

Parliament and Public Affairs Update

Week Commencing 9th August 2010

Parliament is in recess until the 6th September. Departments continue to draw up plans for spending cuts to inform the CSR to be announced on the 20th October.

Unemployment figures were released this week it saw the number of people out of work and on benefits fall by 0.2% in June from the previous 3 months to 7.8%. Analysts reported a significant growth in part-time working and predicted that number of jobless could rise in the next reporting stage.
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=12>

The Bank of England published its quarterly inflation report, marking a volatile period in recovery it uplifted its inflation forecast predicting it would remain over the 2% until 2011.
<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/inflationreport/irlatest.htm>

Consultations

COI redundancy programme

The Central Office of Information (COI) has launched a consultation on staff restructuring and its redundancy programme.

The consultation follows the central government freeze on non-essential advertising and marketing spend which has resulted in significantly reduced volumes of work for the COI. As a result there will be a 40 per cent staff reduction, with a loss of 287 jobs.

The consultation closes on November 1 2010.

Capital review

The Department for Education has issued a consultation on capital spending. The consultation has been launched as part of the department's capital spending review to change the way school building is done in order to minimise waste and increase improvement. The aim of the review is to ensure that future capital investment is better value-for-money, less bureaucratic and more cost-efficient.

Views are sought on how best to allocate capital from next April as determined by the forthcoming spending review.

The consultation closes on September 17 2010.

[Department for Education, August 6 2010](#)

Stakeholders

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service released a press release this week strongly refuting media stories that the organisation faced closure. Dr David Collins, Chief Exec said,

A poorly worded press release from the BIS press office, a largely inaccurate report from the CIPD on how much money could be saved by cutting various "quangos" and LSIS apparently is being abolished - at least according to the Telegraph and the Independent.

The reality of course is somewhat different. Like all "arm's length bodies" (incidentally LSIS is a sector led body and not a "quango" as such) the Learning and Skills Improvement Service will not be immune from the cuts that are facing the public sector. This year's budget, for example, has been slashed from £145m to £65m and no doubt in 2011-2012 there will be further efficiencies called for. But the Minister [John Hayes](#) is very much behind the organisation, carrying out the Conservative party's stated intention of having "one improvement body" for Learning and Skills, and the sector has woken up to the opportunities in having some money set aside for innovation and improvement at a national level.

The last round of the Flexibility and Innovation Fund, for example, produced more than 250 collaborative bids to develop new ideas and "accelerate the drive for excellence". Major projects that are underway include the establishment of a virtual management college for Learning and Skills staff (being developed in conjunction with LSN and AoC) and a whole new approach to sector engagement with industry, spearheaded by 157 and ALP. The policy of "using the sector to develop the sector" has brought out the best in what is already the most successful part of our education system. Sixty percent of all LSIS delivery is now being undertaken by those currently employed in organisations that receive SFA or **YPLA** funding and that figure will rise to 80% over the next two years as the capacity of the sector increases. Essentially LSIS funding is being redirected back to the front line, focusing on quality improvement but funding colleges, private training providers and the adult and community sector to help themselves in providing an even better service for learners.

Participation levels in LSIS activities are also on the up. The launch of LSIS accounts to encourage all learning and skills organisations to take part in quality improvement activities has already had "sign up" from nearly a 1000 bodies and the range of what can be purchased from them is increasing all the time.

So what of the future? Undoubtedly the sector will be expected to contribute more to quality improvement but there will also be central support channelled through the SFA (and possibly the YPLA) to ensure that key national priorities are not overlooked. With the demise of other bodies, notably BECTA and the QCDA) there will, if anything, be additional opportunities for LSIS to pick up

aspects of their work and carry it forward. Far from being dead and buried, LSIS is very much alive and kicking!

Parliamentary Questions

Academies

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the legal and other costs of transferring ownership of (a) an infant school, (b) a primary school, and (c) a secondary school from a local authority or church foundation to an academy trust.[HL1582]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Lord Hill of Oareford): We recognise that schools which apply to convert to academy status will incur costs for services such as legal advice. The impact assessment completed for the Academies Bill provides a one-off cost of £78,000, which is an estimate of the average cost to the school. The department provides a flat-rate grant, normally £25,000, as a contribution to these costs for outstanding schools which are converting to academy status.

