

Inside View from Westminster

by 'Sceptic'

The terms of reference for the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee are to "examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Education and Skills and its associated public bodies." The latter are many!

Schools admissions, teacher retention and the work of OFSTED are topics recently considered. In addition to its watch on public expenditure on an annual basis, the Committee is currently considering the National Skills Strategy, 14–19 Education, Prison Education, and the School Transport Bill.

Taking evidence on the latter two is just beginning, but interviewing on 14–19s must surely be nearly complete. The Committee has heard from Tomlinson (twice), the Secretary of State (twice), relevant Officers of the DES, QCA, OFSTED, LSC, TUC and from employers, together with several eminent academics such as Professors Raffe (Edinburgh University), Adam Smith (on mathematics), Phil Brown (Cardiff University), and Alison Wolf (until recently from the London Institute of Education but now in the more rarified atmosphere of a management school). However, Tomlinson's final report is not due out until the summer, so a replay of some scenes is likely.

In June the Committee was due to hear from Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children on "Every Child Matters". Now that the Children Bill is with us, the Committee will, no doubt, wish to concentrate on that. Have you noticed, by the way, that in the word count of official publications and speeches 'education' has long been overtaken by "learners" and "skills"? If the Children Bill becomes an Act unamended (which is by no means certain) it will add to the trend. Out will go "Directors of Education" in will come "Directors of Children's Services". Holistic care for children is on its way. SEC members, are you ready for the challenge?

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