

Proposals to amend Ofsted Further Education and Skills inspections

Sir Michael Wilshaw, the new Ofsted Chief Inspector has announced his intention 'to achieve a step change in ambition and expectation across the board'. As part of his proposals for the reform of inspections, he has singled out 'those colleges that are not yet good' for special attention. Extracts from the recently published consultation document 'A good education for all' are outlined below. The changes proposed are expected to be put into place with effect from 1 September 2012:

- 'Outstanding' providers must have 'outstanding' teaching, learning and assessment. *'The current inspection framework makes it clear that inspectors are likely to judge a provider as outstanding if the quality of provision, including teaching, learning and assessment, is at least good. Teaching, learning and assessment is the area that has the greatest impact on the progress learners make. We therefore propose that to be judged an outstanding provider, 'teaching, learning and assessment' must also be judged as 'outstanding'.*
- The current grade 3 'satisfactory' judgement will be removed and replaced with a new grade 3 'requires improvement' judgement. *'This change will raise expectations of weaker providers and will support the proposal that the expected grade for all providers should be 'good'. We do not intend changing the grade boundary between 'good' and 'satisfactory' when we implement the change of the grade. 'Good' will continue to set high expectations. We believe, however, that the proposed change will encourage providers judged to be less than 'good' to bring about rapid improvement. The grade 4 category will remain as 'inadequate'. A provider judged to be 'inadequate' will be deemed to require full re-inspection in line with current practice.'*
- Providers given the grade 'requires improvement' will be subject to re-inspection earlier than is currently the case. *'Ofsted is proposing to re-inspect all providers judged as 'requires improvement' within 12–18 months of their last inspection. The inspection will be a full inspection under part 8 of the Education Act 2006 and will consider the overall effectiveness of the provider. These providers will not receive a monitoring inspection.*
- The number of times a provider can be deemed as 'requires improvement' is limited to two consecutive inspections before being deemed to be judged 'inadequate'. *'Being 'satisfactory' is clearly not good enough. Ofsted intends to raise expectations by implementing a new approach. If, at its third consecutive inspection, a provider has not made sufficient progress to be judged 'good' it will be judged 'inadequate'. For those providers judged as 'satisfactory' before 31 August 2012, we intend counting this inspection as their first 'requires improvement' judgement for the purpose of implementing this proposal'.*
- Inspections will take place without notice to the provider. *'This will allow inspectors to see what providers are really like and will provide reassurance to learners, employers and parents that inspections are as robust as they can be. Ofsted currently undertakes many unannounced inspections each year in schools and is fully aware of the operational challenges this can present for those we are inspecting'.*
- Providers will be required to present an anonymised summary of the outcomes of the most recent performance management of all teachers, trainers and assessors. *'High-quality teaching, learning and assessment make a significant difference to the future life chances of young people and adult learners. It is one of the most important factors in determining whether a provider is 'good' or 'outstanding'. Senior staff in provider organisations should use performance management and professional development to increase the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment so that it raises standards and increases engagement of learners. This will not be reported in the inspection report but will be used, together with other evidence, as a line of enquiry when determining whether senior*

managers and governing bodies are showing strong leadership and management skills and using performance management effectively to assist in the drive for improvement’.

No pressure there then.

Changes in apprenticeship numbers

The Data Service’s Statistical First Release (SFR) shows that in the first quarter of the 2011/12 year the total number of apprentices in all age categories increased to 665,900. This is an increase of 35.5% compared to the same period the previous year. Within this total:

- The number of apprentices aged 18 and under increased to 203,100. This is an increase of 9% compared to the same time the previous year.
- The numbers of apprentices aged 19-24 increased to 251,900. This is an increase of 19% compared to the same time the previous year.
- The numbers of apprentices aged 25-49 increased to 181,200. This is an increase of 113% compared to the same time the previous year.
- The numbers of apprentices aged 50+ increased to 29,700. This is an increase of 234% compared to the same time the previous year.

The above figures demonstrate that the biggest overall increase in apprenticeships is for those aged 25+. However, the biggest relative increase in apprenticeships is in respect of those aged 50+.

As it happens, I’m well over 50, so after I’ve finished writing this, I’m off to my local apprenticeship hub to try to sign up as an apprentice cheese maker. I’ve always wanted to make cheese. If I’m successful, I’ll be starting my own business in cheese making. I shall call my new business ‘Cheeses of Nazareth’. Blessed are the cheese makers.