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to transfer debts from an existing maintained school to the local authority or the Department for Education if the school becomes an academy trust.[HL1583]

Lord Hill of Oareford: Schools with a budget deficit that wish to convert to academy status may still do so, although if they have a significant deficit their application may be postponed until they have managed this down to a reasonable level. When a school with a deficit is approved to convert, the department will pay the local authority an amount equivalent to the deficit. The Young People's Learning Agency, the agency responsible for funding academies, will recoup the amount through a reduction in the recurrent funding paid to the academy. Detailed guidance will be provided on the procedure to be followed by the local authority.

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government what requirements there will be for academy trusts to make provision off site for permanently excluded pupils.[HL1584]

Lord Hill of Oareford: Academy trusts, like maintained schools, are not required to make off-site provision for permanently excluded pupils. From the sixth school day of a permanent exclusion, the local authority is statutorily responsible for ensuring that suitable full-time education is provided to pupils of compulsory school age regardless of whether they are excluded from an academy or maintained school.

Academy trusts are responsible, however, for providing education during a fixed period exclusion. Where a pupil is given a fixed period exclusion of a duration of six school days or longer, the academy has a duty to arrange suitable full-time educational provision from and including the sixth school day of the exclusion. This does not apply to pupils of non-compulsory school age.

Asked by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the information given to parents of children in academies about their awareness of the implications of taking level 2 BTEC science instead of GCSEs.[HL1890]

Lord Hill of Oareford: It is up to all schools, including academies, to provide parents and students with appropriate information regarding qualifications. We have not made any assessment of this information.

The Government want to see more pupils engage and excel in science, including increasing numbers studying science at GCSE. This will ensure more young people consider taking physics, chemistry and biology at A-level. We will be looking at accountability arrangements to make sure there is proper recognition of the key subjects which all pupils need to learn throughout their time at school, including science, and make sure there are no perverse incentives that limit engagement, attainment and progression.

Inclusion

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to provide home computers and broadband connectivity to children at risk from digital exclusion.[HL1696]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Lord Hill of Oareford): The Government have supported the home access programme, which is close to providing the expected 270,000 grants to low-income households where children who are eligible qualify for a free computer and/or broadband internet access. It is expected that all the grants will be issued by this summer and there are no plans to extend the scheme. However, a component part of the scheme to provide equipment for those with special needs will continue until around September this year.

Further funding for digital inclusion will need to be considered within the context of the comprehensive spending review.

Skills

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to increase the number of level 4 courses in further education colleges.[HL1693]

Lord Shutt of Greetland: A key priority for the Government is to ensure we have a skills system that supports progression. The Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Skills Funding Agency both fund higher level skills in further education colleges to meet the needs of individuals and employers.

The Government's Strategy for Sustainable Growth, published on 20 July, sets out a commitment to provide incentives to encourage provision and take-up of training in priority areas, including a growth and innovation fund to

support sector-based joint investment with employers. The apprenticeship programme will be refocused to prioritise progression to level 3 and higher to help deliver the technician-level skills that the economy needs.

The Government will also review actions to support progression from further into higher education through vocational as well as academic routes.

Asked by Lord Young of Norwood Green

To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures they plan to achieve an additional 50,000 apprentices, especially amongst 16 to 18 year-olds, in the public and private sectors.[HL1918]

Lord Shutt of Greetland: We intend to increase the number of apprenticeship places for people of all ages, and we are committed to improving the quality of apprenticeships to make them better suited to the needs of employers and learners. Our plans to redeploy £150 million from Train to Gain to apprenticeships will benefit adults and are in addition to the significant expansion of apprenticeships already in progress for young people aged 16 to 18. Our strategy for sustainable growth, published last month, outlined our plans for a skilled workforce including apprenticeships, particularly at level 3, to provide the growth in technician-level skills that a dynamic economy needs.

QCDA

David Mowat:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education what timetable he has set for the abolition of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency; what plans he has for the transfer of its functions; and if he will make a statement. [10936]

Mr Gibb:

We intend to introduce legislation to abolish the QCDA, and in the meantime Department Officials are working closely with the QCDA on the orderly winding down of its functions.

We are committed to ensuring that national curriculum tests continue to be delivered effectively, and therefore currently envisage that these functions would be needed after closure.

Where QCDA is presently engaged in activity that supports the administration of examinations (such as Diploma Awarding) we would wish to retain such functions until these activities are no longer required or can be transferred. Our view is that Government or its agencies should in principle not be involved in this kind of work in the future, which is properly the domain of awarding bodies.