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Pocket Watch – Vocationalism: the new race to the top

Introduction

So almost a new set of faces around the education table but give or take a change in tone here, a shift in emphasis there, the broad thrust of education policy goes on. One area where there'll be a lot of interest is vocational education where the last few months in particular have seen both parties go head to head on new announcements. Tech Awards for 14-16 year olds, Traineeships for 16-24 year olds, apprenticeship funding from the Government side, a National Bacc, L3 apprenticeships and tech degrees from the Opposition side, all have followed in quick succession. As both Parties take stock for the coming months, here's a snapshot of how things look in vocation land at present, including some of the more recent announcements.

14-19 Phase

Conservatives

- 14-16. New national curriculum plus Tech Award options
- 16-19. 5 possible routes: academic, applied general, tech level, substantial L2, work-based
- Tech Bacc. Accountability measure comprising L3 tech level, L3 maths, Extended Project

Labour

- Bacc framework programme leading to a Nat Bacc comprising a L3 VQ, L3 English and maths, project and personal skills development
- Delivered "mainly through colleges" accredited as Institutes of Tech Education with lecturers holding requisite qualifications
- Strengthened, locally driven careers guidance service, obligations on schools to track and deliver on progression
- More UTCs, creation of 'Teach Next,' development of Directors of Enterprise and Employment in schools

English and maths

Conservatives

- Provision up to age 18, big push on extending maths opportunities beyond age 16
- Condition of funding in 16-19 study programmes
- Range of bursaries and incentives to enable more qualified teachers
- Long-term aspiration for 'new' GCSEs to represent national standard, evidence call on alignment to business needs due shortly
- Development of other maths programmes as part of 'Your Life' business backed STEM campaign

Labour

- Similar application up to age 18, component of Nat Bacc
- Interest in development of 'applied and slimline' alternative courses
- Teachers/lecturers to hold minimum requirements

Apprenticeships

Conservatives

- Increasingly employer-led following major review

- Use of sector-based employer Trailblazers to develop simpler (high quality) standard and assessment features
- Co-investment funding system under development
- Big push on higher apprenticeships, identified funding and target numbers
- Development of initial Traineeship stage

Labour

- Similar commitment to employer-led model
- Drive to position at L3 with minimum durations, L2 to constitute traineeship route
- Employer-led sector bodies to determine quantity and quality of frameworks
- Push for more young apprenticeships especially in STEM sectors
- Apprenticeships to be included in major government contracts

Adult/Higher level

Conservatives

- Broad principles set out in series of key reviews (McLoughlin, Whitehead, FELTAG), emphasis on flexibility, simplicity, quality, stronger employer involvement
- Reduction in number of qualifications, regulator review of QCF, stronger regulation
- Use of funding lever to ensure quality and business needs, commissioning through growth deals
- Support for higher apprenticeship and higher voc routes and bridging FE/HE gap
- Interest in developing much clearer rationale for 'approved' quals
- Development of high tech/voc centres of excellence
- Keen to develop more online learning and assessment

Labour

- Greater employer say over how training is funded and delivered
- Greater support to be given to developing middle-level skills
- Development of stronger all through voc route leading to tech degree
- Interest in 'earn as you learn' approach
- College focus on locally determined technician skill and adult training
- Jobs guarantee for long-term unemployed
- Support for LEP managed local commissioning of skills training

Funding

Conservatives

- Adult VQs required to meet new funding business rules
- Further proposed extension of fee loan system to 19+ and some L2 provision
- EFA funded study programme model for 16-19 year olds (though with incoming rate reduction for f/t 18 yr olds)

Labour

- Potential transfer of youth skills training funding local plus careers and youth support services to local authority/commissioning agents
- Consideration of aligning 16-19 and 19+ funding along similar per student lines



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New race to the top July 2014