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Pocket Watch – What does 2013 hold for schools?

Introduction

With a sweeping programme of reform already set covering changes to 16-19 Programmes of Study and funding due from Sept 2013, revisions to the national curriculum and some A levels due from Sept 2014 and reform of Key Stage 4 qualifications, the exam system and even the DfE itself due from 2015, the big issue facing schools at the start of 2013 remains the speed and extent of change as much as the change itself

Current context

We may get greater clarity on timescales and extent from some of the consultations lined up for the first part of the year including those on the primary and secondary national curriculum, performance table criteria for 16-19 vocational qualifications, school accountability and regulatory criteria for KS4 reform but pressure points are already evident. The regulator has expressed its concerns about the extent of such change although the Secretary of State appears keen to stick with it telling the Education Committee just before Christmas that *"if a red light flashes, we will take account of it but my very, very strong view is that we should stick to the timetable we already have."* Elsewhere, schools featured prominently in both the Prime Minister's New Year message, *"we said we need more discipline, tougher exams and more academies,"* and in the Coalition's mid-term review plans with 17 fairly familiar pledges on areas like pay, performance and qualification reform all listed for the next couple of years

Likely themes for 2013

At this point five seem likely to dominate. First reform of the qualification system with considerable wrestling over ownership of the Bacc template. A number of issues stand out here including: resolution of some of the technical issues in EBacc design including tiering and grading let alone the status of non EBC subjects; recognition and provision for those pupils who do not achieve the EBC package; and coherence amongst the various Bacc variants at 16-19. Second, reform of the exam market where the single board model at KS4 and HE involvement at KS5 both await greater operational clarity. Third, school accountability where consultations on both EBacc performance measures and 16-19 performance table criteria are expected. Fourth, further developments for the profession with tougher entry tests due this autumn and performance related pay looming. Fifth, further diversity in the school system following the additional funding (nearly £1bn) given for this in last month's Autumn Statement and its featuring in 4 of the 17 Coalition mid-year review promises for future school activity

Some useful dates

- Publication of 2012 school performance tables (Jan 2013)
- Consultation on criteria for 16-19 performance tables (Jan/Feb 2013)
- Consultation on regulatory criteria for KS4 exam system (spring 2013)
- Consultation on the next round of drafts for the national curriculum (spring 2013)
- Series of regulator reports on exam system (Feb-April 2013)
- Ofsted Access and Achievement Report (May 2013)
- Introduction of new 16-19 funding and RPA regime (August 2013)



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Schools in 2013