

Policy watch

Priorities and investment for 16-19 provision for 2010/11



A couple of months on from the publication of the funding and priorities for FE and adult skills for the coming year comes the complementary version for 16-19 learning. Two for one is something we'll have to get used to now that the two systems, one pre-19 and one post-19, are emerging from the shell of the LSC.

There are some similarities between the two. Both, for example, build on existing LSC systems, both have a keen eye on targets to be met, both recognise that things will be tight, "*this will have to be done within a much tighter fiscal environment*" to quote the Skills Strategy, both focus heavily on the key priorities, both put a premium on the quality of provision and performance, and both reflect the importance being attached to regional planning and advice and guidance.

But that's as far as it goes for similarities for when it comes to the money side, it's the 16-19 Strategy that has the more reasons to be cheerful. While the Skills Paper sets out "*the funding changes that must be made for the 2010/11 year to achieve the necessary efficiency savings from the skills system,*" the 16-19 Paper is able to state with some confidence "*the government's continued commitment to increased investment in education and training for young people.*"

That confidence comes from the consistent prioritisation of the needs of young people that has been coming through from government policy over the last year and evident in the Prime Minister's announcements about Young People's Guarantees following the Queen's Speech in November, the Chancellor's Pre - Budget Statement in December and Ed Balls' subsequent letter to the Chair of YPLA. The letter confirms that "*In 2010/11, we will be investing £8.2bn in the education and training of young people aged 16-19 including some £7.2bn for learning places and £900m for direct financial support...This is the highest ever investment in 16-19 learning and will accelerate participation in education and training for all young people as we move towards education for all 16-18 year olds.*"

So how's this '*highest ever investment*' being deployed? The lion's share, £7.5bn, will go on providing more places in learning for 16 and 17 year olds where the target is a participation rate of 97% for 16 year olds and 92% for 17 year olds. Backing this up will be a considerable package of learner support funds, somewhere in the region of £900m if you add in the dedicated funds for learners with specialist needs. In general, funding will increasingly only be available for approved qualifications under the respective 14-19 and Qualifications and Credit Frameworks, will include an uplift for learners on Diploma programmes, will prioritise literacy and numeracy increasingly in the form of functional skills, and will support the co-ordination of entry learning under Foundation Learning .

Providers will want to note that although the number of learners is intended to increase, the base rate will remain the same. Also that a system of in-year adjustments will operate so that those who under recruit will see some of their funding shifted to those who have significantly increased their numbers and that

provider success rates will be used as a measure to determine funding allocations. In addition, efficiency savings will never be far away although this has been held for this sector to 3% aggregated over the two years 2011/12 and 2012/13.

A couple of other points about commissioning. For this year, 2010/11, the LSC will in effect be allocating funding to providers on behalf of the YPLA. For 2011/12, the YPLA will take over allocating funds on the basis of the national formula and other criteria identified in the National Commissioning Framework. The commissioning cycle involves a sequence of detailed planning stages starting at the 14-19 Partnership and Sub-Regional Grouping level and going through a series of refinements as the picture and priorities take shape. Secondly, and sitting within this planning process, provision for apprenticeship places will be scoped out at a local level and then passed on to the National Apprenticeship Service to procure provision. The aim in both cases is to match provision to identified need.

As to the priorities for this funding, this Paper identifies quite a few: reducing the numbers of NEETs through early intervention and tailored programmes; raising the quality of provision as the Framework for Excellence moves from pilot to implementation for school sixth forms this year; ensuring sufficient provision and support is in place for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in line with the new responsibilities local authorities now face under the ASCL Act; and putting in place systems for extending and encouraging work experience for young people over the compulsory school age.

Three particular priorities, however, stand out. One is information, advice and guidance (IAG) where this year will see three important features coming together in the shape of the 14-19 Prospectus, the Apprenticeship Vacancies online service and the Common Application Process. Work on each of these has been going on for some time and was highlighted in last October's IAG Strategy. Increasingly it means that young people will have access to a more integrated system of opportunities and support, all available online

Second, financial support. There are a couple of points to note here; one is that this government seems committed to maintaining the EMA system albeit with the bonus payment system lopped off so that the allowances can be spread further. The other is that the cross-departmental review of financial support for 16-19 year olds which was set up in the wake of last year's '*New Opportunities*' White Paper is due to report shortly and will no doubt lead to further developments.

Third is the continued consolidation of the 14-19 qualification framework where a number of priorities are highlighted. Some of these may change in the light of the forthcoming 14-19 JACQA Biennial Review but for the present the government is clearly keen to see apprenticeship numbers growing, each local authority delivering Foundation Learning as existing provision such as Entry to Employment is progressively brought into it, community service extended, "*it is the government's ambition that, in time, all young people will complete at least 50 hours of community service by the time they reach the age of 19,*" functional skills to take over from adult literacy and numeracy qualifications for young people, and the overall qualification system for young people heavily tidied up as qualifications are increasingly channelled through the new qualification frameworks.

Nine further developments are listed, all of which may have an impact on how the system shapes up.

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