APPG for Education Inquiry

How should our education system prepare young people for their future careers?

Response from the Association of School and College Leaders

A Introduction

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 inquiry. There is a real need at present to engage as widely as possible in discussion about education with the aim of arriving at a new consensus. This inquiry can contribute to that, as it raises fundamental questions about the purpose of education and how it should best be conducted in the present context.

3 Education is not only about preparing young people for their working lives. As work is very important for most people, occupying a large part of adult life, providing an income and a sense of purpose and collectively supporting the national economy, it is a very significant function of education to prepare young people for it, but there are other very important tasks too. Our analysis is set out below in the section about the purpose of education, and is based on our vision of an inclusive education system set out in the ASCL *Blueprint for a Self-Improving System*[1].

4 The call for evidence sets up knowledge and skills in opposition, as to be chosen between. This is a false dichotomy. In practice neither is possible without the other; skills cannot be acquired in a vacuum, and knowledge without the skills necessary to apply it is futile.

5 Schools collectively are clearly of great importance in considering these question but they are by no means the only part of the education system involved. Further

[1] ASCL, *Leading the Way: Blueprint for a Self-Improving System*, ASCL, 2015.
See http://www.ascl.org.uk/news-and-views/blueprint-for-selfimproving-system/

education (FE), higher education (HE), apprenticeships and employers all have a part to play. And of course the young people themselves, and their families also have responsibilities in this area. And we need to consider very carefully what we might mean by 'ready for the world of work'.

6 Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) is clearly an important strand in preparing young people for future careers.

7 Our remarks are therefore organised in sections as follows:

A Introduction
B The purpose of education
C Responsibilities of different elements of the system
D Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)
E Specific questions
F Conclusion

B The purpose of education

8 ASCL wants a system in which all children and young people achieve. We believe we can have a great education system that delivers quality and equality for all learners, preparing them fully for all aspects of adult life. To achieve this will involve an act of imagination, courage and collective action. Our *Blueprint for a Self-Improving System*[2] sets out a vision for the education system in England. At its heart is capacity building – leadership capacity, pedagogical capacity and the capacity for creativity and action.

9 We welcome this All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Education inquiry not least because it opens the question of what is the purpose of education. Many high performing systems in the world have an explicit statement about the purposes of education. This often takes the form of a statement of the desired outcomes of education, or what society expects an educated young person to know, be able to do and to contribute to society. Curriculum, assessment and qualifications follow. None of the jurisdictions within the UK has such a statement.

The purpose of education for children of all ages in England

10 Our *Blueprint* proposes that the purpose of **education is for the common good**. A good education creates the social conditions that allow children and young people, both as individuals and in groups, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. A good education system builds character and resilience.

11 An education that is for the common good has four explicit and interrelated desired outcomes:

- To learn to know/ passing on "the best that has been thought and said"[3];
- To learn to do/ use what we know;
- To learn to live together/ engage with the world;
- To learn to be/ to live authentically.[4]

[2] Ibid.
[3] Robert H. *Super, Culture and Anarchy with Friendship's Garland and Some Literary Essays*, Volume V of *The Complete Works of Matthew Arnold*, The University of Michigan Press, 1965.
[4] These are the 'four pillars' of UNESCO's *International Commission on Education in the 21st Century.* The Canadian Council on Learning used these pillars to create the Composite Learning Index (CLI). The CLI is Canada's annual measure of progress in lifelong learning. It is based on a

12 Debates about the outcomes of education have historically remained stuck in a sterile knowledge / skills debate. We fundamentally reject this unhelpful binary opposition. Children do not learn skills in a vacuum. There is now a well-established body of research which shows that human cognition in which general abilities, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving and concept formation, cannot be studied independently of 'content' or knowledge domains.[5] Equally, as the CBI report alluded to in the call for evidence points out, it is not enough to have mastered a body of academic knowledge in order to be able to perform well in the workplace. We would add that the same applies to other aspects of adult life.

13 In addition to what children and young people learn to know and do, schools should also enable children and young people to learn to live together and to live authentically. UNESCO's *International Commission on Education in the 21st Century* states: "There is every reason to place renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of education. This process must begin with self-understanding through knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism."

