

SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS...

CHANGES AT THE ESFA

Eileen Miller, the new Chief Executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has been busy reorganising the agency personnel. Key changes include the following:

- Peter Mucklow, who was ESFA Director of Young People, becomes the ESFA Director of FE. In his new role, Mr Mucklow assumes responsibility for intervention strategies to 'prevent or remedy poor performance in finance, quality or governance'. He will also support Richard Atkins, the FE Commissioner for England in delivering the implementation of post-16 area review recommendations. (In a former role, Mr Mucklow was the Sixth Form Colleges' Commissioner for England until his role was absorbed into that of Mr Atkins). Mr Mucklow's duties as ESFA Director of FE also involves overseeing the process for devolving the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in England to those Combined Authorities that have reached an agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) to control AEB spending in their areas. These areas are London, the West Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, the West of England, Tees Valley, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and Sheffield City Region. The ESFA will retain responsibility for the distribution of AEB funding in all other areas of England.
- Mr Mucklow replaces Keith Smith, who becomes the ESFA's Director of Apprenticeships. In his new role, Mr Smith assumes responsibility for oversight of the apprenticeship levy, the apprenticeship funding service and for initiating intervention if apprenticeship providers fail or become high risk. He also takes over from Sue Husband as Head of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).
- Ms Husband, in turn, becomes the ESFA's Director of Employer and Employee Engagement. In her new role, she assumes responsibility for the National Careers Service (NCS), World Skills and for the ESFA's 'People Board' (which provides a forum for the involvement of, and feedback, from ESFA staff).
- Matthew Atkinson, the former Director of the ESFA Transaction Unit, becomes the ESFA's Director of Provider Market Oversight and will lead the ESFA's new 'Provider Market Oversight Unit'. This unit is made up of a 120 strong team of auditors whose duties include 'improving on the intervention model by identifying and preventing problems before they occur and conducting reviews of providers' financial statements and management reports to ensure funds are used for the proper purposes and potential areas of irregular expenditure is identified. The unit's role has been given added importance because of the huge increase in the number of providers following recent apprenticeship reforms and the FE insolvency regime scheduled to be introduced later this year, at which point exceptional financial support payments from the ESFA to colleges in financial difficulties will be phased out. Mr Atkinson also retains control and oversight of the ESFA Transaction Unit until all area review recommendations requiring financial support have been implemented, at which point it will also be phased out.

Watching a few episodes of the BBC's 'W1A' will probably help give you a better perspective of all of this.

2016/17 COLLEGE ACCOUNTS

The ESFA has published college accounts for 2016/17, Further information can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/esfa-financial-management-college-accounts?utm_source=5c98a850-9cda-4347-81bc-49b759682343&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

COMBINED AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND BEGIN TO APPOINT STAFF TO MANAGE THE AEB

The ESFA currently employs around 20 managers to administer the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in England. However, the AEB is to be devolved to the 8 Combined Authorities in England in September 2019, with a 'transitional' (or practice) year starting in September 2018. So far, at least 350 new managers have been, or are in the process of being appointed by the Combined Authorities to manage the AEB in their areas. For example, London's mayor Sadiq Khan has [announced controversial plans to top-slice £3](#)

million from the Greater London Authority (GLA) devolved AEB to pay for the appointment of more than 53 managers to form a new 'Skills and Employment Unit'. In addition to the Director of the new unit (whose salary will be £139,000), 4 senior managers, 1 senior project officer, 16 principal policy officers, 12 principal project officers, 10 senior policy/project officers, 8 project/programme support officers and 1 team assistant/administrator are in the process of being appointed. Critics (mainly from the FE sector) say that these new local authority staff will simply duplicate the work being done by a smaller ESFA AEB team.

FREE FE COURSES FOR ADULTS EARNING LESS THAN THE SOCIAL MOBILITY COMMISSION LOW PAY THRESHOLD

In the past, for adults to be eligible to receive full funding for FE courses in England, including English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) courses, they have had to be in receipt of benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit. However, in section 4 of its update circular dated 30 May, the ESFA has announced that for the period from August 2018 until July 2019, colleges and other providers will be given the discretion to fully fund adult education programmes for those students who earn less per year than the Social Mobility Commission's low-pay threshold of £15,736.50. The extra funding that will be required for this is believed to come from the current large underspends in the existing AEB. A copy of the ESFA update can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-30-may-2018/esfa-update-further-education-30-may-2018>

