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Pocket Watch – FE Workforce Strategy

Introduction

First released four months ago and then hastily withdrawn, the Government's **Strategy** for Workforce Excellence in FE was finally released recently as part of the series of announcements about post-16 maths. Raising standards in maths as well as English and SEN remain as the key priorities for the sector which has clearly been pressed into service to pick up the pieces for learners who have struggled to achieve so far. It's not a new role but the demands of the new "*more stretching and relevant*" English and maths GCSEs mean that a fully trained workforce is needed and there's a mix of bursary incentives and support programmes now in place to support this.

An initial SWOT

In terms of where FE is at present, the Paper finds both strengths and what were originally called weaknesses but are now described as challenges. The sense is that at its best, FE is doing a great job serving a wide constituency of needs but this is not the case for all providers. Five particular concerns are listed, none will come as a surprise as each has been the subject of at least one recent Report. They include: raising the quality of teaching especially in English and maths; sharpening up leadership and governance; improving responsiveness; making greater use of new learning technology; and helping recruit high quality staff.

The Approach

The policy divide at present is between a self-improving system and one that requires externally managed measures. The Government prefers the former so rather than calling for prescribed levels of qualification for those teaching subjects like English and maths as the Opposition has, it's leaving it to "*FE providers to decide themselves the appropriate qualifications required.*" Broadly the approach being used here is one of carrots and sticks with the Government listing a series of success measures it intends to use in the future.

The Four Current Priorities

1. Improving the quantity, quality and professionalism of teachers and trainers with the emphasis initially on the teaching of English, maths and SEN supported by bursaries and the ETF programmes. The longer-term aspiration is to raise the profile and encourage more graduates to teach in FE and although there's no specific mention of an FE Teach First, schemes and interest remain
2. Responsiveness to employers. Criticised by Ofsted on this in the past, sector responsiveness is being subjected to two lines of attack. First of all adoption of principles in last year's CAVTL Report including '*a clear line of sight*' between qualifications and employment and '*two-way street*' of providers and employers working together, and secondly the development of dedicated sector-based National Colleges. More to follow
3. Improving the quality of governance and leadership. Both have been in the spotlight recently and the AoC, the ETF, Ofsted's new data dashboard and of course the FE Commissioner and his team have all pitched in over the last year. This work continues and the Government is hoping that the CAVTL Report and the Commissioner's and Chief Inspector's Annual Reports, all due this autumn, will indicate signs of improvement
4. Effective use of learning technology. As per the Government's recent FELTAG Response

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