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Pocket Watch – The UK's Digital Moment?

Introduction

According to the House of Lords Digital Skills Committee in a strongly worded **report** out this week, we're at a tipping point when it comes to the development of digital skills and digital development generally. '*Make or break'* is in fact the title of a report described as *"a wake-up call"* generally about digital skills. *"Digital is everywhere"* the report stresses and *"we have a choice as a country about whether we seize this opportunity or whether we fall behind."* *"Whoever forms the next government in May"* should take control of the issue, create a national agenda and rather like Lord Baker in the early flushes of computing in the 1980s, sanction a Cabinet Minister to lead it. Much of the report is aimed at education; this is what it has to say.

For schools

The report welcomed the new computing curriculum which started in schools in September but recognised that provision varies across the UK, that some teachers need more help in delivering it and that employers also look for the creative and innovative skills in young people that enable them to develop and exploit changing technology. It therefore recommended:

- Digital literacy being embedded in the school curriculum as the third core skill
- A new training and investment programme to help upskill teachers
- Strong links developed with employers with an employer on each governing board

For FE

The view here was that FE has a key role to play in developing such skills but that provision and responsiveness were also variable. The report considers the nature, funding and agility of the skills system and highlights the importance of strengthening digital skill development in the apprenticeship system. The main recommendation here was for a major industry-led review of the FE offer, to be completed in the first six months of the new Parliament and to consider:

- The inclusion of a digital element in all FE courses
- Stronger industry relationships and industry-designed and endorsed certificates
- More apprenticeships, particularly those that include a digital skills element
- Skills funding targeted at short, flexible courses and apprenticeships
- Stronger careers guidance especially for 16-19 year olds

For HE

Less was said about the role of HE but there was support for high levels of research, closer links with employers and for greater promotion of computer science courses

And the rest

In a strong set of messages, the Committee also called for the internet to be viewed as an essential utility service, for more work to be done on digital inclusion (apparently 6m citizens have yet to use the internet) and for more to be done to prepare for the effects of digitalisation on working ('*35% of UK jobs risk being automated over the next 20 years'*) and daily life.

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