

2011/30

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Pocket Watch – Participation Strategy for 16-24 year olds

Introduction

Yesterday the Government set out its policy on encouraging more young people to participate in education, training and employment opportunities in the shape of an overall participation strategy for 16-24 year olds. It brings to a head a number of important papers and proposals starting with the Wolf Review and Social Mobility Strategy at the start of the year and ending with the Youth Contract at the end of the year, each of which has helped shape a comprehensive policy response to the concerns about the employment and training prospects for young people

The context

The latest unemployment figures showed that the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds rose 2% to 22% in the three months to October. This confirmed a trend that has been well reported in the media as the totals have edged over the 1m mark. Three additional points stand out. First that while a lot of young people stay on in learning beyond the age of 16, this drops significantly around the ages of 17/18. Second that as a number of important think tank reports have recently indicated, many young people suffer from a 'fatal' combination of poor school leaving qualifications and declining local industries which in some parts of the country is creating some profound 'bleak' spots. And third that current predictions point to unemployment not picking up until late 2012 even 2013 with obvious consequences for young people

What are the main headlines in the Strategy?

With the Government having made a number of announcements in recent months for this area, much of this latest Strategy is fairly well-known. However, it brings together commitments from three Government Depts (DfE, BIS, DWP) and as such is a useful summary of current activity.

This activity can be captured under five key priority headings including: using mechanisms such as the Wolf Review and the focus on English and maths to ensure young people are equipped with the right skills needed to progress; implementing a new Youth Contract; developing systems to support the raising of the participation age; encouraging the development of the work-based apprenticeship route; supporting those most at need through the Work Programme, Job Centre Plus and ultimately the Universal Credit system

What about any less well-known headlines?

- The £4.5m for high-quality work experience for 16-19 year olds is being piloted in 25 listed colleges and comes with a new myth-buster to make it clearer for employers about what's involved in offering places. Additional health and safety risk assessments may not be needed for instance
- Employers who take on an 18-24 yr old from the Work Programme should qualify for one of the 160,000 £2,000+ per business subsidies
- The new duty on schools providing independent and impartial careers guidance for Years 9-11 comes into force from Sept 2012 and consultation on extending this will follow
- Along with a new Key Stage 4 Destination Measure, the Government is looking at performance table measures for 16-19 yr olds
- Further consultation on the implementation of raising the participation age will follow

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Maximising youth participation. Dec 2011