Welcome to the IEBE Policy Update for March

• The Budget and the Plan for Growth
• Wolf Report on Vocational Education
• Demos report: ‘The Forgotten Half’
• Enterprise Education in England

The Budget 2011

The Chancellor made his Budget statement on 23 March. The full report is available here.

In it he praised Alison Wolf’s Report on vocational education. He went on to announce funding for 24 University Technical Colleges, additional work experience and Apprenticeship places for unemployed 16-24 year olds, and an expansion of Higher Apprenticeships.

Plan for Growth

Alongside the Budget report, the Government published a “Plan for Growth”.

The Plan has sections on the tax regime, funding new and growing businesses, encouraging investment and exports, the planning system, and creating a more educated and flexible workforce.

From an education perspective the Budget and the Plan for Growth state that the Government will:

1. Fund an additional 80,000 work experience places for young people (aged 16-24) - helping them develop key work skills and get on the employment ladder. Up to 100,000 places will be available over the next two years. Employers including Hilton Hotels, Skanska, McDonald’s and Carillion have already signed up to offer young people places.

2. Provide £180 million for up to 50,000 additional Apprenticeship places over the next four years. 40,000 places will provide additional capacity to support young unemployed people, in particular through progression from the 16-24 work experience programme.

3. Support business consortia to set up and maintain advanced and higher Apprenticeships schemes, supported by grants, creating a further 10,000 Apprenticeships.

4. Support the development of a new higher level Apprenticeship. In addition, a new Level 5 framework, which would provide a route for engineering Apprentices to achieve professional accreditation, is considered a priority.

5. Expand flexible advanced and higher Apprenticeships which suit the freelance business models often seen in the digital and creative industries. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills will look at whether a new accountancy Apprenticeship programme would be effective.

6. Expand the University Technical Colleges programme to establish at least 24 new colleges by 2014. Formed through partnerships between universities, colleges and businesses, UTCs will provide technical training opportunities for 11 to 19 year olds. The sponsors will help set curricula to match the needs of the local economy and of their sectors, provide high quality work placements, and allow the colleges to use their specialist facilities.

7. Support the Careers Profession Alliance to improve training for careers professionals in subject-specific specialisms, including STEM.

8. Increase the number of industry-school visits (e.g. by Apprenticeship Ambassadors).

9. Strengthen STEM promotion activities, including STEMNET.

The Chancellor also announced that the Professional and Business Services Group (PSBG) - chaired by Sir Michael Snyder - will launch a ‘Log of Professional Readiness’, in which school leavers and undergraduates can record work experience, relevant gap year activity, positions of responsibility and leadership, active citizenship and volunteering, and extra-curricular investment in employability.

Get in Touch

Have any comments about the Budget? Please email them to members@iebe.org.uk
Wolf Report on 14-19 Vocational Education

The Wolf Report on 14-19 Vocational Education was published on 3 March. The IEBE Policy Update March 2011 – Wolf Review Special Edition provided a summary of the main findings. Below is more detailed analysis of this important document.

The report starts with an analysis of issues facing practical and vocational education in England. Professor Wolf says:

- The economy is characterised, throughout most of the developed world, by a shrinkage in traditional skilled manufacturing jobs, and a youth labour market which has imploded. Nonetheless, the English economy suffers from some important and clearly discernible skills shortages.
- Large numbers of young people are taking vocational qualifications which the labour market does not reward in any way.
- Established vocational qualifications which are recognised, valued and indeed critical to key industries are being denied accreditation and funding by government agencies.
- Young people are encouraged to take qualifications at age 14-16 which will block their progression to many valuable post-16 options, and for reasons which have nothing to do with the pupils’ own best interests.
- There are high drop-out rates and ‘churning’ as 16-18 year olds try to find appropriate pathways.
- Funding and performance management systems have actively deterred schools and colleges from providing substantial maths and English courses post-16 to those without good GCSEs.
- There has been a significant and marked decline, over the last 25 years, in the average returns to post-16 vocational education for those who move from it straight into the labour market.

The report does not look in detail at individual qualifications. Instead, Professor Wolf comes down firmly in favour of a broad curriculum at Key Stage 4, whilst stating that young people (of all abilities) should have the opportunity to take vocational subjects for up to 20% of their time. She says:

“Among those responding to the Review … there was no appetite for an entirely uniform and traditional academic curriculum in KS4 … The value of practical skills as part of a rounded education; the potential to sample different material as a form of orientation; and the opportunity for young people to excel on a variety of dimensions are all important and should be encouraged.”

