

2015/18

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Pocket Watch – Two months and counting

Introduction

By next week, the government will have had two months. While still short of the nominal 'first 100 days,' it's perhaps enough time to see how things are shaping up. Education, it was thought, might not be a big priority but concerns about cuts, the curriculum and coasting have changed that. As the Education Secretary said in her speech at the Festival of Education recently: *"I don't want anyone to mistake silence for stability, to presume that education is no longer a priority for the government."* Proving the point, this is an update on progress so far in the Party's 38 education and training pledges listed in its 2015 election manifesto.

Manifesto Progress Check

- On the core curriculum there were two pledges: first that secondary pupils would be required to take GCSEs in core subjects and second that Ofsted would only award highest ratings to schools that taught them. Although there'll be consultation this autumn on some of the details, how far it's applicable to all pupils for instance, the government has already confirmed that pupils starting secondary this Sept will be expected to take the EBacc subjects to GCSE. At the moment, accountability is likely to be through league table data
- On school performance there were three pledges including National Leaders taking over 'failing' primary schools, 'best' head teachers and sponsors taking over other underperforming schools and an expansion of academies and free schools. In a letter on 15 June, the government strengthened the powers of Regional School Commissioners to tackle school underperformance while other powers proposed for the Education Secretary, such as issuing warning notices and academy conversion orders, are under discussion in the current Education Bill. A definition of underperforming and/or coasting has been proposed and further consultation will also follow this autumn
- On school behavioural issues where there was a pledge 'to tackle low-level disruption,' the government has appointed a behaviour 'expert' who will lead a team of practitioners coming up with training, resources and advice to help teachers
- On apprenticeships, there were two pledges: to scrap NI contributions for apprentices under 25, pencilled in for next year and, notably, 'to deliver 3m apprenticeships over the next 5 years,' currently concentrating minds in the skills sector. The government has already confirmed that schools, hospitals and prisons will be set targets to recruit apprentices, the new Youth Allowance will shift those unemployed for 6 months or more on to apprenticeship programmes, formal reporting of progress will be enshrined in the Full Employment and Welfare Bill while the forthcoming Enterprise Bill will give government powers to convert 'low-quality' courses into apprenticeship courses
- On local growth and devolution of skills planning/funding, where there were four pledges covering local growth deals and devolved powers to Greater Manchester, the London Mayor and other regions wishing to bid, the Cities and Local Government Bill, intended to create a legislative framework for such developments to happen, is already progressing through Parliament. It reaches the report stage in the House of Lords on 13 July
- On higher education where there were a number of pledges including on science, online learning, and the implementation of a national postgrad loans system, the core pledge of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was the subject of a wide-ranging speech by the Minister this week. Not only will a Green Paper on the TEF follow in the autumn but the government is also interested in providing more informed choice and protection for students, knowledge exchange with business and a revised degree scale

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