

Policy Update



10th March – 31st March 2011

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Further Education and Skills

24th March – Geoff Russell speaks on freedoms, funding and accountability

Geoff Russell, Skills Funding Agency chief executive, has delivered a **speech** on the critical role for governors in the further education and skills sector. Geoff Russell said that with the transition from local democratic accountability, the challenge for governance is greater as a key responsibility for governors will be to set the strategy. Geoff Russell said that he believes that FE can *'lead the way'* in public service reform to the coalition government's vision of a customer focused, locally accountable system whose strength is that it consists of competitive public and private businesses with a social mission. He also said that:

- there will still be a high level framework that sets some of the parameters for governors' decisions. *'The government will continue to make decisions about the types of learning that it thinks needs public subsidy and the degree of subsidy that can be afforded... You will choose from the menu of publicly subsidised learning what you want to deliver and which customers you wish to serve'*;
- the funding system will *'inextricably'* incentivise delivery of achievement and employment outcomes;
- the fiscal environment over the spending review period will mean that in the absence of innovative changes in operating models, the SFA estimates that the number of that the number of colleges in outstanding financial health will decrease and the number in financial trouble will increase;
- institutions in financial trouble will *'encourage'* an SFA led *'rapid change of management and/or governance – and possibly business model - or else we will withdraw funding'*;
- governing strategies for the next four years should include collaborating with other colleges and other education institutions to reduce costs, improve revenues and enhance quality for your learners across organisations; and
- the SFA will *'monitor and support – not direct'* the critical measures of the quality of delivery, the financial health and the efficiency of the business *'to ensure that the government's stewardship duty is fulfilled'*.

Geoff Russell said *'The government is providing your freedom and the Agency is relinquishing all of the formal levers its holds. So you are in the driving seat. It is now for you... to ensure that the challenges we*

face are a catalyst for transformation to serve learners even better. I am completely confident that you will do just that'.

31st March – Statistical First Release: post-16 education & skills

The **Statistical First Release** includes final data for the 2009/10 academic year, and provisional data for the first six months of the 2010/11 academic year. It shows key statistics on the level of highest qualification held by adults in England from 2001 to 2009, calculated from Labour Force Survey (LFS) data. These include attainment rates for specific priority groups of adult learners in the population that are of key interest within BIS and the Skills Funding Agency. Key statistics include:

- Some 4,635,500 learners participated in some form of government-funded Further Education in the 2009/10 academic year. This is a decrease in learner participation of 4.2 per cent compared to 2008/09. The main reduction has been in the number of learners participating on Below Level 2 and non-Full Level 2 courses;
- 3,377,400 learners achieved a government-funded Further Education qualification in the 2009/10 academic year. This is an increase of 0.5 per cent compared to 2008/09;
- Of the 4,635,500 learners participating in further education in 2009/10:
 - 54.9% were female, 45.1% were male;
 - 12.1% of learners declared a Learning Difficulty, Disability or health problem;
 - 17.5% of learners were from a Black or Minority Ethnic background (including Mixed, Asian, Black and Chinese or Other Ethnic Group learners);
 - 23.6% of learners were aged under 19; 76.4% were aged 19 or older.

30th March – Further education boosts economy by £75 billion

BIS has **published** the results of a study which examined the economic value generated by government funded post-19 qualifications, including Apprenticeships, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) undertaken in college and workplace settings and Basic Skills Qualifications. The estimates were calculated using data from the cohort of learners that started qualifications in 2008/09.

The approach to measuring the economic value of the sector was to estimate the Net Present Value (NPV) associated with undertaking different qualifications and aggregating them up to the sector as a whole. The NPV is calculated by estimating the discounted benefits from achieving a qualification over the working life of the learner, and subtracting the costs associated with undertaking the qualification.

Key findings include:

- FE participants that started a qualification in 2008/09 will generate an additional £75bn for the economy over their working lives, over and above what they would have contributed if they had not achieved these qualifications;
- the benefits include increased wages and improved employment prospects for individuals, as well as benefits to employers stemming from increased productivity; and
- an apprenticeship is found to add the most value on average, compared to other learning streams. The return on government investment for apprenticeships works out at around £40 for each £1 of government funding, when taken as an individual's first qualification at that level.

29th March – Skills Conditionality: government response to the consultation

Following the government's decision to roll out skills conditionality, a consultation document was published in December 2010. The consultation, conducted jointly by DWP and BIS, sought 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 government has published its **response** to the consultation. The main themes from respondents include:

- support for the policy objective of improving claimants' attendance at training provision and careers guidance sessions;
- recognition of the potential for skills conditionality to help colleges and training and Next Step providers to improve attendance on provision, particularly among disengaged learners;
- a number of risks were also identified, including both financial and reputational risks for colleges and training providers if mandatory referrals result in fewer learning achievements. Concerns were also raised around the potential additional administrative burden on colleges and training providers.

The government response includes the following:

- to support effective partnership working, it will be important to ensure, through early and constructive local dialogue, that Jobcentre Plus and learning providers share common assumptions about anticipated patterns of supply and demand for training;
- Work is under way to clarify the parameters for sharing feedback on claimants' attendance and participation; and
- clarity will be needed on all sides about the role, responsibilities and expectations on the claimant, the skills provider, Next Step and Jobcentre Plus for the successful implementation of skills conditionality.
- JSA sanctions will not affect Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit

Employment minister, Chris Grayling **said** *'We want to give people every opportunity to move closer to employment, but those who refuse the offer of help, fail to attend, or don't finish their course could face sanctions. This is part of our new contract with jobseekers – we will give you the right help and support to get you into work and off benefits, but we expect you to play your part'*.

29th March – SFA publishes briefing note on progression funding

The Skills Funding Agency has published a **briefing paper** on progression. The paper also sets out the parameters for funding for those with an entitlement to a Level 2 qualification who need help to make the step up from basic skills. Detail includes:

- the Skills Investment Strategy set out the reform of statutory entitlements from the 2012/13 academic year. This included full funding for those with an entitlement to a Level 2 qualification who need help to make the step up from basic skills. This funding will now be provided from the 2011/12 academic year;
- for 2011/12 Entry or Level 1 aims will be fully funded where a learner has an entitlement to a Level 2 qualification, in that they must have a highest prior attainment of Level 1 or below, but need a step up from basic skills in order to progress to Level 2; and

- In 2011/12, this entitlement will be available to all ages. From 2012/13, this entitlement will be available to 19-23 year old learners only. Those learners aged 24 and over who have taken up the entitlement will continue to have full funding in 2012/13 only for those learning aims started in 2011/12.

24th March – SFA publishes Q&A note on National Skills Academies and the Growth and Innovation Fund

The Skills Funding Agency has published a list of **questions and answers** relating to the National Skills Academies strand of activity within the Growth and Innovation Fund. The document will be updated regularly with the questions and answers which are raised and answered via the National Skills Academies email: nationalskillsacademies@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk. The document responds to questions including: what are the current sector definitions; is it possible to have more than one National Skills Academy within a Sector Skills Council 'footprint'; and who should be involved in the development of proposals for a National Skills Academy?

31st March – SFA publishes analysis of college finance records for 2009/10 and QCF qualifications for public funding

The Skills Funding Agency has published an **electronic summary** of key data from college annual financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2010.

