

2013/72

17 October 2013

## Pocket Watch – Getting to grips with p/t and growth activity in HE

### Introduction

HE has had its fair share of issues to cope with in recent years and two in particular, the fall in the number of part-time students and HE's role in helping drive economic growth, have been the subject of significant reports this week. Neither is a particularly new problem although in each case there are new determining factors such as the sharp drop in part-time and mature numbers over the last couple of years and the strength or otherwise of the Government's current Industrial Strategy. The **report** on part-time students is "*the beginning of a process to understand what is going on and how to address it*" and is being led by Universities UK while that on economic growth is the culmination of a seven month **review** that has been led by Sir Andrew Witty. The Minister who sanctioned both reports, has said he'll look closely at both sets of recommendations although funding inevitably remains an issue.

### The part-time issue

The Independent Commission on Fees claimed last month that the number of mature applicants in England had fallen by 14% since the introduction of the fee regime while the number of part-time undergraduates had fallen by 40% between 2010/11 and 2012/13. Final figures for this year have yet to be confirmed but either way, the trend is clearly disturbing and one that many people had predicted. The UUK report examines some of the reasons for this and finds them ranging from a lack of awareness and poor marketing, to a drop in employer willingness to support such provision when times are hard, down by 25% according to a parallel report from BIS, to the whole issue of loans and financing. They conclude that a big problem is that no one owns or leads for part-time HE, "*part-time undergraduate higher education is not the concern of a particular part of the sector.*"

Five recommendations are put forward to help strengthen the position of part-time provision. Some of this is about better communication and information, "*this should be done immediately in order to have an effect on 2015/15 entry*" but a lot of it is about better positioning of part-time HE in local employer partnerships where UUK will work closely with UKCES on employer engagement and LEPs as they develop their Strategic Economic Plans.

### HE as generators of growth

Like the Wilson review of 18 months ago, let alone the Lambert report of a decade ago, the Witty review sees universities as a key link in the skills and innovation supply chain to business but one hampered by what Sir Andrew calls "*the thicket of funding complexity.*"

The Witty review comes at things from an industrial angle and as such goes directly to the transfer to market issue, "*mind to factory,*" calling for a new £1bn fund to help university researchers turn great ideas into marketable propositions through the concept of '*Arrow Projects.*' The aim would be to "*mobilise collective national clusters to win in global markets,*" creating what the review calls "*a third dimension*" for universities alongside research and education. They would not be the only ones involved in this. National bodies like the Technology Strategy Board and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) would help align activity to national economic priorities, smaller players like SMEs would be engaged through an enhanced HE Innovation Fund while local players such as LEPs would work closely with universities on R/D and local strategies.

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**Two HE Reports Oct 2013**