

## Further Education, Skills and the Economy

### 15<sup>th</sup> December – Summary statistics in the Framework for Excellence published

Summary statistics for the Framework for Excellence have been **published**. The paper contains data on summary statistics, analysis and interpretation for the Framework for Excellence<sup>1</sup> (FfE) 2010 performance indicators: learner views, learner destinations, employer views and success rates.

The prime purpose of the FfE is to provide information for learners and employers to make informed choices about post-16 education and training giving learners and employers better information. The ambition is that the FfE will drive a ‘*step change*’ in quality improvement; where accountability is founded on the relationship between provider and customer rather than provider and government.

Geoff Russell, chief executive of the Skills Funding Agency said ‘*The publication... is bringing to life the Government’s commitment to open and transparent information on quality and standards as set out in Skills for Sustainable Growth... It is an important step in the journey for colleges and training organisations towards greater self-regulation and will help them benchmark themselves against others to improve their performance. Crucially, it will also allow individuals and employers to make more informed choices about where, what and from whom they can get education and training*’.

### 9<sup>th</sup> December – Skills conditionality: public consultation

DWP and BIS have launched a **consultation** which seeks views to inform the implementation of Skills conditionality. Skills conditionality involves Jobcentre Plus referring claimants to a skills training provider, further education college or Next Step adviser with potential benefit sanctions for non-participation. The training will include vocational, basic skills, employability training as well as support with softer skills such as motivation and confidence building.

The consultation asks a number of questions, including:

- what risks and opportunities does the proposal present for colleges and training providers or Next Step prime contractors?
- how can government minimise any risks for the skills system, while optimising the impact on participation and completion rates and employment outcomes?
- What does government need to do to ensure that Jobcentre Plus advisers provide people with the best opportunities to improve their skills, whilst ensuring local decision making and flexibility?
- how can the process of asking people to return to a training course that they have previously left be best managed, in relation to the role of Jobcentre Plus, and the implications for the claimant and the college or training provider or Next Step provider?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ffepublication.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>

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- What information do providers (including Next Step) require in order to enable them to ensure that mandated learners are placed on the most appropriate provision?

The closing date for responses is 3 February 2011.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> December – Colleges in the community: joint inquiry launched

A **joint inquiry** examining the role that colleges play in their community has been launched by NIACE, the Association of Colleges and the 157 Group.

The Colleges in the Community Inquiry will be chaired by Baroness Sharp of Guildford and will publish its final report in autumn 2011. The inquiry will start with a focus on successful community colleges from other countries to identify good practice and transferrable learning. The inquiry's commissioners will then identify a vision, strategic framework and potential models of delivery for enhancing the role of colleges in their community.

Areas for particular focus for the Colleges in the Community Inquiry will include how:

- local planning mechanisms such as the proposed local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) can facilitate College involvement in planning and delivery to their communities in partnership with stakeholders in all sectors;
- colleges can work with local councils and strategic partners to support economic and community well-being;
- colleges can become fully involved in local placed-based budgeting proposals;
- colleges can support offenders in the community and ex-offenders;
- college premises can be used cost effectively as a resource to their communities;
- colleges can support non accredited learning as a sustainable model; and
- colleges can collaborate more effectively in progression partnerships to deliver higher level skills.

## 9<sup>th</sup> December – Sector Skills Council relicensing decision for Lifelong Learning UK

BIS has **announced** that Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the lifelong learning workforce, will not be relicensed as a SSC in its own right. The decision follows a relicensing review process managed by UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), who have advised that the responsibilities currently fulfilled by LLUK across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are not compatible with the projected level of resources. LLUK will remain in place until 31 March 2011. Discussions are ongoing on future arrangements, which will take effect from 1 April 2011.

Charlie Mayfield, Chairman of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills added *'The UK Commission will work with LLUK to help ensure a seamless transition of the core elements of its work to other partners next Spring. I would like to thank the staff and management at LLUK for the professionalism they have shown throughout this difficult time'*.

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## 14<sup>th</sup> December – Willetts: new qualification is an extra rung on the ladder of opportunity

David Willetts has **welcomed** a new BTEC degree to deliver advanced skills for economic growth. Responding to the announcement that the education company, Pearson, will create a new degree-level BTEC, Mr Willetts said *'BTECs that are equivalent to GCSEs and A levels lead to higher earnings because employers respect them. But students cannot currently study BTECs at a higher level.'*

*'So I am delighted that, after discussions with Pearson, this will now change. There will be a new rung on the ladder of opportunity. Further education colleges, universities and other training providers will be able to offer this tried-and-tested qualification at a higher level for the first time. Students, employers and the economy all stand to benefit.'*

*'In the forthcoming higher education White Paper, we want to make it easier to award new high-quality and affordable degrees like BTECs. This is the key to extending opportunity, improving social mobility and raising skills.'*

## 13<sup>th</sup> December – Colleges seek continuation of EMAs

Colleges are putting forward the case for retaining the Education Maintenance Allowance, **calling** on government to reverse the decision to abolish EMAs. The call coincides with students and staff at colleges across England protesting against Government's decision during a 'Save EMA' day of action.

The protests follow months of campaigning by AoC and member Colleges, who have been contacting MPs to make the case for keeping the EMA, which is 'a key factor' in improving participation in Colleges across the UK, helping those students whose household income is less than £20,817.