EDUCATION SECRETARY ISSUES 'MINISTERIAL DIRECTIVE' TO DfE PERMANENT SECRETARY ON T-LEVEL START DATE

On 17 May, the DfE Permanent Secretary, Jonathan Slater sent to a letter to Damian Hinds, the Education Secretary for England. In his letter, Mr Slater said that 'As things stand today, it will clearly be very challenging to ensure that the first three T-Levels are ready to be taught from 2020' and went on to say that as the DfE's accounting officer, he was required to 'consider the regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility of public spending'. He therefore advised that Mr Hinds to defer the T-Level start date to 2021 'in order to mitigate the 'value for money risks'. Mr Slater conceded that Mr Hinds could 'legitimately decide to retain 2020 start date', but added that if Mr Hinds did so, he would need 'a formal written direction from you'. On 24 May, Mr Hinds responded to Mr Slater's letter by taking the almost unprecedented step of issuing a 'ministerial directive' informing him that the 2020 start date for T-Levels would be retained. A copy of Mr Hinds' ministerial directive to Mr Slater can be accessed below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-levels-ministerial-direction>

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE T-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION CONSULTATION IS PUBLISHED

The government has published its response to the DfE's T-Level implementation consultation. The main elements of the response and further details of the T-Level design and roll-out include the following:

- The first three T-level pilots in Digital (Digital Production, Design and Development pathway), Childcare and Education (one single pathway) and Construction (Design, Surveying and Planning pathway), will begin in September 2020, but the full roll-out of T-levels will be delayed until September 2023. This 12-month extension to the implementation schedule means that the phased introduction of T-Levels will now take four years, rather than the three years originally planned.
- T-Level qualifications will eventually be available in the following areas: Digital; Construction; Education and Childcare; Engineering and Manufacturing; Health and Science; Legal, Finance and Accounting; Hair and Beauty; Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care; Business and Administration; Catering and Hospitality; and Creative and Design. These T-Levels can be delivered either through a college-based programme or through an apprenticeship. However, four other T-Levels can only be delivered through an apprenticeship. These are: Protective Services; Transport and Logistics; Sales, Marketing and Procurement; and Social Care.
- Each T-Level can be achieved through one or more 'pathways'.

- The 'core' element of a T-Level pathway will consist of two parts. The first part will provide students with 'underpinning technical knowledge and skills' relevant to all occupations within the industry covered by their T-Level programme. The second part will require students to apply their knowledge and skills to complete a project which *must* be employer-set.
- Students will also continue to study mathematics, English and digital skills to an appropriate level.
- T-Levels must contain a 'meaningful industry placement with an employer'. These will last a minimum of 45 working days but can last up to 60 working days. Colleges and other providers will work with employers to decide if the placement 'is best delivered through day release, a single three-month placement, or a number of blocks at different times during the programme' (which could, if necessary, be with multiple employers).
- The total delivery time for a T-Level programme will be around 1,800 hours spread over two years (including the work placement). This is a significant increase in the number of delivery hours compared with other current technical education programmes.
- The DfE has committed extra funding to the delivery of T-Levels (eventually rising to £500 million a year) reflecting the fact that students require more learning time. The DfE will also:
 - Invest up to £20 million on a support programme to help teachers to prepare for the delivery of T-Levels.
 - Fund additional hours for mathematics and English *in addition* to funded T-Level delivery hours.
 - Provide additional bursary funding in the 2018/19 academic year to help students travel to their work placements.
- T-Levels are designated as Level 3 courses and are intended to be the vocational equivalent of GCE A-Levels. However, students will be able to take an appropriate GCE A-Level alongside their T-Level qualification if this supports 'high-attaining students'. (For example, students who may need to take a GCE A-Level in mathematics alongside their T-Level to support their application for a university place).
- An overall pass grade will only be awarded if a student successfully completes the work placement, attains the technical qualification, and achieves the other mandatory elements of the T-level programme.
- On the T-level certificate, the technical qualification will be given a grade from a six-point scale (A*-E), and occupational specialisms will get a 3-point grading scale (Distinction, Merit or Pass).
- When students complete a T-Level, they will theoretically be able to choose between moving into a skilled occupation, higher-level apprenticeships, or higher education. UCAS tariff points will need to be allocated to T-Levels to support progression into HE. The DfE is also considering whether T-Levels at Level 4 and 5 should be developed.
- The providers that will teach the first three T-Levels in 2020 are as follows:
 - **East Midlands:** Derby College.
 - **East of England:** Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership, Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education, Thorpe St Andrew School and Sixth Form.
 - **London:** Big Creative Training, Cranford Community College, HCUC, La Retraite RC Girls School, London Design and Engineering UTC, Ursuline High School.
 - **North East:** Durham Sixth Form Centre, Gateshead College, New College Durham, St Thomas More Catholic School.
 - **North West:** Blackpool and the Fylde College, Cardinal Newman College, Nelson and Colne College, Oldham Sixth Form College, Runshaw College.
 - **South East:** Chichester College Group, Fareham College, Farnborough College of Technology, Havant and South Downs College, Peter Symonds Salesian School, Sussex Coast College Hastings, The College of Richard Collyer, The Leigh UTC.
 - **South West:** Bridgwater and Taunton College, Cirencester College, Exeter College, Strode College, Truro and Penwith College, Weston College.

