



**NEW DEAL
FOR TEACHERS**

POLITICAL BRIEFING

**Supporting world-class 16-plus
education and training**

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MAKE CHANGE
HAPPEN

A promising legacy...

No young person can achieve their potential and make the best contribution possible to their society without broad, balanced, engaging and relevant 16-plus learning opportunities. High-quality 16-plus provision is not only valuable and worthwhile in and of itself, but it also provides an important bridge between schooling and further study and employment. All of the education systems held up as international examples of best practice are characterised by strong post-compulsory schooling frameworks.

Historically, 16-plus education and training has not always had the level of public and political attention that has been afforded to 5-16 schooling and higher education. However, policy developments during 2000-2010 began to move 16-plus learning in a more positive direction.

Key policy developments during this period included:

- enhancing investment in the sector to ensure it was placed on a more sustainable footing and to support its workforce in broadening and developing its provision for young people;
- introducing comprehensive financial support for learners to help ensure that no young person was denied access to the learning pathway of their choice through material disadvantage;
- improving England's historically low post-16 participation rate by raising the statutory participation age in education and training from 16 to 18, and offering support to learners and providers to remove barriers to increased participation;
- working, through the Diploma Programme, towards a unified qualifications system, with no artificial distinctions drawn between so-called 'academic' and 'vocational' pathways and no artificial cut-offs in learning journeys at the end of Key Stage 4 – an authentically 14-19 education system;
- improving access to genuinely independent information, advice and guidance for all young people on their future learning and employment options; and
- building a coherent, integrated 16-plus sector, based on collaboration and partnership rather than competition between providers, with an aim to give effect to the principle that access to a comprehensive learning offer should be guaranteed regardless of where a young person happens to live.

...unnecessarily undermined

While there was still much to do to support the development of the 16-plus sector in 2010, a basis for positive change had been established. However, over the course of the last 14 years, this foundation for improvement has been needlessly and substantially undermined through, for example:

- drastically scaling back financial support for learners and undermining incentives to remain in education and training, particularly for those facing the greatest financial challenges;
- damaging support for young people's decision-making on future education, training and employment options by undermining the independence and comprehensiveness of the advice and information available to them and placing disproportionate responsibility on young people to search for information themselves;
- dismantling the provider partnerships on which to build an efficient and equitable 16-plus education and training framework;

- driving through qualifications reform without meaningful consultation with stakeholders and without a clear rationale for abandoning reforms that were beginning to have a positive impact; and
- reducing investment in the system so that, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, between 2010/11 and 2019/20, spending per student fell 14% in colleges and 28% in school sixth forms.

Without a change in direction in national 16-plus policy, the barriers to development that the sector faces currently are likely to become more intense. These challenges, including proposals to introduce an Advanced British Standard qualification without a clear rationale, the reckless withdrawal of most key applied general qualifications such as BTECs from 16-plus learning offers, and a growing student population, place the effectiveness and equity of the system at long-term risk.

Towards a sustainable and positive future

Addressing the damage done to the 16-plus sector over the past 14 years will not be straightforward and will require a range of short- and long-term policy responses.

However, it will be critical for the next government to commit to working with all those with a stake in the success of the system to create a strategy for its recovery and renewal. Key elements of any such strategy will need to include:

- a plan to address the recruitment and retention crisis currently affecting much of the sector by tackling factors such as pay, workload, insecure employment and inadequate access to professional training and development;
- developing a more evidence-based and inclusive approach to qualification reform: in the short-term, halting the withdrawal of valuable applied general qualifications; in the long-term, exploring options for change that will create genuine parity of esteem between different learning pathways and deliver genuine breadth and balance in all students' learning experiences;
- ensuring that every young person has access to impartial, informed and tailored advice and guidance on future employment, as well as learning options that place their needs and interests first;
- rebuilding a fractured system by ensuring that local providers collaborate to widen learning options for young people, share expertise and support further improvement in all settings;
- review funding support for young people and their families so that whatever learning pathway a young person may wish to pursue, their economic circumstances do not place barriers in their way;
- as part of broader policy of reform to provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), ensuring that the challenges in accessing the support for young people with SEND and the 16-plus staff that work with them are addressed; and
- developing an approach to policy development and implementation that views the sector's workforce and their recognised trade unions as partners for progress, allies in solving problems, and joint advocates for the value and importance of 16-plus education and training.

About us

NASUWT is The Teachers' Union and is the voice of the teaching profession.

Our aim is to improve and protect the status, morale and working conditions of the teaching profession so that teachers and headteachers can provide the best education and support to children and young people.

We are committed to ensuring that teachers and headteachers are recognised and rewarded as highly skilled professionals with working conditions that enable them to focus on their core role of leading teaching and learning.

Further information

For further information, please email campaigns@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

nasuwt.org.uk