



Institute of Directors

116 Pall Mall

London

SW1Y 5ED

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CAR Review Team,
Sanctuary Buildings,
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State,

Curriculum and assessment review: Call for evidence

About the IoD

The IoD is an independent, non-party political organisation representing 20,000 company directors, senior business leaders, and entrepreneurs. It is the UK's longest-running organisation for professional leaders, having been founded in 1903 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1906. Its aim is to promote good governance and ensure high levels of skills and integrity among directors of organisations. It campaigns on issues of importance to its members and to the wider business community with the aim of fostering a climate favourable to entrepreneurial activity in the UK.

The IoD welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence as part of the Curriculum and Assessment Review. Ensuring that young people leave the education system with the skills and knowledge needed to meet the UK's skills needs is of considerable interest to the IoD and its membership, and we are therefore pleased to present our views.

In the first section, we provide a summary of our key perspectives on the proposals. We then offer more detailed responses to individual questions.

Summary of the IoD view

The government's commitment to review the extent to which current secondary and 16-19 curricula and assessment meet the needs of learners is welcome. Any reforms should place improvements in the key skills which young people need to thrive in a rapidly-evolving labour market – literacy, numeracy, essential skills, digital literacy, and an openness to lifelong learning – at their heart. While discipline-related skills and knowledge are essential, and should be regularly updated in line with employer

feedback, the pace of change in skills needs is such that it is the aforementioned core and transferable skills which will set young people up for lifelong success in the workplace.

Answers to individual questions

26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

While the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways help many students to gain the skills and knowledge needed to progress to the next level of education or training, the needs of a sizeable minority of students are not served as a result of the lack of a clear vocational pathway alongside the traditional GCSE pathway. Such a vocational curriculum should be linked to students' interests and provide a solid foundation for post-16 vocational study. It should be high quality, developing both foundation vocational skills to keep learners motivated and foundation employability skills.

There is also concern in the business community that the basic functional skills – literacy, numeracy, and essential skills – are not sufficiently developed in young people in the pre-16 education system. In IoD research exploring the proposed policy of mandating mathematics until age 18, employers frequently commented that such a policy would not be needed if the pre-16 system better delivered the numeracy outcomes needed for success in the workplace.

“The current level 2 qualifications are not fit for purpose for the world of work. Financial management, analytical thinking, decision making, and risk management would be valuable” – Microbusiness, Professional, scientific and technical activities, London

“The whole standard of education up to 16, let alone 18 needs sorting. We look at candidates who hardly know how to write a letter to apply for a job, yet have A*s” – Microbusiness, Transportation and storage, East Midlands

Furthermore, better preparation for the world of work could be achieved through more frequent high-quality touchpoints with employers. Employer-education relationships vary considerably in quality between institutions; despite general enthusiasm on both sides, a lack of systemic linkages mean that quality and quantity of connections is often dependent on personal connections. The new government's commitment to all students receiving the equivalent of two weeks' worth of work experience is welcome but will only be deliverable if investment is made in building better employer-education relationships.

27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

From the employer perspective, the current 16-19 curriculum and qualification pathways deliver generally well-understood – in the case of A Levels, BTECs, and apprenticeships, at least, as T Levels are for obvious reasons less well-known – credentials which serve to signal skills and knowledge to employers.

The introduction of T Levels as a new technical education pathway was welcome; their rigour and the central role of industry placements can provide students with an excellent foundation for work. However, we are concerned that the drive for T Levels to become the default 16-18 technical education may leave behind a section of the student cohort unable to meet the requirements needed to achieve the T Level qualification. The aim to simplify the qualifications landscape and raise the profile of technical education is generally welcome but should not come at the expense of meeting the varied needs of a diverse student cohort. Many schools and sixth form colleges have been successful in offering BTECS alongside A Levels. Such an approach enables schools and colleges to tailor provision to meet the needs of their students and should be encouraged.

Employers should play a vital role in developing post 16 pathways, not only in vocational qualifications but also in A Levels which have a strong vocational link such as medicine, engineering, and the physical, chemical, and biological sciences.

The principles of more frequent, high-quality touchpoints with employers should also be extended across the 16-19 sector. While it would be impracticable for all students to undertake an industry placement of comparable length to T Level students, we would encourage government to explore how a baseline of employer engagement can be secured across the board in 16-19 provision.

49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

High quality advice and guidance is the key to change in this area. It should be impartial and objective and contain information on the full range of post 16 options, including A Levels, T Levels, apprenticeships, and other vocational options. Crucially, the advice should emphasise to students that there is a growing diversity of routes into professions which traditionally required a degree – such as accountancy – and of ways to get a degree, such as degree apprenticeships. The advice should also ensure that students and their caregivers understand the opportunities that their post 16 choices can lead to as well as the options they close down.

There has been a welcome improvement in the prevalence of young people being exposed in schools and colleges to information about the vocational and technical education options available to them, and UCAS' move to list apprenticeship opportunities represents a further positive step. However, compliance with the Baker Clause remains inconsistent; improving enforcement to ensure that all students benefit from engagement with technical education providers would be a helpful step.

