

AoC defends colleges after Wilshaw renews questions over engagement

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Association of Colleges (AoC) chief executive Martin Doel has defended his members after Ofsted chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw renewed his questioning of the sector over employer engagement.

The education watchdog's 2013/14 annual report, published on Wednesday (December 10), had positive words for the FE and skills sector in referring to a growing proportion of quality providers, but it also bemoaned a "lack of employer involvement".

Sir Michael, echoing concerns he raised in the 2012/13 annual report, wrote: "The FE and skills sector is generally better than it was two years ago in terms of the quality of provision. However, too many institutions are still not equipping learners with the knowledge and skills that employers seek."

And, in an exclusive interview with *FE Week* following the release of the report, Ofsted director of FE and skills Lorna Fitzjohn said colleges needed to respond to the needs of employers in their local areas, but also called on businesses to be more proactive.

She said: "I think it is important that employers are clear on what they want but actually then join with the sector and work with the sector so that what comes out of it is what the employers want at the end of it. I do think there is more that providers and colleges can do to promote apprenticeships in their regions to work with their employers to get more apprenticeships on board."

But Mr Doel said: "This must be recognised as a two-way street with employers being fully engaged in working with colleges to create meaningful qualifications relevant for the future job market." He also drew attention to colleges' engagement with "an average of 600 businesses" — a claim that has repeatedly featured in recent AoC responses.

Ms Fitzjohn, in a further echo of past Ofsted criticism, also expanded on the report's mention of local enterprise partnership (Lep) responses to skills shortages, calling them "inconsistent". She said: "I think some of the Leps are good and doing a good job, but there are some which are not. What I would want to see is more FE representation on Lep boards. I think that would really help the situation

because they would know and understand the sector. I think the Leps are very focused on level three and engineering and high-level skills.

"I think they need to think far more about those young people who come out at level one at 16. The more disadvantaged, those who need a good start in life, so I think there is much more they can do."

She also raised concerns about the quality of provision offered by employer providers after the report revealed the majority of the 16 providers inspected in 2013/14 had been graded as inadequate (three) or requires improvement (seven). The rest were good. It comes a year after *FE Week* took an in depth look at the employer provider offer.

She said: "We are concerned about them and have been for some while. I think that does focus on a particular issue for us. Some of those large employer providers will have offered a Train to Gain programme in the past which was very much about assessment, it was not about teaching new skills for apprenticeships. What we are keen for, and what apprenticeships should be about is learning new skills and people making progress and developing in their job role and giving them opportunities for the future. And we are seeing a system that isn't teaching or training new skills for apprenticeships, despite the fact the learners are achieving the apprenticeship. They are at the same level and doing the same job with the same skills as when they started the programme. We will keep a close eye on them."

A Department for Business, Innovation and Skills spokesperson said: "We are committed to driving up quality across the FE sector and have introduced a faster, more robust intervention regime that works to rapidly tackle poor performance. The government is investing more than £30m over two years to raise the capacity and quality of the FE workforce.

"This is already having an impact with more than 2,000 existing teachers having enhanced their skills in teaching maths and more than 800 doing so in English. In addition to this, more than 400 graduates are receiving bursaries to teach in FE and more than 130 new maths teachers have already been recruited with support of government grants."

Key points from the Ofsted annual report on FE and skills

- Proportion of FE and skills providers rated good or outstanding has risen to 81 per cent from 72 per cent last year
- Colleges and schools with sixth forms have "failed to respond to the requirements of study programmes quickly enough"
- English and maths teaching is "still not good enough". Inspections found many learners were working towards qualifications which were not higher than their previous levels of attainment
- Employers aren't offering enough apprenticeships. Apprenticeship starts among 16 to 18-year-olds have been

- "stagnant" for 10 years. Providers not doing enough to adapt training to community needs
- Local tracking of learners remains "unreliable"
- No "effective" national skills strategy or local accountability for the range of post-16 provision
- Secondary pupils "frequently receive poor careers advice"
- Inspection of providers offering traineeships showed low numbers of trainees, reflecting a "slow start" to the initiative

SIR MICHAEL WILSHAW
Ofsted chief inspector



Too many young people are leaving schools and colleges without the skills and attitudes employers are looking for. Indeed, despite there being around one million young people aged 16 to 24 not in work, education or training, 22 employers report that almost three in every 10 vacancies are hard to fill.

