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6 August 2013

## Pocket Watch – Reviewing system provision for 16-24 yr olds

### Introduction

The Government's recently announced "*comprehensive*" system review of provision arrangements for 16-24 year olds will probably come too late to help many young people due to get their exam results over the next couple of weeks but does come as concerns remain high in this area. It's less than two years since the Government launched its last strategy for 16-24 year olds highlighting "*five priorities for action*" ranging from transforming vocational provision to implementing the Youth Contract but worries remain about high levels of youth unemployment, especially in certain parts of the country and about how well the education and training system is responding to the needs of both the labour market and young people. Both major political Parties are looking closely at this area at present, the Government through this latest review, the Opposition through its **Youth Jobs Taskforce**.

### What's the key issue?

In all cases, a key question is how to make the system simpler and easier to use whether for employers seeking to take on a young person or young people trying to find out what sorts of help and opportunities are available. As Nick Clegg put it in announcing the Government's review: "*what we want is a simple, easier to use system that lays down a clear route into work for young people and gives businesses a coherent offer to find the workers they need.*" It's an attractive proposition and one that tempts many Governments so just how difficult is it for young people, particularly those unable to follow standard entry routes into employment or continuing education, let alone for employers, to get the kind of advice and support they need?

### What's available for young people?

In a useful **Report** last year, the Local Government Association identified 33 formal services and funds designed to help young people. There are also of course a large number of private, local, voluntary and charitable schemes offering help and support. Based on some pretty unscientific research, the current range of what's on offer for young people looks like this:

- A range of school, college and training provider courses including new programmes of study, English/maths support and work experience schemes, new traineeships, employer sponsored and other dedicated provision
- Government schemes such as the Youth Contract and the Work Programme which offer employers subsidies for taking on young people although suffering a bit from slow burn
- The National Careers Service which offers a range of tools and advice from writing a cv to skills health checks and which this summer is joining up with the National Apprenticeship Service to offer two new services: Results Advice, which will run on social network sites in the second half of August, and Jobs Bus, a touring road show
- The September Guarantee which as the name implies guarantees a place in education or training for 16 and 17 year olds and becomes part of the raising of the participation age for 17 year olds this year
- The National Apprenticeship Service new AV Search app which allows for a mobile form of vacancy searching
- Universal Jobmatch and work experience placements available through Jobcentre Plus
- The DirectGov website which hosts links and information on such matters as training schemes, Jobseekers Allowance, the Enterprise Allowance and the 16-19 Bursary Fund
- A range of organisations and schemes dedicated to working with young people at various stages. A sample of some of the most well-known includes
  - Barnardo's Employment, Training and Skills Services which offer life skills and other training to over 3,000 16-24 year olds each year
  - YMCA Training which similarly offers vocational and personal development courses at various centres around the country

- The Prince's Trust, well-known for providing a range of training and support programmes such as the Fairbridge programme, aimed generally at young adults, educational underachievers and the unemployed
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance, a charity dedicated to providing skills training and personal development support typically for disengaged 16-24 year olds

### And what for employers?

For many employers looking to engage with the training system and/or recruit young people, knowing where to start is often a big problem which is why a lot of emphasis in the past has been on developing networks of brokers, partners and mentors. According to the latest CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey, 85% of employers currently have a link of some type with one or more school or college and certainly when it comes to employment opportunities, the relationship between local FE providers and local employers can be very valuable. The Government sees giving employers greater access to funding and 'ownership' of parts of the skills system as equally important. Other useful channels for employers include:

- The development of LEP based local economic plans designed to provide a closer alignment between local market needs and local training provision
- The Apprenticeship Grant for Employers, introduced to help eligible employers take on suitable 16-24 year olds for an apprenticeship and in turn potentially, employment. The scheme has been extended for a further year
- New measures from the National Apprenticeship Service including an online search tool and two new films, to help guide employers on how to recruit an apprentice
- Wage incentives. Available through Jobcentre Plus or the Work Programme, these can be worth up to £2,275 for each 18-24 year old an employer recruits
- Key agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service
- Government schemes including the Youth Contract and the Work Programme
- Targeted initiatives such as the Employer Ownership of Skills Pilots and the Regional Growth Fund which offer employers opportunities to source funding and create jobs
- Market intelligence including notably now the UKCES LMI for All tool

### What now?

As indicated, most major Parties are looking closely at this area and what could be done to improve things. It's not suffered from a lack of initiatives in the past and indeed reformers could do a lot worse than look at a **Report** five years ago from the UKCES which cited initiatives as one of the major issues in trying to simplify the skills system. Others incidentally included: difficulties of access for employers; excessive bureaucracy; rapidity of change; and system complexity, all pretty much still relevant today.

Apart from those, four other issues stand out and which could usefully be factored into any system review for 16-24 year olds. First, the lack of a universal careers service where Labour's interest in the European Vocational Orientation System and the National Careers Council's Employer Advisory Board, look interesting options. Second, building programmes around a core of work experience and the development of employability skills, where the Government's new study programmes and Employer Ownership Pilots and Labour proposals for teacher industry placements as part of FE CPD look interesting. Third, strengthening the FE sector where the Gazelle Group's Learning Company Model and the Centre for Vocational Excellence Model from both political parties look interesting. Fourth, enhancing vocational provision where the independent Commission's proposals on employer engagement in qualification design and UKCES proposals for co-locating college depts within business premises equally look interesting. As ever, there's no shortage of ideas.



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**Review of youth education and training provision August 2013**