

Sector Developments

I hadn't intended to send out another **Click** newsletter until the end of September, but so much seems to have happened over the summer, I felt that there would too much of a gap in the ever-unfolding story of FE if we didn't. Kate has asked me make the point that any views expressed by the author are not necessarily those of **Click**... So here you have part 2 of the **Click** summer special.

New clowns, same old circus

As a result of the cabinet reshuffle in July a number of ministers involved with schools, universities, FE and Skills were either promoted, demoted or moved sideways, (depending on your point of view).

- Michael Gove left his post as Secretary of State for Education to become the government Chief Whip. He was replaced by the up and coming Nicky Morgan, an Oxford graduate who was first elected to parliament in 2010. She quickly became a member of the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee and four months after this she became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Universities Minister David Willetts and was given the post of minister for Women and Equalities. She was then promoted to the post of Economic Secretary to the Treasury and six months later was promoted again to become Financial Secretary to the Treasury.
- Matthew Hancock was promoted to the more senior post of Minister for Business, Enterprise and Energy and was replaced by Nick Boles, who was also elected for the first time in 2010. Mr Boles was previously Minister for Planning at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). He helped to set up the right wing 'Policy Exchange' think tank and, prior to entering politics he worked as a merchant banker in Russia and Eastern Europe, 'helping state owned industries prepare for private ownership'. After this he set up and ran his own business. Mr Boles was privately educated at Winchester College and then studied at Magdalene College, Oxford, eventually winning a Kennedy Scholarship to Harvard University. The term 'Further Education' seems to have been omitted from his new title of Minister for Skills and Equalities. This is probably just as well, since he admits to knowing 'absolutely nothing' about FE, thereby making him Mr Cameron's obvious choice for the role. Mr Boles says that since his appointment he has been inundated with invitations from principals to visit their colleges which, in a period of savage cuts to the FE budget, you might think is probably a bit like inviting a burglar round to your house so that they can find out what else there is to steal.
- Greg Clark has replaced David Willetts as minister with responsibility for Universities and Science. Mr Clark has been an MP since 2005 and was a former junior minister in the DCLG.

New Skills Minister gets stuck in

No doubt wanting to get off to a flying start, Mr Boles says that he is 'prepared to investigate whether qualifications reform had gone too far'. Mr Boles said 'I believe we were right to scrap some of the qualifications that purported to get people a job, but didn't', but added that he 'had heard that this may have gone too far'. Hedging his bets somewhat, Mr Boles went on to say 'I am not going to even for a moment suggest that I agree with this', but promised that he would 'talk to the Chairman of the Select Committee', who he understood had 'similar concerns about the matter'. Mr Boles went said that when he was Planning Minister he had a 'simple mission' which was to get more houses built, and that in his new job as Skills Minister he had 'an equally simple mission', which is 'to ensure that every young person acquires the skills that they will need to share in our economic recovery'.

In his first parliamentary questions session, Mr. Boles announced that from 2016, schools and colleges would receive 'between £400 and £800 more in their core funding for learners who take on extra qualifications'. Apparently, the extra funding will be mainly 'for students taking on a fourth GCE A level, or Technical Baccalaureate (TechBacc) programme'. The move to fund extra qualifications seems to be at odds with the Wolf Review recommendation for a per-learner, rather than a per-qualification, funding system, and critics claim that only a very small number of students in a very small number of highly selective schools will benefit. They go on to argue that it would have been more equitable to increase the basic rate of funding to help all students get the support they need to progress to higher education or employment. MPs also asked Mr Boles about the TechBacc programme and he responded by saying that his aim was that 'one in four young people would eventually study for the TechBacc'. However, thus far only 5 'trail blazer' colleges will be offering the TeccBacc this September, so there is still some way to go. No doubt reflecting on the speed with which 'Diplomas', GNVQs and other vocational qualifications have come and gone, colleges do not seem to be falling over themselves to be amongst the first to offer them.

Calls for Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) to be reintroduced

The latest to join the ranks of those relentlessly hunting for new ways to spend large chunks of FE funding before it ever gets anywhere near colleges, is the former Labour Shadow Skills Minister, Gordon Marsden MP. Mr Marsden has written an article in which he argues that ILAs (that were introduced by the last Labour government) were 'an idea whose time had come again'. In his article entitled 'Transforming Skills and Life Chances for 2020 Britain' Mr Marsden admits that there were 'problems with ILAs' (although this is probably a bit of an understatement). However, he goes on to argue that 'If aspects of that delivery were flawed, the ideas behind it were not'. He also argues that ILAs should be part of a 'new deal for adult learning and skills' and claims that his proposals are 'absolutely in line with Labour's skills agenda'.

Coincidentally, the National Institute for Continuing Adult Education (NIACE) has called for the introduction of 'Personal Skills Accounts' that also look suspiciously like the old ILAs. A spokesperson for NIACE said 'Our proposal for new Personal Skills Accounts would empower and support adults of working age to get the skills they need to gain decent employment, stay in work longer and be more productive while at work'. As those of you old enough will no doubt remember, the previous ILA scheme was abandoned just a year after it was launched, ostensibly because of 'problems with implementation'. This was a euphemism for 'large-scale fraudulent funding claims for work that was never delivered'. A report compiled for the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) estimated that of the £290 million that was spent on the scheme, fraud amounted to around £97 million. Nevertheless, the NIACE spokesperson insisted that the lessons from the earlier ILA debacle could 'easily be learned and managed', because of the 'new mechanisms' that were now in place' (such as the Unique Learner Number).