Martin Doel, Association of Colleges chief executive, said *'we oppose Government's decision to abolish Education Maintenance Allowances in England. The overall spending cut involved could see support for the poorest young people shrinking from £574million to possibly as little as £75million.'*

*'We urge Ministers to reconsider their decision which will disadvantage young people from low income families, severely limiting their career prospects which, in turn, will have an impact on the wider economy. We are particularly alarmed at the Department for Education's decision to stop paying Education Maintenance Allowances in July 2011 to 16-18 year olds, including those who will be half way through their course.'*

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have published a **statement** referring to **previous research** which found that the EMA 'significantly' increased participation rates in post-16 education among young adults who were eligible to receive it. Responding to the IFS analysis, the Department for Education **said** *'around 90 per cent of pupils receiving the EMA would still go to college or sixth form even if it didn't exist, according to research from both the IFS and NFER. We have consistently made it clear we will still provide support for the 10 per cent of young people who really need help to stay in post-16 education, through substantially increasing the size of the discretionary learner support fund...'*

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## 13<sup>th</sup> December – New Anglia, Black Country and Worcestershire join Local Enterprise Partnership network

Three **new** local enterprise partnerships have been approved by business secretary, Vince Cable and local government secretary, Eric Pickles. The partnerships for New Anglia, covering Norfolk and Suffolk, the Black Country and Worcestershire now join the 24 approved partnerships that were announced in October at the launch of the Government's Local Growth White Paper.

The local enterprise partnerships have been designed to bring local business and civic leaders together, working to support their local economy. They will operate within a geography that reflects natural economic areas and will provide the vision, knowledge and strategic leadership '*needed to drive sustainable private sector growth and job creation*' in their area.

The first round of bidding for the Regional Growth Fund closes on January 21. All bids received will be assessed by an independent panel chaired by Lord Heseltine.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> December – Businesses urged to help build Big Society

Prime minister David Cameron has set out what businesses can do to help to build the Big Society. In his **speech** he explained how the business sector has the '*power, creativity and enterprise to help tackle some of the most pressing social challenges the UK faces*'. David Cameron said that ministers want businesses to sign up to a commitment to responsible business practice and take action in five priority areas where government would value business commitment the most.

These are:

- improving skills and creating jobs, for example by increasing the number of apprenticeships;
- supporting small and medium sized enterprises, such as by mentoring a start-up business;
- reducing carbon and protecting the environment;
- improving quality of life and wellbeing through measures such as introducing flexible working; and
- supporting your community, for example by encouraging staff to volunteer.

## 23<sup>rd</sup> November – 157 group sets out vision for learning accounts

The 157 Group has published a policy paper setting out its vision for a system of accounts that could help provide people with access to learning in a system that reflects learner and employer demand. The paper, **Learning Accounts that Count**, states that learning accounts have the potential to help individuals save for learning, borrow for learning and access public subsidy and argues that:

- institutional funding should be based on the choices of learners rather than on centralised planning;
- wherever possible, those benefiting from further education should make a financial contribution towards it;
- financial support in the sector should move towards helping people pay for provision rather than just helping them avoid paying;

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- learning accounts could be an effective vehicle for signalling learner preferences and assisting them to borrow and pay for learning;
- to motivate learners, a learning account needs to contain a voucher with a cash value; not just a learning log; and
- accounts that simply complicate the process of accessing public funding risk distracting from the core relationship between customer and supplier.

Other recent 157 publications include a 2009-10 **impact review**, a set of materials highlighting the value of its member colleges' international work, and Training Quality Standard **case studies** published to showcase the role 157 group member colleges play in stimulating improvements in the quality of training and development provision to employers.

## 14-19 and Schools

### 13<sup>th</sup> December – Written statement on schools financial settlement: education spending

The secretary of state for education, Michael Gove has written a **ministerial statement** announcing local authority allocations for their Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and capital for 2011-12 and for the Early Intervention Grant in 2011-12 and 2012-13. Details include:

- mainstreaming relevant grants into the DSG on the same per-pupil distribution as this year. 2011-12 Guaranteed Units of Funding (GUFs) are therefore the sum of 2010-11 GUFs and the per-pupil grant allocations. This means that at local authority, level allocations for school funding are flat cash per pupil for 2011-12;
- where local authorities have falling pupil numbers – no authority will lose more than 2 per cent of its budget in cash terms compared with 2010-11;
- in 2011-12, £1337m will be available for capital maintenance for schools, with over £1bn being allocated for local areas to prioritise according to maintenance need and £195m will be allocated directly to schools for their own use;
- a new non-ring-fenced Early Intervention Grant for local authorities in England, worth £2212m in 2011-12 and £2297m in 2012-13 designed to *'provide a substantial funding stream, with new flexibility to enable local authorities to act more strategically and target investment early, where it will have the greatest impact'*. This grant should support a number of priorities, including: Sure Start Children's Centres; Two-year-olds; and short breaks for disabled children.
- The Early Intervention Grant is, however, not limited to these areas. The grant underpins *'creative local approaches to local priorities, across the whole field of services for children, young people and families'*. It will therefore
  - *'help local authorities to support vulnerable young people to engage in education and training, intervening early with those who are at risk of disengagement'*;
  - support transitional arrangements *'to ensure that young people have access to impartial careers guidance'* in advance of the all-age careers service being fully operational;

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- provide an opportunity for local areas to pursue greater coherence of local services for families with complex needs; and
- local authorities *'will want to consider'* using EIG funds to support local action in support of the national campaign to improve outcomes for families with multiple and complex problems and reduce costs to welfare and public services.

