and retention not limited to a few specific specialisms, a crisis which has now arrived. Recent ASCL documents that make this case include an ASCL survey of school leaders (January 2015)², a ten-point plan to tackle the problem (April 2015)³, our submission to the Education Select Committee Inquiry into the Supply of Teachers (November 2015)⁴, an ASCL survey of school leaders (January 2016)⁵, our submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into the Training of New Teachers (February 2016)⁶ and our submission to the Migration Advisory Committee (September 2016)⁷.

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11 April 2017

² See www.ascl.org.uk/news-and-views/news_news-detail.ascl-survey-reveals-scale-of-growing-teacher-recruitment-crisis

³ See www.ascl.org.uk/help-and-advice/help-and-advice.10-point-plan-to-tackle-recruitment-crisis.html

⁴ See www.ascl.org.uk/utilities/document-summary.html?id=45DC7F27-65AB-4188-81AACE71A59B5A6F

⁵ See www.ascl.org.uk/news-and-views/news_news-detail.survey-shows-damage-of-teacher-shortages.html and the appendix.

⁶ See www.ascl.org.uk/policy/consultation-responses_news-detail.training-new-teachers.html

⁷ www.ascl.org.uk/policy/consultation-responses_news-detail.partial-review-shortage-occupation-list-teachers.html