

2011/14

12 October 2011

## Pocket Watch – Sector-based work academies. What are they?

### Introduction

One of the measures the Government is keen to highlight as it seeks to respond to the latest 'grim' unemployment figures is sector-based academies. In the words of the Employment Minister: *"sector-based academies are the next key part of our strategy to tackle youth unemployment... they will put people at the head of the queue for vacancies"*

### So what are sector-based academies?

Essentially they are designed to help young people in particular, with preparation and entry into work. As the name implies they are sector based, offered through Jobcentre Plus and aimed at those aged 18 or over claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA.) Generally a programme can last up to six weeks and comprise three elements: preparation training for work, funded by the Skills Funding Agency and typically delivered through colleges and training providers; a work placement; a guaranteed job interview. The scheme's not new, it was considered by the Conservatives while in Opposition although known at the time as service academies, was incorporated into the Government's *'Supporting Youth Employment'* strategy earlier this year and formally launched on 1 August

### Will they make much impact?

Clearly the Government is hoping so and is claiming that it has funding to support up to 50,000 places over the next two years. Participants continue to receive JSA while attending an academy though must attend regular reviews. The funding will support the training stage and although the Government is stressing that this will help employers recruit known and trained staff, it's not clear yet how many of them will support placements. Labour argues that the Government was wrong to scrap the Future Jobs Fund, a £1bn scheme it introduced in 2009 and which offered subsidies to employers to take on recruits for up to six months

### What else is the Government doing?

The Government would point to lots of things including: Work Clubs; the New Enterprise Allowance; the Work Programme; reform of vocational qualifications; the creation of Enterprise Zones and a big increase in apprenticeships. The big bone of contention, however, is whether the Government really has a Growth Plan or not. The Government says 'yes' and points to measures listed in its Phase 1 Paper launched in March with a Phase 2 follow-up due in November; critics say 'no,' this doesn't add up to a proper growth plan

### Just how bad were the unemployment figures?

The figures, released on 12 October and covering the period from to June to August 2011, show that unemployment had risen to 2.57m, its highest total for 17 years. For 16-24 year olds, it was up 74,000 to 991,000 though this does include those in f/t education but available for work. Hardest hit appear to be the North East and part-time employment, the latter down 175,000, while the anticipated growth in private sector employment, up just 41,000, appears minimal

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**Sector based academies Oct 2011**