The SFA has also **published** a list which identifies the qualifications within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) that have so far been confirmed as appropriate for public funding in Adult Learner Responsive and Train to Gain for 2010/11.

17th March – Skills Commission Inquiry 2011: technician and higher level skills

The Skills Commission is undertaking an **inquiry** examining provision for technician and higher level skills. The inquiry is being chaired by Professor Alison Halstead, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Aston University, and is being supported by the Gatsby Foundation, Pearson and the Tec Trust Fund. The Commission will be holding a series of evidence sessions and taking written evidence submissions. The Commission will consider the following questions:

- what do employers need from technician and higher level skills training?
- how should technician and higher level skills training be funded?
- how do we ensure there are clear progression pathways through technician and higher level skills training?

The closing date for submissions is 31 May 2011.

10th March – National Training Awards

The National Training Awards (NTAs) recognise and celebrate Investors in People accredited organisations that have delivered '*outstanding organisational benefits*' by directly linking the training needs of their people to the business needs of their organisation. For further information can be obtained from the National Training Awards **Website**. The deadline for all entries is 5 May 2011.

Economy, Enterprise and Employment

23rd March – Budget 2011 announced

The chancellor, George Osborne, has presented the **2011 Budget**. This Budget builds on action announced in the **Spending Review 2010** and the **June Budget 2010** to *'rebalance the economy from unsustainable public spending towards exports and investment'*. It is anticipated that this budget will support the UK's long-term economic potential and help to create new jobs. The government's economic policy objective is to achieve *'strong, sustainable and balanced growth that is more evenly shared across the country and between industries'*. There were a number of key announcements of relevance to the further education and skills sector, including that government will:

- fund 50,000 additional apprenticeship places over the next four years to create 40,000 new apprenticeship places targeted on young people not in employment, education or training and to provide grant funding to stimulate the development of 10,000 new Higher Level Apprenticeship places in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).;
- support the development of a new degree-equivalent Higher Level Apprenticeship which will include incorporating engineering status and professional recognition for successful apprentices when they graduate;
- provide £150 million of new capital funding to support improved technical and vocational education, including an expansion of the University Technical Colleges programme, to establish at least 24 new colleges by 2014;
- fund an additional 80,000 work experience places for young people, ensuring up to 100,000 places will be available over the next two years;
- provide £100 million of new capital funding in 2011-12 for science and innovation campuses;
- launch the first Technology and Innovation Centre in high value manufacturing;
- invest £100 million in science capital development;
- strengthen its strategy for promoting STEM skills;
- begin the initial £3 billion capitalisation of the Green Investment Bank that will start operation in 2012-13, a year earlier than previously anticipated;
- establish 21 new Enterprise Zones, with the location of ten new urban Enterprise Zones within the following Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas: Birmingham and Solihull; Leeds City Region; Sheffield City Region; Liverpool City Region; Greater Manchester; West of England; Tees Valley; North Eastern; the Black Country; and Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. In addition, London will have an Enterprise Zone and be able to choose its site. The government will launch a competitive process for interested LEPs to establish ten more Enterprise Zones;
- allow charities to claim new Gift Aid on up to £5,000 of small donations per year;

- continue Community Investment Tax Relief and consult on improvements: supporting community development financing institutions that lend to small businesses and start-ups who are not able to access bank loans, particularly in disadvantaged groups and regions;
- exempt micro and start-up business from new domestic regulation for three years and extend the current small business rate relief holiday for one year;
- reform the state pension system for future pensioners so that it provides contributory, flat-rate support above the level of the means tested Guarantee Credit; and
- maintain all income tax rates for 2011-12 at their 2010-11 levels. As announced at the June Budget 2010, the income tax personal allowance for those aged under 65 will increase by £1,000 in cash terms to £7,475 in 2011-12. There will also be a £2,400 cash decrease in the basic rate limit, taking it to £35,000. This means that the income tax higher rate threshold, which equals the sum of the personal allowance and basic rate limit, will be £42,475.

The government published **The Plan for Growth**, alongside the Budget, a document which sets out a package of measures to support private sector investment, enterprise and innovation. It is based around four overarching ambitions for the British economy. To:

- create the most competitive tax system in the G20;
- make the UK one of the best places in Europe to start, finance and grow a business;
- encourage investment and exports as a route to a more balanced economy; and
- create a more educated workforce that is the most flexible in Europe.

16th March – Latest ILO figures show an increase in unemployment

New figures **published** by the Office for National Statistics show that unemployment (ILO measure) has risen by 27,000 on the quarter to 2.5 million. However, the overall picture continues to be mixed with the number of people in employment rising by 32,000, driven entirely by the growth of full time jobs in the private sector. The figures also show a fall in the number claiming Jobseeker's Allowance this month, while the total number claiming out-of-work benefits has fallen by around a quarter of a million over the last year.

The number of young people aged 16 to 24 who are classed as ILO unemployed rose by 30,000 over the quarter to 974,000. However, of the 30,000 increase, 13,000 are students in full time education and looking for some part time work to fit around their studies. Of the 974,000 ILO unemployed, there are 285,000 students – over a quarter of the total - in full time education looking for some part time work to fit out around their studies.

To enable young people to get valuable work experience government has changed the rules so that young people can do up to two months work experience and keep their benefits rather than the previous two weeks.

24th March – Enterprise Zone Prospectus launched

Budget 2011 announced that government would establish 21 new Enterprise Zones in Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England. The Department for Communities and Local Government has published a **prospectus** to provide more information to local enterprise partnerships, local authorities and partners about the government's Enterprise Zone programme.

Enterprise Zones will be geographically defined areas, agreed between the local enterprise partnership and government. There is no single size for an Enterprise Zone, but there are limits imposed by the levels of funding that government has been able to set aside to support the Zones. The government anticipates that most Enterprise Zones would be broadly 50-150 hectares, although this will depend on a range of factors, including the size of the area covered by the local enterprise partnership, the nature of the site, the size of business likely to be attracted, and the level of rates that would be foregone as a result. Four vanguard areas have been **announced**: Boots campus in Nottingham, Liverpool Waters, Manchester Airport and the Royal Docks in London.

The document includes further detail including the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships in Enterprise Zones and the timetable for the first and second wave of enterprise zones. All Enterprise Zones will benefit from:

- a business rate discount worth up to £275,000 per business over a five year period;
- all business rates growth within the zone for a period of at least 25 years will be retained by the local area, to support the Partnership's economic priorities and ensure that Enterprise Zone growth is reinvested locally;
- government help to develop simplified planning approaches for the zone using, for example, existing Local Development Order powers; and
- government support to ensure that broadband is rolled out throughout the zone.

31st March – Heart of South West joins local enterprise partnership network

A **new local enterprise partnership** for part of the South West of England has been approved by minister for business, Mark Prisk, and decentralisation minister, Greg Clark. The Heart of the South West local enterprise partnership covers Devon, Plymouth, Exeter, Torbay and Somerset. It joins the 31 partnerships announced since the government's Local Growth White Paper was published in October last year. The Heart of the South West partnership proposal was agreed after separate bids from Devon and Somerset were not approved by ministers.