- **West Midlands:** Access Creative College (Access to Music), Bordesley Green Girls' School and Sixth Form, City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College, Dudley College of Technology, Lordwood Girls' School and Sixth Form Centre, Painsley Catholic College, Sandwell Academy, University College Birmingham, Walsall College, Walsall Studio School.
- **Yorkshire and the Humber:** Archbishop Holgates School, Barnsley College, Bishop Burton College, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College, Scarborough Sixth Form College, Shipley College of Further Education, York College.

A copy of the government response can be accessed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/711472/Implementation_of_T_Level_programmes-Government_consultation_response.pdf

DFE ANNOUNCES REVIEW OF CURRENT LEVEL 3 VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The DfE has announced that there is to be review of all current Level 3 vocational qualifications. The DfE says that it wants to make sure funding is only made available for qualifications 'that serve a genuine and useful purpose, are of a high quality and enable students to progress to meaningful outcomes'. The review is expected to decide the fate of existing applied general qualifications such as BTECs.

IFA PUBLISHES DRAFT CONTENT FOR THE FIRST THREE T-LEVELS STARTING IN 2020

The IfA will assume responsibility for the whole T-Level programme later this year. After considerable slippage in the timetable for doing so, the IfA has now published the draft content for the first three T-Levels in Digital, Construction, and Education and Childcare. Initially, the IfA gave the FE sector until 4 June to respond to the consultation (a period of around 5 working days which included the May half term). However, following complaints about the short time scale, this has now been extended to 10 June. The consultation document shows that for the T-Level in Construction, the IfA has decided that the Design, Surveying and Planning Pathway will be offered rather than the Building Services Engineering Pathway, which was initially intended. The draft content for the first three T-Levels can be found at:

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/about/outline-content-for-first-new-t-levels/>

DFE LAUNCHES T-LEVEL TENDERING PROCESS

The DfE has published details of the tendering process for those awarding organisations (AOs) interested in bidding for the contract to administer the new T-Levels qualifications. The launch of the process further confirms that, despite the concerns expressed by Ofqual and others, the DfE intends to move forward with its contentious plan to use just one AO per qualification. The DfE says that tender will be used is to 'select and appoint an awarding organisation to be responsible for developing and delivering each of the wave one T-levels, under an exclusive licensing approach'. The licence period is expected to be 5 years 'to ensure consistency but prevent the risk of complacency'. There are separate tenders for each of the three T-Level pathways that are scheduled to be delivered from 2020 (see section above). More information on, and details of, the tendering process can be found at:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/f6486a72-4d9c-4646-9598-96d87a16397a?p=@8=UFQxUIRRPT0=NjJNT0>

THE NUMBER OF APPRENTICESHIP STARTS CONTINUES TO CONTRACT

ESFA figures released in May reveal that there were 21,800 apprenticeship starts in February, compared with 36,400 in February 2017. This is a contraction of 40%, the biggest year-on-year percentage fall since last August. Questioned about this in parliament, Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State for Education in England, told MPs that the government had expected that 'the transition to levy funding would take time for firms to adapt to'. He also said that the figures revealed a 'a shift to longer, higher-quality apprenticeships', and that this trend 'was to be welcomed'. A copy of the ESFA data can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/apprenticeship-and-levy-statistics-may-2018>

STANDARDS APPROVAL NUMBERS FALL FOLLOWING LAUNCH OF THE IFA'S 'FASTER AND BETTER' INITIATIVE

Last November, the Institute of Apprenticeships (IfA) launched its 'Faster and Better' initiative to speed up the apprenticeship standards approvals process. However, since the announcement, the standards approval process seems to have slowed down. For example, in February, there were only 21 approvals, in March this had fallen to 10 approvals and in April there were just 4 approvals, although increased to 19 in May. Responding to the continuing contraction in approvals, a spokesperson for the IfA said that the figures were 'not surprising' and that the IfA had anticipated that recent reforms would 'slow things down temporarily', but insisted that there would be a 'speeding up of the process' in the second half of this year.

DfE PUBLISHES STRATEGIC GUIDANCE FOR IFA IN 2018/19

The DfE has published its strategic priorities and guidance for the IfA in 2018/19. The guidance explains 'the purpose of the IfA' and 'provides directions for the IfA to consider when carrying out its duties to ensure quality apprenticeships and technical education reform'. Amongst the other priorities laid out for the IfA, Anne Milton, the Apprenticeships and Skills Minister has used the guidance to tell the IfA to actually get 'faster and better' at approving apprenticeship standards. A copy of the document can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/institute-for-apprenticeships-strategic-guidance-2018-to-2019>

QUALITY OF APPRENTICESHIPS IS IN DECLINE SAYS OFSTED

At a recent meeting of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, Paul Joyce, Ofsted's Deputy Director for FE and Skills told members that the 'quality of apprenticeships is in decline' and that half of Ofsted inspections carried out so far this year have resulted in providers being given 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' ratings for their apprenticeship provision. Mr Joyce went on to tell MPs that Ofsted had, for example, encountered apprenticeship programmes 'where very little off-the-job training is taking place, particularly with apprentices that are enrolled on programmes for the older age demographic'. He also said that Ofsted was concerned that an increasing number of 'Train to Gain-type programmes' were being badged as an apprenticeship.

