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Pocket Watch – Pulling together for young people

Introduction

It's been a difficult week for young people or to be more precise for the programmes and systems that support them. The OECD has once again highlighted the plight of young people, particularly low-skilled 15-29 year olds and the need for a robust employability skills programme, **Ofsted** has raised concerns about the lack of impact arising out of the new 16-19 study programmes and the **National Careers Council** has added their voice, and they're not the first, about weaknesses in the provision of careers guidance for young people. Once again it seems that how we educate, train, support and guide our young people at this critical stage in their lives is falling woefully short.

What's the headline problem?

Essentially that there is no coherent system to help support young people, especially the low-skilled, through from school/college to further study or work. This is not a new problem and has been the staple of numerous reports over the years. Here for instance, is the **National Audit Office** in a report on youth participation just three weeks ago: *"the Dept should find ways to encourage employers, colleges and schools to work together to increase apprenticeships, Traineeships and work experience for young people."* There are other problems: lack of funding, gaps in tracking data, the demise of careers guidance, too many initiatives and so on but it's the lack of a joined-up system that features most prominently.

What did Ofsted find?

Ofsted looked at the first year of the new more tailored 16-19 study programmes, introduced last September and developed on the basis of the Wolf principles. It concluded that so far, and their investigation ran only up to April this year, not much had changed and where there was change, it was variable. Broadly five problems stood out:

- Programmes not fully meeting the needs of learners meaning progression rates particularly at lower levels were poor
- A lack of trained specialists in English and maths meaning teaching in these areas was poor especially at level 2
- Poor provision of work-related learning and/or work experience programmes
- A familiar tale now but a pressing one, namely "weak" careers guidance provision
- Poor system tracking of what happens to young people

The worry is that if things are not sorted out at the 16-19 stage then problems are simply shunted down the line: *"the 18 - 24 age group could fast become the new NEETs."*

Is it all doom and gloom?

Not completely. Ofsted did find examples of good practice, the Government is introducing a programme of bursaries and incentives to encourage more trained English and maths specialists and is shortly to launch an 18-21 English and maths Work Skills Pilot, while plenty of others are pitching in with good ideas, Lord Adonis's Directors of Enterprise and the CBI's work experience and careers guidance brokers to name but two. But as Ofsted pointed out, what's needed is for everyone to work together: *"someone has to make sure there is cohesive provision."*

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Providing for young people Sept 2014