

Executive summary

Introduction

Educational failure can have a shattering impact on a child's life chances and opportunities, and prevent them from reaching their potential. This represents both a social injustice and an economic cost as we deprive our country of the best workforce it can have.

- **Educational failure perpetuates cycles of disadvantage:** parents who did not achieve in school are more likely to have children who suffer the same.¹ This may be because they are less able to support the learning of their own children. Given the considerable impact of parental engagement and parental education on children's outcomes – we must 'get education right' for this generation. At the most extreme end, educational failure can lead to social breakdown: nearly half of prisoners say they have no qualifications;²
- **Educational failure represents a strain on our economy:** 35 per cent of businesses are dissatisfied with the basic literacy of school and college leavers and 30 per cent are dissatisfied with their basic numeracy.³ Children leaving school with few or no meaningful qualifications are less likely to enter into and progress in work.⁴

Today's school pupils are the citizens, parents and workers of tomorrow, it is therefore in everyone's interest that urgent action is taken to tackle underperformance.

The scale of the problem

Whilst exam results have for the most part been rising, we must not be complacent. Not only are there concerns that this in part reflects years of grade inflation, there are still too many children leaving school without the basics.⁵

1 OECD, *Education at a Glance, OECD indicators*, Paris: OECD, 2013
2 Ministry of Justice, *The pre-custody employment, training and education status of newly sentenced prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2012
3 Confederation of British Industry, *Learning to grow: what employers need from education and skills*, London: CBI, 2012
4 OECD, *Education at a Glance, OECD indicators*, Paris: OECD, 2013
5 OECD, *Economic Surveys United Kingdom*, Paris: OECD, 2011, p10

Last year, almost 40 per cent of children left school without five good GCSEs including English and maths.⁶ However when looking at the attainment of particular children, and in particular parts of the country – the situation becomes even bleaker. Last year, only the following proportions of children achieved this benchmark:⁷

- 38 per cent of children on free school meals (FSM);
- 28 per cent of white British boys eligible for FSM;
- 15 per cent of looked after children;
- 44 per cent of children in Knowsley;
- 22 per cent of children on FSM in Barnsley.

Whilst there have been some long-term improvements in standards it is clear that there is still an extremely long way to go. The challenge we must set ourselves is to ensure all children leave school ready for the next steps in life. To make this crucial transition, schools must equip young people with both the hard skills and soft skills they need.

By improving the quality of schools, the reforms we propose will benefit everyone in the education system for years to come. However, our focus in this report is on supporting the country's most disadvantaged children, and those communities which for years, have been left to fail. These are the areas that struggle to attract inspirational leadership and teaching, and which have so far, not benefited from the dynamism that the most effective academy chains have brought to areas like London. Indeed, during the London Challenge, London moved from being one of the worst, to one of the highest performing regions at Key Stage 4 (KS4).⁸ This shows just what is possible – and it is now time to build on this success and spread it across the country.

The context

England's education system is currently undergoing extensive and widespread reform, the full effects of which will not be felt for some time. Indeed the Coalition Government has driven forward educational reform at unprecedented speed.

We are highly supportive of the direction of much of this reform. Indeed we welcome the fact that since our last report, many of our concerns have been acted on. For example, reformed league tables now look at the attainment gap between poorer pupils and their better-off peers, so that schools can no longer hide behind the attainment of some children at the expense of others.⁹ We welcome the Pupil Premium – the per-pupil funding which supports

6 Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics*, London: Department for Education, 2014, See for example pp7, 8; good GCSEs refer to A*-C grades

7 Ibid

8 Ogden V, *Making Sense of Policy in London Secondary Education: What can be learned from the London Challenge?* London: Institute of Education, London

9 Department for Education, Press release, *Pupil premium evaluation paves way for new raft of measures so schools help disadvantaged pupils*, 2 July 2013 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/news/pupil-premium-evaluation-paves-way-for-new-raft-of-measures-so-schools-help-disadvantaged-pupils (18/08/14)]

the education of disadvantaged children – having ourselves called for the introduction of educational credits to support the needs of these pupils.¹⁰

Moreover, by increasing the autonomy and flexibility of schools, the Academies programme has offered schools considerable opportunity to improve education for their pupils. In particular, academy chains which can share experience and expertise are delivering considerable improvement to schools which have long suffered disadvantage. Likewise, Free Schools, which we called for in the form of Pioneer Schools, are also bringing greater innovation in the sector.

