

Parliament and Public Affairs Update Week Commencing 6th September

This week Parliament returned from the summer recess. In its first week the Secretary of State for Education announced that 16 schools had successfully progressed to the next phase in the free school application process and a review into vocational education. He spoke about free schools and tackling disadvantage during a visit to Westminster Academy. Parliament debated changes to the voting system and policing and crime.

NAO report on Academies

The NAO have published its report on the academies programme. The report evaluates the performance of existing academies in meeting the original programme objectives. It compares academies to maintained schools with similar pupil intakes but without academy freedoms. The report can be downloaded on the following link:

www.nao.org.uk/publications/1011/academies.aspx

Independent review into vocational education

The Secretary of State, Michael Gove, announced in a written Ministerial Statement that he has commissioned an independent review into vocational education. He has asked professor Alison Wolf to chair the review and that she reports back in spring 2011 with practical recommendations. In his statement the Secretary of State said:

“For many years our education system has failed to value practical education, choosing to give far greater emphasis to purely academic achievements. This has left a gap in the country's skills base and, as a result, a shortage of appropriately trained and educated young people to fulfill the needs of our employers. To help support our economic recovery, we need to ensure that this position does not continue and in future we are able to meet the needs of our labour market. I am today announcing an independent review of vocational education which will be chaired by Professor Alison Wolf

To enable us to achieve this long-term aim, the Government are currently developing a new approach to qualifications, considering all routes which are available to young people, to ensure that the qualifications that they study for are rigorous, relevant and bear comparison with the best in the world. As part of this I have asked Professor Wolf to consider how we can improve vocational education for 14 to 19-year-olds to support participation and progression, specifically: how vocational education for 14 to 19-year-olds can be improved; what the appropriate target audience for vocational education is; what principles should underpin the content, structure and teaching methods of the vocational education offer; and how progression from vocational education to positive destinations can be improved. The review will not be considering the detailed content of specific qualifications, but will be focusing on the effectiveness of the overall structure of the vocational offer.”

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Free Schools

On Tuesday Michael Gove announced in a written ministerial statement that 16 free school proposals had progressed to the next stage to develop a full business case and plan. the announcement has sparked a number of opposition parliamentary questions outlined in this update.

In his statement the Secretary of State announced:

“The proposals I have agreed to move forward to business case and plan stage today represent a diverse mix: there are parent-led, community-led, sponsor-led and teacher-led proposals; there are faith and non-faith proposals; there are proposals for large secondary schools and for small primary schools.

I hope that many of the projects progressing today will become the first Free Schools in September 2011. This is a challenging time scale, and some groups may decide that it is preferable to open at a later date for practical reasons. To support groups in meeting the robust requirements of the business case and plan stage, we will now be providing the proposers that progress to this stage with support co-ordinated by a named contact within my Department. At the next stage, proposers will need to make a fully detailed business case for the new school and set out their plans for opening and operating the proposed school. I will make an assessment based on this final business case on whether to allow a new school to be set up.

The proposals announced today are just the start of our Free Schools programme. My Department has received a number of promising proposals for 2012 and 2013 and we will be making further announcements about taking these forward in due course.”

The full 16 schools are listed in the statement which can be downloaded on the following link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100906/wmstext/100906m0001.htm>

Further Education Estate

The Minister for Further Education and Skills, John Hayes announced to Parliament that £50 million reprioritised from the Train to Gain budget will now be allocated to those colleges who had successfully applied for funding. The SFA has written to 21 of the 91 applicants for further investment who will each receive £225,000 Renewal Grant. The announcement was welcomed by the Association of Colleges.

Questions and Early Day Motions

Free Schools and Academies

Ed Balls: With reference to his announcement of 1 September 2010, whether he plans to publish academy school funding agreements he has signed with schools converting from outstanding maintained school status. [15417] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Ed Balls: With reference to his announcement of 1 September 2010, whether all of the schools listed as converting from outstanding maintained schools have signed the published model funding agreement published on his Department's website. [15416] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Ed Balls: If he will publish all written agreements between his Department and the New Schools Network. [14947] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Ed Balls: Pursuant to the Written Ministerial Statement of 6 September 2010, Official Report, column 4WS, on pupil place planning, on what date his Department received each of the 16 applications for free school status. [14948] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Lisa Nandy: Whether any officials from his Department will be seconded to the New Schools Network (NSN) during the period of his Department's contract with NSN. [14954] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Lisa Nandy: Which Minister in his Department is responsible for his Department's contract with the New Schools Network; when the contract was agreed; and if he will make a statement. [14955] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Lisa Nandy: Whether any companies other than the New Schools Network tendered for his Department's contract for advice to potential free school providers. [14973] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Lisa Nandy: Whether there is a mechanism to ensure that the New Schools Network does not have any financial conflicts of interest relating to its work on behalf of his Department. [14959] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Toby Perkins: How many of the 16 schools that have been accepted for free school status previously had grant-maintained status. [14581] (For answer 09/09/2010)

