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Pocket Watch – The changing face of FE

Introduction

There's a lot on FE plates at present, you only have to look at the latest funding letter to the Skills Funding Agency issued a couple of weeks ago to see that. Traineeships, loans, local skills arrangements, quality standards and review, integration of the National Apprenticeship Service, they are all there. We could also add of course the race to get the new Guild and chartered status arrangements ready in the next few months let alone the messages coming out of the Heseltine and Richard Reviews. FE is rarely still but four recent Papers help give some sense of what's driving developments; three reflect the current interest in landscape changes where 'responsiveness' and 'employer ownership' remain the watchwords while the other one focuses on the core area of teaching and learning where 'rigour' and 'quality' remain the drivers

Four current shaping Reports

1. Ofsted's **Report** on 'Local accountability and autonomy in colleges.' Continuing Ofsted's sometimes delicate relationship with FE, this recent Report looks at how well colleges have been responding to the so-called new freedoms and flexibilities granted as part of the Government's responsiveness agenda. The survey which was completed last autumn was only able to offer an early snapshot but it's clear that there's a long way to go in transforming products or services let alone both. A big issue appears to be access to good LMI: "the quality and availability of labour market data varied too much." As the Report indicates, much may now hinge on the development of relationships with LEPs
2. UKCES **Report** on 'Employer Ownership of Skills.' Employer ownership has been a regular mantra for the skills system but gained a new momentum in December 2011 when the UKCES outlined a new vision for employer ownership which the Government has been keen to buy into through its funding for Employer Ownership Pilots. This Report which was published last month looks at progress made in each of the four pillars of this new model and what else needs doing. The UK Commission is looking to move the model on to something more long-term and is proposing a number of developments of interest to FE including: directing apprenticeship funding to employers; developing an LMI portal; focusing performance on labour market outcomes; reviewing the adult vocational qualification system and encouraging employers to be contributors as well as consumers
3. The independent Commission's **Report** on 'Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning.' For a sector that provides for such a wide range of learners, identifying and promoting good practice is essential and the Commission was set up to do just that. Its Report, published last month, recommends a number of practical changes such as a greater use of new technology and the creation of a specialist national training centre but arguably the Report's most important outcome is the raising of the profile of this form of learning
4. BIS/DfE **Paper** 'Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills. The final Paper in this shaping quartet came from BIS a couple of weeks ago and in effect reset the dials of the 'New Challenges, New Chances' agenda around six key areas including notably new intervention procedures, better customer information and incentive funding

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