

# POLICY THUMBNAIL

## Pupil Power

**A Better Transition From School To Education, Work & Training, To Level Up Life Chances For Everyone**



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# THE PROBLEM

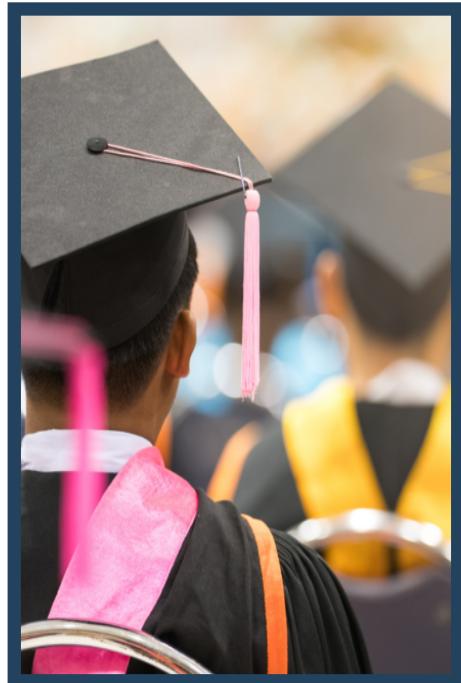
Britain's students face 4 pitfalls which increase the chances they'll be shoehorned into the wrong job for their particular interests, abilities and talents, and which make it harder to change direction later too. This limits their opportunities and life chances, and reduces Britain's economic productivity as well. The 4 pitfalls are:

1. Many university degrees are highly-valued, internationally-renowned qualifications, but others leave students with small jobs and big debts when they graduate.
2. At the same time, many apprenticeships and further education courses give their graduates excellent job prospects and life chances at a fraction of the cost of university degrees, but are education's poor relations; blue-collar, working-class Cinderellas that are looked down on by their white-collar, middle-class University sisters.
3. Students who leave school without going on to further or higher education are more likely to be NEETS (not in employment, education or training) or in poorly-paid, insecure employment too.
4. Mature students who want to switch careers have to sit through courses covering foundational skills or knowledge they have already acquired in previous roles, before they learn anything new. These pointless and expensive delays make it harder for mid-career students with family or other responsibilities to improve their life chances or fulfil their potential.

# THE SOLUTION

Four parallel reforms will solve these problems. They are:

- a) Publish information to show the percentage of students from every Higher and Further Education college, university and apprenticeship who have jobs 1 and 3 years after finishing each of their courses, and what the average salaries and accumulated student debts were in each case too. This information is already collected in the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) database, but is not widely or publicly available at present.
- b) Publish equivalent LEO information for every secondary school for leavers who aren't going on to tertiary education of some kind, so they have the same information and can make equally-informed decisions about their life chances and outcomes as their more-academic classmates too.
- c) Require Ofsted inspections grades of secondary schools to include an assessment of the quality of their careers guidance. In the same way that it is already impossible for a school to get an overall Ofsted inspection grade of 'good' or better if its safeguarding regime isn't up to standard, it should also be impossible if its careers guidance isn't either. Good careers guidance should include advice and support on how to



start and build a business or become an entrepreneur, particularly in areas where the opportunities for local employment are more limited.

d) Require all HE & FE universities, colleges and qualification awarding bodies to agree a universal accreditation system to assess and recognise knowledge and skills acquired through practical on-the-job experience, to exempt mature students from foundational modules covering skills and knowledge they already possess. The new system should be developed and agreed by the universities and colleges themselves, rather than by Government, to keep the system flexible, up-to-date and free from political meddling. The Office for Students should provide an independent and regular audit to confirm the new system is genuinely comprehensive and



## THE BENEFITS

These changes will make Britain a fairer, more meritocratic, socially-just society, where everyone has more equal life chances no matter who their parents were.

1. Publishing the LEO data for every Higher and Further Education college, university and apprenticeship will:

- improve the career opportunities and life chances of every student considering a tertiary education qualification by equipping them with the information they need to make better-informed decisions about their chances of getting a fulfilling job after taking a particular course at any University or FE College, compared to a rival version at a different institution elsewhere. And whether taking on thousands of pounds of student debts would be worth it or not as well.

- reveal the best-value further and higher education courses in a directly-comparable way for the first time. The best courses will attract more students and grow, while poor-value ones will either be redesigned or shut down.
- increase the voice of employers as less-popular courses are redesigned to give students better chances of good jobs, creating a permanent, future-proof ratchet where all courses are constantly being improved and updated to keep up with employers' changing needs. Employer-led standards are already central to apprenticeships, but shouldn't only apply to blue-collar courses and roles.
- reduce overall student debts, as more students choose high-value but cheaper Further Education courses and apprenticeships instead of longer, more expensive University qualifications. And as traditional University courses are redesigned to become more flexible so students can earn while they learn.
- establish Further and Higher education qualifications as equally-valid life choices for the first time ever, because less-academic middle-class pupils would no longer be pushed towards potentially poor-value Higher Education courses, and clever working class ones towards FE courses which aren't right for them either.