## 13<sup>th</sup> December – Written ministerial statement on schools financial settlement: pupil premium

The secretary of state for education, Michael Gove has written a **ministerial statement** confirming the details of the pupil premium part of the schools financial settlement. Details include confirmation that:

- total funding available for the pupil premium will be £625m in 2011-12, rising each year until 2014-15 when it will be worth £2.5bn;
- in 2011-12, the pupil premium will be allocated to those pupils eligible for free school meals and looked-after children. ;
- there is an aim for the pupil premium in 2012-13 to be extended to those who have previously been on free school meals;
- the level of the pupil premium will be £430 per pupil and will be the same for every deprived pupil, no matter where they live;
- additional funding will be passed straight to schools and will not be ring-fenced; and
- children of armed services personnel will receive a pupil premium of £200 in 2011-12, this expenditure should be on pastoral support.

## 13<sup>th</sup> December – New drive to help *'troubled'* families

The government has set out an **ambition** to help all *'troubled'* families *'get back on their feet and create a better future for their children'*. This new drive has been designed to ensure that the 120,000 families who are struggling in the face of multiple problems are helped to address their problems in ways that *'really work'*.

In a speech the prime minister set out his vision for the UK to be a much more family-friendly society stating that the strength and stability of adult relationships in a family are vital to the wellbeing of children, that government, businesses and communities need to do more to support family relationships, and that in particular the most troubled families need targeted interventions, urgently.

Central to this ambition is a trial for new approaches to providing tailored support to the whole family for those with complex problems, providing personalised and holistic support to help a family deal with its problems and get back to work.

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As a first stage of this new drive, the government:

- will give local authorities new freedoms to pool budgets to help provide more joined up solutions for ‘troubled’ families<sup>2</sup>;
- will provide new money to a number of local authorities through the Early Intervention Grant for trialling innovative new approaches to help families with problems; and
- welcomes the announcement that Emma Harrison, an entrepreneur who specialises in getting jobseekers into work, will help up to 500 families in an initial six to ten areas of the country to develop and deliver these trials.

As part of the government’s focus on strong and stable families, Children’s Minister Sarah Teather also announced plans to invest £30 million of Government funding over four years for relationship support. This will be used to deliver better support for couples in relationship distress, for example in Sure Start children’s centres, encouraging couples to take up preventative support, and minimise the negative impacts for children when relationships breakdown. *‘The funding represents a significant increase to the Department’s current funding levels of just over £5 million a year for relationship support’.*

## 9<sup>th</sup> December – End of Ofsted’s children’s services annual rating process

In a letter to Ofsted, the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, the Local Government Association (LGA), and Solace, children’s minister Tim Loughton outlined the **decision** to end the annual rating process<sup>3</sup> as soon as a suitable legislative opportunity can be identified.

Across local authorities, there has been a concern that in its current form the annual ratings adds little understanding of children’s services in an area over and above the individual inspections that underlie it, and are not particularly helpful in aiding improvement. The decision is also in line with wider changes to local authority accountability arrangements across Government and the termination of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The department will work with Ofsted in the meantime to ensure the rating process is *‘as simple and transparent as possible and does not create unnecessary burdens for local areas’*. The department is working alongside Ofsted to consider potential changes to aspects of the wider children’s services inspection framework, in line with the drive for greater local accountability and freedoms. This will be informed by any relevant findings and recommendations from the review of child protection currently being conducted by Professor Eileen Munro and the review of early years by Dame Clare Tickell.

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<sup>2</sup> The focus of the first 16 community based budget pilots announced by the Department of Communities and Local Government on 22nd October and covered in Policy Update No. 13

<sup>3</sup> The annual rating provides a simple summary of the outcomes of the inspections of services and settings carried out by Ofsted during the year and an analysis of the performance data related to that authority. Ratings are awarded on a four-point scale: (1) performs poorly; (2) performs adequately; (3) performs well; (4) performs excellently. The 2010 ratings are: performs excellently – 20 local authorities (compared to 10 in 2009), performing well – 77 (93 in 2009), performing adequately – 37 (40 in 2009); performing poorly – 12 (9 in 2009).

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## 10<sup>th</sup> December – Ofsted report on The London Challenge

Ofsted has published a **report** on The London Challenge, a school improvement programme established in 2003 to *'improve outcomes in low-performing secondary schools in the capital'*. Primary schools were included in the scheme from 2008. The paper reports that since the introduction of London Challenge, secondary schools in London have better performance and have improved at a faster rate than schools in the rest of England in terms of their examination results.

Key findings include:

- the primary schools in London Challenge since 2008 are improving faster than those in the rest of England;
- at their most recent inspection, 30% of London's local authority controlled secondary schools were judged to be outstanding, this compares with 17.5% for the rest of England. Of the 34 academies in London that have been inspected, eight have been judged to be outstanding (24%), with 22% of all inspected academies (84) judged outstanding; and
- only 2.4% of London's secondary schools are currently judged by Ofsted to be inadequate, compared with 4.1% in the rest of England, and 9% of London academies. Across England, 9.5% of academies that have been inspected have been judged to be inadequate.

## 10<sup>th</sup> December – Future of the Every Child Matters website

As part of the coalition government's commitment to reduce the number of websites it manages and owns, the Department for Education (DfE) is undertaking work to move relevant content from the ECM website to the 'children and young people' **section** of the DfE site. It is anticipated that the work will be complete and the ECM website will be decommissioned and closed by the end of December 2010. Information on the coalition government's current policies previously housed on ECM will now be housed on the DfE website

For those who may, for reference or research purposes, wish to access information previously held on ECM, a copy of the site will be saved on the **National Archives**.