14 To this end, we would draw the group's attention to the laudable aim of the International Baccalaureate (IB): "to develop internationally minded people who, recognising their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world". ASCL strongly endorses this as a statement of the aims of education, particularly the global focus of the IB which seeks to build intercultural understanding and global engagement.

15 ASCL is developing a profession-led policy statement of the desired outcomes of education. We are also working with Pearson to develop a conceptually systematic approach to character education which will be tested in schools. Our conceptual framework for character education draws on the Jubilee Centre's articulation of civic, moral and performance character virtues. We believe that an education that enables the development of these virtues will support children and young people to learn to live together and to live authentically.

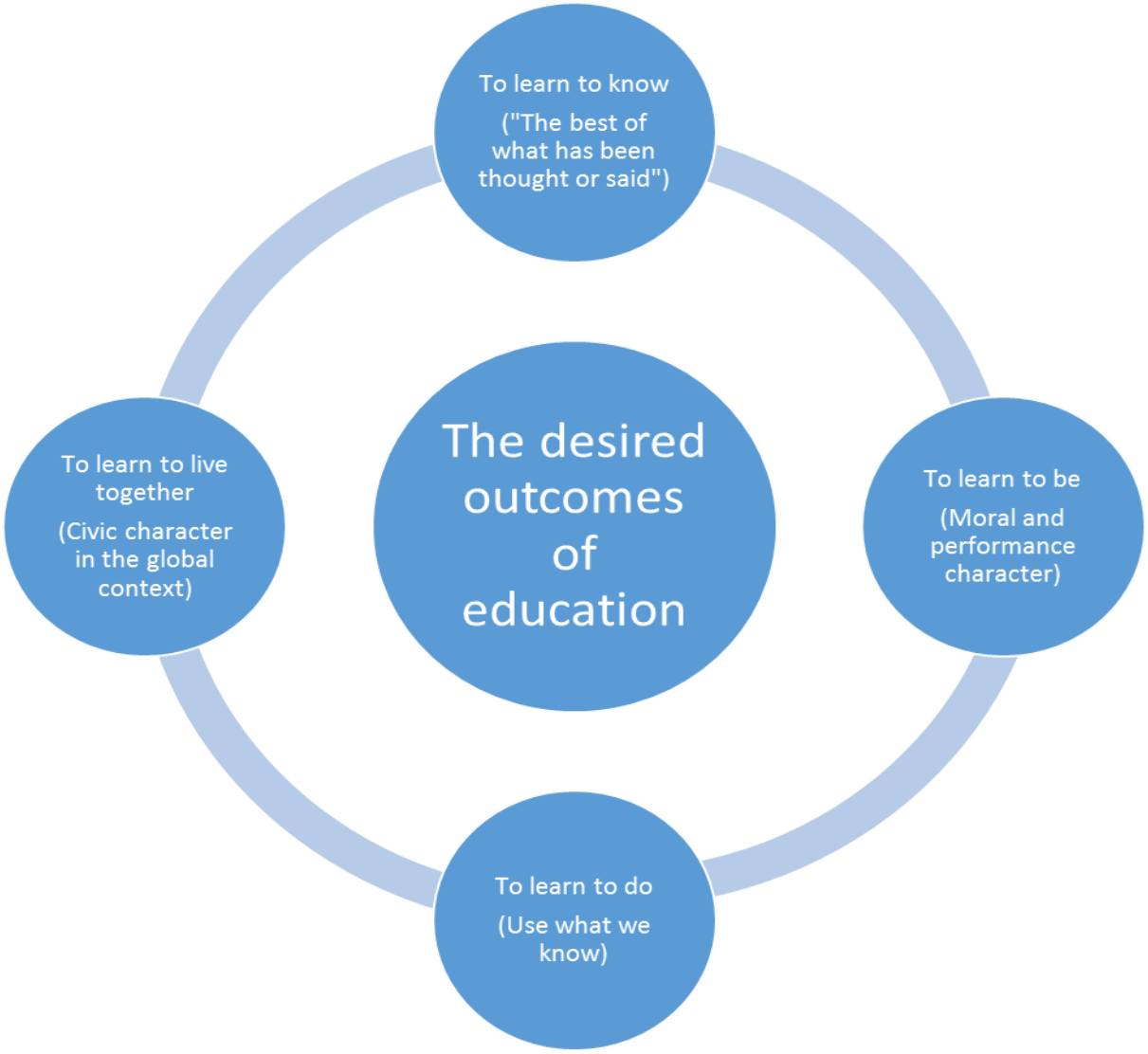
16 The diagram on the following page brings together our thoughts about the purpose of education, the aim of education and the desired outcomes of education. It integrates the UNESCO framework with the Jubilee Centre's character education framework. It draws on the traditions of liberal education, and the international dimension of the International Baccalaureate and its stated aim. It focuses on the moral and cultural aspects of education alongside the skills needed to succeed in a global economy. It promotes the values of liberty, mutual respect and tolerance in a desire to create a better world.

