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Pocket Watch – Up for review: latest on post-16 review process

Introduction

The publication this week of further **guidance** on the area-based review process for post-16 provision moved the re-structuring of the college sector a step closer. A step rather than a leap because a lot of the detail about precisely which institutions are involved and how it'll work at a local level have still to be determined but it has answered a number of questions as follows:

The objective?

Pretty much the same as originally indicated in the July announcement: cutting out duplication and waste, matching local and learner needs better, developing higher-level specialist provision, or in two words 'efficiency' and 'focus.' There are three differences to the July announcement: a greater emphasis on the role of technology both in teaching and management; the importance being attached to IoTs (Institutes of Technology,) *"one per LEP area;"* and, inevitably, the need to keep an eye on the Spending Review... *'living within your means'* is the new catchphrase

Who's going to lead the reviews?

The local steering group comprising chairs of governors, local Commissioners, LEP, LA and agency reps, remains the lead body reporting into a National Area Review Steering Group. More interesting perhaps is how other interested parties engage: Ofsted and the funding agencies for instance who are expected to provide specialist intelligence, the government which has said it will be hands off unless it has concerns, and other providers such as HE and training providers

What about schools?

Still not fully clear. Regional Schools Commissioners have the brief to 'engage' with school sixth forms and as the guidance makes clear, *'other providers'* can opt in and *'all post-16 providers will be in scope'* at least for the initial phase. In fairness, the Dept is carrying out its review of how new school sixth forms are created and is pushing the case for greater collaboration

What will trigger a review?

Either a risk alert from one of the Commissioners or a funding agency which will set the process in motion or alternatively, a local area itself can come forward with its own review proposals

How long will a review last?

Typically 3-4 months, with the whole national programme itself due to complete in spring 2017

Who's first?

Colleges in parts of East Anglia and the City of Nottingham have been 'done' first in trial form; next up are colleges in Birmingham and Solihull, Greater Manchester and Sheffield City. The National Steering Group will publish a schedule of who's been done and who's next in due course

Who pays?

The local area concerned...government finance only *"as a last resort"*

Steve Besley
Head of Policy



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