

Sector Developments

A bit like the Beano and Dandy Summer Specials, this **Click** newsletter is a bumper edition, and is so lengthy it will probably be a good cure for insomnia as well. This larger edition is because we are off on our holidays later this month, and hopefully not much will be happening in the sector from late July until August. However normal service will be resumed in September (whether you want it to be or not!).

The FE Commissioner writes a letter

The FE Commissioner, Dr David Collins, has written to college chairs, principals and the FE sector generally, summarising his findings from the college visits he has made thus far. Although the letter contains some positive comments, Dr Collins says that too many colleges have:

- A high number of small classes
- Excessively high levels of staffing expenditure as a percentage of turnover
- An 'inappropriate mix of support and teaching staff' (by which he means too many support staff)
- Boards that have 'skills shortages' (particularly financial expertise)
- A lower level of 'challenge and scrutiny by the governing body than might be expected'
- Boards that rely 'too heavily on the flow of information provided by the principal' and derive 'too much comfort from satisfactory audit reports'
- Boards and managers that were failing to meet the challenges of government funding cuts
- Embarked on new initiatives without carrying out a sufficiently robust cost-benefit analysis
- Senior management teams that do not include finance specialists
- Premises that are under utilised

The letter was circulated to colleges at the same time as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) published the first batch of the Commissioner's individual college reports. This is no doubt in the belief that the humiliation caused by publicly exposing their problems will not only help them to achieve the corrective action required, but will somehow cause all other colleges to buck their ideas up as well.

The government publishes another FE strategy

The government has re-published its strategy for developing FE staff entitled 'Workforce Strategy for Further Education in England'. The word 're-publish' is used because the strategy was originally published in March, but was swiftly withdrawn the following day, apparently because of the provocative terminology used. For example, the original document referred to several 'key weaknesses' in FE colleges in England including all the usual stuff about 'poor teaching standards, especially in mathematics', 'weak leadership and governance', 'lack of engagement with employers', 'the unattractiveness of FE as a career option for teachers' and the 'ineffective use of technology' etc. In the new strategy document, 'key weaknesses' are now referred to as 'challenges' and 'issues'. In his foreword, Matthew Hancock says that the best of the FE sector is 'truly world class'. However he goes on to say that 'standards need to be raised among all staff to match' and that the government intends 'to help' colleges to deliver this. The 'help' offered includes, for example, confirming the previously announced 'golden hellos' (worth between £7,500 and up to an overall total of £30,000) to tempt those with good degrees in mathematics to teach the subject in FE colleges.

The government proposes more new national colleges

Presumably in the belief that existing colleges are not quite up to the job, BIS has announced the establishment of a number of new national colleges for advanced manufacturing, high-speed rail and nuclear energy, and is proposing another one for high end IT skills, such as computer coding. BIS is now seeking further proposals from 'interested parties' for the development of more new national colleges 'to tackle the shortage of higher-level vocational skills'. BIS says that £50 million is available to invest from April 2015 up to March 2017 (no doubt recycled from government cuts elsewhere in the FE sector) and that it wants to work with 'interested parties who believe there is a need for a national college in their sector, industry or profession'. BIS goes on to say that new colleges will only be supported where there is 'real employer demand and commitment', and where 'there is a strategic need for intervention at a national level'. To qualify for BIS support, the new colleges 'must not duplicate existing provision, must address a skills gap at levels 3, 4 and 5, and be led by employers, who must provide an initial financial commitment of

at least 50% of the cost of setting them up'. 'Interested parties' have until 5 September to respond.

The Institute for Learning (IfL) is set to close

The IfL was created to be the mandatory professional body for the FE sector, but came under pressure when its government funding of around £5 million per year was cut and the IfL raised its membership fees from £30 to £68 a year to make up the shortfall. The hike in fees resulted in a furious backlash from the University and College Union (UCU), with most members boycotting the IfL and refusing to pay the increased fees. Since then, membership of the IfL (not to be confused with the IFE) has fallen from a peak of around 181,000 to a current level of around 33,000. Fears that the IfL will soon run out of cash has resulted in the IfL board recommending that it should close and that its assets and 'legacy' be passed to the new Education and Training Foundation (ETF). Sue Crowley, the chair of the IfL board, explained that that 'without further substantial investment or alternative sources of revenue, IfL's financial position is not sustainable in the long term' and said that the board felt 'that it would be best to initiate an orderly wind-down of the IfL and its operations'. If the IfL's elected advisory council agrees to the proposal in a vote on July 17, the closure process will begin, with all key functions being transferred to the ETF by the autumn.

The FE sector expresses concerns about the future of 'Chartered Status'

The Institute of Further Education (IFE) is the new body charged by BIS with responsibility for administering and awarding 'Chartered Status'. The IFE (not to be confused with the ETF) is chaired by Lord Lingfield, whose 'Review of Professionalism in FE' was critical of the IFL and probably contributed to the IFL's demise. However, given the apparent lack of progress in getting the award up and running, FE leaders are now starting to become critical of the IFE. Serious concerns are also beginning to be expressed about the longevity of new 'Chartered Status' quality kite mark, with many fearing that it will, like so many other FE kite marks (such as the Training Quality Standard introduced in 2008), prove to be short lived. They have therefore sought assurance from BIS that Chartered Status is a long-term proposition before they begin to spend time and money on obtaining the award. They have also sought clarification as to whether acquiring Chartered Status might entail other benefits, such as increased access to funding, or is just intended to improve providers' reputations.

A spokesperson for BIS declined to comment on this, but a spokesperson for the IFE explained the delay by saying 'We are still waiting for royal permission before we can start granting Chartered Status' and presumably in order to show that some progress was being made, Lord Lingfield, pointed out that the IFE had taken out a lease on offices in central London and that representatives from a 'small group of providers' had attended meetings to 'further refine the Institute's qualifying criteria for the award'. (Although he was curiously reticent to say who these representatives were or which organisations they represented). Lord Lingfield has also confirmed that fees will be charged to cover the assessment and administration costs associated with the award of Chartered Status, and it seems that an initial assessment fee of £10,000, along with an as yet unspecified fee for re-assessment every 3 years, may have been suggested. Meanwhile, it has emerged that in 2012/13, BIS provided the IFE with a grant of £400,000, but that only just over half of this (£201,193) was spent. No doubt as a result of this, the BIS grant for 2014/15 has been reduced to £350,000. Commenting on the reduction, a spokesperson for the IFE said that 'the availability of any future grant funding beyond 2014-15 is a matter for BIS', but that in any case, it was 'always intended that the IFE would become self-financing from membership fees as soon as possible'.

