

## POLICY WATCH

2009/05

20 January 2009

### What's Going On? An informal guide to what happened in the world of education in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2008

This Guide provides a gentle summary of what happened in the world of education and skills in the second half of last year. It is intended as a reference for those who like to keep track of where things are. The most obvious difference between the first and the second half of the year was the impact of the economic downturn, it now intrudes at nearly every turn. Below is a quick headline summary of most of the topics covered; abbreviations explained in the text.

- [AACs](#). The new integrated adult guidance service launches in prototype
- Academies. Adonis moves on but the programme continues to grow
- Adult learning. Some hopeful signs as the [NIACE Inquiry](#) draws to a close
- A levels. Numbers up but choosing the 'right' A level becomes an issue
- Apprenticeships. New national service gets ready to build on the momentum
- Assessment. Tests go at KS3 but not KS2, expert group reviewing system
- Children's Plan. One year old, [Progress Report](#) charts a busy year
- Conservatives. 3 keynote speeches but the Swedish model still charms
- Credit crunch. Begins to impact, education system helping where it can
- [Education Bills](#). One more passed, one more lined up
- EMAs. A difficult time, interest grows about their future
- FE. First ever Colleges Week signals growing recognition
- 14-19. A gentle start, a new [Next Steps Plan](#), a long road
- HE. A new, long-term vision takes shape but debate on tuition fees looms
- [Innovation](#). A buzz of activity captured in the latest Progress Update
- [JACQA](#). New advisory body on 14-19 funding now in place
- [LSC](#). Last lap but plenty still to do including transfer of expertise
- [LSIS](#). [Grant and remit letter](#) confirm importance of role
- [National Challenge](#). Improvement plans coming through, Advisers in
- [NCEE](#). Proposals on school - business links accepted by Government
- [NEETs](#). Two more Reports as staying on rate is approved
- OECD. Annual Education Update finds familiar UK picture
- Ofsted. Annual [Report](#) also finds familiar picture
- [Pre Budget Report](#). Confirms cuts in growth, more efficiency savings
- [QCF](#). Officially launched in Oct, completing framework by 2010
- Rose Review. [Interim Report](#) goes for thematic approach
- Schools. Performance and accountability the key issues
- [School Report Card](#). DCSF looks to pilot from autumn 09
- SFA. Duties grow as position in the landscape is sketched out
- [Sutherland Inquiry](#) finds 'a catalogue of errors' over 2008 tests
- TtG. Increased flexibilities to help extend support in the downturn
- UKCES. [Simplification Plan](#) released, State of Nation Report awaited
- Welfare. [New White Paper](#) balances benefits with skills and responsibilities

## Academies

- Will the good flock stray without its shepherd? Questions surface in October after Academy 'spiritual' leader Lord Adonis moves in the Government reshuffle
- 130 school Academies now open, 80 more due next Sept, 100 the Sept after, the flock growing and now fed through the National Challenge
- Conservatives pledge at their annual Conference to double Academy numbers and grant them greater independence, even offer Lord Adonis his job back
- JCB reveal plans to open an Engineering and Business Academy in the Midlands but the credit crunch may temper ambition
- [Final Report](#) from PWC on Academies finds many positives: strong leadership, parental interest, improving performance but picture mixed in some parts and still some issues about selection
- Yet whatever the question, as a [Sutton Trust Report](#) identifies, Academy is in the answer

## Adult Advancement and Careers (AACCS)

- Proposed in Leitch, pledged in numerous Government Papers and potentially important in the current economic climate, the AACCS moves a step nearer with the launch of a prospectus at the end of October
- Essentially a one-stop service providing advice and guidance on matters like training, housing, personal finance, child care
- 10 prototypes to operate across England testing out models over the next 2 years
- Emphasis on the most needy; Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, Primary Care Trusts all pitching in
- The service to sit within the new Skills Funding Agency when fully operational from 2010/11
- £4m provided to kickstart prototypes, £50m promised for roll out
- As an advancement agency with strengthened next step services to help people put their best foot forward, there's only one way this can go

## Adult learning

- *"Let us be clear that informal adult learning is valued by Government."* That's the claim but it hasn't felt like it with Government famously prioritising plumbing over pilates in recent years
- With claims that 1.4m adult learners have been lost over the last 3 years, stamina has been in as much demand as skill
- But hope springs from 4 quarters
- First the national [consultation](#) on informal adult learning which ran for much of the year, attracted 5,500 replies, laid down some new principles and generally stirred the disheartened. [Next Steps Paper](#) expected shortly
- Second, the NIACE sponsored Inquiry into the [Future of Lifelong Learning](#) which has swept up many in its train and aims to *"offer an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK."* Report due June 09

- Third, the launch of a new campaigning group, CALL, already with over 60 organisations signed up and a rally planned in the spring
- Fourth, noises from the Conservatives about the importance of adult learning
- Maintaining the momentum in the face of harsher economic needs now becomes the priority

## A levels

- New GCEs begin in Sept 08 with fewer units of assessment, more stretch and challenge, an A\* grade and more synoptic questions but still facing the big question about its long-term position
- The new 14 - 19 Qualification Strategy positions A level as one of the primary routes but rivals emerge in the form of the Pre-U and Bac variants
- Either way, debate about the nature and purpose of A level unlikely to go away; "*it's just about regurgitating knowledge*," Sir Mike Tomlinson tells an HE conference in October lamenting the lack of innovative thinking
- A further issue bubbling away is about which A levels are best at securing university entry
- Policy Exchange the latest to expose the 'soft' subjects perceived to be looked down on by certain universities
- Claim that only Cambridge and LSE list the subjects to avoid, others leave it to applicants to guess
- Yet, despite the above, entries for A level up 2.7% for summer 2008 so the 'royal' route still attracting interest

