



Permanent Secretary

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Meg Hillier
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
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10 September 2020

Dear Meg,

**Fifth report of the session 2019-21: University Technical Colleges
Committee Hearing on 16 March 2020**

I am writing to update you on our work in response to two of the recommendations in your Committee's report on UTCs. This follows the Government's overall response to the Report, which was published on 30 July 2020.

Recommendation 3: The Department should, within three months, write to us to explain how it uses data on student destinations to track the performance of UTCs, and what steps it will take to better inform parents about how they can use these data to assess the benefits of a UTC education.

The Department recognises that success in destinations is a key performance measure for UTCs. This reflects their aim of preparing young people for careers which require technical skills.

The Department therefore currently uses destinations data, together with other performance data including Ofsted judgements, in monitoring UTC performance at individual UTC and UTC programme level.

The Department gathers statistics showing the number of young people going into education, employment or apprenticeships the year after reaching the end of: i) Key Stage 4 (usually aged 16); and ii) 16 to 18 study. The most recent data shows that UTCs have higher levels of pupils going into apprenticeships than other schools. At KS5 the figure was 21%, which is double the national average. UTC students are also more likely to move into higher level apprenticeships than students from other types of school or sixth form.

On [the Find and Compare Schools in England](#) website on gov.uk parents and pupils can see destinations information for each UTC. This shows the percentage of pupils who either stayed in education or entered employment alongside the

local authority and England averages. This allows pupils and parents to see clearly how an institution is performing in this respect, compared to these averages. Student destination data is therefore already available to parents and potential pupils. The current data provides clear and comparable information on the success of a UTC in helping their pupils take courses that offer them the best opportunity to continue in education or training or successfully enter employment.

UTCs, like other secondary schools, are held to account against all the Government's headline Key Stage 4 measures. The Department recognises that some of these measures, as published in the school performance tables, are more appropriate for those schools catering for the full Key Stages 3 and other than UTCs. Obviously institutions catering for pupils aged 14-19 only educate pupils for two years of the five measured by Progress 8 and UTCs have a focus on preparing pupils for their future careers by providing an integrated academic and professional education. A caveat statement was added to the performance tables website in 2017 for UTCs, studio schools and further education colleges (with provision for 14-16 year olds), highlighting both these points and that pupil destinations is a more important measure for these establishments. We also added a caveat statement explaining it is not appropriate to expect the same rates of EBacc entry from UTCs (and similar schools and colleges) and that they should decide on a case-by-case basis whether their specialist curriculum is compatible with the full EBacc.

The Government is committed to ensuring it provides the best information possible on school performance to enable parents and students to make an informed decision about school choices. In response to the PAC's feedback we have made some further changes to the presentation of performance data in the performance tables for UTCs in order to make this clearer for parents. We have:

- i) changed the order in which the measures appear in the table for UTCs (and similar schools and colleges), so that destinations data comes first alongside attainment in English and Maths; and
- ii) given greater prominence to the caveat statements for UTCs (and similar schools and colleges) in relation to Progress 8 and entering EBacc. This will ensure that parents and pupils are better informed about how they can use the publicly available data to assess the benefits of a UTC education.

Recommendation 4: The Department should work with UTCs to obtain the information necessary to gain assurance about the value schools are getting from the licence fee they pay to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, and write to us with its findings within three months.

Our response to Recommendation 4 confirmed that the Department would write to all UTCs to ask them for details of the services they receive from the Baker Dearing Educational Trust and how they have assured themselves that the annual licence fee represents good value for money. We have now done that but have not pressed individual UTCs for a response over the summer because we were keen that schools, including UTCs, focus all their energy on a successful return of all pupils this month following the lifting of Covid restrictions

Once responses have been received, the Department will complete an initial review to establish how trustees have assured themselves that the licence fee represents good value for money. Our analysis will help us to identify any further action we need to take, working with the Baker Dearing Educational Trust. We will inform the Committee of our findings.

I hope this update is useful for the Committee. As we continue to work on the recommendations, I will be happy to provide further updates.

I am copying this letter to Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General and David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Acland-Hood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD
ACTING PERMANENT SECRETARY

