



**Leading the Way:  
Blueprint for a Self-Improving System**

**Author:**

**Leora Cruddas** ASCL Director of Policy

February 2015

“You can mandate adequacy;  
you can’t mandate greatness.  
It has to be unleashed.”

Joel Klein



# Contents

Foreword: A story of trust and transformation	4
Principles that underpin our blueprint	6
A view from the future – a vision set in 2020...	7
Element One: Teacher professionalism	9
Element Two: Curriculum, assessment and qualifications	12
Element Three: Funding and governance	14
Element Four: Accountability	16
Element Five: Scrutiny, intervention and support	18
Element Six: Strategic planning	20
Postscript	21
Appendix A: Architecture of s self-improving system	22
Appendix B: Members of the external reference group	23



# Foreword: A story of trust and transformation

## How can the caterpillar begin to imagine what the butterfly sees?

We want 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 students. This will involve an act of imagination, courage and collective action. Our blueprint sets out a vision for our education system. At its heart is capacity building – leadership capacity, pedagogical capacity and the capacity for creativity and action.

In order to achieve this, we must move beyond the sterile structures/standards debate that is a common feature of current rhetoric. Teaching does not happen in a vacuum – good, enabling structures create the condition for expert teaching and disciplined innovation. However, our current system is over-complicated, bureaucratic and not fit-for-purpose. It is therefore important that structures are streamlined and enabling, without losing the diversity of provision that creates dynamism in the system. The education system is necessarily complex. It is not necessarily complicated<sup>1</sup>.

The direction of travel over three decades has been towards greater school autonomy. It is five years since Professor David Hargreaves published the first of his important and influential think pieces on a self-improving system<sup>2</sup>. Since then, much has been said and written. The literature review we commissioned from UCL Institute of Education (IOE) provides an overview of the research and evidence<sup>3</sup>.

Coalition policies have centred on delivering a self-improving system through the concept of system leadership – teaching schools and national, local and specialist leaders of education. The commonly understood concept of system leadership has been those leaders who build leadership capacity within their own school at the same time as working beyond their school with other schools in their localities.

The (former) National College for School Leadership defined system leadership as educational leadership, rather than institutional leadership. Educational leadership includes but is not defined by locality leadership or leadership of groups of schools. We believe the next phase in system leadership is leadership of the education system itself.

The McKinsey report, *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*<sup>4</sup>, says the 'good' to 'great' journey marks the point at which the school system comes to largely rely upon the values and behaviours of its educators to propel continuing improvement. The focus shifts from central direction (or 'mandating adequacy') to 'unleashing greatness' in schools themselves – working collaboratively to improve the quality both of teachers entering the profession and existing teachers, cultivating peer learning within schools and between them, encouraging innovation to discover future leading practices and ultimately ownership of outcomes and the quality of education by the profession.

There is an important difference between a self-improving system and a school-led system. It is of course possible that a school-led system is not an improving one. It is also possible that a school-led system is self-serving rather than self-improving. A self-improving system is by definition strongly school-led, with the government legitimately responsible for determining the standards and regulatory frameworks for accountability purposes. A self-improving system has secure controls that act as a guard to self-interest.

As we take this significant step towards clarifying and giving definition to a self-improving system, it is important that we give careful consideration to the constraints that work against it. A question many school leaders may ask is whether the current approach of Ofsted, in particular, is contributing to or hindering the further development of a self-improving system. As part of this blueprint, we consider what accountability looks like in a self-improving system.

Education will always be a political priority because of the amount of public money expended on it and because it is the key investment in the nation's future prosperity and wellbeing. We do not believe education should be de-politicised. However, we do see a more strategic role for government. The role of government is perhaps to remove obstacles and create the conditions for a self-improving system. And this will need to involve a commitment from politicians to re-calibrate their relationship with the profession and vacate the space that will allow the next stage in a self-improving system to emerge.

We recognise that there has been significant change in the system and that the blueprint anticipates further change at a time when the education sector is change-fatigued. The key difference between current reform programmes and the changes we are outlining is the shift away from government and towards the profession in terms of leadership of change.

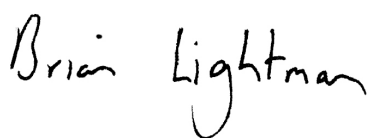
- 
- 1 This distinction is drawn from complexity theory. In this paragraph, it refers to the current complicated system architecture which arguably involves many different and confusing aspects. The blueprint seeks to simplify these aspects of system architecture to enable an emergent self-improving system.
  - 2 Hargreaves, D. (2010) *Creating a self-improving school system*, National College for School Leadership.
  - 3 Greany, T. (2015) *The self-improving school-led system in England: a review of evidence and thinking*, ASCL
  - 4 Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. and Chikioke, C. 2010, *How the World's Most Improved Systems Keep Getting Better*, London, McKinsey & Company.



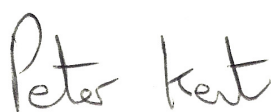
This blueprint deliberately speaks to schools and school leaders – primary, secondary and special. However, its principles and vision is relevant to the whole education sector from early years through to post-16 and further education. The larger number of actions for school leaders relative to those for government reflect a shift of agency and power that we believe is a necessary condition for a self-improving system to emerge.

It is now time for the profession of school leaders to step forward and grasp this leadership challenge. The next phase in system leadership is to define what a world-class, self-improving system looks like, and then move steadily and determinedly towards it. This is why the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) has published a blueprint for a self-improving system – our story of trust and transformation.

Finally, we would like to thank the many colleagues who have contributed to the development of the blueprint. Professor Toby Greany from UCL Institute of Education (IOE), who is the author of the literature review, has also provided us with constructive challenge throughout the process. Our reference group (at appendix B) has made an absolutely invaluable contribution to the development of the blueprint. The roundtables with politicians and political advisers provided a vital perspective. The seminars with Compass and BELMAS both offered incredibly helpful and practical challenge. We are very grateful to the people and organisations who responded to the consultation. Notably, the response from the National Governors' Association (NGA) has been absolutely formative in developing our thinking about the role of governing boards. Finally, our own working group of ASCL Council members who have expertly steered the development of the blueprint, contributed to drafts and provided skilful leadership.



