

Sector Developments

Departmental and ministerial changes

Following David Cameron's resignation in the wake of the Brexit vote, and his replacement by Theresa May as the new UK Prime Minister, there have been a number of changes to the way in which the government departments involved with FE and skills in England are organised, and in the MPs who fill the ministerial posts associated with them. These are as follows:

- The Department for Education (DfE) has taken over responsibility for FE, skills and higher education (HE). The responsibility for further and higher education was previously under the remit of the former Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). A spokesperson for the Prime Minister's office said 'bringing responsibilities for FE, skills and HE together in one department will mean that the government can take a comprehensive, end-to-end view of skills and education, supporting people from early years through to postgraduate study and work'. BIS officials involved with FE, skills and HE will transfer to the DfE.
- The new Secretary of State for Education in England is Justine Greening (a former comprehensive school pupil and college student), who replaces the former Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan. Walsall College was the first FE college to be visited by Ms Greening in her new ministerial role.
- Robert Halfon has been appointed as Minister of State with responsibility for FE, Skills and Apprenticeships in England, replacing Nick Boles, who resigned from the post. Mr Halfon is a career politician who was elected MP for Harlow in 2010. In July 2014 he became George Osborne's Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) and in May 2015 David Cameron appointed him as 'Minister without portfolio (attending Cabinet)' and also as Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party.
- Jo Johnson (brother of Boris) retains his post as Minister for Universities and Science in England, (but as mentioned above, now within the DfE rather than BIS).
- Nick Gibb retains his responsibilities as Minister for Schools in England.
- BIS has now become the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Greg Clarke has become the Secretary of State for the new department.
- The former Secretary of State for BIS, Sajid Javed, has become the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.
- Damian Green has replaced Stephen Crabb as Minister for Work and Pensions.

Readers sometimes ask why terms such as 'Secretary of State for Education *for England*', are used in the newsletter. The answer is to make it clear that some UK government ministers and departments only have authority for policy in England. This includes FE, HE and school policy, which in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the sole responsibility of ministers of the devolved governments of those countries. There is no equivalent English Parliament and it is the UK parliament at Westminster deals with FE, HE and skills policy in England. However, the UK parliament includes 117 Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland MPs and the failure to implement 'English votes on English legislation' (EVEL) means that these MPs can, and sometimes do, vote on education and skills policy in England (e.g. in 2004 the then Labour government was only able to introduce university 'top up' tuition fees in England with the support of Labour MPs from Scottish constituencies). Conversely, English MPs in Westminster are not allowed any say in education and skills policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, thereby providing an interesting example of the as yet unanswered 'West Lothian Question', first posed by Tam Dalyell, the MP for that constituency.

Report of the 'Independent Panel on Technical Education' is published

Immediately before the recent Cabinet re-shuffle and re-organisation of UK government departments, the DfE and BIS published the long awaited 'Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education'. The panel was chaired by Lord Sainsbury and included Baroness Alison Wolf amongst its membership. The report proposes a radical overhaul of the post-16 vocational qualification system in England, the main feature of which is a recommendation that a 'binary system' should be established whereby post-16 students will, after completing their GCSEs, be required to choose between an academic or a technical pathway. It is likely that, if and when implemented, the proposals will mean that 16-18 year olds will no longer be able to opt for a mixture of academic and vocational qualifications, although there will be an option for students to switch between the two routes after completing GCE A Levels or equivalent

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qualifications. This in turn, is thought likely to lead to greater specialisation in the post-16 curriculum offered by schools, colleges and other providers. The main characteristics of the two pathways are as follows:

- Students opting to take the academic pathway will undertake a study programme involving GCSE A Levels or their equivalent (e.g. the International Baccalaureate), leading to degree level study.
- Students choosing the technical pathway can opt for either a two-year, college-based programme, (including compulsory work experience), or an employment-based programme (most likely to be an apprenticeship). After this, they can progress to Level 4 or 5 higher technical programmes, including higher apprenticeships. In some cases, students on the technical pathway will be able to take 'bridging provision', leading to an undergraduate degree.
- Both pathways are intended to be appropriate for students aged 16-18 and for those aged 19+.

