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Pocket Watch – The changing face of inspection and accountability

Introduction

It's been a significant week in the world of inspection and accountability. At the start of the week HEFCE **announced** a potentially far-reaching review of quality assessment arrangements in higher education, a couple of days later, Ofsted launched its **consultation** on future inspection arrangements for school, FE and early years providers and at the end of the week **consultation** closed on proposed new success measures for FE. In many ways this is all about inspection and quality assurance arrangements catching up with the increasing diversification of the provider side, different types of school, different types of university, different types of performance and so on but it's also a recognition of the changing face of external review: shorter, sharper, specialised, forensic and data fuelled. So what's being considered?

For Ofsted inspections

Ofsted has been gradually evolving a different approach to inspections and the consultation launched this week builds on those developments. Pinch points remain, no-notice inspections for instance, said to be favoured by the Prime Minister are still under review, while the agency's mission creep into policy determination which has so irritated head teachers recently, remains unresolved. Inspections are never going to be wildly popular but the use of trained in house inspectors and a more consistent approach, both underlined in this consultation, may help. Essentially there are three proposals due to take effect from Sept 2015:

- The use of a common inspection framework across all types of provider incorporating greater emphasis on curriculum balance, safeguarding and preparation for life in Britain and applying some wider criteria, adding the quality of assessment to the quality of teaching and learning for instance and a focus on outcomes rather than achievement
- The use of shorter (two inspectors over one day) and more frequent (three rather than five years) for those schools and colleges rated as 'good.' Sir Michael pointed out that 860 recently judged as 'good' had subsequently fallen back so more frequent but shorter inspections were needed to halt such slippage
- Using the proposed new common framework with non-associated independent schools

For adult FE

Here the Government has been consulting on three 'core measures' which it hopes to add to the existing use of Qualification Success Rates or Achievement as it is now to be called. The three are: learner progression (to a higher level qualification ;) learner destination; and earnings one year after completion. Further data modelling is needed but the aim is to apply these from 2016

For HE

Here HEFCE and its partner bodies in Wales and Northern Ireland announced this week that it would conduct a review of quality assessment arrangements with a view to drawing up a new operating specification to be offered out to tender. The aim would appear to be a new quality assurance approach for a changing HE market potentially for use from Sept 2017 but the reference to quality assessment and to tendering surprised many

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Schools and HE face new accountability arrangements Oct 2014