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Pocket Watch – Autumn leaves little time for Colleges

Introduction

The corridors have only just cleared and the gates clanged shut on another busy year but things are already piling up for the next College year. Details were set out in the Minister's end of term letter to the sector last week. Not all of it comes as a surprise, the raising of the participation age for 17 year olds and the introduction of fee loans for L3 24+ learners have both been planned for some time but still to come this autumn is a consultation on 16-19 accountability, a report on post-19 qualifications, a new plan for apprenticeship development and a host of qualification and programmes reforms. Broadly, developments can be grouped under three headings: structural, qualification-based and accountability. At the risk of dampening the summer spirits, this is how things look for September onwards

Structural developments

Apart from the introduction of 24+ loans, there are three others. First, 17 year olds will be required from this September to participate in some form of education or training. Last year, 95.2% of 16 year olds and 89.5% of 17 year olds were offered a place in education or training under the September Guarantee so the impact of this may be limited until 2015 when 18 year olds come in. For the moment, the issue will be how far the new duties on Local Authorities help tackle residual NEET numbers. Second, also from September colleges will be able to formally enrol rather than just provide for 14-16 year olds for the first time. So far it appears that seven colleges have met the criteria required for this scheme, others have until the end of August to submit intentions. Third, and it may be later in the autumn, the Government will publish its plan for implementing many of the recommendations that came out of the Richard Review of Apprenticeships, including potentially now a new system of funding

Qualification-based developments

A number of developments are under way here including the implementation of new study programmes for 16-19 year olds, the introduction of new Traineeships for 16-24 year olds and the development of Supported Internships for 16-25 year olds with Learning Difficulties. This autumn will also see the build-up towards the Tech Bacc with Labour publishing its latest proposals on the format and in November, the Government publishing the listings of Applied General and Tech Level qualifications along with the Core Maths qualification that will start to shape its version from Sept 2014 for performance table reporting from 2016. For adult Vocational Qualifications (VQs,) the tidying up of publicly funded qualifications continues. The Government has already announced the withdrawal of funding for over 1,800 low take-up qualifications while the SFA continues to develop 'clear business rules' for the funding of new qualifications. Of particular interest will be the Whitehead review, due to report in September and intended to outline a similar criteria-based approach for 19+ VQs

Accountability developments

16-19 remains the last of the triumvirate of accountability reviews that the Government had promised earlier in the year. With the criteria and separate listing for Applied General and Tech Level Quals confirmed, Destination Measures established and new inspection and financial monitoring procedures established, this consultation can now go ahead with Sept looking likely



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