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08/03/2024

THE RT HON GILLIAN KEEGAN MP

Secretary of State for Education

Advanced British Standard Consultation Team

Department for Education

20 Great Smith Street

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Dear Secretary of State,

A world-class education system: The Advanced British Standards consultation

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 this consultation on the Advanced British Standard. 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 concept of a 16-19 education system which delivers a broad curriculum, underpinned by English and maths for all students and with a more integrated approach to academic and vocational education,

is a welcome one for the business community. In an IoD poll of 420 business leaders in November 2023 (Annex: Figure 1), 45% of respondents agreed with the tenets of the ABS reforms and just 23% disagreed.

The business leaders we polled were generally optimistic about the potential of a broader curriculum and compulsory English and maths to produce young people with more rounded skillsets than at present. However, many also expressed concern that the frequency of reforms to the education system is undermining employers' ability to engage and that the reforms lack a clear enough focus on employability skills. In order to best meet the UK's skills needs, the ABS should therefore be designed with employability at its heart.

Answers to individual questions

11. We propose several overarching aims and principles that should underpin the introduction and design of the Advanced British Standard. To what extent do you support these proposed aims and principles? If you have further views on this, please share below. (Options: Fully support, Somewhat support, Neither support nor oppose, Somewhat oppose, Fully oppose, Don't know Free text box: 250 words)

Somewhat support. The aims and principles listed in the consultation represent a sound starting point for designing the ABS. In particular, the core of Maths and English – where reforms focus on the numeracy and literacy skills needed in the modern workplace – and the emphasis on greater breadth of knowledge are principles which should go some way to addressing business leaders' concerns about young people's preparedness for work.

However, the importance of employability and essential skills should feature more prominently as central principles underpinning the ABS. In addition, 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.

12. What do you think is the most important thing that the Advanced British Standard could achieve? (250 words)

The most important purpose of the ABS should be equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and mindset for lifelong learning needed to ensure success in their chosen careers.

27. If you have views or evidence on how time for employability, enrichment and pastoral (EEP) can best be used, please share below. We particularly welcome views and evidence about how to support students with additional challenges, e.g. lower prior attainment or the most disadvantaged. (250 words)

While giving educational providers flexibility to adapt EEP activities to the needs of their students is welcome, there may also be benefit in a more standardised approach to EEP activities. The International Baccalaureate's Creativity, Activity, Service requirements, as well as from the Duke of

Edinburgh Award’s Volunteering, Physical, and Skills framework, represent good examples of qualifications and awards which systematically build essential skills through extracurricular activities. This work would benefit from building on SkillsBuilder’s Universal Framework, the key tenets of which reflect the kinds of employability skills that businesses are looking to the education system to inculcate.

Employment preparation activities should be an equally important part of all pathways offered under the ABS. While the length of industry placement required in the occupational pathway would not be suitable – nor would employer supply be likely to match demand in such a scenario – for all students, there would be value in work experience forming a part of every student’s experience of the ABS.

Work experience is an effective means for young people to develop essential skills in an employment setting. We therefore support the introduction of a requirement for all young people to complete at least two weeks of work experience before leaving compulsory education, and the ABS could be an appropriate vehicle through which to put this policy into practice.

28. If you have views on how we can encourage employers to offer industry placements and what further support education providers will require, please share below. (250 words)

In January 2024, we polled 671 business leaders on T Level industry placements (Annex: Figure 2). 11% of respondents reported that their organisation was already offering placements or planning to do so, 27% were unsure about whether to offer placements, and 38% had no intention of offering placements.

When we asked respondents whose organisations were not currently offering placements why that was the case, the most common reasons cited were not having the requisite infrastructure to host placements (35%), T Levels not being relevant to their organisation (33%), and not knowing enough about what is involved (31%).

Qualitative responses also highlighted difficulties around hosting placements when an employer operates a hybrid or remote working model and in employers’ ability to offer post-T Level progression pathways at Level 3:

“Much of our company’s work is handled remotely making it difficult to adequately accommodate a student” – Small business, manufacturing sector

“[The DfE] wanted T-Level finishers to have the option to progress onto an apprenticeship at Level 3 or above... There needs to be a recognition that students may not always go in a linear fashion when achieving qualifications, and that a Level 2 apprenticeship is a worthwhile route following a Level 3 qualification” – Large business, construction sector

In order to encourage employers to offer placements, we would therefore suggest: embedding flexibilities with regards to the location of placements for companies whose working patterns are hybrid/remote; direct outreach from colleges and local authorities to employers; and more flexibility in the progression pathways expected from host employers.

