

GOV.UK uses cookies to make the site simpler. [Find out more about cookies](#)



Search



[Departments](#) [Worldwide](#) [How government works](#)
[Get involved](#)
[Policies](#) [Publications](#) [Consultations](#) [Statistics](#)
[Announcements](#)

Speech

Sir Michael Wilshaw's speech at the Baker Dearing UTC conference

From: [Ofsted](#) and [Sir Michael Wilshaw](#)
Delivered on: 21 July 2016 (Transcript of the speech, exactly as it was delivered)
First published: 21 July 2016

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, spoke at the Baker Dearing UTC annual conference in central London



Good morning everyone and thank you for inviting me to speak at your conference.

What amazing times we live in.

It is hard to believe that the EU Referendum vote took place just 4 short weeks ago today. There won't be many here in this room who can remember living through such tumultuous times before. I, for one, certainly cannot.

The momentous decision our country reached on 23 June has upturned so many old certainties and transformed the terms of

our national debates almost overnight. And as the shock waves continue to reverberate, few would doubt that one of the critical questions we face will be how we equip our young people with the skills the UK needs to survive and prosper in a post-Brexit world.

Of course, we don't yet know exactly how Theresa May will approach the forthcoming negotiations over access to the single market and the free movement of labour.

But as much as anything can be certain, businesses here will surely have to learn to rely less on imported workers from Eastern Europe and elsewhere to plug existing skills gaps and much more on the home-grown population.

A previous Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in another context, famously described how the kaleidoscope had been shaken and how the pieces, currently in flux, would soon settle. You could just as easily apply this analogy to describe the opportunity that now suddenly presents itself to re-order our technical and vocational education system in a truly radical way.

As I enter my final few months as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, I will be urging the new government to seize this opportunity with both hands.

The main reason I am here today is because I believe university technical colleges have a pivotal role to play in raising both the status and the quality of technical education in this country.

Those who have been paying attention will know this has been one of the principal themes of my tenure and an issue I have returned to time and again.

For far too long, we have let down millions of young people and allowed their talents to go to waste because we have not given the non-academic pathway into employment the priority it deserves.

Let me be clear. I believe the government's ambition to raise the academic achievement of our young people and to put many

more of them through the English Baccalaureate in future years is a laudable one. But having taught in disadvantaged communities for most of my professional life, I also recognise that there will always be some children who will respond better to a technical curriculum than a purely academic one. Even when I was head at Mossbourne Academy in Hackney, which had a great academic reputation, 20% of students always failed to reach our targets.

The consequences of an inflexible curriculum are plain to see. We see it in the demotivated youngsters who leave school with few relevant qualifications and an antipathy to learning. We see it in the ranks of the unskilled unemployed.

As I have argued in the past, the problem in many ways is as much attitudinal as it is educational. Vocational training in this country does not have the esteem and status that it should have.

The education systems of a good number of our international competitors are more flexible than ours and are much more geared towards aligning the potential of the student with the needs of their economies. As a result, countries like Germany, Norway and Switzerland, which have excellent technical routes as well as academic ones, have far lower rates of youth unemployment than we do.

While our system has become increasingly adept at guiding young people into higher education, it continues to struggle, despite the recent focus on apprenticeships, to inform them about alternatives to university.

Report after report finds that careers guidance in both schools and colleges is uniformly weak, while the way we prepare young people for the world of work remains poor.

My candid assessment earlier this year of the state of 16 to 19 education in England drew furious response and landed me in all sorts of trouble with the further education (FE) sector.

My remarks arose from my exasperation with the status quo and the glacial pace of change. They reflected my concern that too

many general further education (GFE) colleges are still packing their curriculum with low-quality courses that fail to match the skills gaps in their local and national labour market. And they betrayed my frustration with the fact that so many young people who failed to reach the grade in maths and English at 16 still haven't got these key qualifications 2 years later.

Although there are some excellent GFE institutions, such as Truro and Penwith, Runshaw and Blackpool and the Fylde College, nearly half of the 71 GFE colleges inspected by Ofsted this academic year have been judged to be less than good - including 10 colleges that were inadequate.

This is an alarming rate of underperformance and failure, especially when we remember that the majority of 16 to 19-year-olds are educated in the FE sector.