Our ambitions: aspirational education for all

These bold reforms are creating a new educational landscape which has enormous potential to transform lives and opportunities. However, there is much further still to go. In this report we set out how the next phase of reform can make further improvements for the benefit of all children, particularly the most disadvantaged:

- **Achieving readiness for school:** how we can make sure disadvantaged children get the best start in life;
- **Supporting the most disadvantaged pupils:** how we can make sure that the Pupil Premium reaches those who need it most, and how school can do more to support the most vulnerable children with unstable family lives;
- **Improving schools and teaching:** how we can get schools working together in more effective partnerships and drive up standards in teaching;
- **Spreading success:** how we can get our best headteachers, our best teachers and our best academy chains to go into the most disadvantaged areas and support genuine transformation for these schools;
- **Further Education and the journey to work:** how we can ratchet up the quality of provision and its accountability to learners and improve transitions between education and work by brokering closer relationships between education providers and employers.

Chapter 1: The best start in life

As our last report showed, at present too many children – particularly those in deprived areas – are starting compulsory schooling behind their peers. A staggering 50 per cent of children in some areas of social disadvantage start school with poor language¹¹ and there is a 19-month gap at the start of school between the most and least advantaged children.¹²

The early years have a major impact on subsequent educational development, particularly for the most disadvantaged children. It is therefore essential that more is done to help these children before they start formal school. The Government's extension of free early education

¹⁰ Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain Ending the costs of social breakdown Volume 3: Educational Failure*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

¹¹ Ainscow et al, *An Evaluation of The Communication Trust's 'Talk of the Town' Project*, Manchester: Centre for Equity in Education, 2012

¹² Department for Education, *Early Years Pupil Premium and funding for two-year-olds*, London: Department for Education, 2014, p3

is positive, but we must ensure more provision is high quality and delivered in a way that improves parental engagement.

Raising our aspirations for those working in the early years

Staff qualification levels have a major impact on outcomes in the early years. Better qualified staff offer higher quality support for children age 30 months to five years in developing communication, language, literacy, reasoning, thinking and mathematical skills.¹³ However we still expect too little of those working with our youngest children.¹⁴

- To raise our expectations of those working with our youngest children, we call for all early years staff to hold at least Level 3 Early Years Educator qualifications. We also call for all staff to hold a minimum grade C in English and maths GCSE or equivalent. This will ensure staff can support the development of children's key skills, particularly around vocabulary development.
- To reflect the importance of transitions from the early years to primary, and the rapid change that takes place at age two, we call for early years Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to be redefined to start at age two. To help raise standards, every setting, including Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings, should work towards having at least one person with QTS within five years. This will ensure staff have strong knowledge of development at age two, as well as knowing what to expect in the early years of primary.

Expanding nursery classes in primary schools

The CSJ has heard that a major opportunity to further improve quality in pre-school provision lies in having nursery classes attached to primary schools.

- Evidence shows that nursery classes attached to primary schools produce strong outcomes for the most disadvantaged children. One of the most important reasons for this is because it gives these children access to better-qualified staff. To expand access, we call for all Good and Outstanding (grade 1s and 2s) primary schools to be given the support to offer nursery provision, starting with those schools serving disadvantaged communities which have the capacity and desire to do so.
- To enable these children to make a smooth transition into reception, disadvantaged children attending these classes should be given preference in admissions to the same primary school. This will allow staff to maintain and build on the crucial links they have formed with parents.

