

Parliamentary and Public Affairs Update

24 September 2010

Liberal Democrat Conference

This week the liberal democrat party held its annual conference in Liverpool. In his keynote speech the Minister for Business and Skills, Vince Cable, called for a revolution in post 16 education. Addressing conference he said the coalition must 'remove the barriers between FE and HE, between academic and vocational and part-time and full-time.'

Educational Fringe events

The ATL, NASUWT and NUT fringe event on 'England's schools: Free for all?' focused on the recent issues addressed on the Academies Bill, free schools and the way forward in education. Dan Rogerson, Chair of the Liberal Democrat Education Policy Committee, opened the session by speaking on the opportunities the party have to be involved in the policy-making function of education, academies and free schools. Rogerson stated he was keen for the party to "figure out a way to work together in coalition" and provide parliamentarians with the opportunity to talk on education, children and matters facing young people.

The Learning and Skills Network and Pearson Centre for Policy and Learning hosted a fringe on funding models for skills and training, opening discussion on a 'mismatch' between the education needs of employers and provision within the sector. Speakers included, Vince Cable MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Chris Banks, former chairman of LSC and now Chair of Independent Review of Fees in Further Education and David Frost, Director General, British Chambers of Commerce.

At the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), Association of Colleges (AoC), and Cambridge Assessment event, the panel were asked to offer their suggestions on how education in Britain can be improved. Speakers included: Tessa Munt, Liberal Democrat MP for Wells, member of Education Select Committee, Chris Morecroft, President of the AOC, Brian Lightman, General Secretary, ASCL and Tim Oates, Group Director of Cambridge Assessment

A full summary of the conference is attached to the update.

Review of Arms Length Bodies

The Cabinet Office has responded as follows to the Daily Telegraph report on public bodies:

"We are not going to comment on the specific details of a leaked document. The Government has made it clear that it is committed to radically increasing accountability and improving efficiency. As part of this, work is already underway to make substantial reforms to its public bodies. This work is on-going and an announcement will be made in due course. We deeply regret any extra uncertainty for employees that this irresponsible leak has caused.

The Cabinet Secretary has this morning asked for an immediate investigation into the leak of a government document on Public Bodies reform.”

It has ordered a leak inquiry.

QCDA revised remit

Michael Gove has outlined the QCDA role for the remainder of this financial year in a revised remit letter to the organisation. It follows the announcement in May of the intention to close the QCDA as part of reforms of the education system. The new remit can be accessed on the link below:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/news/news/~media/Files/lacuna/news/QCDA%20letter.ashx>

CBI announcement on spending review

The CBI has called on the Government to protect economic growth in its forthcoming Spending Review. In its submission to the government on the CBI said that as government limits spending, it should prioritise areas that foster the economy's ability to grow. The Government should therefore prioritise spending on investment in infrastructure; knowledge assets such as and research and development; and human capital via education and skills.

John Cridland, CBI Deputy Director-General, said:

"The Government rightly decided to limit public spending. The alternative would have been tax rises and other consequences that would have damaged the economy for years to come."

"Cutting spending means tough choices. We think that the need for economic growth, not the noise of the loudest voice, should determine where cuts are made."

"The Government must improve the efficiency of public services and focus the limited public money available on areas that do most to galvanise growth."

The CBI said three areas of investment must be prioritised: infrastructure investment; knowledge assets and human capital. The CBI emphasised the importance of investing in transport infrastructure in particular, as this offers high returns and will play a crucial role in boosting domestic and international trade."

Removal of the schools self evaluation form (SEF).

On Wednesday the Secretary of State Michael Gove announced moves to end the SEF and that he has asked Ofsted to remove it.

The SEF asks teachers and heads to collect and verify facts and figures about their school in preparation for their Ofsted inspection. The move comes as part of the package across the coalition to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

The announcement has been largely welcomed by stakeholders under the proviso that the principle of self evaluation to support school improvement remains.

Commenting on the announcement, Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers said:

"The school Self Evaluation Form (SEF) was never about professional and collaborative self evaluation; but arid and time consuming form filling and box ticking.

"The NUT has a very long standing policy that school self evaluation is a good thing. If the announcement today is the first step on the road to fundamentally changing the current inspection regime then it is very much to be welcomed".

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), said:

"The Secretary of State is right to refocus the inspection framework on the core business of schools that is teaching and learning, along with assessment of pupil progress and leadership and behaviour.

There is a danger that left to their own devices, some schools will generate systems of self-evaluation which are more bureaucratic than the self-evaluation form."

"We also have a question: if the new academies, which are outstanding schools, are not to be inspected by Ofsted, and are not part of the local authority family, who will support them to evaluate their own performance?"

Office for Fair Access Report (OFFA)

The OFFA published its report 'have bursaries influenced choices between universities'. The research shows that disadvantaged young people have not been influenced by the size of bursary on offer when making university choices.

In the light of the findings, OFFA will be asking universities that currently use higher bursaries to encourage applications from disadvantaged students to consider diverting some of this money to targeted outreach work with schools and colleges. The full report can be downloaded below:

<http://www.offa.org.uk/publications/>

Ofqual Chief Executive

In other news, Ofqual chief executive, Isabel Nisbet, will leave the independent regulator of examinations and qualifications next year. She will take up the post of Senior Education Adviser (Asia Pacific Region) with University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) in March 2011.

Questions

No questions tabled this week.