

Securing a better future for all at 16 and beyond – annual lecture for further education and skills 2014

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Good morning to everyone and welcome

I'd like to start this lecture by talking to you about Tom, a family friend. He's looked after his mother since she became ill when he was 12. He's certainly never been a bad lad and he's always managed to avoid the temptation of getting involved in drugs or other criminal activities. He left school at 16 with only two GCSEs, both at grade D – in art and geography - but he had no clear direction about his future. He started an NVQ course in catering at the local college, along with a couple of mates, although he'd always fancied landscape gardening. He dropped out after a few months as he felt working in a kitchen really wasn't for him. Since then, he's drifted, in and out of labouring work, mostly for a self-employed neighbour who works in garden maintenance. He's reliable, works hard and just lives from day to day.

Today, approximately 1,184,000¹ young people aged between 16 and 24, like Tom, do not have a full-time job and are not attending full-time education or training courses. That is more than the total population of Birmingham and quite simply over a million too many. And 955,000 of them belong to the category known as NEET: not in employment, education or training.²

Our third annual lecture for further education and skills is therefore all about the Toms of this world and preventing future young men and women like him from slipping through the net. I really hope that we can all end this event today prepared to take action that will make a difference. We must work together to reduce

¹ Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion, labour market analysis; www.cesi.org.uk/statistics.

² Office for National Statistics - Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), August 2014;

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/young-people-not-in-education--employment-or-training--neets-/august-2014/index.html.



dramatically this very high number of young people who may never reach their potential.

Young people like Tom often encounter multiple barriers to engagement with education or employment. They might have had a background of economic hardship, parental care may have been wanting or they may have a history of being in care. Perhaps they have a learning difficulty, disability or mental health problems, or they may have found that they were unable to keep up at school. Bit by bit, they lost interest and motivation and simply disengaged. They may also be academically able young people from stable family backgrounds. Perhaps they have dropped out of education mid-way through their course or training because they lacked direction, fell behind in their work and they failed to get back on track. These are not other people's children.

The raising of the participation age in education, training and employment to 17 last year – and to 18 next year – seems to be having a positive impact on reducing the number of 16- to 17-year-olds who are NEET. However, part of the problem seems to have shifted and the focus is now on the high number of young people aged 18 to 24 who are NEET. Unemployment currently affects around 605,000 18– 24-year-olds³. Is this because education and training for young people aged 16, 17 and 18 are not preparing them well enough for employment and further or higher education at 18 and beyond?

The 16 to 19 study programmes introduced on 1 August last year seem to hold some of the answers. They were developed to provide a 'step change' in provision for all young people. All learners aged 16 to 19 should now be on individualised programmes that support their progression to their next planned step, be it further/higher education, training or employment.

I am using this annual lecture to launch our survey report *Transforming education and training: the early implementation of the 16 to 19 study programmes*.⁴ We used inspection findings and specific visits to explore how well providers were adapting their provision in line with the new requirements.

Much of my lecture is based on findings from a survey on youth participation. The survey explored how well local authorities, schools, FE and skills providers and the voluntary and community sector ensure effective participation of all 16–19-year-olds, in education, employment or training – especially those who are disadvantaged. The supplementary resource, published today, alongside this lecture, illustrates some of these findings.⁵

³ Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Statistics, August 2014; www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/august-2014/index.html.

⁴ Ofsted, 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140129.

⁵ Ofsted, 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140155.

Both surveys identified a few providers with good practice, but much more needs to be done to ensure a secure future for all of those at 16 and beyond.

I have therefore selected three themes for this lecture which will lead to three sets of recommendations.

- The first theme is about accountability. What do we need to do to ensure that we have the right processes for tracking and supporting young people who are NEET or those at risk of dropping out of education and training?
- I'd then like to explore the need to identify the problems at a local level and what we need to do to find local solutions. Where is the local accountability to make sure there is sufficient suitable provision locally for all young people?
- I'll then discuss education and training for 16- to 19-year-olds and report on our survey on the new study programmes. I'll also look at why getting this right is key to the NEET agenda.

