

# Speech: Amanda Spielman at the 2018 AoC Annual Conference

It's really good to be back. Thank you. I do appreciate you all still being here at the end of what I've no doubt has been a busy and stimulating 2 days.

Speaking to you last year, I expressed my hope that it would be the first of many appearances; I am glad I am keeping my promise.

In many ways, this has been a good year for your sector, with notable improvements in performance, including a 9-point rise in the proportion of general FE colleges rated good or outstanding. It has been particularly pleasing to see a number of colleges, which have been either inadequate or RI [requires improvement] for extended periods, break that cycle and get to good. So well done to Richmond-upon-Thames, Waltham Forest and The City of Liverpool College and others for moving up to good this year. And also congratulations to Fareham and Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form Colleges and others for their outstanding success.

In the visits I've made to colleges throughout the year, I have consistently been impressed by their ambition for their students. Take Barking and Dagenham College. They are forming beneficial partnerships with a wide range of employers. This has meant they can source facilities such as IT suites, create a curriculum intended to lead to direct employment and give learners a meaningful insight into the world of work.

And obviously they aren't alone. Up and down the country, there are colleges doing remarkable work, often in very demanding circumstances.

Because there is no point pretending that there aren't continuing challenges. As I recently reflected in [my letter to the Public Accounts Committee](#), the funding situation for FE remains particularly difficult.

I have expressed my concerns before, not least at this conference last year, that the constraints on further education and skills funding are affecting the sustainability and quality of provision. My strong view is that the government should use the forthcoming spending review to increase the base rate for 16 to 18 funding.

Let's not forget, the national funding rate for 16 and 17-year olds has been frozen since 2013 to 2014. Our inspection evidence, published reports and insights have indicated several areas where leaders and managers are having to make increasingly difficult decisions. There are colleges where significant staffing cuts have been made, where teaching hours have been reduced, and where the curriculum offer has been narrowed, reducing enrichment or tutorial time, or by offering fewer courses.

I really do commend all those that are coping and adapting to the financial challenges. But there are still a number of colleges that are less than good,

which naturally means too many young people are getting a less than good educational experience. And while it is good that colleges are improving, we have seen several colleges take quite a long time to do so.

And beyond our own evidence, it worries me that there are grade 2 colleges now in financial intervention, as this may well impact on quality.

You don't need me to tell you that you are also having to cope with the changes to technical and vocational education. Implementing the apprenticeship reforms is taking time and energy and the planned introduction of T-levels is also presenting challenges as well as opportunities. And, of course, there is the devolution of the Adult Education Budget, and all that entails, to contend with. There really is a lot going on and I know that's always been the case.

In this context of challenge and building very much on my comments to you last year, I want today to set out Ofsted's plans for change as we prepare for the future of education inspection. And given all the change mentioned above, let me reassure you: we are talking evolution not revolution.

## **Inspection changes**

As I have made clear since I started this job, my commitment for Ofsted is that, in everything we do, we should be a force for improvement. This time last year I shared with you the thinking behind [our corporate strategy](#), where we expanded on that commitment to make clear that in everything we do, we will be intelligent, responsible and focused. But how does that translate into our framework development work?

We will be intelligent by basing the framework on research from inspection and other wider research. We have already undertaken and published 2 substantial pieces of work on the curriculum. Today, to coincide with this conference, we are publishing the next phase – looking at [Level 2 study programmes](#).

We will be responsible by setting clear expectations and debunking misconceptions. Paul Joyce and his colleagues, and I can see Chris Jones over there, have been up and down the country sharing our emerging plans, not least at workshops at this very conference. And, of course, we will consult widely on the draft framework and handbooks when we start the full consultation early in the new year.

And we are being focused, by removing any measures that do not genuinely assess quality of education and by doing so, making sure that inspectors' and your time is used to best effect. So, less emphasis on data and qualification achievement rates and more on the real substance of education, the curriculum, the design and the content of learning programmes.

## **Curriculum**

Of course, inspectors in further education have always considered the appropriateness of the curriculum when arriving at inspection judgements. In

the new framework, there will be a stronger emphasis. The content of the curriculum and the way that this content is taught and assessed will be a bigger part of inspection activity.

I want to make sure that at Ofsted we are focusing on what is taught and how it is taught: not just the qualification that comes out at the end. This will let us reward colleges and other providers for doing the right thing by their students.

Our report on Level 2 study programmes, published today, has looked at this question in much more detail. It serves as a useful case study for some of the wider issues in the sector.

The wider concerns that Ofsted has about the focus on outcomes over substance, on assessment without consideration for curriculum, are particularly prominent in level 2 study programmes.