The DfE calls for more internet-based college performance data to be published

College performance data is now published on the SFA's FE Choices website, on Ofsted's Employer View and Learner View websites and on the Ofsted main inspection report website. Information on college performance is also available on the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and National Careers Service (NCS) websites. To this has recently been added the new FE Data Dashboard website. Obviously on a bit of a roll, the Department for Education (DfE) is now consulting on a proposal that colleges should publish key performance data on their own websites (schools are already required to do this). The information that the DfE proposes that colleges should be published includes:

- Students' progress in academic subjects or 'Tech Levels'
- Students' average grades achieved in each category of qualification or award
- Progress made by students joining the college without a GCSE grade C in English and mathematics

- The proportion of students who drop out of their courses
- The proportion of students that go on to further study, a job or training at the end of their courses.

The consultation period ends on July 4 with the new requirements expected to come into force from 2016.

UCU calls for an end to graded lesson observations

UCU has recently published a report entitled 'Developing a National Framework for the Effective Use of Lesson Observation in FE', in which the union raises 'serious questions about the fitness for purpose of prevailing observation assessment systems in FE'. The report says that 'Attempts to measure the professional capabilities of practitioners through the lens of graded lesson observations are a pointless exercise based on a pseudo-scientific approach to teacher assessment' and that 'the sooner we put an end to this pernicious practice, the better the sector will be for it'. However, a spokesperson for the Association of Colleges (AoC) said 'Evidence from our work with members suggests that individually graded lessons can be useful in assessing the quality of teaching and learning for students', but also went on to say that 'uniform approaches to lesson observations, which prescribe what colleges should do to observe teaching and learning, are neither appropriate nor helpful'.

Ofsted to abandon graded lesson observations in FE

It seems that Ofsted is considering abandoning graded lesson observations during FE and skills inspections. Interestingly, Lorna Fitzjohn, Ofsted's Director for FE and Skills chose to use Twitter to announce this, and presumably in order to reassure the sector that it was indeed Ms. Fitzjohn that had posted the tweet, an Ofsted spokesperson confirmed that the inspectorate would be piloting FE inspections without graded lesson observations from this September. UCU has clearly welcomed the move, and has gone so far as to suggest that this is a direct response by Ofsted to pressure from the union.

Ofsted to issue a separate grade for school sixth form provision in inspections

The Ofsted consultation on a proposal to introduce a separate inspection grade for school sixth forms ended in May. Based on responses received, Ofsted Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has announced that from 1 September, a separate inspection grade for school sixth form provision will be given. This will allow inspection reports to be used for the direct comparison of school sixth form performance with FE and sixth form college performance.

Leading contender for the new Chair of Ofsted is named

David Ross, the co-founder of Carphone Warehouse, is believed to be the leading candidate for the post of Chair of Ofsted (after Michael Gove, in effect, sacked the previous incumbent, Baroness Morgan). If Mr. Ross is appointed to the post, the move is likely to be controversial and Liberal Democrat schools minister David Laws is expected to be prominent amongst those that will object. This is because, as well as having made significant donations to the Conservative Party, Mr. Ross is also the founder of a charity called 'The Education Trust' that sponsors a chain of 25 Academies, causing some observers to question the extent to which this might influence matters when inspectors are sent into his own schools. However, a DfE spokesman said 'The recruitment process for the new chair of Ofsted is still ongoing and the successful candidate will be announced in due course'. The spokesperson went on to say 'As with all public appointments, the appointment process is being conducted in accordance with the requirements set by the Commissioner for Public Appointments'. Nevertheless, Mr. Gove has insisted that no candidate 'should be ruled out on the grounds of political allegiance' and says that he wants the new Ofsted chair to have had both business and education experience, (a requirement that is likely to constrain the field of eligible candidates somewhat).

All SFA funded courses to have an on-line learning component from September 2015

From September 2015, all courses offered by colleges (and private trainers) will need to have a minimum online component in order to be eligible for Skills Funding Agency (SFA) cash. The new requirement comes as a response to the recommendation made by the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) that at least 10% of all course content should be delivered online (possibly rising to 50% at some point in the future). Announcing the new online requirement, Matthew Hancock said that the SFA would be introducing 'a new business rule for the approval of funding and setting out a minimum online threshold for the delivery of course content'. He also announced that the government would be working with 'a small

number of awarding organisations, employers and providers to take forward online-only trailblazers, focusing initially on vocational qualifications, to allow us to road-test the funding and audit implications of online delivery’.

SFA reduces tolerance levels for under-delivery against contract

The SFA is reducing its tolerance levels in respect of under-delivery of provision against contract, raising concerns that more providers will be placed at risk of an in-year ‘claw-back’ of their funding allocation. During this academic year (2013/14), providers who were delivering provision at a level that was 15% below their SFA contract target as at November 2013 faced an in-year reduction in funds. This tolerance level then fell to 8% in February this year and fell further to 5% in May. However, next academic year (2014/15) the tolerance levels for under delivery against contract will be reduced to 12%, 6% and 3%, respectively, leaving more providers worried that they will face increasing levels of financial instability. The new tolerance levels were published in the SFA’s ‘Operational Performance Management Rules 2014/15’ at the end of June, and no doubt with the intention of providing a modicum of comfort, an SFA spokesperson confirmed that ‘providers will still be able to make a case for retaining contract values where they can demonstrate that their profile of delivery will differ from the sector performance profile’.

