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SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS…

THE GENERAL ELECTION AND FE

Just in case you may possibly have been in a coma for the last month, the results of the General Election held on 8 June were as follows:

- Conservatives: 317 seats (42.4% of the total votes cast)
- Labour Party: 262 seats (40.0% of the total votes cast)
- Scottish National Party (SNP): 35 seats (3.0% of the total votes cast)
- Liberal Democrats: 12 seats (7.4% of the total votes cast)
- Democratic Unionist Party (DUP): 10 seats (0.9% of the total votes cast)
- Sinn Fein: 7 seats (0.7% of the total votes cast)
- Plaid Cymru: 4 seats (0.5% of the total votes cast)
- Green Party: 1 seat (1.6% of the total votes cast)

To these are added one independent MP (North Down in Northern Ireland) and the Speaker. The UK Independence Party received 1.9 % of the total votes cast but won no seats. Other minority parties received a combined total of 1.6% of the total votes cast.

Although no party achieved an overall majority in the House of Commons, the Conservatives (having returned the highest number of seats) remain in office for the time being. This is after Theresa May was given permission by the Queen to form a minority government with support from the DUP. It is thought highly likely that the Conservatives' manifesto plans for the expansion of the apprenticeship programme and the introduction of new T-Levels in England will be carried through parliament, partly because their implementation started before the election was called, and partly because none of the proposals are so controversial that the opposition parties might combine to defeat them.

The unexpectedly large Labour vote share (bigger than that achieved by Tony Blair in 2005, Gordon Brown in 2010 and Ed Miliband in 2015) has been attributed to a much higher turnout amongst younger voters, who were thought to have been attracted by many of Labour's manifesto pledges. These included such things proposals to restore housing benefits for young people, and to abolish FE and university tuition fees (in England). However, despite the increase in votes received, it seems unlikely that the Labour Party would be able to form a viable alternative government, even with the support of the numerous other smaller parties including the SNP, particularly if the Conservatives can establish the necessary working relationship with the DUP (even if this does involve paying a future Northern Ireland Executive additional sums of money not too far away from the entire Adult Education Budget for England).

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH AND FE

The Queen's Speech was delivered to MPs on 21 June and sets out the new government's legislative priorities for the next two years. There was a relatively brief reference to FE and skills in England, with the Queen just saying, 'My ministers will work to ensure people have the skills they need for the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future, including through a major reform of technical education'. However, the government briefing that accompanies the Queen's speech is more detailed and includes information about the following:

- The replacement of many existing technical and vocational qualifications with 15 new 'high quality' technical routes, leading to the award of new 'T-Level qualifications' in England.
- An extra £500 million a year to support technical curriculum development and qualification reform.
- The establishment of new Institutes of Technology (IoTs) 'in every major city, to enable more young people to take advanced technical qualifications'. The government says that IoTs will 'become key

institutions for the development of the skills required by local, national and regional industry' and will 'provide courses at degree level and above specialising in technical disciplines, and higher-level apprenticeships'.
- The creation of 3 million new apprenticeship starts by 2020.
- The introduction of maintenance loans for students on FE courses leading to higher level qualifications.

There was no mention in the Queen's Speech (or the accompanying government briefing note) of establishing more University Technical Colleges UTCs. Nor was there any mention of earlier proposals *not* to require teachers to repay their tuition fee loans while they remained in teaching, as a way of helping to tackle teacher shortages. Proposals in respect of creating more grammar schools and ending free school meals for primary school children also appear to have been abandoned. This is probably because it would be unlikely that the new government could secure sufficient support in parliament to enact any of these measures. A copy of the Queen's Speech can be accessed at:

https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Queens+Speech+2017+21062017152000?open

And a copy of the detailed government briefing notes accompanying the Queen's Speech can be accessed at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/queens-speech-2015-background-briefing-notes

NEW MINISTER FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND SKILLS IN ENGLAND

Anne Milton, the MP for Guildford, has been appointed as the new Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills in England. She replaces Robert Halfon, who took over the role from Nick Boles in July 2016. Ms Milton has previously served as Shadow Minister for Tourism, as a member of the House of Commons Health Select Committee, and as Shadow Minister for Health. Between 2010 and 2012 she served as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, and was appointed a Government Whip in 2012. The second new education related appointment is that of Robert Goodwill, the MP for Scarborough and Whitby, who becomes a Minister of State for Education (although the focus of his duties in this role are, at present, unclear). Other ministers with responsibilities for education who have retained their positions after the election include:

