

## Sector Developments

### Interim Report on Professionalism in FE

The interim report of the Independent Review of Professionalism in the Further Education and Skills Sector in England that was chaired by Lord Lingfield has now been published. The main thrust of the recommendations contained in the report is that, with effect from September 2012, FE lecturers will no longer be under an obligation to register with the Institute for Learning (IfL). This has been a statutory requirement for all FE lecturers in England since 2007.

John Hayes, the Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, has welcomed the report, and officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) will now consult with sector representatives, the IfL and other organisations directly affected by the recommendations prior to preparing a more detailed response.

The report concludes that 'staff training, professional updating, competency and behaviour are essentially matters between employer and employee' and goes on to argue that 'there are already sufficient statutory arrangements in place to ensure at least a minimum threshold level of professional competence set out in employment legislation and through, for example, 'the requirements for staff performance management and learner safeguarding', set out in the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (CIF)'.

The main recommendations contained in the interim report include the following:

- With effect from September 2012, responsibility for overseeing professionalism among FE lecturers should be transferred to the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
- The 'Further Education Teachers' Continuing Professional Development and Registration, (England) Regulations 2007' and the 'Further Education Teachers' Qualifications, (England), Regulations 2007' should both be revoked.
- Government grant funding to the IfL should be phased out.
- The last increment of transitional funding for the IfL should be used to refund part of the second year of fees paid by FE lecturers
- LSIS should provide advice to FE employers on appropriate qualifications for staff and continuous professional development; however this advice should be largely discretionary.
- In-service teaching qualifications for teachers in FE colleges in England should be 'simplified and re-named'
- An 'appropriate government body' should assume responsibility for 'keeping a register of staff that have been found guilty of gross misconduct by the authorities, so that they may be excluded from future employment in the FE sector'.

The IfL, meanwhile, has confirmed it will seek to continue in existence, but will in the future operate as an independent professional organisation based on voluntary subscriptions and membership. No doubt we all wish it the very best of luck with this.

### Evaluation of FE Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007

With impeccable timing, at almost exactly the same time as the review of 'Professionalism in FE' was recommending that these regulations should be scrapped, an evaluation of the 'Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007' was being undertaken by GHK Consulting on behalf of BIS.

The evaluation of the regulations draws on findings from 27 case studies of further education colleges, adult and community learning (ACL) providers and work based learning (WBL) providers based in England. The overall conclusion arrived at by GHK Consulting is that 'there is evidence that good progress has been made towards ensuring a qualified and expert teaching profession with the majority of new entrants to the sector being enrolled on or having achieved a recognised teaching qualification'.

Findings from the evaluation include the following:

- In the period between 2003/04 and 2006/07 there was a year-on-year increase in the proportion of staff with a teaching qualification at Level 5 or above. This trend continued after the introduction of the Regulations in 2007.
- Of the new teachers joining the Learning and Skills Sector (in England) after September 2007, and who are therefore in direct scope of the Regulations, it is estimated that between 68% and 80% either already hold a recognised teaching qualification or are enrolled on a course leading to one. This figure rises to 76% in ACL providers. Similar data for the WBL sector is unavailable.
- Approximately 80% of all teaching staff within FE colleges in England (regardless of their start date in the sector) are estimated to already have, or be working towards, a recognised teaching qualification. This figure is estimated to be slightly lower in WBL and ACL providers;
- According to the most recent staff information record (SIR) data in 2009/10, 57% of teaching staff in FE colleges hold a Level 5 or above teaching qualification, compared with a figure of around 52% in 2006/07.

The evaluation also showed that having 'qualified teacher learning and skills (QTLS) status was widely considered to be of significant importance in terms of achieving parity of esteem between teachers in FE colleges and those in schools.

### **More on 'New Business Models'**

As many of you will be only too well aware, colleges have been encouraged to explore new business models in the relentless drive to increase efficiency and return value for public money. We have seen examples of 'hard' federations, 'soft' federations, shared back office services, and college 'groups' that include clusters of private training companies, Academies, Free Schools, Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges. We have also seen proposals to convert some colleges into mutual societies and others into public limited companies. We have even seen some colleges drop the word 'college' from their name altogether.

Against this, engaging in a bit of simple out-sourcing might seem mundane stuff. However, after bidding for, and winning, funding from the FE Efficiency and Innovation Fund, one college has spiced things up by taking the unusual step of outsourcing the processing of its student application forms to a firm based in India. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that the college sent staff out to the sub-continent to help sort things out, things apparently did not go quite according to plan, and it appears that the project has gone somewhat pear shaped. The college has now decided not to extend the outsourcing arrangement beyond the current contract.

It is undoubtedly a good idea for colleges to try to become more efficient and effective. But if the government is actually serious about helping colleges to become better at what they do, perhaps the plethora of schemes and initiatives currently infesting the FE sector should be scrapped and be replaced by a single initiative called 'Let's just have really good colleges and provide really good courses for our students', with adequate funding to support it. I don't suppose we will ever see this. Some people in government departments and funding agencies make quite a good living out of inventing daft schemes and initiatives and imposing them on the sector, and others make an equally good living out of co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating them.