Taken together, the 32 partnerships represent:

- 1.8m or 90% of all businesses (active enterprises) in England;
- 21m employees (employee jobs figures) or 91% of all employees in England; and
- a population of 47m or 90% of England's population.

18th March – Reduced regulation for businesses

In a speech to the Federation of Small Businesses in Liverpool Business Secretary, Mark Prisk revealed Vince Cable's **plans** for a range of measures to be included in the Growth Review that will allow businesses to grow, including:

- a public audit of almost 22,000 statutory instruments that are currently on the statute book;
- a moratorium to exempt businesses with fewer than ten employees and genuine start ups from new domestic regulation for three years;
- lightening the audit requirements of smaller firms. It is anticipated that by choosing to match the minimum required by EU directives, more small companies can be exempt from the requirement for an audit.

- a withdrawal of the proposed extension of the right to request flexible working to parents of 17 year olds; and
- a *'comprehensive'* review of employment law.

For the public audit, the legislation will be grouped into themes on a dedicated website and businesses will be asked to tell the government what they think of those regulations and how to improve the system. The intention will be that any *'overly burdensome or unnecessary'* regulations are removed unless departments can prove there is a good reason for them. The moratorium will be preceded by engagement with businesses and other groups over the coming weeks to work to ensure that the introduction of these rules does not lead to any unintended consequences for business.

Mark Prisk said *'when the man from Whitehall is telling Mr Whippy how to sing, something has surely gone wrong'*.

16th March - A competition regime for growth: a consultation on options for reform

BIS has launched a **consultation** which seeks views on proposals to develop options for strengthening the competition regime and creating a single competition and markets authority (CMA). It aims to *'improve the robustness of decisions, support competition authorities in taking forward high impact cases, and improve speed and predictability for business'*.

Proposals for consultation include:

- *improving the robustness of decisions and strengthening the regime*; including:
 - considering ways to improve the voluntary merger notification scheme and the alternative of the mandatory pre-notification of mergers;
 - ways to strengthen the operation of concurrent competition powers, including joint working between the CMA and sector regulators on competition cases;
 - reforming the dishonesty requirement of the criminal cartel offence to make it easier to secure convictions in serious cases; and
 - achieving the right governance and decision-making structures for the CMA.
- *supporting the competition authority in taking forward high impact cases*; including:
 - enabling the CMA to carry out investigations into similar practices across different markets; and
 - strengthening the voice of small business by extending the super-complaint powers to SME bodies.
- *improving the speed and predictability for business*; including:
 - introducing more (and tighter) statutory deadlines in merger and market cases, coupled with appropriate information powers;
 - introducing an exemption for small businesses from merger control; and
 - streamlining the handling of antitrust cases.

28th March – Government announces measures to support enterprise and small business

The government has announced a package of measures to support enterprise and small business. These announcements come alongside the launch of **Start-Up Britain**, the response from the private sector to the government's call for an 'enterprise-led' recovery. It is anticipated that the new measures will give young people the opportunity to gain real business experience, inspiring the next generation to seriously think about starting their own company. The programme consists of:

- the creation of **enterprise societies** in every university and most further education colleges. Enterprise societies in universities and colleges will provide students with the skills and support to develop and manage a business. The government will aim to deliver enterprise societies into all 89 universities in England and at least 160 Further Education Colleges;
- support for every school to run its own business through the **Enterprise Champions Programme**. Schools will be given access to online resource materials and tools which will give practical advice for teachers. The Government will help schools engage local enterprise champions to support school businesses and extend learning into the commercial environment. BIS will be working with the Education and Employers Taskforce to have all elements of the programme up and running by the end of this year;
- a roll-out of **Tenner Tycoon** a programme which challenges young people to make as much profit and social impact as possible through enterprising activities over one month with a ten pound loan. Currently, 25,000 young people take part in the Tenner Tycoon competition each year. The Government will work with the Peter Jones Foundation to help Tenner Tycoon reach at least 250,000 young people by 2014;
- a new online tool, the **Innovation Launch Pad**, enabling small businesses to pitch their ideas on how they could do the business of government more cheaply or more efficiently; and
- the launch of **Brighton Fuse**, an initiative to expand the creative, digital and IT sector in Brighton and Hove and provide business opportunities for graduates.

14th March – Shortage jobs list halved

The government has **announced** that the number of potential posts open to skilled migrant workers will be reduced by around 270,000. Eight occupations have been removed from the shortage occupation list meaning that the number of jobs available to migrants will reduce from 500,000 to around 230,000. The shortage list covers occupations which are hard to fill with UK or EU workers.

The government is also removing 71 professions from the list of 192 approved jobs available under the **skilled job route of the points-based system**. The remaining jobs will need to be advertised for four weeks and be offered to resident workers before they can be offered to non-EU workers. This is part of new rules to be introduced in April which say that anyone wishing to enter the UK under this skilled route must be employed in a graduate level job.

The government has now commissioned the Migration Advisory College (MAC) to **review** shortages across the entire labour market to see if the list can be cut further. The MAC invites evidence to support its consideration of this question. The deadline for responses is 10 June 2011.

29th March – Beliefs About Work: an attitudinal segmentation of out-of-work people in Great Britain

DWP has **published** a report which presents a segmentation model developed to '*enable DWP to understand and communicate with key customer groups better in order to support Departmental strategies and objectives*'. The research audience consisted of: working-age benefit claimants; unemployed non-claimants looking for work; out-of-work non-claimants not looking for work but living in a low income household; and working people who report that they are on notice of redundancy.

The research data was used to develop a segmentation model, dividing the out-of-work population into groups based on their attitudes and behaviour in relation to work and job-seeking, and underpinned by behaviour change principles. The segmentation model consists of eight groups, as follows, which are described in detail within the report:

- determined seekers: confident and driven, aiming to get back to work as quickly as possible - whatever it takes;
- thwarted seekers: confidence, motivation and sense of control are in decline as they worry about a future without work;
- balanced seekers: believe that work is a key part of a balanced life but job search is less urgent as they make the most of the benefits of not working;
- status quo seekers: feel that to work or claim benefits is simply a choice individuals should be free to make. Will work if and when the 'right job' comes along;
- constrained by circumstance: feel trapped by personal circumstances that make 'normal' work seem impractical;
- defeated by circumstance: lack of belief in their capability means they have resigned themselves to not working;
- benefits are better: feel fully justified being on benefits and that life without the added complication of work has much to recommend it; and
- home focused: in putting family first, they feel that they have found an alternative and more satisfying purpose in life so do not feel 'out of work' – there is no void to fill.

14-19 and Schools

11th March – DfE launches review of qualifications to raise the standard of teaching

An independent **review** of the key skills that teachers need to improve students' performance has been launched. The review will be led by Sally Coates, Principal at Burlington Danes Academy in London. Other '*excellent*' headteachers, teachers and education experts will sit on the review. They will recommend to government a '*simple and clear*' set of key skills that teachers must meet. They will also review the GTCE Code of Conduct and consider how the standards fit with the new Ofsted inspection criteria.