- Justine Greening: Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities
- Nick Gibb: Minister of State for School Standards
- Jo Johnson: Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation
- Caroline Dinenage: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Early Years
- Lord Nash: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System

POST-ELECTION SPENDING ON 16-18 PROVISION WILL STILL BE LOWER THAN SPENDING ON 11-16 PROVISION

An analysis of the election manifestos of the main political parties carried out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) prior to the election suggests that whatever the outcome had been, spending per head on students aged 16-18 in England would still be around 10% lower than spending on secondary school aged pupils. The report says:

- Spending on students aged 16-18 has 'fared substantially worse than other areas of education funding'. In 1990/91, spending per head on students aged 16-18 was 50% higher than spending per secondary school pupil, but by 2017/18, it was 13% lower. This, said the IFS, represents a 'massive' reduction in funding.
- Both the Conservative and Labour Party manifestos proposed a higher level of spending on 16-18 provision relative to that in secondary schools. However, both would see 16-18 spending per head remaining lower than spending per head on secondary school pupils, whichever party had been elected.
- Conservative spending plans will see the gap reduced from its current level of 13% to around 10% in 2021/22. Labour's proposals would have seen the gap fall to 11% over the same period.

- In the unlikely event that the Liberal Democrats had won, spending on 16-18 and secondary schools would have remained the same in real terms, so there would have been no reduction in the current spending gap.

A copy of the IFS report can be accessed at:

https://election2017.ifs.org.uk/article/comparison-of-parties-plans-for-education-spending-on-16-18-year-olds-in-england

ESFA PUBLISHES LATEST NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT RATE TABLES

On 15 June, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published the 2015/16 National Achievement Rate Tables (NARTs) for England. The data has been contentious, particularly that for apprenticeships. In February, a number revisions were made to the way in which apprenticeship NARTs were calculated in order to 'close a series of loopholes' in the way the data was reported. These changes have resulted in learners who did not have a 'completion status' now being recorded as a 'fail'. With respect to apprenticeships, the change has resulted in overall achievement rates falling by nearly 5%, compared to 2014/15. 18 providers have seen their achievement drop by 30% or more between 2014/15 and 2015/16, even though half of them have been rated 'good' by Ofsted. However, the 2015/16 NART data has been published without *directly comparable* figures for the previous year, which critics argue is 'clearly misleading'. Stating the obvious, the ESFA has defended its decision to do this by merely stating that 'different methodology' had been used and that therefore 'any direct comparison between the two years would be misleading'. The ESFA did point out that data for 2014/15 was 'still available', but made no mention of the fact that the earlier data still uses unrevised figures. The latest NART tables, which includes overall and individual provider performance data for all courses, including apprenticeships, can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-achievement-rates-tables-2015-to-2016

COLLEGES UNAWARE OF NEW LEGAL DUTY TO PUBLISH 16-18 PERFORMANCE DATA ON WEBSITES

The Department for Education (DfE) now requires all 16-18 providers (including FE and sixth form colleges) to publish five new 'headline accountability measures' on their websites. The requirement was introduced for the first time this year as a way for colleges to assess how well they are doing in relation to others, and to enable prospective students, parents, employers etc, to compare the performance of different providers in the locality. The measures that colleges are required to publish in relation to their own performance includes:

- Students' progress overall compared with that of students across the country.
- The average attainment students achieve at Key Stage 5, by qualification type.
- Progress made by learners without at least a GSCE grade C in English and mathematics in these subjects.
- The proportion of students who get to the end of their main programme of study, by qualification type.
- The percentage of students who continue in education of training, or who move on to employment.

Colleges must also publish a link to the full national performance tables for all providers. Unfortunately, colleges do not appear to have been informed of this and therefore have been unaware that they were required to publish these measures on their websites. An examination of college websites would seem to confirm this. Fortunately, the DfE does not appear to be about to sanction colleges for non-compliance. More details of the performance measures that colleges are now required to publish on their websites can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537547/16-19_accountability_headline_measures_briefing_note.pdf

NEETS ON THE RISE AGAIN

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has released data shows that:

- Between 2014/15 and 2015/16 the number of young people age 16-18 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) rose by more than 2% to 15.5%, an increase that the ONS says is 'significant'. The increase last year follows a period of contraction in the numbers of young people classed as NEET, and rise is even more surprising because it comes in the first year that young people leaving school at 16 have been required by law to remain in some form of education or be in a job with training until they are aged 18.
- Meanwhile, of those young people aged 19-24 classed as NEET in 2015/16, it appears that only 42% were actually looking for work. These were classified as 'unemployed'. While the overall UK unemployment rate is currently at 4.6%, the figure for young people age 19-24 who are classed as 'unemployed' is 12.7%, meaning that 19-24-year-olds are three times more likely to be unemployed than the rest of the general population. The other 58% of young people in this age range who were NEET were not actively seeking work, and were classed as 'economically inactive'.

