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Pocket Watch – Lessons from Foundation Learning

Introduction

Foundation Learning in its current form draws to a close next month to become part of the new format for 16-19 Study Programmes first proposed in the Wolf Report. Ofsted has been monitoring Foundation Learning in its various forms for some time and this week published a **Report** on the provision for learners aged 16-18 in independent and community learning providers. Its conclusions were pretty dispiriting: many learners had been able to improve their personal and social skills but far too few had been able to progress on into further training or employment

Context

Foundation Learning is generally aimed at those learners designated at entry level and level 1 and is offered in schools, colleges and as here, a range of different learning providers. Typically such programmes offer a mix of some vocational provision, functional skills, work experience and work preparation, tailored where possible. It can be an unsung area and was sharply criticised in the Wolf Report which went on to set out some new, more demanding criteria, for these and indeed other 16-19 Programmes of Study built around three features: achievement in English and maths, preferably GCSE but functional skill stepping stones if not; achievement in a substantive qualification, preferably one that would enable progression; and some work placement. This Report highlights some of the lessons to be learned from current Foundation Learning programmes as they transit to meet the new criteria and supplements this with case study evidence of good practice evidenced through inspections. It's worth remembering that the evidence comes from a particular form of Foundation Learning provision

What's worked well and what hasn't?

It's clear from virtually all the inspections that the support and pastoral care provided for these learners was strong and that *"providers worked very effectively with partners and other local organisations."* Not all were aware of some of the flexibilities offered through the funding system but in essence the learning environment was clearly supportive.

On the downside, not many learners managed to achieve much in the way of English and maths, *"fewer than 100 leavers had worked towards functional skills at level 2,"* some of the teaching and learning was limited, *"too much teaching was classroom based and relied on worksheets,"* and the quality of work placements and advice and guidance both variable

Where now?

The Government is clearly hoping that the new core criteria for Study Programmes as well as Traineeships will help raise the game in what can be a challenging area of work. Equally there are pockets of good practice as Ofsted has cited in the five good practice case studies added to this Report. The 'high' five and the accompanying discussion materials all match the new Study Programme criteria for 16-19 year olds, tackling areas like the integration of functional skills, work experience opportunities and partnership working, and offer good practice materials



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