combination of statistical indicators that reflect the many ways people learn, whether in school, in the home, at work or within the community.

[5] For example, Young, M. et al. 2014, *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice*, Bloomsbury and Hirsch, E.D. 1988, *Cultural Literacy*, Vintage Books.

The purpose of education:

Education is for **the common good.** A good education creates the social conditions that allow children and young people, both as individuals and in groups, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. A good education system builds character and resilience.



The aim of education:

"To develop internationally minded people who, recognising their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better world."

17 It is however, not sufficient to outline the purpose and desired outcomes of education without articulating a theory of learning. Education has historically been held hostage to theories and ideas about learning that often do not have a strong evidence-base or indeed any evidence-base at all. As society would expect a neurosurgeon to be connected to the wider world of neurosurgery, understand the most up-to-date evidence and interrogate constantly their practice, so society must expect the same of teachers. A statement of the purpose of education must exist alongside the latest research from cognitive science related to how students learn, and connect this research to its practical implications for teaching and learning.

18 It is also not sufficient to outline the purpose and outcomes of education but retain a belief in determinism – the view that some children either by virtue of innate intelligence or background will not succeed in our education system. A fundamental principle of our *Blueprint* is that achievement can be realised at scale for all children and young people.

C Responsibilities of different elements of the system

19 Sensible employers do not expect young people to arrive fully ready to take up new roles in the workplace; training specific to the particular employer and particular job is always needed. It is clear that the CBI is not asking for that. Rather there is a desire for young people to be better equipped with attributes that will enable them to move more quickly into mastery of their new situations. These include generic skills such as literacy and numeracy, attitudes of mind such as commitment and willingness to work, socialisation to enable team-working, a body of basic general knowledge, knowledge of how the country and the workplace operate (citizenship) and, crucially, learning skills to facilitate rapid mastery of new knowledge and skills.

20 It is doubtful that the present system is as well set up as it might be to provide young people with these attributes, and employers are right to point this out. But employers must understand that preparation for work is not the whole function of education, and that they will always have a role to play.

21 It is perhaps unhelpful to frame questions in terms of what ‘schools’ should do. We need to distinguish between the compulsory phase of full-time education (from age 5 to 16) and other elements. Apart from a small minority, school is the common experience between the ages of 5 and 16, and it is up to that point that we might reasonably look for a common set of skills, knowledge and attitudes – though clearly these should be tailored to the particular aptitudes and interests of each young person.

22 For most this phase is characterised as a gradually shifting partnership between young people, parents and schools.

23 The 16-19 transitional phase allows for a divergence of routes, with some young people following an academic route towards HE, either in school or at college, some taking vocational courses aimed at more specific career routes and containing more specific job skills, and an increasing number following the apprenticeship route of work with training. Employers should have different expectations of those who have followed these different routes, but it important to maintain a common core of attributes that all young people can attain.

24 At this stage, and still more in the next (19-25) phase, the young people themselves take responsibility for their own learning, in conjunction with a college or an employer. By the age of 25 most young people have arrived at full-time work, by whatever route.

D Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)

25 Clearly this is one important element in preparing young people for future careers. The situation is very much less than ideal. ASCL has long argued that there is a need for a fundamental rethink of CEIAG so that the young people in our schools and colleges can make better choices, and be better prepared for successful and productive working lives.