Lisa Nandy: How he plans to ensure sufficient funding for academies for (a) special educational needs support services, (b) behaviour support services, (c) education welfare services, (d) school meals, (e) pupils' support and (f) staffing costs. [14006] (For answer 07/09/2010)

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EMA

David Nuttall: What his most recent assessment is of the effectiveness of the education maintenance allowance in widening access to further education. [14838] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Lisa Nandy: If he will change the system of assessing eligibility for education maintenance allowance to take into account the number of young people in a household who are in education. [14971] (For answer 13/09/2010)

Funding

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the value added tax paid by maintained schools in the latest year for which figures are available. [7269]

Mr Gibb: In general terms, local authorities can recover input value added tax. Maintained schools count as part of the local authority when spending local authority funds (section 49(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998); therefore they can recover VAT through their maintaining authority. There are a few exceptions to this rule, but we do not collect any figures so cannot make an estimate.

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education according to what criteria the pupil premium will be allocated. [11458]

Mr Gibb: On Monday 26 July the Secretary of State and the Children's Minister launched a consultation on our proposals for school funding in 2011-12, including options on the best deprivation indicator to use to allocate the pupil premium. The options being considered are:

Free School Meal eligibility-which could be current eligibility or a measure of whether the pupil has ever been eligible for FSM;

Tax Credit Indicator-pupils in families in receipt of out of work tax credit; and

Commercial packages based on classifications of postcodes, such as Mosaic or Acorn.

We are also seeking views on proposals about how to extend the coverage of the pupil premium to target Looked After Children, and children whose parents are in the armed forces.

Full details of the consultation, and a copy of the written ministerial statement by the Secretary of State, can be found online at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/news/press-notice-new/pupil-premium>

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department plans to reduce its expenditure through the termination of (a) area-based and (b) other targeted grants. [11461]

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Mr Gibb: Details of the reductions the Department of Education has made to the area based grant and other targeted grants to local authorities as a result of its contribution to the £6.2 billion worth of saving in 2010-11 are set out in the Secretary of State's letter of 16 June 2010 to directors of Children's Services. A copy of that letter is available at the following website.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/news/news/~media/Files/lacuna/news/LetterDCS16June2010v2.ashx>.

The Secretary of State also wrote to directors of Children's Services on 14 July 2010 setting out details of the capital grants to local authorities that are being reduced in 2010-11. These reductions were as a result of the Treasury's announcement on 5 July 2010, that Departments had to address unrealistic inherited spending commitments for 2010-11, where funding was reliant on under spends through the end year flexibility system. A copy of that letter is available at the following website.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/news/news/~media/Files/lacuna/news/SoStoDCSs.ashx>.

Details of the funding available for 2011-12 onwards will be discussed and agreed as part of the current spending review .

Ms Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the effect on the provision of (a) homework clubs, (b) breakfast clubs, (c) after school activities and (d) school music of reductions in the levels of area-based grants. [4757]

Sarah Teather: Local authorities should be able to achieve the necessary savings through efficiencies across their budgets rather than cuts to frontline services. The Area Based Grant is a form of funding where the Department makes specific allocations to local authorities, but where local authorities have flexibility about how they spend it.

The ring-fenced Music Grant in the Standards Fund is not part of the Area Based Grant, and is not affected by the wider decision to remove ring-fencing from funds that go to local authorities. The Area Based Grant includes start up funding for extended services through schools-which can include homework clubs, breakfast clubs, and after school activities. The start-up funding is intended to support the co-ordination and advice provided by local authorities that has enabled schools to develop access to extended services. In practice 98% of schools are now providing access to these services, and so there is less need for the start-up funding.

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the Harnessing Technology grant; and if he will make a statement. [10337]

Mr Gibb: The Harnessing Technology grant is being reduced by £100 million in the current financial year. £50 million of the reduction has been used to provide capital for Free Schools as announced on 18 June. A further £50 million is the result of the 5 July

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announcement on End Year Flexibility (EYF), and is to address inherited spending commitments for 2010-11, where funding was reliant on under-spends through the EYF system or additional funding from the Reserve.

Liz Kendall: What recent estimate he has made of the proportion of funding for maintained schools which comes from (a) (i) central and (ii) local government and (b) other sources. [14038] (For answer 07/09/2010)

Curriculum and qualifications

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what assessment he has made of the consultation undertaken with further education colleges by Summit Skills when developing new qualifications under the Qualifications and Credit Framework; [13688]

Andrew Griffiths: (2) what steps he takes to ensure that sector skills councils represent the views of small and medium-sized businesses when developing qualifications under the Qualifications and Credit Framework. [13689]

Mr Hayes: Sector Skills Councils consult with a wide range of employers and other interested parties when developing National Occupational Standards, Sector Qualifications Strategies and Action Plans; all of which allow them to decide on the vocational qualifications that then need to be developed for the Qualifications and Credit Framework in their sector.

