

SECTOR DEVELOPMENTS...

INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced that the £170 million in capital funding for the development of Institutes of Technology (IoTs) referred to in the recent Industrial Strategy Green Paper and in the Post 16 Skills Plan will be allocated to existing high quality providers. This has led to comparisons being made with the previous Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) initiative that came and then went in the early 2000s. The DfE has also confirmed that IoT funding will be spread in roughly equal tranches across the three years to 2019/20. Never slow to miss an opportunity, Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), said 'Independent training providers stand ready to take the lead, or be active partners in the establishment of each new IoT'. The Green Paper is generally critical of the level of FE performance and implies that this is one of the main reasons for creating the new IoTs. However, it seems that eligibility for IoT funding may be restricted to high performing FE colleges offering courses predominantly at Levels 3, 4 and 5. More information can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/technical-education-at-heart-of-modern-industrial-strategy-for-post-brexit-success>

INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS BOARD MEMBERS APPOINTED

Last June, the DfE advertised for applications to join the board of the new Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA). After what some observers have described as an 'inordinate delay' (given that the IfA is due to become fully operational in April), the DfE has finally announced the names of the appointees. These are:

- Dr Katherine Barclay, Chair of the Life Science and Industrial Sciences Apprenticeship Trailblazer Group and a chartered chemical engineer with Pfizer UK
- Sir Gerry Berragan, former British Army Adjutant-General and apprenticeships ambassador
- Bev Robinson, Principal of Blackpool and the Fylde College, and Director of the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas, member of the Sainsbury Vocational Qualifications review panel and member of the Lancashire LEP Skills and Employment Board
- Paul Cadman, HR Director for Walter Smith Fine Foods, and apprenticeships ambassador
- Dame Fiona Kendrick, Chair and CEO of Nestle UK and Ireland and a former Commissioner for UK Employment and Skills (UKES)
- Dame Asha Khemka, Principal and Chief Executive of the West Nottinghamshire College Group
- Robin Millar, Chair of Blue Raincoat Chrysalis Group
- Toby Peyton-Jones, HR Director for Siemens UK and North-West Europe

The DfE says that details of who will chair the board will be announced later. Board membership is part-time and carries an annual salary of £15,000 per year. More information can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/institute-for-apprenticeships-board-members-announced>

DFE PUBLISHES DRAFT IFA OPERATIONAL PLAN

The DfE has also published the draft of its long-awaited IfA operational plan. The plan sets out how the IfA 'will take forward the programme of reform and raise the quality of apprenticeships' and says that the IfA's main tasks will be to 'support the government's drive to deliver three million quality apprenticeships by 2020 and to 'help businesses get the skilled workforce they need to prosper'. Other elements in the plan include:

- 'Reforms to improve the quality of apprenticeships'.
- 'Regulating the quality of apprenticeship standards and assessments'.
- 'Collaborating with partners to drive quality across the apprenticeship system'.
- 'Leading the reforms to technical education'.

A copy of the plan can be accessed at:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/comms-and-stakeholder-engagement/institute-for-apprenticeships-operational-plan/>

FIRST (AND SO FAR, ONLY) FULL TIME IfA SENIOR MANAGER APPOINTED

After a succession of temporary appointments, the first full time IfA senior manager has been appointed. Anastasia Osbourne (no relation to George), who was previously a member of the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Enterprise Directorate, has been appointed as the Deputy Director of 'Approvals'. Ms Osbourne will assume responsibility for four main functions. These are:

- 'Coordination of the approvals process for standards'.
- 'Working with technical route committees to ensure excellent quality assurance practice'.
- 'Building effective relationships with stakeholders'.
- 'Working with analysts and others to develop occupational maps'.

The post is one of six Deputy Director posts. The other five Deputy Director posts will cover:

- 'Assessment and quality'
- 'Corporate effectiveness'
- 'Data'
- 'Funding'
- 'Standards creation and review'.