## Apprenticeships

- Despite the economic worries or perhaps because of them, the Government press ahead with further development of the apprenticeship system
- Current developments include a new Vacancy Matching Service, an Expansion Programme for employers, a new National Apprenticeship end-to-end Service and the establishment of a young person's entitlement, details incorporated in latest Education Bill
- The Skills Commission and both Dept Select Committees cast their eyes over developments
- The DCSF Committee support the direction of travel but question whether more legislation is needed to get there
- Amongst their 14 recommendations are concerns about whether demand for placements can be met and about suitable progression
- The DIUS Select Committee come up with 35 recommendations with anxieties about going for growth at the expense of quality topping the list
- Other concerns include just how the new Service will be resourced and organised (Simon Waugh announced as the first Chief Exec) and just from where the promised new flexibilities will come
- The Conservatives not far behind on apprenticeships, unveil a £20m programme at their Party Conference to support a 1000+ 'skills scholarships,' essentially apprenticeship routes into HE
- Labour meanwhile commit to increase apprenticeship funding to over £1bn by 2010/11, to increase the minimum wage from August 09 and to help create 10,000 further places during the downturn

- Much of this will come through construction procurement contracts though Sainsburys, Tesco, Superdrug all committed to expanding numbers also
- Currently there are over 180 types of apprenticeship available, 180,000 employers involved and 224,800 people have embarked on one but as Fuller and Unwin point out in their study on '*Expansive Apprenticeships*' most of these are grouped in just a dozen sectors
- Construction, hairdressing, business admin, customer care the most popular
- Programme led apprenticeships and Group Training Schemes all helping to boost numbers along with a big push on the public sector
- But waiting in the wings is the bark of Sir Alan Sugar who becomes the face of a new apprenticeship campaign to be launched in Feb

### Assessment and testing

- Claiming in Sept that the "*current national testing system is not set in stone,*" the Secretary of State moves a few a month later with a major announcement to Parliament
- Out go KS3 tests and in comes a significant review of a system which has run for nearly 20 years
- Much of this prompted by a comprehensive 6 month inquiry headed by the DIUS Select Committee in the first half of the year and the problems associated with the summer 08 SATs
- 3 major features announced
- First, some new guiding principles on the nature and purpose of testing
- Second, some changes to current testing: at KS1, teacher assessments to remain but to be reviewed; at KS2, national tests to remain but with one eye on the alternative single level pilots and the other eye on trying to minimise teaching to the test; at KS3, national tests to go immediately and be replaced by a system of national sampling with schools being held to account through a new School Report Card
- Third, consultation on wider forms of accountability for schools based around the Report Card (see details under School Report Card)
- An Expert Group set up to flesh out the details and report back in the spring prior to a subsequent White Paper
- Performance in summer 08 national tests somewhat laboured
- At KS1, based on teacher assessments, no change in performance levels in reading and writing, a 1% drop in boys' speaking and listening
- At KS2, 1% increase in English and maths, science levels static
- At KS3, 1% increase in maths but 1% drop in English and 2% in science
- Government still straining to push up stands in core subjects, a further £15m put in to help with 1:1 tuition in English and maths for 10/11 yr olds
- PWC report on initial progress of single level pilots, find "*emerging pockets of excellent practice*" but implication that deeper pockets some way off
- Changing the culture of testing may prove hard; the TES report in Dec that already 60% of primary schools have started coaching for this year's KS2 tests

### Children's Plan

- Not one but two reports greet the first anniversary of the DCSF's 10year [Children's Plan](#) though a shadow cast by events in Haringey

- The first is a [Progress Report](#) on what's been achieved over the last year such as: more Children's Centres; a healthy eating campaign; a review of child internet safety; the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage; a Youth Alcohol Action Plan; and getting more youngsters to stay on
- But a big in tray for the coming year including: a new child health strategy; requiring all schools to record all incidents of bullying; improving speech provision; publishing a primary strategy; legislating for Children's Trusts; and responding to the latest [Laming Report](#)
- The second sets out a new vision for schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; integrated, extended, partnered, and at the hub of the community
- Nanny increasingly as important as teacher

### Conservatives/Lib-Dems

- Stung by accusations of being the do-nothing Party over the economy, the Conservatives maintain an active front on education
- 3 key note speeches from Michael Gove, Shadow Education spokesman, capture the flavour
- The first to the CBI conference in Sept sets out the current Conservative view on 14 - 19 Diplomas, namely: we're not keen on general Diplomas, we support vocational options for post-16 but are unsure if Diplomas are it, we'll conduct a thorough review of 14 - 19 reforms if we get in
- The second to the Party Conference a week later lists a wave of reforms the Conservatives would introduce to the school system: *"in the first few weeks, we'll cut the guff, bureaucracy and box ticking"* and ends up stressing the attractive virtues of the Swedish model (of schools)
- The third to the Haberdashers Foundation in November on the exam system praises the IB, called for a decent international measure for comparing exam performance as opposed to Government tests and concludes by calling for schools to have freedom over exam choice, for Ofqual to concentrate on guaranteeing standards and for Ofsted to conduct 'sudden death' inspections
- School standards, social mobility, the pupil premium, the removal of state control and adult skills rapidly becoming the battleground for the major Parties
- But it's the Lib-Dems who appear the most popular according to a TES poll
- Lib-Dem Spokesman, David Laws earns more brownie points by calling for less teaching to the test and for a simpler National Curriculum
- As he reminds Conference, *"since 1997, we've been force-fed 14 Education Bills, 370 consultation papers and over 1,600 parliamentary regulations - that's one new education measure every 2 days"*
- The Government announce another Education Bill a few weeks later

### Credit crunch

- *'Darling, it's bad news!'* As the media highlight the depths of the economic downturn, the Government look to the education and training service to provide what help it can for those threatened with redundancy or needing upskilling

