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Pocket Watch – Getting ahead with a Tech Bacc

Introduction

This week's **announcement** that the Government intends to introduce a Tech Bacc performance measure for 16-19 year olds from September 2014 ensures that virtually all of the recommendations set out in the 2011 Wolf Report have now been acted on in some way. The Tech Bacc is not a qualification as such but an important statement about a young person's readiness for progression into the labour market or further study, a "*mark of achievement*" as the Skills Minister called it. It will be left to Awarding Organisations to determine whether to create a qualification/certificate or not

What is a Tech Bacc?

Both political Parties have been working on a Tech Bacc for some time. Labour's version, originally set out in Ed Miliband's Conference speech last autumn, incorporates an employer accredited qualification at level 3, progression in English and maths and high-quality work experience linked to a young person's studies. The Government's version includes a DfE approved qualification at level 3, a level 3 maths qualification (further details to come) and a written Project. In both cases the intent is similar, namely to enhance the status of vocational learning and improve the prospects for young people but there are subtle differences. Labour for example places great emphasis on links with employers through qualification accreditation, work experience and more apprenticeships, the Government focus is on higher level maths, recognition of literacy through the Extended Project and qualifications approved on the basis of performance table criteria set by the Dept

Who would take a Tech Bacc?

Part of the drive behind the Tech Bacc from both Parties is the desire to strengthen technical level training and skills, often regarded as a weakness in the English vocational system. The Government suggests that the Bacc would be most suited "*to young people interested in occupations that require significant theory and knowledge acquisition such as STEM technicians, Service technicians and Creative technicians.*" Both Parties are keen to provide an established route for the other 50% who don't go on to university but one defining feature of these latest proposals is that a student would need to have achieved a level 2 English and maths qualification before starting, which would raise the status but curtail the target group

Does this mean we've now got a high-quality VET system for young people?

Wolf's remit had been to '*look at ways of improving vocational education for 14-19 year olds*' so have we now got the high-quality VET system for young people that this country has lacked for so long? There've certainly been significant changes to the qualification system, to the provider side, apprenticeships and accountability arrangements but on the downside, careers guidance, industrial training for teachers and school to work transition remain as weaknesses

What now?

Consultation on approved qualifications closes on 10 May, one on 16-19 accountability will follow with Labour's Skills Taskforce Report on improving the skills system also taking shape



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