

Sector Developments

BIS and the DfE publish revised area review guidance

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Education (DfE) have published an updated version of their joint area review guidance, which, they say, 'builds on the experience of the ongoing early reviews'. The new document is almost twice as long as the previous version and provides more information about the 'restructuring facility' from which colleges can apply for loans or grants to help them implement area review recommendations. The document also provides details of the new 'transaction unit' that will oversee the process for loan applications. Other changes in the guidance include the removal of the option for 'proactive' (i.e. non-government initiated) proposals for new area reviews.

Where colleges are undergoing mergers, the guidance says that it is 'essential for the new chair and the transitional board to have access to dedicated specialists'. The guidance appears to question the impartiality and competence of existing management teams, and says that boards should 'commission specialist consultancy support'. In some cases, this might be comprised of a whole 'project team with significant restructuring or turnaround expertise, recruited on an interim basis'. Consultants should 'report directly' to the chair and transitional board, so that they can 'deal effectively' with such things as 'structural change' or the 'setting up of a new group structure'. BIS says that grants and loans (separate from the 'restructuring facility' mentioned above) will be made available to help colleges pay for this specialist support and details of how to access these funds will be made available 'shortly'.

The guidance also confirms that, following the implementation of area review recommendations, 'no further exceptional financial support will be available for colleges', and that a new 'insolvency regime' will be introduced, so that 'if colleges fail in the future, there will be a process that will allow them to close in an orderly way'. A copy of the revised BIS/DfE guidance can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/505693/BIS-16-118-reviewing-post-16-education-and-training-institutions-updated-guidance-on-area-reviews.pdf

The FE Commissioner writes a letter

The FE Commissioner for England, Sir David Collins, has written his latest letter to FE college chairs and principals updating them 'on the progress of area reviews and the lessons learned from wave 1'. In his letter, Sir David refers to positive developments, but admits that 'not everything has gone completely to plan' and that 'communications within colleges with staff, unions and students as to the process and the benefits for learners and employers has been variable'. A copy of Sir David's letter can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508262/FE_Commissioner_letter_to_the_FE_sector_March_2016.pdf?dm_i=26BG,44CO5,HXH45S,EZ3IH,1

London area reviews

The first two London sub-regional area reviews have been announced. The two reviews, in London Central and London West, are the first of four London sub-regional reviews and will be part of the second wave of area reviews. 10 general further education colleges (GFEs) and 4 sixth form colleges (SFCs), covering 12 London boroughs, will be involved in the London Central review, while the London West review will involve 7 GFEs and 2 SFCs across 7 London boroughs. The two remaining London reviews, in East London and South-West London, will be part of the third wave of area reviews. Munira Mirza, London's Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture, says that the reviews offer 'an incredible opportunity to revitalize and turbo-charge our much-neglected FE sector'. One London College has become so 'revitalized' and 'turbo charged', it has initiated merger talks with a college in Newcastle.

AoC says that mergers could increase the level of college debt still further

The total value of existing long-term bank loans to colleges is estimated to be around £1.6 billion. However, the Association of Colleges (AoC) says that 'mounting financial pressures' has resulted in an 'increasing number of colleges suffering financial penalties for failing to comply with the terms of their existing loans', and that 'some colleges have been forced to accept higher interest rates, or even to borrow more money from other banks in order to manage their debts'. The AoC says that this, combined with 'the costs of the structural overhaul of the FE sector in the wake of area reviews, is likely to lead to a further increase in college indebtedness'. The AoC goes on to warn that because banks 'reserve the right to treat a merged

college as a new organisation', they may see this as an opportunity to renegotiate existing loans, and that if this happens 'there is clearly a risk that colleges will end up paying more'. The AoC also warns that some banks might even use a merger as an excuse 'to withdraw their loans altogether'. The new area review guidance confirms that the role of banks, as colleges' creditors is 'critical', and that BIS has 'initiated national level discussions on this with the banks' to discuss the matter.

DfE publishes guidance for sixth form colleges that want to apply for academy status

The DfE has published further guidance on the process by which SFCs can apply to convert to academy status and has confirmed that only those SFCs that are 'strong both academically and financially' will be allowed to become 'stand alone' academies. The rest will be required to join multi-academy trusts (MATs). The DfE has also confirmed that SFCs will *not* be able to access the 'academy conversion grant' available to schools. SFCs requiring financial support to assist with conversion will have to apply for funds from the areas review 'restructuring facility' referred to above. A copy of the guidance, entitled 'Becoming a 16 to 19 academy: advice for sixth-form colleges', can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/502173/Becoming_a_16_to_19_academy_-_advice_for_sixth-form_colleges.pdf