Abolition of EMAs in England has reduced the participation rates of poorer students

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was introduced in 2004 and gave an entitlement of up to around £30 per week (depending on parental income and levels of attendance) to disadvantaged students aged 16-18 to help them continue in full time education at school or college. The coalition government abolished the EMA for students in England in 2011 and replaced it with a 16-19 Bursary Fund. (Although EMAs for disadvantaged students have been retained elsewhere in the UK). In England, schools and colleges were given the responsibility for deciding which students should receive financial assistance from the fund. Many claim that there is nowhere near enough cash to meet the level of demand from eligible students, and that they have to 'top up' the bursary fund with cash diverted from elsewhere in their budgets.

Recently, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Institute for Education were jointly commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to research what impact the new policy had in 2011/2012 (which was the year in which the EMA was replaced by the Bursary Fund). The research findings say that 'participation by students who would otherwise have been eligible for full EMA payments fell by around 8,100' and that this was 'a direct consequence of the policy change'. The report goes on to warn that this figure probably 'underestimates the true impact'. The report also draws attention to the fact that the vast majority of grants from the Bursary Fund go 'to provide support for students who are currently in, or have recently left care, and to those who are receiving income support, employment support allowance or disability living allowance'. The report says that the EMA cost the taxpayer £560 million in 2010/11, whereas the total budget for the 16-19 Bursary Fund that replaced it in 2011/12 was just £180 million and concludes that the impact of the policy change has been 'a significant reduction in the overall resources available to young people' in England.

Institute for Learning is to close

Earlier this year, the IfL's non-executive board recommended that the IfL (not to be confused with FETL) should close because there was not enough cash to keep it going. This was caused by the withdrawal of government funding and the subsequent collapse in membership in the wake of large increases in membership fees needed to make up the shortfall. The IfL's advisory council has now formally voted to accept the non-executive board's recommendation to disband the organisation and to pass its assets on to the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). However, the decision has not been without controversy and a number of rank and file IfL members have complained that they were not consulted about the closure. This is a view supported by the IfL deputy chief executive who said 'I am left wondering why the IfL did not consult its membership, it makes no sense to me and is such a tragic waste'. He went on to say 'I have spoken with many members and I know that the appetite for an independent professional body remains. This is not met by gifting the membership to the ETF'. He also warned that the ETF might not be

a 'solid basis for a membership body' and that the ETF 'may not even survive the next election'. In response, the IfL chair pointed out that the IfL constitution says that members of the advisory board are the democratic representatives of the rank and file IfL membership. She added that the closure process was likely to 'take several months', that it would 'include discussions about the future of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS)' and that there would be 'consultations about likely IfL staff redundancies'.

Welcoming the decision, the chief executive of the ETF said, 'Taking on the IfL's legacy will help the ETF evolve positively as an organisation'. He went on to say that that IfL members could 'play a key role in our organisation, and reassured them that they would 'become part of the ETF's professional membership'.

FETL appoints a Chief Executive

The recently created Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) has appointed Mark Ravenhall as its first chief executive. Mr Ravenhall was a former Director for Policy and Impact at NIACE and since then has worked as a freelance researcher and on projects such as the European Commission's 'Agenda for Adult Learning'. FETL (not to be confused with the ETF) has access to an initial budget of £5.5 million derived from the funds left over from the now defunct Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). The president of FETL is Dame Ruth Silver, who was also the chair of LSIS. From this September, FETL will award grants, fellowships and bursaries to support research on 'leadership theory and practice in the sector'. It will become a 'think tank' for FE. Details of how to apply for FETL grants will be available on its new website. Elaborating on these developments, Dame Ruth explained 'It is about the leadership of thinking and thinking of leadership'.

Gazelle Group ETF 'Learning Technology' contract defended

David Russell, the ETF chief executive, has defended the decision to award a £1 million learning technology contract to the Gazelle Group. In doing so, he acknowledged that recent allegations that the Gazelle Group had spent public money on 'expensive initiatives that had little educational impact' had caused some 'scepticism' about the decision. Mr Russell explained that the Gazelle Group had been awarded the contract because the group's bid was 'dynamic and innovative, pedagogy-focused not technology-focused, and above all had learner benefit at its heart'. He also pointed out that in delivering the project, the Gazelle Group would be overseen by a wider steering group, which included 'the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), the 157 Group, and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Gazelle Group chief executive, Fintan Donohue explained that the group had already been awarded five other ETF contracts, including one for 'Strategic Consultation on Learning Companies', and another for 'Strategic Consultation on Vocational Education and Training Technology in Teaching and Higher Level Apprenticeships'. He went on to say that the Learning Technology programme would 'help the sector meet the recommendations of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) and the challenges laid down in the recent report of the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG)' - not to be confused with the National Information and Learning Technology Alliance (NILTA)

Interim Skills Funding Agency (SFA) Chief Executive is to leave

Last November, Barbara Spicer took over from Kim Thorneycroft as interim Chief Executive of the SFA. Ms Spicer was previously chief executive of Salford City Council, but resigned after a disagreement with the elected mayor. Ms Spicer has now announced she will be stepping down in September at the end of her 9 month contract to become the Chief Executive of the Plus Dane Group, a housing agency based in Liverpool. BIS officials have now advertised for her successor. Like so many of the top jobs in the sector these days, the advertisement states that, 'Prior experience of FE and skills policy is not essential'. However, to be fair, the advert does *not* go so far as to say that 'anyone who might have even the remotest understanding or experience of FE need not apply'.