- This backed up by an open letter from leading figures about the dangers of cutting back on training when the going gets tough. HE and FE meanwhile issue '*ready when you are*' notices
- Government talks up a rosier outlook from later 2009/10 but few join them
- In fact the Pre Budget Report in November cuts spending growth from 2011/12 from 1.9% to 1.1% leaving the Leitch world-class skills vision a long way off
- The Government issue a series of pronouncements as things deepen
- An additional £50m put in to support adult advancement services, £350m transferred from Train to Gain to support especially small businesses and Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, £158m to help those who need new skills or pre job training, a new '*Solutions for Business*' package from BERR and simplifications to the skills system to help employers engage from the UK Commission
- Elsewhere a new 'war' cabinet, the National Economic Council sits along with a similar Council for the regions
- If it is a war footing, the learning and skills system provides a natural line of defence

#### Education Bills

- As one Education Bill enters the statute books, another waits in the wings
- The one through is the [Education and Skills Act 2008](#) with its central proposal on raising the compulsory participation age hotly pursued at various stages in Parliament over the year
- Specific requirements are set out in Part1 of the Act, notably Sections 21 onwards which spell out incumbent duties on employers, parents, providers and everyone else to enforce staying on
- Other Parts of the Act provide for impartial careers advice in schools, collaboration to support 14-19 learning, provision for L1 adult skills, recognition of 'other' bodies for awarding or authenticating qualifications and changes to KS tests
- As for the Bill about to enter Parliament this is the Children, Schools and Learning Bill 2009, a collection of proposals as disparate as its title suggests
- Some Parts of this legislate for what is already happening such as the creation of an independent regulator, some for things to happen such as the creation of the National Apprenticeship Service, and some for things intended to happen such as the establishment of Children's Trust Boards
- Overall 5 main headings covered: school standards including more proportionate inspections and responsibilities on Local Authorities to take action where necessary; tackling poor behaviour in schools including the power to search pupils for alcohol and drugs; realising potential including a right to request time off for training and an apprenticeship place for all eligible young people; local involvement including the transfer of 16-19 funding to Local Authorities; and streamlining the national infrastructure including dismantling the LSC for a new Skills Funding Agency
- Teeth gritted for some lengthy sessions ahead

#### EMAs

- An awkward autumn, a new contractor and perhaps a changing future

- The autumn term begins with many youngsters hit by delays in receiving payments, numbers hit rise to some 150,000 out of 600,000 recipients
- A new contractor agreed in November but sweeping up still going on
- Meanwhile Scotland consults on a different approach, putting the emphasis on the most needy and those on training projects rather than just those who need an incentive to staying on
- In England, the Conservatives hint at getting rid of EMAs, Labour consider their role in the post compulsory participation age and the thinktank Policy Exchange propose the £550m scheme could be used for the pupil premium

## FE

- The first ever VQ day in the summer, the first ever Colleges Week in the autumn; is the neglected middle child at last getting some attention?
- "*Your work is fundamental to many of our ambitions across Government*" John Denham tells the annual college conference in November which comes as part of the week
- The Colleges week regarded as a great success: 52 business breakfasts, 86 skills challenges, 4 open days, an awards ceremony and a rush of attention
- The prevailing economic climate adds a sense of urgency; John Denham writes to all College Principals urging them to help out with training and support where possible
- 4 major features on the FE landscape as the year draws to a close
- First, the Machinery of Government changes and the potential impact of a dual system, one pre-, one post- 19 with different funding and commissioning requirements in each case
- Life post the LSC may require some adjustments not least in business planning and operations, next 18 months will reveal how much
- Second, the changing nature of relationships both 14-19 and HE but principally through the strengthening Single Voice for self regulation
- Consultation on an FE Accord, Framework for Performance Management and Improvement, a Framework for Accountability, an FE overseeing body, all ingredients of a self regulated system, closes in late December
- Third, changes on the qualification front as new composite frameworks take shape both pre- and post-19, awarding powers open up and employer requirements harden
- Reading the market, both financial and labour, becomes a key skill
- Fourth, venture activity afforded by the opening up of the 'market' through demand-led funding, the emergence of new networks for knowledge and skill transfer, and the introduction of a new FE Specialisation and Innovation Fund
- Is a week enough? Perhaps a College Year is needed next

## Framework for Excellence (FfE)

- Implementation of Phase 1 of the performance-assessment framework gets under way in Sept 08
- 2 years in development and now 3 years in roll out, the FfE an important component of the new provider system; quality determines position in the market place which determines funding

- Performance ratings based on three 'dimensions:' responsiveness, effectiveness and finance, in turn defined by seven key performance areas
- FE colleges and training providers in the first Phase, school sixth forms and adult learning providers following on, 120 providers in current trials
- A clean bill of health for the Framework so far from GHK Consultants but further evolution needed to accommodate different types of providers and different landscape requirements
- Additional indicators being looked at including retention rates and credit success rates (for the QCF not the banking system!)
- Further refinements expected as system hardens