National Audit Office (NAO) review of Apprenticeships

The NAO has now released its report in respect of the delivery of apprenticeships. Findings within the report include the following:

- *‘There has been a rapid increase in the number of apprentices. However too much of this expansion has been targeted at low level qualifications for those who are already working in sectors such as business administration and retail, and that apprenticeships are having a limited impact on the jobs market’.*
- *‘There are many examples of providers using apprenticeship funding to train employees who would have been trained on the job anyway’.*
- *‘Half of the increase in apprentices created between 2006/07 and 2010/11 was among the over-25s, and most of this has been in just 10 occupations’.*

Against this the NAO found that:

- *‘Adult apprenticeships offer good value for money overall, producing an economic return of £18 for every £1 spent’.* (This figure was significantly less than the figure of £28 per £1 spent claimed by BIS).
- *‘Apprentices and inspectors are generally positive about the quality of apprenticeships. 91% of apprentices say that they are generally satisfied with their training’.*
- *‘The apprenticeship programme is well co-ordinated and is better managed than a previous government programme, Train to Gain’.*

The NAO’s main concerns were in respect of the quality of apprenticeship programmes. These were as follows:

- *'In 2010/11, 34,600 (19%) of apprenticeships lasted for less than six months. Although apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds will soon be required to run for at least a year, concerns remain about the quality of short apprenticeships for adults'.*
- *'Most apprenticeships in England are at a lower level than those offered by other countries. For example, only 33 per cent of apprenticeships are at an advanced level (equivalent to two A levels), compared with 60 per cent in France'.*
- *'Payments to providers are not based on sufficiently robust information on the cost of the training provision, and so the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) do not know the extent to which providers may be earning surpluses or incurring losses on some types of apprenticeship'.*

The NAO report concluded by saying that:

- *'BIS should set its sights higher in order to get better value from the £0.5 billion and rising now spent on adult apprenticeships each year'*
- *'More should be done 'to target resources more effectively, confirm the training provided is in addition to what would have been provided without public support, and make sure that the funding system is informed by robust information on the cost of delivery'.*

Meanwhile, the BIS Select Committee has now begun to receive evidence for its own inquiry into apprenticeships.

Minimum Apprenticeship duration

The SFA has published a statement on the minimum duration of apprenticeships. The statement contains the following elements:

- *'The minimum duration of 12 months for Apprenticeships for those aged 16-18 will commence in August 2012. The 12 month minimum duration will apply to all new starts from 1 August 2012 onwards. From 1st August this requirement will become effective and will be described in the 2012/13 funding rules that the Skills Funding Agency expects to publish by the end of March 2012. In announcing this, it is also our expectation that all training organisations and employers start to implement this with immediate effect.'*
- *'Whilst the introduction of the new funding rule does not formally apply to those already in learning prior to August, the SFA 'strongly encourages' all training organisations and employers to offer all existing apprentices aged 16-18 a 12- month minimum programme wherever it is possible to do so'*
- *'The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is currently reviewing the position with regard to a minimum duration time for those apprentices aged 19 and over. Once the review is completed, the SFA will ensure that adequate notice is given should any changes to current funding rules be called for by government ministers'*
- *'NAS will consider ways of establishing 'a more robust link' between the duration of an Apprenticeship set by the framework developers and the programmes delivered by training organisations and employers'.*

Statistical First Release (SFR) data on post-16 participation and achievement

The Data Service has published information on learner participation and achievement for post-16 education for the first quarter of 2011/12. This data that shows that of men aged 19 to 64 and women aged 19 to 59:

- 77.7 per cent were qualified to at least Level 2
- 58.8 per cent were qualified to at least Level 3
- 37.6 per cent were qualified to Level 4 and above

- The total number of learners participating in government-funded further education, excluding schools, fell by 8.0 per cent to 4,264,900. (This was due to a 10.7 per cent fall in adult learners).
- 699,400 learners participated on a Community Learning course.

‘FE Choices’ replaces Framework for Excellence (FfE)

The FE Choices website (which is hosted on the Data Service’s website) has replaced the FfE as the main source of information on the quality of provision of colleges and other providers offering academic and vocational subjects, apprenticeships, and all other on and off the job training to those aged 16+. Data on individual provider performance is published annually and includes information on such things as:

- *Success Rates*: How many of those recruited by the provider pass the qualification they start
- *Learner Destinations*: The numbers of learners and trainees who moved into further learning, or found a job as a result of completing their course
- *Learner Satisfaction*: The views of learners who studied or trained with the provider
- *Employer Satisfaction*: The views of employers about the service they have received and the quality of training the provider has delivered to their staff.