SFA to axe ‘dedicated relationship managers’

The SFA has shed 600 of its 1,900 staff since October 2010 and aims to reduce staffing level by another 30%, to 925. In the attempt to achieve further staffing reductions the SFA has announced that providers will no longer have access to a dedicated relationship manager, and that from July a new Central Delivery Service (CDS) will be the first point of contact for provider queries about contracts, payments, and technical support etc. The SFA says that the only exception to this will be in cases where ‘providers are subject to the agency’s formal intervention processes’, and those providers deemed by the SFA to be ‘at risk’.

The government launches new ‘Substantial Vocational Qualifications’

Although it may seem to be a little unclear how this fits in to the government’s strategy to ‘streamline and rationalise’ the existing plethora of vocational qualifications, Matthew Hancock has announced the launch of yet another new suite of Level 2 qualifications that, he says, ‘will help 16-19 year olds to go straight into a skilled trade or to move onto one of the new Tech Levels’ (not to be confused with ‘TechBaccs’). The new qualifications will be called ‘Substantial Vocational Qualifications’ (SVQs) and Mr. Hancock says that they will be available for English schools and colleges to offer from September 2015. A DfE spokesperson said SVQs (not to be confused with Scottish Vocational Qualifications), would ‘meet tough new criteria’, and that there would be ‘a requirement for employer involvement’, for example, ‘through the provision of work placements or projects set by industry practitioners’. The spokesperson added that the new awards ‘will be studied alongside a minimum of five core GCSEs, including mathematics and English’. As an aside, the spokesperson pointed out that the new SVQs were just the sort of thing that could be studied in University Technical Colleges (UTCs), presumably as a counter to criticism from some quarters that UTCs are neither universities, nor colleges, nor particularly technical.

Mandatory inclusion of GCSE mathematics and English in Study Programmes is brought forward

Matthew Hancock has announced that it will become ‘a funding condition that all full-time students with grade D or below in English or mathematics GCSE will be required to study these subjects as part of their 16-19 study programmes’ with effect from August 2015 onwards. This is 2 years earlier than was expected and the AoC says that meeting this deadline will place colleges under significant pressure. Mr. Hancock also went on to say that from 2017, the new, more rigorous GCSEs would be the ‘standard qualification taken by FE students who fail to get a good pass in English or mathematics by the time they leave school’.

The new system of funding 16 to 19 study programmes may be being misused

As was recommended in the 2011 Wolf Review of Vocational Education, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) now pays colleges and other providers per student, rather than per qualification. For students to be designated as full-time, colleges must provide them with a study programme of at least 540 planned hours per year. To be eligible for funding, these planned hours ‘must contribute towards a coherent study programme for the student, be timetabled, organised and supervised by the provider and be within the provider’s normal working pattern’. However, recently released figures show that there has been a

significant increase in the number of students who are being registered as full-time than was the case under the previous funding system. As a result, the EFA is concerned that students who would previously have been registered as part-time are now being registered as full-time and that providers are either not delivering the full 540 hours or, where they are being delivered, 'they are being condensed into periods of as little as 4 months'. The EFA has therefore announced that it will be 'conducting a review to ensure all data and funding claims are valid' and that it will be also 'asking institutions that have had the most significant increase in their full time programmes to complete a straightforward return highlighting the main reasons for the increase'.

Public funding for 19+ FE provision in England may be replaced by loans

Public funding for courses taken by FE students in England aged 24 and over, who are studying at Levels 3 or 4, has now been withdrawn and replaced by a system of student loans, called '24+ Advanced Learning Loans'. The loans are administered by the Student Loans Company (SLC), which also administers HE loans. As with HE loans, BIS provides the funds to enable the SLC to provide students with a loan to cover the cost of their courses fees. Students are then required to repay the loans, with interest, when their earnings exceed a threshold currently set at £21,000 per year. BIS is now consulting on a proposal to extend the loans system to all FE students in England aged 19 or over, including those studying courses at Level 2. The government apparently believes that requiring all students aged 19 and over to take out a loan to pay for their studies will somehow result in more people taking up learning. Matthew Hancock has confirmed this belief saying that 'By helping FE learners access the finance to support their studies, we're enabling more people to develop the vital skills that will allow them to begin a prosperous and productive career'. The consultation ends on 21 August and a government decision is expected in the autumn (with no prizes for correctly guessing what the decision will be). Any changes arising from the government's decision will be introduced in 2016/17.

Toni Pearce, the National Union of Students (NUS) president, has spotted that proposed extension of FE loans 'means that the full cost of education will be put on the individual'. She went on to say 'I don't know what the government is thinking. Its own research has shown that two thirds of FE students wouldn't take out a loan to study'. And Sally Hunt, the general secretary of the UCU, said 'Ever since 24+ Advanced Learning Loans were introduced, the sector has feared that it was the thin end of the wedge and now, it seems, we were right'.

Apprenticeship funding will, of course, continue to remain outside the loans system, including funding for apprenticeships for people aged 25 and over. Initially, these older people were also required to take out a loan to cover the cost of their apprenticeships, but BIS removed the requirement after it was revealed that only 404 applications for loans had been received in the first 7 months of the scheme up to Christmas 2013. Demonstrating an innovative capacity to bend the rules to fit the circumstances, a BIS spokesperson explained that 'It was clear from application and starts data that 24+ advanced learning loans were not the preferred route for employers or prospective apprentices'. It will be interesting to see how BIS rises to the challenge of ensuring that FE loans taken out by students who are devout Muslims comply with Sharia Law, which forbids the payment of loan interest.

Sixth Form College students receive 35% less funding than sixth form pupils in Academies

A research report recently published by the London School of Economics (LSE, not to be confused with LSC) called 'Assessing the value for money in Sixth Form Education', shows that Academies are able to spend an average of £1,560 more per student (£6,158 compared to £4,598) than Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs). This is despite the fact that SFCs significantly out-perform Academies in terms of GCE A Level results. The disparity is largely due to the increased levels of government funding and subsidies that Academies receive. For example, Academies are not required to pay Value Added Tax (VAT), whereas the average SFC spends £335,000 each year paying in VAT. The report goes on to say that there is 'clear evidence' that many Academies are using some of the funding they receive for their 11-16 year olds to subsidise their expenditure on their sixth form pupils, and reveals that:

- Over two-thirds of SFCs have had to drop courses this year as a result of budget cuts
- More than a third have discontinued modern language courses
- More than a fifth have discontinued courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics
- Almost all say they have had to reduce staffing levels

- More than two-thirds are teaching students in larger classes
- Almost three-quarters say have had to scale down or discontinue extra-curricular activities.