**Brian Lightman** ASCL General Secretary



**Peter Kent** ASCL President

January 2015



# Principles that underpin our blueprint

## We believe the following principles are fundamental to unleashing greatness in our education system:

- **Quality and equality:** A good education for all is a central principle of our blueprint. We believe achievement can be realised at scale for all children and young people. We reject determinism either by social background or by perceived intelligence.
- **Accountability:** The highest form of accountability is the individual's professional accountability for the quality of his or her own work and to the people who the profession serves. In a self-improving system, we believe that teachers and school leaders must be agents of their own accountability. The role of the state is to determine the accountability measures in the interests of the parents and the wider community, incentivising policies and behaviours that contribute to a high-quality education for all. The role of governing boards in holding schools and their leaders to account is central to a self-improving system.
- **Evidence:** We believe that there is a need for a strong system for analysing evidence so that it can be informed by professional expertise to improve the quality of practice and outcomes for students. Both policy and practice should be evidence-informed.
- **Emergence:** Our education system must prepare young people for life in a global, digitised community whilst continuing to equip them with core skills and an understanding of the best that has been thought and said. So education must both improve and innovate to stay relevant – it must both do things better and do things differently. A whole generation of children and young people are growing up using mobile devices and social media in an information age – their expectations will grow quickly. Pedagogical development is therefore both inevitable and necessary, but it will rightly build on the solid foundations that most schools have in place.
- **Collaboration and partnership:** There is a strong correlation between collaborative cultures and system success. We believe in continuous improvement through principled strategic partnerships: as government steps back, schools will need to operate in such partnerships if they are to build capacity and address system-wide challenges such as succession planning. School systems improve when the quality of teaching improves – partnerships offer the best way to ensure the spread of professional expertise and evidence between schools. We believe it is necessary to consciously build professional capital and trust among teachers and create the conditions for teachers to work together to improve practice within and across schools.
- **Subsidiarity:** We believe that decision making should be devolved to the most immediate level consistent with its implementation and to the place closest to students, ie to schools. This is our preferred definition of the principle that is elsewhere referred to as 'autonomy'. In a system in which subsidiarity is the norm, there must be strong and intelligent accountability. Thus, subsidiarity and accountability are twin principles.
- **Common good:** We believe that education is for the common good. A good education creates the social conditions that allow 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 in all young people. We accept that sometimes the imperative for the common good must override subsidiarity – government has a role to play in ensuring that the system serves all equally well.



# A view from the future – a vision set in 2020...

The education system is world-class and self-improving with strong school-led features.

The early 'green shoots' such as teaching schools, national, local and specialist leaders of education, academies etc have blossomed into a full-blown, coherent and sustainable self-improving system with strong and clearly defined school-led features.

The system learned from early initiatives like London Challenge where a sense of collective endeavour, accountability, a focus on students' outcomes and partnerships between and among schools brought about significant improvement including and especially for children and young people from economically deprived backgrounds.

In 2015, formal partnerships of schools in the form of multi-academy trusts (MATs) and federations began to proliferate quickly. This was an explicit feature of the drive to subsidiarity and based on the evidence that formal partnerships make the most difference. However, the problem of scale and sustainability of small stand-alone institutions, particularly small primary schools, in a tightening fiscal climate was unresolved. The in-coming government in 2015 acted quickly to make formal partnerships a requirement of the national fair funding formula and schools, particularly small ones, now operate in formal partnerships through MATs and federations. These are financially sustainable and driven by strong curricula and pedagogical models.

School leaders, sensing an emergent model back in 2015, stepped up to take forward the transformation agenda, pursuing the goal of a high-quality broad, balanced and relevant education for all young people. They took on a shared responsibility for the quality of education of all young people in their area, not just those in their own school. They quickly understood autonomy and freedom to mean agency, responsibility and accountability. There is a strong commitment to principled strategic partnerships, including with higher education institutions.

All schools in the system are now scrutinised and overseen by education commissioners in regional education jurisdictions.

Following the election in 2015, the government created the legislative framework to consolidate the self-improving system. It took on an enabling role, using its powers to stimulate school-led raising of standards and high-quality education. The system has been mobilised by a small number of ambitious goals that have fired the collective imagination and released professional energy. All schools are now equally ambitious.

Government stepped back.



# The responsibilities of government are clearly delineated

They include:

- fair per pupil funding that is sufficient, sustainable and equitable, includes weighting for disadvantage and enables educational organisations to focus on closing achievement gaps
- a *slim, smart and stable* framework of standards in outcomes and public accountability
- calculation through agreed modelling of numbers of teachers needed in each sector and region and the promotion of the status and value of teaching as a profession
- a capital programme that ensures sufficiency and quality of educational provision and learning environments that are fit for the 21st century
- a role in monitoring the performance of the system and in identifying and helping to address potential strategic issues that could hamper future success

*School leaders and the government worked together to create the blueprint for the new system using six elements...*





# Element One: Teacher professionalism

## Our vision

Teaching is seen as a highly skilled profession that is constantly being refined, challenged and developed to improve outcomes for students.

Teachers see themselves as contributing collectively to excellence in a world-class education system, the creation of a fair society and the common good. This renewed focus on the moral imperative of teaching and the purpose of education has brought a strong sense of energy, collective purpose and professionalism.

The responsibility for professional learning is entirely the remit of teachers, schools and groups of schools working in collaboration with each other through teaching school alliances and other partnerships, and the Royal College of Teaching. There is now a good spread of teaching school alliances.

It is commonplace for teachers to have a professional learning ladder from initial teacher education (ITE) through to newly qualified teacher to accredited Masters/research programmes at subject or leadership levels. Professional learning is sharply focused on student outcomes.

Initial teacher education (ITE)<sup>5</sup> is grounded in strong pedagogical knowledge, developing the quality of instruction, classroom management and climate and professional behaviours<sup>6</sup>. ITE has a core curriculum framework that sets out underpinning knowledge that scaffolds both practice and reflection on practice. Teaching is understood to be rooted in a body of knowledge and evidence-informed. ITE is predicated on strong subject knowledge right from the lower end of primary education and teachers entering the profession have a deep knowledge of the subjects they teach. Higher education institutions work in partnership with schools to ensure that pedagogical practice and skill is anchored in strong theoretical knowledge. Right from the point of entry into the profession, teachers both use and create evidence.