More information on NEET trends can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/neet-statistics-quarterly-brief-january-to-march-2017

'PAUSE' IN THE NON-LEVY APPRENTICESHIP PROCUREMENT PROCESS IS ENDED

Speaking at the recent Association of Education and Learning Providers (AELP) conference, the new Skills Minister for England, Anne Milton, made a number of announcements. These included the following:

- The 'pause' in the non-levy procurement process has now been ended and non-levy apprenticeship growth requests will re-commence in July.
- A new non-levy tendering process will also begin in July.
- Providers that made a business case for growth in non-levy funding allocations prior to the 'pause' will be given a response 'shortly'. It is expected that 42 providers will see their initial allocations increased in respect of contracts and allocations for the period between January 2018 and April 2019. This growth will only be available to providers that are already on the Register of Approved Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP).
- There will be a further opportunity for providers to apply to be included on the RoATP, but new providers on the register will be restricted to tendering for levy-only apprenticeship provision.

NUMBER OF NEW PROVIDERS OFFERING APPRENTICESHIPS INCREASING, BUT OFSTED SAYS IT CAN COPE

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's new Chief Inspector for England has admitted that the rapidly increasing number of new training providers that are, or will in future be, delivering apprenticeships has presented Ofsted with a 'real challenge'. However, she says that Ofsted will only need the same number of employees to work in the post-16 system, and she does not 'expect that more resource will be needed' to cope with the increase. The number of providers on the RoATP has risen from 1473 to 1894 just over the period since May, and many more new providers are known to be in the process of applying to be included on the register. All providers that are included on the RoATP are required be inspected by Ofsted.

ESFA WARNS APPRENTICESHIP PROVIDERS AGAINST ABUSING SUBCONTRACTING RULES

Also speaking at the recent AELP conference, Keith Smith, Director of Funding and Programmes at the ESFA, said that the agency was becoming increasingly concerned that apprenticeship providers were using employers as subcontractors' and said that this was 'contrary to the spirit' of the new apprenticeship reforms. As an example of this, he said that through the subcontracting process some employers were receiving government funding for training they were already providing. This, he said, was 'contrary to everything the ESFA is trying to achieve'. He said that 'as soon as we see a provider or an employer working against the intent of the rules we will intervene', and warned that 'the provider will be removed from register' and that 'there may potentially other larger consequences as well'.

DFE PUBLISHES GUIDANCE ON 20% OFF-THE-JOB-TRAINING RULE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

The DfE has published its long awaited additional guidance on the '20% percent off-the-job' training rule for apprenticeships. The DfE says that the new guidance is intended to help providers 'ensure that they are offering off-the-job training in accordance with the funding rules and policy intent'. The guidance confirms that apprenticeships must last a minimum of 12 months and must involve at least 20% off-the-job training. This requirement is measured over the entire length of an apprenticeship, rather than over an academic year.

The guidance defines off-the-job training as 'learning which is undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day working environment and leads towards the achievement of an apprenticeship'. This could include training that is delivered at the apprentice's normal place of work, but must not be delivered as part of their normal working duties. The off-the-job training must take place during employed time. If training, by exception, takes place in an evening, or outside of contracted hours, this must be recognised (for example, through time off in lieu). Examples of off-the-job training include:

- The teaching of theory (for example: lectures, role playing, simulation exercises, online learning).
- Practical training (for example: shadowing, mentoring, industry visits and attendance at competitions).
- Learning support and time spent writing assessments/assignments.

Off-the-job training does *not* include

- English and mathematics (up to Level 2) which is funded separately.
- Progress reviews, or on-programme assessment.
- Study or training undertaken outside of working hours and outside paid employment.