The Review will consider the Framework of Professional Standards for Teachers developed by the Training and Development Agency for Schools and the General Teaching Council for England's Code of Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers. The aim of the Review is to establish a set of standards that:

- are unequivocal, clear and easy to understand;
- provide a tool to assess teachers' performance and steer professional development;
- are designed to inspire confidence in the profession;
- focus primarily on the key elements of excellent teaching (including approaches to early reading and early mathematics), how to address poor behaviour and how to support children with additional needs, including special educational needs; and
- encompass standards of ethics and behaviour, both within and outside the school, including, for example, having tolerance and respect for the rights and views of others and not undermining UK democratic values.

28th March – YPLA Grant Letter and Revised Remit Letter

Education secretary Michael Gove has written to YPLA chair, Les Walton, with a **grant letter** and has outlined the agency's **revised remit** for 2011/12. This includes updating the YPLA's contribution to the Academies programme and outlining its role in the coalition government's arms length body (ALB) reform programme. 2011/12 will be a year of transition for the YPLA as it becomes an effective base for the Education Funding Agency.

Detail of the YPLA's remit include to:

- continue to monitor the levels of educational attainment in open Academies and to provide support and challenge to these schools in order to raise standards until July 2011;
- work in close co-operation over the coming year with Partnership for Schools (PfS) in the administration of capital funding for Academies and Free Schools;
- continue to administer the post-16 capital programmes;
- continue to work innovatively with local authorities and other partners to improve access for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities whilst reducing costs;
- work in partnership with local authorities to support them to meet their duties in respect of the education of young people detained in custody and with the Ministry of Justice as they develop new contracting arrangements for young offender education; and
- Work with the Skills Funding Agency to streamline YPLA relationships with colleges and other FE providers.

28th March – Consultation on financial support for 16 to 19 year olds in education or training

The Department for Education has launched a **consultation** which seeks the views of young people, parents, learning providers and other stakeholders on the government's proposed package of financial support for 16-19 year olds in education or training in England, including the proposed transitional arrangements for 16 to 19 year olds currently receiving Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The proposals include:

- from September 2011, the introduction of a new 16-19 Bursary Fund, worth £180m per academic year. This Fund will be distributed to schools, colleges and work-based training providers to provide financial support to young people aged 16-19 participating in full-time education or training.

- an expectation that schools, colleges and work-based training providers will award bursaries of at least £1,200 a year to young people in the following vulnerable groups:
 - young people aged 16 and 17 in care
 - care leavers aged 16, 17 and 18
 - young people aged 16, 17 and 18 who are in receipt of income support, for example: young people who are living independently of their parents; those whose parents have died; young people with severe disabilities; and teenage parents.
- an anticipation that beyond the above, schools, colleges and training providers will be able to use the 16-19 Bursary Fund in ways that best fit the needs and circumstances of their students, for example, to provide help with meals, transport, books or other course-related costs.

The closing date for responses is 20 May 2011.

29th March – Further detail on the Discretionary Support Fund

The new £180 million bursary scheme to *'help the most vulnerable 16-19 years olds continue in full-time education'* will be made up of two parts – a guaranteed payment to a small group of the most vulnerable, and a discretionary fund for schools and colleges to distribute:

The current **discretionary fund** is £26 million. In future the fund will be worth £180 million. DfE estimates that after the guaranteed bursaries have been paid to the most vulnerable 12,000, colleges will still have £165M for the discretionary fund.

There will also be additional transitional arrangements to help those who are part-way through their studies and are currently receiving the EMA. The transitional arrangements consist of two parts:

- all students who first successfully applied for EMA in 2009/10 will continue to receive payments at the same level until the end of the 2011/12 academic year.
- young people now in their first year of post-16 study who were in receipt of the maximum weekly EMA payment of £30 will be eligible for £20 for each week they are in education or training until the end of the 2011/12 academic year.

23rd March – NAO report: Getting value for money from the education of 16- to 18-year-olds

The National Audit Office has **published** a report which examines whether DfE is getting value for money from its funding of education for 16-18 year olds. The analysis focuses on the three main types of provider: general further education colleges; sixth-form colleges; and school sixth forms that between them deliver over 90 per cent of provision. Key findings include:

- across most of the main measures of learner achievement, performance has improved nationally over the last four years. There are, however, variations by provider type and by size of provider. For example, learners in larger providers achieve, on average, better academic progress and results;
- DfE gains assurance on quality of education from Ofsted and on participation and achievement through the Young People's Learning Agency. However, it does not systematically review the whole system, including how local authorities fulfil their responsibility for securing adequate provision and developing

the market, and how providers are contributing to some wider outcomes such as preparing young people for employment.

Recommendations include:

- DfE should disseminate information on how providers can collaborate through federations or other cost-effective means to improve choice of courses to learners while achieving economies of scale; and
- DfE should establish an appropriate framework to ensure that young people receive independent, impartial information, advice and guidance from schools about the options available to them at age 16.

31st March - Evaluation of the implementation and impact of diplomas

DfE has **published** a report which presents the findings from the second in a series of three surveys investigating higher education institutions' (HEIs) views and experiences of the Diplomas for 14-19 year olds, first introduced in schools in September 2008 by the previous Labour government. Key findings include:

- the 2009/10 survey suggests that the readiness of HEIs to become involved in Diploma development had grown since the previous year.
- when asked about involvement in delivery, it was clear that most HEIs had a narrow view of what 'delivery' might involve. In their responses, they focused almost exclusively on consideration of class-based teaching by their staff of elements of the Diploma.
- UCAS had received a number of queries from HEIs, schools and colleges in relation to the structure of Diplomas and how the final grade/tariff score was to be reached.
- the majority of institutions specifying what the Additional and/or Specialist Learning component of the Diploma should comprise required an A level in a subject related to the applicant's Diploma. As this suggests that Specialist Learning is preferred to Additional Learning at Level 3 by some HEIs, it is important to alert staff who deliver information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges of this finding, in order to make sure that they discuss with learners how choosing Additional Learning, instead of Specialist Learning, might constrain their choice of HEI and/or undergraduate course later.

31st March – Better value for money in schools

The Audit Commission has published four briefings which have been designed to help school heads, governing bodies and councils control costs without compromising educational attainment. England's maintained schools spent £35 billion in 2009/10. School staff account for over three-quarters of this total and form one of the country's largest public sector workforces. These briefings, under the heading **Better Value for Money in Schools**, examine patterns in spending in maintained schools in England. The papers explore four areas where it is deemed that schools have scope to improve efficiency:

- the deployment of classroom staff, including class sizes and allocation of teachers and teaching assistants;
- the breadth and focus of schools' curriculum offer;
- approaches to covering for staff absence, including supply teachers; and
- the size, cost and composition of the wider (non-teaching) school workforce.

There is also a summary paper, *An overview of school workforce spending*, which is targeted at chairs of governing bodies and lead members on children's services.

29th March – How to apply to open a Free School

DfE has **published** a **how to apply** form and **financial plan template** for mainstream and 16-19 Free Schools. The application system for those groups that wish to open Free Schools from September 2012 will have the following features:

- all groups will provide information, as set out in the 'how to apply' form, to a set deadline, rather than submitting an initial proposal at a time of their own choosing. This will require detailed and robust responses to questions about things like parental demand, the type of education the school will provide, its ethos and the capacity and capability of the groups themselves;
- applications should be submitted to the Department for Education between 16 May 2011 and 1 June 2011;
- details on the submission process will be made available by Monday 9 May 2011;
- groups that meet the minimum requirements will be judged against each other and scored on the strength of their proposals;
- the *'best'* applicants will be invited to an interview in August 2011;
- shortlisted applicants will be called for an interview to discuss aspects of their proposal. Interview panels will consist of Department for Education officials, financial experts, education advisers, headteachers and organisations *'with a track record of setting up and running schools'*; and
- applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application by the end of September 2011.