DR MARY BOUSTED
General secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers



The FE and skills sector has a critical role in ensuring that all young people and adults are appropriately prepared for good-quality jobs. It is encouraging, therefore, that we have seen an increase in the proportion of FE providers judged to be good or outstanding at their latest inspection.

This reflects improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in providers inspected this year. However, I am concerned that there is not enough good teaching in the subject areas where it is needed most.

JAMES KEWIN
Deputy chief executive, Sixth Form Colleges' Association



In the face of severe budget cuts and unprecedented change, the number of good and outstanding colleges has continued to improve. That is a success story and demonstrates the hard work and commitment of all staff working in colleges. The most important ingredient in improving English and maths results is excellent teachers and lecturers. The chief inspector voiced his concerns about the shortage of good teachers and we share this.

BRIAN LIGHTMAN
General secretary, Association of School and College Leaders



It is good news that the proportion of FE and skills providers that were rated good or outstanding increased last year. This means that most learners were at good or outstanding providers, and that inspectors saw better teaching, learning and assessment. Given the massive cuts that have been imposed on the sector, we should be congratulating FE on managing to achieve so much.

DR LYNNE SEDGMORE
Executive director, 157 Group



It is absolutely right that the report highlights the importance of increased attention to staff development as a factor driving College improvement. A world class skills system can only be built on the skills of its teachers. It is particularly welcome that Ofsted have acknowledged the importance of partnerships and the need for local solutions in driving continued improvement and the threat of competition between institutions to that improvement.

STEWART SEGAL
Chief executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers

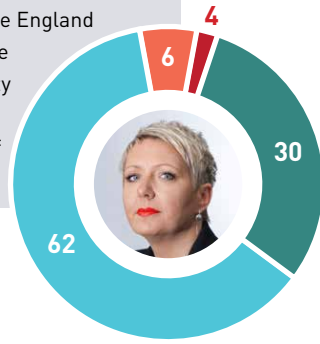


We are pleased Ofsted has recognised that attendance and retention on traineeships was much better than on previous pre-apprenticeship programmes and AELP would argue that a major reason for this was that providers had a much greater input into the new programme's design. Ofsted recognises that changes to government programmes sometimes affect the quality of delivery and in the case of apprenticeships, a period of stability is needed to continue the drive for improvement.

North West
Jo Morgan

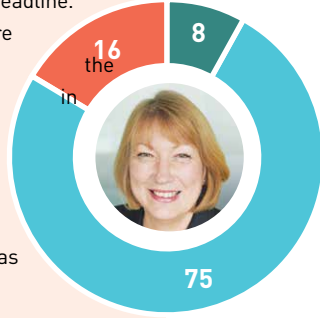
Further education and skills provision is strong in the North West.

Ninety per cent of provision is judged to be good or outstanding, which is significantly higher than the England level of 81 per cent. Despite improvements in the quality of teaching, concerns remain about the quality of the curriculum on offer.



West Midlands
Lorna Fitzjohn

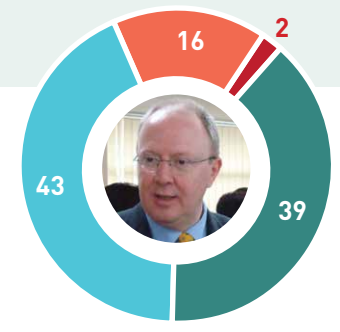
In Ofsted's 2012/13 West Midlands regional report, the poor performance of FE colleges was a key headline. Only 51 per cent of colleges in the region were good or outstanding and the region had highest proportion of inadequate colleges the country. Work has contributed to notable improvements in inspection grades, as confirmed by feedback from providers. In independent learning and community learning and skills providers, performance has remained strong.