UCU says that college leaders have not done enough to defend the FE sector

Speaking at the recent joint University and College Union (UCU) and Unison rally in London, Shadow Skills Minister for England, Gordon Marsden surprised nobody by saying that the FE sector will be facing 'a really difficult time over the next couple of years'. He went on to say 'If there was ever a better time to use that much overused phrase, "we're all in it together", this would be it', but that it was clear that 'college employers are not in it together'. UCU General Secretary, Sally Hunt, disagreed with Mr Marsden and said 'I think the employers and the AoC *have* got their act together', and suggested that 'years of pay freeze for college staff' had been a deliberate strategy. She went on to accuse some college leaders of 'failing to challenge the government on its treatment of the sector' and implied that there were some who seemed to be more concerned with impressing ministers with how compliant they had been in implementing government cuts, than they were in defending the FE sector from them. Referring to the joint UCU/Unison 'day of action', Ms Hunt said 'today is about *us* doing the job that our employers should be doing'.

EFA and SFA to use 'shared services'

Although there are apparently no plans to formally merge the SFA and the EFA, Peter Lauener, the Chief Executive of both agencies, has announced that a new 'Funding Agencies Shared Services Team' is to be established. The new team will be called 'FAS2T', (not to be confused with 'FAR2T', which apparently is private number plate available for purchase on the DVLA website). FAS2T will provide both agencies with finance, IT and data handling services. There are also proposals to reduce the number of sites the agencies operate from, and for SFA and EFA staff to be located together in premises in Coventry, Birmingham and Swindon. Meanwhile, the number of permanent staff at the SFA fell from 1,241 in April 2014 to 899 in October 2015, while the number of EFA permanent staff increased from 753 to 837 over the same period. Mr Lauener explained that restructuring exercises had 'significantly reduced' the number of senior staff in both agencies, but said that some of the posts in the new structure could not be filled, so he had 'brought in one or two senior colleagues to complete his senior team'. These new appointments will presumably be in addition to any other new staff appointed to 'strengthen' SFA and EFA intervention teams, area review implementation teams, the new transaction unit, and the FE Commissioners' teams.

EFA 2016/17 Funding Allocations

The EFA has issued its 2016/17 funding allocations for 16-18 provision in colleges and schools in England. GFEs and SFCs are now competing to recruit 16-18 year olds, and for a share of the available EFA funding, with more than 3,000 publicly funded school sixth forms. Further details can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-funding-for-academic-year-2016-to-2017>

SFA 2016/17 funding allocations

The SFA has sent GFEs details of their funding allocations for 2016/17. Allocations reflect the policy framework contained in the 2016/17 Skills Funding letter, a copy of which can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-funding-letter-april-2016-to-march-2017>

The methodology by which individual college allocations have been determined can be accessed at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510418/How we have worked your allocations out.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510418/How_we_have_worked_your_allocations_out.pdf)

The SFA allocation letter says that ‘the allocation methodology will be altered to support the government’s plans to devolve the adult education budget (AEB) to local areas’ during 2016/17 and that this ‘may result in changes to individual provider allocations’. The letter goes on to say that ‘providers will need to plan for this’. Details of the proposals for devolving the AEB to the new combined authorities can be accessed at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/496195/Adult Education Budget changing context and arrangements for 2016 to 2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/496195/Adult_Education_Budget_changing_context_and_arrangements_for_2016_to_2017.pdf)

With reference to apprenticeships, the SFA letter says that ‘allocations from April 2017 may be subject to change as new starts begin to come through the Digital Apprenticeship Service and that colleges should ‘factor this into their planning’ as well.

SFA to fund all ‘high quality’ 16-18 apprenticeships to the end of March 2016

Following this month’s budget, the SFA has announced that all ‘high quality’ 16-18 apprenticeships and traineeships for the period August 2015 to March 2016 will be fully funded’ (and will therefore not be limited to the £25 million maximum for growth funding previously announced). A spokesperson for the SFA said that ‘further information on the process for requesting growth’ would be provided ‘shortly’, and that growth allocations will be in line with the SFAs ‘operational performance management rules for 2015/16’.

SFA publishes list of qualifications that will no longer be eligible for funding in 2016/17

The SFA has consulted on plans to withdraw funding from more than 500 full Level 2 and 3 qualifications covering around 20% of all qualifications in these categories. The qualifications are mainly targeted at those age 19+, and are offered by 56 different awarding organisations (AOs). The consultancy period ran for just 14 days and ended on 29 February and the SFA was criticised by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB), for the relatively short time period for AOs to respond. However, an SFA spokesperson defended the tight timescale, saying that it was necessary in order ‘to allow sufficient time for colleges and training providers to finalise their 2016/17 offer’, and warned that ‘there would be no extension’. The SFA has now published a list of full Level 2 and 3 qualifications that are ‘safe’ for 2016/7. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualifications-getting-approval-for-funding>