A full list of Professor Wolf’s 27 recommendations was included in the Policy Update Special Edition, so they are not repeated here. Instead, the following table lists things IEBE said in our submission to Professor Wolf, and how she responded.

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<th>IEBE said:</th>
<th>Professor Wolf said:</th>
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<td>Students need clear, well understood learning pathways linked to the needs of the modern economy.</td>
<td>Any young person's programme of study, whether 'academic' or 'vocational', should provide for labour market and educational progress on a wide front.</td>
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<td>Vocational options need to be promoted as having high value and prestige.</td>
<td>Vocational education today includes, as it always has, courses and programmes which teach important and valuable skills to a very high standard. High quality vocational qualifications can and should be identified by the government. The vocational qualifications which we encourage schools to offer, and which give them credit within performance management systems, must be of a quality and rigour which develop new skills and encourage progression. Achieving this will do far more for the status and respect accorded to vocational qualifications, and the prospects of those who take them, than several thousand speeches proclaiming the importance of 'parity of esteem'.</td>
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<td>Awarding bodies are best placed to fund the development of vocational qualifications, under the supervision of Ofqual and with input from employers.</td>
<td>If vocational qualifications (in the very broadest sense) are to promote successful progression by young people into the labour market, they need to be recognised and 'owned' by employers. At Key Stage 4, schools should be free to offer any qualifications they wish from a regulated Awarding Body. At college and school level the assessment and awarding processes used for vocational awards should involve local employers. Awarding bodies should demonstrate how employers are involved directly in the development and specification of qualifications.</td>
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<td>There is an urgent need for more (better) Level 1 vocational courses and qualifications.</td>
<td>DfE should review current policies for the lowest-attaining quintile of pupils at Key Stage 4, with a view to increasing greatly the proportion who are able to progress directly onto Level 2 programmes at age 16. [Nevertheless] there is almost bound to be a sizeable number of young people who are not able to engage with a regular post-16 programme. Programmes for the lowest attaining learners should concentrate on the core academic skills of English and maths, and on work experience.</td>
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Vocational education needs to be provided in appropriate facilities, with up-to-date materials and equipment. You cannot run a full programme with a single part-time member of staff; sizeable and advanced vocational qualifications require a critical mass of staff and expertise. Vocational provision is expensive, and is one area of education where there are genuine economies of scale. Most schools cannot possibly build up the large groups needed for genuinely high-quality, professionally directed vocational courses. It follows that colleges will generally be far better placed to provide vocational options for 14-16 year olds. Colleges should (therefore) be able to enrol students under 16, provided they can offer them a full KS4 programme. (In addition) well-equipped and specialist schools such as Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges will and should offer programmes with a strong and distinctive vocational element. It should become easier to create institutions with specialist strengths, whether in creative arts (like London's successful BRIT School), IT, commerce or catering. It is also necessary that, alongside specialisation, the commitment to maths, English and the pre-16 common core be maintained. All young people should be able to opt for applied and vocational subjects at 14+. [My recommendations are] designed to ensure that all KS4 students are guaranteed a broad core curriculum, such that they can progress to a wide range of post-16 academic and vocational options; but also to ensure that academically successful pupils are given the chance to take practical courses.

Apprenticeships need to expand rapidly. Increasing young people’s access to Apprenticeship is a government priority and of the utmost importance to the future of 16-18 vocational education. Major efforts should be made to provide greater access to the workplace for 16-18 year olds. Apprenticeship offers great opportunities to young people.

Careers information, advice and guidance should be impartial and provided by independent organisations. [There is a] widely recognised need for good Information, Advice and Guidance. I wish simply to reiterate its importance.

Once qualifications are developed, they should be given ample time to bed in. Employers need help, too: we cannot assume they understand vocational education and qualifications. We do have empirical evidence that employers today are confused by the repeated reform drives which generate new qualifications for young people. Employers recognise and value familiarity, often with the awarding body as much as with the particular award. The serial reform of qualifications in this country reduces their value in the labour market.

Connecting employers with education is a priority. It is critical that institutions - whether highly specialised or general in their vocational orientation - maintain close links with local employers. Helping young people to obtain genuine work experience - and, therefore, what the CBI calls 'employability skills' - should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years. DfE should evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds who are enrolled as full-time students. Schools and colleges should be encouraged to prioritise longer internships for older students. [Pre-16, however, the government should request the] statutory duty to provide every young person at KS4 with a standard amount of ‘work-related learning’.