Peter Lauener, who is also the Chief Executive of both the Skills Funding agency (SFA) and the Education Funding Agency (EFA) remains in post as temporary IfA Chief Executive. A DfE spokesperson confirmed that other key post would be advertised 'soon' and that in the meantime 'senior post holders appointed on an interim basis would continue to drive forward the creation of the IfA'. Shadow Skills Minister for England, Gordon Marsden, has described the whole IfA appointment process as 'a complete shambles'.

CHOICE OF PROVIDERS OF EXTERNAL APPRENTICESHIP END-POINT ASSESSMENT QUALITY ASSURANCE SERVICES

When employer Trailblazer groups submit their assessment plans for new apprenticeship standards, they must choose one of four external organisations to provide them with quality assurance. These are:

- *Ofqual*: An Ofqual spokesperson has confirmed 'we do not charge, and we do not intend to charge for our external quality assurance role'.
- *The IfA*: Peter Lauener, the interim Chief Executive of the IfA, says that the Institute is prepared to provide this service but will charge for it.
- *A professional or sector body, which the Trailblazer group creates themselves*: As an example of this, the Retail, Hospitality and Travel Industries sector has chosen to use an organisation called 'People 1st' for their external quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments. A spokesperson for 'People 1st' said that the charge was unlikely to 'exceed £40 per apprentice'.
- *The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)*: The QAA will deal with the end-point assessment of graduate and certain other higher level apprenticeships. No details are yet available in respect of charges.

More information on the process can be accessed at:

<https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2016/04/15/regulating-apprenticeship-end-point-assessments/>

DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIP SERVICE (DAS) GOES LIVE

Having been through a 'thorough 3-month beta assessment' undertaken by the Government Digital Service (GDS), the new online DAS has been cleared by the DfE to go live, and has been made available to firms that are levy-payers and that employ apprentices, to set up and access their accounts online. The DAS will also allow employers to choose the types of apprenticeships they want to run, the number of apprentices

they take on, and to source off-the-job training. The most recent SFA update (6 February) on how the apprenticeship funding reforms are intended to work, including the implementation of the DAS, can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work>

The DfE has also added a link to the apprenticeships website to provide employers with guidance on how to set up their digital account. To do this, employers will need to be able to provide details of their Government Gateway login, details of the PAYE schemes they want to include in the account, and details of all the organisations they will be using for the provision of off-the-job training. Employers will also be required to work out how much apprenticeship levy they are due to pay, and report this to HMRC for the funds to be credited to their accounts. In a further twist, the word 'Digital' has been dropped from the DAS title. (Presumably meaning that the 'DAS' will now be referred to as the 'AS'). The link can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-apprenticeship-funds>

NEW METHODOLOGY SEES 2015/16 APPRENTICESHIP QUALIFICATION ACHIEVEMENT RATE FALL TO 67%

Following a change in the methodology used to calculate apprenticeship qualification achievement rates, the overall rate for 2015/16 has fallen to 67%, from 71.7% in 2014/15. However, if the new methodology is applied to data for previous years, the qualification achievement rate remains steady at around 67% for both 2014/15 and 2015/16. The sector subject areas which recorded the lowest achievement rate in 2015/16 was Arts, Media and Publishing (60.4%, against a SFA Minimum Standard threshold for 2015/16 of 62%). Details of 2015/16 (and earlier) apprenticeship qualification achievement rates by age, level and sector can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592160/SFR07_2017_achievement_rates_update.pdf

Details of the new methodology used for calculating achievement rates in 2015/16 can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592161/SFR07_2017_QualityandMethodology_achievement_rates_update.pdf

And details of SFA minimum standards for 2015/16 can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/475609/Minimum_Standards_2015_to_2016.pdf

A THIRD OF EMPLOYERS REQUIRED TO PAY THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY IN APRIL HAVE 'NEVER HEARD OF IT'

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Federation of Small Businesses (FBS) and the Institute of Directors (IoD) have all expressed concerns about the extent to which the new levy system was understood by employers. To test this, between 18 November and 5 December last year, City & Guilds carried out a poll of 500 major employers to ascertain the level of their knowledge of apprenticeship funding reforms. The findings of the poll, which were published in a report entitled '*Skills Shortage Nation*', reveal that:

- 33% of employers who will be legally required to pay the new apprenticeship levy from this April said that they 'knew nothing about it'.