The report concludes that the cuts in funding have placed the SFC sector at a 'tipping point'. Commenting on the report's findings, a spokesperson for the Sixth Form Colleges' Association (SFCA) said. 'Despite the outstanding performance of Sixth Form Colleges, the government is obsessed with the idea that every school should become an Academy and every Academy should have a sixth form'

The EFA needs to uncover poor money management in Academies and Free Schools earlier

The EFA will this year (2013/14) distribute around £54 billion to education providers. However, a recent report from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) says that the EFA 'lacks both the systems and the data necessary to carry out its responsibilities effectively' and that as a result 'it has not yet got to grips with the effective oversight of how that money is spent and does not spot risks or intervene quickly enough'. As examples of this, the report says that:

- 'Around 10% of 339 academy trusts in England failed to submit their annual accounts on time, but that by March this year the EFA had issued only 8 notices to improve'
- The EFA 'relies excessively on whistleblowers, external auditors and broad, desk-based reviews' to identify irregularities'
- There were 'potential conflicts of interest where Academies have links to private companies' and there was evidence in 12 cases that 'individuals may have benefitted from their position when providing academy trusts with goods and services'.

The report concludes that 'agency interventions in at-risk institutions can come too late'. As a result the PAC has called on both the DfE and the EFA to say how they intend to improve their capability to gather 'complete, accurate and timely data' and how they will 'be more robust in relation to Academies that fail to comply with financial reporting requirements'. Responding to the PAC criticisms, a DfE spokesperson said 'we do not agree with the PAC's interpretation'. The spokesperson went on to say that the EFA was 'faster at intervening in failing schools than many local authorities' and added that the use of whistleblowers was 'an important means of gathering evidence that was by no means unusual in the public sector'.

EFA issues additional guidance to FE colleges on the recruitment of full time 14-16 year olds

The EFA has circulated a letter targeted at those colleges that are considering recruiting full time 14-16 year olds this September. The letter confirms that eligibility requirements to recruit full time 14-16 year olds remain 'unchanged' but goes on to say that 'because performance tables have changed (with separate academic and vocational point scores) the performance of the small number colleges previously judged as being grade 3 for overall effectiveness, but that had not yet been inspected under the new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (CIF) could not be easily compared'. The letter goes on to say that 'most colleges who were judged to be grade 3 before 2012 have now been re-inspected and will either have improved, and are thus eligible to recruit 14-16 full time learners, or have still been graded as 'requires improvement' and therefore remain ineligible'. This has left some observers wondering what all the fuss was about. Meanwhile, and to put things in perspective, as at the end of May, the DfE said that it had received just 2 expressions of interest in direct recruitment of full time 14-16 year olds (compared to 7 last year).

First 'Career Colleges' announced

Career Colleges are the brainchild of Lord Kenneth Baker, the former Conservative Education Minister, who gave his name to 'Baker Days' in schools. (In case you were wondering what these were, Baker Days had nothing to do with cakes or bread. They were staff development days). Lord Baker says that Career Colleges will enable full time 14-16 vocational course provision offered in FE colleges to be 'badged', and to develop his ideas further, Lord Baker has helped to set up of the 'Career Colleges Trust'. Just in case colleges might be a bit unclear as to exactly why they should go to the trouble of 'badging' their full time 14-16 provision as a Career College, the Trust has helpfully explained that Career Colleges will 'provide accelerated vocationally-focused programmes of study alongside core academic work' (which will included English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities) and will 'provide clear progression routes into higher education, apprenticeships, further education and above all, work'. Concerns that Career Colleges might duplicate, or at least be very similar to existing UTCs, and could therefore be the cause of some confusion, Lord Baker (who was also closely involved in the development of UTCs) has clarified things by

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explaining that whereas UTCs will focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, Career Colleges, apparently, won't.

Although the 14-16 vocational provision will be based within existing FE colleges and those colleges offering this provision will be primarily accountable to the DfE and subject to the EFA's 14-16 direct recruitment funding rules, the Trust has imposed additional conditions of its own. For example, a Career College must have a subsidiary board, at least 40% of the membership of which must be comprised of employers. Also, in order to use the Career College 'badge', FE colleges must apply for a license, for which they are required to pay the Trust a fee. It seems that 'after consulting with sector representatives' an earlier proposal for a flat rate fee that was thought to be well over £100,000 has been abandoned. The Trust now says that fees for licenses will be charged at a level reflecting individual host college circumstances, in return for which the Trust will provide colleges with 'a bespoke service'. The Trust claims that it has been approached by around 40 colleges and 20 employers interested in setting up Career Colleges, but has declined to reveal which institutions these were. However, the Trust has recently announced that it has awarded the first two licenses to open Career Colleges this September and that a further 10 were being planned for next year (including 4 applications from one college).

At least 100 more UTCs are needed, says Lord Adonis

Former education minister Lord Adonis (who was the architect of the Academies programme under the last government), says that priority should be given to building more UTCs 'to help increase opportunities for technical education' and has called for 'at least 100 more UTCs to be set up in the next six years to help tackle the skills gap'. Lord Adonis has also recommended that there should be a 'major expansion of high-quality youth apprenticeships', including 'a trebling of the number of STEM based youth apprenticeships by 2020'. No doubt drawing on the views he developed whilst working on his PhD thesis on 'the British Aristocracy of the late 19th Century' at Christ Church College, Oxford, Lord Adonis has also called for 'stronger links between schools and employers' and recommends that 'every secondary school in England should appoint a full-time Director of Enterprise and Employment'. With reference to FE, (and he is alleged to have once said that he 'couldn't see the point of general further education colleges'), Lord Adonis says that there are 'too many vocational courses do not lead to employment in relevant occupations, while many industries suffer from chronic technical skills shortages'. He goes on to say that colleges 'should focus strongly on teaching technician-level skills', and that 'Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), working with their local authorities, should set priorities for the funding of post-19 vocational training courses in their area'. In response, spokesperson for the AoC said 'adding more small institutions to a fragmented education system at a time of continuing public spending cuts may not be the best response to the problems Lord Adonis outlines'.