IEBE made two points not discussed in Professor Wolf’s report:

1. Teachers need a better understanding of the economy and of practical and vocational pathways, reinforced through CPD and links with local employers.
2. Work-related learning needs to form part of the curriculum through Key Stages 2 and 3 so that young people have a better understanding of the options open to them. This should include opportunities for learning from experience - for example, by visiting and meeting employers.

There is only one point of disagreement between IEBE and Professor Wolf, and that surrounds pre-16 work-related learning and work experience. She says that:

“Fewer and fewer employers are willing to accommodate young people under 16 on their premises; and the paperwork associated with placements has increased exponentially. For that reason the blanket requirement to give all KS4 pupils ‘work experience’ - or, as it has officially become, ‘work-related learning’ - has served its time.”

Her claim that “fewer and fewer employers” are willing to provide placements is not supported by YPLA data, which shows that over 400,000 employers provided placements in 2009-10, of whom 60,000 had not provided placements the year before.

In addition, it is incorrect to imply that “work experience” and “work-related learning” are one and the same. Clearly, they are not.

What Next?
The Secretary of State will respond to the Wolf Report within the next two months.
Demos has published a report on vocational education called 'The Forgotten Half'.

The report starts by asking, “what has happened in the last decade to the ‘other 50 per cent’ – the young adults who do not go to university?”

It suggests: “the emphasis on academic work in schools is largely driven by the priority of written assessment and standardised tests. The result has been a narrowing of the learning experience to privilege theoretical knowledge and written ability over practical knowledge and communication skills.”

And that: “schools and colleges are failing to provide the type of high quality work-related learning that students desire and need... A lack of contact between students and local industry may particularly reduce numbers going into technician level jobs by not making young people aware of opportunities and expecta...”

The report goes on to criticise the current vocational offer, saying that:

- There is a lack of high quality vocational curricula that combine ‘vocationalised’ academic learning with practical learning that connects meaningfully to business
- Schools fail to prepare students for post-16 vocational training opportunities

Too many young people are “herded” into studying low-level NVQ qualifications post-16, with these qualifications often having little value in the work place.

This leads to a set of conclusions and recommendations, including a focus on five “premiums” - that is, five types of achievement which help young people secure a strong position in the workforce:

1. Character premium – capabilities and ‘soft skills’ such as the ability to communicate effectively, apply oneself to a task, commit to long-term goals, and work effectively in a team are now as important as academic ability in predicting earnings at age 30
2. Literacy and numeracy premium – literacy and numeracy skills boost earnings and employment rates, all other things being equal
3. Work premium – work is the best way to build employability skills, and early experiences of work lead to more employment over the life course
4. Technical premium – training and education to Level 3 (A-levels or equivalent) yields a substantial wage return – for example, completing a Level 3 Apprenticeship. Depending on the qualifications, training schemes and degrees, Level 3 vocational qualifications can yield wage returns similar to university degrees
5. Graduate premium – graduates (on average) gain a wage premium of £100,000 over the course of their lives

To support these aims, the report says schools should:

- Teach core literacy and numeracy skills, including ‘vocationalised’ academic learning (academic skills learned in vocational contexts)
- Use engaging and creative activities that build ‘soft skills’ and ‘character capabilities’ through practical learning, enterprise and entrepreneurship, and community-based learning
- Provide high quality work experience and employability skills training, including:
  - Opportunities for high-quality practical and vocational learning
  - Teaching of specific ‘employability skills’ like CV writing and interview techniques
  - Meaningful work experience
  - Business engagement in education
  - High quality information, advice and guidance on work and careers.

Enterprise Education

Mark Prisk, Minister of State for Business and Enterprise has spoken about the importance of entrepreneurs. Speaking at an FSB conference on 18 March, he said:

“Britain is full of potential entrepreneurs. But this spirit has been undermined. Over half the jobs created in the last decade were related to the public sector. And for many years it was easier to make money through property speculation than genuine entrepreneurship.”

“Our entrepreneurial ambitions should be higher. Such gaps open up at an early age so we are focussing on education. We have a broad programme extending from school to university and beyond, and plan to expand this in our strategy for enterprise in education, to reach hundreds of thousands of young people each year.”

Click here to read the full speech.