

Association of Colleges membership survey of careers advice and guidance

Why Careers Guidance:
Guaranteed is crucial



AoC is a not for profit organisation created by colleges for colleges – it was established in 1996 as a voice for further education and higher education delivered at national and regional level.

AoC exists to represent and promote the interests of colleges and provide members with professional support services. As such, it aims to be the authoritative voice of colleges – based on credible analysis, research, advocacy and consultation – and the first choice destination for guidance and advice for members.

AoC's structure includes a busy national office in London, an active network of nine regional offices which work closely with colleges and Government agencies in their regions, and a very wide range of member networks, through which staff, Governors and students inform and shape AoC policy and activity.

SUPPORTING COMMENTS

// All of us - schools, colleges and businesses – have a role to play in ensuring young people receive the information they need to make the right career choices for them **//**

Neil Carberry, CBI director for employment and skills

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“Schools with sixth forms actively block the college having contact in any way with students. This attitude comes from (school) heads making it clear that they do not want information about the college available.”

“The lack of funding allocated to schools for careers guidance has also had a massive impact on what form of independent careers advice is provided by schools.”

“The main issue is that schools generally do not understand further education or vocational education. They have a sound understanding of GCSEs and A Levels and often deem other routes as 'second classes.’”

“A failure of staff to understand how the local economy relates to skills gaps and their role in providing advice to children and parents.”

“There are difficulties in getting into schools to talk about all the options. We can get in to talk about apprenticeships though this is with a hand-selected group of young people.”

“Whether they take A-levels, go on to university or enrol for an apprenticeship, students need the full facts and sadly in too many cases this is not happening.”

“Too many are dependent on guidance from individual teachers, or it's left to family and friends to try and pick up the pieces.”

“We need a new system to build relationships between schools, colleges and local companies, allowing firms to get more involved and inspire young people.”

Background to careers advice and guidance – why AoC is campaigning

For a number of years our member colleges have told us that independent careers advice and guidance for young people is inadequate. We have heard from colleges that they are being prevented from visiting schools to talk about what they offer, and pupils are being pushed to stay on in school sixth forms to study A Levels when this is not the best route for them. This is borne out by some of the comments we received in our latest annual member survey into their experiences of school-delivered independent information, advice and guidance (IAG).

This lack of information often leads young people to waste their time. They stay on at school to do A Levels because that's what they're told is their best option, but many drop out after their AS Levels when it becomes clear to them – and often the school – that they are not going to pass their exams. What happens next is that they either end up not in employment, education or training (Neet) or they find their way to college where they are able to pursue a qualification which suits them, whether that is academic, vocational or a mixture of both. However, they could have gone straight to college if they'd been given information about the full range of options available to them.

Since the introduction of the statutory duty for schools to secure independent careers advice and guidance in 2012 (under the terms of the Education Act 2011) the picture from a college perspective has not really changed. Colleges still find it difficult to get schools to allow them access to all their pupils to tell them about their options. Schools often 'cherry-pick' the students they will allow colleges to speak to – usually those considered 'less academic' – or do not allow pupils time away from school to attend college open days.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) is not the only organisation to be critical of careers advice and guidance. In January 2013 the Education Select Committee¹ produced a report after launching an inquiry into how schools were carrying out their statutory duty. It raised concerns about the quality of advice young people were receiving and called for urgent steps to be taken by Government to ensure young people's needs are met. In September 2013, Ofsted also released a highly critical report² which called for school inspections to take into account careers guidance and student destinations, more employer engagement and more effective marketing of the National Careers Service. This is in line with the *Careers Guidance: Guaranteed* campaign that AoC launched around the same time³.

Schools may not be the best place to get independent careers advice and guidance. Following the raising of the participation age – the age at which pupils can leave full-time education or training, often wrongly billed as the *school* leaving age – it is even more important that young people are given correct information to help them take the right steps towards a future career. The current participation age is the end of the academic year in which the student turns 17, although this will rise to 18 in 2015. If we get this advice wrong, we risk students disengaging from education altogether.

