

## POLICY WATCH

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### The dust settles on the latest Schools White Paper

The latest [Schools White Paper](#) has had mixed reviews. There has been some support for the principle of pupil and parent guarantees, "*the public should be encouraged to think of themselves as consumers of public services, picking and choosing providers,*" the FT argued, while even one of the professional associations could see some of the benefits in the proposed licensing system for new teachers. "*Professions such as medicine and law already have licences to practice. These enhance their professional standing,*" being the initial reaction from the NASUWT. But there has also been much talk of sledgehammers and nuts, of basic principles being "*obfuscated*" as *The Times* put it, "*by jargon and dangerous guff*" and of the whole thing being hard to sell. "*Mr Balls's kaleidoscope prescription of academies, federations, local autonomy and central direction is not an easy political sell*" the conclusion in *The Guardian*. As it is, the Opposition has already said it's not buying the licensing scheme.

In his accompanying letter to teachers setting out the objectives of the White Paper, the Secretary of State said "*I firmly believe that the White Paper will truly create a system which reflects the needs of schools teachers and pupils in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*" It would have been good therefore, to have seen more on vocational learning, assessment practice and learning technology, all critical to schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But there is plenty on other things, five in particular.

First, workforce development and the measure that has attracted so much comment, the proposed new licensing system. Both Parties have got their teeth into teacher training at present. Last week, the Shadow Schools Secretary pledged to raise the bar for new primary teachers; "*they will need a B grade at GCSE or iGCSE in English and maths,*" while for the Government, enrolment begins early next year for the new Masters Qualification intended to help make teaching a Masters level profession. In addition, as this Paper confirms, the Government is keen to establish a CPD entitlement for teachers, expand the Teach First programme, reward Executive Heads who take on other schools and boost the skills of the workforce generally. "*In the 21<sup>st</sup>c school all staff working to support pupils' learning will have, or be working towards, a Level 3 qualification.*"

But it's the proposal to establish a renewable '*licence to teach*' for newly qualified teachers and returners to teaching from Sept 2010 and for other teachers in due course, that has attracted most interest. There are two views on this. Either it's a good way of raising the stature of teaching to that of other professions or it's a complicated way of weeding out a few poor teachers. Apparently only 10 teachers in the last 10 years have been struck off for incompetence so the numbers of the latter aren't huge but perception is important. The scheme will be managed by the GTC and consultation will follow but many will argue that this should be internally managed rather than externally led.



**Second**, the new parent and pupil guarantees. In many cases the individual guarantees are not new but the cataloguing of them as a set of minimum standards is. Again there are two schools of thought on these: a good way of ensuring minimum standards of provision are available to all or a set of abstract aspirations that mean little to the average parent. For most consumers, two questions stand out: who's going to pay for it all and who do I complain to if I'm not getting what I should? On the first, Ed Balls has promised to make funding available and on the second, parents will be able to go the Local Government Ombudsman for redress if necessary. It remains to be seen how far they will feel genuinely 'empowered.'

**Third**, school accountability where three main measures were outlined. The first of these was announced a few weeks ago in the shape of Ofsted's revised inspection framework for 2009. This, as the Paper confirms, sets out a renewed focus on observing teaching and learning, on analysing 'raw' exam results, on looking at pupil wellbeing and reporting on partnership working. In addition, Ofsted will now incorporate the quality of local schools as part of its annual ratings of Children's Services. Second an expansion of the role of the SIP, the School Improvement Partner or critical friend brought in often under a Challenge Programme to work closely with a school on improvement plans. This role will now be beefed up with the SIP spending more time in a school, linking up with the local authority and brokering support where needed.

But the headline announcement in this area is that of the School Report Card. The Paper confirms that following consultation earlier this year, the Dept intends to push ahead with two years of piloting of the Card from this September, prior to a national launch from 2011. Details are set out in an accompanying Paper which indicates that the piloting will assess the viability of using six performance categories and that it will move ahead on the contentious '*presumption*' that there will be an overall score. There's still a lot to be resolved, not least the Card's relationship with the post-16 Framework for Excellence, the alignment with the inspection framework and perhaps most significantly of all, what will happen to 'league' tables? The Paper says the Card will "*supersede*" the tables "*as the central source of information*" but argues "*that will not mean a reduction in the information publicly available about schools' performance.*" But it's the Card that most will use in the future.

**Fourth**, a continuing emphasis on federations, partnerships, academy chains and the presumption that 'no school can do it alone.' The main announcement here is of an accreditation system for providers wishing to manage groups of schools. This will be developed through the National College for School Leadership and the Government is putting in £20m over two years to ensure schools that wish to take on other schools have the skills and capacity to do so effectively.

**Fifth**, and significantly in that it indicates a welcome shift towards decentralisation is the confirmation that schools will increasingly be able to seek other forms of help and support in areas like literacy and numeracy beyond that laid out in the National Strategies. On the basis that this is a recognition of the growing maturity of schools in being able to identify and commission the support they need rather than have it imposed on them, this is a positive step.

Finally, most Papers have a throwaway line. The one here occurs in para 5.10; "*we have an ambition to develop a national funding formula for 14-19 provision.*" This will be followed with interest.

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