



Pearson

A life of learning: Priorities for an incoming government

Summary

Pearson is a global digital learning company with expertise in educational content. Our experience and understanding spans all stages of an educational lifetime; from early years, through school, college and university, to the workplace and continuous adult learning.

Education policy, quite rightly, forms a central part of any general election campaign. With all of the main parties committed to extra funding for schools, post-16 and adult learning, Pearson asks an incoming government to consider the following policy priorities:

An inclusive curriculum, with choice post-16

- Continued progress on improving standards and developing curriculum
- Three pathway choices at age 16 (academic; career focussed; occupational)

A culture of lifelong learning

- Accessible learning, supporting careers of the future
- Investment to increase participation in adult learning across all qualification levels

Equitable education investment

- Fair funding across all stages of education: schools, FE, and HE
- Investment to support flexible modes of learning

Improvement in the working lives of teachers and lecturers

- Encouraging digital innovation to support effective teaching and reduce workload
- Access to high quality Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Encourage education's export potential

- Recognising the international value of Britain's education system and qualifications
- Government, business, and education providers working in partnership to deliver shared benefits for the UK economy

An inclusive curriculum, with choice post-16

All phases of curricula should evolve in order to:

- equip young people for jobs that are changing, or have not yet been created;
- keep pace and meaningfully respond to a dynamic and fast-changing labour market; and
- equip young people with the core knowledge, skills, and 'real world' experiences so they can adapt to the changes that are being driven by the still nascent potential of AI and robotics.¹

We believe in the importance of recognising diversity in curriculum programmes and teaching materials. Students should be exposed to content reflective of all parts of society. Being able to see themselves in materials supports student engagement and helps them better relate to what is being taught. Providing stretch for all students is also key to help them maximise their potential.

Accountability measures should reflect the wider benefits to young people of a rich curriculum, and the development of broader behaviours and skills. Exam outcomes are important, but they need to be benchmarked within the wider school context.²

There is clear evidence that some students thrive from more vocational pathways at KS4.³ We must ensure that the 16-19 phase continues to offer young people a range of options for a purely subject-based curriculum (A Levels), a career-focussed route (notably BTEC), and more specialised technical options that lead into specific occupations (T Levels and Apprenticeships). Maintaining three quality pathways will allow sufficient choice for young people at 16, creating a range of options to enable them to go on to university, a higher or degree apprenticeship, or in to skilled employment.⁴

A culture of lifelong learning

The 40-year career is gone, replaced by lifelong learning and diverse career paths; the talent economy has arrived and the traditional, linear career path is a thing of the past. Learners are moulding education into what they need and what fits with modern lifestyles. Opportunities to support a lifetime of learning need to be provided in a way that is flexible and adaptable, ensuring accessibility for all.⁵

To achieve this, the full capabilities of digital learning must be realised. Digital and virtual learning is expected to be the new normal in the next decade: people are using technology

¹ [Pearson Global Learning Survey](#), 2019 and [Future of Skills](#), Pearson & Nesta, 2017.

² Pearson response to Ofsted's 'Education inspection framework 2019: inspecting the substance of education' 2019

³ Department for Education, [Non-GCSE qualifications in England: key stage 4 entries and absence and exclusions outcomes](#), 2019.

⁴ Pearson response to DfE's 'Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England', 2019

⁵ [Pearson Global Learning Survey](#), 2019.

in every aspect of their lives and they are now embracing it as part of their education. From online degrees, artificial intelligence (AI) tools and smart devices, people see the future of learning made easier and more engaging with technology.

Through flexible and adaptable provision, participation in adult learning at level 2, 3 and above must be increased. This should be achieved by incentivising learners through offering lifelong learner accounts, and investing in adult learning as part of the further education sector.⁶

Equitable education investment

A fairly funded education system is vital to meet the present and future needs of learners and, ultimately, our economy. Currently, inconsistencies and inequalities exist that have the potential to impact, detrimentally, quality and learner choice. For example, 16-19 funding has fallen, across all provider types, by twice the size of cuts to school funding over the last decade.⁷

As a proportion of GDP, public expenditure on training in Great Britain was among the lowest of the G7 countries between 2004-2011 with only Japan at comparably low levels.⁸ Creating a system that is sustainable, and that supports further education in particular, will lead to productivity gains by addressing skills gaps, skills shortages and skills under-utilisation. This in turn will provide a clear return on investment for the public purse through economic benefits.⁹

And by evenly distributing funding across all levels, and creating mechanisms that deliver positive outcomes, the stock of the system rises. Vocational education will then begin to be held in the same regard as academic routes by employers, learners and society alike.

Improving the working lives of teachers and lecturers

The issue of workload and retention is complex and involves a range of factors, including length of time in the profession. However, teachers are positive about the impact that technology can have, and the majority believe that digital learning will enhance their role.¹⁰ They also believe that digital learning helps increase student engagement. Digital technology also has the potential to reduce workload associated with assessment.

There is a shared responsibility, between education technology providers and government, to develop tools that reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on teachers and frees them to teach.

Teachers and lecturers need increased access to high quality and flexible CPD. For example, they need support, training and resources founded on well-researched pedagogy, to equip

⁶ Pearson response to DfE's 'Higher Technical Education' consultation, 2019

⁷ EPI, [16-19 education funding](#), 2019

⁸ Social Mobility Commission, [The adult skills gap](#), 2019

⁹ Commission on Sustainable Learning, Report, 2019

¹⁰ Ibid.

them with a deeper and more technical understanding of assessment. They also need the tools to plan their curriculum, deliver high quality formative assessments, mark them, and use the insights to inform their teaching.¹¹

Encouraging education's export potential

As Britain looks to future trading relationships, education needs to form part of discussions. British educational standards remain a benchmark for countries across the globe; and there is an appetite which should, provided support, continue to grow. Latest figures put the value of the UK's education exports at almost £20bn.¹²

Countries across all continents look to, and trust, British education. Technological developments provide multiple channels and opportunities to export our country's educational expertise.

We call on any new government to actively support the education sector as an important export product for the UK. This includes the recognition of the export revenue the products bring and the way they attract students to UK universities. The influence the UK education system has globally, and its importance to the UK soft power, needs to be nurtured and encouraged.

About Pearson

Pearson is a global digital learning company with expertise in educational content and assessment, and a range of teaching and learning services powered by technology. Our mission is to help people make progress in their lives through access to better learning. We believe that learning opens up opportunities, creating fulfilling careers and better lives.

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¹¹ *Testing the Water*, Pearson & LKMCo, 2017

¹² DfE, [UK revenue from education related exports and transnational education activity in 2016](#), 2019