13th March – Ofsted report on history education in schools

Ofsted has **published** a report which evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of history in primary and secondary schools based on evidence from inspections of history between April 2007 and March 2010 in 83 primary schools and 83 secondary schools. The report evaluates standards and achievement in history, and the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, curriculum provision and the quality of leadership and management in the schools visited. Recommendations include:

- local authorities should ensure that, as a result of the National Curriculum Review, pupils in primary schools experience history as a coherent subject which develops their knowledge, thinking and understanding, especially their chronological understanding, and that all students in secondary schools benefit from a significant amount of history to at least the age of 14;
- secondary schools should ensure that pupils have a greater understanding of the history of the interrelationships of the different countries which comprise the British Isles;
- secondary schools should ensure that technology is exploited to best effect in the teaching and learning of history; and
- secondary schools should ensure that sixth form history students read widely in preparation for the demands of higher education.

30th March – Ofsted launches consultation on inspection of residential provision in boarding and residential special schools

Ofsted has launched a **consultation** on its proposals for inspecting residential provision in boarding and residential special schools. The changes reflect new national minimum standards being introduced by the government in September 2011. Ofsted's aim is to use this opportunity to revise and strengthen the inspection system.

The consultation seeks the views of everyone with an interest in boarding and residential special schools. The proposed changes are intended to benefit schools, teachers and proprietors by providing them with better information on how inspectors make their judgements. They are intended to promote improvement with clearer reports for parents, carers and placing authorities, and help to ensure a better residential experience for children.

The closing date for the consultation is 25 May 2011.

25th March – Ofsted evaluation of design and technology in the curriculum

Ofsted has produced a **report** evaluating the provision of design and technology (D&T) in the curriculum. The report found that achievement and provision in D&T were good in about two thirds of the primary schools and just under half of the secondary schools, particularly where up-to-date technologies were used and explained accurately to pupils. However, a lack of subject-specific training for teachers undermined efforts to develop pupils' knowledge and skills, particularly in using electronics, developing control systems and using computers to aid designing and making. The report also addresses the challenges presented to schools in modernising the D&T curriculum so that it keeps pace with global technological developments. Key recommendations include:

- DfE should ensure that all pupils have a minimum entitlement to learn about innovative new materials, electronics, and systems and control, and combine their scientific and technical understanding to design and make practical products and systems; and
- secondary schools should ensure that teachers have access to high-quality subject professional development to enable them to teach students about modern and smart materials, electronics, and systems and control, make effective use of computer aided design and manufacture resources, and stay up to date with developments in research and innovation.

25th March – QCDA withdraws Diploma validator from service

The Diploma validator tool has been **withdrawn** from service and is no longer available for schools and colleges to use to create and validate programmes of study for Diploma students. This online tool has been withdrawn in line with QCDA's remit from the Department for Education. Schools and colleges should now create, validate and assign planned programmes of study to Diploma students using the PPOS feature in the Diploma aggregation service (DAS).

More information on planned programme of study (PPOS), the DAS e-learning tool, DAS user guide for centres and DAS Quick, is available on the **DAS information for centres page**.

10th March – Applications invited for new funding to run 2012 National Citizen Service pilots

The government has opened the application process for organisations that want to help run the second set of National Citizen Service pilots in summer 2012. Bids are invited from organisations or groups of

organisations that are able to deliver the full National Citizen Service programme set out in the specification document. Bid documents and further information about the bidding process can be found on the **Department for Education website**.

National Citizen Service is a flagship policy *'at the heart of the coalition government's vision for building a Big Society'*. It has been designed to bring together 16 year olds from different backgrounds in a summer programme of challenge, service and learning, enabling them to develop the confidence, skills and attitudes they need to become more engaged with their communities and to become active and responsible citizens.

The first pilots of the 7-8 week programme will be held this summer with eleven thousand 16 year olds. The 2012 pilot scheme will offer 30,000 places and will inform decisions on national roll out.

Higher Education

17th March – £6.5 billion announced for universities and colleges in England

HEFCE will distribute £6,507 million to 130 universities and higher education colleges, and 124 directly funded further education colleges, for the academic year 2011-12. The overall **grant**, including capital, for the 2011/12 academic year of £6,507 million represents an underlying reduction in cash terms, compared to the previously planned total for 2010/11, of £685 million (-9.5 per cent). In addition, short-term funding of £255 million is ending for some special funding programmes and the University Modernisation Fund (UMF), which was for 2010-11 only. These bring the total reduction to £940 million (-12.6 per cent)

The main elements of the grant are: £4,339 million for teaching; £1,558 million for research; £150 million for knowledge exchange; £30 million for moderation funding to smooth significant year-on-year reductions; £223 million for earmarked capital grants; and £207 million for special funding.

Key points for the allocation of this funding include:

- prioritisation to support a smooth transition in 2011/12 to the new funding regime in 2012/13 when more funding will be routed to institutions via the student loans system;
- widening participation and improving student retention have been prioritised by maintaining funding in cash terms for these elements of teaching funding;
- funding for research is being allocated more selectively by prioritising internationally excellent and world-leading research; and
- knowledge exchange funding is being maintained in cash terms, and incentives to increase interaction with business are being increased by concentrating funding on the most effective performers.

31st March – David Willetts speaks on HE in FE

David Willetts has delivered a speech on higher education in further education at an Association of Colleges Conference. The minister said:

- that the primary objective of the funding reforms and the forthcoming Higher Education White Paper is to create the conditions for a *'dynamic, responsive higher education system, with fewer barriers for new institutions who want to offer HE courses'*. This includes FE colleges that do not currently receive direct funding from HEFCE;
- government is not going to confer favours on one part of the sector at the expense of another. *'But colleges will benefit if students, using much better comparative information on courses and employment*

prospects, vote with their feet – just like the more than 100,000 students currently taking HE courses at FE colleges.’ 123 colleges receive direct funding from HEFCE to deliver HE. More than 170 offer franchised courses. At present, though, 60 FE colleges account for half of all HE in FE provision.

- college principals have expressed fears that some universities may revise their validation charges and franchising arrangements – thereby hindering the development of HE in FE over the next few years while the new system beds in. *‘Such deliberately anti-competitive behaviour is unacceptable. More than that, if FE colleges can offer good-quality degrees at a more competitive price than a validating university does at its home campus, then I’m all in favour... universities should not impede cost-effective provision of HE by colleges...It will be a backwards step if FE colleges are squeezed out of the market by universities seeking to claw back franchised places’.* In the White Paper, government will be looking at how FE colleges can be freed from these risks.
- One way forward is to increase the opportunities presented by external degrees. Government will allow non-teaching bodies to apply to offer external degrees – so opening up the market.
- In the meantime, the minister said that he would welcome immediate thoughts on what can be done to strengthen HE in FE.

