

Press release: College students with unrealised potential deserve better

Addressing delegates at the Association of Colleges (AoC) annual conference in Birmingham, Ofsted's Chief Inspector will say that many of the 170,000 young people doing level 2 study programmes are facing narrow options and limited flexibility.

Ms Spielman's comments come as Ofsted publishes a [major report on the curriculum](#) available to students taking level 2 study programmes at further education colleges. Often these young people do not have 5 good GCSEs and there are gaps in their understanding of English and maths.

The report says that these young people's life-long employability depends on the ability of teachers to redirect their education into a course that stimulates and motivates them, and which offers the prospect of further study, training or work. However, it finds that for too long they have been seen by policy makers as "other people's children" and, as a result, their needs have not always been met.

In her speech to the AoC, HM Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman will say the report found that the colleges that were thinking most deeply about curriculum did 3 important things:

- collaborate with local employers to design and deliver curricula that set up leaders for good local jobs
- recognise the importance of personal, social and employability skills
- evaluate the benefits of their study programmes by properly tracking destinations and feed that back into curriculum design

Today's report also outlines concern about the number of courses on offer that do not lead to good local jobs. Ofsted found that many colleges collected little data about learners' destinations. But those colleges that did were able to give Ofsted a view about which courses had the best and worst employment prospects.

Art and media courses were seen by students as having the least chance of leading to a job, but at least 3 colleges surveyed by Ofsted reported these courses as having the most applicants.

Ms Spielman will say in her speech:

Arts and media does stand out as the area where there is greatest mismatch between the numbers of students taking the courses and their future employment in the industry. There is a point up to which courses that engage learners have value but ultimately there have to be viable prospects at the end.

Yet even with the poor prospects, course adverts often listed

potential jobs in the arts which are, in reality, unlikely to be available to the vast majority of learners but underplay the value of other skills these courses develop.

These colleges risk giving false hope to students. It raises the question: are they putting the financial imperative of headcount in the classroom ahead of the best interests of the young people taking up their courses. If so, this isn't acceptable.

Ofsted has already announced that there will be a stronger emphasis on the curriculum in the new Education Inspection Framework, which will take effect in September 2019. There will also be a new judgement for 'quality of education'. This will replace the current 'outcomes for pupils' and 'teaching, learning and assessment' judgements with a broader, single judgement. The Chief Inspector will use her speech to the Association of Colleges to outline how these plans will relate to the further education and skills sector.

Ms Spielman will continue:

Inspectors will still judge the progress that learners are making from their starting points, but will evaluate this in terms of how they have developed new knowledge, skills and behaviours rather than the amount of progress they have made towards achieving a component of a qualification.

In the new framework inspectors will want to make sure that learners are developing a deep understanding of the subject and that this is embedded in their long term memory. Inspectors will want to see that learners are able to recall information and have the skills to complete tasks routinely, rather than simply for a one-off assessment or test.

We want to send a clear message that teaching to the test to achieve high achievement rates is not good practice, and there is no need to continually assess learners to predict likely achievement grades. That time is far better spent making sure learners accumulate all the required knowledge, skills and behaviours.

As a result, today's report recommends that colleges should:

- engage actively with employers, who should co-design and implement aspects of the curriculum and assess learners
- review their current minimum requirements for level 2 and level 3 study programmes to make sure that they are appropriate
- ensure that teachers are up to date with the practices and jobs available in their industry
- arrange work experience so that they are relevant to learners' programmes of study

- give clearer feedback to learners on their progress
- not focus too much on qualification outcomes
- evaluate whether level 2 learners improve their progression into careers by progressing to a level 3 study programme

Ofsted also recommends that the Department for Education should provide guidance to colleges about the information they should publish on their websites about student destinations, and evaluate the impact of the policy requiring students to re-sit their English and mathematics GCSE.