More details can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-off-the-job-training

MOST APPRENTICESHIP PROVIDERS LOOK TO THE IFA FOR THEIR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Apprenticeship providers must choose from four options for their external quality assurance (EQA). These are:

- A relevant and established employer group
- A recognised professional body
- Ofqual
- The Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA).

It was previously anticipated that Ofqual would be the most popular choice for EQAs, particularly since an Ofqual spokesperson said, 'We don't charge and do not intend to introduce charges for our services'. However, the IfA has proved to be the most popular choice. This is despite the IfA making it clear that it did 'not have the resource to perform the EQA role directly' and would have to charge providers to cover the cost of 'outsourcing the delivery of the EQA to a contractor'. Earlier this month (June), the IfA published details on the '*gov.uk contracts finder'* website of how interested contractors could bid to deliver EQA on its behalf. Potential contractors were informed that:

- The overall value of contracts to deliver EQAs is £160,000.
- Contracts awarded will run from 1 August 2017 until 31 March 2018, with an option for the EFA to extend the contract for up to a further six months.
- Shortlisted contractors will meet with the IfA on 4 July and contracts will be awarded on 14 July.
- Contracts awarded will cover both the delivery of EQA and the End-Point Assessment (EPA), where the IfA is the named EQA provider. (The IfA anticipates that between 1,500 and 2,500 apprentices will undertake an EPA across up to 36 apprenticeship standards).

The details also say that successful applicants must:

- Deliver a comprehensive EQA service, which will include 'ensuring standards and assessment plans are fit for purpose and are delivering high quality outcomes'.
- Ensure that apprenticeship assessment organisations (AAO's) are 'interpreting assessment plans consistently across the standard', and that their 'assessment instruments are fit-for-purpose'.
- Guarantee that rigorous 'processes and procedures are in place to manage the delivery of EQAs'.
- Ensure that 'individual AAOs have robust *internal* quality assurance processes in place'.
- Provide monthly progress reports to the IfA 'highlighting progress against agreed project plans, and any risks and issues identified within them'.

Further details can be accessed at:

https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/6c5d9829-3ffa-4956-93d3-e72ae20ea51d?p=@NT08=UFQxUlRRPT0=NjJ

NOCN ACQUIRES CSKILLS

The National Open College Network (NOCN) has acquired CSkills Awards from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). CSkills will officially move to NOCN on 1 August, bringing around 4,000 apprenticeships a year into the NOCN accreditation framework. CSkills is the second largest apprenticeship awarding organisation (AAO) in the construction sector after City and Guilds, regulating 271 construction qualifications, 97,500 learner registrations and 69,000 qualification achievements in 2015/16.

FUNDING ALLOCATED TO SUPPORT THE EXPANSION OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

The government has allocated £8.5 million to increase the number of apprenticeships at Levels 6 and 7 through the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF). The fund is managed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and is intended to support HE providers to work with employers to establish new degree apprenticeships. The first DADF allocations totalling £4.5 million has been awarded to 25 universities and 20 FE colleges to help fund 18 projects intended to deliver up to 5,200 new degree apprenticeships from this autumn. As an example of such a project, the University of the West of England has received £350,000 through the fund, and is working in partnership with Weston College, City of Bristol College, Gloucestershire College and Bridgwater College, to develop new degree apprenticeships in nine subjects, including digital technology, aerospace and electronics.

NEW POLICE DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP IS LAUNCHED

The College of Policing has launched its new degree apprenticeship, which it says is 'designed to provide the next generation of police officers with the skills required of a modern constable'. Alongside traditional areas of policing, such as public protection, criminology and crime prevention, the course will include new areas such as digital policing. Apprentices will complete a degree in Professional Policing Practice over a three-year period and is one of three routes forming part of the new Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF), the aim of which is to ensure all new police officers hold a degree-level qualification. More details on the PEQF can be found at:

http://www.college.police.uk/News/College-news/Pages/peqf_consultation.aspx

ETF LAUNCHES A NEW ADVANCED TEACHER STATUS (ATS) AWARD FOR THE FE SECTOR

Following consultation with members of the Society for Education and Training (SET), the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has announced that an Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) award is to be launched. The new award is intended to give recognition to 'those teaching in the FE sector who can demonstrate mastery of the profession beyond the achievement of their Qualified Teaching Learning and Skills (QTLS) award'. Those applying for ATS will be required to build a portfolio of supporting evidence over a minimum of nine months that will enable them to demonstrate:

- Mastery in teaching and/or training.
- An exemplary degree of subject knowledge in their area of professional expertise.