OFSTED TO BE GIVEN OVERALL CONTROL OF FE AND SKILLS QUALITY

During the Education Select Committee meeting (above) members said they were confused about whether it was Ofsted or the ESFA that was ultimately accountable for monitoring the quality of apprenticeship programmes. One member referred to an instance where the ESFA was said to have 'undermined the inspectorate' by allowing a provider described by Ofsted as 'not fit for purpose' to continue training apprentices. After the meeting, Apprenticeships and Skills Minister for England, Anne Milton, admitted that there was a 'lack of clarity' over where the accountability system for apprenticeships lay. As a result it has now been decided that Ofsted will be given the final say on FE education and training quality judgements. Ofsted will also be given additional powers. For example, if an inspection or monitoring visit to an apprenticeship provider raises serious concerns, Ofsted can require the ESFA to immediately be take the provider off the ESFA's Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP).

OFSTED TO BE GIVEN A LARGER BUDGET

Ofsted's need for a larger budget was highlighted in a recently published National Audit Office (NAO) report. The NAO report primarily dealt with inspections of schools, but also covered FE and skills and revealed that in the 2017/18 financial year (April-March), Ofsted spent around £10 million on inspecting FE and skills providers. This is a reduction of around £4 million (or 30%) on the amount spent in 2010/11. Over the same period, the number of private providers in scope of inspection has increased dramatically. For example, in May 2017 there were around 1,000 providers, but numbers increased rapidly when the recent apprenticeship reforms came into effect and now stand at 2,543. The DfE has now agreed that Ofsted will be given a larger budget for FE inspections but thus far will not say how much this will be. The NAO report is only available for *purchase*. Further details can be accessed via the weblink below:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/ofsteds-inspection-of-schools/>

ETF PUBLISHES 'THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ANALYSIS OF FE WORKFORCE TRAINING NEEDS EVER DONE'

In the Autumn of 2017, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) carried out a survey of 2,366 teachers, trainers, managers and assessors in 481 FE colleges and private training institutions. The findings have been published in a report entitled *'Training Needs in the Further Education Sector'*, which the ETF claims is 'the most significant analysis of the development and training needs of the FE workforce ever done'. The report says that around 90% of FE sector staff are participating in training and professional development and that this compares well with 75% for the education sector workforce as a whole (including schools and higher education institutions as well as the FE sector) and 63% participation for all sectors of the UK workforce. The report also says that FE sector staff training is, on average, of 'significant length' (an average of 44 hours per individual trained). Despite this, the report says that there remains 'room for improvement' and that more training was needed in leadership and management, English, mathematics and digital skills. The report also says that 'a significant minority (23%) of respondents did not receive the training and development they wanted or needed'. It also revealed differences in the amounts spent on training in different parts of the FE sector (surprisingly up to £889 per member of staff at independent training providers down to £172 for FE college staff). Budget restrictions and difficulties in freeing staff up were regarded as the key challenges and around a quarter of the institutions surveyed said that their staff training budgets were insufficient to meet all of their needs. A copy of the ETF report can be found at:

http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/1331_Training-Needs-Analysis-Final-.pdf

TRAILBLAZER GROUP CLAIMS THAT FE TEACHING APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING BANDS DO NOT COVER THE COST

The Education and Training Trailblazer Group (which includes colleges, universities, independent training providers and the ETF) that is developing the three FE teaching apprenticeship standards is in dispute with the IfA on the basis that the funding bands the programmes have been allocated to represent just half what they will cost to deliver. The funding bands have been set at £5,000 for a Level 3 'learning mentor' apprenticeship, £6,000 for a Level 4 'assessor/coach' apprenticeship and £9,000 for a Level 5 'learning and skills teacher' apprenticeship. These bands have now been rejected by a 'unanimous decision' of members of the group. A spokesperson for the group claimed that the IfA had ignored the costings the supplied with the standards proposal. For its part, the IfA insists that the way it has assigned funding bands to the three standards is 'fair'. Finding a way through the impasse will be difficult because it appears that trailblazer groups can only appeal against IfA decisions in respect of the 'processes' relating to the approval of standards and not against the funding band the standard is assigned to.