¹³ Department for Education, *Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund Final report*, London: Department for Education, 2011

¹⁴ House of Commons Education Committee, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's Centres, Volume I*, London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2013

Improving the impact of children's centres

Improving engagement with hard-to-reach families is essential given the important role parental involvement has in improving children's educational outcomes. Having more children's centres attached to schools would enable families to readily access services as part of a 'Family Hub' model and allow schools to intervene earlier in children's education.

- Good and Outstanding local primary schools should be able to set up their own early years settings or take over failing provision. This will enable more families to access a range of services on-site, and create greater opportunities for parental engagement;
- To improve outreach, we suggest Government places a duty on health professionals and local authorities to ensure all children's centres are given local birth data. This will help ensure centres have improved knowledge on where families live so they can improve outreach by supporting parental engagement with education and care, and encourage those with the greatest needs to access services.

School readiness and the importance of language

If we want to ensure that children 'get the basics' we need to be clearer on what the basics are. We must also ensure this information is passed on to parents in a way that is easily understood. As part of this, there must be greater awareness of the importance of communication skills upon which future literacy and learning depend. In areas of poverty over 50 per cent of children are thought to be starting school with delayed communication skills.¹⁵ Our reforms can, therefore, help ensure these children do not fall further behind.

- To help parents and teachers better understand young children's needs, we suggest the first assessment that is made of children on entering reception (the EYFSP) is simplified and focussed primarily on the core skills of literacy, numeracy, communication and social development;
- Those who do not reach the levels expected at the end of the foundation stage should be given additional, specialist help to bring their language skills up to speed. To support parental involvement, parents should all be given information on 'developmental milestones on communication' as part of transition plans into school. Parents should continue to be given information on their child's communication development throughout school.

¹⁵ Communication Trust, *Communication difficulties – Facts and Stats*, [accessed via: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/2612/communication_difficulties_-_facts_and_stats.pdf (17/08/14)]

Chapter 2: Supporting the most disadvantaged children

It is extremely important that closing the attainment gap between rich and poor remains a high priority for government. In this chapter we ask how government can do more to help provide additional support to those who need it most.

Improving the reach of the Pupil Premium

The introduction of the Pupil Premium is very positive, as this reflects consensus on the importance of closing the attainment gap between rich and poor. However, the current mechanism used to allocate it, free school meals (FSM) uses arbitrary income cut-off points and means-tested benefits to decide eligibility. As the CSJ has argued, these cut-off points can mean that children can be defined as in or not in relative income poverty on the basis of a £1 difference in income.¹⁶ Therefore FSM eligibility rules mean children whose family income is just above the threshold of £16,190 are ineligible, even though they may experience many, or even more of the problems experienced by children on the other side of the line.¹⁷ In addition, because FSM is pinned to existing benefits, as Universal Credit is rolled out there will be a need to use a different means of calculating eligibility.

We would strongly recommend that the Government review the eligibility criteria for the Pupil Premium considering the following criteria and how each of these factors could be weighted to ensure a new measure supports the most disadvantaged children:

- Parental education;
- Family breakdown;
- Long-term unemployment;
- Parental addiction;
- Parental mental health;
- Whether the child is a young carer;
- Whether the child is looked after.

Extending access to state boarding schools

As good as some schools are, given the limited scope of the school day and term they will not be enough to overcome the disadvantages some children face at home. There is strong evidence to suggest that boarding schools can act as a preventative intervention for disadvantaged children who may otherwise have gone into care.¹⁸ However, the number of places is limited and furthermore, not enough children who would benefit are currently accessing those places which are available. Consequently we call on the Government to:

¹⁶ See Centre for Social Justice, *Rethinking Child Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012

¹⁷ Iniesta-Martinez S and Evans H, *Pupils not claiming free school meals*, London: Department for Education, 2012

¹⁸ RNCJ, *Research*, [accessed via: www.rncf.org.uk/research.php (17/08/14)]

- Commission a review into the number of disadvantaged children that would benefit from attending a state boarding school; the number of additional places needed and an evaluation of the socio-economic profile of current intakes. Following this they should establish a plan for expanding the availability of places – with funded, year on year increases. The aim should be to have a funded place available for every child that would benefit;
- Actively encourage all local authorities to make greater use of state boarding schools as a form of early intervention. Parents whose children are ‘children in need’ should also be able to self-refer their children for a place, as should long-term foster carers, rather than having to go through social services.