31st March – Participation rates in higher education

BIS has **published** the latest provisional statistics on participation rates in higher education for academic years 2006/07 to 2009/10. The figures show the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) for 17-30 year old English domiciled first-time participants at UK Higher Education Institutions, English, Welsh and Scottish Further Education Colleges.¹ Key points include:

- the provisional HEIPR for 2009/10 was 47%, up from the final figure for 2008/09 of 46%;
- the provisional HEIPR for males for 2009/10 was 41%, up from the final figure for 2008/09 of 40%. For females, the provisional HEIPR for 2009/10 was 52%, up from the final figure for 2007/08 of 51%;
- the provisional figure for full-time students in 2009/10 was 40%, up from the final figure for 2008/09 of 39%. The provisional figure for part-time students was 6% in 2009/10, no change from the final figure for 2008/09; and
- the provisional figures for 2009/10 on the age specific initial participation rates for males and females show that participation rates for females were higher than those for males for all ages from 17 to 30.

25th March – Financial health of the higher education sector

HEFCE has **published** a report which provides an overview of the financial health of the higher education sector in England. The analysis covers the 2009-10 financial results and 2010-11 budgets, as submitted to HEFCE in early December 2010. Key points include:

- the overall financial results for the sector in 2009-10 show a stronger financial position than previous years. On a number of key indicators the financial results are the best on record. At the end of 2009-10

¹ Provisional figures for 2009/10 exclude students studying in Welsh Further Education Colleges. This is due to a delay in receiving data from the Welsh Assembly Government.

the sector had strong cash balances and healthy reserve levels, which will provide some cushion for the likely risks the sector now faces. There is also evidence that many institutions have taken the opportunity to restructure their cost bases ahead of the pressures on public funding.

- the projected performance in 2010-11 is sound overall, albeit not as strong as 2009-10. Cash levels are expected to remain strong, which is important as the sector enters a potentially difficult year in 2011-12. However, as already noted, the 2010-11 projections were made before further reductions to HEFCE funding were announced in January 2011.

21st March – Statement on foreign student visas

The home secretary, Theresa May, issued a **statement** on the new student visa process. Under the new proposals, government will:

- require all sponsors to be vetted by one of the approved inspectorates —either Ofsted and its devolved equivalents, the Quality Assurance Agency or the relevant independent schools inspectorate - and all must become Highly Trusted Sponsors;
- strengthen the evidence that students need to demonstrate that they have the financial means to fend for themselves, streamline the requirements for students from *'low risk countries'* and prioritise resources on *'high-risk students'* and *'toughen up'* the rules on English language competence;
- end permission to work during term time from all students other than those at university and publicly-funded further education colleges. Students at public sector FE colleges will be allowed to work for 10 hours per week and students at university for 20 hours per week;
- reduce the amount of work that can be done on work placement courses for non-university students from 50:50 as now, to two-thirds study, one third work;
- close the current Post Study Work route from April next year. In future, only those graduates who have an offer of a skilled graduate level job from an employer who is licensed by the UK Border Agency will be allowed to stay; and
- implement the measures in three stages, starting with new Rules which will be laid by the end of March.

31st March – QAA announces new institutional review: England and Northern Ireland

In September 2011 QAA will launch a new process for reviewing academic quality and standards in higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. The process is called **Institutional review** and replaces the current method, Institutional audit

The aim of Institutional review is to *'safeguard'* quality and standards in higher education in England and Northern Ireland; to help improve students' experience of higher education; and to allow QAA to look into public concerns about quality and standards in higher education. The new process is characterised by an intention to place current and prospective students' interests at its heart, with a commitment to clear communication with the general public.

Institutional review is a peer review process. All team members have current or recent experience of academic management and quality assurance in UK higher education, and every team includes a student reviewer. The team looks at information provided by both the institution and its students, and makes judgments on:

- the institution's threshold academic standards

- the quality of students' learning opportunities (teaching and academic support)
- from 2012-13, the quality of public information, including that produced for students and applicants
- the institution's enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

Each higher education institution in England and Northern Ireland will take part in Institutional review approximately once every six years. Reports for each institution will be published on the QAA website.

28th March 2011 – PM welcomes scheme to help graduates start businesses

Entrepreneur First, a new programme to encourage entrepreneurship has been launched, with recruitment of the first intake due to start this year. The scheme is a two-year programme, through which graduates *with 'the most promising business ideas'* will get the opportunity to start their business, with the support of corporate mentoring, business training and networking. After the two years, participants will have the option to continue building their own business or apply to graduate recruitment schemes in some of the sponsoring companies.

The national scheme will be modeled on the charity Teach First which has successfully encouraged more graduates into teaching. The sponsoring companies are McKinsey & Company, Microsoft, Tesco, BNP Paribas, BT, Cisco, Qualcomm, Intel, Civil Service Faststream, L'Oreal, Allen & Overy, Diageo, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Shell, RBS, Silicon Valley Bank, City and Law, and Enternships.

Wider Public Sector and Local Government

30th March – Future of Local Public Audit: a consultation

On the 13 August 2010 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced plans to disband the Audit Commission, and refocus audit of local public bodies on helping local people hold those bodies to account for local spending decisions, *'the very essence of localism'*.

The aim is to replace the current, centralised audit systems managed by the Audit Commission, with a new decentralised regime, which will support local democratic accountability, and one that will also cut bureaucracy and costs, while ensuring that there continues to be robust local public audit.

This consultation sets out proposals on the new audit framework where:

- audit quality is regulated within a statutory framework, overseen by the National Audit Office and the accountancy profession
- local public bodies will be free to appoint their own external auditors with stringent safeguards for independence.

This **consultation** will run until 30 June 2011.

29th March – Eric Pickles speaks on Community Budgets

Eric Pickles has delivered a **speech** on Community Budgets highlighting some of the work that is being done in pilot areas. The current focus is on *'chaotic families'*. *'We estimate across the country 46,000 families with the greatest difficulties cost the economy £2.2 billion in reactive spending alone. Children going into care. Families evicted for anti-social behaviour. Truancy. Vandalism. Nuisance behaviour.'* Current pilot area work includes:

- in Islington the Council, the NHS, Job Centre Plus, Probation, Police, housing and voluntary sector - will pool staff and over £6m of resources. There will be a new Family Outreach Support Service in place this autumn able to support a thousand families with persistent problems at any one time and they will also look to prevent families falling into crisis by working with 9000 unemployed parents. Supporting them to get back into work.
- Swindon brought together professionals from housing, the police, the NHS and children's and adult's services to work intensively with 12 families for two years. *'Some of this was just helping them sort out rent arrears and getting the washing machine to work. And there were trickier issues like managing a teenager's violent behaviour. The result was children coming off child protection plans. Children going to school more regularly. Evictions avoided. Police callouts reduced. Adults getting back into work.'* After spending £190,000 Swindon estimate that they could save over £1.5m in two years.
- Hammersmith & Fulham are currently developing a project with Ministry of Justice and Department for Education to tackle the delays to applications for taking children into care. Department for Education have also committed to funding over 20 innovative exemplar projects so the Community Budget areas can to test out new ways of supporting these families and support other areas to follow their lead. They've also offered advances on future years funding to invest in the redesign of services for families.