## **National Careers Service launched**

The new National Careers Service (NCS) was launched earlier this month (April) by FE Minister, John Hayes. There will be 3,250 careers service locations, including nearly 200 based in FE colleges. Schools now have a statutory duty to provide impartial advice on post 16 options. To reinforce this, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the new Ofsted Chief Inspector has told the Education Select Committee that Ofsted will include the quality and evaluation of the quality and impartiality of careers advice in their future inspections of Schools.

With reference to those age 19 and over, each year, the NCS is expected to be able to provide around 700,000 people with on-line and web-based and careers advice, supplemented where needed, by 'impartial, face-to-face guidance from a qualified professional'.

## **Minimum Contract Level (MCL) to remain unchanged in 2012/13**

The SFA has confirmed that the MCL will remain set at £500,000 for 2012/13. Providers with volumes of activity below MCL can apply for a one-year exemption, with the latest date for returning applications for exemption being 1 May 2012. The SFA will also be writing to those training organisations that were given a one-year exemption from MCL in 2011/12, to allow them time to make alternative arrangements and to ascertain the actions they will be taking in respect of their future plans as providers.

## **Funding for ESOL and Adult Basic Skills to continue in 2012/13**

Meanwhile, the SFA has also confirmed the continuation of funding for ESOL programmes and Adult Basic Skills Certificates at entry level, level 1 and level 2 in 2012/13.

## **Proposal to allow FE and Sixth Form Colleges to recruit full time 14-16 students**

In England, there are now more than 1,700 academies with sixth forms and there is continuing pressure both on and from other maintained schools without sixth forms, to establish them. However, rather than colleges being worried about schools encroachment into the post 16 market, changes currently being proposed could see colleges entering the market for full time 14-16 year olds and, in so doing, perhaps providing schools with a bit of angst for a change.

This is because the Department for Education (DfE) is proposing that 'with effect from 2013 and following Professor Alison Wolf's review of vocational education, FE and sixth-form colleges will be able to make full-time provision for 14 to 16 year olds'. A spokesperson for the DfE added, 'We need to ensure that there is a fair and effective means of funding this' and the explicit assumption is that FE and sixth-form colleges will be funded for students aged 14-16 on the same basis as schools.

A consultation document containing these proposals has recently been published by the DfE.

## **Duration of adult apprenticeship programmes to be increased to a minimum of 12 months**

Following on from a similar earlier announcement in respect of apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds, John Hayes has announced that, from August this year, all adult apprenticeships must also be for a minimum duration of 12 months. The exception to this requirement is that if an apprentice who is aged 19+ can demonstrate appropriate and relevant prior learning or attainment, the duration of the apprenticeship programme can be reduced to an absolute minimum of six months.

## **BIS Select Committee Inquiry into Apprenticeships**

David Way, interim chief executive of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and Geoff Russell, chief executive of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), were once again called as witnesses for the sixth evidence session of the BIS Select Committee on Apprenticeships.

Meanwhile, the Dudley MP, Ian Austin is demanding an inquiry into apprenticeships offered by the fast food chain, Subway. Mr Austin's call for an inquiry is in response to allegations that Subway 'apprentices' in the Black Country are being paid £2.60 per hour to walk around town wearing advertising sandwich boards that, as you might expect, advertise the firm's sandwiches.

Personally, I wish that the government would come up with a new name for apprenticeships. The engineering apprenticeship I did many years ago lasted for 5 years and it cost my employer a lot of money. I know that it would be very difficult to resurrect this type of apprenticeship today, but to describe as 'apprenticeships' training programmes of 6 to 12 months duration (or very much less in the past), which have sometimes been shown to be of dubious quality, and that often appear to be just a means of making shed loads of money for the private trainers delivering them, seems to me to be a bit demeaning. On the other hand, I suppose it might just be the 'Victor Meldrew' in me coming out (again).

### **2012/13 pay negotiations for Further Education Colleges**

The 2012-13 joint trade union pay claim is for a 5% pay increase or £750, whichever is the greater. Other aspects of the claim include the following:

- The elimination of the use of zero hours employment contracts
- Full implementation of the Joint Agreement on Guidance on Regulating Working Hours
- Negotiations on a national agreement on lesson observations.

### **Proposal to give Russell Group universities greater involvement in GCE A Levels**

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove has proposed that the Russell Group of universities should play a greater role in the design and assessment of GCE A Levels. Mr Gove's recent letter to the exams regulator Ofqual contains details of a proposal that suggests that academics from Russell Group universities would do a better job of 'resisting grade inflation' than awarding bodies or even the Government itself. Ofqual would appear to be in agreement with this proposal, since the reply to Mr Gove's letter from OFQUAL's Chief Executive says that, 'assuming we can secure the commitment of university leaders, we would aim to start consulting formally in June on introducing the proposed new arrangements.'

This development is also being interpreted as an indication that DfE has no desire to move towards the single national awarding body recommended by the current Education Select Committee enquiry on examinations for 15-19 year olds.

