



APPG on Apprenticeships Careers Advice in Schools – Tuesday 25 February 2020

Chaired by Catherine McKinnell MP

Speakers:

- Matt Joyce, Regional Lead: North East Ambition, North East LEP;
- Mark Fox, North East Ambition Careers Hub Facilitator;
- Dr Anne Murdoch OBE, Senior Advisor, College Leadership Association of School and College Leaders;
- Aimee Higgins, Director of Employers & Partnerships, the Careers and Enterprise Company; and
- Sean Harford, National Director of Education, Ofsted.

Also in attendance: Ian Mearns MP, Jack Lopresti MP, Stephen Farry MP, Jane Stevenson MP, Jonathan Gullis MP, Mike Amesbury MP, Lord Aberdare, Baroness Garden

Catherine gave some opening remarks on the subject before introducing the panellists. She said MPs work on a cross party basis on the issue of careers advice and apprenticeships in order to find common ground and help young people. She added that there has been so much change in careers advice over the last ten years, having vastly improved since she was at school. Catherine then introduced the first speaker, Aimee Higgins.

Aimee began by explaining that the Careers Enterprise Company was established in 2015 to support businesses in connecting with local schools and colleges. The Company works closely with LEPs to coordinate clusters of schools (up to 22 schools in each cluster). Aimee said the network now has over 3000 apprenticeship advisers who work with careers leaders in schools to examine whether best practice and the Gatsby Benchmarks are being achieved. She talked about their 'compass' tool which allows schools and colleges to assess themselves across the benchmarks. The tool also creates a large data source, allowing for a comparison of apprenticeship provision across the country. The aim is to then use this comparison as a means to micro-target the activities to the young people that need it in different areas of the country. In 2017, DfE strategy called for career hubs to be set up across the country. Career hubs are now being tested across hubs and allows additional support.

Any schools which do not have the best scores in careers advice are connected to the apprenticeship coordinators, in conjunction with the National Apprenticeship Service and LEPs. Coordinators and apprenticeship advisers will connect the school to cornerstone employers and provide training on benefits of high quality, balanced careers guidance.

Sean Harford from Ofsted then explained a bit of the history of Ofsted's verdicts of careers advice in schools. He explained that five or six years ago Ofsted were incredibly critical of careers advice but that as Catherine says there has been a great improvement since then. Ofsted have tried to improve what was in the handbook regarding best practice in order to give schools and colleges better guidance. Ofsted believe best practice is for pupils in years 8-13 receive detailed high quality careers advice which is made up of unbiased information and based on opportunities to experience the world of work. Sean added that in addition to those factors, schools must also adhere to "the Baker Clause" and meet the Gatsby Benchmarks in order to get a good rating in careers advice provision.

Sean explained that careers advice often cuts across several areas of an Ofsted inspection, including that of personal development and so only particular inspections will look specifically at careers advice in addition to other areas of schooling. He added that this can mean it is difficult to

get a full and accurate data set from Ofsted inspections but they will always find elements of work which are particularly strong or weak. He highlighted the importance of not just putting the opportunities in front of young people but ensuring they are good quality opportunities too. He concluded his remarks by assuring the room that Ofsted are currently in the process of identifying which providers of apprenticeships are not high enough quality and inspecting them, in order to drive up standards.

Dr Anne Murdoch was next to speak and informed the meeting that the ASCL is a professional association with 19,300 members, the majority of which are school leaders, but it does also have leaders from most of the UK's Further Education colleges. She echoed previous calls that advice is improving, particularly in the last five years but she added that the biggest problem is that schools find apprenticeships and their application system incredibly confusing and complex. This often means that after receiving GCSE results which were not as expected, schools may suggest a last minute switch of focus to apprenticeships for the pupil. She said this was not good enough as young people need to be prepared for the application, the interview and the job itself through their school's support.