26 There is too much variation in the quality and availability of CEIAG across England, and the general standard is not high enough (paragraphs 27-30 below). To address this ASCL argues for a more strategic role for education with respect to the economy, and for policy to be made proactively rather than in response to issues raised elsewhere (paragraphs 31-35). ASCL makes three recommendations related to the curriculum, employer engagement with education, and CEIAG providers (paragraphs 36-48).

Massive variation in CEIAG across England

27 For students, teachers and parents it has become increasingly difficult in the current local and regional landscape to navigate traineeships, apprenticeships, employer-sponsored degrees, school-leaver programmes, further education, UTCs, studio schools, higher education, internship opportunities, work placements, summer schools.

28 There is also a significant mismatch between student aspirations and the labour market. Research by the Education and Employers Taskforce demonstrates that the career aspirations of young Britons shows a significant mismatch to the requirements of the labour market. Direct exposure to labour market information could help young people make positive and proactive choices. Teachers do not have the qualifications or experience to do this.

29 CEAIG providers have proliferated and there is now massive variation in the range, quality and cost of providers in the market.

30 The establishment of the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) has been a positive move to address these issues. The advent of ‘Enterprise Advisers’ has the potential to significantly increase the quantity of opportunities for schools to engage with employers and to establish appropriate links with Local Education Partnerships (LEPs) which are seriously underdeveloped in virtually all areas of the country. However it is very early days for the CEC and it will not be possible to assess the impact of these developments for some time. It should also be noted that the provision of access to qualified careers advisers is beyond the scope of the company. Neither employers nor teachers are qualified to provide these services.

A more strategic role for education linked to economic and growth policy

31 It is essential to position the debate about CEIAG in the larger one about a more strategic role for education and its relationship with economic and growth policies. So far this debate has largely been conducted by economists rather than those actively involved in schools and colleges. There is a need to understand and articulate the

contribution that education makes to GDP, including how progression through apprenticeships and/or higher education supports its increase.

32 Therefore, it is vital that school and college leaders as well as economists contribute actively to this debate and that the forms (and reforms) of education, including CEIAG, are inclusive and responsive.

33 It is also essential that the accountability framework contains the right drivers to support this direction of travel. Destination data is a powerful tool, especially when collected over a longer period so that the routes taken by young people beyond their first move out of school can be understood. Schools and colleges should take such data into consideration when planning their curriculum and CEIAG provision. However a focus on narrow indicators such as the percentage of young people who progress to certain universities can be misleading if not integrated into a broader analysis of progression routes.

Proactive versus reactive policy

34 Recently, the debate about CEIAG has largely been a reaction to the change in government policy that placed a new statutory duty on schools for the delivery of CEIAG. Not enough consideration has been given to policy that is proactive and anticipative of economic change rather than reactive, in response to government policy and defined by a 'best practice' status quo. Rapid changes in the labour market and significant skills gaps in a range of areas necessitate a culture change in which young people of all abilities and their parents are empowered to make informed decisions about career routes. The days of traditional university degrees being the only option for academically able young people are long gone.

35 The National Careers Council (NCC), appointed by government, spent two years promoting a pro-active stance by calling for such a 'culture change in careers provision'. Whilst the devolution of the responsibility and accountability for providing CEIAG wholly accords with the principle of a self-improving system, the very limited responsibilities within the remit of the National Careers Service (NCS) towards schools and colleges severely constrains the capacity of the education service to achieve this. It is imperative that the opportunity presented by the CEC to bring about this culture change be taken. There is nevertheless a significant risk. Large amounts of effective work is currently being conducted by third sector organisations. Without access to secure funding many of these are at risk.

Recommended three-pronged policy response

36 ASCL recommends the following three-pronged policy response in this rapidly changing, diverse landscape. The first of these is profession-led, the second jointly led by government, employers and the profession and the third government-led.