Right across the country, we find colleges that simply aren't delivering what's needed. In too many cases, inspectors are coming across weak provision, characterised by poor outcomes for learners and apprentices, high drop-out rates and sub-standard work experience placements that fail to develop students' industry-specific skills.

Earlier this year, I highlighted how in 2 of the West Midlands' largest colleges, less than 10% of the combined population of nearly 30,000 students were on apprenticeship courses. Far too few learners in these institutions were progressing into an apprenticeship or into skilled employment. This in a region where 9 in 10 manufacturing firms said they were experiencing significant recruitment difficulties. This picture of businesses suffering acute skills shortages is mirrored across all regions and in many different sectors, as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) reported only this week.

In the UK, there are 210,000 vacancies across the economy – an increase of 43% from just 3 years ago. These vacancies remain unfilled because candidates lack the necessary skills that employers are desperately looking for.

As John Cridland remarked a few months ago when stepping

down as head of the CBI, it is the 'Achilles heel' of economic growth. The problems of poor productivity and skills shortages, he suggested, originate in the classroom, not the workplace.

I am willing to bet there are few people in this room today who would gainsay this view?

Indeed, the growth of the university technical college (UTC) movement is a response to the long-standing failure to improve the poor quality of technical provision in schools and colleges – just as the academy movement was a response to the systemic failure of local authorities to raise standards.

This is hardly a new problem we are grappling with. More than 50 years have now passed since John Newsom warned in his seminal report 'Half our future', that this country was failing half its young people. Half a century on, what has changed?

At this juncture, it is right to acknowledge the ambitious steps the government has taken in very recent years to increase both the number and the quality of apprenticeships.

The proposed measures to transform post-16 technical education, set out earlier this month by the now departed Skills Minister in response to the Sainsbury recommendations, are also very welcome.

However, it is vital that we do everything in our power to prevent this proving yet another false dawn. We are all too aware that the gap between the good intentions of successive administrations and the reality of what is happening on the ground remains a yawning one.

In a speech at the start of this year, I said it was a moral imperative as well as an economic one that we embark on a radical change of direction. If that were true 6 months ago, it is even more so now given the events of the past few weeks.

It is fair to say I have ruffled a few ministerial feathers in the last couple of years by saying there should be more opportunity at 14 for pupils to follow a strong technical pathway without abandoning the essential core curriculum.

But it's a view I hold on to firmly. And that is where you come in.

I have argued that every medium or large multi-academy trust or federation should contain a UTC. Such an arrangement would enable young people to transfer across institutions in the cluster to follow a route into high-level academic or vocational study. Pupils on either path would be free to access the specialist teaching available in the other and would not be stuck in one route.

Ofsted would be there to ensure that the UTC did not become a dumping ground for the difficult or disaffected and that it delivered high quality pre-apprenticeship programmes to the age of 19.

So if that's the vision, what do we need to do to make it a reality?

How do we encourage more strongly performing trusts to buy into this approach and to get more actively involved?

How do we tackle the problem of low enrolment numbers across the UTC network and achieve a better gender balance?

How do we persuade many more teenagers – boys and girls – that leaving behind their friends and support networks at the age of 14 to move into an unfamiliar environment is a step worth taking for their future?

How do we get parents onside?

The answer to these questions, of course, lies in demonstrating that UTCs are capable of delivering a consistently high standard of education. As we all know, the experience to date is that this consistency has been missing. The UTC performance track-record is patchy.

To date, Ofsted has inspected 15 out of the 39 UTCs currently operating. One of these – Reading – was judged outstanding, 7 were good, 5 required improvement and 2 were inadequate.

You need to be doing significantly better than this, particularly

because, unlike GFE colleges, you largely focus on one vocational or technical specialist area. If the UTC movement is to survive and prosper, then radical improvement is necessary. If this doesn't happen, politicians will come to the conclusion that the model is flawed and not worthy of further political or financial support.

Where providers have been judged less than good to date, inspectors have found a number of common weaknesses:

- an often indistinctive and poorly thought-through curriculum
- low expectations of what pupils can achieve
- weak and inconsistent teaching, including of literacy and numeracy skills
- under-developed careers guidance and a failure to make best use of links with local employers.

