

2013/26

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## Pocket Watch – Consulting times

### Introduction

Some important consultations are due to complete in the next few weeks. The one on reforms to much of the National Curriculum closes next week and then in quick succession we have consultations on secondary school accountability, vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds and apprenticeship reform, all drawing to a close in May. Some important issues are at stake

### Reform of the National Curriculum in England

The reform of the National Curriculum, which started in January 2011, is moving into its final, critical stages. This latest **consultation** which concludes on 16 April essentially seeks views on new programmes of study in all but the core subjects at Key Stage 4 as well as a number of implementation issues. Curriculum reviews tend to provoke sharp reactions and two issues are stoking feelings at present: whether the reforms create what a number of academics have called 'a rote learning curriculum' and how far they allow for greater school autonomy? On the former, the Government is likely to stick with its desire to focus on 'essential knowledge,' on the latter much hinges on how the relationship between the prescribed National Curriculum and more flexible school curriculum plays out. Other issues bubbling around at present include arguments for and against level descriptors, reporting of pupil progress, training time and support for staff and potential impact on pupils, particularly the disadvantaged

### Secondary school accountability

This **consultation** which closes on 1 May, seeks views on a new accountability framework incorporating an English and maths threshold measure and a new average points score plus progress measure. It's been well received but questions remain. A big question for many schools is when the average point score measure is due to come in and what impact this might have on the qualification offer; the Dept appears to be waiting here until the consultation is complete before pronouncing. Other issues around school accountability at present include: differentiating between headline and other measures; how best to recognise 'other' learning; and most fundamentally of all, the continuing demands for data transparency

### Reform of vocational qualifications (VQs) for 16-19 year olds

This **consultation**, which closes on 10 May, proposes standard criteria for qualifications for 16-19 performance tables. As such it follows a procedure already gone through for 14-16 qualifications and generating similar concerns about definitions of qualification size, assessment and content. Particular concerns for 16-19 include the categorisation of learning into three types, definitions of content as specialist or not, and impact on learner choice

### Apprenticeships reform

**Consultation** here follows the publication of the Response to the Richard Review and runs until 22 May. Key issues include the employer role in the design of standards and whether there should be a single occupational set, the nature of competency testing and employer funding



**Steve Besley**

Head of Policy (UK and International)

*Pearson Think Tank*

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