

EDUCATION JOURNAL

No. 156

ISSN: 1364-4505

Friday 8 March, 2013

Gove plans major vocational reforms

Yesterday the Government launched a consultation on the future of vocational qualifications. Heavily influenced by the report last year of Professor Alison Wolf, the Government proposes to restrict the number of vocational qualifications that will count in school league tables. Schools will still be able to offer qualifications that don't count in the tables, but the assumption is that schools that have played the system by entering pupils for vocational qualifications that have counted as A-level equivalent will not do so once the incentive to improve their league table place is removed by the loss of equivalence.

The Government proposes to split vocational qualifications at Level 3 into two types – applied general and occupational. Only those that are rigorous and meet pre-defined standards will be included in performance tables. The Government would like to see a reduction in the large number of Level 3 vocational qualifications that exist at present. It estimates that around 90 per cent of the nearly 4,000 existing courses will not count in performance tables.

The consultation also seeks views on whether the Government should fund learners who are over 19 to take vocational qualifications that meet the new characteristics, but do not conform to the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

The Minister for Further Education and Skills, Matthew Hancock, said: "For vocational education to be valued and held in high esteem we must be uncompromising about its quality. Vocational qualifications must be stretching and strong. The proposals would ensure that only large qualifications which meet a quality bar will count in the performance tables. The changes would also mean that qualifications which lead into skilled occupations – either directly or through higher education – would be reported separately from those which are more general in nature. Academic achievement would also be reported separately.

"Our proposals will have two very positive effects. First, it will end the current perverse incentives – every student will have to study a high-quality qualification of substantial size if their college or school sixth form is to get credit in the league tables. Secondly, it will be clear which qualifications will progress young people into skilled occupations and which are more general in nature. At the moment too many students are spending time working hard but getting nowhere. This is not their fault. The vocational courses they are taking have limited value in the jobs market. But because they count equally in the performance tables, they appear to have the same value. This is not true.

Commenting on the reform proposals, Prof Alison Wolf said: "Those aged 16 to 19 need to study qualifications that are suited to their age group and which improve their prospects. The current system does not identify these clearly."

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The Vocational Divide

The Government's consultation on vocational qualifications for 16 to 19-year olds, published yesterday, is the latest piece of the accountability jigsaw to surface. This is likely to have an easier ride than Michael Gove's attempt to introduce English Baccalaureate Certificates, but then it is heavily influenced by Professor Alison Wolf's report on vocational qualifications published last year. Yet not everyone buys Wolf's analysis.

The Government's proposals for reform do have a certain coherence about them, although that is not obvious from the consultation itself. At the same time that it published proposals for reforming vocational qualifications post 16 the Department for Education also announced plans for new courses in engineering and construction for those between 14 and 16.

The Government has already announced that it is to allow children to transfer to further education colleges at 14. While the new courses in construction and engineering could in theory be provided in schools, it is FE colleges that already have the facilities to do this and to provide a seamless transition to post-16 Level 3 courses in the same subjects.

Michael Gove clearly sees the FE sector as the main provider of vocational education, and to a greater extent than it already is, and changing the law to allow 14-16 year-olds to go to an FE college is part of that vision. Although the FE sector is cautious at present, it will follow the money. With most vocational Level 2 courses being cut out of performance tables schools will soon drop a significant part of their vocational offer. High stakes league tables to not allow most schools the luxury of running courses that are excluded from the league tables that the school will be judged by.

“The heroic attempt of Sir Mike Tomlinson to bridge the academic-vocational divide ... is dead. The divide remains and will become wider than ever.”

Recent changes to A-levels are likely to see a switch to vocational courses. Mr Gove's decision to drop the modular approach in favour of an exam at the end of two years and to abandon the AS level as a stepping stone to A2 will mean that some weaker A-level students for whom these are important aides to getting through A-levels will not try this route at all. That will have knock-on effects with fewer people going to university, but without the Government suffering the opprobrium of

having to announce the reversal of Tony Blair's admittedly arbitrary target of 50 per cent of young people going to university. It will also save money, but without the appearance of budget cuts.

Beefing up Level 3 vocational qualifications will also reduce their attractiveness to schools, few of which are equipped to provide much of a range of courses. Schools will continue to do what they already do well, which is to cater for the increasing number of people who want to mix and match, taking a vocational course alongside A-levels. This has become increasingly popular, with the numbers studying purely academic subjects at Level 3 dropping from 70 per cent in 2008 to 51 per cent in 2012. Yet the number of vocational qualifications that fit this sort of provision is few and likely to be even fewer once 90 per cent of existing vocational qualifications are excluded from performance tables.

The new engineering and construction courses for 14 to 16-year-olds will be attractive to the small number of University Technical Colleges. The DfE has approved the opening of another 11 UTCs in September. Yet it is difficult to see UTCs thriving now that FE colleges can recruit at 14 – the same age that UTCs start at. That change in policy is likely to have holed UTCs below the water line in the long term.

The future, therefore, will be one where increasingly 14 is the age of transfer for those who want to follow a vocational path, transfer to an FE college while schools cater for those who want to pursue the traditional academic path through A-levels to university. A sprinkling of vocational courses will still be available at school as well as A-levels, but that will not be the main focus for schools. The heroic attempt of Sir Mike Tomlinson to bridge the academic-vocational divide, half-heartedly backed by the last Labour government with its version of Diplomas, is dead. The divide remains and will become wider than ever.

New vocational qualifications for 14-16

Alongside the consultation on vocational qualifications for 16-19 year-olds announced yesterday, the Department for Education has also announced that a series of high-quality vocational qualifications are being developed for use by 14- to 16-year-olds.

Three construction qualifications of GCSE-size will reflect the skills and knowledge needed to meet employers' needs. The Government promises that these will be "rigorous, high-quality vocational qualifications" meeting the characteristics required for inclusion in the 2016 Key Stage 4 performance tables.

A new 14 to 19 Advisory Committee, chaired by Roy Cavanagh MBE, Training and Education Executive at Seddon Construction, has been established to create these courses. The committee involves employers, awarding organisations, professional bodies and Higher and Further Education. Mr Cavanagh said: "We need to give our young people every chance of fulfilling their potential. Employers have already played a major role via the development of qualifications for 14- to 19-year-olds in construction and built environment. This sector accounts for eight per cent of GDP, employing over two million people across its supply chain. We want to capitalise on the progress that has been made over recent years, seizing the opportunity to create new qualifications which will prepare students for work in the industry." Engineering organisations – led by the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAE) – are working to develop four new qualifications which will prepare students for careers in the engineering sector and meeting the demands of the sector.

Occupational and Applied General qualifications

At the heart of the Government's proposals for reforming vocational qualifications is the proposal to split them into two kinds – occupational and applied general. The Government feels that there are too many qualifications and many of them leave employers and students alike confused. It has taken to heart the Wolf Report view that too many students are short-changed by the present system. She concluded that "at least 350,000 young people in a given 16-19 cohort are poorly served by current arrangements. Their programmes ... fail to promote progression into either stable, paid employment or higher level education and training in a consistent or an effective way."

As the new consultation puts it, "some vocational qualifications are robust, challenging, and held in very high esteem by employers and Higher Education institutions. Yet too many students are being guided to spend time and effort working towards other vocational qualifications with limited value, only to find themselves with few options for moving onto employment or further training at the age of 19."

Applied General Qualifications will be intended for "young people who wish to continue their general education and learn in an applied way". These qualifications will combine theory and some practice for a sector subject area (e.g. manufacturing technologies, retailing and wholesaling or travel and tourism) but do not directly prepare students for a specific occupation. These qualifications are intended to provide broad progression opportunities and will often be taken alongside A levels, where they may satisfy an entry requirement to higher education.