## HE

- The Government sets out to sketch out a long-term vision for HE in advance of the impending review of tuition fees
- The review agreed as part of the original Blair deal but doubts raised as to whether it will be completed before the next general election
- The long-term vision being pieced together through a series of reviews announced in key note speeches by John Denham in Feb and Sept 08
- Nine in all ranging from the demographic challenge and student experience to e learning and international perspectives
- DIUS staff up late at night working through the findings, aim is for a draft policy framework shortly
- UKHE performing pretty well as latest OECD stats indicate but facing significant challenges including: changing learner profile and expectations; differing patterns of study; low level investment in new technology; new demands on assessment and accountability; lack of capital surplus to feed back into the infrastructure; increasing global competition
- CBI forms its own Task Force to explore what business wants from HE; report due June 09 while over 200 responses received for the 'Higher Skills: High Value' consultation aimed at generating more employable graduates
- Debate simmers about how far HE should bend to meet demands from Government or business, tetchy spat between John Denham and Chris Patten, Oxford Chancellor symbolises concern about interference
- UCAS applications through to be slow this year but early days and latest HEPI research sees demographic demand rising up to 2011, then flat to 2020 before a further surge to 2029
- Some may be fuelled by the expansion of new HE centres under the Government's '[new university challenge](#)'
- Launched earlier in the year, in November the Government announce the first 27 areas in England keen to open up a centre
- Elsewhere financial constraints temper ambitions; DIUS have to announce an upper limit in the family income of £50,020 rather than £60,000 for the receipt of grants and limits ASNs to 10,000 for 2009/10
- The research Assessment Exercise reveals a high level of quality research, over £1.5bn pa of funds to be distributed from 2009/10
- Following strong words in the summer about the value of degrees, the DIUS Select Committee launch an Inquiry into degree classification, admissions, teaching and sundry else
- [UUK](#) greet the announcement with a "*robust*" report on QA arrangements
- 18 HEIs agree to test out HEAR (HE Achievement Record) the student profile record proposed by the Burgess Group 4 year ago

- The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bologna Declaration sees 45 countries now involved in trying to create a Europe wide HR area; Britain has some difficulties over aligning degree models and remains on the edge
- Finally, one university issues an etiquette guide to postgrads seeking employment; among the tips: never talk about sex, politics or religion at dinner and wear unobtrusive underwear, no evidence of a rush on thongs

## 14-19

- Phase 1 Diplomas kick off with numbers low, expectations high but pulses steady
- Initial picture suggests Diplomas settling as a mainly L2 pre 16 qual for those seeking a generic programme but long way to go before system fully in place
- Long-term perspective set out in autumn DCSF '[Next Steps](#)' document, effectively an update on the [2005 Implementation Plan](#)
- 4 main features
- First, the development of a more coherent and streamlined qual system built around a series of prescribed 'suites' as per 14-19 Qual Strategy
- Progress on this well under way with revised criteria for the Section 96 list of approved quals, a new approval and regulatory framework built around JACQA, QCDA and Ofqual, the corralling of quals into prescribed routes and further flexibilities under consideration
- Second, development of stronger systems of support for young people through impartial careers advice, integration of support services under LAs, flexible New deal access for NEETs and significantly, proposed introduction from 2010 of an area wide Common Application Process
- Third, development of partnership arrangements with the creation this spring of a national learner panel, expansion of Diploma Champion Network and additional capital funding to upgrade 14-19 learning facilities
- Fourth, development of the infrastructure to support 14-19 delivery with new duties on LAs, new sub-regional groupings, new planning and commissioning arrangements and a new overseer in the YPLA
- Formal evaluation of initial Diploma experience due in the spring, NFER and Oxford/Warwick commissioned to produce
- The Nuffield Review of 14-19 reform due to complete in the summer but plenty of other sources of advice available
- [Ofsted](#), for instance, produce a report on last year's preparations while the Public Accounts Committee look at some of the financial implications
- Budget of £1.3bn set aside for 14-19 reform up to 2010/11, nearly £600m spent so far
- The Committee express some concern that the Diploma has yet *"to establish cost estimates for the programme"*
- Sustainable funding an issue given current tightening; 16-19 funding to be based on LSC formula prior to transfer to LAs, funding for 14-16 Diplomas coming through DSG and Diploma Formula Grant with additional sums added from Dept pot
- Most universities now with a positional statement out on Diplomas but small print reading necessary
- The IB Career-related Certificate pilots round the world and may go live from 2011 but unlikely to threaten Diplomas

- The 3 General Diplomas become a source of policy contention with the CBI and Conservatives ranked against them, consultation on their criteria due
- Gateway 3 completes in November, stream of conferences and networks sessions plough on relentlessly, no early nights yet

#### Innovation Nation

- Claiming to be a world first, the Government release its first annual update Report on Innovation following the sparkling [White Paper](#) in March, the STEM consultation over the summer and the instigating Sainsbury Report on Science and Innovation
- A cross Government commitment considered vital to UK future
- Headline developments over the year include a new £5m Innovation Research Centre due to start in Jan 09, a new pilot programme to enable UK business to benefit from FE expertise and commitment by every Government Dept to use their procurement budget to encourage investment in business
- Also 4<sup>th</sup> round of HE Innovation Fund bidding and considerable rash of activity around STEM subjects and £120m of collaborative work through the Research Councils on developing high-value added technologies
- The report claims the proportion of innovative businesses has increased from 49% to 67% over the last 6 years
- The subject has not lost its ability to attract strained language forms
- How about 'sandpits?' Apparently these are "*intensive, interactive and free-thinking events where a diverse group of people meet over a number of days to explore innovative solutions to real problems.*" Keep digging

#### Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications (JACQA)

- JACQA moves into place as the filtering mechanism for advising on the funding of 14 - 19 qualifications
- The October [Next Steps Paper](#) confirms JACQA as the joint responsibility of QCDA and LSC and as a non-statutory advisory body
- Initial focus will be on advising the Secretary of State on the application of Section 96 criteria as revised under the [14-19 Qualification Strategy](#)
- From 2010, the focus will be more on the standalone qualifications, the quals that sit outside but complementary to the prescribed routes
- JACQA will meet termly to advise the Secretary of State but will also conduct biennial landscape reviews over the whole 14 - 19 framework, the first of these in 2009
- JACQA purely an advisory body; the Secretary of State decides on the funding, Ofqual on the accreditation and everyone else on the provision

#### Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

- The LSC takes the bell for the last lap armed with an increased budget, facing some big targets and with much of the crowd still roaring it on
- The increased budget comes in the latest annual grant letter which sees its overall budget rise 4.5% to just over £12bn, £6.7bn for young people and £3.3bn for adult learning

- The big targets follow in the Annual Statement of Priorities
- Headline funds include: a rise in the Train to Gain budget to £925m particularly to support businesses during the downturn; £30m to support colleges in helping local businesses; £360m for adult apprenticeships; and intriguingly, the prospect of future 'rewards' being based on getting learners into jobs
- Headline activities include: helping shape the 14 - 19 delivery system, anything from transport arrangements to provider capacity; supporting the development of the National Apprenticeship Service; developing a demand-led skills system; taking on responsibility for the QCF; and working with Jobcentre Plus on integrating employment and skills
- But much of the time will be taken up in ensuring a smooth transition to the new funding system from 2010
- Legislation about to enter Parliament for provide for the transition of 16-19 funding and for the creation of two new agencies post LSC
- LSC already working with interim transition arrangements, overall staffing requirements of the two new agencies likely to be similar at 3,300; many staff expected to pick up their computers and move over

#### Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

- In October, CEL and QIA formally complete the birth of LSIS and the Secretary of State welcomes the new arrival shortly after with some money and a list of duties
- Money is tight, just under £100,000 this year dropping to £86,000 by 2010/11; much depends on securing transfers and grants from the sector
- DCSF and DWP will be commissioning some work but Grant Letter urges LSIS to seek from where it can; *" we would like therefore to take this opportunity to encourage you to consider further in your plans the scope for developing other sources of income"*
- LSIS with a critical support role as the landscape changes all around it, emphasis will be on building capacity, system improvement and self-regulation
- Specific duties include supporting 14-19 reforms, enhancing the learner experience, helping the expansion of work-based learning, supporting prof development, working with Becta on harnessing technology and significantly, supporting the sector in promoting social mobility
- Quality Champions early outriders of the new Service, plenty more saddling up going on

#### National Challenge

- [The National Challenge](#) becomes part of a wider school improvement programme but loses none of its bite
- The Government looking to ensure every school is '*a good school*' by 2011
- The summer exams see some 260 of the 638 collared schools rise above the threshold of getting 30% of pupils above 5 good GCSEs but plans go ahead to establish National Challenge Trusts and Academies
- Most Local Authorities have their plans for school improvement signed off in outline, two (Bristol and Leics) the first to go ahead with full restructuring plans

- Further developments include a £1m fund to support gifted and talented pupils in national Challenge schools, changes to the admissions code so that National Challenge schools do not have to admit 'challenging' pupils outside the normal admissions round and hints that primary schools may be drawn in with a plans for a floor target
- Meanwhile National Challenge Advisers prepare to go in where it hurts

#### National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE)

- The NCEE publish an important set of [recommendations](#) in October on school/college links with business and with HE
- Set up in June 2007, the Council brings together leading figures from the worlds of business, education and beyond
- Core recommendations in this latest Paper include: a new National Framework for business partnerships due to be in place for every provider by 2010; primary school visits to university campuses; a bigger focus on STEM subjects; more partnerships and shared leadership; and the ubiquitous more effective advice and guidance
- Government agree to adopt the full package and in December announce a new £1.5m employer taskforce with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy in primary and National Challenge schools and a further employer engagement strategy
- Supported by a new Institute for Education Business Excellence from April 2009 and a Business in Schools matching service being developed by Edge

#### NEETs

- 4 years to go before 17 yr olds compelled to stay on in some form of training but disengaged youth continue to attract policy attention
- Despite a national target and national strategy, little headway made in reducing numbers
- Major Reports in the autumn from [CBI](#) and [Nuffield/Rathbone](#) conclude that there are no simple solutions; also that raising the participation age, as Alison Woolf has stridently argued, could decimate the youth labour market
- The CBI Report calls for earlier targeted help to save young people from falling into a cycle of drop out and despair
- 9 recommendations put forward around better support, guidance and flexible options; claim that £5m a week could be saved if half the young people on benefit were in either work or training
- The Nuffield/Rathbone Report based on a detailed study of young people as part of its Youth Enquiry
- It finds most young people completely alienated from school, the daily trudge through targets and tests leaves them left out and isolated; most just want 3 things: someone they can rely on, a job and a place to live
- The question remains: will raising the compulsory participation age give them such things?

## Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

- The annual feeling of the pulse of the UK education system comes in Sept with the publication of OECD's '[Education at a Glance](#)' Report
- Looks at education performance across 30 member countries
- Much of the data relates to 2006 and is familiar: high levels of investment in early years education; above average graduate output, high number of science graduates but on the downside, average performance in reading and maths, larger primary school sizes and low participation rates at 16/17
- The Report identifies 5 challenges facing the English education system: reading levels at primary; gaps between worst and best performing schools; poor staying on rates; low levels of adult literacy; poor social mobility
- All of which explains much of current Government education policy
- Some interesting asides within the Report
- First, the almost universal mass expansion of higher education, an average of 57% of cohort now going on to HE, 13% above English levels, much of it financed through private funds
- Second, UK GDP spend on education running at around 5.6% compared to an OECD average of 6.1%
- Third, many of the high performing countries steering away from centralised testing in favour of more liberal, tailored curricula
- Is the Government ready to take advice from abroad?

