

UPDATE ON NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Contact Officer: Dan Kennedy / Venetia Rogers
Telephone: 01895 250495 / 250494

REASON FOR ITEM

To update the Committee on recent developments in Government policy in education, including the content of ministerial speeches.

SUGGESTED COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Note the update.
2. Question officers about the update.

INFORMATION

Background

Since the White Paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' was published on 17th March 2016 there have been further announcements by new Ministers setting out proposals for the schools sector and for education and skills more broadly. Many of these continue the previous policy direction but there are some significant changes, notably the proposal to extend selection in the schools sector.

In addition to changes at ministerial level, there have also been significant changes to departmental portfolios. In particular, on 14th July, it was announced that the Department for Education would take on responsibility for higher education and skills from the (then) Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. This means that the DfE now has responsibility for education and skills across the age range, rather than ending at 19. The DfE's objectives are set out in a single departmental plan published on 24th August.

Recent announcements and policy developments are set out below.

New Green Paper; 'Schools that work for everyone'

On 9th September, the new Prime Minister, Theresa May, delivered a speech ('Britain, the great meritocracy') on proposed changes to the schools system, in which she set out 'the Government's ambition to create an education system that extends to everyone, not just the privileged few'. Following this, on 12th September, the new Education Secretary, Justine Greening, introduced a Green Paper which formalised the content of the Prime Minister's speech. Consultation on the proposals set out in the Green Paper closes on 12th December 2016.

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/schools-that-work-for-everyone>

The introduction to the Green Paper sets out the Government's view that not enough children are able to access places in 'good' schools. It also acknowledges the need for more school places. The Government's approach is to increase the number of places in good schools that are accessible to all families, for schools of all types to extend their offer and to increase diversity in the schools system.

The Paper also states that, whilst the need to support pupils on free school meals is acknowledged, there is also a need to support 'families who are just about managing'. These families are described as those falling just above the eligibility for free schools meals, whom the Government believes are 'not necessarily well-served' by the education system. The National Funding Formula will include factors (consultation on this to follow 'shortly') that reflect proportions of lower attaining pupils and those from less wealthy backgrounds.

The Green Paper sets out in more detail the specific changes to the schools system that it wishes to put in place. It also confirms the Government's commitment to the proposals set out in the White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (2016), describing the approach to school improvement and to academy status. The Paper sets out the Government's case for each of the proposed changes to the schools system.

1. Extension of Selection

It is proposed to allow the expansion of selective education, through permitting:

- Expansion of existing grammar schools (up to £50m will be set aside for this).
- Establishment of new, wholly or partly, selective schools.
- Existing non-selective schools can become selective in response to local demand, with the flexibility to select 100% on the basis of ability.

The Green Paper also states that measures to preserve school diversity where schools choose to convert will be considered. A number of conditions are proposed. These may vary from school-to-school and will be selected from a menu of options, intended to ensure that increased selection adds value to the whole schools system. These include:

- Selective schools to admit a proportion of pupils from lower income households.
- The establishment of a new, non-selective school.
- Establishment of a new feeder primary school in an area with a higher density of lower income households.
- Partnering with an existing non-selective under-performing school.
- Opportunity for pupils to join the new selective school at different ages.

In addition, the Green Paper states that:

- Proposers of new schools will be expected to work with local authorities and other bodies in considering where to locate a new selective school.
- Selective schools will be particularly encouraged where there is local demand (in this context, reference is made to the number of pupils travelling out-of-borough to grammar schools).
- Multi-academy trusts will be encouraged to select within their trust.

2. Faith Schools

Around one-third of mainstream schools in England are faith schools. At present, proposers of new faith Free Schools can only allocate up to 50% of their places on faith criteria. It is proposed to remove this requirement and replace it with the following:

- Evidence that there would be demand for places from pupils of other faiths.
- Establish twinning arrangements with schools not of their faith.
- Consider setting up mixed-faith multi-academy trusts.
- Consider including in the governing body a member of a different faith or no faith.

It is stated that measures, such as closer monitoring, would be put in place to ensure compliance.

3. Role of Universities in the State Schools System

The Green Paper sets out the Government's belief that universities should take a greater role in raising standards in the schools system, including sponsoring existing schools and setting up new schools. It is proposed that universities will have to meet one of the following as a condition of being able to charge higher tuition fees:

- Establishment of a new school in the state system (costs to be met by the Government).
- Sponsoring of an academy in the state system.

The school would need to be good or outstanding within a certain number of years and over time universities would be expected to extend their partnerships with schools. New guidance will be issued to the independent Director for Fair Access, with an expectation that new the requirements will be reflected in universities' Access Agreements from 2018/19.

4. Role of Independent Schools in the State Schools System

The Government believes that independent schools should be doing more to benefit children from a wider range of backgrounds. Around half of independent schools have charitable status. It is proposed that those independent schools 'with the capacity and capability' should meet one of the following 'in recognition of the benefits of charitable status':

- Sponsor academies or set up new free schools in the state system (capital and revenue costs would be met by the Government).
- Offer a proportion of places as bursaries, with the level expected much higher than that offered currently by most independent schools.

Smaller schools that do not have the capacity for the above would be expected to contribute to the state school sector in other ways e.g. school-to-school support.

Technical Education & Apprenticeships

Significant proposals have been brought forward relating to post-16 education and training. This is summarised below.

In July 2016 the Government published a **Post-16 Skills Plan**, setting out its intention to reform the skills system and 'transform' technical education. The Skills Plan proposes a common framework of 15 routes across all of technical education. A rationalisation of qualifications and awarding body arrangements is also proposed. The Plan sets out a timetable for the changes. The plan also includes the new system for apprenticeships and the need for improved careers guidance. On 5th October, the Education Secretary stated that the Skills Plan would be a 'big focus'.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-skills-plan-and-independent-report-on-technical-education>

On 12th August, proposals for a new funding model for **apprenticeships** were published. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/views-sought-on-plans-to-boost-apprenticeships>

Social Mobility 'Opportunity Areas'

On 4th October, the Education Secretary announced six 'opportunity areas' will benefit from a scheme to promote social mobility, supporting schools and links with employers. None are in London but it is stated that the programme will be rolled out to four other areas. £60m is to be allocated to the programme.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-mobility-package-unveiled-by-education-secretary>

Schools & Early Years Funding

On 21st July, the Education Secretary confirmed the Government's commitment to introduce 'fairer funding' for schools, high needs and early years (the subject of consultation in March 2016). Proposals for a second stage consultation are to be set out this autumn, with final decisions in the New Year.

On 11th August, a six week consultation on the funding system for nurseries, preschools and childminders was launched. It is proposed to replace the existing arrangements with a new formula based on three factors - universal rate for each child, additional needs, and regional costs.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fairer-early-years-funding-plan-launched>