

POLICY TRACKER

2009/03

24 July 2009

Keeping track of education developments in July 2009

Main Talking Points

Three talking points emerged this month. **First**, an admission from the Business Secretary that a future Labour Government would have to restrict public spending; "*10 years of tighter public spending would be needed to deal with the record levels of debt.*" This admission opened up a new front between the two Parties: the message seemed to be that both Parties would have to make some cuts but that Labour cuts would somehow be less brutal. **Second**, the emerging concern about how to provide for the extra university places needed this year, apparently 52,000 more people have applied this year compared to last year. The Government has now confirmed that it will provide for an extra 10,000 places but largely on STEM courses and only partially funded in the sense that tuition fees, loans and grants will be covered but not teaching costs. The money will come from recycling funds within BIS but stories about university places will probably run throughout the summer. **Third**, both Parties turned on quangos. In a major, well-received speech, "*the best I have heard on the subject*" according to *The Independent*, David Cameron called not for the traditional bonfire of quangos but a review of their role and purpose. He offered three criteria. Do they offer technical advice unavailable elsewhere? Do they offer impartial decisions? Are they transparent? Not to be outdone, the Government pledged its own quango review. Neither side was particularly clear how many quangos there actually are. Cameron suggested 790+, others have said 1,000+ but they make for popular sport

Progress on the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill

The Lords have held a couple of Committee sessions this month but progress has been slow. With the House rising for summer recess this week, timing or lack of it becoming an issue. The next Committee session is not due until 12th October, just five weeks before the Queen's Speech announces the next legislative programme

Key headlines from the last month

- *Key Stage 2 tests.* As results come out on time this year, the Government confirms it will stick to a similar date (early May) for next year's tests
- *School Report Card.* Sir Cyril Taylor re-emerges to suggest a different way of publicising performance data, with schools issuing online data about their performance each autumn
- *Teachers.* The Conservatives promise to raise the bar for new primary school teachers, B rather than C grades in English and maths GCSE
- *Skills System.* The UK Commission launches Phase 2 of its campaign to simplify the skills system. 3 crunch questions, views urgently sought
- *FfE.* The LSC confirms that national figures only will be published this year, individual provider results will have to wait until 2010

Reports of the month

- *'The culture of churn for UK ministers.'* According to this report from Demos, the average tenure for Government Ministers is now down to 1.3 years. They argue it's one of the reasons why policy making is so poor
- *'Fair Access to the Professions.'* The final report from the group under the former Cabinet Minister Alan Milburn that has been looking at social mobility. Over 80 recommendations to try and open up some of the professions with the expectation that 7m more professionals will be needed by 2020. Recruitment and internship practices to be reviewed by 2010
- *Select Committee Report on last summer's tests.* This endorses the earlier Sutherland Inquiry but points to excessive Government interference, worries about single-level tests and recommends a review of onscreen marking
- *'Train to Gain: Developing the skills of the workforce.'* A National Audit Office Report, which acknowledges some benefits, but concludes that *"the scheme has not provided good value for money."* Its conclusions have not been accepted either by the Dept or by the LSC

Speech of the month

Lord Mandelson's speech on 8th July on *'Building the Enterprise Economy'* provided a useful insight into his thinking on new industrialism. He identified four key trends for the future: new clusters of suppliers; a more flexible working life; the changing nature of public service provision; and digital communications. One sentence captured it all: *"new industrialism means investing not in jobs but in people"*

Quote(s) of the month

- *"This isn't a serious programme for education at all. It's a cynical and deceitful attempt to limit the scale of Labour's likely defeat."* The Daily Mail takes a restrained view on the latest Schools White Paper
- *"A young person has lost a job almost every minute over the past 3 months."* The Prince's Trust expresses concern about rising youth unemployment
- *"Traditional exams are likely to disappear within 10-15 years to be replaced by computerised testing."* The Head of Cambridge Assessment predicts a different future for the world of exams

Word or Phrase of the month

Guarantee. The Schools White Paper lists 36 for pupils and 26 for parents as guarantees become the new consumer rights

Look out for

- Consultation period closes on the Rose primary proposals (end of July)
- Update on the consultation on Apprenticeship Standards (August)
- White Papers on a new framework for HE, a further national Skills Strategy and Getting Britain back to Work (all due over the summer)
- A further White Paper on the welfare system (autumn)

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