

Cities and Local Growth inquiry

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 welcomes this timely inquiry. Our concern is with the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), specifically as they interact with education and training.
- 3 LEPs are struggling to do a valuable job, and deserve credit for some successes. They are on the whole very lean organisations.
- 4 However, they are very variable in format and quality around the country, with some commanding considerable respect in their locality whilst others are almost invisible or the subject of suspicion.
- 5 They are all relatively new organisations, barely five years old, some took a considerable time to establish themselves as organisations and as noted above some have yet to establish themselves in the eyes of their stakeholders.
- 6 That they are lean organisations is good in that they are not taking a significant proportion of public funds before they reach their intended end-users. But they have very limited staff resources and some have very little expertise, which calls into question their ability to direct public funds to the best effect in line with government and local priorities.
- 7 With regard to adult education and training it is right that one of the chief 'customers', the community of local employers, has a significant voice; but LEP governance is very variable in structure and quality, and is not always transparent.
- 8 As the National Audit Office (NAO) report indicated many LEPs are over-reliant on one or more local authority (LA) for staffing and expertise. In some cases they are too closely associated with a single large further education (FE) college (and see paragraph 11 below).
- 9 ASCL has not been able to obtain details of the governance of all the LEPs, which is itself of concern. Where we have been able to obtain information it is clear that:
 - 10 There is little or no representation of learners or potential learners.
 - 11 Representation of providers is insufficient and lacks transparency. FE colleges, that do much of the work, are not guaranteed a voice, and even where they have

one it may be via a single college not chosen by its peers. In some cases there is no representation of providers or they are represented by a private training provider whose interests may vary strongly from those of colleges and LA adult education services.

- 12 The situation is even worse with respect to schools. Of the 28 out of 39 LEPs for which we do have information, 11 have school representation and 23 have further education (FE) representation on at least 1 of their boards. This suggests that schools are generally underrepresented.
- 13 The concern with respect to schools is that there is a disconnection between secondary schools and business that is not being addressed. This is particularly relevant to the state of careers education and guidance in secondary schools. The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) is trying to ensure by applying conditions to funding that every LEP will have a secondary school representative (as well as an FE representative), but the need for them to do so is of concern.
- 14 Even representation of employers is uncertain, in some cases being dominated by a particular sector to the exclusion of others. And naturally big employers tend to make the running, with SMEs (that generally do not have the time to attend meetings) less well represented.
- 15 There is also an over-riding concern that moving power and responsibility to LEPs will inevitably take resources and decision-making away from local education bodies closer to the actual work; such as FE colleges on delivery of local skills and apprenticeships, and schools and school networks on careers services.
- 16 All the above suggests that it would be dangerous for the government to place even greater reliance on LEPs to plan and deliver its objectives in local areas, handling large sums of public money in the process. Some will make very effective use of such funds to the general good, but there is every likelihood that some LEPs will not be able to do so. Meantime, the very great need for better careers advice and guidance via a better connection between schools and employers will not be addressed, and more colleges will get into financial difficulties and the adult education and training the country desperately needs to improve its workforce will continue to wither on the vine.
- 17 I hope that this is of value to your inquiry, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Martin Ward
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Association of School and College Leaders
13 April 2016