- Effectiveness in working collaboratively to improve teaching standards amongst their peers and/or within their organisation.

In order to be eligible for the ATS award, a candidate must be a SET member and have been a qualified teacher (QTLS) involved in 'teaching post-14 learners in schools, FE colleges, adult and community learning (ACL), work-based learning (WBL), employers' premises, or offender-learning' for at least 4 years. Holders of the ATS award will also be given 'Chartered Teacher Status' by the Chartered College of Teaching (which has previously confined this award to staff working in the schools' sector). The ETF says this will help 'cement parity of professional status between those teaching and training across all educational contexts'. An initial cohort of up to 50 teachers will begin the process commencing this October. Further cohorts will start during 2018. The fee for the first cohort will be £250, rising to £750 for later cohorts. Further details can be found at:

http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/news/education-training-foundation-launches-advanced-teacher-status/

More information on SET and how to apply for ATS can be accessed at:

https://set.et-foundation.co.uk and https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/professionalism/ats/ats-application-process/

More information on the Chartered College of Teaching and Chartered Teacher status can be accessed at:

https://www.collegeofteaching.org

PART-TIME AND CASUAL FE STAFF MISS OUT ON CPD

The '*Further Education Workforce Data for England'* report, published by the ETF reveals that almost two-thirds of FE teachers do not spend any time at all on CPD (Continuous Professional Development). The report is based on Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data returned by 102 FE colleges, and says that in 2015/16 the average FE teacher spent 15 hours a year on CPD. However, that average takes into account the fact that 60% of FE teachers reported spending no time at all on any kind of formal training. This was the first time the SIR has included data on CPD, and so no comparative data for previous years exists. However, it is thought that the low number of teachers engaging in CPD is partly due to the large numbers of FE staff who are employed on zero-hours contracts, or on fixed term, part-time or casual contracts, or are employed indirectly through agencies**.** The report (which contains a full range of data on the FE workforce) can be accessed at:

http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/SIR-Report.pdf

And more information on the SIR can be accessed at: https://www.sirdatainsights.org.uk

PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION IN ENGLAND CONTINUES TO FALL

The most recent quarterly '***Further Education and Skills in England'* report** shows that 1,537,100 learners participated in adult education courses in the first half of 2016/17. This is 78,300 fewer than in the same period in 2015/16. The report says that participation in adult further education fell by 11.2% in 2015/16, compared with 2014/15. This follows a previous 10.8% fall between 2013/14 and 2014/15. Last year, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education warned that adult education could disappear entirely by 2020. A copy of the ***'Further Education and Skills in England'* report can be accessed at:**

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618924/SFR13-2017-June-revision.pdf

JOINT AOC/TES SURVEY SAYS THAT COLLEGE FINANCIAL HEALTH IS IMPROVING

A recent survey of English colleges (to which around a third of colleges responded) conducted by the Association of Colleges (AoC) in partnership with the Times Educational Supplement has revealed that just 13% of colleges are expecting to return a deficit in 2017/18, and perhaps even more surprising, almost two-thirds of colleges are expecting to return a surplus (although 56% of colleges are expecting to have to restructure their workforce further in order to do so). On the surface, the survey indicates a significant improvement on 2016/17, when 20% of colleges said they expected to return a deficit, with nearly a third saying they expected to have to make more compulsory redundancies. The AoC attributes the improvement in financial health to 'more stability from the government, lower levels of restructuring costs and increased income derived from the delivery of apprenticeships'. With reference to the latter, 48% of colleges said they expected their income from the delivery of apprenticeships to continue to grow in 2017/18.

COLLEGES CAN BEGIN TO RECOVER VAT ON TRAINING SUPPLIES

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has confirmed that it has accepted the recent ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) that colleges should be exempt from VAT on supplies used for training, and that colleges can apply for refunds. The ECJ ruling comes in the wake of long-running dispute between Brockenhurst College and HMRC, centred on whether supplies for the college's training restaurant should be exempt from VAT. It is anticipated that up to £10 million of VAT payments will be reclaimed by colleges, with individual claims typically expected to be in the region of between £20,000 and £250,000. It remains to be seen whether the government will seek to recover this through a reduced funding allocation to the sector.