Of those employers who were aware of the levy:

- 67% felt that they were *not* 'fully informed' about how the levy system will work.
- 28% said they were 'unsure about how the levy would affect their business'.
- 31% intended to increase the number of apprentices they recruit because of the levy.
- 15% of employers said that they would be cutting back on recruitment to pay for the levy.

Of those employers that were aware of the levy and 'fully understood' its implications:

- 87% said they were struggling to fill vacancies.
- 29% said that this was also true of filling apprenticeship vacancies.
- 47% thought the levy was a good way to get employers to pay for training.
- 43% said that the levy would give them more control over training.
- 34% believed that the levy would improve the quality of training.

A copy of 'Skill Shortage Nation' can be accessed at:

https://www.cityandguilds.com/~media/News and Insights/CGApprenticeshipResearchSPOnline_pdf.ashx

IFS WARNS THAT THE RAPID EXPANSION OF APPRENTICESHIPS 'MAY AFFECT APPRENTICESHIP QUALITY AND RISK PUBLIC MONEY'

A pre-released chapter taken from the forthcoming Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) 'Green Budget 2017', entitled 'Reforms to Apprenticeship Funding in England', criticises the UK governments **target of 3 million new apprenticeship starts by 2020, and its** approach to achieving this target. In addition to pointing out that 'only 2% of employers will pay the levy, but that at least 60% of employees work for employers who will pay the levy', the IFS said that:

- **'The government has failed to make a convincing case for such a large and rapid expansion in apprenticeships'.**
- The government has made 'wildly optimistic claims about the extra economic activity or earnings such investment in apprenticeships could generate' (e.g. benefit-to-cost ratios of over 20:1).
- 'Although the apprenticeship levy is estimated to raise £2.8 billion in 2019/20, government spending on apprenticeships in England is only expected to increase by £640 million', implying that most of the revenue raised through the levy will be spent elsewhere'.
- '44% of all new apprentices are aged 25 and over, and the 3 million starts target is likely to increase this fraction further, leading to a risk that the apprentice brand will become just another term for training'.
- 'Although the apprenticeship levy increases taxes on large employers, the new subsidies for employers to train apprentices mean that many **employers will pay nothing, or at most 10%, of off-the-job training costs for apprentices**. This will increase the incentive to employers to hire apprentices, particularly those aged 19 and over, in preference to other workers'.
- **'Although** Ofsted has already expressed serious concerns about the quality of many apprenticeship schemes, the **rapid expansion of apprenticeships risks increasing quantity at the expense of quality'.**
- **'The apprenticeship levy will put downward pressure on wages.** The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) predicts that it will reduce wages by about 0.3% by 2020/21.
- **The government requirement for every public-sector employer with at least 250 employees in England for 2.3% to be apprentices, implies that** around one-in-five of all new public sector appointments must be an apprentice. Such a blanket policy cannot be an efficient way to improve skills in the public sector'.

A spokesperson for the DfE has dismissed the IFS concerns, saying 'We have introduced new apprenticeship standards which are developed by employers themselves, we have rigorously checked and taken steps to protect the term *apprenticeship* from misuse and we are confident that the new funding system provides excellent value for money'. A copy of the IFS document can be accessed at:

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8863>

OLDER PEOPLE TO BE ENCOURAGED TO RETRAIN AND TO TAKE UP APPRENTICESHIPS

The recently published UK government Green Paper entitled 'Building our Industrial Strategy' includes specific references to the 'growing challenge' of providing training for older people in work, and the need to develop 'ambitious new approaches' to lifelong learning. Following on from this, the Department for Work

and Pensions (DWP), has recently published a policy paper called '*Fuller Working Lives: A Partnership Approach*'. The paper talks about 'the significance of the ageing demographic to productivity and growth', and the need 'to recognise that older workers are crucial to filling skills gaps'. The paper goes on to discuss how people can 'boost their employment prospects in later life' and identifies 'retraining opportunities for people aged over 45, including those approaching or past conventional retirement age'. The paper points out that 'apprenticeships are an all age programme', and that 'older people can, and do, access apprenticeships'. (Prior to 2007, UK government funded apprenticeships were only available to people under the age of 25). The paper says that in 2015/16 around 57,700 (or 11.3%) of those starting an apprenticeship were aged between 45-59, and around 3,500 were aged 60 and over (1%). Some observers believe that this is an indicator that lifelong learning is back on the government's skills policy agenda. Others suggest that the main aim is more likely to be to keep older people in work for longer to help reduce the state pension bill. A copy of the DWP '*Fuller Working Lives*' policy paper can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fuller-working-lives-a-partnership-approach>

AELP OFFERS TO HELP THE DFE AND OFSTED TO DEFINE 'OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING'

Apprenticeship funding rules stipulate that an apprentice must spend at least 20% of their time undertaking off-the-job training, but fears have been expressed that this may not always be the case and that many apprentices are simply working full-time on a lower wage. To address these fears, employer-providers of apprenticeships are now required to specify 'how the 20% off-the-job training will be quantified and delivered'. However, the SFA guidance on this simply says that employer providers must 'record details' and provides no formal definition of what is, and what is not, acceptable as 'off-the-job' training. Mark Dawe, the Chief Executive of AELP, has argued that off-the-job training is 'not always about being away from the workplace'. He said that, for example, 'it was possible that 'high-quality learning programmes delivered at the workplace through online learning could meet the off-the-job requirement'. However, he admitted it was important to develop 'formal guidance as to what is and what is not acceptable'. To assist with this, Mr Dawe has conducted a survey of AELP members on the matter, and has offered to share the results with the DfE and Ofsted to assist them in the development a more comprehensive definition.

PUBLIC FUNDS MUST NOT BE USED TO PAY BROKERS' COMMISSION

In recent years, specialist firms have been established to 'broker' deals between training providers with SFA contracts that do not have the capacity to deliver those contracts, and other training firms that *do* have the capacity to deliver them, but *do not* have a direct SFA contract. The arrangement usually involves the main (or prime) provider subcontracting the work to another provider. The subcontractor undertaking the work is paid a proportion of the funds the main provider has received from the SFA, less an amount retained by the main provider to cover 'administration' fees. In cases where a broker has been used to arrange a subcontracting deal, the broker will charge the subcontractor 'commission'. This commission is usually a percentage of the value of the subcontract, and can sometimes amount to several million pounds. The practice of 'brokering' and subcontracting have both been the subject of recent political criticism, in that public funds provided for the direct delivery of training are being siphoned off to pay brokers' 'commission' and the main contractor's 'administrative' fees. The practice of subcontracting is already the subject of stringent SFA rules, but this has not been the case with 'brokering'. Because of this, the SFA has now ruled that public funds *cannot* be used to pay brokers' commission. The recently published '*Apprenticeship Funding and Performance Management rules 2017 to 2018*' state that SFA funds 'must *not* be used for... services not related to the delivery and administration of the apprenticeship'. This explicitly covers the recruitment and continuing professional development of staff involved in apprenticeships, company inductions, managing agents and *those providing a brokerage service...*. The SFA has warned it will act against any organisation found to be breaking this rule. A copy of the 2017/18 apprenticeship funding rules can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-and-performance-management-rules-2017-to-2018>

THE ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES (AOC) CONSULTS ON ITS FUTURE

Colleges that are members of the AoC currently make two fee payments, one to the national body and one to regional bodies. In 2016/17, AoC members collectively paid £4.2 million to the national AoC, and £1.6 million to its regional bodies. The large numbers of mergers arising from the area review process is resulting in an ongoing contraction in the number of individual colleges. There are currently 309 colleges, but this number is expected to fall to around 250 by the time all area review recommendations have been implemented. One of the consequences of this has been a corresponding contraction in the number of fee-paying colleges that are AoC members. This, in turn, has resulted a potential £1 million deficit in its 2017/18 budget. To address this the AoC is consulting with its members on the following:

- A proposal for a new membership fee structure in 2017/18 that will set a single fee equivalent to 0.1% of a college's turnover, up to a maximum of £38,500. This, says the AoC, could achieve an overall income of £5.53 million. But there would be winners and losers, with 89 colleges seeing an increase in fees of more than 10%, while 68 colleges would see a reduction in fees of more than 5%. The proposal therefore includes a proviso that changes to fee levels would be capped at 5%, which would decrease overall income in 2017/18 from £5.53 million to £5.25 million.
- An overhaul of the AoC's 'unsustainable regional structure to achieve efficiency savings and address inconsistency in levels of support across the country'. At present, the AoC has nine regions. These are London, Eastern, East Midlands, West Midlands, North East, North West, South East, South West and Yorkshire and the Humber. Six of these are AoC regional offices, while the three others are outsourced by the AoC to the East Midlands Further Education Council (EMFEC), the Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region (ACER), and the Association of South East Colleges (AoSEC). The AoC is proposing to reduce the number of regions (and regional staff working in them) to 'five or six'.
- Whether the AoC should continue to engage in national bargaining with the trade unions over pay and conditions on behalf of members, or whether it should focus its activities on 'developing leading thinking ahead of policy changes'. At present, the AoC represents its members in negotiations with the University and College Union (UCU), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), Unison, GMB and Unite. However, if an agreement is reached, it is then down to individual colleges to decide whether to implement it, or not. UCU says that in 2014/15, just a third of colleges implemented the pay award recommended by the AoC.

The AoC's commercial subsidiary, AoC Create, is currently returning 'falling dividends' because, says David Hughes the AoC chief executive, 'there are fewer projects around'. Because of this, there will be a further consultation with AoC members on the future of AoC Create, and that of other subsidiaries (e.g. AoC Sport), over the coming year. AoC India has already been wound up and is no longer operating.

ANOTHER ONE (UTC) BITES THE DUST

The Greater Manchester University Technical College (UTC) has become the latest UTC to announce that it will close. The UTC will cease operating at the end of this academic year, with the reason given being that low levels of recruitment had resulted in it becoming financially unviable. (The UTC currently has 127 pupils on its roll against a capacity of 600). However, poor qualification achievement rates (e.g. no pupils achieved a GCSE Grade C or above in English and mathematics in 2016) is thought to also have been a contributory factor. The chair of the UTC's trust, said 'Every effort will be made to ensure students complete their courses and get the support and guidance they need for transition to their new place of learning'.

MICHAEL GOVE SAYS UTCs HAVE BEEN 'A FAILURE'

UTCs are free schools, 'sponsored' by local employers or universities and intended to enable 14-19 year olds to study both academic and vocational subjects. The Conservative Party manifesto promised to put a UTC 'within reach of every city. But Michael Gove, who launched a major expansion of UTCs in his former role as Education Secretary for England, has now admitted that the experiment has failed. Writing in an article for the Times newspaper, Mr Gove said that student recruitment had been a 'major problem' for UTCs, and that other schools had regarded them as 'destinations for underperforming children'. He went on

to say that Ofsted inspections show that 'twice as many UTCs are inadequate as are outstanding', that UTC pupils 'have lower GCSE scores', that they 'make less progress academically' and that they 'acquire fewer qualifications than their contemporaries in comprehensives'. Mr. Gove places the blame for the failure of UTCs on 'middle-class politicians', arguing that they 'have long regarded technical education as something for other people's children'. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent setting up more than 40 UTCs since the policy's launch in 2010, but a fifth have since closed. Despite this, a further 6 UTCs are due to open in September 2017 and a further 20 UTCs are in what the DfES describes as the 'pre-opening' stage. A copy of Mr Gove's original article in the Times can only be accessed by subscription, but the main points were replicated in a similar article published in the Telegraph, which can be accessed at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/02/14/technical-colleges-failure-admits-former-education-secretary/>