“A careers adviser saw someone who had finished sixth form at one school, they wanted to go into health/nursing but the school didn't offer anything in this range so instead of signposting (the student) to a college which does, they convinced her to study a Business Studies BTEC.”

“The reality is that schools are telling their students that the raising of the participation age means that you have to stay on at school.”

¹ Education Select Committee report, January 2013, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/substantive-careers-guidance/>

² Ofsted's report Going in the right direction, September 2013 <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/careers-guidance-schools-not-working-well-enough-0>

³ Part One of AoC's careers guidance research carried out by FreshMinds http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/newsroom/aoc_news_releases.cfm/id/4316E9DA-9009-4455-9CF1056A97432AE7/page/4

Methodology

Each year we send a survey out to our 341 sixth form and further education member colleges in England. We ask eight questions about their experience of working with schools in their area, whether the schools have sixth forms and what they think of the advice and guidance being made available to pupils post-14 and post-16.

In writing this report, AoC has taken the results from surveys filled in by members over the last three years to compare how the picture has changed since the statutory duty was introduced in September 2012. The results show that the introduction of the duty has made very little difference to the overall trend.

In each of the surveys between one-third and two-fifths of colleges responded to our survey.

“We are often told we can’t talk about courses the school offers. We have also been told we cannot attend careers fairs as the school has a sixth form.”

“The schools we struggle to gain access to currently are the same schools we had problems with prior to the change in responsibility.”

Summary of results

Schools without a sixth form continue to provide the best access to college information and those with a sixth form continue to be the worst. This remains almost constant across the three annual surveys.

Less than half of all colleges responding reported that schools in their area are providing independent careers advice and guidance.

The top five problems colleges faced in getting information into the schools that currently provide poor/limited advice remain the same across the three surveys:

1. Refusing offers from college liaison officers to speak to pupils
2. Non participation in taster days
3. Not distributing college prospectuses
4. Only allowing college liaison officers to speak to selected students
5. Refusing to display college information in careers units or across the school site.

These are part of the statutory duty⁴ placed on schools by the government and it is of concern that they are not being followed. They are easy to achieve in theory, but schools have not received any additional funding to help them meet this new duty. They have also been affected by the closure of the Connexions service.

“Schools with sixth forms actively block the college having contact in any way with students. This attitude comes from (school) heads making it clear that they do not want information about the college available.”

“Schools/academies are willing to talk to us, but do not pass information on to their pupils.”

⁴ Details of the statutory duty on schools https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/267641/careers_guidance_for_schools_-_statutory_guidance_-_march_2013.pdf

Improvements in information, advice and guidance

The percentage of colleges agreeing that IAG has got better has increased from 3% to 24% between 2013 and 2014, although across the two years surveyed, no one agreed **strongly**. Those colleges strongly disagreeing has fallen from 57% to 29%.

But while there has been some improvement, colleges still remain significantly concerned that raising the participation age is seen locally as 'stay in school', not in any education or training. This was supported by 70% of respondents to our survey.

This suggests that schools may not be the best place for the core delivery of impartial advice to be given. This could be for a number of reasons:

1. Schools are trying to retain students for their own sixth forms – 93% of survey respondents thought this.
2. They don't have the resources or funding – 70% of our survey agreed with this,
3. They don't have the knowledge/expertise to give this advice – in an AoC survey taken during Colleges Week 2012, teachers and parents both said they did not feel they had enough information / knowledge of the local job market to give the right advice to young people⁵.
4. Lack of appropriate external guidance, i.e. from sources outside the school - 56% of survey respondents thought that.

"There are misconceptions around what the raising the participation age really means. Schools are not giving the full picture to parents."

"The lack of funding allocated to schools for careers guidance has also had a massive impact on what form of independent careers advice is provided by schools."