Sector Qualifications Strategies outline the learning and qualifications needs of employers in their sector and action plans specify where changes and new vocational qualifications are needed. Consultation is built into this process; for example, Summit Skills regularly attends further education conferences to listen to colleges' views. Awarding organisations then develop vocational qualifications and SSCs approve these before they are accredited onto the QCF to ensure that they meet the sectors' skills needs.

National Occupational Standards underpin vocational qualifications and SSCs have specific targets for consulting with small and medium-sized enterprises when developing these standards

NEETs and participation gap

Jon Trickett: How many pupils who received free school meals in year 11, went on to (a) study A-Levels, (b) undertake an apprenticeship and (c) participate in other forms of education or training in each of the last five years. [13942] (For answer 07/09/2010)

Catherine McKinnell:

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many persons aged under 25 years are not in education, employment or training (a) nationally and (b) in the North East. [13696]

Mr Hayes: Estimates of the number and proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England are published quarterly by the Department for Education.

The latest publication is available at:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000950/index.shtml>

The supplementary table giving a regional breakdown of 16 to 24-year-olds NEET, and the England total, is available at:

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000950/NEET16_24.xls

Apprenticeships

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what steps his Department is taking to (a) encourage take-up of apprenticeships by and (b) broaden access to apprenticeships for people with disabilities; [14017]

Catherine McKinnell: (2) what steps his Department is taking to promote (a) gender and (b) racial equality in the take-up of apprenticeships in all trades. [14018]

Mr Hayes: Both my Department and the Department for Education are responsible for the promotion of equality of access to apprenticeships. The National Apprenticeships Service (NAS), as the body responsible for promoting apprenticeships to employers and to potential apprentices, manages its systems to ensure equal access to information about the programme and to apprenticeship vacancies. Enhanced support includes additional funding available for training providers to support learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability. A priority for NAS is to address stereotyping and under-representation across apprenticeships including gender, race and disability. NAS and the Skills Funding Agency fund apprenticeships through a wide range of training providers including specialist providers that support disadvantaged learners. NAS also work with employers to help them understand and be more responsive to the needs of under-represented groups.

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what (a) the total administrative cost and (b) the (i) absolute and (ii) percentage administrative cost per apprentice of the National Apprenticeship Scheme was in 2009-10. [13398]

Mr Hayes: In 2009-10, the total expenditure on participation in apprenticeship training was £1,072 million, including the Department for Education's expenditure on apprenticeships for 16 to 18-year-olds. Additionally, a total of £33 million was spent on activities supporting the expansion of the Apprenticeships Programme, such as maintaining the Apprenticeship vacancies IT system, marketing and communications and piloting new delivery models.

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It is not possible to provide a meaningful average cost to the public purse of an apprenticeship. The public cost of delivering an apprenticeship varies significantly depending on the industry in which the apprenticeship framework is being delivered; length of stay on the programme; whether the framework is at Level 2 or 3; and whether the participant is in the 16 to 18, 19 to 25 or 25+ age group. For example, the Skills Funding Agency estimates that the cost of delivering a Level 2 adult apprenticeship in business and administration is around £2,700 and is £16,300 for an advanced apprenticeship (Level 3) in engineering for a 16 to 18-year-old.

The Apprenticeship programme is administered by the National Apprenticeship Service, which was housed within the LSC during 2009-10. The total administrative cost of the LSC in 2009-10 was £247 million. Information on the proportion of this expenditure that relates to the administration of apprenticeships is not available.

This Department regularly publishes starts, completion and success rate data for all these groups and Ofsted assess training providers on their equality and diversity support for apprentices.

Skills and FE

Paul Farrelly: Which of the proposals for local enterprise partnerships received by his Department to date include further education colleges; and if he will make a statement. [15166] (For answer 13/09/2010)

John Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to reform sector skills councils; and whether he will reduce the number of such councils. [12181]

Mr Hayes: The coalition Government believe in a strong employer role and voice in the skills system, and that this is best organised at sectoral level. Sector Skills Councils have a crucial role in all aspects of our skills policy, including apprenticeships. We will continue to empower them as the voice of employers in the skills system-and to challenge them to perform with maximum effectiveness. The number of SSCs should be for employers to determine, taking account of the structure of the economy and the need to resource effectively. The coalition Government will welcome any proposals from employers to merge or rationalise SSCs were this is in the best of interests of their sectors.

Early Day Motion

Catherine McKinnell

That this House believes that the Government is uniquely placed to use the leverage of its procurement programme to promote skills training and apprenticeship opportunities; further believes that a legal requirement should be placed upon contractors who secure public contracts to employ apprentices; and considers that the public procurement process provides a major opportunity for investment in skills training and future employment.