Occupational Qualifications will be intended for young people who have "a clear idea about an occupation they want to pursue and are ready to specialise". These qualifications may prepare students for a specific job role by confirming occupational competence and could form part of a related apprenticeship framework. They may provide a 'licence to practise', as required for some occupations (e.g. gas installation or veterinary nursing) or offer exemption from professional exams (e.g. engineering or accountancy). Alternatively, they may support progression to a specialist degree or higher education qualification that qualifies entry to an occupation, such as is the case now with many health professions.

Does the Icarus legend have a lesson for HMCI?

Chris Waterman tries to understand Sir Michael's real agenda

On Thursday Ofsted published the latest statistics on school inspections, which show that nearly half of schools (977 out of 2102) had improved their overall effectiveness from their previous inspection, with 74% of schools being judged good or outstanding. Sir Michael claimed credit for the improvement, saying "I'm clear that scrapping the satisfactory judgement and replacing it with 'requires improvement' is injecting a sense of urgency in both schools and local authorities. Heads and governing boards now have a much greater focus on tackling the central issues of school improvement." He also referred to the fact that Ofsted, with its new regional structure, is "increasingly helping schools to improve... [by] .. working with underperforming schools until they get to good."

We have reported before about HMCI's u-turn on Ofsted getting involved in improvement as well as inspecting and there are growing concerns in the sector about the conflict of interest if an improvement agency also seeks to be the "independent" inspection agency.

What will happen to the Ofsted improvement arm if underperforming schools, having been supported, do not come good? Will that bit of Ofsted be held accountable for the continuing failure, or will the inspection bit of Ofsted be more generous in its assessment? It will be impossible for the inspectors to not know who has been supporting an underperforming institution and just a little complicated to effectively fail the other arm of the organisation.

"What will happen to the Ofsted improvement arm if underperforming schools, having been supported, do not come good? Will that bit of Ofsted be held accountable for the continuing failure, or will the inspection bit of Ofsted be more generous in its assessment?"

Imagine the reaction to a proposal that the government's driving test examiners should also market themselves as driving instructors. There is little doubt that an emergency stop would be made!

There is also the question of how an underperforming school should react to being offered support from Ofsted. To say no might seem churlish and risk a closer examination next time round. Saying

yes would, automatically, take business away from local authority and private providers of support services.

What Sir Michael has yet to come clean on is who will pay for the improvement support. He has had to up the ante to even fill the regional director posts and if 26% of schools in the next quarter need support, where will the funding and the inspectors come from to support the 500 schools?

There is no evidence that the Ofsted board has approved this move into school improvement but there is evidence that the Education Select Committee is skeptical. Perhaps there is a strategic and business plan somewhere that lays it all out. What we need to know is:

- why Ofsted is seeking to do it
- how much improvement Ofsted plans to deliver
- who, precisely, will deliver it
- what choice underperforming schools will have about accepting it
- when HMCI will let us all know
- which forum the discussion will take place in

I am sure there will be no shortage of offers to help Sir Michael draft the consultation paper on "Proposals to extend Ofsted's remit to become, additionally an improvement agency." There will be many questions that will not be susceptible to easy answers, hence the urgency for a proper discussion of them.

English speaking world still dominates world HE

America once again dominates the list of the world's top universities by reputation, compiled each year by the *Times Higher Education*. The 2013 list was published this week. The UK again came second, with 14 per cent of the top 50 universities. The Americans accounted for just over half the universities in the Top 50. The list is still dominated by the English speaking world, with Canada and Australia each having three universities in the Top 50. Japan has two, Germany one and France, Italy and almost the rest of the world none.

While the English speaking world still dominates the rankings, countries from East Asia are catching up. China has three universities in the Top 50 (one of which is in Hong Kong) and Japan two, while South Korea has one. Looking at the whole list of 600 institutions it is universities from East Asia that are advancing.

At the top end of the list Britain out-performs the whole of Continental Europe put together decisively. Only three Continental universities make the Top 50, from Switzerland, Germany and Russia. Critics of the various world rankings have argued that as most academic research papers and journals are in English this gives universities in the English speaking world an unfair advantage. However, this list is based on reputation, from a poll of academics from all over the world. (*The Times Higher* publishes another ranking in October which is based on performance.) The poor performance of European universities is a striking feature of the list.

Yet at the very top an elite group of six American and British universities is far ahead of the rest of the field. Harvard is again top, followed by MIT, Cambridge, Oxford, Berkeley and Stanford. Other British universities in the Top 50 are Imperial College London (at No.14), University College London (20), the London School of Economics and Political Science (25) and the universities of Edinburgh (46) and Manchester (47).

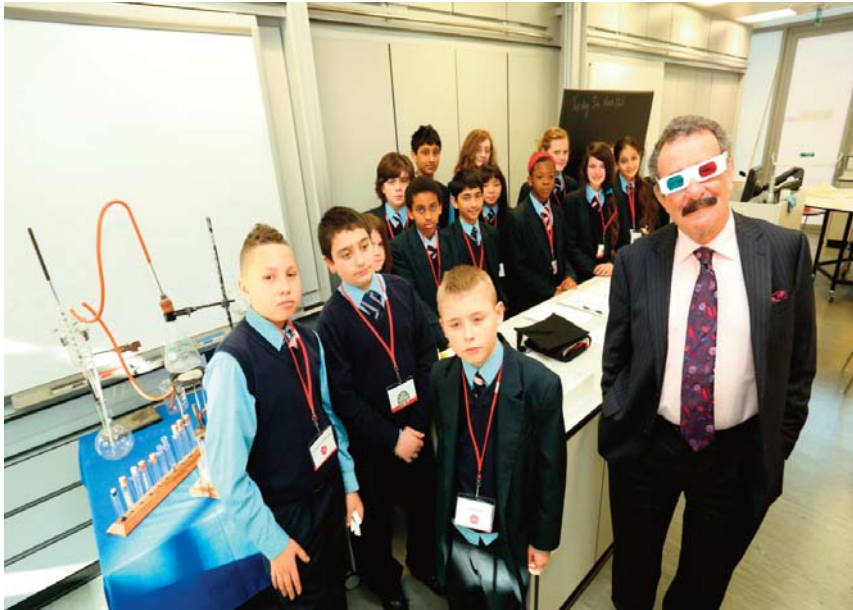
TOP 50 UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD BY REPUTATION

Rank	Institution	Country/ Region	Overall score	Rank	Institution	Country/ Region	Overall score
1	Harvard University	USA	100.0	26	Carnegie Mellon University	USA	11.3
2	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	USA	87.6	27	University of Texas at Austin	USA	11.2
3	University of Cambridge	UK	81.3	27	University of Washington	USA	11.2
4	University of Oxford	UK	73.0	29	New York University	USA	10.8
5	University of California, Berkeley	USA	72.4	30	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA	10.7
6	Stanford University	USA	70.6	31	University of British Columbia	CANADA	10.2
7	Princeton University	USA	36.2	31	Duke University	USA	10.2
8	University of California, Los Angeles	USA	35.6	31	McGill University	CANADA	10.2
9	University of Tokyo	JAPAN	32.9	34	University of California, San Diego	USA	9.7
10	Yale University	USA	32.8	35	Tsinghua University	CHINA	9.6
11	California Institute of Technology	USA	27.8	36	The University of Hong Kong	HKG	9.5
12	University of Michigan	USA	22.4	37	Northwestern University	USA	9.4
13	Columbia University	USA	21.4	38	Georgia Institute of Technology	USA	9.2
14	University of Chicago	USA	21.3	39	University of Melbourne	AUSTRALIA	8.9
14	Imperial College London	UK	21.3	40	University of California, San Francisco	USA	8.7
16	University of Toronto	CANADA	18.8	41	Seoul National University	S KOREA	8.3
17	Cornell University	USA	18.3	42	Australian National University	AUSTRALIA	8.2
18	University of Pennsylvania	USA	17.9	42	University of Massachusetts	USA	8.2
19	Johns Hopkins University	USA	16.9	44	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München	GERMANY	8.0
20	University College London	UK	15.8	45	Peking University	CHINA	7.8
20	ETH Zürich – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology	SWISS	15.8	46	University of Edinburgh	UK	7.7
22	National University of Singapore	SGP	15.5	47	University of Manchester	UK	7.3
23	Kyoto University	JAPAN	15.0	48	University of California, Davis	USA	6.9
24	University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign	USA	14.3	49	University of Sydney	AUSTRALIA	6.7
25	London School of Economics and Political Science	UK	12.1	50	Lomonosov Moscow State University	RUSSIA	6.5
				50	Purdue University	USA	6.5