South West
Bradley Simmons

Of the 25 FE and skills providers inspected in 2013/14, seven remained good and nine improved their previous inspection grade. These improving providers were characterised by strong leadership with high expectations, which led to better teaching, learning and assessment.

The five providers that declined to requires improvement or inadequate had weaknesses in leadership and management.



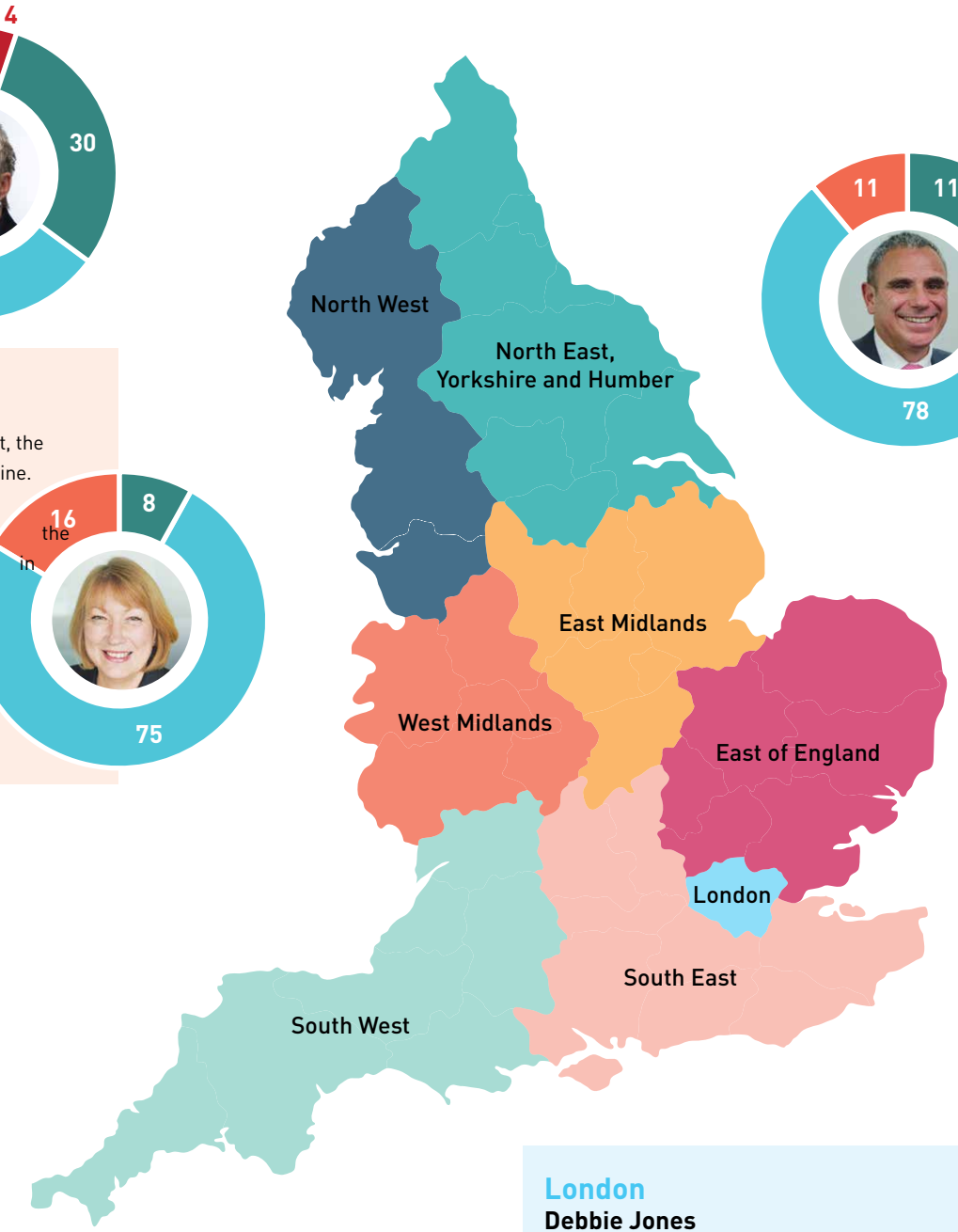
Key
Proportion of learners at providers per Ofsted grading as at August 31, 2013