# Higher Education

## 9<sup>th</sup> December – Fees package will be *'sustainable, competitive and fair'*

Following the vote in the House of Commons on changes to **graduate contributions** for 2012/13,

The key elements of the package are:

### *Graduate contribution*

- any university or college will be able to charge a graduate contribution of up to £6,000.
- in *'exceptional cases'*, universities will be able to charge higher contributions, up to a limit of £9,000, subject to meeting *'tougher conditions'* on widening participation and fair access. It will be

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up to the university or college to decide what it charges, including whether it charges at different levels for different courses.

- the Office for Fair Access will be able to apply sanctions in cases where universities do not deliver on the commitments in their access agreements, up to and including withdrawing the right of the university to charge more than £6,000.
- all eligible part time undergraduate students studying for at least 25% of their time will qualify for full loan support for their tuition costs
- the £21,000 earnings threshold will be updated annually in line with earnings from 2016, when the first graduates under the new system start repayments, rather than every five years as originally proposed. No graduate will repay anything until they reach that income threshold; and
- the £15,000 earnings threshold that applies in the current student finance system will be updated annually in line with inflation from 2012. The £15,000 threshold has not been updated since its announcement in 2004.

## *Loans and maintenance grants*

- a new £150m National Scholarships Programme will be targeted at *'bright potential students from poor backgrounds'*.
- students from families with incomes of up to £25,000 will be entitled to a *'more generous'* student maintenance grant of £3,250 and those from families with incomes up to £42,000 will be entitled to a partial grant.
- maintenance loans will be available to all eligible full time students irrespective of income. Further details of loan rates for students living at home, those living away from home and studying in London, and loans for longer courses will be provided in due course.
- students deferring from 2011/12 to 2012/13, will be able to apply for loans and grants at the 2012/13 rates. Tuition charges for 2012/13 will be determined by individual universities.
- for graduates earning below £21,000, there will be no real rate of interest applied to their loan. For graduates earning between £21,000 and around £41,000, a real rate of interest will start to be charged, reaching a maximum of RPI plus 3%. Above £41,000, graduates will repay at the maximum, rate of RPI plus 3%.

Secretary of state for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable said *'[this] has been an important step in turning the Coalitions commitment to deliver a high-quality university sector that is more responsive to the needs of students into a reality'*.

Minister for universities and science David Willetts said *'our higher education reforms have struck a fair balance between ensuring we advance social mobility and properly fund our world-class universities'*

*The package is fair for students, fair for graduates and affordable for the nation. Next year the Government will publish a higher education White Paper covering the long-term issues arising from Lord Browne's report'.*

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## 6<sup>th</sup> December – National Scholarship Programme steering group established

A steering group has been **established** to ‘ensure the most beneficial initiatives are taken forward in the National Scholarship Programme (NSP)’. The National Scholarship Programme will be targeted at bright potential students from poor backgrounds and will in due course replace the current requirements on universities to provide a minimum bursary.

The group will include Aaron Porter president of the NUS, Nicola Dandridge chief executive at Universities UK, John Fairhurst, president of the Association of School and College Leaders and Mary Curnock-Cook chief executive at UCAS. By 2014/15 the NSP will invest a total of £150 million a year in supporting poorer students.

The group has been asked to look at options for support which universities wanting to charge over £6,000 would then be required to match fund. It is anticipated that proposals could potentially help to support 18,000 students. The group will make recommendations in due course but two options they have been asked by ministers to assess include:

- a first free year for disadvantaged students funded by their university with the NSP then funding the students final year, meaning that those who stay the course are rewarded; and
- a foundation or professional scholarship year to attract young talented people into the professions like law, medicine, finance and architecture ‘*who might have been badly advised on which A-Levels to study*’ with fees waved for a foundation year to get them the qualifications they need.

The deputy prime minister Nick Clegg said ‘*for too long, too many doors of our universities have been closed to bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Government is determined to throw them open. These proposals will ensure that the most highly selective universities are compelled to offer generous scholarships to gifted students from low income backgrounds*’.

## 7<sup>th</sup> December – Ministers set out rules for high charging universities

Universities minister David Willetts has said he expects universities who want to charge over £6000 a year in tuition fees to ‘do all they can to help students from poorer backgrounds’. David Willetts has released an early draft of a **guidance letter** to the director of Fair Access<sup>4</sup>, which states that universities must commit to the new national scholarship programme and invest in helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential and desire to go to university. Detail in the letter includes:

- in drawing up Access Agreements, all institutions should consider how to attract students from under-represented groups to their more selective courses, and retain them; and
- ‘*institutions whose records show they have the furthest to go in securing a diverse student body should consider this particularly carefully. We recognise that this requires cooperation and support from schools and colleges. OFFA will need to inform BIS if it comes to its attention that schools or colleges are not offering this support*’.

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<sup>4</sup> The remit of the director of Fair Access is to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education. The principal mechanism for achieving this will be requiring institutions that wish to charge more than the basic level of graduate contributions to agree new Access Agreements with the Director of Fair Access, setting out how they will promote access by under-represented groups.

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## 2<sup>nd</sup> December – Use of an aptitude test in university entrance: a validity study

In 2005, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned to evaluate the potential value of using an aptitude test (the SAT Reasoning Test) as an additional tool in the selection of candidates for admission to higher education. The five-year study was co-funded by the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS), the NFER, the Sutton Trust and the College Board. The **report** presents findings from the final phase of the project, relating the prior attainment and SAT scores of participating students who graduated in 2006 to their degree outcomes. It also summarises findings from the study as a whole, and cross references where appropriate to the various interim reports.