BIS announces first set of apprenticeship frameworks to be closed to new starts

The SFA has announced the first apprenticeship frameworks that will be closed to new starts from 31 May. Examples of the frameworks affected include Level 3 frameworks in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies, Health, Public services and Care, and Level 2 frameworks in Building Industry Products, and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies. Students already on these frameworks will be able to continue their apprenticeships under the existing funding arrangements. BIS originally planned to cease funding all existing apprenticeship frameworks after 2017/18 in order to ensure that providers were only delivering the new Trailblazer apprenticeships from 2018/19 onwards. However in the recent ‘English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision’ document, BIS says that the 2017/18 cut off date for ending existing frameworks has now been dropped, and that instead ‘a migration from apprenticeship frameworks to Trailblazer standards will take place over the course of the current Parliament’.

Research calls into question the quality of advice and guidance on apprenticeships

Recent research conducted by the Prudential Insurance Company has revealed that school leavers are being ‘put off’ taking apprenticeships’ by widespread misconceptions about levels of pay, qualifications and other benefits. Examples of this given by the Prudential includes the following:

- 6% of 16-18 year-olds surveyed believed that apprentices ‘worked for nothing’
- 34% said that they believed that apprenticeships would ‘not lead to a meaningful qualification’
- 8% said that they thought apprenticeships were ‘for students that could not get into university’
- 30% of the 16-18 year-olds surveyed said they thought that the information, guidance and advice about apprenticeships they were given by their school or college was ‘poor’, ‘very poor’ or ‘non-existent’. (This compares with just 6% who thought the same about information they were given regarding university).

The Prudential says that the research findings 'raise serious concerns about the quality of information, advice and guidance about apprenticeships being given to school and college students'. The AoC now intends to commission research into how effective the Prudential is as an insurance company. (I think I may possibly have made this last bit up).

Apprenticeships are 'failing to deliver' for young people in England

The Joint BIS/DfE Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy is currently conducting an inquiry into apprenticeships and has invited comments from interested parties on such things as 'the target of three million apprentices by 2020', 'how the government could achieve this', 'the take-up of apprenticeships amongst 16-19 year olds', and 'the steps that can be taken to make more young people more aware of apprenticeship opportunities'. The response the sub-committee received from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, contained a warning that the 'drive to increase the number of apprenticeships is failing to deliver for people under the age of 24'. The Commission response points out that 'apprenticeship starts for under-25s rose by just 4% over the period from 2010/11 to 2014/15, and that apprenticeship starts for 16-18 year olds had actually fallen by more than 5,000 over that period'. At the same time, 'the number of over-25 starts grew by 17%', leading to the conclusion that 'the overall growth in apprenticeship starts has largely been driven by large increases in participation by over-25s'. The Commission response also says that 'most apprenticeships taken by young people are not a step up from the apprentice's previous level of study' and that the 'vast majority of apprentices were studying at levels below their age'. For example, '68% of GCE A Level age apprentices are currently taking apprenticeships at GCSE level and 98% of degree-age apprentices are currently taking apprenticeships at GCE A Level equivalent or lower'. The response also argues that 'many youth apprenticeship starts are in sectors associated with low pay and prospects for progress, such as hairdressing and care'. Further details can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/response-to-apprenticeships-inquiry>

BIS Select Committee Chair says the UK government 'doesn't give a toss about FE'

Speaking at a recent 'Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) symposium', the Chair of the BIS Select Committee, Iain Wright MP, told attendees that the UK government 'doesn't give a toss about FE'. He said that although the FE sector was 'essential to economic prosperity' and should be 'at the very heart of the business and skills policy' it 'wasn't being treated as a priority'. Mr Wright also said that he thought that the UK government did not have a 'hope in hell' of creating 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020.

Lord Blunkett is 'very worried' about the devolution of education and skills to English regions

From 2017/18, the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in England will be allocated to providers through the new combined authorities, instead of through the SFA. Speaking at a recent conference jointly organised by the Learning and Work Institute and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), former Education Secretary for England, David (now Lord) Blunkett, said that he was 'very worried' about this, 'not because the principle isn't right', but because it was 'absolutely clear that nobody has a clue what they're doing'.