The performance and decision making of some ministers, senior civil servants and financiers, etc. who are graduates of Oxbridge and other Russell Group universities, has, to say the least, been questionable in recent years. If you ask me, perhaps somebody should be checking that Russell Group university degrees have not also been subjected to a bit of 'grade inflation' and 'dumbing down'.

### **Higher Education Developments**

At the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Conference held in early April, Universities Minister, David Willetts, confirmed plans to move to establish open access to universities for students with AAB+ grades. This will have the ancillary effect of removing 85,000 students from quotas. It also suggests that BIS may be required to fund more places in 2012/13 than was originally planned.

Mr Willetts added that an announcement about the core/margin process for 2013/14 would be made by the end of this month (April); however, to the best of my knowledge, this announcement has yet to be made. Alongside this, BIS is asking the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and HEFCE to work together to ensure the maximum use of university access agreements and widening participation funds.

## **Pay the fee, work for free, get the degree**

Presumably not wanting to let Subway have all the fun when it comes to sandwiches, Wivenhoe House in Colchester, a five star hotel, has become the new venue for a new 'sandwich' degree course. The Edge Hotel School has been established by the former head of Gardener Merchant Catering, via an investment of £10 million made jointly by the Edge Foundation and Essex University. The hotel school is offering 2 year sandwich degrees 'spread' over 45 weeks per year. The degrees are awarded by Essex University in return for tuition fees of £9,000 per year. However, in addition to working towards a degree, undergraduates are given the privilege of being allowed to work unpaid for up to 27 hours per week running the hotel.

The principal of the Hotel School insists that the degree programme is not the same thing as higher apprenticeship; otherwise the students would have to be paid for their work. After all, why pay upwards of £2.60 per hour if you don't need to?

## **And finally.....**

### *Studio Schools*

Following on from this, the Edge Foundation has further raised its profile within the wider world of education by joining forces with the Young Foundation, this time in order to drive forward the current government's Studio School initiative.

Studio Schools are designed for 14-19 year olds of all abilities. The curriculum has 'a focus on personalisation, practical hands-on learning and real work'. They tend to be small schools typically with around 300 students. Each student is assigned a personal coach. The working day is 9am - 5pm and the schools are open all year round. Studio Schools work closely with employers to offer a range of academic and vocational qualifications. In addition, all Studio Schools have enterprise and entrepreneurship skills as part of the curriculum.

A bit like what you would find in a 'bog standard comprehensive', pupils concentrate on developing employability and life skills. However, unlike pupils in 'bog standard comprehensives', work placements are a required part of Studio School curriculum. It is also intended that pupils should be paid for the work they do when they are out on placement.

Many Studio Schools plan to house start-up businesses on-site and to provide incubator units and office space. However, Studio Schools do not necessarily have any studios.

There are currently six Studio Schools open in England and in spite of heavy government spending cuts elsewhere in the education sector, a further twelve are planned to open in September 2012.

### *University Technical Colleges*

Studio Schools should not be confused with University Technical Colleges, although it is easy to see how they could be, particularly since Lord Young (of the Young Foundation mentioned above) is closely involved with them also.

A bit like as is the case with Studio Schools, UTC's offer a combination of practical and academic studies. In the same way that Studio Schools do not necessarily have any studios, University Technical Colleges are not universities nor, for that matter, are they Technical Colleges. They are, in fact just secondary schools. However, they are 'sponsored' by a university, hence the name 'University' Technical College. That is, unless they are sponsored by an FE College, in which case they are still called University Technical Colleges. Otherwise, they might have to be called 'Further Education Technical Colleges' and some folk might find this confusing.

Just because a UTC is 'sponsored' by a university or a college does not necessarily mean that the university or college will be all that closely involved in the running of the UTC. Employers will decide what the UTC will specialise in. Employers will also play the lead role in developing the curriculum of the UTC's, helping them to plan what students are going to learn and ensuring that the qualifications they gain are those required for employment. This might make you wonder why universities or colleges are needed to 'sponsor' UTC's in the first place.

However, as is the case with Studio Schools, employers are not required to provide pupils with jobs at the end of their studies. Nobody ever said that they would and you can't make them, so there. Having got this clear, it is nevertheless thought that both Studio Schools and UTCs will improve pupils' job prospects since, unlike the pupils at 'bog standard comprehensives', work placement opportunities are a required part of the UTC curriculum.

Despite the need to significantly bring down the national budgetary deficit, it is the government's aim to create a further 12 University Technical Colleges (UTCs) in England by the end of 2012.

Neither Studio Schools nor UTC's exist in any of the other countries in the UK, nor are there any planned to be introduced in the future. However, I don't think that this is necessarily because anyone in the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland think that Studio Schools and UTC's are pointless, ill-thought out, unnecessary and irrelevant, (although someone in the Scottish Education Ministry is alleged to have chuckled as he said that he thought they would probably have a shelf life similar to that of Diplomas).

## **Alan Birks – May 2012**

*If this newsletter has been forwarded to you by a colleague and in the future you would like to receive your own copy, you can register for this at [www.click-cms.co.uk](http://www.click-cms.co.uk)*

*All that is required is your email address. You will then be sent your own copy of future editions and will also be able to access back issues.*