NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

Briefing

Area Based Reviews

The Department for Education (DfE) recently published a document entitled *Reviewing Post-16 Education and Institutions*: www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-training-institutions-review.

This document sets out how the Government will support a restructure of the post-16 education and training sector through a series of area-based reviews (ABRs).

The DfE and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) are currently facilitating a programme of ABRs to review 16+ provision in every area. There will be 40 ABRs roughly coinciding with the 40 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The DfE envisages completion by September 2017 and implementation by 2020.

Each review will cover both further education (FE) and sixth-form colleges and will be able to include other providers where they agree. The availability and quality of wider 16+ provision including school sixth forms and higher education institutes (HEIs) will also be considered during the analysis phase.

The Government states that each ABR shall *'establish the appropriate set of institutions to offer high quality provision based on the current and future needs of learners and employers within the local area'*.

While each ABR should be different to take account of local circumstances, the Government has a clear vision of what this process will mean for the FE sector:

'Identification of the scope to make efficiencies including removing duplication in curriculum, reducing management and administration costs, making more efficient use of the land and buildings controlled by the sector, and enabling more efficient and effective use of technology both in terms of teaching, support and assessment, and back office systems.'

'A local learner offer that meets each area's educational and economic needs.'

Governing bodies will be responsible for deciding whether to accept recommendations relating to their institutions. If recommendations are accepted, individual institutions will be responsible for implementing changes following a period of consultation. However, for those institutions that do not accept the recommendations, the DfE has hinted at the need for 'intervention' where those institutions are not sustainable in their current format, and a review of their financial position.

However, the NASUWT notes that the DfE has already clearly stated within this document the direction of travel in terms of the recommendations: *'We will need to move towards fewer, often larger, more resilient and efficient providers.'*

The NASUWT is concerned about the Government's proposals. In particular, the NASUWT will be raising the following issues at the ABRs in relation to FE college members:

- the impact upon learners of rationalisation and increased specialisation, particularly with regard to hard-to-reach groups and those in rural communities;
- the impact upon the jobs of teaching staff should rationalisation lead to fewer, larger colleges;
- the predominance of narrow economic needs as the basis for local provision;
- the failure to include school sixth forms, private training providers, free schools and other institutions within the scope of the review;
- the focus upon further efficiencies in a sector which has already seen public funding fall substantially since 2010.

The NASUWT has secured engagement with the ABRs and will be attending the union meetings before each of the steering committees. Through these meetings, the NASUWT has promoted the value of further and adult education. It is a crucial part of our society and economy and deserves proper investment.

The NASUWT will continue to engage with the ABRs. Currently, no review has reached the stage of making final proposals in relation to FE colleges but it would appear that any recommendations will be based on the criteria below:

- strategic plans to reflect the LEP and local/combined authority skills priorities;
- financial forecasts to include a surplus of between three and five per cent per year (minimum);
- borrowing reduced to 40% of turnover;
- estate utilisation to be increased to 66%;
- average class size to be no less than 16;
- staff costs to be no more than 60% of 'turnover' (max 65%);
- non-staff costs to be no more than 40% of 'turnover';
- quality to be at least 'good';
- apprenticeships to grow in line with the Government's targets;
- students with special needs to have at least the same levels of provision and service as prior to the review.

It is likely that the ABRs will recommend collaborative solutions such as mergers with other FE colleges or sixth-form colleges.