These programmes were supposed to be suited to the needs of the student. The reality, in too many of the colleges we visited for our research, is that options are narrow and flexibility is limited. This is largely driven by the straitjacket of qualifications. Level 2 study programmes have some extras around the edges, but, in practice, are often dominated by the syllabuses of the main qualification, albeit with English and mathematics teaching added on.

While students on Level 2 programmes are fewer in number, curriculum design is exceptionally important to their needs. After all, these are students with unrealised potential. Most of them won't have 5 good GCSEs and will often have gaps in English and mathematics. They are at a crucial juncture. Their lifelong employability depends on the ability of their teachers to redirect their education into a course that stimulates and motivates them and offers prospects of further study, training or work.

Our research found that the colleges that were best at this do 3 important things.

### **Working with local employers**

Firstly, they collaborate with local employers to design and deliver curricula that set learners up for good local jobs. College leaders tell us that employers play an important role in shaping the strategic focus. They are then involved in designing and contributing to the delivery of the curriculum. Examples of this included delivering talks, hosting visits to the workplace and advising on the programme content to reflect current industry practice.

Colleges like Newham and Tyne Metropolitan, and Barking and Dagenham as already mentioned, are leading the way in designing curricula that serve the needs of their students and local employers.

And it's not necessarily just about looking at current opportunities, but working out what the future might hold. In a recent visit to the London South

East College, Bromley, I was particularly struck at the work they were doing in conjunction with, among others, Bombardier and Biggin Hill airport to address the chronic shortage of aerospace engineers and the wider skills needs of the aviation industry.

By way of contrast, I'm afraid I have to draw attention to those colleges knowingly offering courses that do not have good local employment prospects.

Arts and media does stand out as the area where there is greatest mismatch between the numbers of students taking the courses and the employment prospects at the end. 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 these relatively poor prospects, at least three colleges in our survey reported these courses as having the most applicants. 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. This suggests that there are far more students taking these subjects than there are career opportunities. And, 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 that's the case, this isn't acceptable.

## **Developing personal, social and employability skills**

The second common strength is success in developing personal, social and employability skills. For many level 2 students, not reaching a good pass in any GCSEs can generate a sense of failure and dent their self-belief and confidence. A relatively high proportion of these students are likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers' priorities were to get students to experience success, as well as address habits and attitudes to secure a positive next step. Students appreciated this level of support. They saw it as one of the features of colleges that led them to prefer it to school.

## **Evaluation and the curriculum**

And third and finally, they evaluate the benefits of their study programmes by properly tracking destinations and feeding that back into curriculum design.

It can't all be about qualifications. For example, we saw one college that identifies "work skills and behaviours for employment" as the most important measure of quality. And another college, with unusually high proportions of students going onto apprenticeships, achieving this by setting progression to apprenticeships as a strategic goal. They were skilfully using data on destinations to track whether their curriculum had been successful in steering more students towards apprenticeships.

Focusing on the curriculum in this way is helping students across the country succeed and exemplifies why the curriculum will be at the centre of our new

framework.

## **The new framework**

This level 2 study programme research hasn't been undertaken in isolation. It is part of our wider research into the curriculum across all education phases. It has helped shape our thinking about our new framework, and I'd like to say a bit more about our planned changes.

You probably already know that we will be proposing a new judgement of quality of education.

In fact, there are 3 main proposed changes. The first change is losing outcomes as a stand-alone judgement. The second change is broadening the existing quality of teaching, learning and assessment judgement into a quality of education judgement. This one will include curriculum alongside teaching, learning and assessment, and will also reflect outcomes. There will be no separate outcomes judgement. Then thirdly, we propose splitting the current judgement of personal development, behaviour and welfare into 2 separate judgements: one for behaviour and attitudes, and the other for personal development.

Under quality of education, we intend to look at 3 distinct aspects. First the intent – in an FE context, what is it that colleges want for their students? Then the implementation – how are teaching, training and assessment fulfilling the intent? Finally, the impact, which is both the results and wider outcomes that students achieve, including the destinations they go on to.

Of course, qualification achievement rates are important and will continue to be a source of evidence that is considered on inspection. But, in the new framework, inspectors will place more weight on the appropriateness of the curriculum content and how effectively providers are developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours that learners need to progress and achieve. After all, it is pointless having 100% achievement rates on qualifications that add little real value to young people's progression or employment prospects.

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 really can 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 that 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.