The minister also set out the principle for five tests for how the success of community budgets will be judged:

- more local control. Councils coming together with their partners to create local solutions to local problems;
- much better use of resources - giving residents a better deal as money goes straight to the frontline;
- more robust local accountability - acting on behalf of communities not Westminster;
- locally agreed outcomes that reflect what residents want; and
- finally - and this is their own test - to be able to show obvious progress in delivering a radical solution and sense of direction.

Eric Pickles said *'Community Budgets are Total Freedom... We're talking about nothing less than totally changing the way frontline professionals work... A pretty tall order. But my message to local areas is don't be afraid to think big. To be as bold and as innovative as you can'*.

11th March – John Hutton speaks on his final report on the reform of public service pensions

John Hutton of Furness has delivered a **speech** highlighting the key points of this final report on the reform of public service pensions. The report suggests that, subject to government acceptance, it should be possible to introduce new schemes before the end of this Parliament, in 2015, while allowing a longer transition, where needed, for groups such as the armed forces and police.

Key recommendations include that:

- the current defined benefit schemes are replaced by new career average schemes *'This design provides a fairer outcome than those seen in the current final salary schemes – and fairness is at the heart of the reforms'*;

- a switch to career average schemes because they are simpler and easier to understand and to implement than the other scheme designs considered;
- the pension ages in most of these schemes is linked to the State pension Age
- a clear cost ceiling is set for these schemes going forward *'I have suggested basing this on the percentage of pensionable pay paid by the taxpayer'*;
- retaining the final salary link for current members for their past service. *'This will make sure that current members are treated fairly. And those closest to retirement, perhaps in their 50s today, who have less time to adjust will be least affected'*; and
- more independent oversight and much stronger governance of all the public service pension schemes.

22nd March – The government's vision for collaboration in policing

Policing and criminal justice minister Nick Herbert has given a **speech** on collaboration in policing. The minister set out the government's vision for police reform from the local to the national, how the police force envisages collaboration and the steps that are being taken between police forces and partners to drive collaboration forward. Key points include:

- give more space for local determination with stronger local accountability *'Let me be clear: I'm a convinced localist. I don't believe that central government knows best, or should micromanage policing decisions that should be local. The point is to refocus the efforts of the centre where strategic leadership, on issues that crosses force boundaries, is required'*;
- police and crime commissioners will be *'powerfully'* incentivised to look hard at what their forces do and what opportunities there are for working with other forces and partners more efficiently and effectively;
- there are opportunities to identify a role for private sector partnering *'we have, for example, already seen the successful contracting out of custody services in many forces'*; and
- leaders in the police force will need to be responsible for driving collaboration. *'I have attempted to identify a stronger, strategic role for government in driving the process. But collaboration has to start from the bottom up. You, the leaders of the police service, need to take this forward'*.

29th March – New approach to community activism

The government's champion for active safer communities, Baroness Newlove has published a report on tackling neighbourhood crime. The report proposes a new approach to community activism that will see people *'reclaiming their streets, tackling local issues and improving their environment'*.

The report, ***Our vision for safe and active communities*** calls for a change of culture so neighbourhoods no longer see crime, antisocial behaviour (ASB) and disorder as *'someone else's problem'*. It also says that services should go beyond simply asking communities what their problems are and see them as equal partners in resolving those issues. Recommendations include:

- community reward — where information provided by the community leads to a conviction the community is given a reward to spend on crime prevention work;
- Bling Back — where money made from selling local drug dealers' assets is handed back to the neighbourhood where they operated;
- letting communities set their own local speed limits;

- taking **street-level crime maps** to the next level so people can use them to report crime and ASB and agencies can publish details of what action was taken against offenders;
- giving the public a single point of contact through the roll out of the 101 number to report ASB;
- providing council tax rebates, or vouchers for local businesses and services, for people who take part in activism;
- asking police and crime commissioners to commit at least one per cent of their budget to grass roots community groups to use or have a say;
- encouraging public servants to go out into communities, volunteering their time and expertise to support local groups;
- pooling agencies' budgets, giving communities a choice in how it is spent; and
- changing the '9 to 5' culture' of local agencies so they are there to respond when people need them most.

22nd March – Office for Civil Society appoints Strategic Partners

Minister for civil society, Nick Hurd, has **announced** that nine organisations have been selected as Strategic Partners of the Office for Civil Society (OCS). Strategic Partners will receive a total of £8.2m over the next three years. The new Strategic Partners Transition Programme replaces the previous similar initiative which finishes at the end of March 2011. The new programme is focused on effective representation '*to ensure value for money for the taxpayer and to focus resource on front line services*'. Some other government departments continue to fund strategic partner programmes to support specific policy objectives which complement this programme. The OCS Strategic Partners are:

- ACEVO in partnership with Euclid Network and New Philanthropy Capital;
- Community Foundation Network in partnership with Association of Charitable Foundations;
- Institute of Fundraising;
- Locality (new name from April 2011 resulting from DTA and Bassac merger);
- NAVCA;
- NCVO;
- Social Entrepreneurship Partnership (School for Social Entrepreneurs, UnLtd, CAN, Plunkett Foundation and Social Firms UK);
- Social Enterprise Coalition in partnership with Cooperatives UK; and
- Volunteering England.

18th March – Review of Government Direct Communication and COI

The Cabinet Office has **published** a review into Government Direct Communication and the role of the Central Office of Information (COI), carried out by Matt Tee, permanent secretary government communication.

The report calls for a more strategic approach to direct and paid-for communications. It is proposed that activity will be concentrated in fewer areas of focus and to targeted audiences, so that government

communication is more effective and so that the government is not aiming multiple messages at the same audience and that COI should be replaced with a Government Communication Centre (GCC), based in the Cabinet Office.

30th March – Government publishes ICT Strategy

The Cabinet Office has **published** its strategy for ICT in government, setting out its commitment to more effective use of ICT. It sets out how government ICT will enable the delivery of public services in very different ways to the past. The approach includes strategies to:

- where possible, move away from large ICT projects that are slow to implement or pose a greater risk of failure.
- increase standardisation and modularisation of business processes and supporting technologies to create a platform from which government can deliver new models of open and innovative public services;
- put an end to the oligopoly of large suppliers that monopolise its ICT provision. Government will streamline the procurement process to *'break down the barriers'* that impede SMEs from bidding for contracts.
- exploit mobile technologies, collaboration tools, and video and teleconferencing to *'connect, mobilise and reduce cost across the public sector'*; and
- systematically scan the horizon to identify changes in technology and assess the associated opportunities and risks. A director of ICT futures will be appointed to take responsibility for improving the government's capability to meet this challenge of fast-moving technology in order to drive change in the way in which the government adopts a more rapid and open ICT development approach.