There is beginning to be competition for entry to initial teacher education programmes as teaching is increasingly seen to be an attractive career.

Professional learning is continuous and iterative.<sup>7</sup> Professional learning programmes routinely revisit underpinning knowledge to deepen learning and refine practice. There is very little professional learning that is 'one-off,' with the exception of information-giving events – most professional learning programmes are designed over a period of time, are overtly relevant to teachers and involve peer learning and accreditation.

Perhaps most importantly, teachers routinely see themselves as evaluators of their impact on student learning.<sup>8</sup> Professional learning is seen as an entitlement only in as much as it enables improvement and innovation that impact on outcomes for students.

Professional knowledge and skill in assessing and enabling students to make progress in their learning is a key aspect of pedagogy. Teachers assess student progress confidently and chartered assessors from the profession work across schools to challenge, support and develop practice. Assessment practice is guided by a profession-led assessment ethics framework.

A Royal College of Teaching, led by a peer-elected board, exists as the professional body for teachers. The Royal College of Teaching is responsible for setting teacher standards and enhancing teachers' professional learning and development.<sup>9</sup>

Professional learning and development is facilitated through well-established relationships between teaching school alliances and higher education institutions. Most teachers now do masters degrees or other accredited programmes and/or are actively engaged in research.

A designation of 'local leader' exists in most federated or academy groups specifically to lead on initial teacher education and professional learning. A nationally defined set of standards are in place as the gateway for this designation – the Royal College of Teaching develops, monitors and enforces these standards. The 'local leader' or director of professional learning is the internal specialist who coordinates, plans, challenges and supports professional learning and development.

Leaders have access to a nationally recognised suite of qualifications. These qualifications are developed and overseen by a profession-led Leadership Foundation that is responsible for setting headteacher and leadership standards and enhancing leaders' professional learning and development.

---

5 See technical paper on initial teacher education, published separately, for our position on how the landscape of initial teacher education should work.

6 Coe, R., Aloise, C., Higgins, S and Elliot Major, L. (2014) What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research. Durham University and The Sutton Trust.

7 This section draws on the work of Philippa Cordingley at CUREE and Timperley, H. (2008) Teacher professional learning and development. International Academy of Education, International Bureau of Education, UNESCO.

8 Hattie, J. *Visible Learning for Teachers*, Publisher, p 159ff.

9 Princes Teaching Trust, *Blueprint for a College of Teaching*, 2013



There is a national Evidence Centre for Education<sup>10</sup>, funded by endowment, feeding national and international evidence of best practice into the policy-making process at national level and into the professional practice of teachers and school leaders. This is independent of both government and the profession, and therefore necessarily separate from the profession-led Royal College of Teaching, but has a strong relationship with it.

Employers have extensive autonomy over pay and conditions within a broad national framework. They are responsible for performance management, pay progression and the link to student outcomes.

The absolute focus on professional skill, the quality of teaching and its impact on student outcomes means that there is now very little poor teaching. High levels of ownership and accountability by teachers and school leaders – which arose through a shift in the locus of responsibility from outside the school system to within it – has made a significant impact on outcomes. Schools and teachers now hold each other to account.

### **Steps for school leaders to take**

Unleash greatness in the classroom by undertaking the following:

- Recognise that developing the quality of teachers is one of the most important jobs in the school and make it the starting point that professional learning could be better. Identify a talented school leader and give them the resources to lead on initial teacher education and professional learning. Cultivate peer-led learning – excite teachers about teaching, planning and evaluating their teaching together, observing and learning from each other and sharing what works within or across groups of schools – and recognise that external expertise will be necessary to avoid complacency.
- Work with teachers to develop assessment practice – have one or more of the strongest teachers train to be a chartered assessor and give them status in the school.
- Take the lead in developing and testing approaches to closing the gap so that every teacher is engaged in and committed to constant evaluation of evidence and practice is honed and improved on the basis of evidence and growing professional understanding.
- If you are not already leading or working in a teaching school alliance or other partnership, start or join one. Expect to give as much as you get from the partnership.
- Develop a formal relationship with a higher education institution and encourage teachers to undertake research and use a range of credible evidence to inform their practice – if you are not yet involved in an Education Endowment Foundation project or other research project, consider this.

### **Steps for governing boards to take**

- Ensure that your school or trust participates in a teaching school alliance or other partnership.
- Ensure there is sufficient investment in professional learning for all staff, and that developing professionalism is a key strategic priority.
- Review your pay policy so that pay-related progression focuses on student outcomes, the progress students make and uncouple pay from lesson observations so that teachers are genuinely free to innovate, adopt best practice, test new practice and learn together.

### **Steps that ASCL will take**

- Develop the specification for and take forward a profession-led leadership foundation.
- Support the establishment of a Royal College of Teaching and develop a specification for an Evidence Centre for Education.
- Work with the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors to develop an assessment ethics framework.
- Support the development of a broad core curriculum framework for initial teacher education.
- Work with research associations to develop evidence-informed assessment reform.
- Use the systemic review of professional learning being undertaken for the Teacher Development Trust to publish guidance for schools.

---

<sup>10</sup> See technical paper on the proposed evidence centre for education, published separately.



## Steps for government to take

- Work with school leadership associations as we develop the specification for a profession-led leadership foundation.
- Create an endowment fund to enable the profession to establish a Royal College of Teaching, and separately an Evidence Centre for Education, both of which will be entirely independent of government.
- Work with the profession and higher education to create a broad core curriculum framework for initial teacher education and a single qualification.
- Develop and enhance the Teacher Supply Model such that it is better able to take account of regional variation in supply and demand and ensure sufficiency of teachers needed in each sector, subject and region.



# Element Two: Curriculum, assessment and qualifications

## Our vision

A broad nationally defined core curriculum framework in both primary and secondary exists. The framework is determined by an independent commission for curriculum review, which analyses the framework every five years – school leaders, governors, teachers, parents, industry, and politicians are represented on the commission. Governments get one chance to make changes working with the profession within any one political cycle.

