

## Inside View from Westminster

by 'Sceptic'

This time more a brief than a sketch, a General Election having intervened. As a result trees shook, and a Twigg fell. A pity, as he was shaping up as a potential Secretary of State, appearing more knowledgeable and practical than the Minister of State for Schools to whom he was responsible, now moved to a key post in the Cabinet Office.

Jacqui Smith has been recycled as Minister of State for Schools, having previously been an Education Minister with a stint at Trade and Industry in the meantime. She has the assistance, as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, of the recently ennobled, sometime journalist, Andrew Adonis – but given that he had been regarded as the PM's guru on all matters educational in the Cabinet Office, it is a moot point whether she will find him a help or an embarrassment.

The new Minister for State for Life Long Learning, Further and Higher Education is Bill Rammell with, in effect, much of 16+ in his grasp. (No – I don't think he gets paid any more for so wide a remit). Until the General Election, Rammell was a Foreign Office Minister but has many years of relevant experience working for higher education institutions before becoming an MP.

He too has a Parliamentary Under Secretary (Skills) to assist him, Phil Hope. Amongst other things an ex-teacher, and community and youth work consultant, Phil is said to enjoy tap dancing and juggling burning clubs, which may well prove useful in juggling some of the burning issues likely to emerge in his Ministerial patch.

Beverley Hughes, she of the unfortunate Home Office experience, has been reinstated as Minister of State for Children and Families, Margaret Hodge having been rewarded for her work in this area with a tricky little number at Work and Pensions.

To complete the team an Eagle has landed – Maria, solicitor and champion chess player, who becomes P.U.S.S. for Children.

Leading the team is Ruth Kelly as Secretary for State for Education and Skills. An intrepid woman, and, given her drubbing not so long ago at a national teachers' conference, a plucky one. She successfully fought off efforts to return her to a Treasury post. Given her courage, and a certain practical common sense, we should all wish her well.

The main task of the Ministers of a department responsible for a major public service is to keep that service running effectively, but what new legislation is the team to see through in the coming parliamentary session?

The Queen's Speech contains 53 (short) paragraphs indicating proposals for forthcoming legislation and other aspects of future governmental policy and activity. SEC members take heart! References to education and allied matters come on page 1 immediately after the declared intention to continue to pursue stable but developmental economic policies, low inflation and (note this) sound public finance.

'My government will build on its programme of reform and accelerate modernisation of the public services to promote opportunity and fairness. My Government will bring forward legislation in the key areas of public service delivery; education; health; welfare; and crime.' I guess the Queen must have had a bit of a struggle reading that last word, as probably, like most of us, she thought it was criminals, not the public services, that delivered crime.

The main education reference immediately follows:

'Education remains my Government's main priority. My Government will further reform the education system to improve quality and choice in the provision of schooling, and build on the progress already made to improve educational standards for all.'

As we are now intended to have a children's service rather than a specialist stand-alone education one, there are a few other references that may turn out to have relevant implications, for example, 'improving the provision of child care', a 'barring and vetting scheme, and other measures to provide better provision for children', 'fostering a culture of respect', (can they possibly mean respect for teachers?), and school transport under 'support rural services'. But in case you were wondering, there is no provision for legislation to bar 'hoodies' from the Houses of Parliament.

As to what it will all mean in practice, read the education press, listen to 'Today in Parliament', and, for what the Education Select Committee says about it - watch this space.

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