And a detailed analysis of the UTC 'experiment' to date, including the reasons given for UTC closures and government concerns for the future, are given in a parliamentary briefing, which can be accessed at:

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7250/CBP-7250.pdf>

'WIDESPREAD CONFUSION' ABOUT ENGLAND'S NEW GCSE GRADING SYSTEM

In England, GCSE grades A* to G in English language, English literature and mathematics will be phased out this year and will be replaced by grades numbered from 9 to 1 (with 9 being the highest grade). The summer of 2018 will see an additional 20 subjects using numerical grades, with the letter system being entirely phased out by 2019. However, research conducted by DJS Research on behalf of Equal found that around 70% of 400 parents and pupils surveyed said that they 'did not understand the new grading system'. Additional research with 50 human resources managers revealed that less than 50% understood it, while amongst small businesses, the figure dropped to below 20%. Ofqual now says that it 'wants to raise awareness of the numerical grading system as a matter of urgency'. Ofqual's awareness drive includes a series of online workshops for staff in schools, colleges and universities, and these will be extended to include employers over the coming months. An Ofqual document that provides a brief explanation of the new grading system can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537147/Postcard_-_Grading_New_GCSEs.pdf

A more informative (but slightly lengthy) YouTube video posted by Ofqual is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnULodUFz1o>

UK GOVERNMENT IN INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT DRIVE FOR SPECIALIST MATHEMATICS AND PHYSICS TEACHERS

Trainee teacher targets have now been missed for four years running, and the Home Office 'Migration Advisory Committee' (MAC) was requested by the DfE to assess whether there is a national shortage of teachers in England, or just a shortage in some subjects. The MAC has reported that although there is no overall shortage of teachers, there is a serious shortage of teachers in certain subjects, such as mathematics and physics. In response, the UK government is employing a private company to support schools in recruiting qualified teachers in shortage subjects from overseas to work in English secondary schools. This again raises the question of how ethical it is to have to rely on recruiting key public services staff that other countries have paid to train, and can sometimes ill afford to lose.

The contract, initially worth up to £300,000, involves the overseas recruitment of 50 mathematics and physics teachers, but this may be expanded to cover more teachers in these subjects and more shortage subjects (such as computer science and Mandarin). In the first instance, the firm is seeking to recruit teachers from the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland, since schools can recruit teachers from EU countries without any visa restrictions. However, if the MAC recommends widening the number of subjects in which there is a teacher shortage, this is likely to be extended to other non-EU countries, since such a

MAC recommendation will have the effect of relaxing immigration controls for teachers recruited from those countries. This would be expected to particularly help with the recruitment of teachers who have qualified in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US (as well as in the European Union) since they can register their qualifications to obtain qualified teacher status (QTS) in England. A DfE spokesperson said 'While the MAC highlights that there is no overall shortage of teachers nationally, we recognise there are shortages in some subjects. That is why we are spending more than £1.3 billion over this parliament to help attract the brightest and best into the profession, including offering generous tax-free bursaries and scholarships in key subjects'. But the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) said that it was inevitable that the teacher shortage crisis in England 'would get worse with the bulge in pupil numbers, making it very much harder for schools to find a teacher for every class'. A copy of the MAC interim report on teacher shortages, which was published last month (January) can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migration-advisory-committee-mac-report-teacher-shortages-in-the-uk>

POLICE-STYLE BODY CAMERA TRIAL IN PILOT SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND.

Two schools in England are taking part in a three-month trial period where teachers will wear police-style body cameras to help assess whether they assist with preventing or reducing pupil disruption. To avoid accusations of covert filming, the teachers taking part in the trial will be wearing the cameras visibly. The cameras will not be used constantly, but will be switched on whenever teachers want to record something, for example, if they feel there may be a threat to themselves or to another pupil, so that there will be corroborating video evidence of if an incident does occur. The DfE is not naming the schools involved in the trial. In addition to the body camera trial, 600 teachers have been polled on how they feel about the use of body cameras in schools. Of those taking part in the survey:

- 38% said that they *would* wear them, with the main reasons given being to 'gather evidence of student behaviour' and to 'identify exactly what went on and what could have been done differently'.
- 62% said that they would be *reluctant* to wear them, with the main concerns given being the need 'to protect their own privacy' and fears of 'being spied on by management'.