The school curriculum is widely understood to be everything that a young person learns in school. The core curriculum is only one part of a school's curriculum. Schools determine their own curriculum, which has brought creativity, dynamism and relevance into curriculum development. The curriculum in English schools is broad and deep embracing knowledge, skills and qualities.

It is no longer the case that perverse incentives in an out-of-kilter accountability framework drive curricular models and pedagogical practices. It is now commonplace for a curriculum vision and strong pedagogical model to be at the heart of improvement and innovation in a federation or academy trust. Students gain the competencies and dispositions that prepare them to be creative, connected and collaborative as well as healthy holistic human beings who not only contribute to but also create the common good in today's knowledge-based creative, interdependent world.<sup>11</sup>

The use of technologies both within the curriculum and within schools has increased exponentially, learning from the 'technology hubs' that the incoming government set up in 2015. Powerful pedagogical models of teaching and learning are enabled and accelerated by digital tools and resources.<sup>12</sup>

A growth mindset and positive psychology permeates school communities – adults have an unwavering belief that all children can succeed, regardless of perceptions about innate intelligence or economic background.<sup>13</sup>

A qualifications regulator continues to set the standards for awarding organisations to meet when they design, deliver and award regulated qualifications. The regulator is independent of the profession and exists to ensure world-class qualifications. Qualification reform that began in 2014, has been implemented in a period of relative stability, while we collectively stepped back to consider the skills, knowledge and qualities we want in our young people at age 18. Research and evidence has helped to inform the next stage of qualification reform to develop high-quality vocational qualifications that are on a par with academic qualifications. The implementation of these is now being carefully planned.

The qualifications regulator has proportionate and consistent controls around assessments. The profession has developed collaborative arrangements governed by an assessment ethics framework, which means that assessment, and the qualifications based on them are trusted.

In addition to formal qualifications, young people leave school with a range of important skills and qualities: they are resilient, determined, creative, flexible, able to solve complex problems, write accurately and well, present and communicate orally and with a high level of technological literacy.

Gaining in confidence, the profession initiated productive dialogue with higher performing jurisdictions from whom we wished to learn about curriculum and pedagogy and who in turn wished to learn from us about developing a wider skill set. England is now recognised for performing highly in core areas and has influenced the design of the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) to include broader assessments.

English students are increasingly perceived to have the knowledge, skills and qualities that are desirable by employers globally and the English education system is perceived as highly desirable in the international market. The least advantaged young people achieve not only formal qualifications but also the 'cultural capital', which the most advantaged already have. All young people access an education, which is as good as that which only the best schools formerly achieved.

## Steps for school leaders to take

Unleash greatness in school by undertaking the following:

- Develop a bold curricular vision and pedagogical model that will suit the school context – not a pragmatic or instrumentalist response to qualification reform and accountability measures but rather a curriculum which builds character and resilience, inspires and enables young people to achieve and be successful, rounded people.
- Consider the use of technologies both within the curriculum and within schools. Develop and test models of teaching and learning, enabled and accelerated by increasingly pervasive digital tools and resources.

---

11 Fullan, M. and Langworthy, M. (2014) *A Rich Seam - How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning*, Pearson, p.2

12 Ibid.

13 Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House



- Build a culture of curriculum design and development across the school – enable middle leaders to work with each other and across schools and groups of schools to develop subject curricula.
- Tell the story of provision in the school – how it reflects the way you see the fundamental purpose of education and how it will prepare students for life in modern Britain and in a global society.
- Build an assessment strategy around a growth mindset and positive psychology – challenge any and all perceptions about innate ability or low expectations.
- Talk to staff and students and invite them to discuss with each other about the world students will enter – help teachers to think about what students will need to be successful in the 21st century, and then how that might impact on what they do in their classrooms.

### **Steps for governing boards to take**

- Determine as part of the school vision, the provision and how it prepares students for life in a modern world.

### **Steps that ASCL will take**

- Undertake research and develop guidance on what evidence-informed assessment looks like and work with the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors to support capacity.
- Develop guidance to support school leaders to develop a robust, well-evidenced and principled curriculum philosophy.
- Share research evidence and support school leaders to improve expertise and capacity in curriculum design through guidance and ASCL Professional Development (ASCL PD) programmes, which embody the principle that assessment is driven by curriculum.
- Work with the government and Ofqual to reform vocational qualifications so that they are consistently high-quality and on a par with academic qualifications.

### **Steps for government to take**

- Work with the professional and subject associations, higher education and employers to establish the independent commission for curriculum review.
- Work with Ofqual and the profession to reform vocational qualifications so that they are consistently high-quality and on a par with academic qualifications.



# Element Three: Funding and governance

## Our vision

Schools are now funded sufficiently, equitably and sustainably. In the period before 2015, school funding was distributed inequitably. Some schools and groups of schools faced financial failure. The new government acted quickly in 2015 to work with the profession to develop and implement a national funding formula, which incorporated weighted funding for disadvantage, was equitable at the point of delivery, sufficient and sustainable.<sup>14</sup> It was not easy – there were winners and losers – but it was done fairly and it was carefully planned and implemented over a three-year period.

In 2015, formal partnerships of schools in the form of MATs and federations began to proliferate quickly. This was an explicit feature of the drive to subsidiarity and based on the evidence that formal partnerships make the most difference. Formal partnerships also have the scale and capacity to take on system roles which individual schools cannot always do, like the capacity for initial teacher education, sustainable professional learning within and across schools, and research and development.

However, the problem of scale and sustainability of small stand-alone institutions, particularly small primary schools, in a tightening fiscal climate was unresolved. Schools had to make some changes. Small schools (both primary and secondary) realised that they were not sustainable as stand-alone institutions – whether local authority maintained schools, academies, foundation, voluntary aided or controlled.

Schools are now in sustainable formal partnerships be that MATs or federations, single phase and cross phase.<sup>15</sup> The incoming government in 2015 made this a condition of the new funding arrangements and schools had three years as part of the transition to the new funding arrangements to enter or create formal partnerships.

