

2013/15

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Pocket Watch – Life beyond EBaccs

Introduction

With the EBaccs now like Monty Python's famous parrot, 'dead, deceased, no more,' three questions arise: what does life beyond EBCs look like; what big problems still remain; and what's the latest timescale for change?

What does life beyond EBCs now look like?

Life beyond EBCs looks pretty much that as envisaged in the landmark Schools White Paper of 2½ years ago. EBCs apart, most of the other changes indicated in that Paper such as freeing up schools, revising the National Curriculum, GCSEs and A levels, benchmarking against the best in the world, remain and are due to be implemented by 2015. The only exception is reform of school funding, postponed until after 2015. It leaves a system shaped around the following:

- A strengthened academic spine built around a more challenging National Curriculum, GCSEs and A levels
- A streamlined vocational offer defined by progression potential and labour market needs
- 16 remaining as the age of transition though with the participation age creeping up and requirements in English and maths extending to age 18
- Learning remaining structured around stage rather than age but with progress measured by more formal testing arrangements
- More transparent accountability focusing on pupil progress rather than institutional scores
- Greater institutional responsibility for teacher quality and performance reinforced through external inspection
- Increasing diversity and autonomy in the provider system and support services

What problems still remain?

Apart of course from timescale, three stand out:

- Ensuring confidence in the exam system, hugely important as the Education Committee pointed out in its Inquiry, facing continuing expectation but now able to concentrate on more recognised qualification and exam reform
- Provision for the less able, not a new problem but one that suffered from marginalisation in the EBC proposals and deserving of better treatment in any changes to GCSEs
- Closing gaps in performance, highlighted in Ofsted's last Annual Inspection Report, the subject of numerous Ministerial speeches and with 30% of schools judged as being 'not yet good' facing continuous scrutiny

Latest timescale

- Ofqual consultation on revised GCSE criteria (March/April 2013?)
- Government response on new accountability measures (Summer 2013)
- Publication of revised National Curriculum (Autumn 2013)
- New GCSEs in core subjects in schools for planning purposes (Sept 2014)
- First teaching of statutory elements of the National Curriculum (Sept 2014)
- First teaching of new GCSEs and revised A levels in core subject areas (Sept 2015)

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