The main reforms proposed for the technical pathway include the following:

- Existing post-16 vocational courses, which currently involve study for one or more of thousands of existing vocational qualifications, will be replaced with 15 'high-quality routes'.
- The new Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA), due to be launched in 2017, will see its remit expanded to encompass 'all of technical education at Levels 2 to 5', and the IfA will be responsible for bringing together expert groups to set the content and standards for each of the 15 routes. New legislation will need to be introduced for it to become the 'only body responsible for technical education'. In 2018, the Institute for Apprenticeships will be renamed the 'Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education'.
- There will be only one 'Tech Level' qualification at Level 2 or 5 for each occupation, or cluster of related occupations, within each route.
- 'Exclusive licences' to develop these Tech Level qualifications will be granted to a single awarding body 'following an open competition'. This replaces the current situation where there are around 160 awarding bodies, offering around 20,000 different awards in competition with each other. It is thought that the change will lead to 'large numbers' of awarding bodies being 'forced out of business'.
- Each route will have a 'common core' which will include English, mathematics and digital skills as well as a 'specialisation towards a skilled occupation or set of occupations'.
- There will be a single set of 'exit requirements' of minimum standards in mathematics and English for both college and work-based provision.
- Some technical pathway courses will be delivered through full time two-year college based programmes, although they will be closely aligned to the new apprenticeship standards. Every 16-18 year-old on a college based programme will be required to complete a 'high-quality' work placement', and complete a logbook to record the tasks they have undertaken and what they have learnt.
- Colleges and other training providers may be permitted to deliver Traineeships for up to a year (which is a doubling of the current six-month maximum) as part of a 'transition year' for some 16-18 year-olds progressing onto one of the 15 routes.
- Four of the technical pathway routes are intended to be 'primarily delivered through apprenticeships'.
- The Institute for Apprenticeships will 'review all existing apprenticeship standards at the earliest opportunity to ensure there is no substantial overlap' between the 15 routes.
- The first 'pathfinder' technical routes will be taught from September 2019, with the rest 'rolled out' by September 2022.

The 15 vocational routes listed within the report are as follows:

- Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care
- Business and Administrative
- Catering and Hospitality
- Childcare and Education
- Construction
- Creative and Design
- Digital
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Hair and Beauty
- Health and Science
- Legal, Finance and Accounting

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- *Protective Services**
- *Sales, Marketing and Procurement**
- *Social Care**
- *Transport and Logistics**

(* These are the routes the report says are 'primarily intended to be delivered through apprenticeships').

The timeline for the introduction of the new vocational routes is as follows:

- April 2017: The Institute for Apprenticeships is launched and assumes responsibility for the 15 routes
- April 2018: The Institute for Apprenticeships is renamed the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
- October 2018: Procurement begins to select awarding bodies for new Tech Level qualifications
- February 2019: Tech Level qualifications are approved for 'pathfinder' vocational routes
- September 2019: First teaching of 'pathfinder' vocational routes
- September 2020 to September 2022: Roll out of remaining routes and phase out of other post-16 vocational courses and qualifications.

The recommendations made in the report were accepted in full by the DfE and BIS and were encapsulated in the joint DfE/BIS 'Post-16 Skills Plan', which was published on the same day as the Panel report. It is expected that the recent changes in ministerial responsibilities will not affect or delay this.

Many who have worked in the FE sector for a long time will no doubt be reminded that these new proposals in the Sainsbury report are the latest in a series of attempts to reform vocational qualifications and to give them parity of esteem with academic qualifications (particularly GCE A Levels). The last of these attempts involved 14-19 Diplomas, proposed in the Tomlinson Report, published in a White paper in 2005, launched in 2008 and abandoned just a few years later. Hopefully the new proposals will meet with more success.

A copy of both the Independent Panel report and the Skills Plan can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-skills-plan-and-independent-report-on-technical-education>

Inquiry into the 'progress, effectiveness and impact of post-16 areas reviews'

The House of Commons Education, Skills and the Economy Sub-Committee has launched parliamentary inquiry into the 'progress, effectiveness and impact on the FE sector of post-16 education and skills reviews' in England. Amongst other things, the inquiry will consider why other providers, such as school sixth forms and independent training providers, have not been directly involved in the reviews, and why the process has also taken longer than was originally planned. Some cynical observers have suggested that post-16 provision delivered in schools was excluded from the area review process because of the earlier, but now defunct, government plans to force all schools to become academies, and that private trainers were excluded because the government is inclined towards encouraging the further privatisation of FE provision. (See the section entitled '*Insolvent colleges could be sold off to the private sector*' below). With reference to the area review timescale, the FE Commissioner for England, Sir David Collins, admitted that the first wave of reviews had taken 'a bit longer than planned', but added that he was confident that the process would be completed by the March 2017 deadline. The deadline for written submissions is September 30. More on the Education, Skills and Economy sub-committee inquiry can be accessed at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-skills-and-economy/news-parliament-2015/post-16-education-launch-16-17/>

Area reviews are expected reduce the number of colleges by one third

Sir David Collins is reported as saying that when area review recommendations are fully implemented, he expects to see the number of colleges fall by around one-third and that his 'best bet' was that the current 243 colleges would fall to around 170, partly as a result of mergers, but also as a result of some closures.