Governance of the system is now much more consistently strong. There is a widely established culture in governing boards of trusts and federations of continuously striving to develop and improve governance. The importance of governing boards with the right skills to develop the vision and aspiration for the trust or federation and to ensure an appropriate balance of support and challenge is widely recognised. A successful campaign targeting social responsibility schemes to recruit governors from the wider educational, financial and managerial sectors supported this.

Governance of MATs as independent legal entities is now well understood. There is a clear separation of function on academy boards between the role of the board of governors and the members of the academy trust who hold the board of governors to account.

All governing boards of trusts or federations carefully plan succession – normally no single governor spends more than two terms of office on one governing board. Governing boards of trusts and federations routinely employ paid professional clerks with a secure understanding of the law and duties of the governing board. Clerks have a professional body with chartered status.

Governing boards of trusts and federations are more skilled and effective, clear in their vision and focused on a small number of strategic aims that matter most. There is a professional recruitment process for appointing chairs of trusts and federations, who may be paid.<sup>16</sup> Normally, the maximum length of service for a chair of a trust or federation is two terms.

Financial accountability is ensured through annual, independent audit that checks financial controls, systems, transactions and risks. MATs and federation accounts are publicly available. Finance directors in trusts and federations are considered to be important senior leaders. Every governing board of a trust or federation has an audit committee.

There is a mechanism for a school to change from one trust to another, or leave a trust. The process for doing so has strong safeguards to enable the work of school improvement not to be placed at risk. While the individual schools in a MAT are not separate legal entities from the trust, each school in a trust or federation is a registered education institution with its own Department for Education (DfE) number. Each school in a trust or federation has the right to a local governing body, even in cases where a trust delegates few powers or responsibilities to it.

Where the local governing body believes that the school is not being served well by the trust, the local governing body can prepare a business case to the education commissioner to leave the trust.<sup>17</sup> An individual school can only exercise this right once in a five-year period and the school cannot do so if it is in intervention of any kind. The local governing body must inform the trust that they intend to make the application. At this point, the trust no longer has the right to suspend or remove the governors on the local governing body. The trust does however have the right of response. The education commissioner makes a careful assessment of the application and may require an independent review to secure the evidence for the decision if the evidence is inconclusive.

---

14 See technical paper on a national fair funding formula, published separately.

15 See technical paper on governing groups of schools, published with the NGA

16 Charity law currently does not allow the payment of trustees. In some circumstances a trust can apply to the Charity Commission to make payment to a trustee.

17 While schools are independently registered with the DfE, the legal entity is the Trust. There is therefore more work to be done on the legal framework that would allow a school to leave a Trust.



## Steps for governing boards to take

Unleash great governance and secure the future by undertaking to:

- Foster a climate whereby the governance of the school is kept under review. Commission an external review of governance with the aim of working in a more skilled, focused and effective way; being aware of the freedoms to work in different ways; ensuring that there is clarity of vision for and that the governing board is confident that it has a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities and the right number of skilled and committed governors. Consider a written statement that sets out how the governing board will work with senior leaders, stating the roles and responsibilities of each.
- Review the governing board's constitution, ensure there is a clearly defined process to appoint and remove governors with a protocol for deciding renewals to terms of office. Carefully plan succession – work on the basis that no single governor should spend more than two terms on one governing board. Actively recruit people with the right skills. If the governing board does not have an audit committee, then establish one. Recruit a professional clerk.
- Take a hard look at the school/trust's financial position. Model the finances over a three to five year period – consider whether the organisation is sustainable in its current form and what action needs to be taken if it is not. Develop a shadow financial model that calculates and demonstrates a minimum sufficiency to inform strategic decision making. Form or join a formal partnership. Stay in control of the school's destiny.

## Steps for school leaders to take

- Provide leadership to the governing board. Build the right relationship, enabling the board to set the strategic direction for the trust or federation and to offer the right challenge and support.

## Steps that ASCL will take

- Work with the government to deliver an equitable, sufficient and fair national funding formula.
- Work with government to develop a programme of professional development for governors that becomes the industry standard.
- Work with the inspectorate on ways to develop inspectors' practice in relation to governance.

## Steps for government to take

- Develop and implement a national funding formula that is equitable at the point of delivery, sufficient and sustainable and weighted appropriately to those students with the greatest need. Require schools to enter or create sustainable formal partnerships.
- Work with the professional associations and governance associations to develop a campaign to recruit governors from the professional sectors.
- Undertake a review of National Leader of Governance (NLG) designation.
- Legislate to ensure that every school has the right to a local governing body and establish a clear legal process for academies to leave their trust.



# Element Four: Accountability

## Our vision

Accountability is the obligation of an individual and organisation to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. The highest form of accountability is the individual's professional accountability for the quality of his or her own work and to the people who the profession serves. In a self-improving system, we believe that teachers and school leaders are agents of their own accountability.

While this is the highest form of accountability, government has a role in defining a *slim, smart and stable* public accountability framework with a small number of ambitious goals, including a nationally determined progress measure to incentivise improvement.

The accountability framework is well understood by the profession. It has now been in place for the term of government. The accountability measures incentivise schools, trusts and federations to implement policies and behaviours that contribute to a high-quality education for all.

Teachers see themselves as accountable for continuously developing professionally – they work together to refine pedagogical skills, access and use best evidence, evaluate and improve learning and achievement. School leaders, accountable to parents for the quality of provision and outcomes, focus sharply on achieving more and doing things in a better way.

Governing boards are better at developing smart measures of performance for each of the school's strategic priorities and holding leaders to account for these. These include but are not constrained by the government's measures. Governors and leaders are respectful of the external accountability framework but are now much more ambitious than the government. They are explicit and eloquent about their vision and the measures that will evidence success.<sup>18</sup>

In many trusts and federations, innovations in the use of open data have helped to empower parents and the community.<sup>19</sup> These organisations have reconfigured complex data so that it is genuinely useful to parents and other community members in terms of accountability, voice and choice. It is increasingly a parental and community expectation that schools, trusts and federations provide their data in open, accessible and meaningful ways.