## Ofsted

- Ofsted continue to refine its inspection systems to meet current constraints and differing demands
- Current thrust includes more proportionate inspections, increasing short notice inspections, the use of 'health' checks between inspections and more latterly, fitting in to the new accountability system
- The latest consultation, due to complete in Jan 09, covers arrangements in the FE and skills system
- The same overall framework and same 4 point grading scale but the notice period reduced, FfE indicators to be used, greater emphasis on how well user needs being met and a 4-6 year cycle for satisfactory and above providers
- This year's [Chief Inspector's Report](#) the first to reflect the new enlarged Ofsted
- The familiar mixed bag; 2/3 of state schools inspected good or outstanding but 9% of secondary and 4% of primary judged inadequate; growing gaps between best and worst performing; success rates up in FE but still some poor teaching areas; improved adult skills provision but still limited employer involvement
- Plenty of hopeful signs but still some raw deals notably amongst young offenders, the disadvantaged and more latterly some children's services
- Interesting debate emerging about how far inspections are tick box or instinct based; some calls for more stepping outside the box

## Pre Budget report (PBR)

- The Chancellor's [mid-year review](#) presented against a difficult backcloth, "*exceptional measures for exceptional times*" the theme
- Massive rise in annual borrowing means UK net debt share of GDP forecast to hit eye watering 57% in 2013/14
- All of which suggests talk of an early return of the good times is premature
- The Government forecasting  $\frac{3}{4}$  - 1.1/4% growth in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2009 but few agree
- Two projections stand out for the public sector
- The first is an extra £5bn in efficiency savings on top of the existing £30bn planned for up to 2010/11
- The second is reduced growth in spending from 2010/11, cut from 1.9% to 1.1% with £1.4bn reduction in capital investment at same time
- Little room therefore for big salary increases, expensive projects, grand initiatives, education sector sensing the party's over
- For schools the main interest in the PBR lies in the advancement of capital projects, bringing forward school building projects in up to 800 primary and 2000 secondary schools
- Some capital investment too for F and HE but main emphasis here on releasing funds to support back to work measures
- £1.3bn set aside for support through the bad times, all being directed by a new 'war' Cabinet, the National Employment Partnership; dig deep for victory the message

## Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

- The 2 yrs of testing and trialling complete, regulatory arrangements in place, SSC approval of sector based voc quals established and funding being suitably aligned, the Government formally welcome the [QCF](#) in October in suitably extravagant style
- "*The QCF means that for the first time all learning counts*"
- The essence of the claim of course is that under the QCF, learning can now formally be credited, recognised and built up as needs dictate
- For the QCF is an organising mechanism for bringing together a mass of different voc quals and assembling them in a recognised structure from entry to level 8
- Already over 1,000 quals on the framework and the aim is to have the whole thing in place by 2010
- The QCF being adopted in all corners of the UK as part of the wider VQ Reform Programme and eventually intended to lock into the European Qualifications Framework
- The widening out of accrediting powers another important feature and already being seized on
- Aspiration of the QCF naturally attractive and potentially critical during the economic downturn but practical realities make the transition a demanding process
- LSC, Ofqual, SSCs, UKCES and Awarding Bodies all grappling with a heavy agenda including a review of the approval process, the creation of a universal but personalised learner record, the list of approved quals and the template for qual structure

- The Minister confirms adoption of an interim definition for a full L2 as 13 credits, some flexibility for SSCs, position to be confirmed in 2010/11
- Consultation on a 25 credit threshold for full L3
- Public funding to be aligned to SSC qual priorities from 1 August 09, LSC, UKCES and SSCs working a definitive list, initial version due March 09, final answer in June
- Funding to be focused from 1 August 2010 on VQs for adults, entry and L1 FLT quals, apprenticeships and functional skills but driven by SSC and Government priorities
- At the same time 16-19 funding to move to LAs to be able to respond to 14-19 commissioning and in due course lock into the QCF
- The sounds of banging is of joints not heads

## Regions

- Following last year's sub-national review, the Government presses on trying to refine and refocus activity in the regions
- Emerging details to be found in the Government's response to a consultation earlier in the year on sub-national economic regeneration
- Features include the development of City regions with a range of economic powers covering housing, transport and some skills; two more to be announced in Budget 2009
- Also Economic Improvement Boards (EIBs) to work with RDAs on regional strategies and supported in varying degrees by Government Offices, Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies
- Mechanisms include a system of multi and local area agreements but not necessarily a new generation of Mayors
- The aim is to keep wheels moving in the regions rather than add new drivers

## Rose Review of the Primary Curriculum

- 569 teachers, individuals and schools respond to the initial consultation on the primary curriculum being led by Sir Jim Rose but media headlines may have the greatest impact
- Strident headlines greet Sir Jim's proposal to build the curriculum around 6 themes or areas of learning covering Eng/maths, science, art and design and wellbeing
- Sir Jim clear these themes can be used flexibly for project work or subject teaching but subject experts wary
- This is not the first time Sir Jim has been called in to cast his eye over the primary curriculum; he was part of the 'three wise men' review of 1991 and more recently led a review of phonetics but this may be the most significant as it's intended to shape the vision for the future
- The Final Report due by end of March 09; there will then be statutory consultation and further development work on the programmes of learning meaning the first group of pupils will not start until 2011, finish primary in 2017 and secondary education in 2024 so this a leap into the future
- Apart from the proposed new curriculum model, the Report covers 5 major areas

- First, curriculum rationale: to be based on the aims and values in the Children's Plan with future reviews of primary and early years to be considered at set times together as a coherent whole
- Second, the 3Rs and ICT: to be prioritised with '*due attention given to the prime skills of speaking and listening*' and consideration of whether aspects of KS3 ICT can be taken under KS2
- Third, personal development: a stronger framework to be established building on the existing SEAL programme
- Fourth, transition and progression: to be strengthened between primary and secondary and with parents and summer babies to start on the Sept after the 4<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Fifth, languages: the Dearing proposals accepted and schools to focus on just one or two chosen languages
- The reforms mirror those at KS3 and arguably prepare children better for the 21stc but 3 key questions: themes or subjects, which works best? Should children start formal schooling so early? Is national testing the elephant in the room?