2. Extending and publishing LEO data to cover secondary school leavers who aren't going on to tertiary education, and improving the careers guidance they receive, will:

- equip them with the same information to make better-informed decisions about their careers as their more-academic classmates too.
- ensure their life chances and outcomes are treated with the same focus, prominence and value as everyone else.

3. Establishing a universal accreditation scheme which exempts mature students from wasting time and money learning skills and knowledge they already possess will:

- make switching careers or upgrading existing skills far faster, cheaper, more flexible and more meritocratic, so the numbers of mature students will soar and more people will be able to fulfil their potential even if they made the wrong choices early in life, or simply need to change course as Artificial Intelligence reshapes the world of work in future.
- Further erode the snobbish divide between further and higher education, by making comparable skills and knowledge fully transferrable for the first time, no matter where they were learned.
- give universities and colleges more confidence that students enrolling on their courses are properly-prepared, so the number of students who fail to complete each course will plummet too.

## THE SOUNDBITES

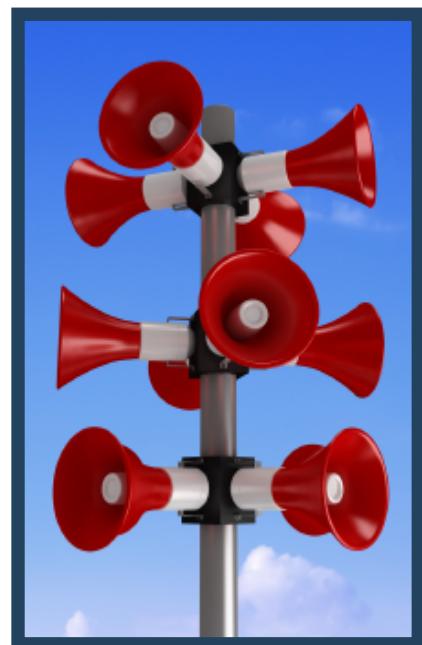
*"It's time to end the stigma that treats too many FE courses as blue-collar, working-class Cinderellas that are somehow inferior to their white-collar, middle-class University sisters."*

*"If we reveal the career prospects and student debts of every further and higher education course in the country, students will be able to make fully-informed choices about which ones will give them the best life chances."*

*"Pupil power will push Universities and Colleges to keep their courses up to date with employers' and students' changing needs, as AI reshapes the world of work."*

*"Pupil Power will cut student debts, as more students choose high-value but cheaper Further Education courses and apprenticeships, and as Universities make courses more flexible so students can earn while they learn."*

*"Pupil Power will give the life chances of less-academic school leavers the same focus, prominence and value as everyone else".*



# THE REBUTTALS



1. *Ministers have been talking about 'parity of esteem' between Higher and Further Education for decades without much changing. Isn't this just more of the same old talk? Why will this make any difference?*

Because information is power, and we are putting it in the hands of students so they can make better-informed decisions when they're choosing their courses for the first time.

2. *Why are you attacking our internationally-successful Universities like this?*

We aren't. Most British university degrees are highly-valued, internationally-renowned qualifications, so publishing this information will give them nothing to fear: it will simply show why they are so good. And it will push the small minority which find it uncomfortable to pull their socks up, and catch up with the best.

3. *Won't a new universal accreditation scheme just mean political interference with academic freedom, and dumbing down of high-quality courses too?*

Quite the opposite. The scheme will be organised and run by the Universities, Colleges and exam boards themselves, rather than by Government, and the independent OfS audit will give everyone confidence it's working properly. It will open up new opportunities to attract mature students at a time when AI is upending traditional jobs; and reduce dropout rates by spotting people who aren't ready to start each course in advance.

4. *Don't these reforms just paper over the real problems of long-term austerity and under-funding of world-leading British Universities?*

No matter what current or future Governments decide to do about education funding, these reforms will make the money go further so Britain becomes a fairer, more meritocratic, socially-just society, where everyone has better life chances no matter who their parents were.

5. *How is it fair on secondary schools serving deprived working-class communities to compare job prospects for their school leavers with those in better-off neighbourhoods?*

You're right that results will partly depend on local employment conditions, but they will also show which schools' career guidance teams are better than others at taking responsibility for supporting their students through the transition into work, including advice on how to start and build a business in areas with higher unemployment, rather than washing their hands after the last day of term. And it will show that Britain takes the life chances of less-academic students just as seriously as someone going on to study at Oxford or Cambridge Universities, rather than airbrushing them out of the figures at the first opportunity too.