Accountability is an aspect of good governance of the system. For school leaders, accountability is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for outcomes and encompasses the obligation to report, explain and be answerable for those outcomes. A self-improving system is not a self-serving system. Thus, inspection is focused on accountability to the public who are the users of the system and to government. In a system where schools are increasingly autonomous and diverse in their legal and operational structures, the case for an independent inspectorate to assure the public both as taxpayers and parents is stronger than ever.

The inspectorate acts on behalf of both parents and politicians and the wider electorate. The inspectorate reports directly to parliament in relation to the quality of educational provision. Inspection is a key part of the accountability system of schools and colleges in England. School leaders and the governing board have an 'account-giving' relationship with the inspectorate in that they must give account of their actions and decisions to ensure good outcomes for all children and young people in their institution.

As schools are publicly funded institutions, the inspectorate's primary function is to evaluate the outcomes and assess how school leaders (including governors) account for these.<sup>20</sup> The inspectorate reaches conclusions about the effectiveness of the school. They exercise this responsibility on behalf of parents and children and young people.

The inspectorate operates under a national framework and has powers to inspect both groups of schools (in MATs and federations) and individual schools, but does so proportionately based on assessment of progress and outcomes. It is tightly focused on education and all responsibilities for the inspection of children's social care functions have been removed. It is now credible and respected by the profession rather than feared. It is a lean and efficient organisation. It responds to complaints and whistle-blowing in a manner that is consistent and proportionate.

The inspectorate has moved towards a model that holds trusts and federations of schools to account for the quality of support and challenge they provide. The inspectorate reviews the model and impact of peer review and challenge in the trust or federation. It reviews the outcomes of the schools in the trust or federation every year on the basis of verifiable data. The criteria for this review are published and understood by the profession. In partnerships with consistently good outcomes and strong peer review that demonstrates impact, the inspectorate does not inspect the individual schools. However, schools can request to be inspected.

---

18 We are indebted to Emma Knights (Chief Executive, National Governors' Association) for her input in this section. We have also drawn from David Hopkins' four phases of development.

19 Open Public Service Network (2013) Empowering Parent, Improving Accountability. [http://www.thersa.org/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1529848/RSA\\_OPSN\\_EmpoweringParentsImprovingAccountability.pdf](http://www.thersa.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1529848/RSA_OPSN_EmpoweringParentsImprovingAccountability.pdf)

20 See technical paper on inspection, published separately.





Inspection reports judge how effectively school leaders drive ambition and make provision in their schools to ensure that all students and groups of students make progress in their learning and leave school with good qualifications, ready for life in modern Britain and in a global society. Inspection has no role in making judgements about processes other than the statutory health and safety and safeguarding processes. It also has no role in improvement. It is focused on outcomes.

The inspection training programme is well-established and highly regarded. School leaders routinely join inspection teams. Her Majesty's inspectors (HMI) are highly regarded and well trained. School leaders now perceive this role to be prestigious. Most HMIs are successful headteachers and principals who have decided to take on what is perceived to be a system leadership role. This has resulted in a significant move towards self-regulation and the profession taking ownership of its own standards.

### **Steps for school leaders to take**

Unleash greatness by building accountability in the school:

- Take ownership of accountability. In addition to the government's accountability measures, define performance measures that demonstrate whether the school is achieving its *own* vision and aims. Build capacity to use and interrogate data to create a rich picture. Focus on continuous improvement and doing things in a better way.
- Experiment with open data methodologies to make your data genuinely useful to parents and other community members.
- Develop teachers so that they are agents of their own accountability, committed to professional learning – improving their pedagogical skills, accessing and using best evidence, innovating, evaluating and improving learning. Aspire to having teachers initiate conversations about what needs to improve rather than middle or senior leaders.
- Free teachers from all unnecessary fear, uncertainty and doubt about inspection and/or myths about what they believe inspectors want to see – build their confidence to focus on developing professional knowledge and skill rather than a narrow compliance culture. Build a culture of learned resourcefulness, optimism and hopefulness.
- Develop governors' understanding of accountability measures – build their capacity as agents of accountability so that they are able to challenge you and tell the story of the school's performance and areas for improvement confidently.
- If peer review is not yet sufficiently robust in your partnership, then explicitly develop it or consider buying in or accessing a credible independent external adviser who can challenge you and the governing board on areas for development.

### **Steps for governing boards to take**

- Develop intelligent measures of performance for each of the school's strategic priorities and hold leaders to account for these.
- Ensure that external data is scrutinised and that there is a secure understanding of how the schools in the trust or federation are benchmarked.

### **Steps that ASCL will take**

- Work with the government to develop a slim, smart and stable intelligent accountability framework, including an agreed progress measure that will be in place for at least the term of government.
- Work with the Open Public Services Network (OPSN) to develop guidance on open data.
- Work with the inspectorate to define an inspection system and framework that is fit for purpose in a self-improving system with the features described in the vision.

### **Steps for government to take**

- Work with the profession to decide on a slim, smart and stable intelligent accountability framework with a small number of ambitious goals. Accountability measures should not over-rely on qualifications.
- Work with the inspectorate and profession to reform school inspection with the design features articulated in the vision.



# Element Five: Scrutiny, intervention and support

## Our vision

Scrutiny of performance of all schools is now undertaken by regional education jurisdictions with regional education commissioners responsible for all schools in an area. The in-coming government in 2015 worked quickly to rationalise, simplify and make more efficient the arrangements for scrutiny, intervention and support. The costly, fragmented bureaucratic infrastructures were streamlined and simplified in the interests of efficiency and coherence. Regional education jurisdictions are co-terminus with local authority boundaries in their region, but legally independent entities.

Primary legislation was passed to create the regional education jurisdictions and remove the statutory role of the director of children's services (DCS) in relation to standards and intervention in schools. Local authorities can still maintain schools but have been required by the new funding arrangements to support their maintained schools to federate in sustainable formal partnerships or leave the local authority join MATs.

The legislation consolidated school oversight and intervention. The performance of all schools regardless of structure (maintained, foundation, voluntary aided or controlled academy) is now overseen by the regional education commissioner. Given the number of schools involved, deputy education commissioners at sub-regional level work to each education commissioner to ensure local knowledge and relationships.