21 March 2011 – Reforming Britain's health and safety regime

DWP has launched **package** of changes to Britain's health and safety system, designed to support the government's growth agenda and to ease the regulatory burdens on business. Under the plans:

- responsible employers will no longer face automatic health and safety inspections. Instead health and safety inspectors are being instructed to concentrate their efforts on high risk locations, like major energy facilities, and on rogue employers who are putting the safety of their staff and the public at risk. This measure will cut the number of inspections carried out in the UK by at least a third. Rogue employers who endanger public and employee safety will also have to pay for the costs of the investigation into their activities.
- ministers are taking steps to eliminate "cowboy" health and safety consultants who are unqualified but are responsible for many of Britain's most inappropriate health and safety recommendations. A new register of qualified consultants will be made available to businesses, and those who are untrained or give false advice will be excluded from the approved list.
- government is also launching a review of all existing health and safety law with a view to scrapping measures that are not needed and put an unnecessary burden on business.
- a new online package, *Health and Safety Made Simple*, will help small and low risk employers find all the help they need in one place to achieve a basic and bureaucracy-free level of health and safety management in their workplaces.

Equality and Diversity

31st March – Public sector equality duty to commence

The **public sector Equality Duty** applies to public authorities and others carrying out public functions. The requirements of the duty are to meet the needs of those who work for it and use its services. The duty requires public authorities to have regard to the need to tackle discrimination and promote equal opportunities. When designing and delivering their services, they should consider how they can make them fair for everyone. It will also ensure that decision making is based on real life experience and evidence of need, rather than arbitrary assumptions and stereotypes.

The Equality Duty consists of a general duty, with three main aims set out in **Section 149** of the Equality Act 2010; and specific duties set out in secondary legislation to accompany the Equality Act 2010. The specific duties are designed to help public bodies with the better performance of the general duty.

The general Equality Duty will be commenced on 5th April 2011.

31st March – EHRC launches Equality Act Codes of Practice

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission has produced **Codes of Practice** on employment; services, public functions and associations; and equal pay. The purpose of these Codes of Practice is to explain the new statutory provisions of the Equality Act. The codes have been designed to help to ensure that the law is applied consistently by lower courts and tribunals. It is anticipated that they will also help make the law accessible to a wider audience, such as those who have obligations and those who have rights - or their representatives. The codes set out what the legislation means. They draw on precedent and case law and explain the implications of clauses in technical terms.

22nd March – Reform of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

Theresa May, minister for women and equalities, and Lynne Featherstone minister for equalities have announced the launch of a **consultation** on plans to reform the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to ensure it focuses on its core regulatory activities. Legislative and non-legislative reforms are proposed in three key areas:

- to set out more clearly the EHRC's core functions as an independent equality regulator and National Human Rights Institution;
- to stop non core activities and, where appropriate, make alternative provision, where they can be done better and/or more cost-effectively by government or other civil society/private sector providers; and
- to clarify the Commission's relationship to government and strengthen further its governance and systems to provide greater transparency, accountability and value for money

The consultation will close on 15 June 2011.

18th March – Theresa May speaks on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equalities

Theresa May has delivered a **speech** at the Stonewall Conference setting out the governments '*new approach*' to equalities as well as highlighting government policy for public and private sector organisations. Detail included:

- Despite real progress in recent years, there is still much to do:

- nearly two thirds of LGB secondary school pupils experience homophobic bullying
- one in five gay or lesbian people have experienced a homophobic hate crime or incident
- and one in five LGB people have experienced bullying from their work colleagues because of their sexual orientation
- Equality is *'about building a modern economy. Now, more than ever, we need to make sure we are using the talents and the skills of every person in this country. So equality is not an optional extra that we should only care about when money is plentiful – it's central to our task of building an economy fit for the 21st century'*;
- A desire to set out a new approach to the way government tries to deliver its aims of equal treatment and equal opportunities, *'we have to move away from the identity politics of the past... Our approach won't be based on box ticking and bureaucracy; it will be based on accountability and transparency'*;
- Public sector organisations should not be judged by whether they have made a *'real and tangible difference to people's lives. That might be by improving the lives of the staff that work for them or improving the services that they deliver'*; and
- The minister also announced a new charter to *'stamp out'* homophobia and transphobia in sport and plans to ensure that schools have access to guidance, which empowers teachers to tackle bad behaviour and bullying in schools, including specific help to identify and tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying.

14th March – Government commitment to working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality

Following the issue of *Working for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality* in 2010, the government has published a new action plan ***Working for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality: Moving Forward*** which sets out the specific actions to be taken across government, in areas such as education, workplaces, in public services and in our international work, to deliver on those commitments. It also sets out new areas of work that government is undertaking. Action points include:

- to reform Ofsted schools inspections, including changes to the coverage of inspection, to give all forms of prejudice based bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying, more prominence;
- explore how the content of the National Curriculum can support the embedding of equality and inclusion within the review of the National Curriculum;
- publish the BIS economic business case for equality and diversity, which will include consideration of LGB&T issues;
- work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to produce an electronic toolkit to help VCS organisations understand the public sector Equality Duty; and
- publish the Hate Crime annual report which will include an update on progress to tackle homophobic and transphobic hate crime.

Voluntary and Community Sector

22nd March – £7 million boost for Big Society as 183 more charities get cash support

The government's Transition Fund, to help charities prepare for Big Society opportunities and face current challenges, will have an additional **£7 million** from the Department of Health, Care Services Minister Paul Burstow announced today. This takes the total fund to £107million.

The announcement was made at the same time as the minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude and civil society minister Nick Hurd announced the next **183 charities to receive immediate payouts** totalling nearly £15million. Charities like the The Damilola Taylor Trust, which works to reduce knife and gun crime; the Sparkplug Motorcycle Project which tackles antisocial behaviour and helps young people into work; and Age Concern North East will all be helped to develop their services and restructure their organisations.

Devolved Administrations

22nd March – £14.3 million European funding injection for Scotland

Around £14.3 million of European **funding** is to be invested to support Scotland's tourism sector, sustainable public transport, develop SMEs, build links between research and business and provide training opportunities. This includes funding from the European Regional Development Fund for VisitScotland to provide extra support to local tourism businesses and promote attractions. The allocations include:

- £1.2 million - Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council - Interface - Phase 2. This project aims to improve knowledge exchange for SMEs by encouraging collaborations between business and academia. This includes translating the needs of companies of all sizes and from all sectors into manageable projects
- £1.1 million - University of Glasgow - Encompass. This is a three-year pilot programme aiming to remove barriers to innovating and growing the number of companies engaged in innovative activities. It will include access to business angel management and financial expertise, and business mentoring networks and access to FE college support
- £442,000 - Glasgow West Regeneration Agency - Partick Employability Centre. This will help provide a training and e-skills centre to help disadvantaged people gain employment

25th March – Appointments to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales announced

Education minister Leighton Andrews has **announced** the reappointment of Mr Roger Thomas, chair to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales for a second three-year term from 5 May 2011. Three existing members have also been reappointed for a second three-year term from 1 December 2011. These members are Mr David Allen, Professor Katherine Oglesby and Dame Alexandra Burslem.

15th March – Consultation on tuition fees in Northern Ireland

Employment and learning minister for Northern Ireland, Danny Kennedy, has launched a public **consultation** on higher education tuition fees and student finance arrangements. The consultation documents sets out five potential options in relation to each of the following:

- the level of the tuition fee;
- the level of, and income thresholds for, maintenance grant;
- the level of the maintenance loan; and
- the earnings threshold at which students who have taken out a loan would start to repay.

Contact the LSIS policy team

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© LSIS March 2011

Published by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

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