

LSIS Policy update – Number 7

15 December 2008 – 9 January 2009



Further education, skills and the economy

January 7th – DIUS will fund 35,000 new apprenticeships in 2009

John Denham, the skills secretary, [announced](#) that DIUS would be providing £140 million in 2009 to fund 35,000 new apprenticeship places in the public and private sectors. DIUS said that this spending would be in addition to the almost £1 billion already budgeted for apprenticeships in the coming year. The Government expects more than 250,000 apprentices to begin courses during the 2009-10 financial year. The programme was announced by Gordon Brown in Derby, where he was visiting the local Rolls Royce¹ plant. Rolls Royce will take on an extra 50 apprentices under the plan.

The DIUS secretary said, *'Now more than ever it is important that we give people the real help they need to get and keep jobs. This is an important initiative and is a further signal of our determination to give people the chance to get the practical training they need to get on and to help ensure the country has the skilled workers it needs to benefit from the upturn'*.

In a related story, McDonald's [announced](#) plans to offer all of its employees Level 2 apprenticeships, with trials to be conducted at 80 restaurants² this year. These trials would include 80 McDonald's restaurants. Some 6,000 employees are expected to take up apprenticeships in 2009, about a twelfth of McDonald's total UK workforce. McDonald's would then expand the programme to all of its 1,200 locations, and expects as many as 10,000 apprenticeships by 2010. The fast-food chain said this would make McDonald's the United Kingdom's largest supplier of apprenticeships. McDonald's was one of three businesses that were given the power to award qualifications last year.

December 17th – Government announces £158 million in EU funds for the unemployed

As unemployment rates increase, DIUS and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have [announced](#) that they will provide £158 million from the European Social Fund (ESF) for services to the jobless. The money will fund 40,000 places in short-term pre-employment training, provide extra financial support to employers to take on new workers, and fund improved careers and training advice, delivered through Jobcentre Plus and Learndirect. The money will also help fund better regional co-ordination on reacting *'to ensure that local bodies and colleges react much quicker to*

¹ Rolls Royce in this case refers to Rolls Royce plc, the aircraft engine manufacturer, and not the auto company, which is separate and based in West Sussex. The two companies were separated in 1973, after Rolls Royce was nationalised by the Heath government.

² We had some dispute at the LSIS office as to whether a McDonald's constitutes a 'restaurant'. On the one hand, it does lack features like table service; on the other, McDonald's itself calls its locations restaurants, and I'm not sure what other descriptive noun to use, aside from 'location'; nor would 'chip shop' or 'take-away' be accurate.

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redundancies so that people losing jobs can be quickly notified of relevant opportunities and suitable training organised'. Half the £158 million will come from DWP's budget, the other half from DIUS's.

Tony McNulty, the employment minister, also **gave** a five-point pledge to the unemployed, saying, *'In the event that someone does become unemployed, I can promise them the extra help and support they need through Jobcentre Plus. Firstly people will get to see an expert Personal Jobcentre Plus Adviser who can support them; they will have access to a wide range of jobs and get help with CV writing and completing job applications forms. Where necessary, they will get help with skills advice and retraining. And they can also receive help with their mortgage'.*

According to DWP figures, employment rates declined 0.4 percent in the last quarter, and the 'claimant unemployment rate' rose 0.2 percent to 3.3 percent. The number of people on Jobseeker's Allowance grew by 75,700 to more than 1.07 million. There were 180,000 redundancies in this quarter of the year. However, 74.2 percent of the working-age population remains employed.

January 6th – Conservatives call for sharp restrictions on public spending

David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party, **has called** for sharp controls on public spending, to prevent too great an increase in the national debt. Cameron would limit all government departments to a real-term expenditure increase of 1 percent in the 2009-10 fiscal year, excepting only Defence, International Development, Health and Schools (presumably meaning DCSF). The Conservative leader also proposed cancelling taxes on savings for those in the basic income tax band, and increasing pensioners' tax allowance. Cameron said, *'We need to make a really big change: from an economy built on debt to an economy built on saving; from a country and government that has lived beyond its means to one that lives within its means'.*

Yvette Cooper, chief secretary to the Treasury, said *'I mean, this is cuts in support for the unemployed to get back to work, cuts in support for training and apprenticeships, cuts in support for business, or housing, transport, regeneration. I think it's economic madness, and no other major government in the world is considering this, quite the reverse'.* Professor Les Ebdon, the head of the Million+ group of post-1992 universities, **said** that the Conservative spending plans *'would mean sub-inflation growth in universities and a cut in student numbers and would undoubtedly restrict the chance to go to university for very many younger and older students from families who have never yet had the opportunity to benefit from higher education. It would also restrict opportunities for those made unemployed and for businesses and the public sector which need to retrain staff'.* He recommended 'counter-cyclical' investment in universities to help boost the economy.