Consultation launched on insolvency procedures for colleges in England

To add to the fun, Nick Boles, the former Skills Minister for England announced that when the reviews are completed, English FE and incorporated sixth form colleges that find themselves in financial difficulties will

no longer be given exceptional financial support (EFS). In effect, this means that the UK government will be prepared to allow post-16 colleges in England to become bankrupt. Currently, no legal arrangements exist for placing insolvent colleges into administration, but the UK government has now launched a consultation on this. In the introduction to the consultation document (which was published immediately before the recent ministerial reorganisations), Mr Boles said 'We plan to establish a comprehensive insolvency regime for the sector, with a clear remit to provide flexibility where colleges can be rescued, and clarity of process where they cannot'. He added that this would 'need to make provision for corporations to exit the market when appropriate, and without undue detriment to learners, creditors and taxpayers'. He went on to say that introducing an insolvency regime for colleges will 'require new government legislation', with the procedures 'being tailored to meet the requirements of the college sector'. The consultation document outlines the general principles underlying the proposed college insolvency regime. These include:

- Retaining the independence of colleges (as expanded by the Education Act 2011) whilst removing or mitigating any expectation of additional exceptional public funding.
- Establishing an orderly process that provides protection for creditors, comparable with other commercial insolvency regimes, while protecting the interests of learners by maintaining continuity of provision and continuing to provide support for critical local and national education and training needs.
- In cases where it is feasible to do so, facilitating the rescue of a college as a going concern, including providing access to new sources of finance. (There are credible suggestions that the government may be prepared to allow struggling colleges to be sold-off to the private sector- see the section below).
- Maintaining and maximising the value of the public assets of the college.
- Creating a legislative context in which commercial lenders will be prepared to continue to lend to colleges on appropriate terms.

The consultation document considers different types of insolvency regimes, which include:

- Voluntary Liquidation
- Administration
- Compulsory Liquidation
- Creditors' Voluntary Liquidation

The document contains proposals for procedures by which either a college, or its creditors, could lodge a court petition for an 'Insolvency order under the Insolvency Act 1986'. The document also stresses that the main aim of any insolvency regime introduced would be to 'deliver options for the rehabilitation of a college wherever possible', and where it is not possible, 'to promote an orderly winding up with protections for learners and creditors'. However, there is also another proposal to establish a 'Special Administration Regime' (SAR) for colleges which would sit alongside other insolvency options. The SAR would be set in motion when 'a college becomes insolvent and the Secretary of State deems it appropriate to apply for an SAR to protect learner provision'. The main aim of the SAR (as opposed to other possible methods of insolvency administration) would be to ensure that 'the interests of learners are given priority and the administrator is able to act accordingly'. Whereas ordinary insolvency procedures would normally take around 12 months, this could be extended because 'SARs may need more time due to the fact that they relate to continuity of public services'. A copy of the consultation document can be downloaded at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-an-insolvency-regime-for-the-further-education-and-sixth-form-sector>

Insolvent colleges 'could be sold off to the private sector'

Former BIS officials have admitted that it is 'unrealistic to assume that area reviews will not result in any colleges becoming financially insolvent'. Presumably in preparation for this contingency, a leaked BIS report entitled 'Framework for due diligence in the FE sector following area reviews', dated June 2016, contains a section called 'Acquisition of an FE college by a private sector organisation'. The section is alleged to say that there is 'a significant and increasing number of private sector organisations operating in the FE private sector' and goes on to say that some of these organisations 'might be interested in the acquisition of FE colleges'. The section is alleged to suggest that private sector organisations may be able to effect a financial turnaround of a college in difficulties because they 'may have different benchmarks as to what is acceptable in terms of both curriculum and financial performance'. These 'benchmarks' presumably include such things lower pay for staff and inferior conditions of employment.

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On learning of the leaked report, Gordon Marsden, the Shadow FE and Skills Minister for England said that it was 'alarming' and went on to say that it would be 'wrong to run a fire sale'. The outgoing chief executive of the AoC Martin Doel said 'Private organisations should not be allowed to 'asset-strip colleges' buildings and facilities or pick and choose students or courses according to how much profit they might generate'. But Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) said 'If the government is genuinely looking for the right solution to give a long term sustainable future to a failing college, it should be open to consider all propositions'.

SFA announces almost £100 million of growth funding for apprenticeships and traineeships

In February, the SFA announced that it had awarded an additional £25 million to colleges and training providers to deliver 16-18 apprenticeships, but at the time said that there was no extra cash for 16-18 traineeships. In May, the SFA announced that growth requests would be offered for the delivery of any of the new apprenticeship standards, but not for existing apprenticeship frameworks. Earlier this month (July), the SFA announced that it would be allocating £83.3 million of growth funding for all apprenticeships offered under the new standards, and £16.3 million for traineeships. The growth allocations are spread across two years as follows:

- 2015/16: £30.1 million for all apprenticeships, and £10.3 million for traineeships
- 2016/17: £53.2 million for all apprenticeships and £5.9 million for traineeships.