SFA awards a contract

Despite the many millions of pounds already spent by the SFA on new IT systems, the long-running problems with SFA's new software re-emerged when the data collection system crashed while colleges and other providers were trying to submit their R12 data return. Meanwhile, the SFA has awarded a £35 million contract to BAE Systems for another new and overarching IT system, even though the BAE did not bid for it. An SFA spokesperson defended the decision, saying that BAE Systems 'already held a comparable contract with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office' and that the firm had demonstrated a 'track record in

providing the service at the necessary scale and level of complexity required by the Agency'. The firm's group managing director is Nigel Whitehead, (who is also a UK Skills Commissioner, and who chaired of government's recent review of Adult Vocational Qualifications). A spokesperson for BAE said that the firm was delighted to have been awarded the contract. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the SFA insisted that there was 'no conflict of interest' in awarding the contract to BAE.

Education Select Committee to review Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Presumably on the basis that they have not been sufficiently reviewed already, Apprenticeships and Traineeships for 16-19 year-olds are to be the subject of another review by the House of Commons Education Select Committee. This will be the last Education Select Committee inquiry before the general election next May. The review will include an examination of the following areas:

- The effectiveness of apprenticeships and traineeships for 16-19 year olds, including 'the extent to which they meet employer needs in various sectors, and provide young people with a solid foundation for employment in general or in particular occupations, or for further study'.
- The range of apprenticeships and traineeships available to young people.
- Current levels of employer engagement in apprenticeships (including in the provision of work placements, defining standards and assessment) and 'how the government could encourage businesses of all sizes and in all sectors to offer more apprenticeships'.
- The impact of recent changes to the funding of apprenticeships and traineeships.
- Whether the government's investment in apprenticeships represents value for money in terms of the future wage returns for young people and their employability.
- What factors prevent more young people considering apprenticeships and how the government could encourage more young people to consider taking up apprenticeships and traineeships.

OFSTED's FE & Skills and Schools CIFs likely to be merged

Ofsted is proposing that both FE inspections and schools inspections should be carried out under the same Common Inspection Framework (CIF). The proposed changes will go out for consultation 'very soon', with a planned implementation date of September 2015. The CIF merger proposals coincide with Ofsted's decision not to renew contracts with private inspection service providers and to bring all FE and Skills and schools inspections 'in-house'. In responding to the proposals, sector representatives have called on Ofsted to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to future inspections.

Grade 3 providers given up to an extra 6 months to improve

Ofsted has announced that providers given an overall Grade 3 inspection rating will be given up to an extra 6 months to improve. The current timeframe for re-inspection for providers with a 'requires improvement' grade is between 12 and 18 months, but from September this will change to between one and two years.

New Ofsted Chair announced.

The post of Chair of Ofsted has been vacant since the previous Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, controversially failed to renew the contract of the previous occupant, Baroness Morgan, (who was a former senior aide to Tony Blair when he was prime minister). It was expected that the equally controversial multimillionaire Conservative Party donor and Carphone Warehouse co-founder, David Ross would be appointed to the vacancy, but observers were surprised when the less controversial David Hoare was appointed to the job. Mr Hoare has chaired of a number of companies including the DX Group, Virgin Express, the Paragon Group and Laura Ashley. He is said to have no political affiliations and is a trustee of the Teenage Cancer Trust. Mr Hoare will take up his new post as Chair of Ofsted in September.

Ofsted to share draft inspection reports with the FE Commissioner

Ofsted and the FE Commissioner have agreed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' outlining how they will co-operate and communicate with each other when carrying out their respective roles. Included in the memorandum is Ofsted's agreement to share draft inspection reports with the FE Commissioner. A BIS spokesperson said that this would help 'to ensure the FE Commissioner has all the relevant timely information and data necessary to make a judgment on the capacity and capability of a college'.

FE Commissioner gets more FE Advisors

BIS is in the process of recruiting a number of additional FE Advisors to add to the 5 already in post. FE

Advisors assist the FE Commissioner with his work and the posts are advertised as being 'one year fixed term contracts, on a part time basis for circa 60-80 days'. The number of additional FE Advisors to be recruited has not been specified, but a BIS spokesperson said that it was expected that all appointments would be made 'before the end of the summer'.

Sixth Form College Commissioner issues a warning

Peter Mucklow is the Sixth Form Colleges Commissioner and he has been in post for around a year. As Michael Caine might have put it, 'Not a lot of people know that'. Mr Mucklow has recently written to chairs of governors and principals of sixth form colleges to tell them that 'as the financial climate gets tougher, the EFA will be reviewing sixth form college financial plans more swiftly and with a greater degree of scrutiny'. He said that this would inevitably 'call for difficult decisions to be made by leaders and managers to ensure that institutions remain in good financial health' and that this 'would require strong, confident challenge and support from governors on financial matters'. Mr Mucklow warned that he would be 'paying close personal attention' to how governors and managers responded to these challenges and reassuringly went on to say that if principals had concerns about 'future viability', they should consider and discuss 'different structures or delivery models' with their governors.