We need to know the world we are in better

Understanding fully the extent of youth unemployment is made difficult by the lack of definitive data on the number of young people who are in fact NEET. Quite simply, there are far too many people that are unaccounted for. The category used for these people is 'current activity not known'. They are often called the 'unknowns'. If you don't know who these young people are, how can you support them?

As Regional Director for the West Midlands, I keep a close eye on these figures. You may be interested in knowing, for example, that the proportion of 'unknown' young people in Worcestershire is around 40% and in Birmingham almost 25%.

Why don't we really know the scale of the problem?

Local authorities have the overall responsibility for recording participation in employment, education and training. However, there are no lines of accountability in making the tracking processes more efficient and effective. The accuracy of the data is also dependent on the quality of the data collection by each local authority and the reliability of data provided by schools and providers. Inspectors encountered hugely contradictory data at a local level. The anomalies were quite shocking. For example, in one area, schools collectively reported a NEET figure of 0%, while the local authority for that area reported a figure of 10%. How can we plan for improvements when we simply can't rely on the figures we have?

Moreover, not enough schools, academies and providers are meeting their requirement to inform the local authority in a timely manner when a young person leaves their institution before completing a learning programme, because – like for Tom – it wasn't right for them. Local authorities have the duty to collect this information, but they do not have the power to enforce the providers to submit it to them. This of course exacerbates the problem. Already vulnerable young people are quite simply put at further risk when authorities cannot act quickly to support them.

Statutory responsibilities to ensure that all providers comply with local protocols are insufficient, as are local authorities' legal powers of intervention.

On the other hand, our survey and inspection findings have shown us that when young people have dropped out of education and training and are known to local authorities, they often receive very good personal support. This can give them the confidence and sense of direction they need to help them turn their lives around. The local authorities just need to know who these young people are so that they can act quickly in assessing their support needs.

To summarise, it is clear that we simply don't know the scale of the problem – and the implications of this are serious. At all levels, planning and delivering education and training to reduce the number of young people in this group is dependent on the quality, accuracy, reliability and transferability of local and national data.

This brings me to my **first set of recommendations**:

- Firstly, the government must ensure that there is a reliable system for tracking a young person's educational progress and participation throughout their learning career. Plans to use the unique learner number linked to an individual's national insurance number may be one way forward. However, any system would need to be accurate, secure and fool-proof. Whatever the systems, local authorities must be held to account if their data collection is ineffective.
- Secondly, local authorities must have legal powers of intervention to ensure that all schools, academies and FE and skills providers comply with local protocols to provide full and prompt information on learners who drop out of their courses into unknown destinations.
- Thirdly, the government must ensure that schools, providers, local authorities and government agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, are mandated to share (albeit sensitively) information about learners' backgrounds. This information is key to providing individualised support to young people when they transfer to different education and training providers.

And now I'd like to turn to the need to ensure that we have the right local provision for young people, which is my **second theme** for today.

Where is the local accountability to make sure there is sufficient suitable education and training for all 16- to 19-year-olds?

Over the past 30 years or so, I have seen so many good ideas and promising short-term projects. Do you remember YTS, MSC, New Deal for Young People, Skills for Life and E2E?⁶ I won't test your memory of what the acronyms mean. The Youth

⁶ YTS – Youth Training Scheme, MSC (Manpower Services Commission), New Deal for young people, Skills for Life and E2E (Entry to Employment).

Contact is the latest scheme. I have no doubt that the pockets of good practice made a significant difference to the lives of some of the young people involved at the time. But none of these initiatives have had any long-term impact on ensuring that there is always enough suitable provision for young people in every local area. It seems that every time a new initiative is launched, we tend to start from scratch and end up reinventing the wheel.

So, what about local strategic planning or accountability?