Four appointments and a non-appointment

- The DfE has confirmed that Sally Collier will replace Glenys Stacey as Ofqual Chief regulator. Ms Collier is currently Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Crown Commercial Service
- Rachel Sandby-Thomas, currently Director General for Skills, Deregulation and Local Growth at BIS, has been appointed as the CEO designate of the new Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA)
- Mark Dawe, a former college principal and the current CEO of the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) examination board, has been appointed as CEO of the private sector Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). He replaces Stewart Segal who is leaving to take up a senior position in a private training provider
- The current Operational Director at the Schools, Students and Teachers Network (SSAT) Bill Watkin, becomes CEO of the Sixth Form Colleges' Association (SFCA), replacing David Igoe who is retiring
- Meanwhile, the AoC has failed to find a suitable candidate to replace Martin Doel, the current CEO, who will leave in September. The post will now be re-advertised

Sir Michael Wishaw tells MPs that FE 'is in a mess'

Lord Anthony Adonis, the driving force behind the academies programme in England during the Blair era, is reported as having said that he 'couldn't see the point of general FE colleges' and that 'all education

provision up to the age of 19 should be delivered in schools'. It seems that Sir Michael Wilshaw, the Ofsted Chief Inspector for England, has now taken up the Lord Adonis' mantle. Sir Michael told members of the House of Commons Education Select Committee that he also thinks all education provision up to age 19 should be delivered in schools, and preferably by 'groups of schools in MATs' in which a UTC was included in order 'to ensure high quality vocational education' can be provided'. He went on to tell MPs that the FE sector is 'in a mess' and that many young people who leave school to go to FE colleges 'do badly'. Sir Michael's comments came less than six weeks after he delivered a speech in which he accused the FE sector of being 'inadequate', and alleged that that courses delivered by FE colleges were 'often irrelevant to the local workplace and national employment'. He went on to say that his negative view of FE had been 'corroborated by the regular complaints of good head teachers about their local college'. The inconvenient reality for Sir Michael is that evidence from recent Ofsted inspections shows that 82% of FE colleges were delivering 16-18 provision that was judged to be either 'good' or 'outstanding'. This will probably not prevent further unwarranted criticism of FE from Sir Michael over the next nine months because he is leaving his post in December this year. Sadly, he seems determined to take the entire FE sector with him. You can watch a video of Sir Michael making his derogatory comments about FE at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2015/purpose-quality-education-evidence2-/>

But it seems that not everyone agrees with Sir Michael

The reaction to Sir Michael's comments from in FE has ranged from stoic resignation through to apoplectic rage. However, observers external to FE have also expressed varying degrees of incredulity. For example, Paul Joyce, Ofsted's Deputy Director for FE and Skills, said 'To say that the further education and skills sector has been under pressure of late would be an understatement, but I have been very impressed by the sector's resolve to do well by learners'. (Although for perhaps obvious reasons, he did not go so far as to directly contradict his boss). Also, a 'source close to Education Secretary for England, Nicky Morgan', is reported to have said 'We are very supportive of the work done by FE colleges and distance ourselves from Sir Michael's comments'. And Skills Minister for England, Nick Boles, speaking at the recent Education and Training Foundation (ETF) 'Leadership Summit', said 'I just want to say, not only do I disagree with him, David Cameron disagrees with him', and whilst not hinting at even the slightest suggestion of 'schizophrenia', Mr Boles went on to say 'I actually think Michael disagrees with himself'.

Minimum Standards

Sir Michael might perhaps benefit from a gentle reminder that, as in previous years, the 2015 interim 16-19 data available on the DfE 'Live Performance Tables' website, shows that virtually every institution falling below minimum standards is a school. The interim data, which also includes qualification and subject results, value-added, spend per pupil/student, and destinations, can be accessed via the link below:

http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/download_data.html?dm_i=26BG,42Q7W,HXH45S,ES2JE,1

University Technical Colleges (UTCs) struggle to fill places

UTCs are not universities, nor are they technical colleges. They are 14-19 schools in England, offering a limited range of vocational options. Existing UTCs have, as a whole, recruited well below their capacity, with around 40% of UTCs seeing their pupil numbers fall further in 2015/16. A number of UTCs that opened between 2010 and 2013 have closed as a result of recruitment and/or quality issues. Central Bedfordshire UTC is the latest of these, and will close in August, four years after it opened. The governing body admitted that the UTC had 'been unable to attract sufficient pupils to provide a financially viable experience'.

Studio Schools also struggle to fill places

Although some observers have struggled to understand the difference between a UTC and a Studio School, there are a number of striking similarities. For example, as with UTCs, Studio Schools are 14-19 schools in England offering a limited range of vocational options. Neither UTCs nor Studio Schools are located in studios. Like UTCs, Studio Schools are initially funded as if they were operating at full capacity. And like UTCs, a number of Studio Schools are closing down because of an inability to recruit a sufficient number of pupils to make them financially viable. Following the closures of Studio Schools in Bradford, Clacton, Hull, Southampton, Nuneaton and Hinkley, the Da Vinci Studio School of Science and Engineering and the Da Vinci Studio School of Creative Enterprise are the latest to announce their impending closure.