These figures reinforce AoC's **Careers Guidance: Guaranteed** campaign which calls for Government to ensure that all young people have access to post-14 education, training and employment options. The campaign is calling for:

- Ofsted to inspect schools for careers advice and guidance (supported by 58% of survey respondents)
- Access: a careers hub managed by colleges/local authority/ Jobcentre Plus (supported by 22% in the survey)
- Match funding from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education to the National Careers Service to ensure it meets the needs of young people (supported by 17% of survey)
- A widget on college /school websites linking to the National Careers Service (supported by 3%).

"The main issue is that schools generally do not understand further education or vocational education. They have a sound understanding of GCSEs and A Levels and often deem other routes as 'second class'."

In addition...

The survey found that 74% of respondents felt information, advice and guidance has worsened because schools want to keep the more academic students to benefit their performance tables, regardless of what is in the best interests of the young person. This is backed up by data from the 2014 survey when 69% of respondents said schools allowed college liaison officers to only speak to certain students; anecdotally this is usually the 'less academic' students.

⁵ Results of the AoC Colleges Week survey on parents and teachers and their careers related knowledge http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/newsroom/aoc_news_releases.cfm/id/F0680F00-88BD-4F9A-937E6FC2EE0B1630/page/27

Careers Guidance: Guaranteed – campaign latest

In September 2013, AoC launched its *Careers Guidance: Guaranteed* campaign in response to colleges' concerns that young people were not getting the right careers advice and guidance to help them progress to their chosen career.

The campaign provides an action plan to get a number of agencies working together to develop the best guidance possible for young people. It calls for:

- Accountability - Ofsted should inspect and report on all careers guidance in schools and colleges to ensure staff delivering careers advice are properly qualified. Such institutions should only be graded good or outstanding by Ofsted if their careers guidance is good or outstanding
- Access - improved access to advice with colleges, Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and local enterprise partnerships working together to ensure there's one careers 'hub' in each area which is clearly signposted as a place where local people can get advice about their options
- Informed choice – install a widget on all school and college websites to link to the National Careers Service
- Investment – To ensure the National Careers Service meets the needs of young people, DfE should match the annual funding provided to it by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

The campaign is particularly important because schools, particularly those with a sixth form, are failing to provide information on vocational options such as apprenticeships. AoC and Find A Future⁶ commissioned research from FreshMinds earlier this year that found only 17% of 11 to 16-year-olds had heard of the Government's flagship apprenticeship programme. This needs to be addressed urgently if we are to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (Neet).

Young people need accurate, impartial and detailed advice at key stages of their education to help them choose the right courses and access to the education and training they need to secure fulfilling jobs.

As part of the campaign, AoC is continuing with further research, speaking to young people to find out what it is they need from careers advice to make sure the provision is being tailored to their needs.

⁶ Formerly The Skills Show

Table of survey results

Comparison of data from AoC's IAG surveys 2012/13/14 – in %						
	2012	2013	2014			
Total number of responses	134	94	105			
Response rate %	38	27	30			
11-16 schools	%					
Limited access	14	6	9			
Some access	31	29	32			
Significant access to information	55	64	59			
11-18 schools						
Limited access	51	40	44			
Some access	31	43	37			
Significant access	18	18	18			
How many schools in area are securing IAG?	n/a	35	44			
Those providing poor/limited advice, what problems have you encountered:						
Declining offers from college liaison officers to speak to pupils	89	88	84			1st across 3yrs
Non participation in taster days	71	75	76			3rd/2nd/2 nd
Not distributing prospectuses	74	67	70			2nd/3rd/3 rd
Only allowing colleges liaisons to speak to selected students	69	66	69			4th across 3yrs
Refusing to display college info in careers units or across school	58	60	55			5th across 3yrs
Has IAG in schools improved since new rules in September 2012		1yr after	2yrs after			
Strongly agree	n/a	0	0			
Agree	n/a	3	24			
Neither	n/a	13	14			
Disagree	n/a	23	30			
Strongly disagree	n/a	57	29			

Is raising participation age seen locally as 'stay in school'						
Yes	n/a	72	70			
No	n/a	28	30			