December 18th – UK employment commission given control of Investors in People

DIUS **announced** that it was transferring control of Investors in People UK (IiP) to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). Investors in People UK is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) responsible for the Investors in People standard, *'a practical framework for improving business performance and competitiveness through good practice in people'.* Since its introduction in 1990, it has been awarded to employers encompassing 32 percent of the British workforce. Previously, IiP was sponsored by the Government's education department (DIUS from 2007). The

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UKCES was established in 2007 as an advisory body to the Government on employment and skills, and to oversee the Sector Skills Councils.

John Denham, the secretary of state for DIUS, said *'I am pleased that the UK Commission for Employment and Skills will be taking on the role of championing and developing the Investors in People standard. It will be working to make sure that the standard continues to prosper. IIP is a highly effective approach to improving performance through people and I believe strongly that organisations of all sizes and sectors should take the time to appraise what the framework can do for them'*.

14-19 and Schools News

Standards, targets and qualifications

January 5th – Government may raise school-participation age to 18 immediately in effort to lower unemployment

The Government is considering plans to immediately introduce the requirement that young people remain in education and training to age 18, rather than wait until 2013 as provided for in recent legislation. The proposal is designed to combat youth unemployment – of the 137,000 people new jobless in the last quarter of 2008, 40 percent were aged between 18 and 24. The unemployment rate in this age group is 14 percent, while 26 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds are currently unemployed. *The Guardian* quoted one unnamed source as saying, *'As unemployment rises the cost of keeping people in education or training falls. So doing that and having more teachers to teach them makes sense. You will have some 17-year-olds who will be cross at having to stay on, but that is better for them than being on the dole'*. Other proposals would involve granting a holiday on National Insurance payments for companies that take on new workers, and more rapidly filling vacancies at the local level.

The Guardian reported in a separate article on January 5th that colleges *'would cautiously welcome'* an immediate implementation of the new participation age, though the Association of Colleges (AoC) and some principals noted that the move would have to be supported with sufficient funds and advice services. Ioan Morgan, principal of Warwickshire College, said, *'Personally I would welcome an immediate raising of the leaving age. There are a lot of principals who would say 'the sooner we get our hands on these youngsters, the better''*. Sally Dicketts, of Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, said, *'If this happens in September and there is funding to support it – and that's a big if – we could handle it in most areas because we would have long enough to recruit the staff needed'*. Dame Ruth Silver, principal of Lewisham College (and LSIS's chair), also supported immediately raising the participation age, adding, *'It would be ironic if the measure of success in times of rising unemployment would continue to be getting people jobs. We need new measures in difficult times'*. The article theorised that sixth forms would take most of the new intake if the participation age were changed.

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December 16th – Inquiry into SATs delays published, as QCA suspends two senior executives

Lord Sutherland, who heads the inquiry examining the mismanagement of the 2008 SATs exams, [published](#) his findings, placing the chief share of blame on the contractor, ETS Europe, but excoriating the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and its subsidiaries. Lord Sutherland found that *'primary responsibility for this summer's delivery failure rests with ETS Global BV, which won the public contract to deliver the tests'*, and whose contract with the QCA was cancelled in August after several weeks of delays in marking and returning the tests. ETS's *'capacity to deliver the contract proved to be insufficient'*, and *'a lack of comprehensive planning and testing by ETS of its systems and processes as a key factor in the delivery failure'*. Sutherland did not spare the QCA, however, saying the agency *'failed to deliver its remit from Government and did not manage the contract it held with ETS effectively'*, acting under the assumption that *'it'll be all right on the night'*.

The QCA board [acted](#) swiftly on the Sutherland inquiry's findings. Although QCA's chief executive, Ken Boston, had resigned on December 14th (see Policy Update Number 6), the QCA board refused his resignation and instead suspended him. The board also suspended David Gee, the chief executive of the National Assessment Agency (NAA), the QCA division responsible for the testing regime. It was Gee who recommended that ETS get the SATs contract. It then took the extra step of dissolving the NAA entirely. DCSF has also ended SATs testing for 14-year-olds.