More Free Schools serving disadvantaged pupils

The CSJ supports the principles behind the Free Schools programme, having recommended the initiative in *Breakthrough Britain*.¹⁹ However, so far, too few effective grassroots, poverty fighting charities have set up these schools in the poorest areas. We therefore ask for increased support for such charities making applications. In particular the Department for Education and the New Schools Network could broker relationships between individual charities interested in setting up a school and people or organisations with educational expertise. More could also be done by organisations such as the New Schools Network to help charities navigate their way through the process of setting up a Free School.

Chapter 3: Improving schools, teaching and leadership

Whilst there have been some notable improvements in the quality of many schools in recent years there is far more to be done.

Helping schools to learn from each other

School-to-school support is at the heart of the current school improvement agenda. However, there is currently not enough coherent brokerage in the system, and not enough support for a school before it gets to crisis point.

To help poor schools improve, Regional Schools Commissioner Boards could be charged with supporting school improvement and brokering support across all schools. Regional Schools Commissioner Boards would for example:

- Broker connections between weak schools and high performing schools who have successfully dealt with similar challenges;
- Support the strategic deployment of National Leaders of Education and National Leaders of Governance, which represent excellent leaders and chairs of governors, to those schools that need them most;

¹⁹ Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain Ending the costs of social breakdown Volume 3: Educational Failure*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

- Have a list of external experts who can be offered, but not forced, on governing boards preparing to recruit a new headteacher.

There also need to be greater incentives built into the inspections system so that Outstanding schools that support improvements in other schools can be recognised. The creation of a fifth category within Ofsted inspection grades – ‘Exceptional’ – could be awarded to Outstanding schools that give intensive and extensive support to other struggling schools.

Driving up standards in primary schools

Having thousands of primary schools working on their own is no longer viable. Many of these schools are too small to operate in isolation and are not working as effectively as they could. There are 16,788 primary schools in the country, out of which just 11 per cent are academies.²⁰ Many would benefit from the shared resources and leadership that come with collaboration, whether as part of an effective chain or a more informal arrangement.

The CSJ has heard that some primary schools can find the process of joining a multi-academy trust (MAT) too great a step to take to begin with. Therefore to ensure these primary schools can benefit from the collaboration that these arrangements bring, this should be incentivised through giving good primary schools £25,000 in seed funding when they join a Hard Federation, as is currently available to those joining MATs.²¹ Encouraging federation in this way incentivises collaboration between primary schools and simultaneously overcomes the initial resistance to MATs felt by some primaries.

Improving and maintaining the quality of teaching and leadership

Greater collaboration is a crucial ingredient to a school's success. However we must also cultivate the great teaching and leadership which schools need to transform lives.

- Developing aspirational teaching: the quality of teaching is the most important school-based influence on the educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. We have heard repeatedly that ongoing and effective continued professional development (CPD) is underused and under-evaluated. To address this, we call for a future Royal College of Teaching to establish a framework of what a teacher can expect in terms of CPD throughout their career; and call on Government to commission an evaluation of CPD, giving a clearer picture on its current use.
- Rewarding our best headteachers: there is no doubt that being an effective leader in a tough school is a challenging job. We must therefore reward and incentivise our best headteachers to stay in the profession. Headteachers working in challenging schools rated Good and Outstanding should be encouraged to take a sabbatical every five years, lasting for a maximum of seven weeks.

20 Department for Education, *Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2014*, London: Department for Education, 2014

21 Or, the level of funding made available to academies

Chapter 4: Spreading success around the country

Whilst the quality of education has improved in many parts of the country, success has by no means been spread equally. Again and again, it is the most disadvantaged children and communities which often get left behind. We have seen how some areas and schools have struggled to attract the great headteachers and teachers they need. To get talent to those areas which have been left behind, we call for Government to embark upon a National Improvement Programme to improve standards in the most poorly performing disadvantaged schools.

