

Speech

Nicky Morgan speech to the Association of Colleges

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#)
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Education Secretary Nicky Morgan addresses college principals, vice principals and chairs of governors from the further education sector.



Thank you, Carole [Stott, Association of Colleges], for that kind introduction.

It's a pleasure to be speaking here to college principals, senior leaders and governors at this Association of Colleges event today.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to extend my personal thanks to Martin Doel as he prepares to leave his role at the Association of Colleges.

Martin, you have done a fantastic job of leading the sector through a period of substantial change, and I am grateful for the determined way in which you have represented your members' interests while engaging constructively with the government.

Although you will be missed, I look forward with interest to seeing your research as the Professor for Further Education and Skills at UCL's Institute of Education.

Our nation's discussion on education is very often focused on schools.

This discussion can sometimes sidestep the important role that further education and sixth-form colleges play in the education of our young people.

The importance of your role is very clear.

But before I discuss the importance of your role I would like to set out my position on something everyone is talking about right now and that's Britain's membership of the European Union.

Like the Prime Minister I have made my position very clear: that Britain is stronger, safer and better off in a reformed European Union. I don't believe that Britain would fail outside the EU but I don't want Britain to be cut off from its partners in Europe either.

I don't want children growing up in Britain today to have their ambitions limited. They should have the freedom to study elsewhere in the EU, and be enriched by the thousands of students who choose to come here to study too.

Our world is changing around us very quickly and we cannot allow ourselves to be cut off from our neighbours and partners in Europe if we want to realise Britain's true potential.

Realising potential is what further education and sixth-form colleges are all about. And that's something I know as a constituency MP. Loughborough College plays a significant role in my local area. It has been inspiring to be a member of the steering group of their Bridge to Work programme which won an Association of Colleges Beacon award in 2013.

Nearly half of all our young people choose to attend an FE college or sixth-form college after finishing their GCSEs, and alongside the rest of the school system, there have been some tremendous successes since 2010. Earlier this month, I was pleased to see the Association of Colleges host an event in Parliament to celebrate student success.

And it was no surprise that there were many inspiring stories.

Stories that showed the power of colleges in transforming the lives of young people.

Students such as Hannah Cooper, from Amersham College, whose experience at college improved her confidence so much that she eventually led an award-winning young enterprise team.

Or students such as young entrepreneur Callum Coles, from Cirencester College, who has developed an approach aimed at reducing drink-driving. In this case, the sector has provided the foundation for him to transform the lives of others.

These are just 2 examples of the many successes that take place across the whole of the country. They serve to demonstrate the central role the sector must play in preparing our young people for adult life.

Spending Review settlement

That role in preparing our young people for adult life underpinned the strong [Spending Review](#) settlement secured for the sector. A settlement that saw:

- the base rate protected for 16- to 19-year-olds
- the core adult skills budget protected throughout this Parliament
- sixth-form colleges given the option to become academies

As a government we recognise that this settlement was important given the key role of colleges in driving economic prosperity, improving skills and raising productivity.

Technical and professional routes

However, we believe that the purpose of education is much wider than just making our young people economically productive.

What does that mean for the sector?

It means that a core academic grounding in maths and English remains crucial to the education of our young people irrespective of their post-16 choices.

The huge increase in the numbers of young people who didn't secure English and maths A* to C at GCSE at 16 who are continuing study is a triumph for the sector, and thousands more young people are now securing those good passes which will unlock movement to a range of skilled occupations.

This increase is down to the hard work and dedication of teachers who work in this sector who work tirelessly to ensure these students don't have their options narrowed later in life due to a lack of core skills. I want to say thank you to the whole sector for all their work in delivering this.

And we want to encourage colleges to continue to enrich the experience of their students to give them the cultural capital to succeed.

But, we always need to be honest with our young people.

Focusing on developing the skills, knowledge and character traits that make them employable are important. It serves as a basis for securing a lifetime of sustained employment - which will support their own ambitions and their future family.

That is why technical and professional education is so important.

Over the last few years we have made great steps forward following the trailblazing [Wolf Review](#). However, whilst standards are improving, the system remains confusing and unnecessarily

complex.

There are over 13,000 qualifications available to 16- to 18-year-olds.

So I ask you:

How can a student know what the best route is for their chosen career?

How can a student know which qualifications will be most relevant?

How can a student know what will be valued by potential employers?

Simply put: it is very difficult.

That is why we will be simplifying the over-complex skills system by creating up to 20 new technical and professional routes to skilled employment. Helping students to make the transition from compulsory schooling to employment with the right skills for their chosen industry.

And we will do this in direct partnership with employers and want colleges to be involved. Ensuring the new system provides the skills valued by employers and the 21st-century economy.

The routes will lead young people from compulsory schooling into employment and the highest level of technical competence. Routes will include apprenticeships, and for many an apprenticeship will be the best option, providing an opportunity to train directly in the workplace.

