

2015/4

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Pocket Watch – Policy Lessons from this year's BETT show

Introduction

Now in its 31st year, the annual BETT show which has been taking place this week offers a great opportunity to showcase the latest gadgets and advances in learning technology but also a useful platform for any policy announcements. It was at BETT 2012, for instance, that Michael Gove made his landmark announcement about ditching the old *'dull and demotivating'* IT curriculum in favour of the industry-led computing curriculum that we now have. This year a number of Ministers have been on hand to offer their thoughts; so what have we learned?

Key policy announcements that have come out this week

1. Last week's Microsoft/Computing at school survey which revealed that *'68% of primary and secondary teachers are concerned that their pupils have a better understanding of computing than they do,'* highlighted some of the challenges being faced by teachers implementing the new computing curriculum. In response, the government is **pledging** to support the scheme led by companies such as Microsoft and Google who have been working in partnership with universities like UCL and Oxford since last year offering training and support for teachers. £3.6m is being made available to support five new projects
2. Barefoot will continue. Barefoot is a training programme, led by the British Computer Society and BT and aimed particularly at primary school teachers for whom it offers free in-school workshops. So far it has trained some 3000 teachers from over 800 schools but DfE funding was due to finish this March. This week, however, BT stepped in with funding to ensure the programme will be able to run for the rest of this year
3. Wi-fi connectivity is still an issue for many schools. Apparently it's now available in 78% of homes and businesses but according to figures quoted in the Secretary of State's speech, admittedly for last year, 65% of primary schools and 54% of secondary schools don't have access to good wi-fi connections. The government's aim is to have super-fast broadband available across 95% of the UK by 2017 and is putting in £1.7bn to support this
4. The Education Technology Action Group (ETAG) which was set up a year ago by the previous Skills Minister to advise on how digital technology might help teachers, produced its first **report** this week with 19 recommendations. Some of these were standard expectations about training, access and the use of data but the section on assessment was perhaps the most eye-catching and included a big nudge towards digital technology-enabled assessment for General Qualifications from 2015/16
5. Still on the future. In her **speech**, the Education Secretary outlined three areas where she felt technology could help *'transform the world of education.'* The first, that of helping generate data that could be used to assess the economic worth of certain qualifications, has attracted considerable comment and shows continuing political interest in learning outcomes and destinations as measures of performance. The other two, supporting assessment/ improving information flows for parents, and helping to reduce teacher workloads, are more mainstream although some remain to be convinced about the latter
6. That FELTAG recommendation for 10% online learning. The Skills Minister endorsed the line from the SFA that this was not a prescriptive target but an attempt to encourage more blended and innovative approaches to learning and assessment in FE, so an aspiration
7. And further afield. Not part of BETT but interesting nevertheless, the government this week launched its **vision** for a single EU digital market for many products and services and the Gates Foundation published its latest open **letter** on learning developments

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What came out of BETT 2015