A spokesperson for the SFA said 'We have funded all credible growth cases to grow delivery in priority areas', and went on to say 'Where there is evidence of increased performance, we have increased providers' 2016 to 2017 allocations accordingly'. Further details are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/apprenticeship-and-traineeship-growth-exercise-2016-to-2017>

Report of taskforce on improving access to apprenticeships for people with disabilities is published

The DfE has agreed to implement all 14 recommendations from a taskforce specifically commissioned to explore how access to apprenticeships can be improved for people with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD). The taskforce was jointly set up by former Skills Minister for England Nick Boles and former Minister for the Disabled, Justin Tomlinson. The taskforce was chaired by Paul Maynard MP and included representatives of disability organisations, learning providers, employers, and senior officials from both the former BIS and the DWP. The taskforce met three times to look at what barriers affect people with learning disabilities in accessing and completing an apprenticeship. From April 2017, after the new apprenticeship funding model has been developed, a pilot will be conducted to explore how the apprenticeship levy to incentivise employers to recruit apprentices with learning disabilities'. A copy of the taskforce report and the government response to the recommendations made in it can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-bis-and-dwp-response-to-recommendations>

PAC report calls for greater clarity in the devolution process in England

There are currently nine English areas with devolution deals agreed with the government. These are Tees Valley, West Yorkshire, Sheffield City Region, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, North East, Cornwall and London. The UK government is set to transfer responsibility for the delivery of a number of areas to these regions from 2017/18, including FE and skills provision for those aged 19+, which is currently the responsibility of BIS and the SFA. In March, Labour peer Lord Blunkett said he was 'very worried' about the devolution of adult skills funding to regions across England 'not because the principle isn't right, but because it's clear that no one's got a clue what they're doing'.

Lord Blunkett's concerns have been echoed in a report published this month by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which says that the UK government 'has not set out clearly what is required from local areas in putting forward devolution proposals, and equally what is, and is not, on offer from central government in return'. The report also says that it is 'alarming that LEPs are not meeting basic standards of governance and transparency, such as disclosing conflicts of interest to the public' and gives as an example 'the fact that 42% of LEPs do not publish a register of interests is clearly a risk to ensuring that decisions are made free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest'. The report warns that the timetable to implement devolution deals over the coming months is 'extremely challenging'. With specific

reference to skills funding, the report says that the devolution deals agreed reveal significant differences in per capita funding, ranging from £11 a year in Greater Manchester to £27 a year in the West of England. Further information and a copy of the PAC report can be accessed at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news-parliament-2015/local-enterprise-partnerships-devolution-england-report-published-16-17/>

Ofsted proposes separate campus inspection grades in the wake of post-16 area reviews

Following discussions between Ofsted, the former BIS and the DfE, Ofsted is proposing to introduce separate campus grades for large colleges that are operating in geographically diverse locations. The change is being considered in response to the area reviews process, which is thought likely to result in a smaller number of larger colleges, many of which may be operating across several geographical locations. Ofsted says that the proposed change is also to 'improve local accountability' in respect of the quality of provision at each campus. A consultation exercise expected to begin later this month (July), to seek views on this from the sector. If the proposal is supported, the change is likely to require a larger team of inspectors, some of who will be inspecting provision on college sites, while others inspecting cross college provision and central services.

Appointment of new Ofsted Chief Inspector for England proves to be controversial

Amanda Spielman, the current chair of Ofqual, was nominated as the new Ofsted Chief Inspector for England by Nicky Morgan, the former Secretary of State for Education in England, to replace Sir Michael Wilshaw when he steps down in December. It is customary for the current Secretary of State's nomination to be endorsed at a 'pre-appointment' meeting with members of the House of Commons Education Select Committee. But following this meeting, members of the Committee decided not to endorse Ms Spielman's appointment. Neil Carmichael, the chair of the Select Committee, explained that Ms Spielman had 'failed to demonstrate to Committee members the vision and passion we would expect', and that they 'did not have confidence in her appropriateness for the job'. Mr Carmichael also implied that she did not have an understanding of FE. Although a statutory part of the recruitment process, the Select Committee cannot actually veto an appointment made by the Secretary of State and there have been precedents for this in appointments made in other UK government departments. Mr Carmichael nevertheless called on Ms Morgan 'not to proceed with Ms Spielman's appointment'.

Concerns had been expressed by teaching unions in respect of Ms Spielman's lack of teaching experience, and as to the independence Ms Spielman in her role as Chief Inspector, if her appointment relied on ministerial patronage. However, Ms Spielman's appointment was supported by the chief executives of both the Association of Colleges (AoC) and Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). AoC Chief Executive Martin Doel said that 'While there may have been concerns that she has never been a teacher, we have had a series of chief inspectors at Ofsted who had little or no experience of further education'. AELP chief executive Mark Dawe said that Ms Spielman had done a very good job at Ofqual', and went on to say, 'As for the Committee's desire for passion, some of previous Chief Inspectors have had this in abundance and if misdirected, it's not always a good thing'.

