

2013/16

21 Feb 2013

Pocket Watch – Obama unleashes the ‘College’ Scorecard

Introduction

President Obama’s annual State of the Union address last week featured a number of education announcements of interest not just for the home audience but perhaps the wider one as well. Along with more standard pronouncements on extending pre-school provision to all and ensuring high school children are equipped with appropriate technical and STEM skills, was a headline grabbing announcement about the need to keep the burgeoning costs of higher education under control. It came as figures suggest that the average loan debt per American graduate has risen to over \$26,000 each and student loan debt generally risen above credit card debt for the first time. One of the control mechanisms will be the [College Scorecard](#)

What is the College Scorecard?

Broadly it provides some essential customer costing information for anyone considering higher education. Using five key datasets covering: average costs; graduation rates; the % of students who have defaulted on student loans; the average amount of loans borrowed; and destination outcomes, it therefore adds budgeting information to the traditional learner information offered through prospectuses. Information on average earnings will be included later this year. The information is presented in easy to read formats and is interactive in the sense that users can tailor the information so that it covers such factors as preferred locations, provider types and programme formats. The aim is to encourage what the Administration calls ‘*smart investment*’ and although there have been criticisms that some of the data is out of date and doesn’t allow for easy comparative listings to be made, its generally been recognised as a helpful budgeting tool for hard pressed families

Would it work here?

Interestingly the Scorecard model, albeit in a different form as a tool for school accountability came close to being introduced here under the last Government before the general election intervened. The model then was more about collation of data, bringing together a range of information about a school and its performance covering anything from exam performance to Ofsted grades to pupil wellbeing. The current focus, as indicated in the recent consultation on school accountability is to shift from narrow scoring systems to using a range of headline measures that can give a wider picture of school performance as well as notably, a picture of ‘efficient’ performance. Budget transparency, destination data; the use of performance table criteria and the emerging Data Warehouse are all examples of this

Colleges and universities have always been very mindful of what President Obama called ‘*affordability and value*,’ even more so now given the introduction of fee loans for HE last year and FE this year. Recent mechanisms applied here have included: setting numbers controls; aligning central grants to stated outcomes; directing funding to particular types of provision; funding distance travelled; reporting on destination data; and using funding agency audits. Current developments, however, place increasing reliance on the operation of a market in which customers, armed with growing amounts of data and information, exercise options of both choice and affordability. Much depends now on how such a market operates in the future as to whether Scorecards drift across the Atlantic



Steve Besley

Head of Policy (UK and International)

Pearson Think Tank

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Obama College Scorecard Feb 2013