NEW AOC DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Gill Clipson has retired from her post as AoC Deputy Chief Executive. She has been replaced by Kirsti Lord, who has been Acting Principal of City College Coventry since April. Working closely with the other AoC Deputy Chief Executive, Julian Gravatt, Ms Lord will focus specifically on 'member services'. Ms Lord was previously Deputy Principal at City College Coventry in 2016, Assistant Principal (Curriculum) at Sandwell College in 2015/16, and Director of Creative and Performing Arts at Leicester College from 2010 until 2015.

FIRST TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF) RESULTS ARE PUBLISHED

The TEF was introduced last year by the previous Conservative government, and is administered by HEFCE. Under the framework, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are rated as 'bronze', 'silver' or 'gold' based on an assessment of the quality of their undergraduate teaching. This is the first year of TEF operation, and all HEIs (including universities, FE colleges offering degree courses and private sector providers) have been allowed to choose whether or not to take part in the scheme. Of the 295 HEIs that did take part, 59 were rated as 'gold', 116 were rated as 'silver' and 56 were rated as 'bronze'. 'Gold' status means that the HEI provides 'consistently outstanding teaching, learning and outcomes for its students'. 'Silver' status means the HEI consistently '*exceeds* the rigorous national quality requirements for UK higher education'. 'Bronze' status means the HEI '*meets* the rigorous national quality requirements'. Some of the most prestigious universities in England were rated in the 'bronze' category. These include the London School of Economics (LSE), Southampton, Liverpool, Goldsmiths and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Of the 21 elite universities in the Russell Group that participated in the TEF, 8 were given a 'gold' rating, 10 were awarded 'silver' and 3 were rated 'bronze'. A total of 49 HEIs were given a provisional rating.

Of the 106 FE colleges that participated in the TEF, 14 were rated 'gold', 46 were rated 'silver', 31 were rated 'bronze', and 15 received a 'provisional' rating. This means that the FE colleges that achieved 'gold' status, outperformed many of the Russell Group universities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the universities rated as bronze have criticised the TEF as 'unfair' and 'unreliable'.

The government says that the new teaching ratings will help students make informed choices about HE courses, but some have said that the TEF is primarily a mechanism to allow universities to charge higher fees. This year, all the HE institutions that took part in the TEF or were given a 'provisional' rating (ie *all* HEIs) will be allowed to raise their annual tuition fees to £9,250 with effect from this September, and subject to maintaining at least 'bronze' standard, will from 2018/19 be allowed to raise them further in line with inflation.

The quality of teaching in HEIs is assessed by an independent panel based on a range of measures, including facilities, student satisfaction, drop-out rates and how many students go on to employment or further study after graduating. The final rating is based purely on data (much of which is provided by the HEI itself). However, some cynics think they may have spotted a flaw in the TEF as a method of accurately assessing the quality of undergraduate teaching. The flaw, they say, lies in the fact that the TEF does not actually involve anyone being observed teaching.

TEF grades awarded to HEIs (including FE colleges and private providers that offer HE) can be accessed at: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/tefoutcomes/#/

POORER YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE DETERRED FROM ATTENDING UNIVERSITY BY TUITION FEE DEBT

Earlier this month the University College London (UCL) Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) published a research study into young peoples' attitudes to student debt in the years between 2002 and 2015. This was period over which university tuition fees in England increased from £1,100 per year to £9,000. Researchers found that:

- By 2015, more young people were prepared accept high levels of student debt, seeing it as a necessary part of getting a degree.
- Young people from low-income families were more reluctant to take on student debt in 2002 than their wealthier counterparts. By 2015 the level of debt aversion amongst young people from poorer families had increased significantly, relative to their better off peers.
- Because of these debt fears, says the report, working-class young people are now far less likely than students from other social classes to apply to go to university.
- Although university applications in England have continued to rise between 2002 and 2015, and more students from all backgrounds, including from poorer families, are now getting places, there are still significant relative differences in application levels depending on young people's backgrounds.
- Even when poorer young people achieve same examination results as their wealthier peers, they are less likely to apply to go to university.

A copy of the UCL report can be accessed at:

http://www.llakes.ac.uk/sites/llakes.ac.uk/files/58.%20Callender%20and%20Mason.pdf

IPPR RECOMMENDS THAT UTCS CONVERT TO 16-19 VOCATIONAL COLLEGES AND THAT STUDIO SCHOOLS JOIN MATS

A report entitled *'Tech Transitions'* produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) for the Nuffield Foundation says that, despite 'high levels of government support' for both University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools, they were 'not working for pupils', and faced 'too many barriers to being successful'. The report found that in 2015/16:

- UTCs attracted 'a year 10 intake with a similar profile to the national average', however their league table performance was 'significantly below average'. Two-thirds of UTCs were ranked in the bottom 10% of schools nationally for 'Progress 8' (which is a type of value-added measure of the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school).
- Just 35% of UTC pupils, and 26% of Studio School pupils, achieved 5 A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, compared with a national average of 54% in other schools.

