



Pearson

## Pocket Watch (2016/7) Why the latest Skills Plan is important and next steps



### Introduction

The latest Skills Plan is just a week old and already questions are being asked about how much of it will survive the current political maelstrom.

In many ways the familiar rhetoric about the need for improved productivity and skills, opportunities for young people and global performance hasn't changed and arguably has even increased in the light of some of the new Prime Minister's utterances and actions. The case for the Plan thus appears to remain unchanged even if the political stewardship of it has.

So why is the Plan still important and what needs to happen for it to be realised?

### Why the Skills Plan is still important?

There are four main reasons.

1. It offers a real prospect of moving us towards a British version of the dual system of education and training that many have admired in Europe for so long and held responsible for some of its economic success. The diagrammatic explanation on page 15 of the Plan may appear deceptively simple let alone prescriptive, with its 'academic' sheep this way and technical 'goats' that way but it offers the one thing employers, learners and others have called for over the years, namely a simple system of routes or pathways.
2. It sets out plans to tackle one of the long-standing fault lines in the English education and training system, namely the failure to provide a coherent transition system for those young people not going on to higher education. Numerous Reports and Plans from the Prince's Trust, to Barnardo's to Impetus PEF have focused on this issue in recent years. Recently, the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee offered its conclusion in a Report. 'A young people considering their options is faced with gobbledygook,' reported the Committee Chair. This is an attempt to cut through that gobbledygook.
3. It moves things forward. Vocational education has been more positively re-branded as technical education; 16 has become the age for making pathway choices so ending the debate about whether it should 14 or 16; college courses have been given a new 'functional' core; 13,000 potential courses for 16-19 year olds have been limited to occupations or clusters; and there are others.
4. As indicated, it's in tune with the current policy riff of productivity, skills, opportunity and so on

### It's not all perfect

None of this is to suggest the Plan is perfect, lots of issues have been raised in initial responses.

*Post 16 Skills Plan July 2016.* Pocket Watches are intended to provide quick, informal updates on national developments. Information is correct at the time of writing and is offered in good faith. No liability is accepted for decisions made on the basis of information given.



# Pearson

Mark Dawe of AELP has raised issues about the proposed 15 routes, pointing out that over 50% of jobs lie outside their scope. Gordon Marston, the Shadow Skills Minister has questioned whether the fledgling Institute for Apprenticeships will have the capacity to manage its enhanced regulatory role. Wonkhe and others have outlined implications for HE given that nearly a quarter of those entering HE last year came armed with a vocational qualification, typically a BTEC in some form. Schools Week has also pointed to the importance of BTECs and other technical qualifications for some schools while raising issues about careers guidance and the proposed transition option. The Association of Colleges has also raised the issue of general and professional qualifications as well as the need to stabilize and fund the college system if it is to lead the delivery of the Plan.

So there are plenty of issues and concerns but also a lot that may be covered off under proposed developments.

## What needs to happen now?

It's probably risky to be too precise about timescales in the current climate but this is what the Plan is indicating needs doing over the coming months.

The number one priority is listed as setting up the new expanded Institute for Apprenticeships which will require legislation being introduced this autumn. More generally, the overall Plan is intended to be implemented 'progressively' with new Functional Skills from Sept 2018, new pathfinder routes from Sept 2019 and the whole thing building from 2020. Other specific actions listed in the Plan include the following:

- Publish an updated careers strategy (Summer 2016)
- Announce next steps for the creation of Institutes of Technology (Autumn 2016)
- Review 16-19 accountability arrangements in the light of the Plan (later this year)
- Publish the government's Digital Strategy (later this year)
- Determine the future contribution of general qualifications (later this year)
- Consult on the transition model (later this year)
- Provide more detail on higher level routes (later this year)
- Complete the Smith Review into options for continuing maths beyond the age of 16 (by Dec 2016)
- Complete the college area review process (April 2017)
- Introduce the apprenticeship levy (April 2017)
- Develop a set of transferable workplace skills (next year)
- Develop content for first pathfinder routes (October 2017)

## Steve Besley

Head of Policy @SteveBesley

*Post 16 Skills Plan July 2016.* Pocket Watches are intended to provide quick, informal updates on national developments. Information is correct at the time of writing and is offered in good faith. No liability is accepted for decisions made on the basis of information given.