Nine more colleges apply to directly recruit 14-16 year olds to full time courses

Seven FE colleges were authorised by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) to directly recruit 14-16 year olds in 2012/13. The EFA has now received a further 9 expressions of interest from colleges seeking to directly recruit full-time 14-16 students with effect from this September. An EFA spokesperson said 'We will assess each expression of interest received against the required published criteria'. This includes the provision of a dedicated area for 14-16 year olds on the college's estate, separate leadership for 14-16 provision and 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted inspection grade. If the criteria are satisfied and EFA permission is given the college becomes eligible to claim EFA funding for the 14 and 15 year old students they recruit. Ofsted will conduct a monitoring visit of 14-16 provision in colleges in the first year of delivery.

GCSE English and mathematics re-take requirements begin to take effect

In 2012/13, around 40% of the 16-18 GCSE cohort failed to gain a GCSE grade A*-C in English and/or mathematics. However, from this September, all full time 16-18 year old students who do not already have a grade C or above in GCSE in English and mathematics, will be required to continue studying GCSE or an approved 'stepping stone' qualification in these subjects as a condition of funding for their entire study programme. (Students with a learning disability that prevents them from studying for any of the 'stepping stone' qualifications are exempt from this). The DfE has now published a list of 245 English and mathematics qualifications that meet the new condition of funding requirements. Of these, 150 are in English, 89 are in mathematics and 6 are available in both subjects. From August 2015, students who have attained a grade D GCSE in English and/or mathematics will be required to retake the GCSE, rather than a GCSE equivalent or 'stepping stone qualification'. Again this will be required as a condition of funding for the whole of a student's study programme.

2013/14 GCSE examination results for England, Wales and Northern Ireland are published

The headline details for this year's GCE results include the following:

- 98.5% of pupils achieved a pass in this year's GCSE examinations, down 0.3% on last year.
- 68.8% of pupils achieved grades A*-C in their GCSE results, up 0.7% on last summer.
- Pupils achieving the top A* grade fell slightly to 6.7%, down from 6.8% last year.
- In GCSE mathematics where the percentage achieving A* to C grades rose by 4.8% to 62.4%.
- The number of pupils achieving A*-C grades in English was down 1.9% to 61.7%, (with the fall being said to have been influenced by the removal of the 'speaking and listening' element of the subject).
- There is still a gender gap, with 73.1% of girls' achieving A* to C grades compared with 64.3% for boys.
- There was a 40% reduction in the numbers of pupils taking their GCSE examinations early.
- There was a fall in the numbers of entries for biology, chemistry and physics (the first such decline for a decade) and a fall in the number of modern languages entries.

In England, this is the first year of results following the switch to linear, non-modular courses that have a greater emphasis on exams at the end of two years, rather than coursework. Wales and Northern Ireland opted to retain modular GCSEs that include in-course assessment, meaning that GCSE examinations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are becoming increasingly dissimilar and difficult to compare.

2013/14 GCE A Level examination results are published

Examination officials say this year's GCE A Level results 'are broadly stable'. Headline figures include:

- The overall GCE A Level pass rate A*-E has fallen for the first time in 32 years, down 0.1% to 98%
- Those achieving highest A* grade has risen from 0.6% to 8.2%.
- For the third successive year those achieving A*-A grades have fallen slightly, down from 0.3% to 26%
- Those achieving grades A*-B, was down 0.5% to 52.4%.

Young people given the wrong advice on which GCE A Level subjects to study

A survey of more than 6,000 students conducted by the 'Student Room' online forum suggests that many are being given poor guidance on what to take at GCE A Level, with large numbers saying that they had taken the wrong subjects to access their chosen university course or career. The study found that:

- 32% rated their school's careers advice as 'weak'.
- 23% said they 'did not have enough information to make informed choices about their future careers or the subjects they should study to achieve their ambitions'.
- Those who 'received the worst guidance were often from the poorest backgrounds with no history of higher education in their family'.
- Among less affluent students, 39% said they had received poor information on subject choices.
- The majority of students said that they did not realise that GCE A Level mathematics was essential for a large number of degrees, including most sciences, engineering and computing, and is sometimes also required for philosophy courses.

Responding to the report, a DfE spokesperson said recent guidance 'makes it clear that schools should involve employers in careers advice and ensure that pupils are informed about all options, from A-levels and university, to vocational routes such as apprenticeships'.

Economic recovery is 'not helping solve the UK's youth unemployment problem'.

The latest ONS data shows that number of people who were unemployed fell by 132,000 to 2.08 million. However, of these 750,000 have been out of work for at least a year. Of those who are in employment, around 1.3 million are working part-time (including many on zero hours contracts) and are seeking full-time work, and around 600,000 are on temporary contracts and are seeking permanent work.