GOVERNMENT TO SELL OFF ENGLISH STUDENT LOAN DEBT TO PRIVATE FINANCIAL SECTOR

HE students in England are expected to take out tuition fee and maintenance loans to pay for their courses. The loans are administered through the Student Loans Company (SLC) with funds provided by the DfE. Universities are paid tuition fees 'up front' on the student's behalf. Students are required to commence repaying their loans once they are earning £21,000 per year or above. Repayments are deducted at source from their salaries. With the lifting of the cap on HE recruitment there has been a significant increase in the number of HE students, along with a corresponding increase in the level income received by universities in fees. Because the fee payments made on students' behalf are technically regarded as loans, the sums involved are not included in UK government expenditure statistics.

Two problems have arisen from this. Firstly, UK government spending on student loans is increasing very rapidly, and is thought likely to rise still further in the future as English universities raise their tuition fees. Secondly, increasing levels of concern are being expressed in respect of the rising levels of non-repayment of loans, either because graduates are simply not earning enough to commence repayments, or because students are defaulting on their loan repayments (e.g. because they cannot be traced). This is an increasing problem in respect of students from other EU countries who took out student loans to study in England and then returned to their home countries on graduating without forwarding an address or making any arrangement for making loan repayments. A small number of EU students are reported to have abused the system by taking out maintenance loans, and then disappearing before even starting their courses.

To help alleviate the financial pressure arising from this, the DfE has announced that the tuition fee and maintenance loan debt of students in England for the period between 2002 and 2006 is to be sold on to private sector financial institutions. The DfE says that this will shortly be followed by the sale of other pre-

2012 student loan debt. The first tranche of loans is thought to have a 'book value' of around £4 billion with the second tranche having a 'book value' of around £12 billion. However, it is thought likely that these 'book values' will need to be discounted to compensate the financial institutions buying the debt for the cost of debt recovery and the potential risk of loan defaults. In response to criticisms of the move, Universities Minister for England, Jo Johnson, said that the government had always made it clear that there was 'a long-standing aim to sell the student loan book to private investors', but insisted that the sale would 'have no impact on people with student loans'. And David Gauke, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, justified the sale saying that it 'would play an important contribution in our work in repairing the public finances'. But Sorana Vieru, the Vice President of the National Union of Students (NUS) warned that the sale 'would begin a process in which loans would have to be made more attractive to private buyers at the expense of student borrowers' and that 'those buying the debt might be tempted to increase interest rates'. The DfE has responded to these concerns by saying that there will be 'no changes to the terms and conditions for borrowers' and that 'rates of repayment for former students will remain the same'. However, there is already evidence of unilateral changes being made to loan terms and conditions. For example, rather than increasing the annual earnings threshold for the commencement of loan repayments in line with inflation as was promised, the UK government has maintained the threshold at £21,000. And the increase in tuition fees from £9,000 to £9,250 scheduled to be implemented from this September (with the likelihood of even higher fees in the future), will affect not only new HE students, but also those who are part way through their course. Meanwhile, the Intergenerational Foundation think tank has calculated that because of the increase in fees this September, a student in England taking out tuition fee and maintenance loans for a three year HE course will pay back an average of around £54,000.

