

POLICY TRACKER

2009/02

26 June 2009

Keeping track of education developments in June 2009

Main Talking Points

Two rather surprise announcements captured the education headlines this month. One was the dismantling of DIUS after just 23 months to join the new super Ministry under Lord Mandelson, the other was the announcement by the Conservatives that they would scrap national tests at the end of primary and replace them with school based tests at the start of secondary education. Lord Mandelson's super ministry, BIS, sees him presiding over 6 senior Ministers, 4 junior Ministers, 3 offices and a remit that extends to outer space. Concern was expressed that HE and FE would get 'lost' in such a big Dept but Lord Mandelson has moved to allay such fears with initial speeches and visits to educational institutions. The key point is that it he now has a role as overseer of domestic policy including public service delivery. The Conservative proposal on SATs was initially welcomed for removing the burden of testing at the end of primary school until it was realised that the burden would shift instead to secondary school teachers who would have to implement a testing regime of their own at the start of Year 7. " *This would be the worst of both worlds,*" one professional body leader put it. This is becoming an election issue

Progress on the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill

The [Bill](#) is now at the committee stage of the Lords where two lengthy sessions have been held and a large number of amendments tabled. The last date for tabling amendments was 22 June. In a telling article in Education Guardian, Warwick Mansell identified 153 new powers, the Bill grants the Secretaries of State

Key headlines from the last month

- *ICT*. An Ofsted [Report](#) blamed 'boring' GCSE specs for a decline in numbers taking ICT courses while a [Report](#) from Estelle Morris called for more ICT training for adults
- [Inspections](#). Ofsted published its latest draft framework for school inspections: no unannounced visits, more emphasis on 'raw' results and Challenge targets, more time spent observing lessons
- [National Challenge](#). Programme now one year old, number of Challenge schools down from 631 to 440, target is no schools having fewer than 30% of pupils gaining 5+ higher level GCSEs including English and maths by 2011
- *NEETs*. Numbers fell for 16 and 17 year olds but rose for 18 year olds to 16.6%. A record 88% of 16/17 year olds are now in education or training
- *BSF*. Partnership for Schools will take over the school building programme
- [IEBE](#). This is new body (Institute for Business Excellence) helping set professional standards for Employer Business Partnerships in schools
- [Skills Pledge](#). Reached its 2nd birthday with 17,000 employers signed up

Reports of the month

- '[Education for All](#).' The summary Report from the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training in England and Wales. 31 recommendations and the culmination of six years work, the Report calls for a refocusing on the needs of young people rather than on performance management and prescribed targets. It holds out the hope of a Bac type approach in the future
- '[Digital Britain](#).' The summary Report from the Digital Britain Project launched last autumn to identify the steps needed to strengthen and modernise the UK's Digital Infrastructure. With a dozen additional Papers published alongside, the Report proposes universal access to today's broadband by 2012, a national plan to improve digital participation, new funding streams and stronger rules on intellectual property
- '[A new level](#).' A Report by the thinktank Reform on A levels. This studied 4 A levels (English, maths, History, Chemistry) over the last decade and concluded that "*intellectual integrity has been traded off against wider participation.*" It called for universities to take a lead on A levels

Speech of the month

The Shadow Chancellor's speech on 9 June under the title '*A New British Economic Model*,' came as debate was hotting up about who will cut and who will invest in public services and by how much. Setting out future Conservative thinking in this area, George Osborne promised that a Conservative Government would establish "*an independent office for Budget responsibility*" to take responsibility for budget forecasting. He identified three economic priorities:

- Re-establish Britain's credibility with a clear plan for dealing with the budget deficit
- Shift the economy from one built on debt to one built on savings and investment
- Re-focus the economy from chasing short-term gains to long-term returns

Quote(s) of the month

- "*It would be no surprise to wake up in the morning and find that he had become an Archbishop.*" William Hague on hearing the list of titles Lord Mandelson had acquired under the reshuffle
- "*Education is not just a matter of turning sausages out of a sausage machine and hitting targets, that's where it's gone wrong.*" Ruth Lea commenting in support of the 14-19 Nuffield Report

Word or Phrase of the month

Activism. A ubiquitous term to describe a new, energetic phase of policy

Look out for

- Schools White Paper (first week of July)
- Talentmap, 'an interactive web-tool to help employers navigate the skills system (7 July)

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