Secondary schools in England struggle to meet the growing demand for places

Meanwhile, at the other end of the capacity spectrum, the Local Government Association (LGA) says that the 'classroom crisis' in England caused by the burgeoning school age population, is getting worse. Councils have already provided in excess of 300,000 additional primary school places, and are under significant pressure to provide even more. However, as the population bulge spreads to the secondary stage, there is also increased pressure on local councils to provide more secondary school places. The LGA says that last year, councils provided more than 2.7 million secondary school places, but went on to say that a significant number of secondary schools are already operating well above their capacity. The LGA says that demand for secondary places is likely reach 3.3 million by the end of the decade and, as a consequence, has warned the UK government that councils in England will soon be unable to fulfill their statutory duty to provide every child with a school place

To avoid this, the LGA has called on the government to give councils the legal powers and the funding to open new schools and to compel existing academies to expand. However, since 2010, UK government policy has been that all new state schools in England must be 'free schools', outside of local authority control. Where local authorities identify the need for a new school, they are required by law to invite proposals to run a new free school, and then forward these to DfE to decide who would be best placed to do so. The situation has been made more complex by the recent announcement that all remaining local authority schools in England are to be forced to convert to academies. Nevertheless, the reality is that there are an increasing number of children who are being denied access to schools in their own localities. They are sometimes being separated from siblings already attending those schools, and often have to travel considerable distances to alternative schools. Commenting on this, Shadow Education Secretary for England, Lucy Powell said, 'Families deserve a better approach to planning for school places'.

Schools in England facing a 'teacher supply crisis'

A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report says that teacher shortages in England are growing, and that ministers have a 'weak understanding of the scale and impact of teacher shortages in some localities'. The report also reveals that:

- The UK government has 'missed teacher recruitment targets for four years'
- 54% of head teachers in schools with large proportions of disadvantaged pupils say that 'attracting and keeping good teachers is a major problem'
- 73% of local education authorities (LEAs) in England have a teacher shortage and are 'struggling to find suitably qualified staff'
- 50% of these said the teacher shortage in their area was 'severe'
- 18% said that the problem had reached 'crisis levels'

A copy of the NAO report can be accessed at:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/training-new-teachers/>

Flexible working could help alleviate teacher shortages in England

Meanwhile, the 'think tank', Policy Exchange has thought about teacher shortages, and now thinks that flexible working could bring thousands of teachers back into the profession, particularly women teachers. A report produced in conjunction with the Association of School and college Leaders (ASCL), says that more than a quarter of the teachers of working age who left the profession between 2008 and 2012 were women aged 30 to 39. Of those who left teaching 'to look after the family', only about half returned to the classroom. The report says that offering flexible part-time contracts to those with caring responsibilities could alleviate teacher shortages. Of course, another way to address teacher shortages is to retrain some of the thousands of FE teachers in England who have been made redundant as a direct result of budget cuts imposed by the UK government. A copy of the report can be accessed at:

<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/media-centre/in-the-news/category/item/how-to-solve-the-teacher-recruitment-crisis>

The Budget

In his budget speech to the House of Commons earlier this month, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, said that the budget was intended to 'put the next generation first'. He followed this up with a number of announcements of relevance to both FE and schools. These include the following:

- From April 2017, employers will receive a 10% 'top-up' to their monthly levy contributions. 'It will mean', said Mr Osborne, 'that if, for example, an employer pays a £2,000 levy, then its levy pot will be £2,200'. He went on to say 'this amount will be available for them to spend on apprenticeship training through their digital account' but that 'only companies that are paying the apprenticeship levy will have access to the new funding system'. Mr Osborne also confirmed that the apprenticeship levy 'will be set at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's payroll, offset by an initial £15,000 allowance'
- Extra money will be made available to fund all 'high quality' 16-18 apprenticeships for the period August 2015 to March 2016. This is likely to be cash moved to the DfE 16-18 budget from the BIS 19+ budget
- £1.8 billion is to be made available to LEPs for new 'growth deals', that colleges may be able to tap into
- National Insurance (NI) payments will be charged on redundancy payments in excess of £30,000

The Budget and schools

- An extra £500 million will be made available to help implement a 'fair funding formula' for schools in England. At present the best-funded areas receive up to £6,300 per pupil per year, while other schools receive as little as £4,200. (Both of these, are of course, more than the £4000 received for 16-18 year olds) The new system will involve a national rate for each pupil, with extra funding for those with additional needs, and comes with a warning that there will be both 'winners and losers' under the new system. There will be a two year transition period for the introduction of the new funding regime, after which school funding will cease to be distributed through councils (although councils will retain a funding role in respect of high-level special educational needs provision)
- There will be an extra £640 million of funding for schools in England to assist all remaining LEA schools with the cost of converting to academy status. However, the Labour Party says that they have identified a £560 million 'black hole' between the funding being made available and the actual cost of conversion. Remaining LEA schools must become academies by 2020 or have official plans to do so by 2022. Those that fail to do so will be subject to new powers that will force them to become academies. Although local authorities have not actually 'run' any mainstream schools since the early 1990s, by forcing them out of mainstream education, the LEA system of schools that has been in place in England since 1902, will come to an end. The proposal has been the subject of intense criticism from the teaching unions and the Labour Party. Perhaps surprisingly, the proposals have also been criticised by Conservative councillors (one of whom said 'I think they've gone bonkers') and backbench Conservative MPs. Even the curiously named 'Freedom and Autonomy for Schools - National Association' (FASNA), which is the organisation that represents self-governing schools and academies, says that the proposal is 'risky' and has questioned whether there was sufficient 'capacity to execute the policy effectively'
- A new sugar tax on fizzy drinks is expected to generate £500 million per year and will be used to support sport in primary schools and after-school sports activities in secondary schools