The report recommends that unless they have a 'record of high performance', all ailing UTCs should be converted into 'high quality 16-19 technical vocational colleges', and that all Studio Schools should join multi-academy trusts (MATs) that would provide 'a more readily available recruitment pool'. Meanwhile, there should be a moratorium on opening any new UTCs or Studio Schools. This, says the IPPR, is because 'the next parliament will see a greater commitment to technical and vocational education as part of a modern industrial strategy post-Brexit', and UTCs could 'help to plug the gap in specialist technical 16-19 provision needed to deliver the government's new T-levels'. A copy of the IPPR report can be accessed at:

http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/Tech_transitions_May17.pdf?noredirect=1

And for anyone interested in finding out more about 'Progress 8', this can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583857/Progress_8_school_performance_measure_Jan_17.pdf

NFER REPORT SAYS UTCS NEED MORE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO ENABLE THEM TO 'THRIVE AND PROSPER'

Meanwhile, another report, this time from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) entitled '*Behind the Headlines'* calls on the government to do much more to support the UTC programme. The report says that, for example, 'absence rates of future UTC pupils were found to be higher than their peers', and that 'many UTC students may have faced challenges in terms of engagement in school'. It goes on to suggest six ways that UTCs could be helped to tackle ongoing issues (such as under recruitment). These are:

- Carrying out an independent assessment of students attending UTCs at the point of entry 'so that progress made while in the institution can be properly measured and UTCs can be held to account only for the time that the student attends the institution'.
- Examining 'how well the current headline accountability measures fit with the curriculum and purpose of UTCs, with the aim of ensuring that they do not disadvantage UTCs (or their students)'. If this concludes that the headline measures do not assess UTCs fairly, 'consideration should be given as to how the existing measures might be adapted or complemented with additional measures (for example, a greater focus on destination and employability skills measures) to better assess UTC performance'.
- Reviewing the non-accredited technical and vocational qualifications on offer in UTCs to 'provide guidance about suitable accreditation alternatives', and if necessary, working with awarding bodies to develop alternative qualifications.
- Reviewing whether there are 'disincentives in the system that may be hindering UTCs from recruiting pupils, and taking appropriate action to address these'.
- Carrying out research into higher attaining UTCs to identify why they are more successful, 'so this can be replicated when future UTCs are set up'.
- Investigating the use of 'more appropriate performance measures' for UTCs.

Many of those working in FE would no doubt welcome this level of special consideration and support being given to FE colleges as well.

Meanwhile, the report's authors warn that unless UTCs get more government support, they will 'continue to be vulnerable to closure', and go on to say, 'If the government is not prepared to provide this support, it might be best for it to reconsider the rationale and purpose of UTCs'. However, they also warn that the failure of UTCs could 'damage the credibility of the whole technical/vocational sector'. A copy of the report can be found at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/IMSA01/

APPLICATIONS FOR PLACES AT UTCS HAVE 'SURGED' THIS YEAR SAYS BAKER DEARING TRUST

Although, pupil numbers have fallen at around two thirds of established UTCs in the current academic year, the Baker Dearing Trust says that applications from 14-year-olds for places at UTCs in 2017/18 have 'surged' and are 'running at nearly double the rate' compared with last year. The Trust gives the following examples:

- Silverstone UTC currently has 201 applications for places in 2017/18, compared with 149 applications this time last year, and is now 'over-subscribed'.
- Aston University Engineering Academy in Birmingham, has 270 applications for 2017/18 compared with 140 this time last year.
- UTC Sheffield currently has 389 applications for 2017/18 compared with 218 this time last year.

The Trust claims this upward trend is being reported by other UTCs, and ascribes it to a change in the law, which now requires every local authority in England to write to parents of 13-year-old children giving them detailed information about options available in 14-19 institutions. The Trust says it is anticipating further increases in applications from this September, because a new clause (introduced by Lord Baker) in the Technical and Further Education Bill, will impose a statutory obligation on schools to give access to their pupils to all FE providers, including UTCs, FE and sixth form colleges, and ITPs.