- Last year, just 44 per cent of children in Knowsley achieved five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared to the national average of 61 per cent;²²
- In a staggering 22 local authorities, more than 70 per cent of children on FSM did not achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths;²³
- A mere 14 per cent of pupils in the Isle of Wight attend a secondary school graded Good or better, compared to 100 per cent of pupils in London's Islington and Tower Hamlets;²⁴
- In the most deprived secondary schools in regions like the North East and Yorkshire and Humber; leadership is good or better in below 60 per cent of schools. Yet by contrast, in the most deprived schools in London, an impressive 87 per cent of schools have leadership which is good or better.²⁵

Injecting dynamism into underperforming areas

The CSJ has heard that academy chains are still reluctant to expand into some of the most disadvantaged areas. Some of the most effective chains have told us that a key part of their success has been the ability to work in 'geographic clusters' where support can be offered to schools easily, and flexibly.

The most effective academy chains are able to inject dynamism and aspiration into their schools. The Sutton Trust found that in nine of the 31 chains they looked at, in 2013, disadvantaged students in sponsored academies outperformed the average for disadvantaged children in mainstream schools. In the top five, the proportion of disadvantaged students achieving five good GCSEs in the sponsored academies in these chains is at least 15 percentage points higher than the average for disadvantaged students in mainstream schools.²⁶

We therefore call on Government to:

- Offer the most effective academy chains groups of failing schools. They should be given funding to set up a local headquarters to help them mirror their operations elsewhere and to build the infrastructure of these schools;

22 Department for Education, *GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics*, London: Department for Education, 2014

23 Ibid

24 Ofsted, *The Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, Schools, 2012/13*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2013, p35, 36

25 Figures extracted from <http://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk/>

26 Sutton Trust, *Chain Effects, The impact of academy chains on low income students*, London: Sutton Trust, 2014

- The Government should also pilot a payment-by-results scheme which would reward chains for improvements in results in their first few years with a heavy weighting towards the results of the most disadvantaged.

Getting the best leaders to struggling schools

Some schools struggle to attract the best leaders, who are able to drive sustainable improvement in that school.

Headteachers have told us that a major disincentive for them to take on failing schools is the current Ofsted regime. Heads worry that they will lose their hard-earned reputation or their job if they do not evidence very rapid improvement – even though effecting meaningful change often takes time. 78 per cent of members of the Association of School and College Leaders said that they are less likely now than a year ago to seek posts in challenging schools, and that this was in part because of the accountability system which sees schools dropping Ofsted categories on the basis of one year's results and unrealistic expectations of the time it takes to improve.²⁷ We should therefore encourage effective headteachers to take up posts in challenging schools, especially in areas where applications are low, by offering them a two-year grace from a formal inspection.

To help inform which schools would be targeted for this help, the Department for Education should also monitor shortlisted applications per vacancy rates for heads (and teachers) via the school workforce census.

Better deployment of our most ambitious teachers

Some schools, particularly in deprived communities, struggle to attract the best teaching. In some regions up to 70 per cent of the most deprived secondary schools have teaching which is less than Good.²⁸ This may be because of subject shortages, or because these children go to schools in areas which are seen as undesirable places to live and work. To combat this problem, the Government should commission a National Teacher Service Scheme to recruit the best teachers to the schools which need them most. Teachers who could demonstrate their ability to achieve positive results for children in challenging circumstances would be offered two-year contracts and deployed strategically by the scheme to areas that struggle to attract high quality teaching. This would help teachers to strengthen their CVs, broaden their experiences and, if the project was tied to the Talented Leaders Programme, learn from an excellent headteacher. We have found that there is a good appetite for this initiative: a survey of 2,000 teachers conducted for the CSJ by TES, found that almost 80 per cent of teachers said that they would consider relocating to a different town or village to work in a new school. It is well established that the quality of teaching is the most important school factor impacting on attainment – and so we must give these children the kind of teachers they deserve.