Information about the performance of school sixth forms is published separately via a link from the ‘FE Choices’ website to school achievement and attainment tables. Information about the performance of universities can be found via a link from the website to the ‘Unistats’ website.

Where the data is sufficiently robust, a provider’s overall scores are published to show how well the organisation is performing compared to the performance of similar types of organisations. If an overall score for a provider can’t be published, as much relevant information as possible is published. The latest Ofsted Inspection grade is also included, giving the date the organisation was inspected and a link from the ‘FE Choices’ website to the Ofsted website so that the latest inspection report can be accessed.

Inaccuracies data published on the ‘FE Choices’ website

Meanwhile, presumably in a development designed to boost the confidence of prospective users, it has emerged that there were a significant number of errors in the data originally published on the ‘FE Choices’ website. Apparently, these errors have since been corrected without the knowledge of ministers or senior civil servants at the SFA. Thus far, it seems that more than 60 sets of data have been amended. Around half of these amendments have involved a decrease in published scores. This has given rise to concerns that some website users may have been given a misleading picture of how some colleges and providers are performing in relation to their main competitors.

A spokesperson for the SFA said. ‘It has been brought to our attention that some figures for the learner satisfaction indicator have changed since the original release’. The spokesperson went on to say ‘We are investigating this issue and will provide more information in due course.’

You might also want to take a look at www.conjunctivitis.com. This really is a site for sore eyes.

Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) Commission on Youth Unemployment

The ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment, chaired by David Miliband MP, has published a report entitled ‘Youth unemployment: The crisis we cannot afford’.

The report deals with the cost of youth unemployment, which the Commission estimates being in the region of £4.8 billion in 2012, which incidentally is a figure greater than the entire budget for 16-19 further education provision in England. The report argues that the government is not doing enough to help young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and goes on to criticise the government’s

apprenticeship scheme and other government programmes designed to tackle youth unemployment. The report also argues that 'the Youth Contract and Work Programme will support only a small proportion of the people who need help'. Some of the key points made in the report include the following:

- While some apprenticeship programmes are of high quality there is 'significant variation' in quality.
- Some employers argue that the 'indiscriminate expansion' of apprenticeships is 'damaging the apprenticeship brand'.
- Apprenticeship opportunities for 16-18 year olds are limited in supply and the main growth in apprenticeship starts is in respect of those aged 25+.
- Many companies were placing existing, older employees on to apprenticeship programmes as a method of funding their 'on the job' training.
- There was 'poor awareness' surrounding the apprenticeship pathway. The report claims that 'too few teachers understand the route, or promote it to young people or their parents'.
- Many vocational courses are 'of limited value' to young people, often encouraging them to enrol on 'consecutive short courses which offer little value'.

The Commission report concludes with a proposal for an entirely new programme for young people, called 'Job Ready', which would help young NEETs back into education or work. The new programme would, of course, be delivered by voluntary sector organisations in their local communities. In addition to the provision of training, there would be incentives such as a financial allowance, subsidised transport or housing support, to help ensure that young people stayed on the programme.

Replacement for Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA's) is inadequate

Barnardo's has recently published the findings of a research study entitled 'Staying the course: Disadvantaged young people's experiences in the first term of the 16-19 Bursary Fund'.

The study claims that:

- The bursary system that has replaced EMA's in England is 'inadequate, inconsistent and under-funded'.
- The abolition of the EMA is 'discouraging poor students from staying on in further education because they are unable to pay for everyday expenses such as food, travel and books'.
- The government 'risks losing significant number of young people to long term unemployment unless the system is re-examined and fixed'.

For those not familiar with the 16-18 Bursary Fund, it guarantees £1,200 for those young people in care or who have been in care, and those claiming Disability Living Allowance, Employment Support Allowance or claiming income support. Any remaining funds are allocated to students at the discretion of the college or other training provider.

Nick Clegg announces additional funding to help 16 and 17 year old NEET's

The Deputy Prime Minister has announced yet another new programme to help 16 and 17 year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The government has allocated a further £126 million to help more than 55,000 young people who have no GCSE's at grades A* to C. The new scheme will offer employers up to £2,200 to help a young person back into full time employment, education or training.

The announcement comes in the same week that it was revealed that more than one third of young people with a statement of special educational needs at age 16 were not in any form of employment, education or training at the age of 18.