The budget and HE

- There will be no student number recruitment limits imposed on private HE providers
- Those wanting to study for PhDs and masters degrees part-time will be able to access tuition fee loans

The budget announcements affecting education relate only to England. Education policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved governments of those countries

Education White Paper: 'Education, Excellence, Everywhere'

The UK government has outlined 5-year vision for education in England in a new White Paper entitled 'Education, Excellence, Everywhere' (not to be confused with Tony Blair's 'Education, Education, Education'). The White Paper covers both schools and 16-19 provision, although, as usual, the term 'further education' is not referred to even once. The proposals contained in the White Paper include the following:

For colleges:

- 'We will introduce new headline performance measures for 16-19 providers. These will look at progress, attainment and retention (including specifically that in English and mathematics for students who have not already achieved a good pass at GCSE)'
- 'We will publish a strategy for improved careers provision for young people, to transform the quality of

the careers education, advice and guidance offered to young people, including further funding for the Careers and Enterprise Company to continue the excellent work it has started'

- 'We will work with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to improve the data we publish on students' destinations after leaving education. This will show how well schools and colleges set pupils up to succeed and whether they are guiding them to make the right choices'

For schools:

- 'We will build on the success of the free school programme to open 500 new schools by 2020. These schools will contribute to achieving educational excellence everywhere by meeting the need for more school places in areas of basic need, and ensuring our school system offers greater choice, innovation and competition in areas where educational standards are currently lower than they should be'
- 'We will target future UTC locations in areas without such provision within reach so that increasing numbers of young people can benefit from this type of technical education. We will strengthen the programme through reforms to help UTCs with pupil recruitment and to improve their educational and financial viability. There will be an expectation that all UTCs should be part of strong partnerships with high-performing MATs'
- 'In the last parliament, we introduced a new, more ambitious national curriculum and reformed qualifications and assessment standards; in this parliament, our reform programme is well underway. Once these changes are complete, our aim is to give schools and colleges as much curriculum stability as possible to deliver these ambitious reforms'.
- 'We will invest in supporting professionals to achieve better outcomes for pupils with SEND, including ensuring they have access to training and support on specific impairments such as autism or dyslexia'.

For both schools and colleges:

- Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) will be replaced with a new process that will see head teachers and principals decide when trainee teachers are ready to be accredited. The new process will 'allow those who progress faster to gain the new accreditation earlier', and is expected to 'make it easier to recruit experts from other fields and to allow them to quickly become professional teachers'.
- Ofsted will consult on removing the separate graded judgments on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to help clarify that the focus of inspection is on outcomes and to reduce burdens on schools and teachers. (While the report does not specifically state that this will also apply to FE, the move to a Common Inspection Framework last September implies that any decision to cease separately grading for teaching, learning and assessment, will also apply to FE inspections).

The White Paper only applies to England since education policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the governments of those countries. A copy of the White Paper can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508550/Educational_excellence_everywhere_print_ready.pdf

BIS consults on FE maintenance loans

HE maintenance grants in England have already been replaced by maintenance loans, and now BIS has launched a consultation on the introduction maintenance loans for FE learners in England. BIS says that maintenance loans are intended for students aged 19 and above studying on courses at Levels 4 to 6 in FE institutions, with the aim of providing the same level of support as is available (and subsequent debt) as students in HE. BIS says that it particularly wants the loans to support learners on advanced courses at specialist providers, such as 'the new National Colleges, and the emerging Institutes of Technology'.