Lord Sutherland said, *'At its heart, this summer's test delivery failure represented a failure in customer service to pupils, parents, schools and markers. It is undoubtedly the case that markers did a professional job and public service to persevere in the face of numerous challenges'*. His inquiry recommended that *'the delivery process for National Curriculum tests should be modernised and improved'*, with trials of online marking. The inquiry's website is [here](#).

On December 31st, *The Guardian* [reported](#) that Edexcel had received a one-year; £25 million contract to manage the 2009 SATs for 11-year-olds, as well as deliver other, non-compulsory exams. Edexcel pledged to deliver 99.9 percent of the test results by July 7th, 2009. However, Boston told the schools secretary, Ed Balls in December that the speed with which the new contract was awarded would leave little time for anyone to prepare procedures to deal with potential delays. *'In the restricted time available to us'*, the QCA chief said, *'it will not be possible to develop mitigations to the level that either you or I would wish. In particular, during the crucial short period between the tests being sat, and the results being published on or by 7 July, the only meaningful contingency available is a delay in publishing the result'*.

December 19th – Colleges object to plans for common application process for 14-19 education

College leaders [expressed](#) doubts about a DCSF plan to introduce a common application process (Caps) for 16-19 provision in local areas. The Caps plan is part of the 14-19 Implementation Plan published by DCSF earlier this year³, and will allow students to use a single process to apply for the

³ For which LSIS is preparing a Brief Guide.

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whole range of 14-19 courses in their areas (A-levels, Diplomas, and so on), which are listed in 14-19 Prospectuses published in each local authority (which already exist).

But some college leaders felt the system could spawn a bureaucratic nightmare, with one warning it could face a fate similar to the application system for junior doctors introduced in 2007. Nick Lewis, the principal of Castle College, Nottingham, said, *'It's a solution to a problem that I don't feel we have'*, while John Guy of Farnborough Sixth Form College said, *'It's a crazy idea that has taken root among a few civil servants who think it is a trivial matter to achieve'*.

The Association of Colleges said it was *'profoundly sceptical'* about the DCSF proposal for Caps, though its finance director said that he was somewhat encouraged that DCSF would consult with colleges on the development of Caps. He noted that the application system would struggle to deal with learners who cross local authority borders to take courses, and would have much less time to approve applications and notify students than the University and College Admissions Service (Ucas) does. He also noted that large computerised systems can suffer large-scale failures, like those that affected the SATs system (see story above) and the Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs)

DCSF said *'this will not be a large, bureaucratic system. It will be a quick and simple way for colleges to match young people with courses'*.

January 7th – Only one-sixth of Diploma students choose advanced option

Only one in six students enrolled in the new 14-19 Diplomas has selected the most challenging option, the Advanced Diploma, according to a [report](#) in the *Financial Times*. The Advanced Diploma is equivalent to 3.5 A-levels, while the other two Diploma levels (Foundation and Higher) are equivalent to 5 or 7 good GCSEs, respectively. The report found that 12,000 students were taking Diplomas across 99 of the 100 local authorities offering the courses. Of the five Diploma courses available, the creative and media studies Diploma is most popular, despite its reputation as a 'soft subject'. Engineering is the second-most popular course, studied by nearly a quarter of students. Mike Harris, the head of education and skills policy for the Institute of Directors (IoD), said the figures *'must be a shot in the arm of realism'* for people who think Diplomas might rival A-levels. David Frost, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce, defended the media studies courses, noting that creative media has been a growth industry in the UK.

January 5th – KPMG report finds that poor maths skills cost taxpayers £2.4 billion

KPMG, one of the world's leading accountancy firms, [has published](#) a report showing that children who do poorly in maths classes go on to cost the public purse some £2.4 billion per annum in increased benefits costs and lower tax yields. KPMG said that each individual with poor maths skills could cost the state up to £44,000 by the age of 37. The report comes as the Every Child a Chance Trust, a charity chaired by KPMG's chairman, is seeking to raise £6 million to support maths education in primary schools. Barclays Bank has already signed on, pledging £1.2 million. John Griffith-Jones, the KPMG chair, said, *'As a business whose people are highly numerate, it seems only right that we should help to do something about the 30,000 children who leave primary schools each*

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year, barely able to do the simplest calculations'. A DCSF spokesperson stressed that the UK performed well in maths, saying, 'A recent international study showed that we are leading Europe in maths and science at age 14 and we have risen 11 places in international league tables since 2003 to seventh place'.