In the wake of Justine Greening's appointment as the new Secretary of State, there was some uncertainty about Ms Spielman's position. However, it has since been confirmed by the DfE that her appointment as the next Ofsted Chief Inspector has been approved by the Privy Council. More details on the reasons why Education Select Committee failed to endorse Ms Spielman's appointment as Ofsted Chief Inspector, including a video of the committee proceedings, can be accessed at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2015/ofsted-pre-appointment-report-published-16-17/>

Sir Michael Wishaw attacks FE Colleges (again) and has a go at UTCs

Speaking at the recent Baker Dearing conference, Sir Michael Wilshaw again attacked the English FE sector and told delegates that while these were some 'excellent colleges', in the current academic year, around half of the colleges inspected by Ofsted had been judged 'unsatisfactory' or 'requires improvement'. This, he said was an 'alarming rate of underperformance and failure'. Sir Michael also referred to

comments he made earlier this year, that 'all 16-19 education should be done in schools' and reiterated that 'too many GFE colleges are still packing their curriculum with low-quality courses that fail to match the skills gaps in the local and national labour market'. Ignoring completely the failures of 11 years spent in the school sector, he also expressed his 'frustration with the fact that so many young people who failed to reach the grade in mathematics and English at 16 still haven't got these key qualifications two years later'.

However, Sir Michael surprised many of those attending by also attacking university technical colleges (UTCs), and warned that 'radical improvement' was needed if they were to survive. Sir Michael said that to date, Ofsted has inspected 15 of the 39 UTCs that are open, however only one of these judged to be 'outstanding', 7 were 'good', 5 'required improvement' and 2 were 'inadequate'. He told delegates from UTCs 'You need to be doing significantly better than this, particularly because, unlike GFE colleges, you largely focus on one vocational or technical specialist area'. He went on to say, 'If the UTC movement is to survive and prosper, then radical improvement is necessary', adding 'If this doesn't happen, politicians will come to the conclusion that the model is flawed and not worthy of further political or financial support'. Despite this, he restated his strong support for a UTC to be included in all multi-academy trusts.

FE providers are 'falling short in protecting learners from risk of extremism'

Ofsted has published a report that is critical of FE in respect of how well colleges and other providers are implementing the UK government's counter-extremism strategy 'Prevent'. The report is based on inspectors' findings during specific visits to 37 FE and skills providers, and the findings from 46 scheduled Ofsted inspections and monitoring visits. The report says that although general further education (GFE) colleges and sixth-form colleges (SFCs) were 'making good progress' with carrying out their statutory Prevent duties on tackling extremism, too many students remain at risk of radicalisation and extremism'. Examples of issues that had given inspectors cause for concern included the following:

- A student had been able to watch a 'terrorist propaganda video' in a college resource centre. (The video in question was produced so-called Islamic State, and included beheadings).
- Although colleges had adopted a tougher line on internet access, such as firewalls and regular checks on attempts to access inappropriate websites, there was evidence that some still lacked adequate safeguards for internet use. (Inspectors found examples of students being able to bypass online security settings to visit websites involved with 'selling firearms' or 'promoting terrorist ideology').
- Not all colleges had systems that could block internet access on students' personal devices when they were on college premises.
- Although some outside speakers helped students 'to learn about different views, which promoted tolerance, respect and democracy', checks on external speakers were found to be inadequate.
- In the case of private training providers 'the progress made in implementing the duty has been slow'.
- Risk assessments 'lacked sufficient detail' and staff training for 'Prevent' was found to be 'ineffective' in around one third of the providers visited.

A copy of the Ofsted report, which is entitled '*How well are FE and skills providers implementing the 'Prevent' duty?*' can be accessed at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-education-and-skills-providers-falling-short-in-protecting-learners-from-risk-of-extremism>

Ofsted expresses concerns about failure of Councils to track young people taken out of school

Meanwhile, Bradford, Birmingham and Luton Councils have been accused by Ofsted of doing too little to trace pupils who go missing from mainstream schools. Ofsted says that children educated at home, in unregistered schools or in some independent faith schools can be at risk of exposure to extremist views. There were also concerns that children may be taken out of school to participate in arranged marriages abroad, or even to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). Birmingham Council was singled out for particular criticism, where it was alleged that two years after the 'Trojan Horse' scandal, the 'the situation remains fragile'. Ofsted said that while many of the schools have improved and children are much safer, recent meetings with head teachers revealed that there were 'a minority of people in the community who are still intent on destabilising these schools'. In one meeting, a group of heads spoke of feeling 'isolated and vulnerable'. Some complained of a continuing 'culture of fear' with 'overt intimidation from some elements within the local community'. Head teachers made specific reference to:

- Continuing organised resistance to personal, social and health education (PSHE), including sex education and the promotion of equality
- Derogatory comments posted on social media
- Continual pressure from some parents to change schools' curriculum and staffing.

Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and Economy publishes report on careers advice in England

It is now a legal requirement for all schools in England to provide independent careers guidance for all 12-18 year olds. However, there have been criticisms of current arrangements that include:

- A lack of consistency in the standard and quality of careers education across the country.
- Sub-standard careers guidance in schools in England is exacerbating current skills shortages.
- Reluctance of schools with sixth forms to provide impartial advice and guidance, because there is a financial incentive for them to encourage their pupils to stay on to study GCE A Levels.
- An 'unruly and complex web' of organisations currently offering careers advice and the need for a 'more joined-up approach' to the provision of publicly funded careers advice.
- A potential for duplication between the National Careers Service (NCS), which is run by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and is intended to provide careers advice to young people at school or college through a network of careers advisers, supported by a dedicated website, and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), which is intended to help persuade private firms to become more involved with providing careers advice.

In response to these criticisms, the House of Commons Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and Economy publishes conducted an inquiry into careers advice in England. The report of the inquiry has now been published and recommendations made in the report include proposals that:

- A minister with specific responsibility for 'careers advice in schools' should be appointed.
- The NCS should be absorbed into the new CEC.
- A specific Ofsted judgment on 'careers information, advice and guidance provided for young people up to age 18' should be introduced, and the current Common Inspection Framework (CIF) should be amended to include a limiting judgment that where careers provision is judged as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' a school cannot be judged to be 'outstanding', and similarly if its careers provision is judged to be 'inadequate' a school cannot be judged as 'good'.
- All Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) 'have the capacity and are encouraged to provide up-to-date good quality labour market information to schools, college and careers professionals in their local area'.
- The government should 'consider how best to present its destination data, to mitigate the risk that schools are judged primarily on the number of their students going onto higher education'.

The report continuously makes reference careers provision in secondary schools. Careers advice provision for 16-18 year olds in FE and sixth form colleges does not appear to be specifically mentioned in the report. However, it is thought likely that the recommendations made in the report will also apply to colleges since they now share the same CIF with schools, Further details and a copy of the report can be accessed at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmese/205/20502.htm>

EPI report says 'Academy trusts are no better than local authorities at raising school standards'

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) has published a report that compares the performance of multi-academy trusts (MATs) with more than five schools with that of local councils. The comparisons are based on how much pupils have improved, rather than examination results, as a way of measuring the effectiveness. Also, many academies operate as stand-alone schools, so these are not included in the rankings. The EPI report findings show that, at both primary and secondary level, academy trusts and local councils are amongst the most, and the least, successful at improving pupil performance, with a spread of success and underachievement in between. The report concludes that, despite regional differences (schools in London are higher performers, and both local authorities and MATs are likely to do better if they have schools in the capital), there is 'little overall difference between academy trusts and local authorities'. Commenting on the report's findings, David Laws, a former schools minister and the EPI's chairman, said that successive governments had been 'in denial about failing academies', and that when he served as education minister in the coalition government 'there had been internal data showing weaknesses in academy trusts'. However, there had been 'a reluctance to publish such information when ministers were

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promoting academy expansion'. A spokesperson for the Local Government Association (LGA) said that the report showed academies were 'no magic bullet for improving school performance'. A copy of the EPI report can be accessed at:

<http://epi.org.uk/report/school-performance-multi-academy-trusts-local-authorities/>

The EPI report was published on the same day as analysis from the Sutton Trust which analysed the performance of disadvantaged pupils in the 39 most established MATs across England, and its impact on social mobility. Both the EPI and the Sutton Trust are now calling for government to ensure that both high performing MATs and high performing LAs are enabled to support struggling schools to improve. A copy of the Sutton Trust report can be accessed at:

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/chaineffects2016/>

IER report says 'Adult education could disappear by 2020'

Data recently published by the former BIS shows that between 2013/14 and 2014/15, the number of adult learners in FE in England fell by 315,900 (or 11%, despite a 1.3% increase in the number of adult apprentices). A report produced and published by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research (IER) on behalf of the All-party Parliamentary Group on Adult Education and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) says that 'because adult and community learning providers continue to be ignored by the area reviews and skills devolution processes, adult education could disappear by 2020'. The report also outlines the economic and social costs of not providing basic skills to adults and makes five key recommendations to secure the future of adult learning. These are:

- The establishment of a national and regional strategy for adult education
- The redistribution of resources to develop a fair and cohesive adult education framework
- Improved awareness of adult education through careers information, advice and guidance
- Research into the full impact of adult education
- The encouragement of employers to offer more opportunities to adults to keep them in employment.