Source: *Times Higher Education*

National Science and Engineering week

This is National Science and Engineering week, when the worlds of science and engineering try and enthuse young people to see these disciplines as exciting and worthwhile. A group of eminent scientists launched the week with an even presided over by the Rt Hon Professor Lord Robert Winston, Professor of Science and Society at Imperial College London, where the launch event took place, and Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University. Prof. Winston said: “One of the great values of National Science & Engineering Week is its focus on practical and experimental science which enthuses children across the nation.”



Professor Lord Robert Winston and students

Dr Zita Martin, teacher of the lesson set in 2063, highlighted the impact of technology: “As technology develops and planned scientific missions deliver huge amounts of new data and information, it won’t be long before children will have access to real life extra terrestrial samples. Movements like ‘citizen science’, which involves volunteers helping professional scientists collect and analyse data, have the potential to expand to include young people at school in the process of real science research.”

The National Science & Engineering Week is organised by the British Science Association, and is now in its 20th year.

The event celebrated advances in science by holding three lessons themed around past (1963), present (2013) and future (2063) taught by internationally renowned scientists, One of these was Dr Becky Parker, MBE a Fellow of the Institute of Physics. She warned: “Science teaching needs to focus on helping children to ‘be’ scientists. The Government has made a lot of noise about wanting the education system to produce more skilled scientists and engineers, but its policies simply do not match up in terms of funding and commitment. Primary school children taking science exams is quite frankly ludicrous and another example of the ‘exam factory’ approach to science education.”



Dr Becky Parker MBE

Ofsted promotes its Parent View

Parent View is an on-line questionnaire that Ofsted uses to provide a way for parents to give their views on their children's school. This week Ofsted launched a toolkit for schools to promote Parent View. The agency hopes that parents will complete the questionnaire throughout the year as well as during and inspection.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector and head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw said: "I want to see all schools urging parents and carers to use the Parent View online questionnaire. The views of parents help inspectors form an accurate picture of how a school is performing. Just as importantly, the changes made to Parent View will allow headteachers to regularly monitor how parents see the school and are part of our commitment to help schools improve."

Ofsted has recently made a number of changes to Parent View. These include:

- Schools now need to have a minimum of 10 completed responses – up from three – before the results for the school appear on the Parent View website.
- Schools can now sign up to receive regular email alerts about changes to the results to help them continue to improve their performance.
- Ofsted has committed to investigate any concerns that a school raises about Parent View within 24 hours.

Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the NAHT, said: "We're pleased to see that the protection for the safe use of Parent View has been improved. It is incredibly important that headteachers get parents' views of their school and it is heartening that Parent View has uncovered that the vast majority of parents are really happy and delighted with the education their children are receiving."

The Polemicist



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chris.waterman@e-strategix.co.uk

Vol 1 No 3 explains: "How the BBC might help prevent child abuse"

More opaque and more unfair: secondary school admissions in 2013

Chris Waterman looks hard at what's wrong with admissions

This week there have been three big stories running on school admissions. The first story followed the national offer day for secondary school places, which was Friday 1st March this year. For students transferring to secondary school, and their parents, getting into the best secondary school is seen to be the most important educational achievement of a young person's life. With parents encouraged to shop around and more information available to parents about secondary schools, the pressure on places at the most popular schools increases year-on-year. Inevitably, this means that a lower percentage of parents get their first choice: if 750 parents apply for a place in a five form entry secondary school, 80% of those parents will have to accept a school that they feel is, at best, second best.

It seems that more and more parents are willing to try a range of means to work the system: using a false address near to the preferred school is not uncommon (with some parents renting a property for the key period), but faith schools offer more opportunities to parents to jump the queue, as they manage their own admissions and apply tests of religiosity that are more subjective.

This year is the last year of a very detailed admissions procedure, which was developed over many years by the previous government. From next year a "simpler, fairer" admissions code will come into force, with schools able to offer priority to the children of school staff and to define what a "parent" is.

What has changed this year is the huge increase in the number of secondary academy schools, each of which is responsible for its own admissions and, more importantly, its own appeals procedure. With central government deliberately weakening the role of the schools adjudicator, the admissions watchdog, there will not be the same comprehensive information available about how the admissions is working: a case of the government (and the rest of us) not knowing what the government doesn't want us to know.

However, the little-known Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council (AJTC) has weighed into the debate with a letter to Michael Gove in response to the Academies Commission Report "Unleashing greatness – getting the best out of an academised system".

The Council has found, inter alia, that: the complexity of the admissions system is exacerbated by the different arrangements for appeals between community schools and academies; there is a threat to equality of access to high quality schools; and allowing schools to run their own appeals fails the natural justice test.

The AJTC recommends an independent appeals process for all school admission appeals, pointing out that academies appeals panels "lack any semblance of independence". It also recommends that the Local Government Ombudsman's powers should be extended to include consideration of complaints against maladministration of all admission appeals, including faith schools and academies.

The third story is about Nick Clegg's son being offered a place at the Oratory School, one of the most selective non-selective secondary schools in the country. Critical to gaining a place at the Oratory is an assessment of catholicity. With one parent (in this case, Dad) a self-confessed atheist Master Clegg must feel even more fortunate that another party leader's son in getting a place. Party politics apart, public confidence in the admissions system has been dealt yet another blow.

It is the government's aspiration that all secondary schools become academies, and thus their own admissions and appeal authorities. The government talks the talk, but seems incapable of walking the walk, about increasing social mobility. The developing picture will mean that those children foolish enough to have chosen parents less expert in working the school admissions system will have one more disadvantage to overcome.

The future of teaching science in schools

By Katherine Mathieson, Director of Education, British Science Association

The future of science in schools and colleges will depend on the extent of the investment that as a society, we're willing to make. The new, draft national curriculum for science in England and Wales claims that "a high quality science education provides the foundations for understanding the world" and that "pupils should be encouraged...to develop a sense of excitement and curiosity about natural phenomena". Evidence from the PISA studies suggests that young people's aspirations in science reflect their levels of enjoyment and engagement in science at school.

Science in schools is about much more than the science lessons – and is increasingly referred to as 'STEM' (science, technology, engineering & maths'). It's about lessons in design & technology, maths, ICT and (increasingly) computing. It's also about the activities that go on outside lessons: STEM Clubs at lunchtime, off-timetable days, trips to science centres and STEM fairs, activities as part of National Science & Engineering Week and many, many other examples.

We know that high quality, extra-curricular activities are capable of changing young people's achievements in and attitudes towards science. For example, an independent evaluation of the British Science Association's CREST Awards scheme, which supports student-led project work in STEM subjects, found positive impacts on students' learning, skills and attitudes to science.