37 Neither curriculum prescription nor key performance indicators will solve the problem of good, dynamic career learning. Nor will this follow from a compliance culture enforced by the inspectorate. In order to respond to the complex issues about life, learning and work decisions, we need innovative, creative and agile policy responses that can keep up with dynamic changes in society, knowledge-production and labour markets.

38 It must be noted that school and college budgets are under considerable strain given that there has been no cash increase in budgets for three years and there is little

prospect of an increase in general funding in the near future. The achievement of high quality CEIAG is a key element of developing the economic future of our nations and as such cannot go unfunded. School and college budgets should be increased so that school and college leaders can ensure that they provide a full careers programme, including purchasing face to face provision from quality-assured providers.

1 A curriculum-led approach (profession-led)

39 Both the Pearson report (2012) and the OECD (2003) cite evidence that shows that the most effective approaches are curriculum-led*.*

40 The OECD (2003) sets out the possible key elements of this approach:

- *A learning-centred approach*, over and above an information and advice approach. Career learning is not just about the process of choosing and transitioning into a job. Rather it is about thinking through the range of roles that individuals as economically active citizens might play over the course of their lives.
- *A developmental approach*, tailoring the content of career learning to the developmental stages that students find themselves in, and including career learning experiences throughout schooling, not just at one point.
- *A more student-centred approach* through, for example, incorporating learning from and reflecting upon experience, self-directed learning methods, and learning from significant others, such as employers, parents, alumni and older students.
- *A universal approach*, with career learning forming part of the education of all students, not just those in particular types of school or programme.

41 Importantly this cannot be implemented through curriculum prescription or a bolt-on solution to a centrally determined national curriculum. The approach advocated here is a fundamental part of pedagogical practice related to the curriculum vision of the school or college. ASCL would be happy to lead the way in producing guidance for our members on such a curriculum-led approach.

2 Further development of the involvement of employers in the provision of inspiration (employer, government and profession led)

42 As a result of encouragement by government and close partnership working between employers and education professionals there is currently a vast amount of excellent practice in employer engagement in education. Programmes like Inspiring the Future, Business in the Community, Inspiring Women and Speakers for Schools are reaching large numbers of young people. The CBI has been a driving force through its Raising Ambition for Education initiative in which ASCL has been a key partner. With the support of BIS, ASCL was able to employ an Apprenticeships and Employability specialist for a fixed term to raise awareness of the importance of this policy area in schools. As a short term measure this was very helpful but the funding was not sustained. There is still much to do to build upon that work.

43 It is essential that the drive to increase young people's uptake of apprenticeships continues. This requires the sustained commitment of employers to work flexibly with education in raising awareness of apprenticeships, alongside extended outreach work by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and communication through the LEPs. Although several private and third sector organisations are helping to make information available there appears to be no coherent nationwide approach leading to the potential for further regional variation.

44 There is still scope for further development with the significant number of schools which are not yet benefitting from such links. This needs to be developed collaboratively by all partners and needs to continue to be supported across government.

45 ASCL remains fully committed to encouraging school and college leaders to develop such links, working with employer organisations and the CEC and sharing best practice. Drawing on the network of Enterprise Advisers and Coordinators LEPs should take on a central role in facilitating such links, along the lines of Lord Young's helpful recommendations. It is particularly important that such work focuses on the so called 'cold spots', rural and more remote areas of the country where links are often harder to establish. The projects funded through the CEC 'investment fund' have considerable potential to support this. The involvement of SMEs is vitally important and particularly challenging due to their limited capacity in contrast to larger companies.

3 A national framework agreement for CEIAG providers (government-led)

46 Given the proliferation of CEIAG providers in the market and the significant variation in both cost and quality, it is recommended that a national framework is adopted which would essentially provide a quality assurance function in relation to both cost and quality. An existing quality standard (Matrix or QICS) should underpin the framework. The framework would need to ensure that providers keep CEIAG professionals up-to-date in relation to labour market information and a range of skills through on-going training and professional development. Schools and colleges could then safely purchase from this framework to supplement their curriculum approaches. And schools and colleges should be funded to support this investment.