This new judgement will help us to recognise colleges who concentrate on what matters most. Inspection will reward providers where leaders, managers, teachers and trainers do the best they can for their students. Inspectors will especially focus on how effectively the provision prepares learners for progression – be that to higher education, further training, to employment or to greater independence. Inspectors will want to see that the decisions that are being made are in the best interests of learners, rather than in the interests of performance tables or for financial gain.

Beyond the quality of education judgement, by separating ‘personal development, behaviour and welfare’ into 2 judgements – it’s taken a long time to get to the end of that phrase – we are recognising the very different elements at stake here. We believe that the tough business of behaviour and the attitudes students bring to learning, and a provider’s approach to things like attendance are best considered separately from the question of wider personal development, such as the opportunities they have to learn how to behave in the work place, and about being active, healthy and engaged citizens. And finally, leadership and management is also expected to remain a key judgement.

It is really important to stress that the new framework is not a schools framework that colleges somehow have to fit within, like an awkward jigsaw puzzle piece. Further education will retain a separate inspection handbook – which we will consult on alongside the framework. The evaluation criteria for judgements will be tailored to further education and skills providers just as they are for schools and early years.

I do recognise that, in the public discussion of Ofsted priorities and challenges, the schools agenda can often dominate. This is a reality of the wider media and public interest in the school end of things. FE Week and TES do a fine job but the national media is hard work. That should never be taken as an indication of a lack of interest or concern at our end about the whole breadth of what we do.

We are taking the opportunity of the changes to the framework to consider other aspects of how we report on colleges.

We want to make it easier for people, particularly employers, parents and students, to find the information they need from our [inspection reports](#). Therefore, we are planning to simplify the classification of provision types that we inspect. We will consult on reducing this from the current 6 categories down to 3. The working titles are:

- Education programmes for young people
- Apprenticeships
- Adult learning programmes

Within these we will make sure that inspectors continue to report on traineeships and on full time 14 to 16 provision. We are particularly concerned that provision for learners with high needs and with special

educational needs and disabilities will be well and truly represented within these 3 provision types.

## **Well-managed change**

Now, I do realise that a lot of change is being floated here. For a sector that has so much going on, in the shape of area reviews, college mergers, growing academisation, the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and with T-levels coming down the line, dealing with a new framework may feel like another moving of the goal posts. But, as I said before, this will be evolution not revolution. To a large extent, it is rebalancing what we are doing already to get to better inspection conversations. We want to have the best possible professional dialogue that contributes as much as it can to your future development.

And I also appreciate that any change of emphasis from Ofsted will get a lot of attention and generate a degree of apprehension. We have an absolute obligation, which we take very seriously, to make sure that the changes we make are fair, valid and, as far as possible, without side-effects. We also have to make sure that we put plenty of time and resource into developing changes.

We have already carried out a thorough, research-based, curriculum review, publishing 2 reports with a third instalment to come. We have researched both primary and secondary curriculum as well as today's report on Level 2 study programmes in FE.

We've held workshops to develop the curriculum thinking further, involving many of our regional and national FE stakeholder groups; indeed, I suspect some of you may have already contributed. And, of course, all this builds on the wealth of knowledge from our inspection programme and the years of inspection evidence and inspector experience. In developing the changes, Ofsted colleagues have been at numerous events to discuss and share our plans, including many specifically with the FE sector and with AoC nationally and regionally, including workshops at this conference. In fact, I am confident that this will be the most researched and evidence-based framework in our history.

We are piloting options for the new framework starting this term, and through the course of the year, so that anything that doesn't work can be changed well in advance. Initially, this will involve 'soft pilots' with colleges and FE providers who have volunteered for the experience, helping our inspectors test the new methodology in a consequence-free way. Across all our education remits, we plan to conduct over 200 pilot inspections, of which 40 or 50 are with FE providers.

Alongside this, we've revamped inspector training, putting in place a long lead-in programme to get our inspectors up to speed on what they need to know and look at in this new model. We'll also be running similar training sessions for colleges, so you can be clear about our expectations. Our first workshop is in London this coming Friday and we have another workshop in Manchester the week after. Apologies, but they are full up now, we hope to

set up more.

Finally, from early in the New Year we'll be consulting on the inspection framework and will be sharing individual draft inspection handbooks as well, the first time we've done so at such an early stage. That means we'll be able to capture your views earlier, and where there are problems we'll be able to make changes. That is what we did when we consulted on the monitoring of RI providers last year. When we consult, we listen.

I have talked about a number of themes today, putting our inspection plans in their FE context, explaining our latest research on level 2 study programmes. I hope I have made clear that our concerns about substance in education are as relevant to the FE world as any other part of the education sector. I recognise the scale of change you are already facing and thank you for listening to me today.