- Outstanding %
- Good %
- Requires Improvement %
- Inadequate %

Includes general FE (GFE)/tertiary colleges, higher education institutions, independent specialist colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist FE colleges. Source: Ofsted, December 2014

Regional breakdown

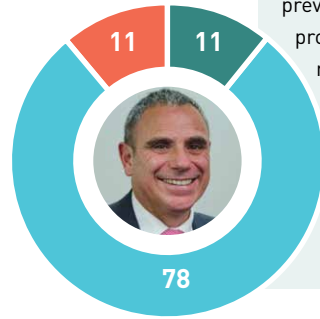
The Ofsted report also includes reports from its regional directors showing the differences in FE performance across England. The separate analyses of the sector are brought together here, along with quotes offering a glimpse into how each director sees their region.



North East, Yorkshire and Humber
Nick Hudson

The proportion of good and outstanding FE colleges is well above the national level and there is a high proportion of outstanding providers. Fewer colleges require improvement than is found nationally. This represents a significant achievement given that the region previously had the second highest proportion of these providers that required improvement.

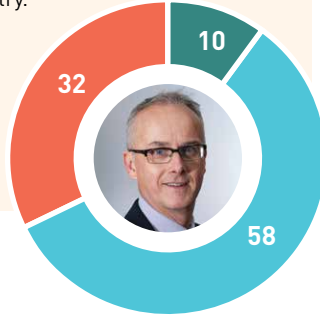
Improving picture of provision, the proportion of learners attaining level two qualifications, including English and maths, remains too low in most authorities.



East Midlands
Chris Russell

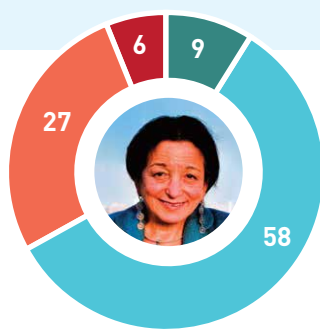
Eighty-five per cent of colleges in the East Midlands have been judged good or outstanding. However, because some of the weak providers are large, only 68 per cent of learners attend a good or outstanding college. More work remains to be done to help these large providers to improve.

The proportion of learners who achieve a level three qualification by the age of 19 in the East Midlands is among the lowest in the country.



London
Debbie Jones

While the number of learners in good or outstanding provision increased, the pace of improvement was too slow. Of 20 providers inspected who were previously judged to be good or outstanding, 13 received a lower rating, five remained the same and only two improved. Although many providers improved, this was counteracted by others who declined in their effectiveness. As a result, too many learners were still in provision that was less than good.

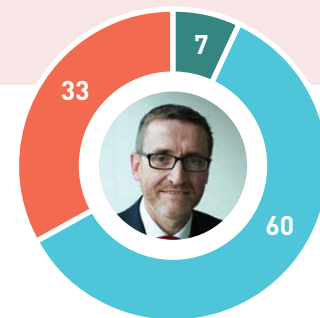


East of England
Sean Harford

In terms of the attainment of post-16 learners, the region continues to perform better than the national level, but variations within the region remain.

Learners from low-income backgrounds, however, do worse than the national level for similar learners.

The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), at 5.1 per cent in 2013, was the joint third lowest in the country and reduced from 2012.



South East
Sir Robin Boshier

The proportion of FE and skills providers graded good or outstanding at their most recent inspection has continued to rise and the South East performs well when compared with other regions and with England as a whole. However, while this is an improving picture overall, headline data hide some underperformance in individual providers.