I know there are people in this audience who think Ofsted has been too hard on some of the institutions we have inspected, especially during the first wave. There is a feeling that Her Majesty's Inspectors have simply failed to properly get to grips with the fact that UTCs are organised differently from other schools and have different objectives and priorities for their students. Some of you have even suggested UTCs should be inspected under their own, separate framework.

Let me say that I understand these concerns and have discussed them at length with colleagues in Ofsted. So today I want to give you the reassurance that inspectors do recognise the unique context in which UTCs are operating – and they will continue to do so.

We do not expect you to conform to a particular type or fit into an educational straitjacket that doesn't take account of your distinctive purpose and mission.

While we inspect UTCs under the same common inspection framework that we have used to inspect schools, FE colleges and early years settings since last September, this does not mean we take a one-size-fits-all approach to how we grade them. For every type of provider inspected under the common

framework, we pay attention to the most pertinent aspects of the framework and the inspection handbook when reaching judgements on the leadership and management, on the teaching, learning and assessment and on outcomes.

Our UTC inspections are always led by a schools HMI. From the start of next term, we are rolling out a bespoke UTC training package for these lead inspectors, with a particular focus on the leadership of the curriculum and careers guidance. Furthermore, our UTC inspection teams will continue to include a further education and skills inspector, whose background and expertise will match as closely as possible the particular specialism of the institution.

So yes, we do take account of the context in which you are operating and the reason you were set up in the first place. But that doesn't mean we will soft pedal or pull our punches where standards fall short. To do so would, in my view and I hope in yours too, be doing the UTC movement a grave disservice.

After all, we know that under our inspection framework, it is possible for a UTC to receive a report just as glowing as any other type of school because we have seen it happen already.

Indeed, just as we have found some common weaknesses in under-performing UTCs, those we have judged to be good or outstanding have tended to share many similar strengths and characteristics, including:

- business-like ethos and culture of high aspirations and expectations for both staff and students
- carefully designed and specialised curriculum, with a strong focus on equipping students with the technical knowledge to meet local skills shortages
- robust tracking and assessment systems
- impressive destination data showing students have achieved the relevant qualifications to enable them to progress to the next stage of their education or into a job
- excellent links forged with local and national employers that offer students real world experience through well-planned work placements

- exemplary careers guidance;
- well-equipped laboratories and workshops
- strong literacy and numeracy development that underpins good progress in the technical aspects of the curriculum;
- strong feedback from business partners on the progress of students.

It is really important that in all UTCs, leaders inject rigour in everything that they do. They should insist on pupils being punctual, smartly dressed and ready to learn. They should focus relentlessly on fostering a culture of respect and order in the classrooms and corridors.

They need to understand that employers are looking for young people who not only have the right technical skills and knowledge but have also been taught the required attitudes and behaviours needed to succeed in the work place.

Crucially too, they should understand that it is right that they are held to account for providing a strong core curriculum. They need to know that for every young person in their charge, a sound grasp of English and maths will be the bedrock for all future study, training and employment.

As the manager of the Birmingham Electrical Training company told me on a visit last year: "I'm not interested in apprentices who don't have good literacy and numeracy skills, because so much of what they have to do demands good communication and on the job calculations."

To use that time-worn cliché, this is not rocket science. Although following Tim Peake's recent exploits, I look forward to a new UTC specialising in this subject before too long.

These are the aspects against which all your institutions will be judged when Ofsted comes to inspect you – including the 18 planned UTCs due to open by the end of 2018. Get these right and the students will come. You will soon start to forge a good reputation in your area and help the wider movement into the bargain.

As a nation we are at a crossroads. As I said at the outset, our future success and prosperity depends on us turning out many more confident and properly educated young people, who are work ready and have the technical, literacy, numeracy and personal skills that our industries need.

Now is the time for UTCs to take up the challenge and to cement their place in our educational landscape.

For my part, I will continue to champion your cause, both in the time I have left in this post and after I step down in December.

I wish you all the very best. Thank you for listening.

Share this page



Facebook



Twitter

Published:

21 July 2016

From:

Ofsted

Sir Michael Wilshaw

[Is there anything wrong with this page?](#)

Services and information

[Benefits](#)

[Births, deaths, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

Departments and policy

[How government works](#)

[Departments](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Worldwide](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Policies](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Publications](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Help](#) [Cookies](#) [Contact](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

[Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#) Built by the [Government Digital Service](#)

OGL All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright