

The availability of fee information, purchasing decisions and securing value for money in the regulated qualifications market - call for evidence

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents nearly 19,000 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 Ofqual's call for evidence into how qualification purchasers decide which qualifications to buy, in particular how easy they find it to compare their cost.
- 3 Schools and colleges need to ensure value for money including cost-effective purchasing of their qualifications to deliver efficiencies; they also need readily available information to be able to make informed choices and improve value for money.
- 4 **Gathering Information** – when choosing qualifications our members prioritise the curriculum content as set out in the specification and the nature of the assessment and its appropriateness. A primary concern is the extent to which the qualification meets the needs of students and is accessible to them along with teachers' understanding, familiarisation and capability in delivering the qualification.
- 5 Other factors our members consider when choosing qualifications relate to the balance of non-examined assessment, particular literacy requirements, the exam board's reputational support and advice, the cost of the qualification, perceived value with university and employers and league table recognition.
- 6 **The importance of price when choosing qualifications** – our members do not prioritise the cost as a key factor in determining choice of qualification. The real cost is in teacher time, so the price of the assessment is secondary, although there would come a point when this would become a factor. Additionally, if pricing is completely out of line, this would trigger a review of alternatives based on the merits of each qualification. Our members feel there is generally not a lot of difference in cost between boards to merit switching purely on cost basis.
- 7 **Information about the price of qualifications** – our members receive all information about pricing from awarding organisations and their websites and ratifying bodies
- 8 **Switching qualifications** – our members have frequently considered changing qualifications and have had a mixed response when collecting information to make this choice. Many members have found it frustrating and overly complex to navigate and are increasingly finding requirements for non-examined assessment more difficult.

Whilst we accept that it is not in the providers' interest to make this straightforward, we do think the process could be improved.

- 9 ASCL members do not report having had significant experience of attempting to negotiate or re-negotiate the pricing of qualifications themselves, as many individual schools and members do not have the time and capacity for this. However larger multi-academy trusts are beginning to negotiate better deals through larger 'buying power'.
- 10 Members are reasonably confident they have secured value for money although many pay the published price without attempting to negotiate this. As the courses are chosen on their content and best fit to the learning needs of students, it is the one area of a school's financial work where many schools have not had a history of trying to negotiate or compare prices. This does result in a perception of the qualifications providers benefitting from a very captive market, which does not often question value for money. A more transparent process could support better informed decision making in regard to this. Joint procurement could be an option if this is available and publicised more.
- 11 ASCL members consider the amount and format of information provided on invoices from awarding organisations sufficient to allow them to reconcile expenditure with activity and budgets.
- 12 This response reflects the views of only a small number of our members but we hope you find the above helpful.
- 13 We 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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