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Planting the Seed: what makes a successful partnership and what results do we want from them?

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Building stronger school-university partnerships in London

Report commissioned by Lord Adonis, delivered in April 2009 to Sarah McCarthy-Fry, Minister for London Schools

A “delivery plan” to 2011 on London Challenge pledges:

(i) Every maintained secondary school in London will have a partnership with an HE institution (HEI)

(ii) A higher proportion of young Londoners will go on to HE, including the more competitive universities.

The Big Picture: The Role of Education

Education as a Privilege

Education as a Right

Education as an Obligation

Education as a Passport

Education as a Necessity

Milestones

Leitch 2006: "what the UK's long-term ambition should be for developing skills in order to maximise economic prosperity, productivity and to improve social justice" (Leitch Review of Skills, Foreword)

2013 (or earlier?) Compulsory education to age seventeen

(*Education and Skills Act 2008)*

2015 (or earlier?) Compulsory education to age eighteen
(Education and Skills Act 2008)

2020: "Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills" (Leitch final report title)

Leitch 2020 ambition

Basic skills: over 90 percent of adult population Level 2 or above

Intermediate skills: over around 70 per cent of adult population Level 3 or above

Higher skills: over 40 per cent of adult population Level 4 or above

(Leitch Review of Skills, 2006, Executive Summary)

By 2020, 50 per cent of London jobs requiring Level 4 or higher skills

Current dilemmas 1

Diversifying view on skills?
- Skills progress as less important in recession?
- Training for unemployment (disillusionment)
- More competitive employment market than ever

Weakening of partner commitment?
- Institutions, governments, employers, communities

Scattering of focus?
- Lifelong versus once-off learning
- Full-time versus part-time learning
- Credit portability versus credit barriers

Current dilemmas 2

Strong pressures on government funding?
- Renewal of London Lifelong Learning Networks funding
- Continuation of current links between FECs and HEIs

Less clear articulation of employer needs?
- struggle for survival
- less ability to foster staff (in-house) training, however vital to the future

An opportunity to accelerate the UK's provision of post-secondary education?
- Additional student places, even at more marginal value
- Real alternative to additional youth unemployment

The HE Sector 1

Growing commitment to skills agenda and diverse pathways to study (but dislikes the word “vocational”)

Confused about current priorities

- Mixed messages on skills (widen or sharpen?)
- Stimulus or cuts in current economic crisis?
- England, Britain or Europe?

Demographic challenge in 2010-2020: decline of nearly fifteen per cent in cohort size, then renewed growth of “school leavers” from 2020

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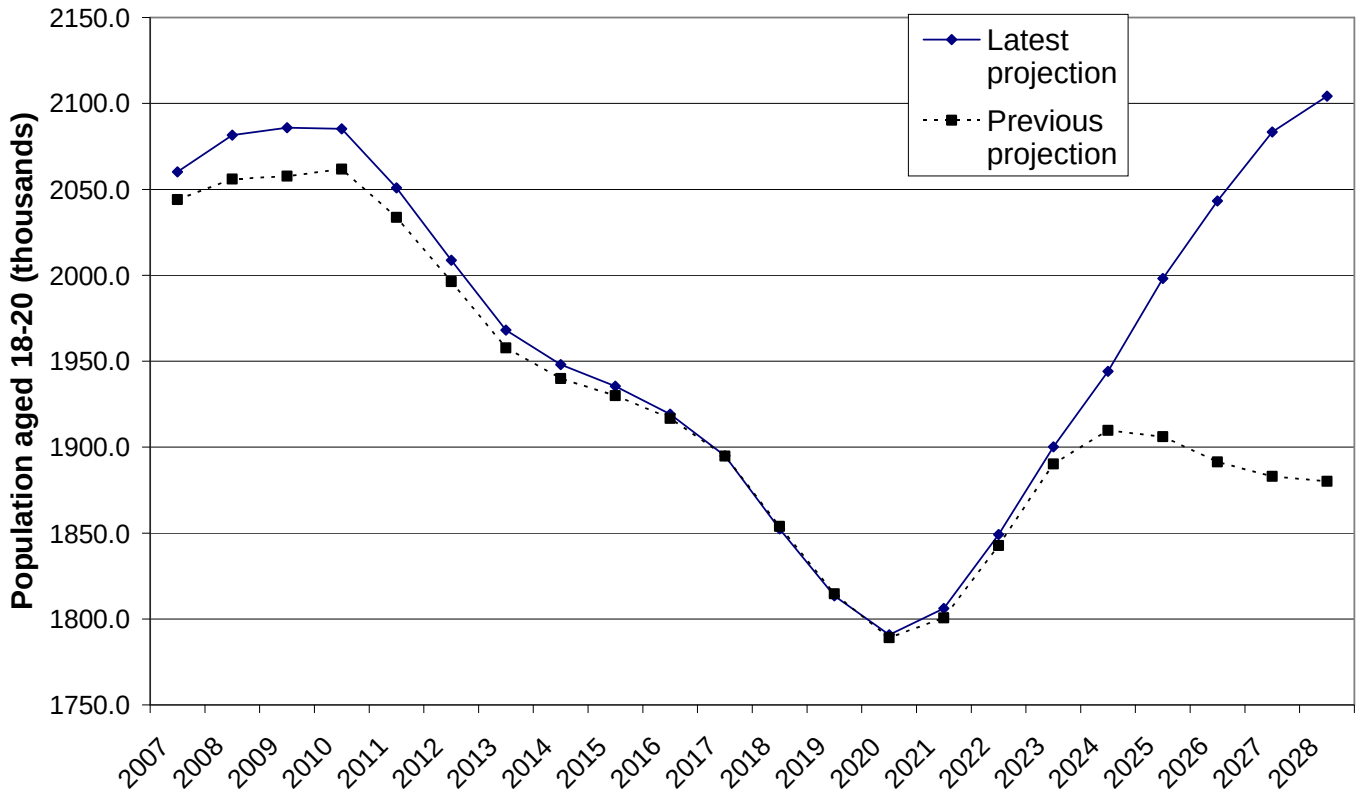
The University for business and the professions