Within the unemployed total, the number of young people aged 16-24 who were unemployed fell 102,000 to 767,000. However a recent report from the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) entitled 'The Young Ones: Improving Career Opportunities For Britain's Young People', says that around 250,000 of these young people 'have been out of work for more than a year, with many never having had a job'. The report argues that economic recovery will not help resolve the long-term youth unemployment problem because of the 'striking mismatch between what young people are training for and the types of jobs available'. The report goes on to say that, 'for example, in 2012/13, 94,000 people were trained in beauty therapy and hairdressing for just 18,000 jobs, while only 123,000 were trained in the construction and engineering sectors for an advertised 275,000 jobs'. Interestingly, not many politicians or analysts seem to think that there are too many young people studying, say, Ancient History, Archaeology, Classics or Philosophy, at degree or A level compared to the number of jobs available in those areas.

The IPPR also argues that apprentices should be no older than 23 at the time of starting their course. Official figures show the number of apprenticeships in England almost doubled between 2008/09 and 2012/13. However, much of the increase involved people aged 25 and over. The number of apprentices aged 24 and under has increased by only 30% over the same period. As a result, whereas young people aged 16-24 accounted for 80% of apprenticeships in 2008/09, they now account for less than 60%.

NEET figures in England at their lowest for a decade

Recent government figures show that the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England is now at its lowest level for nearly a decade. There were 809,000 16-24 year olds who were classed as NEET between April and June, down 125,000 on the same period last year. There was also a reduction in the number of 16-18 year olds classed as NEET to 146,000, down on the same period last year by 22,000. The reduction in NEETs is, in part, credited to the government's raising of the participation age (RPA) policy, with the participation rate for 16 year olds currently standing at 95.3%.

'Trojan Horse' letter inquiry reports are published

The as yet unauthenticated 'Trojan horse' letter is alleged to have originated in Birmingham and been sent to someone in Bradford. It includes a 5-point plan to show how schools could be taken over by those following a hard line Islamist agenda and refers to schools in Birmingham where such a 'take over' had already been accomplished. The letter goes on to outline how the process could be repeated in schools in other areas of the country, saying 'This is a long-term plan and one which we are sure will lead to great success in taking over a number of schools and ensuring they are run on strict Islamic principles'.

The seriousness of the letter's content prompted a number of inquiries, starting with a request made by the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, for Ofsted to carry out inspections of 25 schools in Birmingham. Ofsted has now completed the inspections and has published its findings, which seem to confirm that some (but not all) of the schools did have governing bodies and senior management teams that had been infiltrated by hard line Islamists. In delivering his findings to MPs, the Ofsted chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw, said there had been a 'culture of fear and intimidation in which head teachers had been undermined by governing bodies'. He went on to say that his staff had found 'detailed instances of head teachers being forced out of their jobs' by governors or trustees. Five of the schools inspected were subsequently placed in 'special measures' and a number of others were graded as 'requires improvement'.

Mr Gove also commissioned an inquiry headed by Peter Clarke, the former Metropolitan Police head of counter terrorism and Birmingham City Council (BCC) commissioned its own inquiry into the matter, headed by Ian Kershaw, a retired head teacher, and overseen by a review group that included Home Office officials and representatives of the West Midlands Police. In addition, the EFA commissioned audits focused on parallel allegations of financial irregularity in the schools involved.

The Clarke and Kershaw reports have now been published, and their main findings are outlined below.

The Clarke Report

During the course of the inquiry, more than 2,200 documents and over 2,000 pages of interview transcripts from 50 witnesses, including former head teachers, teachers, council staff and school governors were collected. Describing the interview process, Mr Clarke said that 'The level of distress and anxiety felt by the witnesses cannot be overstated'. Mr Clarke confirmed Ofsted's view that 'in some schools there was a co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action carried out by a number of associated individuals to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamist ethos', and that there was 'very clear evidence that young people were being encouraged to accept a particular hardline strand of Sunni Islam'. He went on to say that this had been accomplished by 'achieving influence on governing bodies'. Governors then removed head teachers and senior staff who 'were not sufficiently compliant' and replaced them with others who 'were more sympathetic'. They also appointed 'sympathetic' staff as teachers (some of whom were unqualified), or to other roles in the schools, often without following normal recruitment procedures. Mr Clarke also said 'teachers or governors at one school often appear to have been involved in activities at other schools and that there was 'a degree of coordination behind what has happened'.

As part of his inquiry, Mr Clarke took possession of the contents of a social media discussion between members of the 'Park View Brotherhood', a group of teachers at one of the schools investigated. He said that 'The evidence from more than 3,000 messages shows that this group either promoted, or failed to challenge, views that are grossly intolerant of beliefs and practices other than their own. The all-male group discussions include explicit homophobia, highly offensive comments about British service personnel, a stated ambition to increase segregation at the school, scepticism about the truth of reports concerning the murder of Lee Rigby and the Boston bombings, and a constant under current of anti-western, anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment'. Some of the messages contained 'links to extremists speakers'.

Examples of the findings in the Clarke Report relating to some (but not all) schools include the following:

- Improper employment practices in respect of both the recruitment and promotion of staff.
- People described as 'having an Islamist mindset joined the governing body and sometimes volunteered to bring other governors with them'. The head teacher would then be subjected to harassment and bullying, which included governors and parents leading protests at the school gate or on social media. Eventually the head teacher would be 'so worn down and distressed that he or she would feel that the only way to restore their mental and physical health was to resign'.
- Arabic and Urdu had been introduced as replacements for European languages.

- Governors 'overstepped their responsibilities' by 'insisting on an Islamic approach to subjects such as personal, social and health education, science and religious education.
- Creationism was taught in science lessons and in assemblies as fact.
- Islamic slogans and instructions were prominently displayed in classrooms.
- Friday prayers were introduced and all students and staff were pressured to attend.
- Christmas celebrations were stopped.
- Drama lessons were removed from the timetable, children were barred from playing musical instruments and any portrayal of full faces was removed from the art curriculum.
- Student ambassadors, known as 'religious police' were appointed to report the names of staff or students 'who exhibited behaviour deemed unacceptable to Islam'.
- Homophobic behaviour was openly displayed and female staff were discriminated against.
- Incidents of racism were reported. (For example, disparaging remarks were made about white women in general, and when one of the schools enrolled a white child, a Muslim parent was alleged to have told staff to 'get a white chair and white desk and put the white kid in a white corner with a white teacher and keep him away from the our children, and if that fails get rid of the white kid'.

Mr Clarke's report also raised concerns about the lack of intervention by Birmingham City Council, which he said amounted to 'appeasement' and 'a failure in their duty of care towards their employees'. Mr Clarke said that there was 'incontrovertible evidence that both senior officials and elected members of BCC were aware of activities that bear a striking resemblance to those described in the Trojan horse letter for many months before it surfaced'. In his conclusions Mr Clarke said that council members and officers:

- 'Did not consider carefully enough, or soon enough, whether there was a pattern in what was happening in a number of schools'.
- Had been 'too sensitive to the risk of being accused of racism and Islamophobia'.
- Had shied away from 'confronting and dealing appropriately with unacceptable behaviour of some governors and some governing bodies'.
- Was 'insufficiently supportive of head teachers when problems arose with the conduct of some governing bodies'.
- Were in some cases complicit in 'head teachers being eased out through the profligate use of compromise agreements'.

The Kershaw Report

The findings in the report compiled for BCC by former head teacher Ian Kershaw largely agreed with those in Mr Clarke's report, but differed in the conclusions reached. Mr Kershaw said that he had found evidence that 'key individuals had promoted Islamic principles in schools' and had 'noted a pattern of these individuals moving between schools'. He also agreed that Birmingham City Council had been 'slow to respond' to the Trojan horse letter and placed the blame for this on 'weaknesses in the system and poor oversight of governance'. Mr Kershaw said that he had found evidence that 'the five steps outlined in the original letter were present in a large number of the schools' and that these activities were being carried out by a group of 'British male governors, teachers and parents, predominantly of Pakistani heritage'. However, he argued that although 'the tactics employed by these groups were often improper', there was 'no real evidence of a widespread plot'. His view was that their motivation for engaging in these activities was more 'an attempt to raise standards based on a genuine and understandable desire to improve education and opportunities for Muslim pupils'. Also, whilst agreeing that 'there was evidence of a co-ordinated plan to seize control of the governing boards in 13 schools in Birmingham', he said that he had found 'no evidence of a conspiracy to promote an anti-British agenda, violent extremism or radicalisation'.

Examples of other findings in the Kershaw Report relating to some (but not all) of the schools include:

- Children were coerced into Muslim worship.
- Children were told 'not to listen to Christians because they were all liars'. Pupils were told they were 'lucky to be Muslims and not ignorant like Christians and Jews'.
- Arabic had been introduced as a replacement for European languages.
- Christmas and Diwali celebrations were stopped and Islamic assemblies had been introduced

Both reports called for a review of the process by which schools are allowed to convert to Academy status.

Responses to the Clarke and Kershaw Reports

Responding to the findings of the Clarke Report, Nicky Morgan, the new Secretary of State for Education told MPs that:

- The Boards of Trustees and governing bodies of the schools involved had now been replaced.
- Two head teachers and a deputy at the schools involved had been suspended. Disciplinary measures were being instigated at a 'fast pace' and other suspensions were likely to follow.
- Fourteen teachers were facing misconduct enquiries and 'the National College for Teaching and Leadership would consider whether any of the teachers involved should be barred from the profession'.
- An Education Commissioner for Birmingham would be appointed who would report directly to her.
- 'A wider review of the governance culture' of Birmingham City Council would be carried out, which would report by the end of the year.
- Public funding would be withdrawn from any school found to be 'promoting anti-British values'.

Responding to the findings of the Kershaw Report, Birmingham City Council leader Sir Albert Bore admitted that the council failed to act for 'fear of being seen as racist or Islamophobic', and said he wanted 'to apologise to the people of Birmingham for the way the actions of a few, including some within the council, had undermined the city's reputation'.

Some of the staff at the schools affected said they were 'delighted' when Kershaw and Clarke reports were published with one saying that there were 'huge smiles knowing that justice has been done and there can be no more denying what has gone on'. However, many people in the local Muslim community in Birmingham have expressed anger at the reports, branding the inquiries as 'nothing short of a witch-hunt'. Many parents said that they were very happy with the schools, insisting their children 'received both a good education and were allowed to observe their religion'.

Trojan horse tactics may have spread to Bradford

A recent Ofsted inspection of a local authority school in Bradford says that the school, 'met the needs of Muslim students, but did not take sufficient account of other faiths' and 'did not protect children sufficiently from the risks of extremism'. Examples of other unacceptable practices identified by Ofsted bear a strong resemblance to the findings of Ofsted inspections of some of the 'Trojan horse' schools in Birmingham, and the chair of governors, along with senior staff and other governors had previously visited one of the 'Trojan horse' schools in Birmingham. Responding to the report, the school's governors said that it was 'full of inaccuracies' and again, many parents expressed their support for the school.

Although Ofsted had previously graded the school as 'good', the latest report said that there had been 'significant changes in leadership and staffing over the past 18 months, with two head teachers, an acting head teacher, and more than 20 teachers having left the school'. Commenting on the resignation of one head teacher, the chief executive of the Bradford Schools Partnership, said 'I think an excellent, outstanding head teacher has been driven out by a governing body because she would not give in to their agenda of making it reflect the culture and traditions of the Muslim students'. The school has now also been placed in special measures and Bradford City Council, has asked the DfE to allow the council to appoint an interim executive board to replace the governing body.

Earlier this year, the governing body of another Bradford local authority school, was replaced with an interim executive board. The move followed an Ofsted inspection that judged the school as 'inadequate'. The report said that 'relationships between governors, school staff and the local authority had deteriorated markedly' since the previous inspection, that 'actions by the governing body were increasingly undermining senior leaders' and that 'governors were becoming too involved in operational matters'. There was an overlap in the membership of the governing body of this school with the one above and the local MP, David Ward, said 'We cannot allow the situation that has developed in Birmingham, where it has spread to many more schools than are currently affected in Bradford. It needs to be dealt with before it gets out of hand'.

Concerns expressed at plans to combat extremism

Updated regulations are now being issued to schools and colleges that are intended to reduce the threat of extremism. These include a requirement to promote 'British values', such as 'mutual respect and tolerance'. However some head teachers and other groups have warned that these could have unintended consequences. They argue that the new measures are being 'rushed' in and are calling for a longer time for consultation. The Christian Institute, which is threatening legal action over the matter, says that the

regulations are 'badly written', and could leave schools open to challenges over how these 'values' are interpreted. The Institute goes on to say that the new regulations 'could be used to punish any school which has 'a religious ethos, a set of traditional beliefs, or who didn't promote every minority group's view of the world' and that, for example, Christian festivals such as Christmas 'could be downgraded so as not to offend atheists and those of other faiths'. A spokesperson for the Independent Schools Council also expressed concerns about the new regulations and said 'existing Independent School Standards already helps to ensure that member schools prepare children for life in modern Britain and promote tolerance and respect for all faiths and cultures'. Adding his concerns, the Deputy General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), warned that the new regulations 'could make teachers reluctant to discuss controversial topics,' and as a result, 'rather than protecting free speech, they could inadvertently limit free speech'.

London Oratory School is required to change its admissions policy

Meanwhile, the London Oratory School has been accused by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) of discriminating against pupils on the basis of their ethnicity and socio-economic background. The adjudicator compared the school with 12 other Catholic schools in neighbouring boroughs and found that the London Oratory School had 'the highest proportion of white British pupils, the lowest proportion of non-white pupils and the lowest proportion of pupils of African heritage'. OSA also says that the school must not prioritise places for children 'on the basis of any practical or financial support parents may give to the school'. OSA identified a number breaches of the admissions code, including:

- Asking to see parents' baptism certificates.
- Giving preference to the children of parents that gave financial and other support to the Catholic church.
- Giving priority to those who had already attended 'any other Catholic school'.
- Not allowing the admission of children of no faith.

The school counts amongst its pupils the children of many prominent people. For example Tony Blair sent his two eldest sons, Nicky and Euan to the school, and his daughter Kathryn is believed to have joined the sixth form. Nick Clegg's eldest son Antonio also attends the school. Some have suggested that the school provides children from affluent backgrounds with the equivalent of a private education without the political embarrassment of their parents having to admit that they sent their children to a fee-paying school. The school's head teacher David McFadden said that OSA had made determinations against the school in the past but these had been 'challenged successfully'.

Possible changes to England's HE loan system

Last month, former universities minister David Willetts said that lifting the cap on HE numbers was not dependent on the sale of existing and future HE loan debt to the private sector. However, a recent BIS Select Committee report says that the existing loans system is 'beset with so many problems, its continued existence is under threat' and goes on to warn that the government could lose up to 45p on every £1 loaned to students. The report says that there is 'no immediate pressure on the system' but highlights projections that debt levels 'could reach £330 billion over the next 30 years'.

A new proposal has now emerged from BIS researchers suggesting that universities might in future, 'buy their students' loan debt as they graduated'. This would 'establish a direct connection between the university and the graduate' and mean that universities 'would profit if their students repaid more of their debt'. However, universities would also be required to take on 'the risk that their own students repay less of their debt than expected'. A BIS spokesperson said that, thus far, the proposals had received the support of about 'half a dozen top universities', who believed that 'if universities were to share some risk, they might be allowed to charge more in fees'. However, others expressed concern that the proposal 'could lead to higher tuition fee charges, changes in loan terms and changes in the way higher education works'.