Strategic planning for post-16 provision today seems to be increasingly disparate and fragmented, with unclear accountabilities. So how can anyone be sure that there are sufficient suitable courses for 16- to 19-year-olds in a specific geographical area?

Over the past year or so, we have carried out what we've called a '14 to 19 area review' in a few cities or local authority regions. A small group of inspectors explored the effectiveness of education and training in these areas. These reviews quite simply focused on how well the education and training for these young people:

- met the needs of local communities, including employers
- increased participation and
- raised achievement.

Inspectors also explored how well the provision supported learners' progression to further learning and employment.

These reviews highlighted some key messages for me.

- It was difficult to identify the combined curriculum offer for these young people in each of the areas visited.
- Apart from a few excellent examples, there was little systematic collaboration among providers to reduce duplication and unnecessary competition in the provision offered locally. This can often confuse young people when making choices about their future. So is autonomy at school or provider level working locally?
- There were no clear structures or lines of accountability to ensure that the range of provision locally available served all the young people well. Similarly, there were no mechanisms in place to check that this prepared young people for career pathways that were in line with the needs of employers and of the economy.

Why are there not enough local solutions to local problems?

One of the main issues is that nationally managed strategies have too often been poorly aligned with local delivery. Youth unemployment and the proportion of young people who are NEET vary considerably according to different geographical areas. So shouldn't there be local solutions?

Surely we need to know if there is an appropriate balance of traineeships, apprenticeships, vocational programmes and academic studies in a given area. The provision must primarily equip learners with the skills employers are looking for. I know there are some very good examples, such as in the North East, where councils are working with the local enterprise partnerships and other employer networks, to promote young people into work. However, it seems that few areas have achieved this.

There must be national strategies to support local initiatives to develop long-term solutions. However, strategic planning can only be really effective when all key partners of 14 to 19 provision are committed to finding shared solutions that meet the needs of all young people. Shouldn't all significant players, such as elected members, FE colleges and academy chains, work together better for the good of all young people?

With no clear local accountability for the range of provision, there is also no clear overview of all that is on offer for these young people. So how can young people, their parents or carers and careers guidance professionals find out what's on offer? Young people must have access to good quality information, advice and guidance so that they know the full range of training, education and employment pathways open to them locally. We must ensure that they are in a good position to make informed choices as they progress to the study programmes.

This brings me to my **second set of recommendations**:

- Firstly, young people must be at the heart of all planning and delivery of 14 to 19 provision. The government must ensure that there are clear lines of local accountability for the range and content of education and training, be it through the local enterprise partnerships, the local authority or other bodies.
- Secondly, employers must take responsibility for leading vocational education and training for young people and make sure it supports the economy of the area. In turn, providers must work with employers to ensure that what they provide leads to their learners securing employment.
- Finally, all schools must collaborate with other providers and careers guidance professionals to ensure that every young person has access to impartial careers guidance to help make informed choices about their futures.

I know move to my **third and final theme**: ensuring that we have the right provision for all 16- to 19-year-olds.

The study programmes were primarily set up in response to Professor Alison Wolf's report on vocational training⁷. Her main concern was the high numbers of learners achieving low level vocational qualifications that did little to support their future careers. Similarly, in our Annual Report for FE and Skills 2012, we criticised a national system that incentivised the achievement of qualifications, with little regard for the value or usefulness of those qualifications. What is the point of helping learners gain a qualification that doesn't enhance their CV or an application form? Both reports were set in the context of rising youth unemployment, especially for those aged 18 to 24 and unacceptably high numbers of young people who were NEET.

So, are the study programmes meeting requirements?

Government introduced the 16 to 19 study programmes in August 2013.

- Funding is per learner instead of per qualification.
- Performance measures will soon be based on the proportion of learners who complete their core aim and their destinations at the end of their programme.
- English and mathematics are requirements for those without GCSE at grade C in these subjects.
- External work experience is expected for all those on vocational programmes and also for learners who are not ready to start a substantial vocational programme at level 2.
- Traineeships, a short programme to prepare learners to progress to apprenticeships or employment with training, were introduced at the same time.

