

Education : A social equalizer ?

Document 1 – Colleges exaggerating arts students' career prospects, says Ofsted Chief

Further education colleges are giving false hope to students when they offer courses with slim or unrealistic job prospects in the arts and media, the head of Ofsted has said.

Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector of schools in England, also called for the government to increase its funding to FE colleges, as Labour warned that a growing number faced financial difficulties. [...]

“Arts and media does stand out as the area where there is greatest mismatch between the numbers of students taking the courses and their future employment in the industry,” Spielman said.

“Yet even with the poor prospects, course adverts often listed potential jobs in the arts which are, in reality, unlikely to be available to the vast majority of learners, but underplay the value of other skills these courses develop. These colleges risk giving false hope to students.

“It raises the question: are they putting the financial imperative of headcount in the classroom ahead of the best interests of the young people taking up their courses? If so, this isn’t acceptable.” [...]

“Colleges contribute greatly to developing the workers driving this major economic force for the UK. As the creative industries continue to grow, so too will the demand for a skilled and flexible workforce,” Frampton said. “But industries like the arts and journalism are still too often a closed shop, only accessible for those who have family connections to get them through the door. By working with employers and by offering a strong, industry-focused education, colleges are helping to open up these professions.”

Ofsted has published a report on level-two qualifications, which rank below qualifications such as A-levels or advanced apprenticeships.

In her introduction to the report, Spielman said of students taking these qualifications: “In the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster they risk being seen as ‘other people’s children’. As a result they have been overshadowed by the larger and better-understood majority who progress directly on to level-three study after completing GCSEs.” Spielman said Ofsted’s report found there were many students of “unrealised potential” taking level-two courses, whose employment prospects depended on teachers’ abilities to motivate them to go further. Spielman also called for the government to improve funding for 16- to 18-year-olds as part of its review of tertiary education funding. “There are colleges where significant staffing cuts have been made, where teaching hours have been reduced and where the curriculum offer has been narrowed, reducing enrichment or tutorial time, or by offering fewer courses,” she said.

Labour said a large number of colleges in England risked insolvency within the next decade because of increased pensions costs.

Angela Rayner, the shadow education secretary, said: “The Treasury is imposing new unfunded pension costs of £80m a year from 2020, amounting to more than £300,000 per college. So I want to reiterate our call on the government to give all schools and colleges the certainty they need and guarantee that their budgets will be protected from these stealth cuts.”

Adapted from *The Guardian*

Richard Adams

November 21, 2018

Document 2 - Education secretary demands action on low number of 'white British disadvantaged boys' going to university

The education secretary will say that the UK's schooling system must be challenged over why "white British disadvantaged boys" are the least likely of any ethnic group to make it to university. [...]

On Monday Mr Hinds will launch Opportunity North East, a scheme aimed at tackling the issues that hold back "young people from all communities" and that risk areas feeling "left behind". He will tell a round table meeting that: "It's absolutely right that we challenge ourselves to do things like increasing access to university for young people from black and minority ethnic communities, but we must remember that disadvantage is not limited to a single group."

"White British disadvantaged boys are the least likely of any large ethnic group to go to university. We need to ask ourselves why that is and challenge government, universities and the wider system to change that."

"It's vital that we do this to make sure that no part of our country feels as though it has been left behind, and that every community feels like this is a country that works for everyone."

Mr Hinds will cite research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which found white British disadvantaged boys are the least likely of any ethnic group to progress to university.

It found groups with the next lowest progression rates – disadvantaged black Caribbean males and males from a mixed ethnic background – are around twice as likely to progress to higher education than their white British disadvantaged peers.

The Opportunity North East scheme will include £12m to improve pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in the region and a further £12m to boost early career training for new teachers to improve classroom standards.

Commenting on the announcement by Damian Hinds, Angela Rayner MP, Labour's shadow secretary of state for education, said: "The education secretary is right to say that children in the northeast are missing out, but this is the result of his own government's policies."

"The funding announced today is nothing compared to the funding that has been cut from Sure Start centres, schools, and colleges across the region. The Tories are trying to say that austerity is over, but the reality is that schools are still facing a funding crisis after eight years of deep and damaging cuts."

Experts called for a national debate about "culture and ambition in white working class families" earlier in 2018 after it emerged that the number of young white people going to university had declined over the past three years, despite an overall increase in admissions.

Figures published in January by the Higher Education Statistics Agency showed that the number of white students had fallen by more than 34,000 since 2013/14 – a decrease of two per cent – while total enrolments rose by one per cent in the same period.

Other ethnic groups, meanwhile, saw significant increases, with the number of black students up by 11 per cent, Asian students by 12 per cent and those from other or mixed ethnic backgrounds by 18 per cent. [...]

