

2014/14

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Pocket Watch – Helping school to work transition

Introduction

It was in May 2011 that the Government launched the first of its major strategies aimed at tackling youth unemployment which was followed up rapidly a year later with the launch of the Youth Contract and the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers. Three years on, despite a more positive set of economic indicators and some recent more welcome stats on NEETs and youth employment, the issue of helping young people into the labour market, school-work transition as it's called, remains just as pressing. It's not a new issue, it's one that most Governments have had a go at and it's one that according to the OECD and others, we're not very good at. This week, Nick Clegg became the latest Minister to come up with a set of proposals. Many people would have liked to have seen a published version of the so-called Heywood Review from which these proposals appear to have emanated but for the moment we are left with the Clegg announcements although more may come in the Chancellor's forthcoming Budget speech.

What was announced?

The theme of Nick Clegg's speech was '*Better choices, better prospects*' and he made three specific announcements intended to do just that.

- A promise of new guidance for schools "*in the next few weeks*" on careers provision and advice. This doesn't appear to have been a Damascene conversion by Government to the virtues of a fully established careers service despite the torrent of Reports over the last 18 months calling for the same because the realpolitik is "*we're giving schools the flexibility to decide how best they can meet the standard of support Ofsted is looking for and we will see how this works over the next months.*" In summary, schools will get a new responsibility to call in local employers to help, destination data will become a key measure of success and Ofsted will become the arbiter of good practice
- The creation of a UCAS style information system for all 16 year olds. This is an idea that has been mooted for some time particularly for the apprenticeship route but as expressed here will cover, via a single website "*the full range of college courses, apprenticeships, traineeships and other work-based programmes.*" An updated and online version of the original 14-19 local area prospectus perhaps, managed as a local authority service
- Specific face-to-face support through Jobcentre Plus for unemployed 16 and 17 year olds, presumably those not covered under the raising of the participation age. This follows the announcement in last December's Autumn Statement where the Chancellor promised a small amount of money, £10m pa, to help provide a support service that presently is only available for those aged 18 and above. This will be trialled shortly and many will welcome the inclusion of face-to-face support, a big bone of contention under current arrangements.

Conclusion

Youth unemployment remains a sensitive issue for all Parties. Just last month for instance Labour announced its own Jobs Guarantee scheme intended to help 55,000 young people in the first year with more announcements to come. The challenge remains, however, how to move from short-term initiatives to long-term structures, 'removing the hurdles from *the E2E journey*' as McKinsey described it in their '*Education to Employment*' Report last month.

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