



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

Education Select Committee

Alternative Provision Inquiry

Association of Colleges

November 2017



Background

1. The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents nearly 95% of the 288 colleges in England incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.
2. Colleges are drivers of social mobility, economic growth and community development. They provide high-quality technical and professional education and training for 3 million young people and adults and thousands of employers. In doing this, they support people into careers as well as strengthen the economy. Colleges are inspirational places to learn because education and training is delivered by expert teaching staff in purpose-built facilities.
3. Colleges offer first-rate academic and technical teaching, particularly at advanced level, and cover a broad range of disciplines including science, engineering, IT, construction, hospitality and the creative arts.
4. Colleges are both providers of alternative provision (AP) in Key Stage 4 and the post-16 destination for many students who have progressed from AP either from within the college or from local schools, pupil referral units (PRUs) and private providers such as provision for looked after young people.

Routes into alternative provision

5. 13,650 14 to 16-year-olds study in colleges. Just over 2,250 students are on full-time Key Stage 4 direct entry programmes; all others are enrolled on AP programmes in collaboration with schools or are home educated. Students on direct entry provision work towards vocational qualifications and core skills such as English, maths and science GCSEs. Many of these students choose a college direct entry course because it better meets their needs than a more traditional school environment. This might be because they want to take a technical programme or because they have had negative experiences in school such as bullying and isolation.
6. Young people are referred to AP in colleges for a variety of reasons. Schools may feel that students would benefit from a 'hands-on' vocational/technical curriculum offer. For others, it will be the opportunity of a different environment. Some young people who select to be home educated are positively guided by Local Authority advisors to opt into a college environment. The highly supportive, personalised and consultative approach in college often leads to sustained positive engagement.
7. Students who are referred from schools often have a history of disengagement, poor attendance, disrupted education and challenging personal and/or family circumstances. They may have been victims or perpetrators of bullying at school. These young people are likely to be lacking aspiration, have low self-esteem, lack positive familial role models and may have poor mental health and demonstrate challenging or attention seeking behaviour.

8. Young people are placed on highly individualised programmes which focus on a vocational specialism or tasters in a number of technical areas and may also include English and maths depending on the number of hours they attend. Personalised programmes for both pre and post-16 students often focus on what are considered 'soft' or 'holistic' issues, via an academic or technical medium. Much of this activity is driven by the final aspiration and behaviour required to be successful in the world of work. Once a student is able to feel some positives and has a consistent, supportive and appropriately challenging experience, aspiration and progression evolve. The ongoing ripple effect of positive engagement is often three-fold: at home, in the community and, for pre-16s, in their base school. Often these young people become agents of change due to their sharing of the positive role models they experience.

The quality of provision in alternative provision

9. College based AP is collaboratively created by a myriad of stakeholders, young people, parents, schools, employers and technical specialists who co-create appropriate solutions ensuring young people are not disadvantaged by the Progress 8 and EBacc restrictions.
10. College AP is part of the wider college quality system involving classroom observations under the Ofsted framework. In addition, many providers encourage collaborative quality partnerships, supportive learning walks, sharing of good practice and transparent sharing of information to inform planning and positively manage learner engagement. Progress, small step attainment and personal development are celebrated and play a huge part in raising esteem and aspirations.
11. Students benefit from the opportunity to study and engage in industry standard facilities with expert teaching. They may also be able to undertake a work experience placement suited to their needs and aspirations and or benefit from employer visits and being involved in projects.

Educational outcomes and destinations of students

12. As AP providers, colleges aim to re-engage young people in education, develop aspiration, improve attendance and build a path to positive progression, realistic advice and guidance at 16 and beyond, facilitating a productive adult life. Colleges often enable students to achieve technical and or general qualifications such as functional skills or GCSEs in English and maths. As AP providers, they plan expected outcomes with the home school, young person and parents/carers.
13. Colleges are often the provider of choice for students progressing into post-16 education from AP. However, colleges are frequently hampered in meeting students' needs by poor transition information from alternative providers and inadequate funding. Often this results in a positive start which the student is then not able to sustain, resulting in further damage to esteem, aspiration and

resilience. What colleges do offer is a 'fresh start' option on more than one occasion – often having prolonged involvement over a full academic year prior to full time enrolment.

14. Comprehensive details for young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are not always forwarded to colleges to support transition and especially additional support needs. Additionally, many students in alternative education in Key Stage 4 do not have EHCPs and transition information is scant, this is often further complicated due to the placement in AP being as a direct result of behavioural challenge rather than a specific inclusion need.
15. If progressing to a college from a PRU students will have studied in highly supported small groups of six to eight, and often less and they will have received funding of up to £18,000 per student. At college, post-16, they will be expected to be in classes of 18 with much less individualised support and funding. The potential positive impact of collaborative sustained information, advice and guidance between a PRU and post-16 provider would not only facilitate positive outcomes, it would improve experience, foster transparency and empower young people to share their positive journeys as the norm.

Safety, accommodation and provision of resources for students

16. Colleges have highly developed safeguarding systems which comply with Department for Education statutory guidance on 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. Any concerns would be dealt with swiftly and appropriately in close liaison with the student's home school where appropriate.
17. College AP provision has a dedicated manager and students have additional learning support tailored to meet their needs. Students study in classrooms and workshops which have been subject to thorough health and safety risk assessments. Resources are provided as per the individual course requirements. Students are required to wear personal protective equipment in line with college health and safety requirements.

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