The key findings were:

- of the prior attainment measures, average A level points score is the best predictor of HE participation and degree class, followed by average GCSE points score. The inclusion of GCSE information adds usefully to the predictive power of A levels; and
- in the absence of other data, the SAT has some predictive power but it does not add any additional information, over and above that of GCSEs and A levels (or GCSEs alone), at a significantly useful level.

Implications for policy and practice include:

- tests used in the admission of candidates to HE should be investigated to ensure they are valid predictors of undergraduate performance;
- the use of data about the educational context in which students have obtained their qualifications, particularly the type of school attended, should be encouraged when comparing the attainment of HE candidates; and
- the importance of A level performance in predicting HE outcomes suggests that, due to some inequalities in the reliability of predicted grades, a post-qualification system may be more equitable and useful in assisting in the selection of candidates.

## Devolved Administrations

### 14<sup>th</sup> December – Scotland announces details of skills package

Education secretary Michael Russell has **announced** that communities across Scotland will receive a share of a £168 million as part of a national skills development programme to strengthen Scotland's workforce.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress, organisations within the third sector, Community Planning Partnerships, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council are topping up £64.6 million of European Structural Funds (ESF) to deliver a total investment of £168 million.

This funding will contribute to delivering employability and training services for the unemployed, the lowest paid and people from deprived areas, ranging from early engagement through to in-work support and skills development. *'The organisations will all be involved in the delivery of the strategic*

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*skills programme which fits with the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy and Economic Recovery Programme*'.

## 15<sup>th</sup> December – Scotland's Education Maintenance Allowance statistics 2009-10

**Statistics** on school pupils and college students supported under the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme have been published by Scotland's chief statistician. These statistics relate to the 2009-10 academic year.

Key findings include:

- 37,230 school pupils and college students received EMA payments in Scotland in the academic year 2009-10. 63 per cent of recipients were school pupils and 37 per cent were college students. 47 per cent of recipients were male and 53 per cent were female.
- 36 per cent or 23,290 of the 64,648 school pupils aged 16-19 years old in Scotland received an EMA payment in 2009-10.
- The number of young people in receipt of EMA decreased by 5 per cent (or 1,770) from 39,000 in 2008-09 to 37,230 in 2009-10. This decrease was due to the closure of the £10 and £20 a week payments to new entrants in 2009-10, with the number of young people in receipt of the £30 a week payments increasing by 9 per cent (or 2,935).
- 24 per cent of recipients (whose deprivation classification was known) in 2009-10 lived in one of Scotland's 15 per cent most deprived areas.

## 8<sup>th</sup> December – Welsh language Measure approved

Welsh ministers have **welcomed** the approval of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, a law specific to Wales passed by the Welsh Assembly, as an historic step forward for the Welsh language. The Measure meets the three One Wales<sup>5</sup> commitments to confirm official status for Welsh, linguistic rights in the provision of services and establish the post of Language Commissioner.

The Measure:

- confirms the official status of the Welsh language;
- creates a new system of placing duties on bodies to provide services through the medium of Welsh;
- creates a Welsh Language Commissioner with strong enforcement powers to protect the rights of Welsh speakers to access services through the medium of Welsh;
- establishes a Welsh Language Tribunal;
- gives individuals and bodies the right to appeal decisions made in relation to the provision of services through the medium of Welsh;

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<sup>5</sup> One Wales is an agreement between the Labour and Plaid Cymru Groups in the National Assembly. *'It offers a progressive agenda for improving the quality of life of people in all of Wales's communities, from all walks of life, and especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged'*.  
<http://wales.gov.uk/about/programmeforgovernment/1wales/?lang=en>

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- creates a Welsh Language Partnership Council to advise Government on its strategy in relation to the Welsh language; and
- allows for an official investigation by the Welsh Language Commissioner of instances where there is an attempt to interfere with the freedom of Welsh speakers to use the language with one another.

Minister for heritage, Alun Ffred Jones, said *'I have been lucky enough to live most of my life using Welsh. As a Government, we believe that everyone who wants to do the same should have that opportunity. This legislation is an important step along the path to realising that vision.'*

## Local Government and Wider Public Sector

### 13<sup>th</sup> December – Government publishes guide to Decentralisation and Localism Bill

The government has published the Decentralisation and Localism Bill<sup>6</sup> and an accompanying **guide**. It makes the case for *'a radical shift of power from the centralised state to local communities'*, and describes six *'essential actions'* required to deliver decentralisation down *'through every level of government to every citizen'*. The guide focuses on the Localism Bill as it is intended to provide the legislative foundation for change.

The document describes the devolution of power, money and knowledge as the *'best contribution that central government can make'* to the Big Society. The guide describes six *'essential'* actions of decentralising reform.

To begin decentralisation:

- *lift the burden of bureaucracy* – by removing the cost and control of unnecessary red tape and regulation, whose effect is to restrict local action; and
- *empower communities to do things their way* – by creating rights for people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities.

To provide the resources and the freedom of choice needed to sustain progress on decentralisation:

- *Increase local control of public finance* – so that more of the decisions over how public money is spent and raised can be taken within communities; and
- *Diversify the supply of public services* – by ending public sector monopolies, ensuring a level playing field for all suppliers, giving people more choice and a better standard of service.

To enable local people to take complete control of the process of decentralisation as it affects them in their communities:

- *open up government to public scrutiny* – by releasing government information into the public domain, so that people can know how their money is spent, how it is used and to what effect; and

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<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/126/part2/11126.i-vii.html#top>

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- *strengthen accountability to local people* – by giving every citizen the power to change the services provided to them through participation, choice or the ballot box.