DFE INVITES BIDS TO ESTABLISH CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR BASIC MATHEMATICS

In his November Budget Statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, earmarked £40 million to fund around 20 'Centres of Excellence for Basic Mathematics' across England, with at least one centre to be located in each English region. The Chancellor also allocated a research budget of £8.5 million 'to test innovative approaches that improve GCSE resit outcomes'. In May, some six months later, the DfE invited bids from 'exceptional' post-16 institutions to set up one or more Centres of Excellence in Basic Mathematics, initially for three-year period but with an option to extend up to five years. To be eligible to bid for the funding, an institution must have a minimum of 250 students aged 16 or over with prior attainment in GCSE mathematics below grades 9-4. It is expected that the centres will receive between £140,000 and £300,000 per year, depending on the nature and quality of the agreed plans. The DfE says that the aim of the centres is to support the post-16 sector to 'develop, test, deliver and share pedagogical approaches to improve maths teaching for students with low prior attainment'. Applications should be submitted by 10 July. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their bid in September and successful applicants will be expected to be operational shortly afterwards. More information on how to apply can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/basic-maths-centres-for-excellence-application?utm_source=2c94727f-0bf5-4e84-99b6-04e0e9e60131&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

ESFA ANNOUNCES POST-16 BASIC MATHEMATICS PREMIUM PILOT

The ESFA has announced the launch of a 'post-16 basic mathematics premium pilot'. The scheme will allow FE providers in some of the most disadvantaged areas of England to bid for an extra £500 per learner for post-16 mathematics teaching. The aim of the pilot is to test three different approaches to improving results for students with the lowest prior attainment in mathematics. (These are defined as learners with a Grade 3 or lower in GCSE mathematics). The areas in which post-16 providers are located will determine whether they are eligible to bid for funds. These will be areas defined by the DfE as a Category 5 or 6 according to its 'Achieving Excellence' methodology, meaning that they are areas that have been identified as having low standards for learners and a poor capacity to improve. Funding allocated through the pilot will be in *addition* to the provider's normal ESFA 16-19 funding allocation. Providers will decide how to use the funding, which could include such things as additional teaching hours, smaller class sizes or the use of specific technology. Further information about the pilot is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/post-16-basic-maths-premium-pilot>

DFE NAMES THE 16 PROVIDERS IN THE FINAL STAGE OF THE IOT COMPETITION

The DfE has announced the names of the providers whose proposals will move forward to the final stage of the competition to receive a share of the £170 million earmarked for Institutes of Technology (IoTs). 13 out of the 16 proposals which have made it to this stage are FE colleges. The full shortlist is as follows:

- The University of Exeter
- South Essex College of Further & Higher Education
- Queen Mary University London
- Weston College of Further and Higher Education
- York College
- Milton Keynes College
- West Suffolk College
- The Newcastle College Group
- The University of Lincoln
- Barking & Dagenham College
- New College, Durham
- Harrow & Uxbridge Colleges
- North Warwickshire & South Leicestershire College
- Solihull College
- Dudley College of Technology
- Swindon College

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN ENGLAND 'HAS LOST ITS WAY', SAYS NEW THINK-TANK REPORT

The Politeia thinktank has produced a report entitled '*Reversing Decline: Vocational training and education for a highly skilled workforce*', which analyses the differences between vocational education systems in England, France and Germany. The report says that in the period since the Second World War, England has 'neglected vocational education and training, abolished most of the academically focused grammar schools and imposed a uniformly low-level curriculum and examination system for all'. The report goes on to say that over the same period, in France and Germany all pupils (including more academically able pupils) 'are inspired and encouraged during school years to follow the technological pathway' and to 'combine vocational and technological training with high standards of continuing general education'. The report also says that, unlike in France and Germany, post-17 vocational education and training in England has 'been at the mercy of stop-gap solutions'. Recommendations made in the report include the following:

- Those students taking the vocational route post-16 should continue with a 'rigorous system of general education' alongside their vocational studies.

- Post-16 students on vocational courses should be subject to 'selection' to 'allow for different aptitudes' and to facilitate differentiated teaching.
- Mathematics, science and technology should be mandatory in the 11-16 school curriculum and pupils should be encouraged to continue to study these subjects post-16 in specialist tertiary institutions.

A copy of the report (which probably doesn't contain much that we don't already know) can be found at:

<http://www.politeia.co.uk/wp-content/Politeia%20Documents/Unpublished/Reversing%20Decline%20Vocational%20Training%20and%20Education%20for%20a%20Highly%20Skilled%20Workforce%20Sheila%20Lawlor.pdf>

SCHOOLS SLOW TO ALLOW FE PROVIDERS ACCESS TO SPEAK THEIR PUPILS ABOUT VOCATIONAL OPTIONS

Schools are now legally required to allow FE colleges, sixth form colleges, independent training providers, Studio Schools and UTCs access to their pupils to make them aware of the vocational and other options available to them at age 14-16 and post-16 (including apprenticeships). Schools are also legally required set out on their websites how providers can request access to speak to pupils about these options. However, it appears that many schools are reluctant to provide this access and are not yet doing so, presumably preferring to retain the students (and the associated funding) in their own sixth-forms. During a recent meeting of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, the Chair of the Committee, Robert Halfon, asked the Apprenticeships and Skills Minister for England, Anne Milton what she was doing to make sure schools were undertaking their legal duty to implement the requirement, to which she replied, 'The need to do this was only brought in in January, so it's quite early days'. No change there then.