I am grateful that Lord Sainsbury has agreed to lead an expert panel to make recommendations to government in this area. We are fortunate to have Bev Robinson from Blackpool and The Fylde College on the panel, and I know the panel and officials have been speaking with AoC members directly about their views.

Engagement with employers and character

This is the right approach for students, colleges and employers.

But it won't work without engagement by colleges with local employers and local enterprise partnerships. And many colleges do work with employers - for example Furness College in Cumbria and BAE Systems or Bridgewater College in Somerset with Mulberry. Household name employers want to work with colleges to access our best students and equip them for work in their industry.

Students want to know that their college is working with potential employers in their region and that their curriculum is aligned with local enterprise priorities.

Employer engagement will help students secure employment and they will be able to take their skills and use them in their local area to support productivity and growth.

We know we lag behind our international peers - that's why we launched the productivity plan in July, right after we returned to government.

In a recent report on skills and employment in the UK economy, it was highlighted that this government has an excellent record on job creation, but there is room for further productivity improvements by developing the skills of our young people.

One of the most interesting aspects of this report for me personally was that 2 types of skills need to be improved.

The first are the technical and professional skills that will be addressed through our strategy on new technical and professional routes and requirements for English and maths.

But the second are the softer skills - those that are often associated with the development of good character. The ability for students to get up and get on in the working world.

I want our colleges to be places that develop the character of their students to prepare them for life in modern Britain.

Character traits like:

- self-improvement
- determination
- self-discipline

And these are just 3 of the character traits associated with success.

That is why we are committed to over 1 billion pounds of funding over this Parliament for the National Citizen Service to serve over 300,000 15- to 17-year-old students by 2020 after finishing their GCSE exams.

Giving young people the chance to be informed and active citizens - understanding their responsibilities as well as their rights.

We must work in partnership to deliver on the development of knowledge and skills but also on character education.

And let me be clear: this is not a 'nice to have', it is a must have for students to succeed and realise their full potential irrespective of their background.

I therefore have 2 challenges I want to put to you all as college chairs and principals:

- work even more with employers to deliver the right skills for your students and local community
- and develop the character of your students even more so they can succeed in the working world and be fully prepared for adult life

Apprenticeships

And, we can't talk about technical and professional education routes without the discussing the critical importance of work placements and apprenticeships.

Learning in the workplace is crucial for our young people - it

provides them with hands-on experience and helps them develop the character traits needed for success in adult life.

That is why this government is committed to a 3-million-apprenticeship-starts target by 2020. I want to see our 16- to 18-year-olds choosing apprenticeships and to help meet that ambitious target because apprenticeships are an option on par with higher qualifications.

And I want to stress this now - we must make sure students are aware of all the options open to them. For some, it will be the academic route that leads to university. But for others, the technical and professional education provided through an apprenticeship or via classroom based provision with a work placement.

The apprenticeships of today cover industries from across the whole economy. From engineering and construction through to digital marketing and fashion.

There is no room for the outdated snobbery that apprenticeship and technical routes are somehow lesser.

They are not.

Colleges have always recognised that we need to cater for these students and with this commitment combined with our skills reform package we will continue to make great strides forward.

And our skills reform package will be anchored in quality as supported by the Institute for Apprenticeships who will ensure the standards match the requirements of employers in every sector.

However, when I look at the data right now - I see that only 37% of apprenticeship funding is going toward colleges, compared to 60% to independent training providers.

Of course, competition is healthy for this sector. But, it is time for it to step up to the plate and forge lasting links with employers to be the 'go to' provider of apprentices in their local community.

The apprenticeship levy shows this government's commitment - and it opens opportunities for you to work with each other and engage with employers to offer the right apprenticeships for your local areas.

I want to see this sector secure a larger share of that apprenticeship revenue stream and remain confident you can do it.

Area reviews

Part of that confidence is built on the constructive engagement we have had across the sector on area reviews. You all understand that we must have a further education and sixth-form college sector that is of high quality and are financially resilient and sustainable.

And getting there will mean some difficult decisions.

For some it will involve mergers to take account of scale economies or the ability to rationalise your estate. For others, it will be ensuring the curriculum is mapped with student and employer demands.

We want to support you as you go through this process but we rightly recognise that this must be locally-led.

High-quality leadership teams in financially resilient institutions will be able to deliver on our shared commitment to improve the skills and life chances of our young people. And I am pleased to see that the first wave of reviews are starting to produce those kinds of outcomes that will help meet these aims.

Conclusion

Further education and sixth-form colleges are central institutions to the education of young people: preparing them for adult life and developing the skills for a more prosperous nation.

This government's commitment to the sector through the Spending Review settlement, reform to technical and professional routes and target of 3 million apprentices; alongside your staff's dedication and shared commitment to transforming the lives of young people is a partnership that will truly prepare our young people for adult life.

Thank you.

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The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP

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