

2014/60

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Pocket Watch – What was in the Autumn Statement for education?

Introduction

Santa Claus or Scrooge: reactions to the Chancellor's fifth, and for this Parliament at least, final Autumn Statement this week, seem to veer between the two and that pretty much sums up the mood in education as well. There were some goodies, for example: on careers guidance, science and innovation and postgrad loans, but there were also some nasties such as: continuing restraint on pay, a further £10bn of 'efficiency' savings from the public sector by 2017/18 and the prospect of further cuts to Dept public spending generally. The Chancellor pitched it in what is fast becoming an electoral rallying cry, as a choice between turning back ("*squandering the economic security we have gained*") or plodding on ("*staying the course.*") 'Course,' as in 'on course,' 'sticking to our course' even 'of course,' seemed to be the key word this time round; it was repeated eight times in the final salvo. The Statement comes with an onslaught of facts and figures and charts and graphs laid out in documents such as the full **report** itself, the Office for Budget Responsibility's overall **economic and fiscal outlook** and accompanying reports such as the **National Infrastructure Plan**. Here's the education bits.

Education headlines: Autumn Statement 2014

- Careers. £20m "to improve careers advice and support for young people"
- Academy chains. £10m to support the expansion of the best academy chains in the North
- Apprenticeships. The scrapping of National Insurance Contributions for apprentices under 25 in most cases. The aim is to make it easier for employers to take on apprentices and support the Prime Minister's pledge to create 3m over the next Parliament
- NEETs. An 'intense' programme of activity and job search will be introduced from Oct 2015, as a requirement for 16-24 yr olds NEETs before claiming Universal Credit
- Adult learning support for mental health. £20m for two years from 2015 will be made available to fund courses for those suffering from 'mild to moderate depression'
- Local Growth. A further £1bn to be distributed from the £12bn Local Growth Fund and LEPs to be encouraged to bring forward proposals to the Fund for science projects. The government will also look favourably at plans to extend Enterprise and Growth Zones
- Northern Powerhouse. The government is putting £7bn into what the Chancellor described in his speech in the summer as 'the Northern Powerhouse.' The aim here is to invigorate growth, science, transport, research and culture in the North as a way of counterbalancing the concentration of growth around London and the South-East
- Devolution. The Greater Manchester Agreement (which could see adult skills planning and funding devolved) welcomed and "*my door is open to other cities*" to do the same
- Science and innovation. £5.9bn over the next Parliament with over half to support a range of research projects and centres and the rest for specific scientific Grand Challenges and other pre-commitments such as the High Value Manufacturing Catapult
- Postgrad loans. To be introduced from 2016/17 for under-30s, worth up to £10,000 but available for any discipline. Postgrad numbers have dipped in recent years yet the demand for high-skill workers in the global economy has increased and the government sees the hi-tech area as a major ingredient in its economic plans. £50m will be made available through HEFCE next year to support postgrads until the new scheme is in place but for the moment the government intends to consult on the various repayment models that have been suggested in recent months by think tanks such as CentreForum and IPPR



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