STUDIO SCHOOLS SEVER LINKS WITH FE COLLEGES

At least £50 million of DfE capital funding and an equal amount of revenue funding has been spent on establishing Studio Schools. These are small 14-19 institutions which are usually sponsored by FE colleges. However, they are seen by many as an unnecessary duplication of provision already offered by FE colleges. Like University Technical Colleges (UTCs), many Studio Schools have experienced recruitment, quality and financial difficulties and the numbers that have closed, or are due to close, has now risen to 24. The Studio Schools Trust, a company set up to support and promote the schools, has also closed in the wake of its own funding problems. Following a meeting with Academies Minister for England, Lord Nash, to 'review the concept of studio schools', a new 'Studio Schools Network' has been set up to replace the Trust. The Studio Schools Network has pledged to 'lead the Studio Schools movement into maturity' and its first act in doing so has been to announce that it will cease working with FE colleges and focus on developing partnerships with multi-academy trusts (MATs) instead. Interestingly, George Osborne, who as Chancellor of the Exchequer was initially very supportive of UTCs and Studio Schools, recently told the House of Commons Education Select Committee that they needed a 'radical review' and he would 'consider scrapping them' if he were still in charge at the Treasury.

PREDICTED GROWTH IN 16-18 NUMBERS IN FE MAY NOT BE MATCHED BY GROWTH IN FUNDING

Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that the number of 15-year-olds will rise from more than 700,000 at present to almost 900,000 by 2027. This theoretically represents an opportunity for FE providers to expand their 16-18 programmes, but concerns are already being expressed that on-going post-16 funding restraints will mean that the anticipated growth in student numbers will not be matched by the extra money needed to accommodate them and that there will even more under-resourced FE programmes delivered by underpaid teachers in overcrowded classrooms and workshops. ONS population growth predictions as at June 2017 can be accessed at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

EDUCATION SECRETARY FOR ENGLAND ANNOUNCES INCENTIVES TO HELP RECRUIT AND RETAIN MORE TEACHERS

Education Secretary for England, Damian Hinds has announced measures which, he says, will help with the recruitment and retention of more teachers in the schools' sector. One of these measures involves the DfE making £5 million available to pay the wages of experienced teachers to enable them to take a year off school to work in industry or to engage in academic research. Another involves proposals to drop the current DfE accountability measure that names and shames 'coasting' schools and forces those identified as 'coasting' to become academies. Mr Hinds went on to say that there will be 'additional offerings' aimed at increasing teacher recruitment and retention, such as 'introducing flexible working practices and extending on-the-job training for new teachers'. Mr Hinds said that 'while there are currently a record number of teachers working in schools, the increase in staff has not kept pace with the explosion of the pupil population following a period of sustained migration and rising birth rates' and that the measures are 'aimed at encouraging more people into the profession to plug the shortfall'. More information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-to-set-out-vision-for-clearer-school-system>

DFE PROVIDES FUNDING TO ENABLE EXISTING GRAMMAR SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND TO EXPAND

Prime Minister Theresa May's plans to create more grammar schools was abandoned after the last general election when it became apparent that she would be unable to obtain enough support in parliament to pass the necessary legislation. However, last month the new Secretary of State for Education in England, Damian Hinds, announced that £50 million is being made available to enable existing grammar schools in England to create thousands of new selective places. Mr Hinds said that the new funding will allow existing grammar schools to grow bigger or to develop spin-off sites (such as the Sevenoaks Annexe at Weald of Kent Grammar School which is 10 miles from the school's main site and has the capacity to accommodate 450 pupils). The funding is subject to a caveat that proposals from grammar schools for funding to expand must also show how they will increase their intake of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

DFE ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR THE CREATION OF MORE FAITH SCHOOLS

Religious groups have been encouraged to apply for public funds to open new faith based Free Schools, but they have been prevented from allocating more than 50% of the school places available on the basis of the religion of the pupils recruited. During the last general election campaign, the Conservatives promised to remove this cap to bring them in line with the arrangements in other, longer established, faith schools in the state sector. However, instead of this, the government has now announced that funding will be provided for local authorities to work in partnership with religious groups to create a new generation of 'voluntary-aided' faith schools. These schools will be allowed to be fully selective on grounds of religion (ie all the pupils recruited can have a single religion). Funding for their creation will be taken from the general DfE budget for the creation of new Free Schools. The Local Government Association (LGA) has welcomed the DfE's plan to open more new schools to meet the burgeoning demand for school places, but has said the focus should not be on faith-based free schools, or selective schools, and that the best way to meet the growing demand for additional school places was to let local councils open more schools themselves.