UTCS ARE PLANNING TO RECRUIT PUPILS AT AN EARLIER AGE

In a further move to boost numbers, many UTCs are planning to recruit pupils at an earlier starting age. The reason they give for this is that most traditional schools now allocate three years of preparation to meet the demands of the new GCSEs. Five UTCs (Liverpool Life Sciences UTC, London Design and Engineering UTC, UTC Cambridge, Sheffield UTC, and Aston University Engineering Academy in Birmingham) are proposing to recruit students from year 9, instead of year 10, with more expected to follow suit. Meanwhile, Leigh UTC, in Kent, is opening an 11-14 feeder school in adjacent premises. The Baker Dearing Trust says it 'fully supports' the changes

16-19 STUDENTS CAN GET FREE ACCESS TO THE FINANCIAL TIMES (FT)

The FT has launched a scheme, sponsored by Lloyd's Bank, initially for pupils in secondary schools with sixth-forms to register for free subscriptions starting in September. The scheme has now been extended to all students and trainees aged 16-19 at FE Colleges and in ITPs who are on any course, including GCE A Levels, BTECs and apprenticeships. Details of how to register for the scheme can be accessed at: https://enterprise.ft.com/en-gb/secondary-schools/

AND FINALLY…

Kermit Jagger was born of a biologically unfeasible, but nevertheless fertile liaison that took place between an aging rock star and a particularly attractive (at least when seen through a drug and alcohol fuelled haze) amphibian. Kermit grew up to be an adult frog/man feeling bored with life and a bit directionless, especially as his old man seemed to prefer indulging in excesses of sex and drugs and rock and roll, rather than having any normal form of social contact with his family. In the absence of any meaningful interaction with his parents, Kermit was left to grow up by himself. He developed an acute interest in horticulture and acquired a considerable level of expertise in growing his own marijuana, which he skilfully made into cakes and 'joints', consuming both in such copious quantities that he was almost always permanently stoned. But in his more lucid moments he had ambitious plans to grow his own poppy and coca plants. Unfortunately, he knew much less about growing these plants than he did about growing marijuana, and his attempts to propagate them had resulted in abject failure.

One day, a copy of the local free paper was pushed through his letter box. He usually threw the paper away without reading it, but this particular edition included a 'wrap' that advertised courses on offer at the local agricultural college. One of the Level 3 courses available at the college attracted Kermit's attention. The course was entitled 'Advanced use of hydroponics and artificial light in exotic herb and plant propagation'. Kermit thought the course could be very useful to him in his attempt to grow coca plants and poppies, and what was even more appealing was the availability of government financial support to pay his course fees in the form of '24+ Advanced Learner Loans', particularly since his dad was not overly forthcoming on the allowance front.

After his usual breakfast of marijuana cakes and 'spliffs', he hopped on the bus, then hopped off again outside the college. He then ate two more cakes to bolster his confidence before going into the college to enrol on the course. After making enquiries at the college reception desk, he was referred to a member of staff called Patrick Wack (fondly known to friends and colleagues as 'Paddy'), who was one of the college's student services team. Patrick organised Kermit's initial assessment and interview, during which Kermit asked about financial support for students aged 24 and over. Patrick explained all about 24+ Advanced Learner Loans and then gave him an enrolment form and a loan application form to fill in. When all the necessary paperwork had been completed, Patrick asked Kermit if he could provide some form of identification. Whereupon Kermit, who was still more than just a little stoned from his earlier consumption of marijuana cakes and 'joints', reached inside his coat pocket and offered Patrick a small porcelain statue of an elephant, which he considered to be perfectly adequate proof of his ID. Patrick had already developed

suspicions about the possibility that Kermit could have a well-developed predilection for the use of mind altering substances, and with concerns about his own responsibilities for safeguarding, and worries about Kermit's intention to repay his loan, uppermost in his mind, he decided to cover his back by getting the Head of Student Services to make the decision on whether to accept or reject Kermit's application. On meeting Kermit, she immediately saw his startling resemblance to his father. She stared at the little statue for a while and then made her decision. Turning to Patrick, she said, 'It's a knick-knack Paddy Wack, give the frog a loan, his old man's a Rolling Stone'.
(Thanks for this one goes to James Hampton, former principal of Yeovil College)

Alan Birks – June 2017

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