She said that schools without sixth form colleges (11-16 years old schools) are better at giving guidance and advice on apprenticeships because they do not see them as competition for their sixth forms. She highlighted the need for schools to build strong links with trusted employers as this would make it easier for parents to understand and support the idea. She added that other improvements could be made through ensuring there is a high enough supply of apprenticeships in the local area, as well as more funding into awareness raising into young people understanding apprenticeships. More training for school staff in particular on the Gatsby benchmarks. She also questioned whether apprenticeships need a coordinating system similar to UCAS to make it easier for students and schools.

Mark Fox from the North East LEP played a series of year 11 careers interviews, unscripted which covers everything he wanted to say. The recordings focused on several students wanting answers, asking who can help, finding it difficult to choose the right path and right provider, struggles with social mobility, the impact of being exposed to employers. The students asked for help with writing CVs and family pressure as well as social mobility.

He highlighted the richness of personal guidance sessions with students. Which he said allows for careers advisors to tell them about alternative options away from academia. He said the issue that the LEP is having in schools is ensuring that there is sustained support for students who want to pursue apprenticeships. More time is needed to apply for an apprenticeship, not just filling in a form for sixth form, it's about entering the adult world of work against competition.

Matt Joyce also from the North East LEP spoke about the North East Ambition programme, a scaling up of original Gatsby pilot. The programme is designed to ensure that every school and college is adopting and achieving the 8 benchmarks and works to provide opportunity for schools and careers leader to come together and share best practice. The Programme sends an 'Opportunities Bulletin' to help careers leaders and also has a website which has a directory of providers and advice. There are 95 schools and colleges in careers hubs, and the programme is now beginning to pilot work in primary schools, so that careers interviews can take place. The information from these interviews can then be passed on to secondary schools. Matt added that this ensures that children meet an apprentice and have had exposure to all the different career routes before moving up to secondary school.

Questions



Catherine thanked Mark for the recording and said it was really powerful to hear from young people and the barriers they face. She asked how the pilot in the north east are measuring the success of their work and to what extent do these opportunities for young people link in with businesses.

Matt answered that the North East LEP is strategic economic plan which works with a range of businesses but also has cornerstone employers and uses the enterprise adviser network to give young people experience with employers and assisting them with employer engagement.

Aimee said they measure through their 'compass' tool which measures progress through benchmark experiences. Sean also added in the importance of self-assessment which means that assessment does not become a tick box exercise, but rather becomes a process which is embedded over time. He added that this makes assessment more sustainable and not a knee jerk reaction.

Ian Mearns MP asked about the long term consequences of the 1988 Act which delegates funding based on the number of pupils a school has. He said this causes many schools flout 'The Baker Clause' because it is in the school's interest to keep their students in their systems. Sean responded that not all schools are part of the regular funding regime meaning the necessary data does not exist. Sean added that there would be a nudging effect of them knowing that Ofsted may assess their careers provision.

Lord Aberdare asked if there are any groups of employers which are not represented amongst those that have close relationships with schools, particularly creative industries and SMEs. He also asked about the panel's view on T levels. Aimee answered that her work includes many SMEs especially through their programme. She said she had been involved in the creative careers programme, and there has been a big push in this through programmes such as 'open doors week'. She praised the Creative Industries Federation and others for working in a joined up way. Anne warned that we must be careful to ensure that there isn't this lack of understanding with T levels like we have with apprenticeships. She also said she didn't want T levels and apprenticeships to have to compete with each other for the same students. Sean said that T levels should learn from diplomas to ensure that the same mistakes aren't made again.

Alison Price informed the panel that she works for a social enterprise called Form the Future in Cambridge which gets businesspeople to go into schools and help with mock interviews and CV writing. Their work receives funding based on the number of apprenticeship starts, she asked how do we track that Form the Future's intervention for a young person to go for an apprenticeship and prove it was our work. Other funding only allows work with post-16 year olds but this does not allow times for parents and students to learn about apprenticeships and get support with applications and interview preparation.

Catherine agreed that a UCAS style system seems like a really attractive option in order to combat those issues about awareness raising and application help. Catherine thanked everyone for their contributions and promised that the Group will be creating a report to lobby the Government to make certain changes and improve careers and apprenticeship provision in the UK.