## 6<sup>th</sup> December – Planning power from Town Hall and Whitehall to local people

New **planning reforms** to 'hand powers down from Whitehall bureaucrats and down from Town Hall officials to communities so local people shape the character of the very neighbourhood in which they live' have been announced.

In what are being labelled the 'building blocks' of the Big Society, changes are being revealed to help galvanise local democracy and help build new homes and plan new development with local support, rewarding those who want to grow and enhance their neighbourhood.

Communities secretary Eric Pickles and planning minister Greg Clark outlined proposals to 'decentralise and streamline' the planning system, ahead of the publication of the Localism Bill.

- *Neighbourhood groups to shape where they live*: Communities will be able to come together to decide what their area should look like, where new shops, offices or homes should go and what green spaces should be protected. If local people then vote in favour of new 'Neighbourhood Plans' in local referendums, councils will have to adopt them.
- *Direct democracy*: This new stimulus will be one of the greatest incentives to get people and communities to come together to take control of planning. The new powers will also allow communities to give planning approval to chosen sites on local land. This will mean that urgent development can go ahead quickly once the plan is adopted, short-circuiting lengthy planning applications and making the system more democratic and efficient.
- *Local benefits from local development*: including the New Homes Bonus, that will financially reward those councils and communities that deliver new homes and businesses to their area. Reforms to the Community Infrastructure Levy will also see a proportion of the levy given to local neighbourhoods where the development takes place.
- *Vanguards to lead the way*: the government would like to see about a dozen local areas come forward to act as vanguards that will trial Neighbourhood Plans in their area.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> December – Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances published

A new strategy to meet the government's target of abolishing child poverty is detailed in the report, ***The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults***. Commissioned by the Prime Minister the report has been published by the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances, conducted by Frank Field.

The report has two overarching recommendations. To prevent poor children from becoming poor adults the Review proposes:

- establishing a set of Life Chances Indicators that will measure how successful we are as a country in making life's outcomes more equal for all children;

The report argues that Life Chances Indicators should be published each year by the Government so that taxpayers can see what progress is being made in preventing poor children from becoming poor adults. These Indicators should similarly be calculated at a local level, so that individual parents can know how their children are progressing. The local indices would also show taxpayers whether their

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local authority is running the Foundation Years effectively to expand the life chances of poorer children

- establishing the first pillar of a new tripartite education system: the Foundation Years, covering the period conception to five. The Foundation Years will then lead into the school years, leading to further, higher and continuing education.

The single objective of the Foundation Years will be to improve the life chances of poor children. Foundation Years' services would be paid according to their success in narrowing class differences as children start school.

Further recommendations include:

- government should gradually move funding to the early years, with funding weighted toward the most disadvantaged children as the evidence base of effective programmes;
- Sure Start Children's Centres should '*re-focus on their original purpose*' and identify, reach and provide targeted help to the most disadvantaged families;
- Local authorities should consider joining with surrounding authorities to establish Poverty and Life Chances Commissions to drive policy in their localities; and
- The Department for Education should ensure that parenting and life skills are reflected in the curriculum, from primary school to GCSE level.

## 14<sup>th</sup> December – Draft *Cabinet Manual*

A draft of the ***Cabinet Manual***, setting out the main laws, rules and conventions affecting the conduct and operation of Government, has been published by the Cabinet Office for comment.

The new *Cabinet Manual* gives an overview of the UK system of Government, including how the executive – the government and the civil service – relates to Her Majesty the Queen, devolved administrations and international institutions such as the European Union (EU). The manual is primarily intended to provide a guide for members of cabinet, other ministers, and civil servants in the carrying out of government business, but it is also intended to serve to bring greater transparency about the mechanisms of government. The *Cabinet Manual* has been published in draft. Comments are welcomed by 8 March 2011 and can be sent to: [cabinetmanual@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cabinetmanual@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)

## 7<sup>th</sup> December – Transparency and Privacy Review announced

Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude has **announced** a review of the impact of transparency on privacy. The review had been designed to help to shape the government's approach to the release of data as part of the transparency agenda. It will also enable government to ensure that on-going releases of data '*are done in a way that provides maximum transparency of data while applying the appropriate data protection safeguards*'.

The review will be led by Dr Kieron O'Hara, a senior research fellow in electronics and computer science at the University of Southampton, with research interests in privacy, trust and web science. It will be supported by a team based in the Cabinet Office's Transparency Team. Findings from the review are set to be published in March 2011.

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## 8<sup>th</sup> December – Pathfinders for NHS reforms announced

The first groups of GPs who will take the lead in the government's plans for commissioning health services have been **announced** by Health Secretary Andrew Lansley. The 52 groups of GP practices from across England have been selected to be the first to take on commissioning responsibilities as part of the Government's plans set out in the NHS White Paper ***Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS***. The groups selected, known as pathfinders, will work together to manage their local budgets and commission services for patients direct with other NHS colleagues and local authorities. It is anticipated that by being in charge of the decisions that affect their patients, the pathfinders will be able to commission *'high quality care tailored to the specific needs of their patients and the wider community'*.

The GP pathfinders announced include 1860 GP practices that provide healthcare to 12.8 million people across England. These pathfinders and any additional consortia that join the programme will begin testing the new commissioning arrangements *'to ensure they are working well before GP consortia take on statutory responsibilities'* from April 2013.