29. We propose that we develop the English and maths offer within these reforms around certain principles. To what extent do you support these principles? (Options: Fully support, Somewhat support, Neither support nor oppose, Somewhat oppose, Fully oppose, Don’t know)

Fully support. We would welcome an English and maths offer which delivers the literacy and numeracy skills that young people need to thrive in the workplace. We particularly support the principle of there being a number of options available for students, given the need for the offer to cater for both students seeking to develop the foundations required in English and maths for related future study and/or technical routes and for students whose focus should be concentrated on functional literacy and numeracy skills.

31. We propose that there will be a range of English and maths majors and minors at Levels 3. To what extent do you support this proposal? (Options: Fully support, Somewhat support, Neither support nor oppose, Somewhat oppose, Fully oppose, Don't know)

We fully support there being a range of English and maths majors and minors at Level 3.

34: If you have views on how existing Level 2 qualifications (GCSEs and FSQs) could provide the basis for two-year Level 2 study for English and maths within the Advanced British Standard, please share below.

The Functional Skills Level 2 qualification could provide a useful blueprint for two-year Level 2 study for maths within the ABS, given that it puts maths into real-life contexts. However, we would encourage a review of the qualification, with input from employers, professional bodies, and employer organisations, to ensure that the qualification is relevant to the needs of various industries.

In our research on the policy of compulsory maths education to age 18, a common theme among qualitative feedback from business leaders emphasised the need for any such policy to address the issues which currently prevent young people from gaining the requisite numeracy skills in their education up to the age of 16.

35. If you have further views on what students will study as part of the Advanced British Standard, or anything else covered in Chapter 2, please share below.

In January 2023 we polled 947 business leaders on whether studying some form of maths should be compulsory until age 18 (Annex: Figure 3). 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.

The proposed applied minor at Level 3 would align well with this feedback by building on the successful work being done with the Core Maths qualification, alongside the major and theoretical minor offering students the option to develop advanced maths skills and knowledge.

39. Do you agree that students should receive some type of overall Advanced British Standard award? If yes, what value could an 'ABS award' add on top of individual component grades, particularly for higher education providers and/or employers? (Options: Yes, No, Don't know. Free text box: 250 words)

Yes, an overall award could be a helpful signal for employers that a student has achieved a minimum level of attainment across the subjects studied. However, students who do not achieve the overall award need to be able to clearly communicate their skills and knowledge in specific subjects to

employers, thus the ability of students to gain standalone qualifications separate to the overall ABS award is crucial.

53. If you have views on how to ensure the Advanced British Standard reforms meet the needs of employers, please share below. (250 words)

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. The ABS reforms should therefore place the development of these skills at its core.

While many business leaders expressed support for the underlying principles of the ABS, there is also a sense of frustration within the business community at frequent changes to the skills system. A Levels in particular are a well-known and understood brand among employers, and employer awareness of T Levels has been gradually building over the past few years. A key way in which the ABS reforms can meet employers' needs, therefore, is for the new system to be a long-term policy which is given sufficient time to embed and gain recognition from employers.

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,



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Appendix

FIGURE 1: 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%

FIGURE 2: IOD MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS: JANUARY 2024 (671 RESPONDENTS)

Row Labels	Does your organisation host T Level industry placements?
Don't know	10.95%
N/A	12.90%
No, and we are unsure about whether to host T Level placements in future	27.03%
No, and we have no intention of hosting T Level placements in future	37.63%
No, but we intend to host T Level placements in future	8.13%

Yes, we are currently hosting T Level placements and/or have done so in the past	3.36%
Grand Total	100.00%

Row Labels	Why does your organisation not offer T Level industry placements?
Other business pressures (e.g. cost pressures, Brexit) make engagement difficult	11.73%
T Levels are not relevant to our organisation	33.02%
The relevant T Levels have not yet been rolled out	5.86%
There is too much bureaucracy involved in setting up the placements	11.42%
We don't have the infrastructure needed to host placements	34.88%
We don't know enough about what is involved	31.79%
We prefer to focus on other forms of engagements with schools and colleges	11.42%

FIGURE 3: 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%