Extra-curricular activities need a little resource (not much) - most importantly, they need a teacher who is enthusiastic and empowered to lead them. In the midst of a rapidly changing educational landscape, it can be difficult for teachers to carve out the time and headspace to lead STEM activities in their school. We

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To encourage all kinds of students, especially girls, to pursue careers in STEM, we need to show that people of all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, etc are welcome in STEM. The science community can help teachers with this: the STEM Ambassadors network and others provide a way for teachers to request volunteer scientists and engineers in support of their lessons and extra-curricular activities.



Katherine Mathieson

need to ensure that despite all the turmoil in educational policy, teachers are given the time, space, encouragement and funding to do activities like these.

In addition, schools need to keep pace with the fast-moving world of research. Teachers need opportunities to update their scientific knowledge and learn about the latest research. The National Network of Science Learning Centres provides excellent courses – but senior management teams still need to provide the flexibility and the funding to enable their teachers to attend. The curriculum needs to flex to enable teachers to adapt their teaching to local and recent interests, as well as to the aspirations and interests of their students.

History Man

By George Low

Bradford has long been a cradle of public education in this country – since the 1870 Education Act, in fact. It was the local MP, William Forster, who pushed through the Act with a view to unleashing educational progress and developments in this lively northern city. When local government took over control of education 30 years later, Bradford City Council took over the reins from the school board and kept the initiatives going with higher grade schools led by a succession of visionary heads and local administrators and backed by a strongly supportive council.

Donald Naismith grew up there in the post-1944 era. From a working-class family he went to Belle Vue Boys Grammar School, before winning a scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge, to read history. After graduating he went into teaching at Crown Woods, one of the largest and most progressive Inner London comprehensives, before returning north to enter educational administration in his home city in the early 70s when Mrs Thatcher was Education Secretary and reorganization of both secondary education and FHE were in process. Donald was in charge of FE and he used his historical ‘Bradford zeal’ to good effect on reorganizing colleges of FE and teacher training at a time of teacher and student unrest.

This was the beginning of his career in educational administration under the wise tutelage of the benign CEO Fred Adams, and his zealous tactics on behalf of the local authority soon brought him into court over a case of student misbehaviour. The case went before Lord Denning on appeal, who came down on the local authority’s side. Naismith, he found, had ‘come very near the line’ in upholding the local authority’s



Donald Naismith

crackdown on students, but he had not once overstepped it. That became Donald’s policy as a local administrator over the next quarter of a century and Denning’s verdict is the title of his memoirs (*Very Near the Line*), which draw a personal and highly coloured picture of the Thatcher era and his role in education policy and practice, which never quite overstepped the mark set by the old English dictum of ‘a national system locally administered’.

Upon local government reorganization in 1974, Donald moved south to the leafy London borough of Richmond upon Thames, where he soon became director of education in charge of a huge reorganization of schools and further education. Here he created London’s first tertiary college, putting together two sixth form colleges and an FE college in the centre of Twickenham. The idea was to give 16-year-olds a wide choice of academic and vocational courses in an everyday setting, breaking with the cloistered ambience of the traditional school sixth form. It was intended to open up the path to higher education, as well as the arts and commerce, to a much wider extent than hitherto. The plan was welcomed by the local Tories, but opposed by the local Labour leader. Nevertheless,

“I knew all too well that neither ‘parental choice’ nor ‘the market’ would have given me the education I had been fortunate to receive ...”

the tertiary college concept was greeted warmly by the Labour FE Minister Gerry Fowler and the college itself was opened by Shirley Williams as a grand new vision of international importance.

Naismith's other innovation at Richmond was to publish league tables of exam results, which attracted the incoming Tory administration under Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph as opening the door to consumer (that is, parental) choice. The rest of his memoirs cover his intriguing on-off relationship with Thatcher, her Ministers and advisers over the next 11 years of her reign. He soon moved south from Richmond to Croydon, another blooming Tory council with links to the new regime. Here he set about another large scale secondary and FE reorganization, only to have his plan undermined by civil servants for being 'overambitious'. For Donald was now linked in to an inner circle of Thatcher's advisers, which bypassed the civil servants – and they resented it.

His next project was to create a complete Croydon curriculum for the borough's schools to follow, based on his experience of the curriculum used in the German School in Richmond but also a 'scissors and paste job from various government reports'. The curriculum was also linked to standardised tests at certain stages and the publication of exam results, as in Richmond. The civil servants, especially Walter Ulrich at the DES, disliked the Croydon creation and wanted it strangled at

birth. Sir Keith Joseph shunned the idea of a national curriculum as too reminiscent of Nazi Germany and wanted 'diversity at local authority and school level.' He was also afraid of what the 'Loony Left' might do in Inner London. But within two years Sir Keith was gone and his successor Kenneth Baker had seized on the idea of a national curriculum and wanted to run with it at top speed - and hand it down from on high. Margaret Thatcher had changed her view on a national curriculum and now called it a 'good idea', but it was to be taken out of the hands of the local authorities completely.

Just before the abolition of the ILEA in 1990 Naismith moved to Wandsworth to set up a new department and run the borough's education service at a difficult time for the local Tory administration both politically and financially. His problem was that all the secondary schools were standard ILEA

comprehensives and several were unpopular with parents. "A certain sameness had settled like a cloud on the comprehensive vision", he recalls. Fortunately, he had two very able local Tory politicians in Councillors Eddie Lister and Paul Beresford, who backed him in introducing a whirlwind policy of 'choice and diversity' in the school system through grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges. The policy was a rapid success, which showed itself both in school exam results, parental choices and in a local victory for the Tories against the national trend.

However, Donald Naismith soon found the 1993 Education Act, designed to improve diversity and choice, was also intended 'to mark the end of the long-standing local education monopoly of state school provision'. In addition, John Patten, John Major's new Education Secretary, gave himself powers to take over the functions of local education authorities altogether and replace them with other 'bodies in receipt of public funds', leaving LEAs with 'those functions for which they were best fitted' – namely statementing special needs children and enforcing school attendance.

Disillusioned, Naismith decided it was time to take early retirement and 'cultivate his garden' in the heart of the French countryside, where he could write his memoirs. "I knew all too well that neither 'parental choice' nor 'the market' would have given me the education I had been fortunate to receive, which had been down to the tedious grind of local administration so often belittled and laughed at, regulations, officials, agenda, reports, committees, even the 'Points of Order, Mr Chairman' ...", he sighs in his last chapter.

“Just before the abolition of the ILEA in 1990 Naismith moved to Wandsworth to set up a new department and run the borough's education service at a difficult time for the local Tory administration both politically and financially. His problem was that all the secondary schools were standard ILEA comprehensives and several were unpopular with parents.”

Very Near the Line, by Donald Naismith, is published by AuthorHouse, 1663 Liberty Drive, Bloomington, Indiana 47403, USA. Paperback £9.95, hardback £17.99. www.authorhouse.com.

Higher Ground

By John Izbicki

If you can't afford fees...

Readers who have followed this column regularly will know my feelings about the constant increases in our university tuition fees. It is not in the least surprising that applications for places at higher education institutions have taken a dive. Sensible students have looked elsewhere for a better deal. And better deals there are. Take for instance, Sweden, where the 350-year-old University of Lund, which features among the best 100 unis in the world, has had an influx of 639 British students – and that's an increase of 80 since last year. It has three major campuses at Helsingborg, Malmoe and Lund itself.

Lund offers 90 Masters and five Bachelor degree programmes, including international marketing and brand management, international development and management, human rights, public health and development studies. Ah, I can hear you say, but what about the language? Swedish is beautiful but difficult. No worries. The teaching is all in English. And what is more, studying in Sweden is completely free for all EU citizens. Only those who do not hold an EU passport would be expected to pay for tuition.