## Schools

- Attention focuses on 3 areas: school accountability and performance; school funding; the school of the future
- On school performance, concerns centre on National Challenge and so-called 'coasting' schools
- Small crumbs of comfort in the latest Ofsted Annual Report: "*the proportion of good and outstanding primary schools this year is similar to last year at 63% while for secondary schools inspected, 17% are now outstanding but 34% only satisfactory and 9% inadequate*"
- Mixed bag too in the latest OECD analysis: higher class sizes but "*significant progress in early childhood*"; high standards in English and maths in primary schools; familiar weaknesses in post-16 participation
- Better news though in the Trends in International Maths and Science Study
- This has English 10 and 14 yr olds performing well in both maths and science when compared with other European nations and closing the gap on the traditionally strong Pacific Rim countries
- In particular, English 14 yr olds are ranked in the top 5 for science and have risen 11 places in 5 yrs for maths
- But little time to celebrate, NAO Report that "*the rate of improvement in primary maths has slowed*" while concerns remain about the gap between the best and worst performing schools
- The latest phase of the Government's school improvement strategy puts the emphasis on coasting schools
- These are defined as "*schools that get results that look acceptable or even good but which are not fulfilling the potential of their pupils*"
- Stats wise that's schools typically getting only 30 - 50% of pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs; the Government reckon there are 500 of them often tucked away in rural areas or suburbs
- Local Authorities asked by the end of Jan 09 to come up with lists of schools that could "*benefit from more support or challenge*"
- Support means more 1:1 tuition, more tracking of pupil progress, new leadership strategies; challenge means more reform of school structures and of course the new Report Card

- On school funding, as the Government grapple with a long-term review of school funding, the concept of a pupil premium raises its head again in a Paper by the thinktank Policy Exchange
- This condemns the current funding system as *"a labyrinth built out of failed policy grants, out-of-date demographics and unnecessary stability measures"*
- The proposal is to move away from Local Authority grants to a national funding formula based on 3 elements: age weighted base; an area cost adjuster; a premium for deprived pupils
- EMAs and the National Challenge would be scrapped to pay for some of this and schools could be able to opt out of the national pay deal
- Given that the pupil premium could cost an extra £4.6bn, the current economic climate may have the final word
- As for schools of the future, sketches provided in a DCSF consultation launched in Dec
- A White Paper is threatened for spring 2009

### School Report Card

- Overtime and over here; the New York City School Progress File looks likely to become a key mechanism for school accountability in England possibly from 2011
- The model in the US has been piloted for 2 years, grades schools on 3 measures (student progress, student performance, school context) and has had UK advisers amongst its following pack
- The attractions here are obvious: it's simple (one side of folded A3;) accessible online; uses existing data; applies a simple grading system; and effectively pulls together a lot of data on school performance in one simple ready reckoner
- The Government is keen to use it with all maintained schools in England including Academies, primary, secondary, special, up to the age of 16 and wants to pilot it from autumn 2009
- Consultation launched in December asks for views on 5 performance categories: pupil test and exam performance; pupil progress; pupil wellbeing; school impact on narrowing the performance gap; parents/pupil views
- The aim is to report all this in an overall A-F grade
- The DCSF Select Committee make the School Report Card a key topic in its major Inquiry into school accountability

### Skills

- The Select Committee delays its report on implementing Leitch but no time to delay anything else as the economic downturn starts to make demands on the skills system
- In Sept, the Government launches a new £150m strategy for Manufacturing and a Clearing House and Task Force for Construction
- In October, £350m of Train to Gain funds are redirected to support small businesses, £100m to help those facing redundancy and £50m to support the new adult careers service
- In November, the Pre Budget report sets out the stark options

- In December, Government confirms £158m now available to provide skills training
- Each month therefore seeing further urgent responses as the economic situation worsens
- Does this mean the ambitious Leitch 2020 vision is scuppered?
- The Government claims not and sets its sights on building a better future
- So the UK Commission press on with simplifying the skills system, 4 more National Skills Academies are announced, 2 more Skills Compacts agreed and new funding arrangements for Ufl identified
- Elsewhere recommendations on relicensing for the first 5 SSCs due to be made in Feb, a new Third Sector Skills Body is announced and record numbers of adults notch up voc quals last year
- But two telling stats: the Olympic site in London suffers a dearth of skilled workers and Jobcentre Plus centres recruit another 6000 staff to cope with the rise in unemployment

### Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

- 31 and counting, that's the list of responsibilities awaiting the new Body when it takes over from the LSC probably late in 2010
- Details revealed in a December Update
- Overall it will house 4 '*key business units*': the National Apprenticeship Service; the Adult Advancement and Careers Service; a national employer responsive skills service built around Train to Gain; and a learner responsive funding system, responsible for routing funding directly to customer need
- The aim is for "*a streamlined organisation visible to customers only through its products*" and it may be less visible given its position as Next Steps Agency within DIUS
- Although primarily a funding agency, it will have oversight of the FE sector through a provider licensing system and will be charged will helping deliver the national skills plan devised by the UK Commission
- Providers will work through an allocated account manager and in theory have greater freedom to respond and innovate without being restricted a detailed business plan
- The new demand driven system, linked to performance management arrangements, due to be fully in place by 2012, though a new list of responsibilities might have been added by then

### Sutherland Inquiry

- "*It is important that we learn the lessons of this Report and act on them immediately*"
- Lord Sutherland's inquiry into what went wrong with the national tests in 2008 is released just before Christmas leaving little time to implement all the changes before the KS2 tests 5 months on
- However QCA rush to get out a response in January, Ed Balls promises an action plan shortly after, Ofqual and DCSF work on stricter procurement for the future and general tightening pf nuts and bolts all round
- Sutherland reveals '*a catalogue of errors*' grouped under 5 headings
- Under procurement ("*the regulator should have played a greater role in defining requirements;*") under governance and contract management

