

# **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Policy Review 2010/11: Update Report**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**23 FEBRUARY 2012**

### **1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The report provides Members of the Committee with an update in relation to the committee's 2010/11 policy review 'Learning at Work; the role of work based learning and apprenticeships in tackling NEET's'.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The 2010/11 policy review around apprenticeships and tackling NEET's was concluded in April 2011 and made a number of recommendations to assist and improve young people moving into work, training or employment.
- 2.2 One of those recommendations was around contacting both the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills highlighting the concerns identified in the committee's policy review. This was primarily related to those issues where a review of government policy at a national level could impact upon life choices for young people identified as NEET.

### **3. Current Position**

- 3.1 The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee attended the Department for Education offices in London on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to discuss the committee's review. Members met with senior civil servants Jennifer Coupland, Deputy Director –Head of Participation and Flexible Resource Division covering raising the participation age, careers guidance, NEET reduction and level 2/3 attainment, and Nick Lawrence, Deputy Director Head of Vocational Qualifications with responsibility for reforming vocational education 14-19, implementing the Wolf Review, performance tables for schools, +16 education – placing a greater focus on progression and high levels of educational achievement and the bursary scheme (successor to EMA).

#### **English Baccalaureate / Vocational**

- 3.3 One of the key issues from the policy review was around the change of focus from central government to schools for a more academic pathway and a reduction in emphasis on vocational routes. There was a concern

that this could alienate some young people and lead to disengagement from school.

- 3.4 DfE representatives noted that the overall aim was to achieve the highest quality of education for young people and ensure that they were in the best position to secure work. Recent labour market analysis had identified the abundance of level 1 vocational qualifications and the lack of progression to higher levels of qualifications. The important emphasis of basic skills was also highlighted and that many of the vocational courses did not encourage the development of these basic skills in Maths and English. The aim was not to stop courses but to support young people with a higher level of progression including Maths and English. However it was acknowledged by the DfE that there was a strong belief, although no evidence to support the fact, that schools and colleges did motivate young people to learn.
- 3.5 It was noted that reforms would be made to the process. At present secondary schools were funded to provide an enormous amount of courses and in future performance tables will reflect a much smaller number of courses. It was noted that currently there are approximately 3,000 – 3,500 vocational courses available and this will be reduced to around 100 – 150 courses through the application of stringent criteria.
- 3.6 Post-16 education is a mix of both vocational and academic courses and the DfE are looking at the best way to encourage training and educational institutions to ensure student progression. The current system provides payment incentives on the number of qualifications achieved, irrespective of the NVQ level of individual students. It was noted that the DfE was looking to each vocational qualification counting as the equivalent of 1 GCSE in future. Meaning some current diplomas and other qualifications that can count as the equivalent to 4/5 GCSE's would change in weighting. The DfE expressed the view that exam boards would most likely review their vocational qualifications, breaking them down into the component parts and resubmit them for GCSE equivalent status. However there would be a delay in carry this process out potentially leaving the September 2012 cohort in limbo.
- 3.7 The DfE is looking at a shift for vocational courses to ensure a similar standard of rigour to that of GCSE qualifications. This is seen as important if such qualifications are to be taken seriously by potential employers. The DfE also acknowledged that both the Department and the Minister were expecting performance levels to dip with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate system.

### **The Raising of the Participation Age**

- 3.8 There are 2 new destination measures in development for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 respectively. These measures will look at the success of schools in helping their pupils to progress on to positive post-16 destinations. The aim of these destination measures is to:
- Provide clear information to parents and young people about the post-16 routes taken by a school, college or training providers former pupils;
  - Make schools and post-16 providers accountable for ensuring that all their pupils take qualifications that offer them the best opportunity to progress and receive the support needed to prepare for and complete that transition;
  - Support the increased focus on disadvantaged pupils to ensure that they make a successful transition, helping to raise post-16 participation and reduce NEET.
- 3.9 At Key Stage 4 these measures may look like this; School A had 90% of pupils who progressed to a positive destination within one year of ending Key Stage 4. Of these pupils:
- 50% entered further education in School Sixth Form
  - 20% entered further education in Further Education College
  - 10% entered work-based learning or an Apprenticeship
  - 10% entered employment.
- 3.10 At Key Stage 5 these measures may look like this; College B had 70% of students who progressed to a positive destination within one year of their 16-18 learning. Of these pupils:
- 40% entered higher education at University (5% of these students went to Oxford or Cambridge University)
  - 20% continued in further education
  - 10% entered employment.
- 3.11 It was also noted that subject to data testing, the Key Stage 4 and 5 destination measures would be published alongside the Key Stage 4 and 5 performance tables.
- 3.12 Members queried how the DfE intended to support those young people who had learning difficulties in going forward. It was acknowledged that it was a major challenge of raising the participation age to make it work for every young person. The DfE had no plans to challenge SEN Young People to progress and recognised that qualifications undertaken needed to be those most relevant to this particular group.

