

2015/15

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Pocket Watch – Lining up the Bills

Introduction

This week saw the first set piece occasion of the new Parliament when the government outlined its legislative programme in the **Queen's Speech**. In the words of the Prime Minister, it was "a clear programme for working people, social justice and bringing our country together," stitched together under the banner of 'One Nation' and offering as the manifesto put it, 'security and opportunity for everyone at every stage of life.' For many people, notably in education, the more challenging half of the government's life plan comes in July when the Chancellor announces his Summer Budget but for the moment, there's plenty to concentrate the mind with at least six Bills likely to affect education in some way, the first three in particular. Details below.

Six education-related Bills

1. Education and Adoption Bill. This is the Bill that deals with the government's manifesto pledge to tackle so-called 'coasting' and underperforming schools. It's a theme that the Party has been pursuing for much of the year most notably in the Prime Minister's 'all-out war on mediocrity in schools' speech in February. The Bill itself incorporates two core elements: stronger intervention powers and speedier conversions to academies but leaves open a number of fundamental issues such as just what a coasting school is in the first place. The Bill hints at a definition but prefers to leave the detail to later. Other questions also remain open such as the benefits or otherwise of academisation, whether there are enough 'top' leaders ready to leap in and help run such schools and as Prof Chris Husbands has indicated, whether the deeper issue is as much performance differences within rather than between schools. This will run
2. Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill. As the title implies, this Bill aims to link work and benefits much more closely and saddled with some big employment targets is also likely to attract considerable attention. The government wants to make work more attractive by ensuring that the minimum wage remains tax free but it also wants to ensure that enough jobs are available so this Bill will introduce annual reporting on the progress against its core targets of 2m new jobs and 3m new apprenticeships. There are two other proposals in the Bill that may prove contentious. One is the proposal to pull in Jobcentre Plus advisers to supplement careers guidance and the other is the introduction of a more punitive Youth Allowance for 18-21 year olds. In both cases as the OECD has shown this week in its Youth, Skills and Employability Report, the question remains whether enough is being done to help young people into work
3. Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. This Bill, now **published**, builds on work the Party has already done to try and stimulate local economic recovery through devolved powers and responsibilities in areas like transport, housing and skills training. The drive here is re-balancing the economy through mechanisms such as the Northern Powerhouse. This Bill is key to the Treasury so will be closely watched and may yet see further ceding of skills planning to local partnerships
4. Childcare Bill. This Bill enshrines the manifesto pledge to provide 30 hours a week of free childcare to eligible families which in turn will mean more trained childcare workers are needed
5. Immigration Bill. This Bill further strengthens the government's immigration measures by in particular reducing the demand for skilled migrant labour. Among the proposals is a new visa levy on businesses that use foreign labour without advertising in the domestic market first
6. Enterprise Bill. This Bill is intended to reduce the regulatory burden on small businesses and thereby encourage job creation but it also aims to encourage more entrepreneurship



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