Universities in England told to recruit more white working class students

Last month (February) the Prime Minister delivered a hard-hitting speech in which he called on universities to be more proactive and transparent in their attempts to recruit more black and minority ethnic minority (BAME) undergraduates, and to publish data on the ethnicity of their applicants. However, a recent Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) research report shows that, *as a proportion of their constituent populations*, BAME young people are actually more likely to attend university than white British young people, with young white working class males being the least likely of any group to be undergraduates. (See last month's newsletter). Universities Minister for England, Jo Johnson, has now called on HE institutions 'to do more' to recruit white working class young people. He has also required the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to include

the white working class in the targets for recruiting under represented groups that OFFA has to agree, if universities in England want to charge more than £6,000 per year in tuition fees.

https://www.go.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510797/BIS-16-179-further-education-maintenance-loans-consultation.pdf

‘Smart’ watches could give candidates an unfair advantage in examinations

Concerns have been expressed that ‘smart’ watches, such as those sold by Apple and Samsung, could enable examination candidates to cheat. The watches normally show a clock face, but can quickly be switched to show considerable amounts of data and information that can be read by candidates whilst they are sitting their examinations, and equally quickly switch back to a clock face if an invigilator approaches. This has led to calls for ‘smart’ watches to be banned from being worn during examinations.

Prevent is ‘closing down freedom of expression and debate’

Under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, school, college and university staff have a statutory duty ‘to actively assist in identifying and tackling risks that could lead to people being radicalised’. ‘Prevent’ is proving to be controversial, since colleges and universities also have a duty under the 1986 Education Act to secure freedom of speech. UCU argues that ‘Prevent’ is turning university and college staff into ‘the eyes and ears of the security state’ and is ‘closing down freedom of expression and debate’. The implementation of the ‘Prevent’ duty in the way the UK government intends is also proving difficult. For example, a Muslim university lecturer was recently awarded £20,000 in damages after he was arrested for downloading the ‘Al Qaeda Training Manual’ for use in a study on counter terrorism.

NUT members call for ‘Prevent’ to be scrapped

This Easter, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has called on the UK government to withdraw ‘Prevent’ and to develop ‘alternative strategies’ to keep children safe. Christine Blower, the union’s general secretary said ‘Young people are more likely to be prey to radicalisation when they are at home surfing the internet than at school or college’, and went on to say that it was important that young people ‘have the space’, and that teachers are allowed to use their professional judgment to ‘enable open debate’. But Professor Anthony Glees, a terror expert and former advisor to the Home Office, said that abandoning Prevent ‘would be seen by Islamists as a green light to carry on trying to brainwash young British Muslims’.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) says that the Prevent strategy has failed

The MCB says that Prevent is ‘alienating young Muslims’ and is actually ‘pushing them towards radical groups’. A spokesperson for the MCB said that the strategy is ‘divisive and creates lack of trust among different communities, as well as within the Muslim communities’. He went on to say that, despite claims to the contrary, ‘Prevent almost exclusively targets young Muslims for the views they hold on religion, or issues such as government foreign policy’. He said that ‘teachers are cast in the role of spies on our young people’, and that this was leading to ‘a breakdown of trust in schools and colleges’. He argued that young Muslims need a ‘safe space where they can speak freely about issues of concern to them without being labelled as extremists’. He said that most Muslims ‘want nothing to do with Prevent’ and this would appear to be borne out by data produced by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), which shows that of the 3,288 referrals to Prevent between January and June 2015, only 280 (8.6%) came from the Muslim community, with the remaining referrals coming from social services, the NHS, the education sector, the prison service and the police.

More Muslim children are being home educated

Earlier this month (March), the BBC Asian Network reported that the number of Muslim parents choosing to home-educate their children was rapidly increasing. Parents say they have taken their children out of school ‘for a number of reasons’, including concerns about ‘standards’, but also because of ‘frustration’ with the Prevent strategy. However, the increase in numbers has also led to concerns that home educated children could be at greater risk of becoming ‘radicalised’ (e.g. by attending unregistered madrassas), or ‘falling off the radar’ (e.g. in respect of young girls being taken abroad for ‘forced marriages’ or ritual circumcision). The DfE said that the department is developing ‘robust strategies’ for preventing this.

Former ‘Trojan Horse’ teacher escapes a teaching ban

Thus far, 14 teachers from four of the 21 Birmingham schools implicated in the ‘Trojan Horse’ affair are being investigated in respect of allegations that they attempted ‘to exercise an undue amount of religious

influence on the education of their pupils'. Three of the teachers who were under investigation were found to be guilty of 'professional misconduct' and have been given a lifetime teaching ban by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). A fourth teacher, who was found to have told his pupils that 'only Muslims have the true religion', that Christians and Jews were 'ignorant' and to have posted an 'ill-advised, offensive and inappropriate' message about the murder of British soldier Lee Rigby on a 'What's App' group used by radicals' escaped a teaching ban, because the NCTL concluded that his actions were 'an unintended consequence arising from his choice of language'. Based on this, the DfE ruled that the teacher's misconduct 'did not have the purpose of promoting extremism' and is he is now free to take up a teaching post at another school.