Adapted from *The Independent*

Joe Watts,

October 8, 2018

Document 3 – The Myth of American Universities as Inequality-Fighters

Colleges aren't doing nearly as much to expand economic opportunity as most people think.

How can the U.S. solve the problem of lasting poverty? For some, the answer starts with education. Many studies show that young people who go to college earn more than their non-college peers, and that teenagers from poor families that attend selective schools especially benefit. While the country's neighborhoods may be stratified, and its boardrooms may be biased, at least the nation's best universities can help students from poor families become thriving workers.

Right? Kind of. In a fascinating new paper published this summer, five economists [...] call into question higher education's role in promoting upward mobility. [...]

They found that America's top universities are largely closed to the poor, merely helping well-off students remain well-off. The best schools for helping low-income students become high-income graduates are accepting fewer and fewer kids from poor families.

Myth #1: America's most prestigious universities are great engines of upward mobility.

The most important takeaway from the paper is simple, and sad: The colleges that are most able to launch people to the very top of the American economic system often are the least accessible to low-income students.

Poor students who graduate from Ivy League universities (and their equivalents like Stanford, Duke, and MIT) have a much better shot at entering the top 1 percent than low-income graduates of other colleges. But these hyper-selective schools are also hyper-elite. A child from the richest 1 percent of families is 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy (or an equally selective college) than a child from a family in the poorest quintile.

It doesn't have to be this way. Elite institutions have the capacity to double or triple their low-income access. But even in the 21st century, most of them are essentially plutocratic.

The true mobility champions of higher education are the colleges that both accept lots of low-income students and send them to the upper quintile of earnings at relatively high rates. These schools are mostly mid-tier public institutions, like State University of New York at Stony Brook, where 16 percent of students are from the bottom quintile, more than four times the Ivy League average. [...] These schools "combine moderate success rates with high levels of access" [...].

Myth #2: Low-income students, who are more likely to be minorities, can't succeed at selective colleges.

If the first myth is a liberal fantasy, the second is a conservative fallacy. [...] "Students from low-income families are not over-placed (or 'mismatched') at selective colleges," the economists conclude in this paper. Instead the results show that children from low- and high-income families who attend the same college have "very similar earnings outcomes."

This suggests one of two things: Either selective colleges are particularly skilled at helping poor students catch up to their richer classmates, or else they are accepting rich and poor students of relatively similar abilities. Either way, the idea that low-income students can't cut it at prestigious colleges appears to be hogwash. [...]

Myth #3: Selective schools are admitting more low-income students.

[...] The number of students from low-income families attending college has soared this century.

Spending on Pell Grants for low-income students nearly tripled between 2001 and 2011.

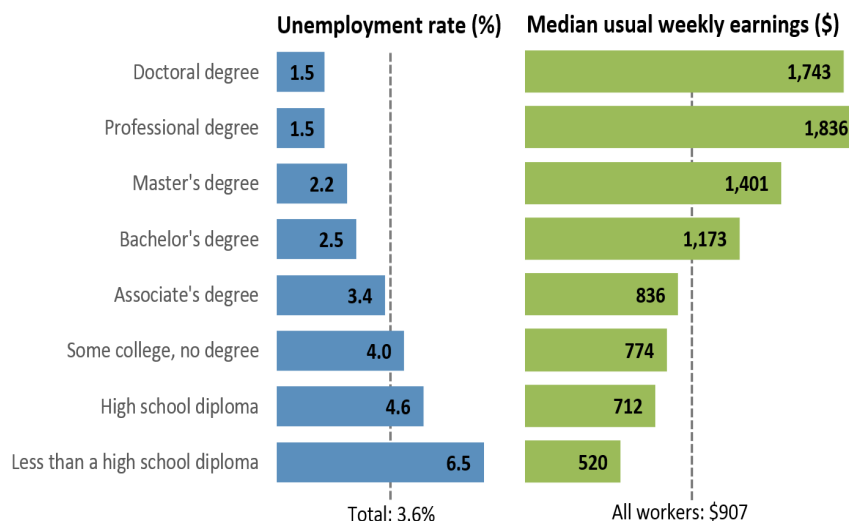
But the boom in Pell Grants appears to have little to do with better access to college among the very poor. Congress raised the income-eligibility threshold for Pell between 2000 and 2011, which automatically increased the number of students who qualified. Then, when household incomes collapsed after 2007, more families suddenly qualified under the new threshold. [...]

At the Ivies and their ilk, there has been almost no overall growth in students whose families are in the bottom 20 percent. The same is true for four-year colleges, as a group. Practically the entire growth in low-income students has happened at for-profit colleges, where graduates have the worst outcomes. What this means is that higher education's mobility champions are becoming less accessible over time. [...]

Adapted from *theatlantic.com*,
Derek Thompson,
August 31, 2017

Document 4 - Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment, 2017

Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment, 2017



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Document 5 - Mathematics performance by race