December 9th – LSN report says school sixth forms have even fewer poor students than universities

A report by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) [argues](#) that school sixth forms draw fewer students from low-income groups than universities, and that no strategy to increase participation rates in universities can succeed without addressing low GCSE attainment rates. The report by Geoff Stanton, a former head of the Government's Further Education Unit, is included in *Unfinished business in widening participation: the end of the beginning*. Stanton argues that half of students get the five good GCSEs that constitute 'the royal route' to university, and thus half the population is effectively cut off from HE. He says that we should have a debate about a system that 'discriminates' in favour of high-achievers and against those at risk of exclusion. 'What cannot continue is a rhetoric that emphasises the latter alongside a funding system that emphasises the former', he said.

In another essay in *Unfinished business*, Geoff Hall and Hugh David present research showing that higher education provided by FE colleges attracts students from a wider social pool than universities. They call for raising the status of HE courses in FE to widen participation, including wider provision of foundation degrees in HE. *Unfinished business* can be downloaded [here](#)

December 17th – DCSF announces £12 million for students with speech and communication impediments

DCSF and the Department of Health [announced](#) £12 million towards an 'action plan' for educating students with speech, language and communications problems. The plan was developed as a response to the Bercow Review into provision for these students, which published its findings last July. The plan includes 20 pathfinder projects 'to develop good practice guidance and a commissioning guide on speech, language and communication needs', £1.5 million for the communications sector, and £1.5 million for research around speech and communications provision. The plan will be overseen by a Communications Champion and Communications Council, to be appointed in early 2009. Alan Johnson, the health secretary, said 'I am determined to make sure that all children get the help they need to communicate effectively, to help them reach their full potential. Over the last 10 years, we have increased the number of therapists and improved access to professional programmes to help children overcome early speech problems. This action plan sets out how we can do more'.

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Schools and the credit crunch

January 7th – Parliamentary committee reports that financial crisis might curtail school capital programmes

The House of Commons Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families [released](#) a report warning that public spending cuts may pare back the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The BSF programme aims to renovate or rebuild every secondary school in England, with rebuilding and remodelling projects underway in every local authority by 2016. The committee expressed concern that an upcoming review of the BSF scheme would lead to the reductions in the programme, and called on DCSF to clarify the programme's future. The committee also said that 'staging points' in the programme should be part of the targets set every three years, and that these targets should not be revised, to ensure consistency. The committee also said that the accounts DCSF provided for the report were excessively vague: Barry Sheerman, the MP who chairs the committee, said, 'We were greatly concerned by a lack of clarity in the presentation of some of Department's expenditure figures. It is vital that our scrutiny is not hindered by confusion over which spending streams relate to which objectives, and we've asked the Department not only for better and clearer presentation, but for much more detail in their 2009 Annual Report'. The full report can be read [here](#).

December 19th – Spike in number of applications for state schools

Local authorities [are reporting](#) sharp increases in the number of parents applying for places in state schools, as the economic crisis puts private schooling out of reach for many. About a tenth of local authorities were reporting an increase in applications, including almost a third of London's boroughs, according to a report by the Audit Commission. A fifth of councils expect more applications in the coming year.

The report also finds that two-thirds of councils are seeing increased demand for benefits, and that one in four are seeing greater demand for elderly care. One in seven councils has either made redundancies or planned to. Steve Bundred, the Audit Commission's chief executive, said 'After all the doom laden headlines, I think facts like this help to inject a little realism. While councils are in the firing line and undoubtedly face some very tough choices in the longer term, they should keep a sense of perspective. By and large councils knew this downturn was coming and have planned for it. The pressures are real but councils are coping with them well'. The full report, *Crunch Time?: The impact of the economic downturn on local government finances*, can be read [here](#).

January 5th – Firm plans increase in number of mid-priced private schools

Cognita, the largest private operator of schools in the UK, is planning to more than double the number of schools it runs by 2013, the *Financial Times* [reported](#). Cognita was formed in 2004, and currently operates 46 schools. Chris Woodhead, Cognita's chairman and a former chief inspector of schools,

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said that his firm hopes to be operating 100 schools within the next four years, and that it is presently in talks about taking over another 10 or 15 schools.