It is hard not to see the benefits of the study programmes. Remember Tom? If they had been around a couple of years or so ago, Tom would have had careers guidance to help him make informed choices about what to do at 16. Hopefully, he would have enrolled on a course that would have led to a career in landscape gardening or he may even have attended a course that would have given him a step up to a traineeship before joining an apprenticeship. I'd like to think that working in horticulture would have motivated him to improve his skills in English and mathematics, especially when he joined the local garden centre for at least one day a week on work experience.

⁷ *Review of vocational education: the Wolf Report*, DfE, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report.

What does our report say?

I fully acknowledge that the fieldwork for our survey, undertaken in the first six months of the programme, only captured providers' initial stages of implementing this new provision. However, even though providers had a full year to prepare for this, inspectors found little evidence of the transformational 'step change' intended in the schools, academies and FE and skills providers sampled.

Too many of these providers had not changed what they offered sufficiently. They were not yet offering programmes that met the key requirements of the study programmes I have just outlined. In particular, we were concerned that too many learners were not progressing to a higher level of study to meet their educational potential or career aspirations, particularly those on level 1 and 2 programmes. Most of the providers didn't use work experience effectively.

Inspectors also found that the introduction of these programmes had disappointingly led to little change to level 3 programmes. Many school and academy leaders seemed to be unaware of the requirements and the implications for sixth form provision. Implementation in these contexts was too slow. Too many courses leading to vocational qualifications at level 3 involved too little external work and many learners on A level courses had too few opportunities to enhance their employability skills.

Who in this room would disagree that careers guidance is the key component to successful choices for learners?

Our survey showed that far too many schools had not provided learners with adequate careers information, advice and guidance. This meant that they were unable to make informed choices about their options for their study programme.⁸ Indeed, too many learners interviewed for this survey were unclear about the progression routes available beyond the study programme they were following. And too many of them felt they had made 'false starts' and had to leave a programme mid-way, change provider or their core aim or both.

Where did we see successful practice?

I hasten to add that some of the schools and providers proved it was possible to transform their provision successfully. We plan to use our evidence and perhaps further visits to develop good practice case studies of their work. In particular, the study programmes at these providers were generally characterised by a thorough review of the curriculum. The focus of any changes was to ensure that learners were on programmes that helped them develop the skills and knowledge that would prepare them for identified progression routes. The most effective programmes

⁸ *Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012*, Ofsted, 2013; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130114.

integrated English and mathematics well and offered external work experience for all learners at some stage of their programme.

As you will see, the report recommends that the DfE works with other government departments and agencies to ensure that all providers implement the study programme quickly and take full account of this report's findings.⁹ It also urges all FE and skills providers, as well as schools and academies with post-16 provision, to identify a senior leader who is accountable for the full implementation of the requirements of the study programmes.

As Ofsted's National Director for FE and skills, I fully endorse all the recommendations in this report as my **final set of recommendations** in this annual lecture. I firmly believe that if we are to get this right, we could be well on our way to ensuring that more young people get the direction, support, training and education they need to support their future careers. This should mean that far fewer of them are NEET or are simply 'unknown'. In turn, this should also mean that young people aged 18 to 24 are well prepared to be engaged in meaningful employment, training or higher education that will help them progress to sustained employment.

As for Ofsted, I can assure you that inspections will take greater account of the actions taken by schools, FE and skills providers and local authorities to decrease the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET. Inspections will focus on how well providers ensure that all young people have a fair chance to progress.

I again call on everyone in this room today to make changes to dramatically reduce this very high number of young people who may never reach their full potential.

Tom has a sister, Amy. She's 14. Surely we all owe her a better future than the one Tom has had so far.

Thank you.

⁹ Such as the Department for BIS, Education Funding Agency, the National Apprenticeship Service, The Education and Training Foundation.