51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

Beyond a general need for the competencies and knowledge taught in specific qualifications to keep pace with the needs of related industries, employers across the board are primarily looking for the compulsory education system to deliver literate and numerate students with key employability skills, including, but not limited to, digital skills, teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, adaptability, and time management. Any reforms to curriculum and assessment should therefore place the development of these skills at its core. A promising means of achieving this aim would be for the

national curriculum and qualifications to use the Skills Builder Universal Framework as a common language to describe essential skills and to set clear age-related expectations of learners.

“While arithmetic is a life skill and is important if you want get on in the workplace, we need more focus on making young people workplace ready in all respects.” -- Microbusiness, Information and communication, Yorkshire and the Humber

Employers also commonly report that new entrants to the labour market lack the literacy and numeracy skills needed to thrive in the workplace; we would therefore welcome a requirement for students to study some form of literacy and numeracy until age 18.

In January 2023, we polled 947 business leaders on whether studying some form of maths should be compulsory until age 18 (Appendix: Figure 1). A majority of respondents (55%) agreed, while 28% disagreed. The strongest theme in the qualitative responses was that the emphasis of such a policy should be on ensuring that all students leave education with the practical numeracy skills needed in all lines of work, such as financial literacy and basic statistics.

“There should be an emphasis on Functional Numeracy that is much more relevant to people's role in the workplace” – Microbusiness, Education, London

“Some students are often too quick to drop maths - often to the detriment of their career choices later - even in the sciences” – Microbusiness, Professional, scientific and technical activities, Yorkshire and the Humber

“It's very apparent in the workplace that many employees have not got the basic grasp of numbers, even high achievers” – Large business, Manufacturing, Yorkshire and the Humber

“Numeracy and learning the times tables needs to be a high priority, we are sending our high-tech work abroad due to lack of numeracy skills” – Small business, Information and communication, London

While we are agnostic as to the policy mechanism chosen to deliver literacy and numeracy instruction to age 18 – whether through better integration of those skills into existing qualifications, a range of standalone qualifications, or both – the premise of reform to 16-19 curricula to increase the emphasis on ensuring young people leave education with good literacy and numeracy skills enjoys widespread support in the business community.

Regardless of whether some form of literacy and numeracy is mandated until age 18, it is clear that the English and mathematics 16-19 curricula are in need of reform. The current English and mathematics resit policy is not only ineffective as a means of improving students' exam performance but also serves to further demotivate many of the students who struggled with English and mathematics pre-16. The use of norm referencing in the allocation of GCSE grades means that the resit policy is fundamentally flawed as a means of improving student outcomes; the system ensures that a consistent proportion of students will fail and the likelihood of their position on the bell curve drastically changing between exam sittings is low. Resits may be suitable for students close to the Level 4 borderline, but for other students the focus should be on qualifications which develop – and certify to employers – the literacy and numeracy skills needed for success in everyday life, including work.

IoD research around the principles underpinning the proposed Advanced British Standard also uncovered considerable business support for the principle of a broader 16-19 curriculum which went beyond the inclusion of literacy and numeracy (Annexe: Figure 2):

“I would welcome a ‘broader’ core subject to be taken which would include, in addition to maths, a basic understanding of economics, statistics, how to use ‘critical thinking’ to understand the truth behind statistics, how the same facts can be distorted to portray completely different things, and dangers of confirmation bias.... Basically, everything to do with how to make an informed decision about just about anything!” – Microbusiness, Manufacturing, Northern Ireland

“Equal emphasis should be given to high art humanities like Politics, Philosophy to enable students to be able to argue complex subjects” – Microbusiness, Construction, London

Furthermore, the pace of economic change is such that many businesses themselves struggle to predict the precise skills which new entrants to the labour market are going to need within the next few years. A successful 16-19 education system is therefore one which not only delivers the key competencies and skills needed at present but also lays the foundations of a cycle of reskilling and upskilling throughout individuals’ careers, at the same time as inculcating the key employability skills – such as communication, teamwork, digital literacy, and leadership – which will always be relevant.

I hope you have found our comments helpful. If you require further information about our views, please do not hesitate to contact us.

With kind regards,



Alex Hall-Chen

Principal Policy Advisor for Skills and Employment

Email: Alexandra.Hall-Chen@iod.com

Appendix

FIGURE 1: IOD MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS: JANUARY 2023 (947 RESPONDENTS)

Row Labels	The Prime Minister has proposed that students should study some form of maths to age 18. To what extent do you agree with this policy?
Strongly agree	23%
Agree	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	16%
Disagree	19%
Strongly disagree	9%
Don't know	1%
Grand Total	100.0%

FIGURE 2: IOD MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS: NOVEMBER 2023 (420 RESPONDENTS)

Row Labels	The government has announced plans to replace A Levels and T Levels with a new baccalaureate-style qualification for 16–19-year-olds, the Advanced British Standard. Students would typically choose five subjects from both academic and vocational options and would be required to study some form of English and maths. To what extent do you agree that this policy would be an improvement on the current system?
Strongly agree	14.3%
Agree	31.2%



Neither agree nor disagree	26.0%
Disagree	13.8%
Strongly disagree	9.5%
Don't know	5.2%
Grand Total	100.0%