

## **Department for Education Consultation: A world-class teaching profession**

### **Response from Sixth Form Colleges' Association (SFCA)**

The Sixth Form Colleges' Association is the representative organisation for the 93 official or 'designated' Sixth Form Colleges across England. Between them, Sixth Form Colleges employ approximately 9,500 teaching staff (full-time and part-time) and educate over 150,000 16-19 year olds each year.

It is absolutely vital for teachers in Sixth Form Colleges to be able to access the same level of high quality professional development as teachers in schools. Sixth Form Colleges should therefore be in scope for the proposed College of Teaching. As the consultation states, the further education sector benefits from its own independent professional body - the Education Training Foundation (ETF). However, only the governance of Sixth Form Colleges falls within the ETF's remit so this reinforces the need for Sixth Form Colleges to benefit from the College of Teaching.

We share the Government's view that teaching professionals should have access to ongoing, high quality professional development opportunities throughout their teaching career. There are new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning constantly emerging, as well as a host of curriculum changes that will affect teachers in the next few years. It is therefore essential to embrace the notion that teaching should be a 'learning profession'. The consultation states that existing teaching school networks will be invited to bid for additional funding to initially develop professional development opportunities, however, we are concerned that the current networks do not have the capacity to extend their reach to more providers in the post-16 sector. Further clarity is required regarding the type and level of professional development the teaching school networks will deliver. We hope that professional development will span from initial teacher training right through to leadership development opportunities.

Alongside teaching school networks, there are alternative models of professional development delivery which should be built on. For example, many Sixth Form Colleges have developed their own highly successful professional development models through existing regional or inter-regional structures. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the merits of these regional models further to inform the proposals set out in the consultation.

In principle, we support the development of a new professional independent body aimed at raising the status of the teaching profession. Teachers play a crucial role in the development of young people - they motivate, challenge and inspire the future generation, therefore we hope the new body instils public confidence in the excellent work they do. Similar to other sector professional bodies in dentistry and medicine, we

see merit in teachers as the the driving force to monitor and evaluate professional standards and identify appropriate professional development – acting almost as a self-improvement agency. The independence from Government and any political involvement will enable teachers to take ownership of their own professional development needs and will help to improve the overall quality of teaching and raise aspirations within the profession.

There is little information in the consultation on the time frame that the Government is working towards to establish the new body and what functions the Government envisage the new membership body will take over (particularly from the National College for Teaching and Leadership). Further clarity is required on what the membership criteria will be for the new body - will it be individual teachers or can the body permit schools and colleges to apply for membership on behalf of their workforce? Sixth Form Colleges would not support a mandatory requirement for their teaching staff to become members of the new body. Membership should be on a voluntary basis which we believe teachers will take up once the proposed body builds momentum and gains credibility.

The consultation states that an expert group will create a new standard for teachers' professional development which will complement the existing teachers' standards. It is important to note that Sixth Form Colleges have their own teachers' standards linked to the Sixth Form College pay and appraisal framework which needs to be considered when developing the new standard for teachers' professional development.

**Q1. What are the greatest impediments teachers and schools face in regularly undertaking high-quality professional development?**

The two main impediments teachers and Sixth Form Colleges are facing is the reduction in Sixth Form College funding and limited time available for teachers to undertake high-quality professional development.

Sixth Form Colleges have been hit by steep funding cuts since 2010, resulting in college CPD/training budgets being cut. The SFCA funding impact survey indicates that 59% of Sixth Form Colleges reduced their staff training budget last year. Many Sixth Form Colleges are becoming involved in collaborative CPD with local schools and colleges to share costs and expertise in niche areas of professional development.

It is difficult to balance and plan effective professional development for teachers without disrupting teaching in the classroom. If the Government is committed to the 'learning profession' ideal outlined in the consultation, funding and resources need to be invested to enable colleges to release teachers from their teaching duties without having a negative impact on student outcomes.

**Q2. To what extent, and how, do teachers currently evaluate their professional development? What would support more rigorous evaluation?**

Teachers currently evaluate their professional development needs through their appraisal process and identify if they have reached their short and long term professional development objectives. Colleges have their own evaluation methods including Professional Development Committees that review and monitor professional development courses attended by staff members and their overall impact on student outcomes.

To support rigorous evaluation, the new professional body could introduce a benchmarking mechanism whereby teachers can monitor and compare their own professional development to other teaching professionals in similar roles.

**Q3. Where should the balance of responsibility lie between teachers, schools and Government for ensuring that appropriate professional development is undertaken? How, in the longer term, might responsibility sit with a new independent professional body?**

It is important to identify the different types of professional development teachers undertake as this will determine where the balance of responsibility should lie. Currently, a large number of teachers are undertaking professional development to keep abreast of new qualifications the Government has introduced/is introducing and many require training to deliver these new qualifications (e.g. teaching the new linear A levels). The balance of responsibility in this case should lie with the Government to provide the appropriate professional development for teachers.

Professional development for teachers in areas such as innovative teaching practices, sharing of good practice amongst peers and sharpening skills set all help inform methods of teaching in the classroom as well as help with career progression. Responsibility therefore should lie with teachers to take on a more proactive approach and identify appropriate professional development for their needs. However, we believe that the new independent professional body, schools and colleges should provide a mechanism whereby access to professional development opportunities are readily available to enable teachers to take control of their own learning.

**Q4. Despite the growing reach of the Teaching Schools network, are there areas where coverage of schools would remain a concern? How could any gaps be addressed?**

The level of engagement with teaching school networks varies in the Sixth Form College sector. Some Sixth Form Colleges have found that teachers benefit greatly from peer to peer support and high quality training on

teaching and leadership through partnership work with local schools and universities.

But there are 'cold spots' in teaching school networks across England which urgently need addressing. Many schools and colleges based in rural areas are unable to effectively participate in their local teaching school network. Cost of travel together with staff cover expenses can put a financial burden on these providers to engage with teaching school networks. Greater investment in online resources, webinars and other technology would help to engage with these hard to reach providers.

It is important to point out that some teaching school networks provide professional development opportunities which may not be relevant to Sixth Form Colleges. Provider needs based on qualification type and student intake should be considered when developing the professional development offer.

**Q5. What should the funding criteria be for Teaching Schools wishing to draw on the new funding pot for professional development? Should there, for example, be a requirement for Teaching Schools to work with a predetermined proportion of schools which are not already "good" or "outstanding"?**

Teaching school networks should work with all types of providers regardless of their Ofsted status. The opportunity to access professional development should be open to all teachers on an ongoing basis to promote continuous development.

If current teaching school networks will be used to deliver professional development as outlined in the consultation, then the quality of the current teaching schools networks should be comprehensively evaluated. The evaluation should focus on the outcomes of each professional development course and evidence of how the network has raised the quality of teaching among its members.

**Q6. Will teachers benefit from an online platform that collates and presents evidence based best practice?**

We welcome the proposal for a national online platform that collates evidence based best practice. Peer to peer learning is an integral part of teaching and development, and a national online platform that pools research of best practice in a central location will help disseminate work more widely and effectively for teachers to access in their own time.

We question how the resources on the online platform will be quality assured and what the criteria will be for current best practice to feature on it. Furthermore, innovative teaching methods can become out of date fairly quickly, therefore the online platform should be regularly updated to alert users of the latest trends in the profession.

**Q7. In addition to the proposals outlined here, what other approaches would help schools to remove barriers and incentivise effective professional development for teachers?**

In line with the Government's aspiration for teaching to be a 'learning profession', a clear progression framework for teachers should be developed which links qualifications recognised by the teaching profession and the wider public to a teacher's professional development plan.

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