And if you're after luxury...

Alternatively, there's also France or Italy – although, unlike Sweden, the French and Italians don't know the meaning of the word "free". But if graduates want to get the feel of luxury, they might wish to know that the Reims Management School has teamed up with the Politecnico di Milano to produce a new and astounding Master's degree in luxury management which will be taught both in France and Italy from the 2013-14 academic year. The 12-month 400-hour programme will be delivered entirely in English.

The good news is that successful students will end up, not with one but two qualifications: an MSc from Reims and another Master's degree from Milan. As for the luxury part, the programme has been designed with the close collaboration of leading luxury brands, including L'Oreal Luxe, Taittinger champagne, Remy Martin cognac, La Maison du Chocolat and Kempinski Hotels.

The bad news is that there's a 100 Euro registration fee (EU students should apply by July 19) and a tuition fee of 14,000 Euros. That in itself must spell luxury.

Some things are still free

British universities are by no means unaware that increasingly high tuition fees are driving prospective students away. Thanks mainly to the Open University, which is an old hand at producing on-line courses, leading universities have got together to produce a perfectly free access to a whole range of learning resources known as Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The new company, called FutureLearn Ltd, will run these courses, featuring programmes from the universities of Leeds, King's College, London, Bristol, Cardiff, East Anglia, Exeter, Lancaster, Southampton, St Andrews, Warwick and, of course, the OU. David Willetts, our Minister for Universities, naturally welcomed this move and said that Britain must be "at the forefront of developments in education technology". Naturally, the online progs will provide only tasters to courses, which are not to be sneered at and might well attract students to sign up for a degree course. For more information, you may look at: www.futurelearn.com.

And gifts are still welcome

Universities are continuing to rely on the generosity of their alumni to help fund new courses, better buildings and research. The University of Leeds, just one of many examples, has gratefully acknowledged a gift of \$4 million from Peter Cheney, an alumnus who graduated in bacteriology and biochemistry in 1969. The gift was made to the North American Foundation for the University of Leeds, which manages to generate grants from former students and other supporters of the university in the U.S. Vice-Chancellor Michael Arthur described the gift as "one of the most visionary acts of philanthropy in our history".

OECD Trends in Education 2013

By Sarah Key

The OECD have outlined several factors which have the potential to shape the future of education in their 2013 publication *Trends in Education*. Globalisation - the increase in connections across national borders, allowing people and information to move more freely across the globe, thus increasing ethnic and cultural diversity – is the first of these.

With it comes a number of challenges for the education system; firstly the ability to adequately recognise prior learning and qualifications and secondly the inequality of educational opportunity migrant families face. The global economic balance is also changing, with countries such as China, India and the Russian Federation playing an increasingly important role in global affairs due to their quickly developing economies. With such change looking set to continue, it is important for education to nurture the skills to

“The OECD argue that the status of vocational education should be raised because many students currently see this as a second class option, hence jobs requiring such skills are difficult to fill.”

enable individuals to adapt to it, possibly through changes to the curricula of Sciences, Languages, History and Geography. This leads to the further question of how well education provides the skills demanded by the economy. To this end, the OECD argue that the status of vocational education should be raised because many students currently see this as a second class option, hence jobs requiring such skills are difficult to fill. Lifelong learning also has a role to play here, because ageing populations and a later retirement age

mean that older people will be working longer, and therefore require updated skills.

The rise of urban living and the megacity go hand in hand with globalisation; people are attracted to cities for the employment opportunities and wealth they create coupled with opportunities for learning, for example through community education. However, cities can foster increased feelings of alienation and depleted emotional well-being, not to mention the challenges to physical health caused by pollution and issues such as obesity. Education systems may therefore be put under strain due to the dense populations requiring them and the extra burdens they may face – such as the responsibility to address issues surrounding physical health, nutrition and emotional well-being. The structure of the modern day family also impacts upon education, as the likelihood that both parents will be in employment has increased, meaning that they may have less time to spend with their children. As a result, education systems may be required to pick up the balance, thus finding themselves under further strain.

It is important to note that income inequality is rising due to a growing divide between the middle and the rich, leading to social exclusion and vulnerability in the labour market. Education can serve to reverse this by providing opportunities, but when the privileged have access to the top positions, it merely reinforces inequalities. The OECD ask therefore, whether education can be designed in such a way as to avoid this, through minimising parental power to choose their desired school so that popular institutions would no longer be restricted to those who can, for example, afford to relocate to the required catchment area.

New technology is a factor which permeates all the above trends, as the increased use and accessibility of the internet, email and apps raise awareness throughout the world by providing constantly updated information. The main question may be then, are we providing sufficient education and training for individuals to use such services, and in particular to the level required in the workplace. With such a wealth of information being available to students via the internet and portable devices, this may challenge conventional notions of learning; however the education system is also likely to bear the burden of implementing safety measures to avoid perils such as cyber bullying and online fraud.

Is there one best method of teaching reading? What is the evidence?

By Professor Margaret Clark OBE
Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Birmingham

Claims have been made over many years for one best method of teaching reading, not necessarily the same method. In 1960s it was the initial teaching alphabet. In England the current government has claimed that the one best method of teaching reading is by synthetic phonics, first, fast and only, with implications for schools, the curriculum and for the training of teachers.

In this article, which is reproduced from the March 2013 issue of *Literacy Today*, the author will consider the evidence for such a claim. In a further article she will discuss the phonics check administered for the first time to all Year 1 children in state schools in England in June 2012 and its effects on the curriculum in the early stages of primary schools.

As early as 2005, during the last Labour Government, claims were being made for the importance of synthetic phonics as an important element in the teaching of reading. This featured in evidence to the Education and Skills Select Committee and in 2006 in the subsequent Rose Report. Reference was made to research in Clackmannanshire in Scotland in support of this view, still cited by the current government in spite of its methodological weaknesses (see below). In an article entitled 'The Rose report in context: what will be its impact on the teaching of reading' (*Education Journal* issue 97, 2006-7 p.27-9) I considered the evidence presented at that time and cited an article by Colin Richards in the same issue entitled 'This could be the end of teacher autonomy'.

It is important to distinguish the following; whether there is evidence for one best method for all children; whether for all children systematic teaching of phonics should form all or only part of their early instruction; whether this should be synthetic rather than analytic phonics.

The current government, and Ofsted, stress that the method of teaching reading should be phonics and synthetic phonics, rather than analytic phonics, and claim this is backed by research evidence.

Definitions of phonics

Phonics instruction: Literacy teaching approaches which focus on the relationship between letters and sounds. Synthetic phonics: The defining characteristics of synthetic phonics for reading are sounding-out and blending. Analytic phonics: The defining characteristics of analytic phonics are avoiding sounding-out, and inferring sound-symbol relationships from sets of words ... Systematic phonics: Teaching of letter-sound relationships in an explicit, organised and sequential fashion as opposed to incidentally or on a 'when-needed' basis ... (From Torgerson et al 2006 p.8 see below).

In this article I will explore the evidence for one best method for all children, citing quotations from distinguished researchers. This will be followed by a reanalysis of the evidence cited by the government claimed to support synthetic phonics as the method to be used in all schools and emphasised in all colleges training teachers. Finally I will introduce some research evidence not cited by the government where concerns are raised.

Is there one best method?

See *Learning to Read: the great debate* J. Chall (1967) for evidence of a longstanding concern with the best method of teaching reading and the controversies surrounding this. In 1972 Vera Southgate stated in *Beginning Reading*, "I think it is unlikely that one method or scheme will ever prove equally effective for all pupils, being taught by all teachers, in all situations" (p.28).