Each regional education jurisdiction has a governing board constituted by elected headteachers and a limited number of other appointed positions. Headteachers standing for election to the governing board of the regional education jurisdiction must meet specific criteria and hold their posts for a period of three years.

The appointment of a regional education commissioner is made by an Order in Council<sup>21</sup>, on the recommendation of the regional education jurisdiction's governing board. Thus, each education commissioner is an office holder under the Crown, accountable to Parliament and technically independent of the Department for Education or the Secretary of State. Each regional education commissioner is required to publish an annual report. They hold public office and are publicly accountable. There is a strong commitment to transparency – the system is prepared to open itself up to scrutiny, publishes open data and 'open sources' its processes, practices and ideas.

The Office of the Schools Commissioner has been reclassified as a non-ministerial department, therefore not an integral part of the DfE. It carries out its work at arm's length the Secretary of State, although the Secretary of State is ultimately responsible to Parliament for the activities of Office of the Education Commissioner. The National Education Commissioner oversees and co-ordinates the work of the regional education commissioners and can recommend to Parliament their removal in circumstances where an individual regional education commissioner is ineffective.

In a system of early intervention, where a school is judged not to be delivering an acceptable quality of education (on grounds of standards assessed over time, a breakdown in leadership or governance and/or safety of students or staff), the regional education commissioner issues a warning notice. Financial scrutiny is undertaken as part of this process with the Education Funding Agency (EFA), or successor body, advising the education commissioner.

If the school does not have the capacity to secure its own improvement, the regional education commissioner intervenes. Thus, the regional education commissioner has executive powers, unlike the inspectorate. Powers of intervention, removing the governing body and/or requiring a school to work in partnership with another named school or trust.

If the regional education commissioner exercises the power to require a school to enter into arrangements with another school, trust or education body, this either takes the form of a sponsor or partnership arrangement. Prospective sponsors or partners put forward proposals which are assessed. These arrangements are kept under review.

Support to schools, needing to secure improvements, is delivered by a range of providers but usually takes the form of school-to-school support delivered by MATs, teaching school alliances, national and local leaders of education. The designation of national and local leaders is undertaken by the regional education commissioner.

The regional education jurisdiction supported the transition of schools to formal partnerships. Applications to join or establish a MAT are made to the education commissioner. There is a robust due diligence process and the regional education commissioner assesses the trust's capability and capacity. The regional education commissioner also approves changes to open academies, including changes to age ranges, mergers between academies and changes to MAT arrangements.

As this system embedded, fewer and fewer schools were judged to require improvement or indeed, special measures. Where they were, there was stronger intervention and quicker exit.

The system improved.

---

21 Orders in Council are issued "by and with the advice of Her Majesty's Privy Council". Normally a representative of the government (a cabinet minister or the Lord President of the Council) drafts the order which is approved by the Queen. Orders in Council are the main method by which the government implements decisions that need legal force.



### **Steps for school leaders to take**

- Build system leadership capacity. Working with other schools in your area to agree and implement strategic approaches for addressing systemic challenges, such as succession planning, subject networks and school-to-school support, if these are not yet in place.
- Grow system leadership roles for example, national, local and specialist leaders of education.
- If you are not already in a teaching school alliance or other partnership, join or initiate one.
- If your school is maintained, work with your LA and peers to shape a future vision that can secure school-led collaboration and improvement.
- Ensure the success of emerging school-led structures like the Teaching Schools Council and headteacher boards by engaging actively with them.

### **Steps for governing boards to take**

- Ensure your institution is building system leadership capacity. Consider whether this should be a strategic priority for your organisation.

### **Steps that ASCL will take**

- Work with the government to take forward the legislative programme.
- Work with the DfE's system reform group to influence policy formation.
- Develop a suite of resources and guidance and ASCL PD programmes for system leaders.

### **Steps for government to take**

- Legislate to create regional education jurisdictions, remove statutory responsibilities of the DCS for educational standards and intervention, create the statutory regional education commissioner role and consolidate all powers of intervention in regional education commissioners.
- Create the Office of the Education Commissioner as a non-ministerial department to oversee and co-ordinate the work of the regional education commissioners.
- Amend the statutory guidance on schools causing concern in light of the above.



# Element Six: Strategic planning

## Our vision

School place needs are calculated by local authorities using a range of data and local intelligence. Where new schools are needed, the case is made to the education commissioner. Invitations to tender are published. Bids are judged by the regional education jurisdiction.

The duty to secure sufficient school places remains with local authorities. The duty to secure high-quality provision through the commissioning process sits with the education commissioner. The identification and transfer of land and planning applications are a matter for local authorities. The education commissioner deals only with the commissioning of schools through a competitive process that is predicated on quality. Bids for new school provision initiated by schools, trusts, parents or other parties/educational providers are assessed on the strength of their educational quality and organisational strength and resilience.

The education commissioner also has the power to terminate funding agreements and/or close schools where places significantly exceed demand, where provision is not sustainable or the quality of provision is below standard. Some excess capacity is retained in order to allow the effective operation of the supply of school places. The Schools Adjudicator assesses appeals on decisions concerning the establishment of new schools and the closure of existing schools.

Each local area has a locally agreed admissions framework that schools cannot opt out of, which does not interfere with the right of voluntary-aided schools or academies to be their own 'Admissions Authority'. All schools are subject to the Schools Adjudicator in relation to admissions.

The local authority working with the local clinical commissioning group (CCG) has responsibility for the assessment of children in relation to special educational needs. The Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for children with special educational needs is agreed, maintained and funded by the local authority.

The most important thing that schools can do to enable young people to find the right pathway into employment and further/higher education is to ensure that they get the best education, leave school with top qualifications and with the aspiration and mindset to succeed. However, an emerging body of research showed a significant mismatch between the aspirations of young people and the jobs available. Education is recognised as a strong driver of economic success. Thus, employers and education providers work together in the region. In the most innovative of these partnerships, there is a wide range of advice and guidance, including further and higher education information, employability schemes and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Local and national labour market information data is collated, interpreted and made public to students and parents through a number of channels.