Ofsted inspection findings in schools implicated in the 'Trojan Horse' letter

Ofsted has inspected 21 Birmingham schools as part of a government response to an anonymous letter (now referred to as the 'Trojan Horse' letter) alleging that Islamic extremists had taken over, or were plotting to take over a number of these schools. The inspections have been completed and the all reports have now been published. Separate inquiries carried out by Birmingham City Council, the EFA and by the former Metropolitan Police head of Counter Terrorism, Peter Clarke on behalf of the DfE, are scheduled to report back later this summer.

Giving evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee, the Ofsted Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw (who exercised personal oversight of the inspections) said that inspectors found that in some schools, a 'culture of fear and intimidation' had developed, and that governors exerted 'more influence than is appropriate or acceptable' over how they were being run. Sir Michael said that 'the inspection findings and talks with head teachers had revealed evidence of grave concern' and that some aspects were 'quite shocking'. He went on to say that inspectors had found evidence that 'children were not being encouraged to develop tolerant attitudes towards other faiths' and that there was an 'organised campaign to target certain schools by those with a hard line Islamist agenda'. He added that 'some of our findings are deeply worrying' and that it was 'vitally important that we remain vigilant for such problems developing in any part of the country'. Because of this, Sir Michael confirmed that Ofsted was also conducting inspections in other areas 'to investigate similar issues'. (For example in a separate inspection of a school in north London, Ofsted found that the school did not 'promote tolerance' and 'had books

suggesting stoning and lashing as appropriate punishments’).

The more negative Ofsted inspection findings in Birmingham also revealed evidence that in some (but not all), schools:

- Too little was being done ‘to keep students safe from the risks associated with extremist views’
- Not enough was being done ‘to mitigate against cultural isolation’, leaving students ‘vulnerable to the risk of marginalisation from wider British society and the risk of radicalisation’
- There was an ‘organised campaign to alter the character and ethos’ of the school
- There was a breakdown of trust between governors and staff, with teachers ‘bullied’ and ‘intimidated’ and ‘fearing loss of their jobs’. Some staff felt ‘intimidated by their colleagues and that they could not talk freely’ (e.g. one teacher was apparently so afraid that a meeting with inspectors had to be arranged in supermarket car park)
- Some teachers reported that they were being treated unfairly because of their gender or religious beliefs
- Family members had been appointed to unadvertised senior leadership posts
- The term ‘white prostitute’ had been used in a class assembly
- Private investigators had been hired to check staff email
- School governors had insisted on vetting a nativity play script and ‘had banned the use of a doll as the baby Jesus’
- Head teachers had been undermined, marginalised and, in some cases, forced out of their jobs
- The curriculum had been narrowed to reflect the ‘personal views of a few governors’
- Only Muslim children were taken on trips to Saudi Arabia
- Calls to Muslim prayer were broadcast over a loudspeaker
- Children were taught that ‘evolution is not what we believe’ in biology lessons
- The breadth of curriculum was too narrow (e.g. in one school, music had been removed from the timetable).
- ‘Inappropriate’ speakers had been invited to address pupils at assemblies.

Five of the Birmingham schools inspected were judged to be ‘inadequate’ and have been placed in ‘special measures’. Education Secretary Michael Gove says the funding agreements for the Academies in special measures ‘will now be terminated, with new sponsors lined up to take them over’ and that the local authority schools in special measures will have their governing bodies replaced. A sixth school was judged as being inadequate because of its ‘poor educational standards’, with a further 12 schools judged as ‘requiring improvement’. However, 3 schools emerged from the inspection with praise rather than criticism, with 2 schools being judged as ‘outstanding’ and 1 being judged as ‘good’.

Sir Michael also criticised Birmingham City Council, which, it is alleged, knew of the allegations as early as ten years ago. He accused the council of a ‘serious failure’ in supporting schools in protecting children from extremism and attacked the council for a ‘lack of urgency’ in tackling concerns about how schools were being governed. Recommendations made by Sir Michael in the wake of the inspections include:

- The appointment of ‘professional governors’ where existing governors were deemed to be weak
- The introduction of mandatory training for governors
- Introducing a register of interests for governors
- Examining how the governance of free schools and academies is monitored
- Reviewing the current exemption from routine inspections for outstanding schools
- Reviewing whistleblowing procedures
- A move from two days’ notice to half-day notice inspections with effect from September 2012.

Responding to the inspection findings, Education Secretary, Michael Gove said that he wanted ‘to build on the Prevent strategy launched by the government in 2011’ and that from now on he wants all schools to ‘actively promote British values, such as democracy, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths’. Pupils are to be taught ‘that participation in elections and the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs are protected in law’ and schools will be expected ‘to confront intolerant or extremist views among staff, parents and pupils’. Mr. Gove also announced that there would be a review of the alleged lack of response from the DfE to warnings received from school leaders that had raised concerns

with officials as early as 2010.

The governing bodies, some staff and most of the parents of the schools involved completely reject the allegations made in the Trojan Horse letter and do not accept the Ofsted inspection findings. A parent at one of the schools inspected said 'I think the government is scared that all the governors are Muslim and that they have a right to change things at the school'. And he makes a fair point. Academies, and in particular Free Schools, were established in order to provide greater parental choice of school for their children and to give them greater influence over how they are managed and run. In areas where the population is almost exclusively, if not entirely, Muslim, it is perhaps hardly surprising that parents will want their children to attend schools that reflect a Muslim ethos and Muslim values and culture. Neither should it be surprising that school governors will be largely drawn from the Muslim community of which they are a part. However, there seems to be a real uncertainty about what should be done when parents and governors want to exercise their freedom to inculcate an ethos and culture in their schools that the wider community regards as being unacceptable.

As a result of the Trojan Horse affair, there have been renewed calls from some quarters for the re-introduction of a national curriculum in all state funded schools and for all teachers to be qualified. There have also been calls for greater levels of transparency and accountability in how Academies and Free Schools are run. Some have even suggested that the government should only provide public funds for secular schools offering a broad and balanced curriculum, and that parents wishing to send their children to a school where the ethos and teaching reflects a more narrow religious belief should really be expected to pay for it themselves.

