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## Pocket Watch – Options for youth employment

### Introduction

There was some slightly better news for youth employment last week. The latest quarterly figures for 16-24 year olds fell slightly, the first time for a while, the Government announced that 28 cities in England would get a slice of a 3-year £50m fund to tackle youth unemployment as part of the latest City Deals and Nestle pledged to create 1,600 jobs and 300 paid for work placements for young people in the UK and Ireland also over the next three years. Welcome though all this was, the issue of school-work transition for many young people remains a problem and one that all Parties are keen to tackle. Many people feel there are lessons to be learned from other European countries and last week a **report** from the think tank IPPR highlighted what some of those lessons might be.

### What does the report tell us?

Europe of course has not been immune from problems of youth unemployment itself and earlier this year the Commission moved to develop a 7-year plan guaranteeing all young people either a job, training, further education or internship within four months of leaving school. The concept of a 'Youth Guarantee' can be attractive and has been used here but as the report notes, it's often a sticking plaster because deeper system issues tend to remain underneath.

For those looking for solutions, perhaps four stand out from the IPPR report. First that '*a high level of employer involvement in the vocational system*' is a good thing, it can help align skill training to skill need although on the downside, it can leave it vulnerable to changing market moods, the current shift from manufacturing to services being an obvious example. Second, any experience of work helps: "*policy efforts to increase the number of students working in paid jobs alongside education should be a priority for policy makers.*" Third, 'orientation' of qualifications is important: "*vocational qualifications lead to better results if they offer young people occupation-specific as opposed to general skills and if they foster direct linkages between education and work.*" And fourth, helping young people stay in work is often just as important as helping them into work in the first place. Alison Wolf's revolving door syndrome still holds: "*repeated spells of unemployment inflict wage and employment scarring effects.*"

### What's happening back home?

Certainly there's no shortage of activity. From Wolf - Whitehead, the Government has been busy conducting a series of sweeping reviews over the last few years intended to reconstruct the vocational qualification system around the needs of users and in particular young people. Clearly defined routes at 16-19, new Traineeship and Tech Level qualifications and increasing employment ownership are part of the response here. The Labour Party has been leading the development of a signature qualification for 14-19 year olds in the form of a Tech Bacc and is also reviewing the vocational qualification system through its independent Skills Taskforce. The Lib-Dems have been promoting the concept of a unified 14-19 framework with stronger support incentives including free meals, subsidised travel and universal support. So plenty going on and we now wait for two things. First confirmation from the Chancellor next month that the recovery is underway and that this will benefit young people as well perhaps through an extended Help to Work scheme and second, the outcomes from the Heywood Review, looking at support arrangements for 16-25 year olds and due to report before the end of the year.

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