Cognita believes that the financial crisis has opened a new market for moderately priced private education. The average Cognita school charges annual fees of £8,500 – by contrast, Eton cost £26,490 in 2007-08, while day fees at Westminster were nearly £18,000 that year; Charterhouse charges nearly £23,000 for day fees in 2008-09⁴. Woodhead said that he was *'amazed at the general inefficiency of some schools, primarily over staffing. We've taken over schools that were paying teachers bizarre amounts of money even though they're not doing a very high amount of teaching'*. He added that *'many, if not the majority [of private schools], seem to think they can put prices up irrespective of the ability of customers to pay'*.

The teacher workforce

January 5th – Ofsted launches campaign against 'boring' teaching

Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, Christine Gilbert, [told The Guardian](#) that Ofsted will launch a *'crackdown'* against *'boring'* teaching. Gilbert said research showed that student boredom had a significant negative effect on students' progress and attainment, and that boredom led to poor behaviour among pupils. Ofsted's last annual report, published in November 2008, said that *'pedestrian'* teaching had a deleterious effect on students: *'The result is their loss of interest, their slow progress and, often, deteriorating behaviour'*.

Gilbert said *'One of the things that we've been concerned to do in the new inspection framework is to really emphasise the importance of teaching and learning. One of the things we really felt it was important to do is to give much clearer information about what schools should do. I read every special measures report every week. Every single one. Too often they say you've got to improve teaching and learning and literacy and numeracy. The school isn't left with enough information. ... I think we need to be much clearer in our recommendations of what schools need to do in terms of their teaching and learning'*.

Teachers' unions defended the profession against charges of poor provision. Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT union, said, *'The fact is that every chief inspector seems to get infected with a virus that makes them say schools are full of teachers who aren't good enough despite the fact that their own evidence shows the standards of teacher is good. With comments like that, the chief inspector fuels the view that every lesson of every day for every minute has got to be packed with excitement. Quite frankly life isn't like that and education isn't like that'*.

⁴ Roedean, on the other hand, charges day fees of between £4,550 and £5,250.

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Higher Education News

December 18th – Cambridge scores first place in Research Assessment Exercise

The 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) which determines how research funds are allocated between universities, [ranked](#) Cambridge first, followed closely by arch-rival Oxford. The London School of Economics, Imperial College London and University College London rounded out the top five. The prestigious Russell Group of older research universities took eight of the top 10 spots, with the other two going to York and Essex. Universities were also ranked by subject – for example, the University of Essex came first in politics and international studies⁵, while Warwick came first in agriculture, veterinary and food science and King's College London first in education.

The RAE [is conducted](#) every few years to determine how funding councils distribute about £1.5 billion in research monies; the last RAE was conducted in 2001. This RAE will govern funding for the next five years. The RAE is carried out on behalf of the councils by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce), which employs panels of academics to review research submitted by individual academic departments. In the current RAE, funding is distributed to these departments proportionate to the ranking of the academics within it – previously, it was assigned by the overall ranking of the department, which allowed departments to 'hide' their poor performers (because if 51 percent of the department's researchers had the highest grade, the overall department did as well, even if the other 49 percent were lacklustre). However, universities don't have to submit all their researchers' work, allowing them to select only their strongest performers. The actual determination of who gets how much will be made in March.

The 2008 RAE was the last such exercise. From 2013, the Research Excellence Framework, which relies more on '*metrics*' and other numerical measurements, will be put in place, in part to reduce the amount of time universities spend preparing for the RAE.

December 16th – University of Birmingham will host national science and engineering programme

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) [has selected](#) the University of Birmingham to house the National Higher Education Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Programme from 2009 to 2011. The scheme '*will aim to deliver significant and sustainable increases in the supply of graduates and trained staff equipped with the skills needed by employers to the benefit of the national economy*', and '*develop innovative and transferable programmes and initiatives for increasing and widening participation in the STEM subjects in higher education*'. It will also work to encourage more young people to study STEM subjects. Birmingham describes its College of

⁵ Beating my alma mater, the London School of Economics, in that subject. My friend Steve went to Essex – he's never going to let me live this down

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Engineering and Physical Sciences as *'one of the largest integrated STEM teams in the United Kingdom'*. Hefce will grant the university £20 million to carry out the programme.