## Steps for school leaders and governing boards

Support greatness in the system by:

- Assessing the capacity of your school/federation/trust to lead in the provision of new school places.

## Steps that ASCL will take

- Work with the DfE's system reform group to clarify the roles and responsibilities for the local authority and education commissioner and develop a framework for the commissioning of new schools.

## Steps for government to take

- Develop statutory guidance to clarify the 'place planning' duty of local authorities. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the local authority and the education commissioner – the former dealing with sufficiency and the latter with quality. This may require a change to primary legislation.
- Develop a framework for the commissioning of new schools.
- Keep the implementation of the special educational needs (SEN) reforms under review to ensure that children and young people with SEN are being served well by the system and achieve good outcomes.



# Postscript

We said in our foreword that we want a system in which all children and young people achieve. We set out a series of principles that underpin our blueprint. The blueprint is a re-imagining of education in England – a move away from prescription to a profession-led system that is evidence-informed, innovative and ethical.

The central premise of the blueprint is that deep and sustained reform of our education system will not come from outside the profession: it depends on us – the many, not just the few.

The blueprint is a vision written from the point of view of an imagined future – it is a narrative that looks back from this vantage point on the steps that we might have taken on our journey towards this future. Thus, it is both a chronicle and a plan. As a chronicle, we should assume some parts are misremembered – or at least set out more simply than the reality might be. As a plan, it is likely to be imperfect, making hard problems look too simple. It attempts to join some dots on the horizon that are perhaps converging and to mobilise the profession to confront problems that have not yet been successfully addressed.

Leading the change will involve a mindset – our education system is not composed of a series of givens by those outside the profession, to which we are required to respond and by which we are constrained. Rather our leadership must be active, passionate, ethical and driven by our collective dedication and effort. We need to break the “mind-forged manacles” that chain us to accept certain beliefs or ways of doing things.

## **Leora Cruddas**

ASCL Director of Policy



# Appendix A: Architecture of a self-improving system

## Schools in sustainable formal partnerships

Multi-academy trusts or federations

### Profession-led structures

*Enabling the profession to set its own standards, enhance professional learning, lead the system and speak authoritatively to government. There are strong fraternal relationships among these profession-led bodies.*

**College of Teaching:** Led by a peer-elected board, the professional body for teachers. The Royal College of Teaching is responsible for setting teacher standards and enhancing teachers' professional learning

**Leadership Foundation:** Led by a peer-elected board, the leadership foundation is responsible for setting headteacher and leadership standards and licensing a suite of accredited leadership programmes.

**National Teaching Schools Council and teaching school alliances:** The Teaching Schools Council is the profession-led body representing all teaching schools across England promoting an inclusive school-led system.

### Regulation, inspection and evidence

*Independent of the profession and government.*

**Qualifications regulator:** A non-ministerial government department led by an independent board ensures world-class qualifications and sets the standards for awarding organisations to meet when they design, deliver and award regulated qualifications. Appointment of the Chief regulator is made by Order of Council. The Chief regulator works with government and the profession to deliver qualification reform.

**Inspectorate:** A non-ministerial government department led by an independent board, the inspectorate acts on behalf of both parents and politicians. The inspectorate reports directly to parliament in relation to the quality of educational provision. Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is made by Order of Council.

**Evidence centre for education:** Synthesises and interprets research and evidence and advises government on evidence-based policy and the profession on evidence-based practice. Therefore has strong relationships with the Department for Education and with the profession-led bodies.

### Scrutiny, intervention and support

*The middle tier between education provision and government – independent of government but reporting to parliament.*

**Regional education jurisdictions:** Whose boundaries are coterminous with local authorities and with elected boards of headteachers and a limited number of appointed positions. Regional education commissioners: responsible for scrutiny of and where necessary intervention in all schools in the area. Appointment of the commissioner is made by Order of Council on the recommendation of the regional education jurisdiction board.

**Office of the Education Commissioner:** Reclassified as a non-ministerial government department therefore not an integral part of the DfE - carries out its work at arm's length from the Secretary of State, although the Secretary of State would be ultimately responsible to Parliament for the activities of Office of the Education Commissioner. Education commissioner oversees and co-ordinates the work of the regional education commissioners and can recommend to Parliament their removal in circumstances where an individual regional education commissioner is ineffective.

### Government

*Accountable to the electorate - sets the policy framework and ensures high standards of education, ensuring that the system serves all equally well.*

**Secretary of State:** The senior political postholder responsible for the work of the Department for Education.

**Department for Education and Permanent Secretary:** The most senior civil servant, charged with running the department on a day-to-day basis.



## Appendix B: Members of the external reference group

**Vicky Beer** Chair, Teaching Schools Council

**Neil Carberry** Director for Employment and Skills, CBI

**Tom Clarke** Chair, FASNA

**Jon Coles** Chief Executive, ULT

**Ty Goddard** Co-founder of the Education Foundation

**Frank Green** Schools Commissioner

**Joe Hallgarten** Director of Education, RSA

**Chris Husbands** Director, Institute of Education

**Kathryn James** Director of Education, NAHT

**Dame Sue John** Director, London Leadership Strategy

**James Kempton** Associate Director, Centre Forum

**Emma Knights** Chief Executive, NGA

**Steve Lancashire** Chief Executive, Reach2

**Heath Monk** Chief Executive, Future Leaders

**Steve Munby** Chief Executive, CfBT

**Dame Alison Peacock** Executive Headteacher, Wroxham Teaching School Alliance

**William Richardson** General Secretary, HMC

**Sue Robinson** Vice Chair, BELMAS

**Marc Rowland** Deputy Director, National Education Trust

**Richard Sheriff** Director, Red Kite Teaching School Alliance

**Jonathan Simons** Director of Education, Policy Exchange

**Charlie Taylor** Chief Executive, NCTL

**Charlotte Vere** General Secretary, GSA

**Nick Weller** Chair, Bradford Partnership and IAA

**Sue Williamson** Chief Executive, SSAT



Association of School and College Leaders

130 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PG

0116 299 1122

[blue.print@ascl.org.uk](mailto:blue.print@ascl.org.uk)

[www.ascl.org.uk](http://www.ascl.org.uk)