²⁷ Speech by the General Secretary of the ASCL, Brian Lightman, General Secretary's address to annual conference, 22 March 2014

²⁸ For example the North East; data extracted from <http://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk/>

Chapter 5: Further Education and the journey into work

Further Education (FE) has traditionally catered to some of our most disadvantaged learners. These are often children who slipped through the gaps at school – many of whom left with few meaningful qualifications.

- There are three times as many students eligible for FSM at colleges than at maintained school sixth forms;²⁹
- Post-16 and adult learners interviewed by Ofsted in 2011 said negative experiences of school led to continued barriers to learning, such as a fear of ‘feeling thick’ and the stigma of attending a literacy class.³⁰

Where it is high quality FE offers these learners a crucial opportunity to acquire the skills they need to enter employment. Yet it is unacceptable that one-quarter of learners are in provision which is less than Good.³¹ There have been positive reforms made in the sector, particularly following Professor Alison Wolf’s influential review and our recommendations build on these, so that provision is more transparent and so that it more often acts as a route into long-term employment.

Quality of the sector

Improving how we inspect colleges: to improve transparency, we call for Ofsted to inspect all departments in FE colleges, rather than only a proportion as they currently do. Given the spread of many colleges and their diverse functions, this would make inspections more accurate and give prospective students a clearer picture of the quality of courses before they sign up.

Improving teaching: To be an excellent teacher in FE, staff must be skilled in their trade as well as in teaching. Pedagogy is also especially important given the high levels of need and disengagement amongst some learners. ‘Teach Too’ was launched this year, looking into the best ways of enabling industry professionals to combine their day-job with teaching. Given the importance of quality teaching, Teach Too should be developed, and subject to evaluation, expanded.

Fairer funding

Funding disparities not only affect the status of the sector, but its ability to deliver high quality provision. Since 2009 there has been a growing gap between how learners of different ages are funded.³² We support the Government’s emphasis on supporting the most disadvantaged school children through initiatives like the Pupil Premium; however, we must not forget our most disadvantaged learners once they leave school.

29 The Association of Colleges, *No Free Lunch? Key Statistics*, [accessed via: www.aoc.co.uk/en/parliament-and-campaigns/campaigns/no-free-lunch/key-statistics.cfm (11/08/13)] (Figures sent to the CS) by the AoC

30 Ofsted, *Children’s Services and Skills, Removing barriers to literacy*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2011

31 Ofsted, *The report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills, Further education and skills 2012/13*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2013

32 Association of Colleges, *College Funding and Finance*, London: Association of Colleges, 2014, p4

- Recent funding cuts affecting 18-year-olds in full time education are deeply concerning. From September 2014, these learners will be funded at a rate 17.5 per cent lower than 16- and 17-year-olds.³³ This will affect the most disadvantaged learners hardest as many will be going to FE to take remedial courses, taking three years to complete. We therefore call on Government to urgently reconsider the cut affecting 18-year-olds;
- As an extension of this, Government should consider addressing all irregularities in how different education institutions are funded, such as the disparity which means whereas schools can reclaim VAT, sixth form colleges and FE colleges cannot;
- Funding can be very complex, coming from among various sources, often cutting across two Government departments – the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS). To address this we call on Government to examine the possibility of bringing FE into the Department for Education. Colleges should also be given greater stability through funding arrangements, through the introduction of three-year funding plans.

Improving the links between FE and employment

Too little FE provision is geared towards the needs of local and national labour markets.³⁴ It is unfair to encourage learners to take courses which are unlikely to lead to positive job outcomes. If we want to support transitions to work, learners need to be clearer on the likely outcomes of taking a particular course at particular institutions.

Both the Department for Education and BIS have begun trial publishing data on the destinations of learners, following KS4 (GCSE level), KS5 (A Level equivalent) and post 19. This has huge potential to encourage young people to take courses which lead to employment, and to drive providers to offer those courses. We call on Government to take urgent steps to improve the robustness of the data so that it can be used for this purpose. Once the quality of this data has been improved schools and colleges, should be encouraged to track trends over time, so that they can ensure their provision is more responsive to outcomes, and so that prospective learners can see the potential impact of their studies.