Burgeoning school age population puts pressure on school places in England

The DfE's Annual Census shows that the school age population in England continues to rise rapidly, driven mainly by an increase in the numbers of primary age children. The year-on-year increase is putting severe pressure on the school system and has resulted in more super-size primary schools and infant classes with numbers that are technically over the legal limits. This growth will ultimately feed through to secondary and further education, raising questions for planners about future capacity in both sectors. The DfE census, which provided a 'snapshot' of the school population as at January 2014, shows that there are now 8.3 million pupils enrolled in schools in England. The census also reveals a school age population that is increasingly diverse, with ethnic minority pupils accounting for around 60% of the increase in numbers over the last 5 years. Around 30% of pupils in primary schools in England are now from ethnic minorities and around 20% of primary pupils speak English as a second language, raising questions about current government policy in respect of cuts in funding for ESOL provision. However, there are very wide regional variations. More than 80% of pupils in primary schools in the inner London Boroughs are from ethnic minorities, but in the north east England the figure is only around 10%. In secondary schools, the proportion of pupils without English as a first language has risen to 14%. Again there are regional variations. In the inner London Boroughs, 56% of secondary school pupils do not have English as a first language (with this being considerably higher in some Boroughs) but in the North East the figure is 6%. Responding to the figures, Labour shadow education secretary, Tristram Hunt, has accused the government of 'creating a crisis in school places'. A DfE spokesperson replied saying 'we recognise the pressure on school places that has occurred as a result of demographic trends over the last decade. That is why we are giving local authorities £5bn to spend on extra places over this parliament'.

White working-class children are the lowest educational achievers

The House of Commons Education Select Committee has been considering the findings of a report entitled 'Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children'. The report says that 'poor white children are consistently the lowest performing group in the country', and that they achieve examination results that 'are much worse than those for similarly disadvantaged black or Asian pupils'. The report says that 'poor white children are already lagging behind when they start primary school, and the gap grows wider as they get older'. The report also says that 'as each school year passes, the attainment gap sees them falling further behind wealthier white pupils and poor children from ethnic minorities', but goes on to argue that 'rising results among poor black and Asian pupils shows that improvements can be made', and that 'poor pupils of all ethnic backgrounds are much more likely to do well in schools judged by Ofsted as being outstanding'.

Commenting on the reasons for the underachievement of white working class children, Committee chair Graham Stuart suggested that although white working-class parents 'might have left school early, they still did well for themselves and mistakenly assume their children can do the same'. Representatives of Leicester City Council who gave evidence told MPs that there were parts of the city where 'white working class culture is characterised by low aspirations and negative attitudes towards education'. A representative of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation who gave evidence to the committee rejected the idea of low parental aspirations amongst the white working class, and said that they also 'wanted their children to be high achievers, but they had a much lower expectation than middle-class families that they would be able to achieve their goals'. A representative of the National Union of Teachers told committee members that underachievement was directly linked to poverty, and went on to say 'Children from disadvantaged backgrounds will not be as school ready as others for the simple reason if you have not had a meal in the evening, slept in your own bed or had breakfast, that will impact on your ability to learn'.

The report has resulted in calls from some quarters for focused funding and support for poor white children, similar to that which in the past has helped black and Asian pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to raise their levels of educational achievement, and in particular in schools where white working class children were now the minority ethnic group. Responding to the report's findings, a DfE spokesperson drew the Committee's attention to the pupil premium and said that the government had provided £2.5 billion extra to support disadvantaged pupils.

Parental advice may be contributing to digital skills shortages

The mobile phone company O2 estimates that by 2017 around 750,000 digitally skilled workers will be needed in order 'to satisfy Britain's digital potential'. However research recently commissioned by O2 suggests that there is a 'disturbing disconnect' between the careers advice parents give to their children and the needs of the jobs market'. 10% of the 2,000 parents questioned as part of the research said they would 'actively discourage' their children from taking up digital jobs such as coding, 3D printing and robotics, whereas 38% said they would advise their children to take up a career in law or medicine. This appears to be supported by data made available by the Higher Education Statistics Association (HESA), which shows that in 2012/13, twice the number of students in the UK took up degrees in medicine compared with computer science and related degrees. Technology firms questioned as part of the survey said there were 'too few graduates with digital skills, such as web design or computer programming', for the jobs available, and a spokesperson for Microsoft, said 'in the software industry alone there are 20,000 graduate vacancies a year, and only 7,500 computer science graduates to fill them'. He went on to say that there were digital skills shortages 'not only in the high-tech sector, but in fast-growing sectors like media, gaming and animation, publishing and finance'. A government spokesperson said that it was hoped that changes in the curriculum due to be introduced in the autumn (e.g. the inclusion of coding in GCSE and GCE A Level Computer Science) and more apprenticeships in digital skills were 'a step in the right direction', but accepted that 'more needs to be done both by the government and by businesses to widen the pathway to higher digital skills'.

Royal Society calls for reform in mathematics and science education

A Royal Society report entitled 'A Vision for Mathematics and Science' says that 'too few 16 year olds are taking mathematics and sciences to maintain a competitive economy'. The report cites research from the Royal Academy of Engineering that estimates that a million new science, engineering and technology professionals will be needed by 2020. The report goes on to warn policy makers 'that the UK education system risks not being fit for purpose in 20 years' time', and recommends that:

- Current examinations (including those at GCE A Level) should 'be replaced by a baccalaureate-style system, with all students taking mathematics and science to the age of 18'.
- Students specialising in arts and humanities 'should be kept engaged in science and technology by the introduction of rigorous new courses'.
- The status of teaching should be raised, with teachers expected to develop subject expertise throughout their careers and that all teachers should either have a teaching qualification or be working towards one.
- Ultimately, teachers should be sufficiently trusted and respected to assess public qualifications, rather than relying on externally set and assessed examinations.

