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## Policy Watch – The latest Dept Business Plans tell us what to expect for the world of education

### Introduction

With the Coalition Government reaching its first birthday intact last month, Government Depts have been busy updating their annual Business Plans for what looks like being a pretty tough second year. Nine priorities for the [BIS](#) Dept, six for the [DfE](#) all with accompanying milestones tell us that education for one remains a high priority

### How do Dept Business Plans work?

Departmental Business Plans, along with monthly progress reports and assorted data 'dumps' on such matters as expenditure, salaries and performance, all form part of the Government's much vaunted promise of more open government.

It means that for instance we now know what the overall budget for each Dept for the next four years looks like and, by following some little bubble charts alongside, where that money is to be spent. The Dept for Education, for example, kicked off last year with an overall budget of £58.4bn which has dropped to £56.4bn for this year but will reach £57.2bn by 2014/15. For BIS, it was £18.5bn last year, dropping to £17.7bn for the current year and £14.6bn by 2014/15.

Not content with that, by scouring the various impact indicators listed in each Business Plan we can also see what progress is being made where. The DfE has 9 of these indicators covering such things as the percentage of 16 year olds achieving the English Bacc and the percentage of pupils on Free School Meals gaining entry to Russell Group universities while BIS has 13 incorporating participation and achievement levels against international comparators, progress in social mobility and levels of innovation and entrepreneurial activity.

Quite how all this information is going down is hard to tell at present. At their most useful, the monthly progress reports or Structural Reform Plan Implementation Updates to give them their full mouthful, mean that you can track progress on all key policies virtually at a glance. The May Update for the Dept for Education, for instance, lists 38 actions all due to be started by the end of May 2011, that for BIS lists 49, although many are ongoing. They also point to where deadlines have been missed and why. Two are of particular interest at the moment both in BIS. One is the HE White Paper, now expected in the next couple of weeks but nearly three months behind schedule and where tensions have been steadily rising. Why the delay? Well, "*reform of this scale warrants careful consideration so we have decided to take more time to develop it.*" In a similar vein, proposals to introduce a fee loan system for FE which was announced last November and where implementation proposals were due to be published before the end of March 2011 have also been caught up in the need for 'careful consideration' and seem unlikely to emerge now much before August.

As the infamous CBI meeting memo recently indicated, fingers appear to be hovering over the pause button in a number of areas of reform at present to allow for further 'reflection.' For education, however, especially for schools, the Government remains keen to keep up the pace.

### What can we learn from the Dept for Education's Business Plan?

Four things stand out from the DfE Plan.

**First**, the continued transformation of the school system. A breakdown of the different types of school is due this September. This will give us some idea about what stage the transformation is at. Clearly momentum is being driven by the shift to Academy status which was opened out this month. The running total shows 704 Academies open at present but with applications coming in

fast, apparently 179 schools applied in the last month alone. Funding and freedom may be the attraction but upping performance levels will be the real test. The year ahead is also intended to herald the arrival of two further types of school. One is the technical school or college already in place as a University Technical College in Staffordshire and with three more due to open shortly. Budget 2011 of course underlined Treasury support for the UTC model with funding set aside for 24 by 2014 while the current Education Bill made provision for Technical Academies as well. The current round for bids closed in April and results are expected next month. Second, and still being hotly debated, Free Schools, in many ways an amorphous title for a different type of locally determined school that the Secretary of State is keen to see develop. Over 300 bids were received for the first wave earlier this year but this has been whittled down with four reaching the final stage. The deadline for bids for 2012 is next week and while the Government is hoping to have at least some pioneers this year, most will be looking towards the year after.

**Second**, funding, where the coming year sees the pupil premium starting to take effect with evaluation of the scheme following the year after; this is another area where the Treasury has committed funding, £625m in 2011/12 rising to £2.5bn by 2014/15. An equally important Fund is the £125m Education Endowment Fund, now being managed by the Sutton and Impetus Trusts and which will be open for bids shortly from primary and secondary schools in England looking to raise performance in areas of disadvantage. Elsewhere, schools will receive notification of their 2012/13 budgets by the end of the year, the Dept continues to push ahead with its consultation on school funding and in November will confirm its approach to capital funding following the recent James Review.

**Third**, curriculum reform, a key area of activity over the last year but where there's still a long way to go. To take two obvious examples, the Review of the National Curriculum has at least two more years of consultation and deliberation to go before first teaching of the core subjects, while a quick glance down the recent Response to the Wolf Review highlights at least 9 'developments' due before the end of the year, 8 areas subject to review or consultation and two requiring legislative change. **Fourth** and finally, some structural change to note. The key date here is April 2012 when many of the targeted 'quangos' shut down and new Executive Agencies formally open, three in particular: on funding, testing, and leadership and teaching, respectively.

### **And the Business Plan for BIS?**

A driving force for BIS is the Government's [Growth Plan](#), phase two of which was launched by Vince Cable this week. Its aspirations generally pepper much of the Dept's list of activities for the coming year and beyond where again perhaps, four features stand out.

**First** of course that HE White Paper, trailed as resetting HE strategy around choice, quality and participation in the context of a marketised model but in the light of recent developments looking to provide re-assurance about how the transition will be managed. **Second**, a core theme of raising skill levels where key features include further development of the apprenticeship system particularly in leading sectors, at higher levels and, post Wolf, for young people; important data on the number of new places will be published in January. Also, and along with development of a loan system for learners, an all through careers service and Learning Accounts both now in the wings, important work is under way and due later this year on encouraging employer investment in skills with the UK Commission playing a lead role.

**Third**, ensuring that economic development is spread more evenly across the regions. Mechanisms include the creation of local enterprise partnerships, 35 now in place and currently working up their business plans, revived Enterprise Zones where a further ten will be announced in September, the development of a network of Technology and Innovation Centres, and the pump priming Regional Growth Fund now open for a second round of bids. And **fourth**, briefly, building growth around leading sectors such as Manufacturing whose new Advisory Service launches this autumn and the green economy where the Investment Bank opens in Sept 2012.

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**Education Business plans**