CAREERS AND ENTERPRISE COMPANY CRITICISED BY EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

The House of Commons Education Select Committee has severely criticised the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) for spending more than £900,000 of public funding on research over the period since its inception in 2015. (For example, 9 research projects were funded in the closing months of 2017 alone). Committee members reminded the Chief Executive of the CEC, Claudia Harris, that the funding was primarily intended to be used for providing frontline careers guidance and advice for students. Members of the committee asked Ms Harris why the CEC was spending so much public money with private research companies, and why, if the research was really needed, universities or the DfE could not have been commissioned to do the work instead. However, Ms Harris defended the research expenditure and added that it was likely that a further £1 million would be spent on research over the next 3 years. This reply seemed to anger committee members and prompted accusations that the CEC had become an 'over

bloated quango'. Committee members also criticised the 'high salaries' the CEC pays its staff and the lack of transparency in its proceedings. For example, board meeting minutes are *not* published, despite the CEC being in receipt of public funding. The Chair of the CEC board, Christine Hodgson, accepted that minutes were not published but argued that as 'an independent organisation' the CEC was not required to publish minutes and that all CEC activity was 'transparent'. Meanwhile, Ms Harris has sent an email to 'friends of the CEC' inviting them to 'to celebrate the success and fantastic work being done to make a real difference to the futures of young people' and asking them to post on Twitter that they 'support the work of the CEC'. A video of the Education Select Committee questioning Ms Hodgson and Ms Harris be found at:

<https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/90b1eb8a-1eca-40c2-8916-0956c5cce7a0>

DFE CRITICISED FOR LACK OF OVERSIGHT OF APPOINTMENT OF SLC CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A National Audit Office (NAO) report says that the previous Chief Executive of Student Loans Company (SLC), Steve Lamey, was appointed against the advice of senior government officials and without having his references checked. Mr Lamey became the SLC Chief Executive in June 2016, after the appointment panel said that he was the 'one suitable candidate' for the job. However, within 18 months he was dismissed for gross professional misconduct after whistle blowers made 69 allegations against him. The NAO report concluded that the DfE had failed to properly monitor Mr Lamey's appointment and his subsequent behaviour afterwards. As a consequence, the DfE is reviewing its oversight and governance arrangements with the SLC, a process that will be extended cover all its 'arms-length bodies', including the IfA, Ofsted and the ESFA. A copy of the NAO report can be accessed at:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/investigation-into-oversight-of-the-student-loans-companys-governance-and-management-of-its-former-chief-executive/>

INFLATION RATE MEASURE USED TO SET INTEREST RATES ON STUDENT LOANS IS 'ABSURD' SAYS MPS

The DfE takes the Retail Prices Index (RPI) in March and then adds on 3%, to determine the interest rates that students in England are charged on the tuition fee and maintenance loans they take out for courses commencing the following September. The RPI in March 2018 was 3.3% which means that this September, the interest rate on student loans will increase to 6.3%. The House of Commons Treasury Select Committee has described the use of the RPI as 'absurd' and has called on the DfE to use the lower Consumer Price Index (CPI), which was 2.3% in March. However, the DfE has stated its intention to continue to use the RPI to determine interest rates, saying that the RPI provided 'consistency over time'. Strangely enough, the DfE seemed to be less convinced of this argument when it unilaterally changed the inflation measure used to determine increases in teachers' pensions from the RPI to the lower CPI.

THE NUMBER OF UNCONDITIONAL OFFERS MADE BY UNIVERSITIES CONTINUES TO ESCALATE

The Universities and Colleges' Admissions Service (UCAS), has recorded a large increase in the numbers of unconditional offers made by universities. Historically, universities made very few unconditional offers of places, but in England in 2012, university tuition fee income was tripled and the cap on the numbers of students that universities could recruit was abolished. Some observers have argued that this was regarded by some universities as being the equivalent of a license to print money. In the light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the number of unconditional offers made by universities rose from 2,985 in 2013/14, to 36,825 in 2014/15 and again to 51,615 in 2015/16. Figures for 2016/17 are expected to be even higher. In England, university tuition fees are theoretically paid for by students who take out loans through the Student Loans Company (SLC). However, in reality the funding is paid 'up-front' by the government through the SLC, with what some would describe as the naïve expectation that students will eventually pay back to the government all of the amount they borrowed. Universities in England have pressed for tuition fees to be raised well beyond the current £9,250 per year, but because the sums being paid out to universities is increasing exponentially Treasury officials have become alarmed and ministers have placed a block on further tuition fee increases pending the report of the recently announced review of post-18 fees and funding in England. Meanwhile, Universities Minister for England, Sam Gyimah said that the increase in the

number unconditional offers being made by universities was also a 'source of concern' and that while admissions policy 'was a matter for individual universities', they should not become the norm.