ENGLISH UNIVERSITY DEGREES NOW AMONGST THE MOST EXPENSIVE IN THE WORLD

The '*Study Abroad Cost Calculator*' from FairFX (a money management and financial advice firm), shows that students in HE institutions in England pay far more to obtain a degree than in other comparable countries. In 2015/16, the average annual expenditure of undergraduates in England was £18,305 (consisting of tuition fees of £9,000 with the remainder accounted for by living costs). This is, for example, nearly triple the £6,706 per year that a typical German student paid. The calculator, which can be used to provides a comparison of the costs of studying individual HE institutions world-wide, can be accessed at:

<http://blog.fairfx.com/explore-the-world/fairfx-study-abroad-cost-calculator/>

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP PUBLISHES INTERIM REPORT ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION

FE and sixth form colleges are being required to take increasing levels of responsibility for celebrating cultural diversity and promoting social cohesion, whilst at the same time, monitoring student activity to help with preventing radicalisation. Their performance in doing so influences Ofsted judgements on their overall effectiveness. Last month (January) a report by Dame Louise Casey found that 'whole areas of Britain are struggling to cope with the pace and scale of change arising from mass immigration'. The report said that was 'vital to help keep communities together amid growing ethnic segregation' and that it was essential that young people in schools and colleges be taught 'British values of tolerance, democracy and respect'. Following on from this, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration has now produced and published its own interim report, which calls on UK government ministers to:

- Encourage immigrants to learn English before they arrive in the UK if possible, or failing this to ensure that they are enrolled on a compulsory English language course when they arrive.
- Provide more English classes for 'isolated groups' already here.
- Encourage 'greater mixing amongst young people through activities such as sport'.
- Establish an 'Integration Impact Fund' to assist local areas under pressure from mass immigration.
- Develop a new national strategy for the integration of immigrants, such as helping to provide awareness of the UK's laws, traditions and culture, and developing 'local integration action plans'.
- Introduce a new 'oath of integration' enshrining British values for those who hold public office.

- Give regions the power to set their own immigration policy. The report says 'The introduction of policies aimed at directing population flows to areas of the country which require higher levels of immigration, or do not currently attract a great many immigrants, might minimise strain on public services and on community relations whilst bolstering regional economies'. However, the report does not explain how migrants living in a region that can absorb them, could be then constrained from moving to live another region where there is significant pressure on public services and a shortage of housing.

Launching the report, Chuka Umunna MP, who is the chair of the APPG, said the failure of the government to do enough to promote the integration of immigrants had 'left a vacuum for extremists and peddlers of hate to exploit'. A copy of the APPG interim report can be accessed at:

http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/570513f1b504f500db000001/attachments/original/1483608320/APPG_Interim_Report_Screen.pdf?1483608320

AND FINALLY...

A college was undergoing a full Ofsted inspection, and a specialist inspector was observing a practical catering class in the college's training kitchen. The students were preparing for a Chinese New Year dinner being held that evening in the college's training restaurant. The inspector had been in the class for around five minutes when, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the lid of a saucepan lift. Just for a second, what appeared to be a bird's beak appeared above the saucepan rim, then quickly disappeared as the saucepan lid then dropped down again. The inspector decided that she was imagining things and carried on with her observation. But a few minutes later, the saucepan lid lifted again and the beak reappeared. But this time the inspector noticed a pair of eyes above the beak, staring at her. A student distracted her attention momentarily, and when she looked back the beak and the eyes were gone and the saucepan lid was down again. The inspector thought that her eyes were playing tricks on her, so she resolved to try to ignore what she had seen. She then moved to a different position in the kitchen and carried on observing the class. But after a few more minutes, the saucepan lid lifted once more and this time she saw not only a beak but a whole feathered head, complete with eyes that were staring at her. The inspector then decided that she must be hallucinating and forced herself looked away. And sure enough, when she looked back, the lid was down and the head was gone. But throughout the lesson, the inspector kept imagining that she saw what appeared to be a bird's head pop up above the saucepan rim to peer at her for a while, only for the lid to drop back down again when she looked back. At the end of the lesson, when the inspector had finished giving her feedback, she turned to the lecturer and said, 'You'll probably think I'm a mad for saying this, but I could swear that I've seen what looked like a bird in one of the saucepans over there'. 'Did the bird keep popping up and looking at you?', asked the lecturer. 'Yes, it did' replied the inspector. 'Ah', said the lecturer, 'that's the Peking duck'.

Alan Birks – February 2017

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