- New independent expert bodies should be established to decide curriculum and assessment standards.
- Learned bodies such as the Institute of Mathematics, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Society of Biology 'should support and shape what is taught and how it is assessed, and provide professional recognition and development for specialist teachers'.
- All primary schools should have access to at least one subject teacher in both science and mathematics.
- Only those teachers holding a relevant degree in the subject should teach mathematics and science in secondary schools and colleges.
- There should be better careers guidance on jobs in science and technology.

Responding to the report, a DfE spokesperson said 'the number of young people studying physics and mathematics has already risen at both GCSE and GCE A level, and reforms to the qualifications system will lead to thousands more young people studying more rigorous courses in mathematics, sciences and vocational education, including the new Technical Baccalaureate' (TechBacc).

Data on public and state school-leavers' progression to HE is published

Statistics recently released by the DfE reveal that in 2011/12, 5% pupils from private schools in England went on to study at Oxford or Cambridge University, as against 1% from English state schools and colleges. The data also shows that on average, 38% of private school pupils went to the top Russell Group of universities, compared with 11% from state schools and colleges. However, the number of state school and college students who either went on to study at university, got a job, or went into further vocational training, increased to 74% compared with 69% in 2010/11. The data also shows that overall, 53% of state school and college students progressed to some form of higher education in 2011/12, compared with 48% in 2010/11. Poorer students from the inner London Boroughs achieved rates significantly above this, with 63% progressing to higher education.

Plans to expand the number of university places in England 'will be self financing'

The SLC is provided with government funding that is then loaned to students to enable them to pay up to £9,000 per year tuition fees now charged by universities in England. The loans start to be repaid to the SLC, with interest, through the UK tax system when the borrowers' earnings reach £21,000 per year. Figures released by the SLC reveal that the total amount lent to all students taking undergraduate degrees in England increased by 26% to £9 billion in 2013/14. With effect from this autumn, the government will be lifting the cap on university places in England, and this is expected to substantially increase the demand for loans. However, allegations have been made that the student loan system is proving to be far more expensive than the government had initially anticipated and fears have been expressed that tracking students who default on loans is likely to prove more demanding than was originally thought. Nevertheless, Universities Minister, David Willetts has announced that to accompany the lifting of the cap on numbers, extra funding will be made available to the SLC to meet an anticipated increase of around 30,000 applications in 2014/15, rising to around 60,000 extra applications per year thereafter. He went on to make it clear that he did not see this as 'the end of the process' and that 'numbers could continue to grow beyond that'. Mr. Willetts said that contrary to what was being said, funding for the expansion of HE was 'not dependent on selling off student loans to the private sector'. He said that graduates were 'the engines of our future growth' and that that the 'expanding the number of graduates would mean higher tax returns from increased earning power in the future'. He went on to claim that 'a female graduate with a 2:1 degree (now the most common degree awarded) would generate £264,000 extra in additional tax revenue over her working life, while a male graduate with the same degree would generate an additional £221,000 in tax revenue'. Mr Willetts also said that there was a 'recovering graduate jobs market, with the highest employment rates for graduates for six years'. (Although recent findings by 'High Fliers Research' based on a poll of 100 employers (including Jaguar Landrover, Unilever and PriceWaterhouseCoopers' revealed that, on average, there were still 39 graduates chasing each vacancy).

'Too much focus on higher education and not enough on vocational education', says IPPR report

Meanwhile, a report commissioned by the Edge Foundation from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) says that 'too much focus is being given to young people gaining a degree and not enough focus is being given to vocational education'. The report says that successive governments 'have consistently

prioritised the expansion of higher education, and have paid relatively little attention to vocational education and training'. The report argues that 'the British economy will be unable to compete globally if the government response to national skill shortages relies simply on expanding higher education' and goes on to say that 'a recent example of this tunnel vision is the decision by the government to remove the cap on HE student numbers, with the express intention of attracting more young people into full-time undergraduate degree courses, while at the same time it is drastically cutting funding for further education and is presiding over a decline in the number of young people going into apprenticeships'. Meanwhile, Graham Stuart MP, the Chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee has announced that vocational education will be the focus of the Committee's last inquiry before the general election.

Since 2010, universities in England have seen their funding grow by 23% as a result of the large increase in tuition fees, (and will see their income rise further as the HE numbers cap is lifted). Schools have had their budgets protected and the schools sector as a whole is benefitting from the billions of pounds spent on the expansion of Academies, Free Schools, UTCs, and Studio Schools etc. However, by the end of this parliament, the FE sector in England will have experienced an overall cut in core government funding of around one third. And neither the AoC, nor UCU, nor any of the many other institutes, groups and quangos whose role includes representing and defending the interests of FE staff and students, seem to have been able to do anything about it.

Increase in EU student loan arrears

Under European law, students from the EU wanting to study at an English university can apply for the same government funded SLC loans as English students, (although why they would want to do so is perhaps a bit of a mystery, since tuition fees in many European universities are now much lower than in England). Figures released by the SLC show that this year (2013/14) around 92,000 non-UK EU students have taken out loans to study at English universities, borrowing a total of £686 million. This is up by more than 40% on the £484 million borrowed last year. English students will automatically repay loans through the UK tax system, but similar systems are not in place to recover loans for those that have returned to mainland Europe, or have simply disappeared. The SLC says that currently, 13% of EU students who have been required to repay loans have failed to do so, and that it is seeking 'additional information' on a further 19% of EU students who have failed to provide the firm with their income details. SLC figures show that non-UK EU student loan arrears currently amount to £38.2 million, up from £21.2 million last year, raising concerns about the SLC's ability to recover arrears. A spokesman for the SLC defended the firm's record saying 'We do have processes in place to trace those who move away and have systems in place to pursue borrowers for repayment regardless of their location, including engagement with overseas debt collection agencies to ensure all repayments owed are paid'. Concerns have also been expressed about the number of non-UK EU students taking out loans for dubious HE courses at private colleges in the UK, and then disappearing, although the government has pledged 'to clamp down on this'.