- 3.13 Building Engagement, Building Futures (HM Government, December 2011) sets out the Government strategy to improve opportunities for young people. As part of this strategy the Youth Contract will see £150 million available over the next three years to get the most vulnerable and disengaged young people back in education, onto an apprenticeship or into sustainable employment.
- 3.14 DfE representatives also highlighted the payment by results programme as an incentive to training providers and prospective employers. Such programmes would provide small payments up-front with the majority of the payment being paid after completion of the programme, therefore ensuring providers are focused on keeping young people engaged on courses or training provision. It is expected that such funding initiatives would be in place by June 2012.
- 3.15 It was queried as to how this would affect the more vulnerable pupils with specific learning needs and ultimately how these would be protected in a payment by results system. The DfE acknowledged the issue but at this time did not offer any potential solutions.

#### **Sharing Data**

- 3.16 The DfE acknowledged that data sharing between services and organisations was a big issue. However the DfE representatives did indicate that there was nothing to prohibit a local authority making contact with Job Centre Plus and making a local agreement on data sharing issues, as has been done by some local authorities. It was also noted that there was recognition from the Department of Work and Pensions Minister that this issue required attention.

#### **Studio Schools**

- 3.17 It was noted that colleges wishing to offer vocational courses to young people aged 14-16 would need to overcome legislative barriers, basically they need to be of school status. There was nothing to stop an FE college from either setting up a free school or even becoming a school, with the final decision resting with the Secretary of State for Education.
- 3.18 The DfE also highlighted the new Studio School concept in education, which seeks to address the growing gap between the skills, and knowledge that young people require to succeed, and those that the current education system provides. Studio Schools are a new approach to learning which includes teaching through enterprise projects and real work. This approach looks to ensure students' learning is rooted in the real world, and was another potential route for FE Colleges.
- 3.19 Studio Schools are designed for 14-19 year olds of all abilities. They are intended to be small schools for 300 students; and with year-round opening and a 9-5 working day, they feel more like a workplace than a

school. Working closely with local employers, Studio Schools will offer a range of academic and vocational qualifications including GCSEs in English, Maths and Science, as well as paid work placements linked directly to employment opportunities in the local area. Students will gain a broad range of employability and life skills through the CREATE skills framework, and will have the option to go on to university, further training, and into employment. It was noted that the DfE were currently supporting around 50 FE colleges in becoming studio schools.

#### **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 The education system in England is in a state of huge change and the DfE are in the process of developing and implementing policy that will have a significant impact on young people both in the North East and across the country. It is clear from the Chair and Vice-Chair's discussions with DfE representatives that raising the participation age and ensuring meaningful progression routes for young people, be that through an academic or vocational pathway, are fundamental drivers to Government policy and new initiatives.
- 4.2 There are risks with any new measures and DfE even acknowledged that there is expected to be a 'dip' in results as schools move to the English Baccalaureate system. The changes in GCSE equivalent vocational qualification weightings will also be a significant factor contributing to this 'dip' in school results. Also payment by results has a risk element to it in that the majority of the payment is 'back loaded' to ensure trainers and providers are motivated to ensure young people stay the course. There are inherent difficulties in this and it may well be seen by many potential investors as a risky option.
- 4.3 However the overarching theme throughout was the need to ensure that young people leaving school or college are prepared, equipped and have the requisite skills that employers are looking for in what is already a compressed and highly competitive market.

#### **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 That the Committee notes the information contained in the report.
- 5.2 That the Committee provides comment and if required seeks clarification or further comment from the Department for Education on any of the issues raised from the meeting held.

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