

2013/65

18 Sept 2013

Pocket Watch – Helping the 16-19 'in-betweeners'

Introduction

Nick Clegg's announcement this week that free school meals will be extended next year not just to children in reception and Years 1 and 2 but also to eligible students in Sixth Form and FE colleges raises the question yet again about what benefits are available to support those who continue their studies in the FE sector rather than school or university. 16+ learners have often been left out when funding support is dished out, 15 sources of funding help are listed on the National Careers Service website for HE students for instance compared to just 5 for FE students while navigating the system of benefits, bursaries and bus passes can be challenging, so what is available and what would make it better?

What is available?

Not an exclusive list but the main ones, generally means tested, include the following:

- The 16-19 Bursary Fund. This is probably the most well-known and was set up as a targeted alternative to EMAs to help the most financially disadvantaged students stay on. The Fund has two elements: a standard annual bursary of £1,200 for the most disadvantaged and a discretionary element, determined at an institutional level, to support eligible students who might face financial difficulties staying on; help with equipment and/or bus passes would be obvious examples
- Travel costs. As indicated, many providers use the discretionary element of their 16-19 Bursary Fund to help with travel costs but many local authorities also offer subsidies to help with such costs usually in the form of a travel pass such as the 16+ or 18+ Oyster Cards in London
- Tax credits. Shortly to become part of the Universal Credit scheme, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit are both possible sources of support and although subject to stringent rules can support the recipient to study where conditions permit
- Child Benefit. Again subject to particular criteria on parental earnings thresholds, this can be a valuable benefit when a 'child' continues in recognised education or training and can continue until the 'child' reaches the age of 20
- Others such as 'Care to Learn' which can help with child care costs if you're under 20, have a child to look after and studying, 'Residential Support Scheme' for those studying away from home and in certain circumstances, Jobseeker's Allowance which may be available for those studying while looking for work

What might help?

Obviously what would help most would be more money and a level playing field particularly for apprentices, those on minimum wages and 18 yr olds who have been out of work for some time and are untouched by the raising of the participation age. More specifically three things might be worth considering. One, and equally something the Lib-Dems are keen on and that is to build a Student Premium on the back of the Pupil Premium, a standardised system in other words to support disadvantaged learners at 16-19. Two, re-consider the 16 hour rule so that young people have more headroom before having benefits cut and three, revamp the Youth Contract into a subsidised work experience scheme for young people. It will be interesting to see what the current Cabinet Office Review of 16-24 arrangements comes up with



Steve Besley

Head of Policy (UK and International)
Pearson Think Tank

Pocket Watches are intended to provide quick, informal updates on national developments. Information is correct at the time of writing and is offered in good faith. No liability is accepted for decisions made on the basis of information given.

Supporting further study Sept 2013