SLC uses Wonga debt recovery strategy

Meanwhile it has emerged that one of the methods used by the SLC to pursue graduates that are in arrears with their loan payments has been to send them a bogus letter from a fictitious debt recovery firm created by the SLC for the purpose, called 'Smith Lawson and Company Recovery Services'. In doing so, the SLC appears to have been emulating the strategy of payday loans firm Wonga, which has also been accused of sending letters from bogus law firms, and which has agreed to pay £2.6 million in compensation to about 45,000 customers for doing so. Although the SLC has now stopped sending them, bogus letters have in the past been sent to around 309,000 former students, but it is unclear how successful the strategy has been in recovering loan arrears. A spokesperson for the SLC said that no letters of apology would be sent, nor would compensation be paid to those affected, and universities minister David Willetts has defended the SLC saying that the strategy was intended to be a 'low cost alternative to referring those graduates to third party debt collection agencies'.

Large-scale fraud uncovered in the award of English language certificates

Immigration Minister James Brokenshire has told the House of Commons that a full investigation will be conducted after an inquiry into the abuse of the student visa system carried out in February found evidence of large-scale criminal activity. Mr Brokenshire said that, 'following a BBC Panorama investigation earlier this year, immigration enforcement officers, with the support of the National Crime Agency and together

with officials from UK Visas and Immigration, had conducted a detailed and wide-ranging investigation into actions by organised criminals to falsify English language tests for student visa applicants'. He went on to say that 'of the 48,000 English language certificates that officers had examined, more than 29,000 were found to be invalid and around a further 19,000 were considered to be 'highly questionable' and that it was 'likely that the eventual totals will be considerably higher'. Mr Brokenshire went on to inform MPs that immigration enforcement officers had now started work 'to identify migrants who were in the country illegally as a result of the falsified language tests so that they could be removed'.

He also said that officers had 'also investigated a number of colleges and universities for their failure to ensure that their students meet the criteria set out in immigration rules' and had 'uncovered evidence that gave them serious concern'. As a result, one university has lost its status as a 'highly-trusted sponsor' and a further two universities are no longer allowed to sponsor new students pending further investigations. In addition, a further 57 private further education colleges lost their licenses for sponsoring foreign student visas. In response, Labour's shadow Home Office minister David Hanson said that despite the government's pledge that there would be 'no more bogus colleges, this was an astounding admission of further systematic abuse on this government's watch'

Ed Miliband proposes a new 'Youth Allowance'

Ed Miliband has launched proposals to replace Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) for those aged 18 to 21 years with a new parental means-tested Youth Allowance linked to being enrolled in training. Mr Miliband's proposal is derived from the final IPPR 'Condition of Britain' report, and is targeted at those young people who have not yet obtained a Level 3 qualification. If implemented, the proposal would affect around 70% of the 18 to 21 year-olds currently claiming JSA. Launching the proposal, Mr Miliband said 'Britain's young people who do not have the skills they need for work should be in training, not on benefits' and went on to claim that the implementation of the scheme would initially save around £65 million per year.

In response, Matthew Hancock accused Labour of copying existing Conservative Party policy and tweeted as such to Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Rachel Reeves, along with a link to national media coverage in which Prime Minister David Cameron said 'under-25s would be stripped of benefits to ensure they either earn or learn', with school-leavers 'having to take a job, an apprenticeship or remain in education or training'. The Tweet said 'Dear Rachel, imitation is flattery and all that, but you've just announced a weaker and more costly version of our own policy'.

Ed Miliband proposes new 'Technical Degrees'

Mr Miliband has also unveiled plans to introduce 'technical degrees' that will apparently be specifically targeted at 'the forgotten 50% who do not currently go to university'. Launching his proposals Mr. Miliband said that technical degree would enable 'those who have excelled in vocational education and training will be able to progress further'. But when asked what the difference would be between the proposed technical degree and existing higher apprenticeships, Mr. Miliband appeared to be a little fazed and answered 'There is a very, very limited number of, I think they're called, degree-level apprenticeships available at the moment in some places. But they vary in their nature in terms of are they foundation degrees or are they equivalent to BA degrees?'

Professor Alison Wolf, author of the 2011 Review of Vocational Education, criticised Mr. Miliband's proposal saying 'This is a surprisingly confusing speech' adding that 'it seems to imply that the Labour Party is as convinced as it ever was that higher education is what everybody needs, and that an apprenticeship is only going to be worthwhile if it leads to this new thing called a technical degree'. She went on to say 'And where does this leave the Foundation Degrees which were one of the major initiatives of the last Labour government and launched by them in 2001 as being part of a skills revolution? Foundation degrees sound and look a lot like these new technical degrees to most of us'. Matthew Hancock again used Twitter to respond to the proposals saying 'I get the impression from Ed Miliband's speech that he doesn't know much about HE in FE, Higher Apprenticeships, or our vocational education revolution'.

Nick Clegg promises to protect education spending 'from cradle to college'

In what seems the unlikely event that the Liberal Democrats win the 2015 general election, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has said that there would be protection for education spending from 'cradle to college' (by which he is thought to actually mean between the ages of 2 to 19). He added that this was a 'manifesto pledge' and that, 'based on this financial year's expenditure an extra £10 billion of education spending would be protected, rising each year with inflation'. Mr Clegg went on to say that the Liberal Democrats 'believe education should be properly funded because education is the very core of a liberal society'.

And finally...

An FE college catering department ran a very successful and popular training restaurant that was open to the public. Each week the students ran very popular theme nights in the restaurant. On these evenings, they would prepare and serve dishes that reflected the cuisine of different nations, such as a 'French night' or 'Italian night' or 'Chinese night'

One week the students decided that they would organise an 'Indian night' and would prepare and serve a selection of curries and other dishes that reflected Indian cuisine. The evening was oversubscribed and the restaurant was full. Everyone was thoroughly enjoying their dinner, when shortly after the main course was served one of the customers appeared to pass out and fell face first into his curry. A cry went up and other customers began rushing towards the stricken diner to see what they could do to help. Suddenly a man stood up shouted that he was a doctor and they should stop and let him through. The other customers stood back as the doctor ran to the side of the unconscious diner and examined him. When asked what was wrong, the doctor replied 'this looks very serious. I think he may have fallen into a Korma'.

*We wish all our **Click** newsletter readers an enjoyable and restful summer break*

Alan Birks – July 2014

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