

Select Committee Sketch

by "Sceptic"

News of the membership of the new Select Committees came just as we were going to press, so who's on and who's out?

Barry Sheerman, the highly respected Chairman of the Education and Skills Select Committee remains as such, even though some of the Committee's forthright and well researched reports have not always met with Governmental approval.

With regard to the other committee members it's pretty well a case of the class of 1997 being joined by the class of 2005. Five members of the new Committee are new to the House and one rejoins after a period in the sticks.

The five old hands are all Labour. Additional to the Chairman are David Chator, highly committed and knowledgeable ex-FE teacher and administrator, who has been Chairman of the All Party FE Group; Jeff Ennis, with a wealth of local government experience and evident commitment for the best possible educational opportunities for all; Helen Jones a solicitor with invaluable forensic questioning skills; and Gordon Marsden, historian with wide interests in the arts and heritage to match his broad university education at Oxford, London, and Harvard.

As to the new kids on the block, the Lib.Dems. have, as usual, produced someone with considerable practical education experience. Tim Foran spent many years in senior positions in FE administration and is an experienced local councillor. This time round the LDs have two members. It is ironic that joining Foran will be Stephen Williams, prominent in both Avon and Bristol councils, who work-wise has a business background. He took the Bristol seat from Valerie Davey, largely, it is thought due to the significant number of student voters in the constituency. Her depth of knowledge of FE, concern about how the whole education system impacts on the local population, and highly articulated and pointed questioning will be greatly missed in the Select Committee. These two new LDs will also have something to live up to following, as they do, Paul Holmes, whose informed and pertinent questions were always listened to with respect by the Committee, but often with embarrassment or trepidation by Ministers and officials.

The two new LDs are joined by three new Conservatives. Out go Andrew Turner and Bill Gibb (although he to higher things). In come Nadine Dorries who does not list education as a special interest in Dodd's; David Evenett, ex-schoolmaster who does, and was previously an MP with a few intervening years in the wilderness; and Rob Wilson, who narrowly won Reading East and has been prominent on the Reading Council. Last of the 2005 in-take is Dr. Roberta Black - Woods former lecturer in social policy and a Professor no less!

What will be in their programme and how will they compare with their predecessors?
As we are now within a week of the end of the session we shall have to wait at least until October to find out.

July 2005