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## Policy Watch – The Government consults on 16-19 funding and provision

### Introduction

The Wolf [recommendations](#) on 14-19 moved a step nearer to fruition last week. First consultation closed on new criteria for Key Stage 4 league tables, a further statement is due in a few weeks and secondly, a batch of [papers](#) was released on 16-19 provision and funding. There were three papers: a proposal to lift the statutory duty on the provision of work related learning at KS4; a set of principles designed to structure all future 16-19 programmes; and a number of questions, 23 in all, about how best to simplify and target 16-19 funding.

There's more to come of course. A support programme for maths, new arrangements for pre-16 enrolment in colleges, a review of employer involvement in qualification development and further consultation on apprenticeship frameworks are all on the 'must do' list for 14-19 learning this autumn. But tackling 16-19 provision was a high priority in Alison Wolf's Report earlier this year, 12 of her 27 recommendations covered it in some way and with the raising of the participation age creeping ever nearer, the Government is clearly keen to have any changes sorted out as soon as possible

### New building blocks for 16-19 programmes

Four are proposed.

One, the inclusion of a beefy qualification, *"a qualification of substantial size, with rigorous assessment and good progression opportunities."* The intention is that this should apply across all 16-19 study programmes including apprenticeships, pre-level 2 programmes and part-time provision. Further guidance will follow, *"we will set out the characteristics of high quality qualifications to guide providers"* but for the moment the expectation is that as many 16-19 programmes as possible will ensure such a qualification, seen by Wolf as essential for progression, is included.

Two, English and maths for those yet to achieve a C or above at GCSE. The problem area here, as employers frequently point out, is maths. It's clear, and Michael Gove signalled as much in his Royal Society speech in June, that given fierce international competition, the Government is anxious to get as many 16-19 year olds as possible proficient in maths, using GCSE as the preferred measure, *"it offers the best employment prospects and opportunities for progression."* The paper does however recognise that alternative pathways may be needed, endless repeats of GCSE may prove fruitless so allows for functional skills and Free Standing Maths where required.

Three, an opportunity for some work experience or *"high quality internships"* as the paper puts it. In her Report, Alison Wolf had argued that the current practice of sending Year 10 students off on a couple of weeks work experience had *"served its time"* and that it would be better to put the emphasis on helping those, whom by virtue of age are closer to entry into the labour market, to gain some experience of it. The argument has become somewhat confused between work experience and work related learning; both remain available for 14-16 year olds but the statutory duty to provide the latter is being lifted and the emphasis on the former looks likely to shift from 14-16 to 16-19. Three issues remain: will enterprise activity be an adequate enough substitute for those 14-16 year olds who might not now have the chance of work experience; will providers, let alone employers, be able to come up with enough places; and who'll pay? *"We want providers to be able to use their programme funding to compensate employers where appropriate,"* the paper argues but providers might see it differently.

Four, the inclusion of appropriate support and management procedures. *"We expect colleges and other providers to identify an individual with overall responsibility for putting together and*

*overseeing a given student's study programme,"* the paper states. Arise, perhaps, a new breed of 16-19 co-ordinators.

And one final point. When it comes to accountability, some of this will come through external inspection but significantly it will be the new performance measures of destination data, English and maths attainment and other progress measures that will increasingly be used. *"We are currently reviewing performance tables for Key Stage 5."*

### **Funding by learner rather than by qualification**

So on to the paper on funding where the intent seems clear from the start: *"we need to strip out the perverse incentives that are inherent in the current system of 'payment by qualification' and introduce funding at learner level that will support the delivery of a coherent programme."* This premise takes the consultation on to a series of propositions intended both to target and to simplify current systems.

In any review of funding, a number of factors come into play. One is the amount of baggage still around, in this case the fall out from the shift from EMAs for disadvantaged students to bursary funding. Another is that almost inevitably a number of other funding consultations on other parts of the system are already going on and in this case it's the review of school funding which closes shortly. And third, in the current climate, it's impossible to divorce funding ideas from funding reality, it acts as a constant restraint.

### **Some key recommendations**

There are, however, some important recommendations in the paper which deserve close scrutiny. This is a summary of three of them.

On supporting disadvantage, the aim is to build on the pupil premium and create an all through system of support from the pre-16 premium, through to the 16-19 bursary and on to the HE National Scholarship Programme. 16-19 disadvantage funding would equally support 16-19 apprenticeships but the questions posed in the paper are firstly whether there should be one overall fund or a number of targeted ones perhaps within it and secondly, and a continuing challenge, how best to identify disadvantage, would previous eligibility for free school meals for instance, work as an indicator?

On simplifying funding for participation, the aim is to adopt Wolf's recommendation 11 and express funding more on a per student basis and less in terms of generic glh or SLN. Views are sought about how this might work for small or large programmes, part-time or full-time students. In this context, paragraph 70 suggests that the size of a full-time programme could be about 600glh a year which, it argues, *"would provide sufficient time for 3 A levels or a good sized vocational qualification with additional hours including English and maths."*

On success rates, the picture is slightly clouded at present by the increasing interest in the use of other success measures such as destination data, progress over time and market outcomes. The paper seeks views on whether success rates should stay or if not whether something like the retention element should remain.

As with many of these options, a useful impact analysis is provided to help weigh up the pros and cons. There's 12 weeks in which to do this.

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**Government consultation on 16-19 Oct 2011**