## 7<sup>th</sup> December – Next phase of superfast broadband

An ambition to deliver a *'digital hub'* in every community in the country is at the heart of the Government's £830 million strategy to make sure the UK has *'the best broadband network in Europe'* by 2015 as a reliable and secure superfast broadband network is deemed vital to the country's economic growth, the development of high tech and creative industries, and the reform of public services.

***Britain's Superfast Broadband Future***, launched by secretary of state for olympics, culture, media and sport Jeremy Hunt, sets out an action plan to stimulate private investment and competition, and *'create an environment in which business can flourish'* by removing key barriers around hardware and cutting costs.

The proposals include:

- a *'digital hub'* in every community by the end of this Parliament;
- investing £50 million in a second wave of projects to test how this will be delivered;
- cutting the costs of and access to infrastructure: increasing shared access, work with house builders to make new homes broadband ready, and cutting the costs of laying cable by clarifying the rules on streetworks; and
- Awarding spectrum for mobile services.

## 6<sup>th</sup> December – Consultation: Disability Living Allowance reform

A **consultation** has been launched on the reform of the Disability Living Allowance as part of the overhaul of the welfare state. It is felt that the Disability Living Allowance needs to better reflect disabled peoples' needs and the extra costs they might incur in society today and so the proposals set out in the consultation are centred on creating a *'clearer, more targeted'* benefit, with an objective assessment, designed *'to enable disabled people to participate more fully in society'*. To mark this change, Disability Living Allowance will now be known as Personal Independence Payment, and will continue to be paid to people in and out of work.

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The consultation asks a number of questions, including:

- What are the problems or barriers that prevent disabled people participating in society and leading independent, full and active lives?
- Should some health conditions or impairments mean an automatic entitlement to the benefit, or should all claims be based on the needs and circumstances of the individual applying?

## 8<sup>th</sup> December – More help for pensioners as Basic State Pension set to rise in 2011

The government has **announced** that pensioners and benefit recipients will get more help in 2011 as the Basic State Pension will increase by £4.50 to £102.15 in April while the majority of working age benefits will be increased by 3.1%. Low income pensioners will also benefit, as most Pension Credit recipients will see a £4.75 increase in their guarantee credit and as announced in the Spending Review, Cold Weather Payments have been permanently increased to £25 from £8.50.

Minister for pensions, Steve Webb said *'we've taken a decision to restore the link with earnings and increase the basic State Pension by the highest of prices, earnings or 2.5%. This triple guarantee will ensure that pensioners can expect a decent offering from the state in retirement'*.

Alongside the new benefit rates, a **consultation** setting out proposals and seeking views on the impact of using the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) for private sector occupational pension schemes has also been launched. It looks at whether there is a case for making it easier for occupational pension schemes to move to using CPI. The consultation recommendations propose to preserve and promote confidence in saving into private pensions.

## 13<sup>th</sup> December – Call for evidence on allowing early access to pension savings

Financial secretary to the Treasury, Mark Hoban MP, has launched a **call for evidence** document on early access to pension savings as part of the coalition government's commitment to exploring whether early access could provide an incentive to encourage higher levels of private pension saving.

The government would like evidence on the potential benefits and risks of allowing early access to pension savings, how it could be offered, and to what extent a reform would be welcomed by pension schemes, providers, individuals and other interested parties. A decision will be taken on whether to develop more detailed proposals in this area in light of the responses received. The deadline for responses is 25 February 2011.

# Equality and Diversity

## 2<sup>nd</sup> December – Government publishes Equality Strategy

The Government has published its **Equality Strategy**. The Strategy sets out a vision for a *'strong, modern and fair Britain'*. It is built on two principles of equality – equal treatment and equal opportunity.

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The strategy sets out a new approach, *'not built on bureaucracy but aimed at changing culture and attitudes, tackling the causes of inequality and building a stronger, fairer and more cohesive society where equality is for everyone and is everyone's responsibility'*. The paper states that *'government cannot and will not do this by dictating from the centre'*. Instead, the strategy sets out how government will work with business, local communities and citizens to promote good practice, transparency and accountability. The strategy is published under five aims:

- Tackle deprivation and inequalities relating to family background, and improve social mobility;
- Work with business to develop a fairer and more flexible labour market that draws on the talents of all and builds a strong economy;
- Devolving power to local communities and promoting greater participation and inclusion in public, political and community life;
- Building respect for all, tackling discrimination, hate crime and violence; and
- The public sector will lead by example and empower citizens and communities with the information they need to hold services to account.

with commitments including:

- working with business and others to develop a voluntary scheme for gender pay reporting in the private and voluntary sector which will be available to all private and voluntary sector businesses, but particularly those with 150 or more employees;
- phase out the Default Retirement Age, allowing older workers to remain in work if they want to and are capable;
- training a new generation of community organisers to work with communities to catalyse social action; and
- ensuring child poverty concerns are built into policy-making across government, supported by the Child Poverty Unit, jointly sponsored by Department for Education (DfE), HM Treasury (HMT) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

## 7<sup>th</sup> December – Twelve steps to tackling discrimination and promoting equality

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) has published a **leaflet** developed by The Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post-School Education. The leaflet identifies twelve steps to tackling discrimination and promoting equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender staff and students in post-school education. These include:

- specific policy, procedure and action against homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and harassment;
- tangible action to increase the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives in education;
- a senior manager to lead on developing sexual orientation and gender identity equality;
- incorporation in policies and procedures of relevant agreements on sexual orientation and gender identity equality, such as that between the education unions and the Association of Colleges;

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- funding and development of strand specific equality action groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender support groups for staff and learners and other forms of organisation and support; and
- incorporation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learner issues into institutional improvement programmes.