In the Bullock Report (*A Language for Life*, DES, 1975) it is stated that: "There is no one method,

medium, approach, device, or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read. Too much attention has been given to polarised opinions about approaches to the teaching of reading” (p.521). In the report from the House of Commons Select Committee (2005) referred to above it is stated that it is “unlikely that any one method or set of changes would lead to a complete elimination of underachievement of reading.” (p.3).

More recently, in July 2011, a House of Commons All Party Parliamentary Group for Education published a *Report of the Inquiry into Overcoming the Barriers to Literacy*, where it is stated that “respondents were clear that there is no one panacea which guarantees all children will become readers ... There are different ways to learn and different learning preferences, this is why a focus on only synthetic phonics is not appropriate” (p.14) (www.educationengland.org.uk).

What is the research evidence on synthetic phonics?

Following the government’s announcement in 2010, many experts wrote to the Department for Education stating their concern about the insistence that in all schools in England the initial approach to teaching reading should be synthetic phonics only, also about the proposed phonics check for six-year-olds.

The Importance of Phonics: Securing Confident Reading (www.education.gov.uk) cites researches such as several of those noted below as proving the superiority of synthetic phonics as the only method for teaching reading. Two frequently cited by the government in support of its current emphasis on synthetic phonics first, fast and only in the initial stages are from Scottish local authorities, Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire. It should be noted that in both these authorities this was part of a major intervention study with additional resources and a staff development programme (see Ellis, 2007 below). None of the researches cited below provide convincing evidence for synthetic phonics as the only approach in the early stages of learning to read.

1. Marilyn Adams (1990) *Beginning to Read: thinking and learning about print*, cited in Clark, Young *Literacy Learners: how we can help them*, 1994) emphasises that “the degree to which children internalize and use their phonics instruction depends on the degree to which they have found it useful for recognizing the words in their earliest texts”. Thus, of importance is “immersion – right from the start – in meaningful connected text” (p. 22).
2. Clark, M.M. (2006) “The Rose Report in context: What will be its impact on the teaching of reading?” *Education Journal*, issue 97, 27-9. This short article critiques the Rose report, and the evidence cited from the Clackmannanshire study which had methodological failings, and where there was little long term gain in reading comprehension. The Rose Report did contain a wide range of recommendations designed to improve the teaching of reading. However, most attention was focused on the synthetic phonics issue ... with the impression that an injection of synthetic phonics first, fast and only as soon as children enter school, would solve all reading problems.
3. Ellis, S. (2007) *Policy and research: lessons from the Clackmannanshire synthetic phonics initiative*, *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, vol. 7(3) 281-297. She claims “that any study driven mainly by one paradigm can only offer limited insights and that other Scottish local authorities deliberately created multi-paradigm projects in response to the national early intervention initiatives”. West Dunbartonshire, Ellis claims, “designed possibly the most successful intervention, and based it on a ‘literacy for all’ agenda” (p.294).
4. MacKay, T. (2007) *Achieving the Vision. The Final Research Report of the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative*. (Education.centralregistry@west-dunbarton.gov.uk). The final report provides an overview of the entire 10-year study. The following are cited by MacKay as crucial to the success of the project: phonological awareness and the alphabet; a strong and structured phonics emphasis; extra classroom help in the early years; raising teacher awareness; and home support for encouraging literacy through focused assessment; increased time spent on key aspects of reading; identification and support for children who are failing, and close monitoring of progress. The project needed to be long term, had substantial funding and high levels of training of staff. The current government in citing this study as evidence for synthetic phonics, omitted the final sentence in the paragraph, as to whether synthetic phonics “has not yet been sufficiently systematically compared with better analytic phonics teaching using a faster pace and more motivating approaches” (p.46).
5. Reedy, D. (2012) *Misconceptions about teaching reading: is it only about phonics?* *Education Review*

NUT (EPC) Vol. 24 No.2. David Reedy explores the evidence for the quotations from Nick Gibb, Schools Minister from 2010 to 2012, questions his claims from research and cites contradictory evidence from Ofsted.

6. Solity, J. and Vousden, J. (2009) *Real books vs reading schemes; a new perspective from instructional psychology*. (*Educational Psychology*. Vol. 29 No. 4, 469-511). This article analyses the structure of adult literature, children's real books, and reading schemes and examines the demands that they make on children's sight vocabulary and phonic skills. While learning phonic skills greatly reduces what children have to memorise, a combination of this and learning the 100 commonest sight words, and studying in the context of real books, makes for 'optimal instruction'. Note that these authors used the McNally and Murray 100 commonest word list from the 1960s in their analysis, and still found it valuable in 2009. The authors claim that "the debate may be resolved by teaching an optimal level of core phonological, phonic, and sight vocabulary skills, rigorously and systematically in conjunction with the use of real books" (p.503).

7. Torgerson, C. J, Brooks, G. and Hall, J. (2006) *A Systematic Review of the Research Literature on the Use of phonics in the Teaching of Reading and Spelling*. The University of Sheffield. RR 711. They claim that since there is evidence that systematic teaching of phonics benefits children's reading accuracy, it should be part of every literacy teacher's repertoire, in a judicious balance with other elements. They claim there is currently no strong randomised control trial evidence that any one form of systematic phonics is more effective than any other. NB "No statistically significant difference in effectiveness was found between synthetic phonics instruction and analytic phonics instruction" (p.8).

8. Wyse, D. and Goswami, U. (2008) *Synthetic phonics and the teaching of reading, British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 34(6) 691-710. They claim that the government's review provided no reliable empirical evidence that synthetic phonics offers the vast majority of beginners the best route to becoming skilled readers ... "There is also evidence that contextualised systematic phonics instruction is effective" (p. 691).

9. Wyse, D. and Styles, M. (2007) *Synthetic phonics and the teaching of reading: the debate surrounding England's Rose Report, Literacy*, vol. 41, 35-42. A review of the international research into the teaching of early reading shows that the Rose Report's main recommendation on synthetic phonics contradicts the powerful body of evidence accumulated over the last 30 years (p 35). "The conclusion of the Rose Report, that teachers and trainee teachers should be required to teach reading through synthetic phonics 'first and fast' is, in our view, wrong" (p 41).

Conclusion

From the researches cited above there is evidence that the inclusion of a systematic programme of phonics within the early instruction in learning to read in English is of benefit within a broad programme. However, there is no evidence to support phonics in isolation as the one best method, nor for synthetic phonics as the required approach.

In the following article, to be published in *Literacy Today*, I will consider the new phonics check administered to all Year One children in England in June 2012 and the implications of the results.

Margaret M Clark has a DLitt for research on literacy, an OBE for services to early years education, a Fellowship from The Scottish Council for Research in Education for her distinguished contribution to research and is a past president of the United Kingdom Literacy Association. Her study of children who could already read with understanding on entry to school at five years of age is still internationally cited. A recent interview on her research into literacy can be heard on www.insideed.com and a chapter entitled 'Literacies in a changing world: What is the evidence?' Chapter 5 in *Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe 2012* can be downloaded from www.ecswe.org/downloads/publications.

This is a list of papers in academic journals published recently. After the title of the journal the information given is the publisher, the volume and issue number, the theoretical date of publication (which is not always the actual date), the number of issues per year or volume, the ISSN; the current personal subscription rate, the print and electronic institutional subscription rate and the electronic only institutional subscription rate. If only one figure is given then that indicates a single rate for all types of subscriber.