A copy of the IER report can be accessed at:

http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education

Closure of UKCES is confirmed

The new Minister for Skills in England, Robert Halfon, has confirmed that the 'operational activities' of UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) 'will be concluded by the end of 2016'. In 2014/15, 94% of UKCES's £41 million budget came directly from the former BIS and Mr Halfon said that the savings made from the closure of UKCES would 'allow the core adult skills participation budgets to be protected in cash terms'. Responsibility for running the UKCES national employer skills survey and the employer perspectives survey has been given to the DfE, while responsibility for national occupational standards will be transferred to another, as yet unnamed, public sector organisation. Following the confirmation of its closure, UKCES has set aside £2 million from its current budget to cover the cost of staff severance.

New CEO for the Learning and Work Institute

Meanwhile, Stephen Evans has been appointed as the replacement for David Hughes, the current CEO when he takes up his new post as CEO of the AoC this September. Mr Evans is currently the Deputy CEO of the Learning and Work Institute and was previously the Director of Policy, Strategy and Business Development of 'Working Links', which is described as 'a leading a learning and skills provider'. The Learning and Work Institute was formed in January by a merger of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (Inclusion).

First three FE organisations join the Chartered Institution for Further Education

For those of you who may have forgotten (or were never particularly interested), the proposals for a Chartered Institution for Further Education were originally initiated by the former BIS. The Royal Seal of Approval needed to establish the then Institution for Further Education (IFE) was granted in July 2012. Around a year later Lord Lingfield was appointed as the chair of the IFE. The Queen then approved the grant of a Royal Charter in June 2015, and in October of that year the IFE was given the 'Great Seal of the Realm', which meant it was able to change its name to the *Chartered* Institution for Further Education

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(CIFE). Membership of the CIFE is now open to organisations that have received an overall grade of 'outstanding' or 'good' in their most recent Ofsted inspection, and are funded by the SFA. 'Fellowships' will be granted to 'distinguished leaders in the sector', but membership of the CIFE will be 'strictly corporate'. Organisations wishing to join the CIFE will be charged an initial £3,000 charged 'to cover the costs of a review to ensure they meet the required standards' and thereafter an annual fee of £5,000

Blackpool and the Fylde College, Bridgwater College and Hawk Training have become the first members of CIFE. Commenting on their membership, Lord Lingfield said that all three organisations 'had passed a rigorous process which has confirmed their position as leading performers in the sector'. However, it appears that Lord Lingfield may have failed to convince most of the private providers who attended the recent AELP conference of the benefits of belonging to the CIFE, since 54% voted to reject membership, saying either that they were not interested in applying for membership, or that it was not relevant to their organisation. Of the remaining 46%, just 6% said they might consider membership now, while the remaining 40% said they might consider joining in the future. Commenting on the apparent low level of interest amongst AELP members, Lord Lingfield said that he was 'not in the least bit surprised' and went on to say 'I think that we shall see a trickle which is followed by a flow and that finally, when we've got some hundreds into membership others will be considering it'.

Report calls for more senior leaders in FE to be recruited from outside the sector

A report jointly produced by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) and the 157 Group of colleges on behalf of the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL), says that more leaders from industries outside the FE sector should be encouraged to apply for senior leadership roles in FE, in order to 'ensure the sector's talent pool does not stagnate' and to help ensure that they 'don't get too easily socialised into sector group think'. The report says that there is already 'a discernible, but as yet unquantified, trend towards recruiting more leaders from outside the FE and skills sector' and that 'these new leaders are challenging existing orthodoxies and taking thinking off in new directions'. The report goes on to say that 'Newcomers can help to challenge and refresh the thinking of existing leaders whilst learning from their history and experiences', and that 'There is immense value to be gained from these exchanges'. Dame Ruth Silver, president of FETL, said 'The rapidly changing landscape for the sector demands that we look everywhere and elsewhere in forging a future for ourselves'. A copy of the report can be accessed at:

<http://www.fetl.org.uk/blog/fe-skills-providers-encouraged-to-consider-recruiting-more-leaders-from-outside-the-sector/>

Contraction in the number of FE trainee teachers

The second annual report of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) contains data which reveals that only 59% of aspiring FE teachers who completed a Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or Cert Ed qualification in 2013/14 were able to find a teaching job in FE within 12 months of completing their course. This was a 7% fall on the previous year. The ETF's report also shows that the rate of learners successfully finishing their courses has dropped. However, salaries for those who did find work rose slightly, with more than two-thirds of the 2013/14 intake who managed to find a job in FE earning between £20,000 and £30,000. The report also reveals that there has been a 15% drop in the number of prospective FE teachers who enrolled on training courses in 2014/15. The largest drop was in the numbers studying towards FE based Diplomas, PGCEs and Cert Eds, which decreased by almost a third. However, there was an increase in the number taking specialist FE based Diplomas in fields such as special educational needs and disability (SEND), literacy and numeracy. The requirement for FE teachers to be qualified was dropped in 2013, as recommended in the Lingfield report a year earlier. The report argued that the move would help to 'free the FE sector from unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy and enable it to take responsibility for its own professionalism'.

