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Pocket Watch – Reshaping the Skills System

Introduction

We've not been short of analysis and reports on our skills system in recent years yet it remains a fertile area for activity with two more Reports out just this week, one from the **Labour Party's Skills Taskforce**, the other part of the **London Skills Challenge**. The catalysts for this current burst of activity appear to be a combination of a continuing flat labour market, an ongoing drive for system efficiency and a battery of recent landmark Reports: Wolf, Richard, Heseltine and so on which have collectively changed the dynamics of the skills debate. With each of these two latest Reports calling for further radical change and further reports such as the Pearson/CBI latest Education and Skills Survey due shortly, the pace is unlikely to slacken. For the moment, these are the headline messages from these two latest Reports

Labour's Skills Taskforce Interim Report

Set up by Labour last year to look in particular at how to improve things for young people, the Taskforce has been taking evidence for much of the last six months and this Report, largely diagnostic at this stage, sets out six key areas where it believes 'a new approach is needed.' The headline message is the need to beef up the FE system so as to ensure it's better aligned with derived workforce needs and better able to offer quality provision. The proposed FE Guild and the recent Vocational Learning Commission let alone the Government's own recent Skills Report are already in this area so it looks like being a busy space to play for. These are the six key reform areas identified in the Report:

- Bridging the academic-vocational divide through a 14-19 Bacc structure
- Encouraging greater employer involvement through industry-led partnerships coordinated at a local level
- Creating a more collaborative provider system that can offer a better integrated set of learning opportunities for young people
- Enhancing core areas of FE provision by building regular industrial experience into teacher CPD and developing applied opportunities to improve English and maths levels
- Raising the bar on the quality of apprenticeships through clearly defined standards and high-value employer ownership
- Strengthening the sources of customer information, moving beyond traditional careers guidance to include assessments of skills and aptitudes through orientation packages

London's Skills Challenge

The main message coming out of this Report is that London needs a Heseltine + model, in other words greater devolution of skills responsibility in this case to groups of London boroughs working together. The rationale for this is that London has such a diverse economy with such a range of skill needs that these need tackling at a local rather than a pan-London level. The implication is that groups of London Boroughs would work together ensuring skills information, provision and funding are managed as close to the local economy as possible. London is perhaps a special case, "its economic output is roughly equivalent to that of Sweden or Belgium," but this takes the Heseltine devolved model to a further sub-regional level and offers further interesting directions for the 20 other cities currently negotiating their own City Deals



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Two more Skills Reports May 2013