Active Learning in Higher Education

Sage | 14/1 | March 2013 | 3 | 1469-7874 | £60 | £413

Enhancing self-directed learning through a content quiz group learning assignment. *Natalie Warburton and Simone Volet*

From model answers to multiple perspectives: Adapting study approaches to suit university study. *David Kember, Celina Hong and Amaly Ho*

The problem of free-riding in group projects: Looking beyond social loafing as reason for non-contribution. *David Hall and Simone Buzwell*

Perceptions and realities in the functions and processes of assessment. *Maddalena Taras and Mark S. Davies*

Facilitating productive use of feedback in higher education. *Anders Jonsson*

Investigating the use of text messages in mobile learning. *Gretchen Geng*

European Journal of Special Needs Education

Routledge | 28/1 | February 2013 | 4 | 0885-6257 | £150 | £489 | £428

Reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils: what support do parents want for their child? *J. Porter, J. Georgeson, H. Daniels, S. Martin and A Feiler*

Dyslexia in Higher Education: the decision to study art. *Alison M. Bacon and Samantha Bennett*

E-Books for supporting the emergent literacy and emergent math of children at risk for learning disabilities: can metacognitive guidance make a difference? *Adina Shamir and Irit Lifshitz*

Local school ideologies and inclusion: the case of Swedish independent. *Kerstin Göransson, Johan Malmqvist and Claes Nilholm*

Exploration of teaching strategies that stimulate the growth of academic skills of children with ASD in special education school. *Eirini Manti, Evert M. Scholte and Ina A. Van Berckelaer-Onnes*

Deaf students' metacognitive awareness during language comprehension. *Caroline Morrison, Marc Marschark, Thomastine Sarchet, Carol M. Convertino, Georgianna Borgna and Richard Dirmyer*

What if you're really different? Case studies of children with high functioning Autism participating in the Get REAL programme who had atypical learning trajectories. *Steven Kemp, Anne Petriwskyi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch and Karen Thorpe*

Sex Education

Routledge | 13/2 | March 2013 | 6 | 1468-1811 | £115 | £350 | £306

Teaching pleasure and danger in sexuality education. *Vanessa Cameron-Lewis and Louisa Allen*

Ethical parenting of sexually active youth: ensuring safety while enabling development. *Laina Y. Bay-Cheng*

Perspectives on HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination: voices of some young people in Ghana. *Georgina Yaa Oduro and Mercy Otsin*

Sexuality diversity, discrimination and 'homosexuality policy' in New South Wales' government schools. *Tania Ferfolja*

'I make sure I am safe and I make sure I have myself in every way possible': African-American youth perspectives on sexuality education. *Allison Kimmel, Terrinieka T. Williams, Tiffany C. Veinot, Bettina Campbell, Terrance R. Campbell, Mark Valacak and Daniel J. Kruger*

Puberty, health and sexual education in Australian regional primary schools: Year 5 and 6 teacher perceptions. *Bernadette Duffy, Nina Fotinatos, Amanda Smith and Jenene Burke*

Advocacy for school-based sexuality education: lessons from India and Nigeria. *Fiona Samuels, Jari Kivela, Dhianaraj Chetty, Joanna Herat, Chris Castle, Evert Ketting and Rob Baltussen*

Factors associated with middle school students' perceptions of the quality of school-based sexual health education. *E. Sandra Byers, Heather A. Sears and Lyndsay R. Foster*

'Where do babies come from?' Barriers to early sexuality communication between parents and young children. *Nicole Stone, Roger Ingham and Katie Gibbins*

Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice

Routledge | 20/1 | February 2013 | 4 | 0969-594X | £170 | £709 | £620

Editorial – Investigating the complexity of judgement practice. *Val Klenowski*

Assuring academic achievement standards: from moderation to calibration. *D. Royce Sadler*

Teachers' professional judgement in assessment: a cognitive act and a socially situated practice. *Linda Allal*

Explicit, latent and meta-criteria: types of criteria at play in professional judgement practice. *Claire Wyatt-Smith and Val Klenowski*

'Exactly what do you mean by consistency?' Exploring concepts of consistency and standards in Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland. *E. Louise Hayward and Carolyn Hutchinson*

The use of teacher judgement for summative assessment in the USA. *Susan M. Brookhart*

The development of teacher assessment identity through participation in online moderation. *Lenore Adie*

Establishing a foundation for valid teacher judgement on student learning: the role of pre-service assessment education. *Christopher DeLuca, Teresa Chavez and Chunhua Cao*

Criteria, comparison and past experiences: how do teachers make judgements when marking coursework? *Victoria Crisp*

Documents

The Department for Communities and Local Government published ***Delivery Agreement – Putting troubled families on the path to work*** on 4 March 2013. Commitments by Jobcentre Plus and local authorities to establish a new network of 150 Troubled Families Employment Advisers. It can be downloaded free from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivery-agreement-putting-troubled-families-on-the-path-to-work>

The Department for Education published ***Adoption Cases Reviewed – An indicative study of process and practice*** on 6 March 2013. This report presents the findings from a study that evaluated the strengths of the current adoption process and establish what changes, if any, are required to ensure that the processes of local authority and court-case handling and decision making are consistent with the principles underpinning the current legal framework of adoption in England. It can be downloaded free from <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-RR270>

Ofsted published ***Improving Schools Through Parent View*** on 6 March 2013. This page hosts a tool-kit that designed to support schools and help them encourage parents to complete the Parent View questionnaire throughout the year and during an inspection. Parent View is an online questionnaire for parents to give their views on their children's schools. It can be downloaded free from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/improving-schools-through-parent-view>

Ofqual published ***Appeals Against Results*** on 6 March 2013. This is a statistical bulletin on appeals against results for the GCSE/GCE summer 2012 examination series. The bulletin covers GCSE and GCE examinations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, provided by the six awarding organisations; AQA, CCEA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC and ICAAE. The bulletin can be downloaded from: <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/statistics/appeals-against-results/>

Consultation

Consultation on 16-19 Vocational Reform

This document consults on proposals to establish rigorous standards for level 3 vocational qualifications taken by 16- to 19-year-olds in schools and colleges from September 2014, so that only high value qualifications count in performance tables. It also seeks views on whether the Government should fund learners who are over 19 to take vocational qualifications that meet the new characteristics, but do not conform to the Qualifications and Credit Framework

Department or agency: Department for Education

Coverage: England

Document type: Consultation paper

Published: 7 March 2012

Deadline: 10 May 2013

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/careers/payandpensions/a00222404/consultation-16-19-vocational-reform->

Children and Families Bill gets underway

By Chris Waterman at the Public Bill Committee

The Children and Families Bill went into committee on Tuesday, for the first of two evidence sessions. From Tuesday 12 March, the committee will meet each Tuesday and Thursday (excluding the Easter recess) until Tuesday 23 April, when, at exactly 5.00p.m. the Bill will be signed off and sent on its way to the chamber of the House of Commons for the report stage debate and third reading before going to the House of Lords.

The most surprising event of the first two “evidence” days was in the letter sent by Edward Timpson, the day before the Committee met, that there would be a new Government clause, which would impose a duty on clinical commissioning groups to provide the health elements of the EHC plan for children with a statement. This is potentially the most important step towards integrated services for children with special educational needs since the introduction of statements in the early 1980’s if – and it’s a very big if – the health service steps up to the plate.

The opening session of the Public Bill Committee was slightly bizarre in that the first three witnesses – Elizabeth Truss, Edward Timpson and Jo Swinson – were all members of the committee. After a very short break the ministers moved from the top table to the witness seats, when they were interrogated by the rest of the committee on the various – and disparate – sections of the bill.

There is a wealth of inexperience on the Bill committee, with new ministers and shadow ministers engaged in their first Bill. The three ministers were less than confident in their handling of the questions (although as members of the committee they will have seen the brief prepared for the committee). The eighteen other members of the Bill committee were keen to seek information about adoption timescales, the timing on the draft SEN code of practice and regulations (which will be published before the Bill committee gets to that part of the Bill) and the right to flexible working.