47 The opportunity for young people to access face to face guidance from a suitably qualified and impartial professional is essential. Face to face information, advice and guidance from a CEIAG professionals can fulfil a social-equity goal. The Pearson report proposes that career guidance can inform the aspirations of disadvantaged groups and support them in gaining access to opportunities that otherwise might have been denied to them, encouraging them to think critically beyond their own ideas and aspirations. In this way careers work can challenge received wisdom and stereotypical thinking and create a space within which a range of personal alternatives can be considered. This should form part of a curriculum approach to CEIAG, and agrees with the broader view of careers as being about a wide range of life, learning and work decisions.

48 Ideally, an all-age National Careers Service would help every local area to develop high quality resources and expertise for all schools and colleges to deliver a 'gold standard' model and would play a key part in the framework described in paragraph 21 above. However the role and status of that organisation is currently unclear. Clarity is needed about the respective roles of DfE, BIS, the National Apprenticeship Service, and the National Careers Service particularly in the changed context of the establishment of the CEC. We recognise however that, in the current fiscal climate, securing the level of funding recommended by PwC of implementing the National Career Benchmarks in the Gatsby Report (May 2014), £207 million in the first year and £173 million per year thereafter, would be enormously challenging. This is in addition to the development of employer engagement to which the government has announced a commitment to substantial funding. Schools and colleges still need to be provided with free, or heavily subsidised, access to independent and impartial career development professionals' expertise. This would help enormously in the transition

phase to support schools and colleges to meet their new statutory duties at a much lower cost. Such support would achieve immediate improvements in careers education and guidance, particularly for young people. It would help schools and colleges make better use of labour market intelligence. There is a real question about whether we can afford not to do this for our economy.

E With reference to your specific questions

Question 1 What should our schools be focusing on in order to prepare young people for the future?

49 This is a very subtle question, and cannot be answered without a clear, agreed statement of the purpose of school education. Please see section B above, in particular the diagram after paragraph 16.

50 No simple answer to so complex a question can possibly be right; in practice what will be required is a balanced blend of the four strands set out in the diagram, varied according to the particular context, aptitude and interests of each young person. Such can only be co-created by the young person, parents in the case of younger children, employers in the case of those with a direct engagement (such as apprentices), skilled teachers, careers advisers, and the school or college.

51 No recipe handed down from Whitehall can possibly be right for the multitude of different circumstances, and hence the stress in the ASCL *Blueprint* on decision-making devolved to as close to the young person as possible.

Question 2 Should schools play a role in developing skills, or should subject knowledge be prioritised?

52 The question is not well formulated as it depends on a false dichotomy. Please see paragraphs 4 and 12, and the whole of section B above.

53 Of course schools, and the rest of the education system, should play a role in developing skills but they can only do that in the context of also teaching a body of knowledge. The significant questions here are which skills and what knowledge we should aim to equip young people with at the end of each phase of education.

Question 3 Who should be responsible for ensuring that young people develop soft, financial and entrepreneurial skills?

54 Schools and colleges undoubtedly have a role here. They already devote time and resources to helping young people to acquire such skills. They could do more were more resources available and were the accountability system to take due account of this valuable work.

55 The education system cannot do this alone, however; as noted above such skills can only effectively be developed in the context of a programme co-created by young people, parents, teachers, and employers.

56 There are a number of employers who, in various ways, assist with this process, but given the large number of young people involved there is always a need for more and better employer input.

Question 4 Do education providers have the resources to prepare young people for the workforce?

57 School and college budgets have been cut back very sharply during this period of government austerity, and have also been subject to a number of cost-pressures that have taken resources away from their main function of education. And see the analysis of the parlous state of CEIAG set out in section D above.

58 Of course schools and colleges can and do prepare young people for the workforce, but they could certainly do so all the better if there were more resources available to the task and if they were not under such severe accountability pressure to do other things.

F Conclusion

59 These are very large issues. ASCL congratulates the APPG for Education on tackling them and trusts that its doing so will contribute to the wide-ranging debate on the purpose of education that we seek.

60 To that end ASCL stands ready to be further consulted; to engage with the APPG in discussion with the issues raised here, in our *Blueprint*, or indeed any others; and to assist in any way that it can.

61 I hope that this is of value to your inquiry.

Martin Ward
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3 February 2017