*(" there was a lack of clarity regarding governance arrangements caused in part by the ambiguous status of the NAA within QCA;")* under project and risk management (*" ETS failed to identify and report risks accurately;"*) under delivery (*" the end-to-end delivery system was insufficiently tested;"*) and under regulation (*"the regulator's risk monitoring and management processes were inadequate"*)

- The Secretary of State apologises in Parliament and confirms acceptance of all 20 recommendations
- But recriminations follow, fingers are pointed at the heavy testing regime, at regulation, at the use of private contractors, at the procurement process and at how much the Dept really knew
- The Secretary of State confirms the future of National Curriculum tests '*not set in stone*' but firm foundations being built for this year

### Train to Gain (TtG)

- TtG reaches its 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday with 100,000 companies signed up, some additional flexibilities, a clean bill of health from Ofsted, a strengthened brand from the UK Commission but familiar question marks
- B/Q do it in October to become the 100,000<sup>th</sup> company
- Since it kicked off in 2006, 570,00 learners have begun Train to Gain programmes, over 160,000 have achieved full L3 quals and 254,000 L2
- The trend is up but still below planning assumptions leaving its funds subject to smash and grab raids from other parts of the service
- Increasingly TtG becoming the fighting fund to support businesses and individuals during the downturn and further flexibilities aid this
- These include some relaxation of the rules at L2 and 3, an increase in the number of Sector Compacts, an increase in funding rates for providers and streamlined processes for procurement and contracting
- The clean bill of health comes in an Ofsted report in November
- This looks at the impact of TtG over the last year and finds most users happy although some criticisms of the brokerage system, some unease about the flexibility of the qualification offer and little evidence that the scheme helps sharpen the appetite for upskilling
- But the current economic climate might and it's partly for that reason that the UK Commission propose rebranding TtG as an integrated service for employers
- The aim is to bring together a range of skill initiatives into a single, flexible programme customised to a company's business plan
- There would be a tariff of offers with a range of subsidies at each level of provision
- Unloved by some, TtG may yet have a decisive role to play in the coming years

### UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)

- The UKCES gets into its stride with a full strategic review of National Occupational Standards (report due Jan 09,) an investigation into high-performance working (report due spring 09,) the relicensing of SSCs (due for completion by Dec 09) and ongoing projects on Talent Mapping and Skills Utilisation

- But it's two business critical pieces of work that stand out
- One is the Commission's first annual State of the Nation Report on progress and issues on employment and skills, due by the end of March 09 and an important reference point for skills policy and development during these troubled times
- The other is the simplification of the English skills system, regarded currently by the Commission as its '*highest priority*'
- Proposals for simplification released in October
- The aim is to try and '*hide the wiring*' so that users find it easier to plug in
- 6 barriers facing users identified: excessive bureaucracy; constant change; extent of different bodies; range of initiatives; restrictive constraints; difficulty of access
- The Report sets down 10 proposals to simplify things
- Overall theme is bring everything under a Programme Simplification Board with an integrated skills support programme under Train to Gain
- Other proposals include ensuring a clear role for SSCs, developing single integrated business brokerage plus support for business responsive providers, all aligned with regional and sectoral support and a uniform tariff
- Government chewing over carefully

#### Welfare to Work

- With Ernst and Young predicting a rise in jobless to 2.2m by the end of 2009, the Government faces a problem it thought it had seen off, namely rising unemployment
- It all creates a difficult scenario for the Government's welfare reform programme
- Compulsory measures for long-term unemployed outlined in June, the '*No one written off*' Green Paper in July, the introduction of the Employment Support Allowance in October, lone parents and those with children over 12 moving on to JSA in November and now a White Paper prior to legislation in 2009
- "*A personalised welfare state where a simpler benefits system underpins the expectation that nearly everyone on benefits is preparing or looking for work*" is what the December White Paper promises
- In all, it's the third stage of the Government's welfare reform programme
- Stage 1 was about '*deepening the obligation to work*' by introducing New Deal, creating JCP, providing support through the National Minimum Wage and Working Tax Credits; the aim being to establish the principle that you sign on for work when you sign on for benefits
- Stage 2 widened the obligation to work by expanding new Deal, introducing pathways to work and replacing incapacity benefit with ESA
- Stage 3 is themed '*No one written off*' where support is increasingly based on searching for work apart from exceptional cases
- Central to this latest stage is the integration of employment and skills (IES) where mechanisms such as skill health checks, Next Step advice and back to work action plans are being trialled in the W. Midlands and East Anglia
- IES due to roll out in 4 more areas from Feb 09, 2 more in March
- Overall the welfare reform programme developed on European and Scandinavian models but based on 2 major Reports: the Freud Report and the Gregg Review
- Both Reports feature in the latest White Paper which has 6 main features

- First, simplifying the benefits system on the basis of a single income replacement benefit for those of working age
- Second, reforming the way welfare services are delivered through open tendering, payment by results and the Freud '*Invest to Save*' model where private and voluntary providers invest up front and are paid out of the resulting benefit savings
- Third, introducing the Gregg principle of '*personalised conditionality*,' where benefits are conditional on a person taking steps to get back into work; 3 categories of 'persons' identified
- Fourth, enhancing support and control for disabled people through new '*Right to control*' funding opportunities
- Fifth, higher expectations for job seekers, escalating support for escalating expectations
- Sixth, enshrining in law the target of eradicating child poverty by 2020
- The Paper claims that 220,000 people move off benefit each month but it's the number moving on that may make the headlines

*Edexcel Policy Watches are intended to help colleagues keep up to date with national developments. Information is correct at the time of writing and is offered in good faith. No liability is accepted for decisions made on the basis of information given.*