Meanwhile, Sir Mike Tomlinson, the Education Commissioner appointed by the DfE to oversee educational improvements in Birmingham in the wake of the 'Trojan Horse' affair, has banned Education Department staff from using of the term 'Trojan Horse'. This, he said, was because it was 'not helpful in attempts to improve the schools' and 'could have an adverse impact on teacher recruitment'. Speaking at the 2016 Global Education and Skills Forum held in Dubai earlier this month (March), Sir Mike told international delegates that the incident formerly known as 'Trojan Horse' could 'have happened anywhere'.

2016 Global Education and Skills Forum

The Global Education and Skills Forum is an annual event that attracts a number of very high profile speakers and delegates from governments and private bodies from around the world. The organisation behind the Forum is Global Education Management Services (GEMS), and although it would perhaps be inaccurate to regard GEMS as being sort of educational 'Illuminati', it could also be argued that both the origin and the nature of the worldwide services GEMS provides are slightly mysterious. GEMS certainly seem to be able to elicit the support of global 'big-hitters'. For example, Pope Francis announced that the winner of the 2016 Global Teaching Prize. The prize of *one million US dollars* was awarded to a Palestinian teacher, Hanan Al Hroub, who grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp, and who is now a teacher of refugees herself. Ms Al Hroub received messages of congratulations from international high profile dignitaries, including our own Prince William. Finalists for the Global Teacher Prize were drawn from teachers from across the world, including Colin Hegarty, a mathematics teacher from London.

Amongst the 'glitterati' attending and speaking at the Forum was none other than former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who told delegates that 'changing a country's education system was one of the most difficult things for a government to achieve'. This, he said, was because 'major interests often stand in the way'. Referring to the education reforms implemented during his time in government, Mr Blair said 'When you first propose it, people tell you it's a terrible thing. When you're doing it, it's hell, and after you've done it, you wish you'd done more of it'. He went on to tell delegates that because the public sector was 'not good at innovating', it was his belief that the UK education system would benefit from allowing private organisations (presumably including GEMS) to run schools for a profit. Mind you, he also believed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction 'that could be deployed against British bases within 45 minutes', that the failure to join the Eurozone would be 'disastrous for the UK economy', and that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) was a 'really good idea'. Mr Blair went on to tell delegates that he was also worried that a 'culture of political populism' was 'impacting on the debate around migration' in the UK. He said that if people believed that 'their incomes were being depressed', they should 'not blame migrants'. Instead, they should 'work harder to get the education and skills they needed to get better jobs and opportunities'. He got his own education at the exclusive Chorister School, Durham, the even more exclusive Fettes College, Edinburgh, and then at St John's College, Oxford. And he honed his skills in a brief, but sadly unsuccessful, career as rock band promoter and then as a 'pupil barrister', before entering politics and becoming prime minister. All of which, helped him to become the multi-millionaire international lobbyist, and advisor to questionable governments and big business, that he is today.

Another speaker at the event was Andreas Schleicher of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Continuing to show what some observers are beginning to think is a slightly abnormal level of interest in UK educational performance, the German born analyst told delegates that 'young people in the UK were falling behind in mathematics'. And, displaying what some might regard as an unfeasibly deep level of understanding of UK teaching methods, he went on to criticise mathematics teaching in the UK as being 'superficial' and 'focusing on memorising and learning facts', saying that lessons 'lack rigour', are 'over-complicated, and fail to help pupils grasp mathematical concepts'. Referring to the latest OECD 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA) tests for mathematics, in

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which the UK was ranked 26th, Mr Schleicher told delegates that the UK was still 'far away from the highest performing systems'. More information on the 2016 Global Education and Skills Forum, and on GEMS, can be accessed at:

<https://educationandskillsforum.org>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEMS_Education

And finally...

Peter Scott, professor of HE studies at UCL Institute of Education, recently wrote in the Guardian:

'A crucial educational lesson learnt long ago in the US is that you can't have peaks without mountain ranges; that elite universities flourish when surrounded by an abundance of low cost part-time community colleges. Technical and technician level education, part-time degrees, lifelong learning - access to these makes for an enterprising economy and a healthy democracy. Yet for all their pious talk about increasing diversity, our government leaders attend almost exclusively to the needs of young, full-time students - the ones with conventional academic qualifications who go to top universities and monopolise top jobs. People like "them", in short. Yet the uncoordinated expansion of academies and free schools, with sixth forms as jewels in their crowns, has made it impossible to create sensible post-16 provision. Meanwhile FE colleges have been hammered by government austerity policies; the tripling of college fees has clobbered part-time students; and those middle of the road graduates who do qualify for loans find that the salaries they go on to receive in their middle-management jobs are eaten away in a lifetime of debt repayments. Britain may pride itself on its two or three genuinely world-class universities, but its educational policy as a whole is an incoherent mess.'

The usual groan-inducing rubbish jokes normally found at the end of the **Click** newsletter will return in the next edition (whether you like it, or not).

Alan Birks – March 2016

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