

## POLICY WATCH

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### The Government sets out the next steps in reforming the learning and skills system

Earlier this year the Government launched its proposals for reforming the learning and skills system in the form of a White Paper entitled '[Raising Expectations](#).' Consultation on that closed in early June and the Government has just released its [official response](#) along with an update on progress. One sentence stands out and can be found on nearly every page - '*further details will follow in the autumn.*'

Once again therefore, it looks like a busy autumn lies ahead as the builders get to work on designing separate pre - 19 and post - 19 systems. The aim is to have as many of the changes as possible in place by 2010 which given the importance of proposals on funding, planning and commissioning means sleeves need to be rolled up now. On top of that, other shaping influences continue to be introduced alongside. Over the last couple of weeks for instance, the DWP has released a [Green Paper](#) on welfare reform, HEFCE has released a [consultation Paper](#) on opening up new regionally based HE centres, the LSC has released a [Paper](#) on further flexibilities for Train to Gain, the UK Commission has released its re - [licensing procedures](#) for SSCs and DCSF/DIUS have released [consultation](#) on a [Draft Apprenticeship Bill](#). Each will affect the learning and skill system in some way. There are no clean sheets where the skills system is involved.

Not that there appears to be any great resistance to many of these proposals. The mood from 443 written responses and nine regional events was, as they say in these situations, broadly supportive but anxious about some of the lack of detail; *"the general support for the reforms was accompanied by the request for further information on the implementation and transition stages including how the new agencies will work together and the plans for planning and commissioning."*

For the pre - 19 system, there were four general concerns: whether Local Authorities had the capacity to cope with all expected of them; just what commissioning was and how it would work; how to keep things simple and responsive at a sub - regional level; and how best to ensure Information, Advice and Guidance worked effectively for all learners. There were fewer comments about the post - 19 system, indeed one of the issues was that the details in the White Paper had been sketchier for the adult system than for the young people's system. Such comments as there were focused on the [Skills Funding Agency \(SFA\)](#) and just how this would work. 46% of respondents were either unsure or disagreed with the proposed '*funding and commissioning role of the Skills Funding Agency.*' And significantly, over 75% were either unsure or disagreed about whether '*the right approach*' had been adopted about sponsorship of the FE sector as a whole. Overall, respondents called for the SFA to be '*streamlined, flexible, pro - active with employers and prepared to build on the expertise of the LSC.*' Hence why the Paper resorted to the term "*cautiously positive.*"

This is how the learning and skills landscape looks at the moment

- [Adult Advancement and Careers Service \(AACCS.\)](#) Confirmation that the Skills Funding Agency *"will be responsible for the strategic commissioning and performance management of the service."* DIUS will publish a prospectus in the autumn setting out in more detail the vision, structure and main features of the service and how it will fit in the adult landscape
- **Commissioning.** Not much more detail but considerable stressing of *"single strategic commissioning conversations with schools, colleges and other providers"* although colleges will have a single commissioner for pre - 19 and a single commissioner for post - 19 provision. The SFA will be the commissioning agency for post - 19, the LSC up to 2010 for 16 - 19 provision thence Local Authorities. A draft planning and commissioning model for pre - 19 will be published in the autumn
- **Funding.** Again few further details added. Pre - 19, *"we do not envisage any major changes to the national funding formula."* As for 14 - 19 funding, some (70%) support for a single funding agency but no changes before 2010/11. Post - 19, mechanisms are currently under discussion as part of the SFA remit but *"colleges will be free to spend the funding allocated to deliver the outcomes they have been commissioned to deliver!"*
- **Local Authorities.** Key role and various statutory responsibilities confirmed, notably from 2010 that of securing sufficient provision for all young people up to 19 (18 for those in youth custody, 25 for those with learning difficulties.) DCSF publishing LA support programme in the autumn
- **LSC.** Interim structures to be in place by the end of 2008 and a wish *"to retain as much LSC staff expertise as possible"*
- [National Apprenticeship Service \(NAS.\)](#) This will be housed in the SFA and provide an end - to - end service. The main issue is how it will operate pre - 19 where in theory each LA will assess the need for apprenticeships in their area, aggregate these sub - regionally and then negotiate with the NAS
- **Performance Management.** Support for a common system applicable to both pre and post - 19 providers and based on the [Framework for Excellence \(FfE.\)](#) The FfE rolls out into colleges/providers this September and details on how it might be applied pre - 19 will be published later this year. As commissioning agents, LAs and the SFA respectively will be responsible for overall performance management
- **Sixth Form Colleges.** Confirmation that SFCs will constitute a legally distinct sector, providing much as before but under LA responsibility
- **Sub - regional groupings.** Local groupings of LAs brought together to plan and agree pre - 19 provision. The model can vary but will involve a number of bodies including RDAs as co - chairs but not individual providers. LAs need to submit their grouping model to their Government Office by 26 Sept 08. DCSF aim to agree working models by 2008/9
- [Skills Funding Agency \(SFA.\)](#) Confirmed as a Next Steps Agency rather than an NDPB thus close to DIUS; business model due end of August, implementation plan by October. Emphasis remains on funding rather than planning
- [Young People's Learning Agency \(YPLA.\)](#) An 'enabling' body with supervisory and reserve powers to support LA 14 - 19 plans. Further details in the autumn but concerns about the fit with other agencies

The Papers come with the ubiquitous Government planning chart

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