Further rise in youth unemployment

Meanwhile, in the three months up to December 2011, data released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed youth unemployment rose by 22,000 to a total of 1.04 million. The unemployment rate for people aged 16 to 24 has now increased to 22.2 per cent, which is an increase of 0.3 percentage points from the previous quarter. The overall figure decreases to 731,000 if young people who are in full-time education, but who are also looking for work, are removed.

Reduction in vocational qualifications available for 14-16 year olds

Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education has announced that, with effect from 2014, the number of vocational qualifications available to be studied by 14-16 year olds will be reduced from around 3000 down to 125. Of this 125, only 70 will count towards a school's GCSE performance in the main published league tables (i.e. the school's performance in respect of the numbers of pupils gaining 5 GCSE's grade A*-C, including Mathematics and English). The reduction in the number of vocational qualifications on offer is in direct response to a recommendation in the recent Wolf report which stated that 'although high quality vocational qualifications were a very valuable option for some 15 and 16 year olds, schools should not be allowed to enter pupils for inappropriate vocational qualifications simply in order to boost their performance in school league tables'.

'Employer Ownership of Skills' Pilot

The Prime Minister, David Cameron recently opened the bidding for funds from the new 'Ownership of Skills' pilot. Employers can now directly bid for up to £250 million of direct public funding to enable them to deliver 'innovative apprenticeships and vocational training'. Employers can deliver programmes directly and do not need to involve colleges and training providers.

As part of the initiative, the Prime Minister also announced the second round of bidding for the higher apprenticeship fund. Total funding available for new higher apprenticeships is in the region of £6 million. Priority will be given to programmes aimed at developing new schemes in the aerospace, energy and renewable technologies industries. The Prime Minister also confirmed that small firms would be offered a £1,500 incentive to hire their first 16-18 apprentice.

Commenting on the Employer Ownership of Skills pilot, Charles Mayfield, chairman of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) said, 'I believe that to improve both the quality and sustainability of vocational skills, we need a shift in the balance of power away from government and towards employers'.

Employers are also to be given direct access to NHS funds in order that to ensure that surgical operations can be carried out on employers premises and without having to use NHS doctors and nurses. Hold on a minute, I think I might have dreamt this last bit.....

More Sixth Form Colleges (SFC's) consider becoming 16-19 Academies

The number of Sixth Form Colleges currently exploring the advantages of converting themselves into 16-19 Academies is increasing. Although the Education Act 2011 does not automatically allow such a conversion, it is possible if the SFC is prepared to dissolve itself as a corporation and then re-create itself under Academy regulations. Advantages to a SFC of converting to Academy status are argued to include the following:

- Academies are funded at school funding rates which are currently higher than is the case with general further education colleges (GFEC's). In 2010/11 the gap in funding per student between schools and SFC's was £389.
- Unlike GFEC's, Academies are exempt from Value Added Tax (VAT) in respect of non-pay costs. (This could be worth £200,000 to an average SFC).

- Academies have access to a much larger capital 'pot' than GFEC's.
- The Academy brand is strongly supported by the current Government.
- Academies can access various funding initiatives not available to GFEC's.
- Academies have less rigorous and well defined success criteria than GFEC's.
- Academies are more likely to be able to attract sponsors than GFEC's, thereby bringing additional financial investment.
- Academy status may prove a more attractive proposition to school leavers.

Review of professionalism in FE begins

On 2 February, John Hayes, the Minister for Further Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills launched the long awaited review of professionalism in FE. The terms of reference are, *'To review the current arrangements to regulate and facilitate the professionalism of the Further Education and Skills workforce, and make recommendations as appropriate for how these should be changed or improved'*.

Areas that will be covered in the review include the following:

- Analysing the progress made with professionalising the FE and Skills workforce following the introduction of reforms stemming from 'Equipping Our Teachers for the Future'.
- Identifying the lessons to be learnt from the way professional status is regulated in other sectors.
- Examining the role, functions, benefits for members and governance of the Institute for Learning (IfL) as the FE sector's lead professional membership body.
- Analysing the regulatory functions of the IfL and how effectively the IfL is facilitating the achievement of a professionalised workforce.
- Considering what is the fairest, most efficient and appropriate way of meeting the costs of facilitating a professionalised FE and Skills workforce.
- Making recommendations for any changes and improvements required to enable continued progress in raising the professional standards and status of the FE and Skills workforce.
- Making recommendations on how to effectively support continuing professional development, and to engage and give confidence to all key stakeholders.