When the robustness of this data is improved, Ofsted should give this data greater weighting in their assessments, again, to ensure providers make sure they consider employability outcomes for their learners. As BIS develops the measures they should chart destinations for individual subject areas or qualifications, to show the impact taking particular courses has on outcomes.

³³ Following a new announcement from the Education Funding Authority, from September schools and colleges in England will see the grant they are given to fund each pupil's place cut by 17.5 per cent for all students who are already over the age of 18 at the beginning of the academic year. See: House of Commons Library, *Cuts in funding for 18 and 19 year olds*, 23 January 2013

³⁴ Ofsted, *Further education and skills 2012/13*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2013, p5

Improving engagement with employers

We are now enduring the effects of a 'skills-mismatch'. At one end of the spectrum the country faces shortages in high-skill industries like engineering, and yet at the other end, many employers complain that too many applicants lack the most basic skills.³⁵ Our reforms can help to ensure that education providers help young people to get the skills that local employers need.

Improving planning: the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs): if we want more young people to leave education with the soft and hard skills employers need, we must improve the strategic planning between education providers and local employers. LEPs are locally-owned partnerships between local authorities and businesses – and their role should be extended to incorporate strategic planning, with responsibility for working with employers to map the employment needs of an area.

Better brokerage: extending the role of local Chambers of Commerce: the role of the British Chambers of Commerce should be extended so that local chambers act as brokers of employer engagement between employers, schools and colleges.³⁶ All schools and colleges should be expected to engage with local employers, with local chambers facilitating this if needed. Local chambers of commerce should be given extended responsibility for brokering these relationships.

University Technical Colleges (UTCs): the CSJ has heard that UTCs are an excellent means of involving industry in education because they engage young people and meet the needs of modern business. We welcome this initiative, but there are not enough UTCs to reach all those children who would benefit. To extend the reach of this innovative initiative, we propose that the following takes place:

- Outstanding FE colleges should be able to sponsor UTCs.³⁷ Some areas are served by their local college and therefore allowing them to act as sponsor would increase the initiative's geographic reach to more learners;
- Subject to evaluation, Government should aim to have at least one UTC in every town. New institutions should arrive when there is a proven skills gap that cannot be met with sufficiently high quality by existing local providers, supported by LEPs.

Meaningful apprenticeships: apprenticeships have to be part of the solution for disadvantaged young people: they can offer excellent on-the-job training and improve how we prepare more people for industry. However, not enough apprenticeships are at a higher level. The Government should therefore ensure a radical expansion of Level 3 apprenticeships, with 150–250,000 extra places established each year, so as to make these the norm, offering a genuine alternative to Higher Education.

³⁵ CBI: *gateway to growth CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2014*, London: CBI

³⁶ The British Chambers of Commerce is a national umbrella body owned by, and acting for, 52 local chambers of commerce across the UK

³⁷ It was originally intended for only universities to do this -UTCs all have a university as a lead sponsor. FE colleges, charitable organisations and the private sector may co-sponsor a UTC; but they must also be led by a university.

Conclusion

The education system must help every child fulfil their potential, regardless of where in the country they live or the family they come from. It is unacceptable that for so many children, education does not act as gateway to success. Whilst we support much of the reform that has taken place, there is clearly far more to be done.

Our ambitious proposals set out how we can ensure more children start school ready for learning. Getting the early years right is crucial because children who fall behind at this young age are less likely to ever catch up. We also set out how we can improve schools and improve incentives for collaboration – so that our best schools can use their expertise to drive the same success amongst their colleagues. Likewise, the important effect of excellent teaching means we must value those who teach our children – and give them the professional development they need so that they too may reach their potential.

Driving success requires efforts across all phases of our system, across all parts of our country and from all members of our society – children, parents, schools, businesses and politicians – everyone has a role to play. We must take urgent action to ensure this takes place.