## Voluntary and Community Sector

7<sup>th</sup> December – *Modernising Commissioning Green Paper* published

Minister for civil society Nick Hurd has published a Green Paper *Modernising Commissioning* which asks for views on how the Government can create a level playing field for charities, voluntary groups and social enterprises bidding for public service contracts.

The Green Paper seeks views on four key questions and outlines the government's current plans for discussion including:

- In which public service areas could government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?
  - Introducing payment by results – so payment is linked to outcomes not inputs; and
  - Setting proportions of specific services that should be delivered by independent organisations;
- How could government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?
  - streamlining procurement processes;
  - Launching a contract finder service, a free facility for small organisations to find procurement and sub-contracting opportunities all in one place.
- How could commissioners use assessments of full social, environmental and economic value to inform their commissioning decisions?
  - Encouraging understanding of social and environmental priorities of local people to be considered in the commissioning process; and
  - Support the 'Social enterprise and Social Value' Bill<sup>7</sup> which would require the recognition of 'full value' as part of mainstream commissioning practice.

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<sup>7</sup> The bill places a duty on the Secretary of State to publish a 'national social enterprise strategy' to encourage engagement in social enterprise; amends Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 so that local authorities (LAs) are required to include in their sustainable community strategy proposals for promoting engagement with social enterprise in their area. LAs must also include a statement of the measures suggested to enable social enterprise to participate in implementing these proposals; and requires local authorities, when entering into public procurement contracts, to give greater consideration to economic, social or environmental wellbeing during the pre-procurement stage. The House of Commons voted for the Bill to be sent to a Public Bill Committee that will scrutinise the Bill clause by clause. Details TBA.  
<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/publicservicessocialenterpriseandsocialvalue.html>

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- How could civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?
  - Develop a new package of support to enable local civil society organisations and state partners strengthen working relationships;

The Green Paper follows the commitment in the **Coalition Agreement** to develop new opportunities for civil society organisations in public service delivery.

The consultation will close on 5 January 2011 and the results will feed into a Public Service Reform White Paper to be published shortly afterwards.

## 14<sup>th</sup> December – Government and voluntary sector agree new Compact

Government and Compact Voice, the organisation which represents civil society organisations on the Compact, have published a **Renewed Compact** – the agreement which governs relations between the government and civil society organisations in England.

This renewed Compact is an agreement between the coalition government, and their associated non-departmental public bodies, arms length bodies and executive agencies, and civil society organisations (CSOs) in England. The agreement aims to ensure that the Government and CSOs work effectively in partnership *‘to achieve common goals and outcomes for the benefit of communities and citizens in England’*. Undertakings include:

- government will respect and uphold the independence of CSOs to deliver their mission, including their right to campaign, regardless of any relationship, financial or otherwise, which may exist;
- government will Ensure greater transparency by making data and information more accessible, helping CSOs to challenge existing provision of services, access new markets and hold government to account;
- CSOs will When campaigning or advocating, ensure that robust evidence is provided, including information about the source and range of people and communities represented; and
- CSOs will advise the government on the social, environmental or economic impact of funding changes, and on ways to minimise their effects on people in vulnerable situations.

## New Faces and Awards

### 16<sup>th</sup> December – Andrew Witty appointed as BIS Lead Non-Executive Board Member

Business secretary Vince Cable has announced the appointment of Andrew Witty as the lead non-executive<sup>8</sup> board member at the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Andrew Witty, the chief executive of GlaxoSmithKline, will take up his position on the new Departmental Board from 1

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<sup>8</sup> Non-Executive Board Members are experts from outside Government who assist in the delivery of policy using relevant experience from business. The new Board will be *‘a forum where political and official leadership is brought together to drive up performance’*.

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January 2011. The Board will form the collective strategic and operational leadership of the Department and will focus on performance and delivery.

## 9<sup>th</sup> December – Teachers and trainers receive awards at the House of Commons

More than 100 members of the Institute for Learning (IfL) gathered at the House of Commons to receive their Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) or Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS) awards. The **ceremony** was hosted by Sajid Javid, member of parliament for Bromsgrove and parliamentary private secretary to the FE and skills minister, John Hayes MP, who gave the keynote address.

Toni Fazaeli, chief executive of IfL, said *'our congratulations go to all those who have attained QTLS or ATLS status through the rigorous process of Professional Formation, over the last few months more than one thousand teachers and trainers from the diverse further education and skills sector.*

John Hayes said *'the status of teachers in post-compulsory education should reflect their considerable impact on individuals, society and the economy, but the importance of their role has not always been fully acknowledged. By increasing the number of teachers and trainers gaining full professional status, the Institute for Learning is starting to rectify this*

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## Contact the LSIS policy team

This policy update has been prepared by Angela Narthey, policy research officer, LSIS. Your comments are welcome – please contact Angela by email on [angela.nartey@LSIS.org.uk](mailto:angela.nartey@LSIS.org.uk).

### **Caroline Mager, Executive Director, Policy, Research and Communications**

[caroline.mager@LSIS.org.uk](mailto:caroline.mager@LSIS.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7929 8733

### **Jenny Williams, Head of Policy**

[Jenny.Williams@LSIS.org.uk](mailto:Jenny.Williams@LSIS.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7929 8713

### **Angela Narthey, Policy Research Officer**

[Angela.Nartey@LSIS.org.uk](mailto:Angela.Nartey@LSIS.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7929 8734

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