“The opening session of the Public Bill Committee was slightly bizarre in that the first three witnesses – Elizabeth Truss, Edward Timpson and Jo Swinson – were all members of the committee.”

At precisely 10.00, the ministers were released to rejoin the committee and the first panel of four witnesses were called in. Given that much of the Bill had been subject to “pre-legislative scrutiny,” the succession of twenty witnesses during the rest of the day added little that was new. It was much more of a context-setting exercise but became a bit of a blur. The real business will get underway on 12 May, when the committee starts the painstaking line-by-line examination of the many devils that are likely to comprise the details of the Bill.

In general terms there is a consensus on the committee (and in the Commons) that the broad thrust of the Bill is the correct one. The role of the local authority seems to ebb and flow in the Bill, with childminder agencies (and Ofsted) taking over from the LA, while the “local offer” will put the local authority centre stage.

There is little reason to believe that there will be much explicit opposition to the Bill, in marked contrast to the two earlier education Bills that the Coalition brought forward (and which became the Academies Act 2010 and the Education Act 2011). It is more likely that the Opposition will be seeking assurances on the degree of support that young people with additional educational needs will be entitled to. We may well have to wait until the Bill goes into the Lords for the real debate will take place.

Headmasterly Michael disciplines the Commons

Chris Waterman at Westminster enjoys the masterclass

On Monday Michael Gove swept into the Commons for education questions and sat down, drawing his metaphorical gown around him and surveying the Opposition assembly. The first day back after half-term usually shows a lower than usual attendance but the inspectors would surely have something to say about the huge number of unauthorised absences on both benches.

Gove was flanked by his team of newly qualified ministers (NQM's), each of them seeking to demonstrate the skills necessary to obtain their QMS (Qualified Minister Status). Unfortunately, trying to learn ministerial skills from Mr Gove, with a double first in flattery and dramatic arts, must be like being taught basic arithmetic by someone with a first in mathematics. How could such a performer, master of the ad lib and the unctuous compliment, and improviser extraordinaire (defined as "making it up as you go along") appreciate the trials and tribulations of four people with the wrong briefs trying to toe the party line?

The Secretary of State's other advantage, of course, is that he can pick which questions to answer. The first question, a piece of fruit so low-hanging it might have been a windfall, was asked by that nice Nick Gibb, recently given early retirement but still missing his old deputy's job. It was about the information that schools did (or did not) make available to parents. Mr Gove sternly informed the House that his department sent out half-termly emails reminding schools of their obligations under legislation.

When Phil Wilson asked the Secretary of State which schools he had visited in East Durham where he said "you can smell the sense of defeatism" it was clear that, rather than his own nose, Mr Gove had relied on that of Lord Adonis. The said Lord, who went straight into the Upper School at the behest of Tony Blair, must surely be embarrassed at receiving more glowing references from the Tory front bench than his own backbenchers (but perhaps not).

Elizabeth Truss gingerly responded to a question on the history curriculum from Kevin Brennan, saying how she had been affected by studying Francis Drake (1540 – 1596) and the princes in the tower (disappeared 1483) in consecutive lessons. Edward Timpson was more relaxed when asked about adoption, his specialist subject, and Matthew Hancock did well enough on the school funding formula.

"The simple answer to the question would have been 'no representations', but why let simplicity get in the way of a party political rant?"

David Laws, the Lib-Dem in the team, more suited to the Treasury's calculations than the children in schools, was keen to criticise the previous government's "over-extended, inefficient and unaffordable" BSF programme and spoke warmly of the 'troops into teachers' initiative, which is unlikely to play well on too many Lib-Dem doorsteps come the next election.

Michael Gove snapped up the question on the secondary curriculum, quoting his recent visit to a Surrey school where children were busy writing computer code. He was then asked about relationships and sex education, and, in the light of the allegations about Jimmy Savile and Cyril Smith, the need to teach children how to deal with predators. Having mentioned that sex education (a *bête noire* for many Conservative MP's) is compulsory, he then said that sexual exploitation is best dealt with by ensuring that we can prosecute the perpetrators. (This generated some odd looks from those MPs who, presumably, had been following the trial of the Oxford group of men. Groomed and exploited young men and women will surely rather have avoided exploitation than seen the perpetrators convicted years later.)

The session seemed to be heading for a quiet ending, with no surprises in the topical questions until Helen Goodman asked about the representations that DfE ministers had made on the "bedroom tax", which penalised non-resident parents wanting to keep a room so that their children can visit them.

It was as if the Secretary of State had been defied by a first former. Having barked that "it is not a tax", he lectured the Commons about the Labour Party having driven the economy into the ground and being 'that crew of socialist wreckers'. The simple answer to the question would have been "no representations", but why let simplicity get in the way of a party political rant?

Pupils: Per Capita Costs

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent on schools per pupil in each of the last 30 years.

Mr Laws: The available information on how much was spent on schools per pupil from 1992-93 to 2011-12 is contained within the following table.

School based expenditure per pupil from 1992-93 to 2011-12

	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02
Nursery education	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Primary education	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,007	2,212	2,483
Pre-primary education and primary education	1,562	1,613	1,662	1,695	1,735	1,740	1,871	2,050	2,277	2,567
Secondary education	2,258	2,242	2,273	2,298	2,346	2,363	2,450	2,612	2,828	3,154
Special schools	10,062	9,077	8,725	9,161	9,653	9,829	10,112	10,896	11,861	13,029
Total (including pre-primary)	1,955	1,949	1,986	2,018	2,064	2,075	2,193	2,391	2,624	2,941
Total (excluding pre-primary)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,368	2,589	2,896
	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12
Nursery education	n/a	n/a	5,972	6,569	7,124	7,877	8,754	9,235	9,757	9,411
Primary education	2,530	2,755	2,914	3,152	3,356	3,578	3,778	3,916	4,039	4,126
Pre-Primary education and primary education	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Secondary education	3,225	3,546	3,798	4,073	4,320	4,618	4,894	5,067	5,247	5,231
Special schools	12,816	14,046	15,105	16,434	17,484	18,647	19,790	20,604	21,166	21,076
Total (including pre-primary)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total (excluding pre-primary)	2,953	3,229	3,452	3,722	3,947	4,213	4,458	4,614	4,756	4,759

n/a = Not applicable. *Notes:* 1. The data source for the information provided for 1992-99 was DCLG's RO1 form. 1999-00 saw a change in data source when the data collection moved from the RO1 to the Department for Education's section 52 (now latterly s251) out-turn tables. 2002-03 saw a further break in the time series following the introduction of Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) and the associated restructuring of the out-turn tables. 2. School based expenditure includes only expenditure incurred directly by the schools. This includes the pay of teachers and school-based support staff, school premises costs, books and equipment, and certain other supplies and services, less any capital items funded from recurrent spending and income from sales, fees and charges and rents and rates. This excludes the central cost of support services such as home to school transport, local authority administration and the financing of capital expenditure. 3. Local government reorganisation (LGR) took place during the mid to late 1990's and those LAs that did not exist either pre or post LGR is likely to mean a further change in the time series. 4. Expenditure was not distinguished between the pre-primary and primary sectors until the inception of section 52 for financial year 1999-00. 5. School based expenditure in nursery schools was not recorded in 2002-03. 6. Figures are in cash terms.

House of Commons, Monday 4 March 2013

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Education Journal is published weekly except during August.

ISBN: 977-1-36-445000-8
ISSN: 1364-4505

Education Journal No.156 (2013)

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Published by
The Education Publishing Company Ltd., CREDITON, Devon.

Education Journal

Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace, CREDITON,
Devon, EX17 3DY, UK.
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