

Pocket Watch: Programmed for work

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“Progression to employment was not a high enough priority”

Introduction

Coming so soon after the LGA/CSJ Report suggesting a skills mismatch in provision for disengaged young people, Ofsted’s Report suggesting a similar mismatch in provision for unemployed adults has naturally raised concerns. The challenges involved in helping people into work can be demanding and never more so than at present when employment opportunities remain flat but Ofsted’s view is that greater flexibility and responsiveness is needed. Its view is that too often recruits are put on courses simply because places are there rather than matching provision to an individual’s needs and employment prospects. FE providers argue that they are doing what they can but are restricted by funding and qualification requirements. At heart is the issue of what freedoms are available to enable providers to respond

What was the purpose of the Ofsted Report?

Ofsted was commissioned by Government last year to look at two things: how far recent initiatives were matching unemployed adults to appropriate training programmes and secondly, how effective such programmes were at getting people into work. In all it visited 45 providers and spoke to over 700 participants up to April 2012

What did Ofsted find?

It found a mixed picture. Some providers, particularly those with extended ESF contracts, had moved quickly, liaised with Jobcentre Plus and set up dedicated programmes but equally some hadn’t, “24 had been slow to respond.” Low numbers of referrals, lack of clarity about funding and the need to build capacity were all cited as reasons. In addition, inspectors were concerned that too few programmes were matched to employment needs and opportunities, that initial assessment was often weak, that basic skills training was limited, and that consequently progression on to employment was limited, 19% of sample. Programmes that did work well had bespoke provision, were linked to particular industries and were managed closely with Jobcentre Plus

What about the LGA/CSJ Report?

This Report, produced jointly by the Local Government Association and the Centre for Social Justice, looked at the long-standing issue of provision for disengaged young people. Over 100 Local Authorities have prioritised the needs of these young people in some way but the Report highlighted two particular issues. One and generally established now, that the needs of this particular group are very diverse and two, and very much in line with the Ofsted report, that provision needs to concentrate more on skills and job opportunities and less on generic training programmes

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Ofsted recommendations at a glance

The Dept should:

- Clarify the aims and objectives of funded programmes
- Clarify how job outcomes should be measured
- Review funding arrangements
- Identify and collect appropriate data

Providers should:

- Ensure appropriate diagnostic assessment is available for all recruits
- Review current and future provision to ensure it is focused on developing requisite skills and securing sustainable employment opportunities
- Agree clearer working arrangements with referral agencies
- Strengthen links and match opportunities with employers
- Ensure provision is inclusive