18-20 year olds in England from 2007 to 2029



Source: ONS and Government Actuary's Department (2006 based projections, published in August 2007). Populations as of 1 January. Age groupings for previous 31 August prepared by DIUS.

The HE sector 2

Widening participation: a necessity

A sectoral necessity to maintain current sector size

A social necessity to build a more cohesive “knowledge” society

An employment necessity to meet industry needs

A taxation necessity to support emerging pensions gap for an increasingly ageing population

The HE sector 3

Widening participation – how are universities doing?

- Still framed largely in terms of progression from schools, not FE; from A levels rather than vocational
- Need for a national bursary scheme; current wide variability and extent of university bursary schemes is confusing
- Universities are providing more diverse offerings for students "with no tradition of higher education"
- But overall English HE participation hovers around 40 percent in last decade with growing male/female gap (45/35%) and large ethnic differences

(House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *Widening participation in higher education,* February 2009)

The HE sector 4

- HEFCE funding for widening participation from less than 1 to greater than 10 percent of institutional teaching grant.

- "In general, the whole [HE] sector is improving but the rate of improvement is similar across all types of universities" i.e. wide differences between different university groupings remain (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, *Widening participation in higher education,* February 2009)

- Growing advocacy in sector for more varied progression routes, including diplomas, apprenticeships, foundation degrees, but less compelling numbers growth.

Building Partnerships 1: Focus

1. Pledges: the two London Challenge pledges to 2011

2. Commitment to widening participation: special funding or mainstreamed?

"The Funding Council [HEFCE] did not intend the [WP] funding to be a reward or incentive for success in widening participation, but a reimbursement to remove a disincentive."

(February 2009 Public Accounts Committee report)

Building Partnerships 2: Parity of educational esteem

"Key to widening participation are pathways: from schools to universities; from further education colleges to universities and vice-versa; from and to employers. The London Challenge programme pledges to develop partnerships between 430 maintained secondary schools in London and the 43 higher education institutions in the capital. Partnerships are a good way of illuminating student pathways." (Gillies, "Student-consumers", *Guardian*, 19 March 2009)

Building Partnerships 3: vocational *and* fundamental

An integrated relationship between vocational and higher education?

- Equal value to vocational and higher education
- “shared and coordinated information base” on future labour market needs and demographic trends
- “integrated responses” to workforce needs
- “efficient regulatory framework” across both
- “clearer and stronger pathways between the sectors *in both directions*”

(Review of Australian Higher Education, December 2008)

Building Partnerships 4: People not structures

Partnerships are about people

1. Exemplary HEI response to current initiative – good contact arrangements, regional focus, strategy

2. More varied school response – STEM focus, peer focus, institutional contacts less clear, need more IAG

Building Partnerships 5: People not structures

People

School management: a school-wide approach

Teachers: a disciplinary approach

Students: a peer-respect approach

Parents and community: an informed approach

Planting the seed?

- Commitment to the wider educational and social purpose of widening participation
- Incentives for continued WP progress (not just compliance or reimbursement)
- "Whole of sector" linkage: schools, FE, universities
- Linkage with existing initiatives (SSAT, GATES, STEM)
- **The key role of key people**
- Recognizing of the interplay of region, class, ethnicity, employment and educational opportunity
- Focus on individual student pathways to success

The results we want?

More educated society

More equitable society

More skilled society

More productive society

More adaptable society