Still the Cinderella service

Universities have now had their admission caps lifted. Estimates suggest that around a further 30,000 university places will be made available in 2013/14, rising to an estimated 60,000 extra places in 2014/15 at a cost of around £5.5 billion. Former universities minister, David Willetts has said that there is 'theoretically no upper limit on student numbers'. It is expected that by the end of this summer's clearing process a new record of well in excess of 500,000 university places will have been allocated, with many applicants having gained places at their university of first choice, even though they did not achieve the grades that were

initially asked for. The ability to charge (and get) fees of up to £9,000 per year for each student recruited means that some universities could be awash with money, with some universities now offering recruitment incentives such as top up grants, laptops or even free flights home in order to attract more students. In theory the students pay the fees, but in practice it is the government that pays the fees to the universities up front on their behalf. This is in the hope that the money can eventually be recovered from the students when they graduate and are earning a salary in excess of £21,000 per year. As mentioned above, many observers (including the PAC and BIS Select Committee) believe that many of these loans will never be repaid. However, this will be the government's problem, and not the universities'.

At the same time, the schools sector has had its funding protected and has benefitted from the billions of pounds spent on new Academies, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools. Schoolteachers now earn more than school FE lecturers for doing an arguably less complex and volatile job, and also face less risk of redundancy. And it seems that it is only the FE sector that has such low hourly rates for part time staff and has seen such a proliferation in the use of zero hours contracts.

We are therefore not all in it together. It is the college sector, rather than universities and schools, that has been required to bear the brunt of government cuts in education spending. Funding for FE and sixth form college students has always been much lower than the funding for students in universities and schools, hence the term 'Cinderella service'. But from a funding base that was already low, some estimates predict that, by the end of this parliament, and despite the introduction of FE loans, the colleges budget will have been slashed by around a third. And anyone expecting the cuts to be reversed if the Labour Party wins the general election next year would be advised not to hold their breath. Over the next 2 years, colleges will see their funding being slashed by 15% as a consequence of 19% reduction in the adult skills budget. There will also be a 17.5% cut in the funding for full-time for 18 year-old students that will impact far more heavily on the college sector than it will on schools. And just for good measure, the large increase in availability of undergraduate places at universities is likely to reduce the demand for HE places in FE. In fact, the only thing that FE seems to get more than its fair share of is the copious amount of audit, inspection and other scrutiny that colleges are subjected to plus, of course, the endless flow of new 'initiatives', 'reviews' and 'reforms' foisted on the sector by successive ministers.

Very little recognition has ever been given to the remarkable achievements of FE and sixth form colleges, and the government now appears to have decided 'Further Education' is not sufficiently important to warrant being included in the new Minister for Skills and Equalities title. The number of Academies and Free Schools etc, all of which have sixth forms, continues to increase, with many calling themselves colleges and referring to their pupils as students. These schools are often fully funded for pupils they have not even recruited. Meanwhile, the number of FE and sixth form colleges is falling, and presumably in order to ensure that those that survive are given no more status than the smallest of private trainers, they are now just referred to as 'providers'. The people who attend them are just 'learners', having even lost the dignity of being able to call themselves 'students'. With the unfettered expansion of sixth forms in schools, the explosion of additional university places, funding now being directly allocated to employers for training, the growth in private training providers and, unlike any other education sector, the mandatory requirement for colleges to deliver increasingly substantial proportions of their courses on-line as a condition of funding, it almost seems that there is an attempt to airbrush the whole concept of college based further education from the public consciousness, and to hand over whatever might survive to private firms.

There is no shortage of associations, groups and other bodies whose job it is to represent and defend the interests of FE students and staff, (usually charging pretty hefty fees and subscriptions for the privilege of doing so). Some of them even receive cash directly from the government, top sliced from the FE budget before it gets anywhere near a college. They have undoubtedly been very good at producing policy documents, briefings, responses, projects, position statements and research papers etc. They organise conferences and even provide colleges with commercial services (all of which they charge extra for). But unfortunately they seem to have been less successful in challenging ministers and resisting the massive budget cuts that colleges have had to deal with. Some observers have suggested that they may even have been sycophantically complicit in their acceptance of them. But this probably goes too far, and to be fair, the AoC was successful in its campaign for free lunches for disadvantaged 16-18 year olds in FE. Even then, David Cummings, a former aide to Michael Gove, claims that the extra cash to pay for free lunches wasn't extra at all, but came from cuts imposed elsewhere in the FE budget.

At this moment in time, although ministers may not like it, FE colleges are probably still necessary for the

delivery of many of the government's key education and skills policies. However time is running out to flex what collective muscle the sector still has left. Colleges require the associations and groups that represent them to be more articulate advocates for FE and to become much better at developing strategies to resist the endless battering that colleges seem to be subject to. Whether these bodies are capable of doing this is, at best, unclear. But something needs to be done before it is too late, otherwise there is a real risk that we are facing the end of the college sector as we know it. (This, of course, has been a rant.)

And finally...

Two ex-college principals were chatting about where they had been on their summer holidays. The first principal explained that he had been to the Canary Islands and went on to say 'The strangest thing is that there are no canaries in the Canary Islands'. The other principal said that he had been on holiday to the Virgin Islands, and added 'Now there's a coincidence. There are no canaries in the Virgin Islands either'.