First FE provider is approved by the QAA to award taught degrees

A number of FE colleges currently award Foundation Degrees, but they are usually required to have their degrees developed, validated and awarded in partnership with an established university. However, following a scrutiny process conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), NCG (formerly known as the Newcastle College Group) has become the first FE college/provider to be granted full taught degree awarding powers (including masters' degrees). NCG is one of the biggest FE providers in England, with a turnover of £178 million, and consists of Newcastle, Kidderminster and West Lancashire

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colleges, Newcastle sixth form college and two training providers (Rathbone and Intraining). It is one of five FE colleges which already have their own Foundation Degree awarding powers, the others being the Hull College Group, Grimsby Institute, New College Durham and Warwickshire College.

Universities in England plan to raise 2017/18 tuition fees above the current £9,000 limit

Some universities in England are announcing increases in annual tuition fees above the current £9,000 limit before MPs have voted on legislation in the UK parliament which will link fee increases in English universities to standards of teaching. The process that will be created to measure teaching quality in English universities is called the 'teaching excellence framework'. This framework does not yet exist, but for its first year the UK government has said that almost all English universities will be assessed as having reached a quality threshold, thereby allowing them to increase their 2017/18 fees to £9,250 'through the back door', and in effect making it the new upper limit. A spokesperson for the DfE said 'The teaching excellence framework will allow universities to maintain fees in line with inflation only if they meet a quality bar, as set out in the recent higher education White Paper, but added that 'without an inflationary increase, the value of tuition fees, providing £11.6 billion to universities, will be eroded'.

Examples of English universities that are already advertising increases in tuition fees for 2017 include Durham, Kent and Royal Holloway, which are intending to increase fees to £9,250 (although there are references on their websites to fees being 'subject to government confirmation' and 'inflationary changes'). These increased fees will also apply to existing students. A spokesperson for the University of Kent said the fee increase 'represented inflation of 2.8%, which could be applied where higher education providers achieve a rating of *meets expectations* under the proposed teaching excellence framework', and went on to say that the university 'had published the higher fee to ensure that both potential students and existing students are provided with as much notice as possible and to comply with consumer protection guidelines'.

The increase in fees in England to £9,000 per year was introduced in 2012 by the UK coalition government. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has since estimated that when maintenance grants are replaced with maintenance loans, graduates from English universities living in England will amass loan debts on graduation of in excess of £50,000. In Scottish universities, students from Scotland do not have to pay tuition fees. Northern Irish students at Northern Irish universities have fees of up to £3,925 and Welsh students have fees of £3,810. If students from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland opt to study at a university in England, the balance of fees payable are met by the governments of those countries.

NHS England training bursaries to be replaced with student loans

Trainee doctors in England are already required to take out student loans to pay for the first 4 years of their training but receive an NHS England bursary to pay for their training from year 5 onwards. Trainee nurses, midwives and certain other allied health professionals currently receive a full NHS England bursary to pay for their training. However, earlier this month (July) the UK government announced that it would be going ahead with proposals to replace these bursaries for trainee nurses and midwives with student loans. In recent years there have been cuts of around one-third in the number of training places as NHS trusts have sought to save money, relying instead on recruiting trained health professionals from abroad. The UK government says that the switch from training bursaries to student loans will eliminate the cap on the number of training places available, and will place trainee health professionals in the same position as, say, trainee teachers, who in England, are also required to take out loans to pay for their training. However, critics of the move claim that, faced with the prospect of incurring high levels of loan debt, there will be fewer people in England who will be inclined to train as nurses and midwives, and that this will increase yet further our reliance on recruiting health professionals from abroad. They go on to say that, apart from issues of language and compatibility in the quality of training, it is immoral for NHS England to rely on recruiting medical staff that other countries have paid to train, and can sometimes ill afford to lose.

And finally...

A college painting and decorating apprentice was out on work placement. His task was to paint the internal walls of the offices of a local voluntary sector organisation. His assessor went out to visit him and to check on the quality of his work and his progress. The assessor was pleased to see that the apprentice was making a really good job of painting the walls but, on noticing that he was sweating profusely asked him why, on such a warm day, he was wearing both a leather jacket and a parka. The apprentice picked up the paint tin and drew the assessor's attention to the writing on the side of the tin. 'It says here', he said, 'that

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for best results, you should put on two coats’.

*You may be relieved to learn that, as in previous years, there will be no **Click** newsletter in August. Normal service will be resumed in September (whether you like it or not). In the meantime, could all of us at **Click** take this opportunity to wish you an enjoyable and relaxing summer holiday, or at least a respite from the stress and turmoil of an increasingly chaotic FE sector.*

Alan Birks – July 2016

*As usual, the views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those held by **Click CMS Ltd***

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