In undertaking these tasks, the review will be expected to take account of:

- The views of practitioners and other key stakeholders in the Further Education and Skills sector.
- Research evidence from those with expertise of professional membership bodies in other sectors.
- Evidence from reviews of initial teacher training and teaching qualifications and the extent to which these impact upon the professional standing of the FE teaching workforce.
- The impact of the de-licensing of Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) as a Sector Skills Council (SSC).
- The contribution of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

A draft report outlining key findings and recommendations is expected within 3 months of the date of the commencement of the review.

John Hayes announces FE Initial Teacher Training (FE ITT) Bursaries

In his speech to the AoC Conference last November, Mr Hayes referred to the need for financial support for those undertaking initial teacher training in FE, comparable to that available to those undertaking initial teacher training in schools (which is currently between £5,000 and £20,000, depending on subject specialism).

However observers have been disappointed to learn that Mr Hayes is now proposing that, for 2012/13, FE ITT bursaries of just £1,000 will be made available for up to a maximum of 10,000 trainees to take either a Higher Education Institution (HEI) accredited Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS)

or a Level 6 Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualification. A further 1,000 trainees can apply for bursaries of £1,500 if they are taking a HEI accredited FE ITT course and will be teaching basic Maths and English.

Critics have already suggested that the new FE ITT bursaries will be nowhere near what is needed to meet the substantially increased tuition fees charged by some universities.

And nearly finally....

In an entry on 'hard federations' in last month's newsletter I inadvertently referred to Kingston College as Kingsway College. I apologise unreservedly to colleagues at these colleges for my error, which I attribute to a combination of impending senility and my deep concern at West Bromwich Albion's home form.

And finally.....

It's all very well the Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, arguing that access to a university education should be based on a person's intellectual ability and not on his or her ability to pay for it. But, I hear you ask, has he thought through what the collateral damage to our traditional social structure would be if even larger numbers of poor people start accessing a university education? For one thing, they might end up asking awkward questions about their place within it.

Yes, it might just be possible that a young person living in a council flat in Toxteth could be a latent physics genius who would be capable of solving the problem of how to achieve nuclear fusion at room temperature, if only she had been given the opportunity to study for a physics degree. But, you have to ask yourself, would she really find the chance of providing the world with endless supplies of cheap energy more fulfilling than, say, studying customer relations on a 12 week apprenticeship programme? Fortuitously, we may never need to trouble ourselves to find the answer.

The massive increase in tuition fees charged by universities in England may have been intended to help boost university finances, but it will also help preserve our class system by making it considerably more difficult for young people from less wealthy backgrounds to get to university.

In any event, universities have always been a bit 'picky' about who they will accept onto their courses. However the recent hike in fees has resulted in the law of unintended consequences coming into play, and these days, prospective undergraduates are becoming equally 'picky' about which universities to which they are prepared to stump up their £9,000 in annual fees.

Take, for example, the case of Elly Nowell, a 19 year old student from Brockenhurst College who is predicted to get straight A's at A Level, and who applied for a place at Oxford University.

Presumably in order to help maintain its status as an elite educational institution, each year Oxford University traditionally sends rejection letters to thousands of hopeful applicants. However, the proverbial boot was placed firmly on the other foot when, after her interview, Elly wrote to admissions tutors to tell them that she was rejecting their offer of a place because she felt that the university had failed to meet her requirements.

In a parody of the university's own rejection letters, Elly wrote to admissions tutors saying, 'I realise you may be disappointed by this decision, but you were in competition with many other universities and, following your interview, I am afraid you did not meet the standards of the other universities I am considering'. Continuing the parody, she went on to advise tutors that they should not attempt to persuade her to 'reapply', since this it was unlikely that such an attempt would be successful.

In order to assist the university increase its chances of attracting other students, Elly helpfully urged the university to become 'more progressive'. To make her point more forcefully, she advised admissions tutors that *'while holding interviews in grand formal settings is inspiring, it allows public school applicants to*

flourish in an environment they are accustomed to, whilst intimidating state school applicants, thereby distorting the true academic potential of both'.

Elly also suggested that the university might possibly want to give consideration to attracting more applications from minorities and other under-represented groups.

In the response to Elly's rejection letter, the university asserted that around 58% of its undergraduates came from state schools, an argument would undoubtedly have been more convincing were it not the case that less than 7% of the school age population actually attend public schools.

A representative of the Oxford Union debating society is alleged to have leapt to the defence of the university, claiming that it '*was considerably more egalitarian than his public school, so there*', and pointing out that, for example, the university '*did not allow the beating of fags*'.