MBA APPRENTICESHIPS LAUNCHED

Around 100 universities are set to offer MBA programmes that will be paid for via the apprenticeship levy. The universities concerned say that the programmes have been developed in response to demand from employers (including government departments) wanting to develop the skills of their existing management teams. At least 40 MBA courses are scheduled to start in Septembers with an estimated 1,400 'apprentices' enrolling on them - most, if not all, of whom will already be employees. Up to £18,000 from apprenticeship levy can be used to pay for the new MBA apprenticeships, yielding a total revenue of around £26 million for the universities offering them. Critics have argued that using government money to fund MBAs for older staff who already have degrees at the expense of providing skills training for young people with few, if any, qualifications, is a travesty. A spokesperson for the DfE defended the MBA apprenticeships saying that the government wanted to encourage 'quality apprenticeships at all levels and in all sectors and occupations'.

UNIVERSITIES 'FURIOUS' WITH THE IFA OVER PROPOSED CUTS TO DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING BANDS

Meanwhile, following the IfA's review of its funding bands, universities say they are 'furious' that reductions in funding are being proposed for many degree apprenticeships. For example, the popular Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, which is currently funded at £27,000 (the maximum for the funding band), is likely to be subject to a significant rate reduction. A spokesperson for the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) said that universities had invested 'substantially' in apprenticeships and that the IfA did not yet 'understand the higher education market', particularly 'the higher staff costs'. Some universities have already threatened to cease offering degree-level apprenticeships if the reductions go ahead.

RUSSELL GROUP SAYS THE DFE SHOULD ALLOCATE UNSPENT APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING TO UNIVERSITIES

Meanwhile, in its response to the government's consultation on post-18 education and funding in England, the Russell Group of Universities has argued that any unspent funds from the apprenticeship levy should be transferred to the HE sector to help universities 'to engage with employers' and to fund a maintenance grant 'for students from a lower socio-economic backgrounds'. Critics have argued that it would be inappropriate for wealthy universities to use apprenticeship funding for bursaries that they can well afford to fund themselves. The Russell Group response to the post-18 funding review can be found at:

<https://russellgroup.ac.uk/policy/policy-documents/post-18-education-and-funding-review/>

OXBRIDGE UNIVERSITIES HAVE ASSETS OF ALMOST £21 BILLION

The extent of the wealth of some universities has been revealed through a freedom of information request lodged by the Guardian. This showed that the 70 colleges that make up the universities of Oxford and Cambridge have, between them, estates, endowments, investments, cash and other assets totalling almost £21 billion. Mind you, given the socio-economic demographic of past and present Oxbridge undergraduates, this is perhaps to be expected. Read Tom Sharpe's *'Porterhouse Blue'* for a better insight.

<https://amp.theguardian.com/education/2018/may/28/oxford-and-cambridge-university-colleges-hold-21bn-in-riches>

AND NEARLY FINALLY...

Those colleges facing an imminent Ofsted inspection who are struggling to find ways of improving student punctuality would probably be advised to avoid emulating the strategy used by a school in Nigeria. A recent BBC news story reported that 3 staff from the school (including the head teacher) had been arrested by police for tying pupils who were late for classes to crosses and flogging them with a horsewhip. Any college manager thinking of giving the strategy a try should perhaps remember that irrespective of whether or not

crucifying and horse-whipping improves student punctuality, the practice is unlikely to impact positively on the college's safeguarding grade.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-44155572>

AND FINALLY...

College staff had become increasingly concerned at the eccentric behaviour of their principal. The college had serious quality issues, was in severe financial difficulties, had been issued with several ESFA Notices of Concern and was on the verge of being placed in administrated status. Just for good measure, a team of crack ESFA auditors had turned up at the college to carry out an investigation into alleged financial irregularities which included, amongst many other things, the principal's inexplicable purchase of a large tract of land immediately adjacent to the college campus for which he had paid an eye-wateringly high price, and which was of no apparent use whatsoever to the college. The auditors arrived at the college in the middle of a heavy rainstorm and after having their coats taken by reception staff, they were escorted to the principal's office naively expecting him to be there waiting for them. However, he was not there, and after almost an hour, they asked the principal's secretary to find out where on earth he was. The secretary sighed, rolled her eyes, and replied that he was probably outside again, standing in the middle of the plot of land he had bought, since this was what he did for most of the time these days. The bewildered auditors insisted that the principal meet with them as agreed and that the college's position was so serious, they would not leave until he had done so. The secretary said that this might be a bit tricky and that it would probably be best if at least two of the college's security staff were sent out to bring the principal back into the college. After a short while, the dishevelled, rain-soaked principal was manhandled into his office by the security staff. The auditors asked the principal, who was now gently humming to himself, what was going on. 'Well', said principal with a slightly maniacal expression on his face, 'I am ensuring that my bid to win the next Times Educational Supplement FE Leader of the year award will be successful, after which all my problems will be solved'. The auditors were perplexed by this and asked the principal how, given all the difficulties the college was facing, he expected to win such a prestigious award. 'Simple' said the principal, tapping his nose and winking at them, 'I have been told that to gain the award, the principal must be exceptional, and I'll have you know that for some time now I have been out standing in my field'.

Alan Birks – June 2018

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