Local government news

December 18th – Ofsted publishes Annual Performance Assessments of local authorities

Ofsted [published](#) the 2008 Annual Performance Assessments (APAs) for 147 local authorities, evaluating their performance on education, health, children's services and social services. The inspectorate found that 73 percent of local councils were judged either good or outstanding *'in the contribution they make to improving services overall for children and young people'*. This is a decrease of 5 percent from last year's figure. Four councils were judged inadequate this year, up from none last year⁶. Eight councils were deemed inadequate in the *'staying safe'* subset of the Every Child Matters agenda. Ofsted notes that there have been significant increases in GCSE attainment and a 10 percent rise in apprenticeships completions over the last year. Areas for improvement include *'improving the proportion of young offenders in education, employment and training'* and *'increasing the number of looked after children allocated a named social worker'*. The APAs are based on *'a council's self assessment, performance data, the views of the local Government Office, assessments by the Youth Justice Board and Healthcare Commission briefings, key data from local inspections and Joint Area Reviews, and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board'*.

These will be the last APAs – from next year, Ofsted and other inspectorates will use the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which takes more account of partnership working in the local area. The results for three local authorities were not published, as these councils are contesting their grades. There is no report summarising the APAs, but you can access an A-Z list of local authorities [here](#).

December 11th – Local Government Association signs protocol on closer working with colleges

The Local Government Association (LGA), the umbrella association for English local government, has [concluded](#) a protocol with the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) on working more closely together. The protocol offers ten suggestions *'for building a new and improved relationship between local government and colleges'*. These include more partnership work between colleges and local councils, through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and council committees; more consultation by both councils and colleges; a review of local authority membership on college governing bodies; discussion on funding and commissioning, and; more joint projects. The protocol is *'an expression of the shared commitment between the LGA, AoC and ADCS to working together nationally to promote young people's outcomes'*.

⁶ Among them the London Borough of Haringey.

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December 17th – Committee seeks evidence in inquiry on standards in local government

The Committee on Standards in Public Life, which advises the Government on ethics and conduct in the public services, [has published](#) a consultation paper as part of an inquiry into standards in local government. The *'Issues and Questions paper ... asks for views and evidence for its inquiry into openness and accountability in Local and London Government'*. The committee's chair, Sir Christopher Kelly, said, *'We are interested in whether current arrangements meet the standards for openness and accountability embodied in the Seven Principles of Public Life⁷. The findings of this review will be presented to the Prime Minister and the leaders of the devolved governments, and will, where appropriate, include recommendations on how the effectiveness of the current arrangements could be improved'*. The paper can be read [here](#): responses are due February 25th.

Devolved administrations

January 4th – Northern Ireland grammar schools will hold 11-plus exams, despite government attempts to abolish them

More than 30 Northern Irish grammar schools [are planning](#) to stage privately run 11-plus exams, to be held in November 2009. The move comes as the Northern Ireland government is preparing to abolish the exams, under plans first announced in late 2007. As many as 30 state grammar schools are preparing to use the new exam, as well as three private, Catholic grammar schools (the state schools in Northern Ireland tend to be majority Protestant). The exams are being prepared by the Association for Quality Education (AQE), which, according to its website, is *'an alliance of parents, principals, governors and teachers, who believe that the future of post-primary education in Northern Ireland should be based on our excellent secondary and grammar schools and not on imposition of the failed one-size-fits-all comprehensive model'*. Parents will have to pay a fee for their children to sit the exams, but the AQE intends to waive this for low-income families. The AQE claims the new exam will be fairer, as it tests children over three papers (on three different Saturdays), rather than two, lessening chances that a *'bad day'* might harm a child's prospects.

The plans to abolish the 11-plus were advanced by Caitríona Ruane, who represents Sinn Féin, the leading Catholic/nationalist party in the Northern Ireland executive. Plans to abolish the 11-plus have split the executive along community lines – the two Catholic parties, favour its abolition, while the two Protestant/Unionist parties oppose it. Martin McGuinness, the Sinn Féin deputy first minister, accused proponents of the 11-plus of waging *'a vicious campaign'* against Ruane, while Lord Maginnis, an Ulster Unionist member of the House of Lords, predicts a *'titanic struggle'* over the reforms.

⁷ Selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. These are sometimes called the Nolan Principles, after the chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life who was in office when they were developed.

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December 16th – LLUK signs agreement with Welsh schools inspectorate

Lifelong Learning UK, the Sector Skills Council for FE, [signed](#) a memorandum of understanding with Estyn⁸, the Welsh schools inspectorate. According to Michelle Creed, the LLUK director for Wales, the memorandum will *‘ensure that the National Occupational Standards, Professional Standards for Wales and Application Guides we produce are fully integrated into the Estyn self-assessment guidance for providers, and that good practice identified through the inspection process is disseminated to lifelong learning sector employers’*. The final memorandum will be signed early in 2009.

New Faces and Appointments

December 31st – New Year’s honours list released

The annual New Year’s honours list [was released](#), with 966 people recognised in this year’s list, including 29 knighthoods. According to the Cabinet Office, which manages the honours system, about one-tenth of those receiving honours did so for services to education. Robert Edwards, head teacher at Garforth Community College, was knighted, as was Professor Timothy Brighouse, an advocate for school improvement. Eleven head teachers and 12 school governors were included on the honours list.

Two FE college principals, Keith Elliott of City of Bristol College and Frank McLaughlin of City and Islington College, were named Commanders of the British Empire (CBE). Seven people were named Officers of the British Empire (OBE) for services to FE, including Michele Sutton, principal of Bradford College; Sarah Robinson, principal of Darlington College; Asha Khemka, principal and chief executive of West Nottinghamshire College; Adam Suddaby, vice principal of Leicester College; Dr. Ursula Howard, former director of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy; Keith Blackwell, principal of Esher Sixth Form College, and; Wendy Wright, principal of Macclesfield College. Four people were created Members of the British Empire (MBE) for services to FE: Susan Lane, assistant principal for student services at Knowsley Community College; John Teal, a caretaker at Hartlepool Sixth Form College; Peter Vowles, a Learning Gateway manager at Weymouth College, and; Susan Whitham, the head of secretariat at the Sixth Form Colleges Forum.

Other notable names on the honours list include Lucy de Groot, executive director of the Improvement and Development Agency, who received a CBE, and Shirley Cramer, a former member of the LSC and chief executive of Dyslexia Action. Outside education, notable honourees included Olympic cyclist Chris Hoy and science fiction author Terry Pratchett, both knighted, and actor Michael Sheen (*The Queen, Frost/Nixon*), who received an OBE. The full honours list may be read [here](#).

⁸ Estyn is officially *‘The office of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales’*. The name Estyn is derived from the Welsh verb meaning ‘to extend’ – it’s not an acronym in either English or Welsh.

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December 12th – Universities UK appoints new president

Universities UK, the membership association for university vice-chancellors, [has elected](#) Steve Smith as its new president for the 2009-11 term. He is vice-chancellor of the University of Exeter, a post he has held since 2002, and is also chair of the 1994 Group, an association of *'smaller research-intensive universities'*⁹. Smith will succeed the current president, Rick Trainor, the principal of King's College London, from August 1st, and will serve for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 academic years.

Other News

January 7th – One college makes Stonewall Workplace Equality Index

Stonewall, a charity dedicated to advancing LGBT rights, [released](#) its annual Workplace Equality Index, naming the 100 employers who provide the best working environments for gay and lesbian employees. One further education college, Newham College of Further Education, made the list, ranking 39th. One Sector Skills Council, Skillset, which serves the creative media industry, made the list at the 83rd position, while LSIS ranked 61st. No universities were included in this year's list.

Public-sector employers made up a large proportion of the list, including 16 local authorities and 24 police services, as well as two NHS trusts (NHS Plymouth and the Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust) and several central government departments. Lloyds TSB came in first overall, followed by the Hampshire Constabulary and Brighton and Hove City Council. The rankings were determined *'according to criteria ranging from implementation of effective equality policies to practical demonstration of good practice in recruitment and mentoring and how they engage with lesbian and gay staff, customers and service users'*.

⁹ Specifically, Bath; Birkbeck, University of London; Durham; East Anglia; Essex; Exeter; Goldsmiths, University of London; Royal Holloway, University of London; Lancaster; Leicester; Loughborough; Queen Mary, University of London; Reading; St Andrews; School of Oriental and African Studies; Surrey; Sussex, and; York. Warwick and the London School of Economics are former members.

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Contact the LSIS policy team

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Published by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

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