

60 SECOND SUMMARY

Since 2010, there has been a steady growth in the number of 14–19 education institutions in England – the two most common models of which are university technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools.

Their recruitment of pupils at age 14 sets them apart from the rest of the schools system, where 11 and 16 are the established transition ages. They also seek to challenge how, and the extent to which, technical and vocational qualifications are delivered within upper-secondary education.

However, UTCs and studio schools are failing to meet their own stated aims. They are failing to recruit sufficient numbers of pupils, attract pupils with a broad mix of backgrounds and abilities, deliver a broad and balanced curriculum offer, and enhance pupils' progress and performance.

Seven UTCs and 14 studio schools have closed or announced that they are to close, and many more look to be several steps along the same path. Structural barriers to the recruitment of 14-year-olds makes them highly vulnerable to falling into a 'cycle of decline'.

The 14–19 model is holding UTCs back from fulfilling their potential. Government should, therefore, repurpose the UTCs programme to deliver high-quality, specialist technical provision to students aged 16–19. This will help the further education (FE) sector meet demand following the introduction of T levels from 2019, and mean UTCs can form an important part of the emerging industrial strategy.

Studio schools are particularly vulnerable to a 'cycle of decline'. As such, no new schools should be opened, and existing studio schools should be made to join multi-academy trusts (MATs) in order to ease recruitment and resourcing problems.

KEY FINDINGS

University technical colleges

- **There are a significant number of UTCs which look to be following a trajectory towards closure.** In 2015/16, 13 UTCs (which currently remain open) filled less than 50 per cent of planned year 10 places.
- **UTCs are, on the whole, succeeding in attracting a comprehensive year 10 intake.** In terms of deprivation, disadvantage, and prior attainment (at ages 7 and 11) pupils broadly match the national average.
- **However, UTCs' league table performance is significantly below average.** In 2015/16, just 10 per cent of UTC pupils were entered for the EBacc, and 3 per cent achieved it (compared to a national average of 37 and 23 per cent respectively); two-thirds of UTCs rank in the bottom 10 per cent of schools nationally for Progress 8.
- **UTCs are, on the whole, failing to deliver a high-quality education to pupils, despite attracting a relatively comprehensive**

intake. In 2015/16, an average of 35 per cent of pupils in UTCs achieved 5 A*–C grades at GCSE (including English and maths), compared to a national average of 54 per cent.

- **UTCs are vulnerable to fall into a cycle of decline** due to structural barriers to recruitment which are extremely difficult to overcome.
- **Government policy is increasingly designed to cement transition at age 16**, when students are to choose between following an academic and technical option for continued learning.

Studio schools

- **There are a significant number of studio schools which look to be following a trajectory towards closure.** In 2015/16, seven studio schools (which currently remain open) filled less than 50 per cent of planned year 10 places.
- **Studio schools are leading to the 'tracking' of disadvantaged and low-attaining pupils.** Compared to the national average, pupils joining studio schools in year 10 have lower attainment at key stage 2, make less progress

between ages 7 and 11, and are more likely to be eligible for free school meals (20 per cent compared to 15 per cent of pupils).

- **Pupils in studio schools are significantly more likely to have special educational needs** (21.4 per cent compared to 12.7 per cent across all state-funded secondary schools).
- **The studio school model is not a sufficiently large driver for recruitment.** Recruitment appears to be primarily driven by pupils' dissatisfaction with life at their previous school, rather than an active commitment to vocational and technical learning.
- **Studio schools experience poor league table performance.** In 2015/16, just 6 per cent of studio school pupils were entered for the EBacc, and 3 per cent achieved it (compared to a national average of 37 and 23 per cent respectively). Two-thirds of studio schools rank in the bottom 10 per cent of schools nationally for Progress 8.
- **Studio schools are, on the whole, failing to deliver a high-quality education to pupils, and are failing to improve progress and attainment.** In 2015/16, an average of 26 per cent of pupils in studio schools achieved 5 A*–C grades at GCSE (including English and maths), compared to a national average of 54 per cent.
- **Studio schools are highly vulnerable to fall into a cycle of decline** due to structural barriers to recruitment which are extremely difficult to overcome.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

No schools should be opened in the knowledge that they face the significant barriers to success experienced by 14–19 institutions.

There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that transition into a UTC is advantageous to pupils with an interest in pursuing qualifications in technical subjects, or that studio schools enhance the attainment and progress of pupils of different abilities by delivering high-quality vocational provision.

However, it is vital that there is a system of high-quality technical education in order to ensure

young people develop the skills necessary to match the needs of the labour market. It is not yet clear that the FE sector has the capacity to deliver high-quality technical provision to sufficient numbers of students, in line with the government's ambition for developing technical skills as part of its new industrial strategy.

- **UTCs should become high-quality providers of technical education for students aged 16–19. All new UTCs should open according to this revised remit. Existing UTCs should also largely convert to become 16–19 providers, with the exception of those with a record of high performance.**
 - UTCs should be made to align with STEM-focussed technical routes to be introduced as part of the government's Post-16 Skills Plan, and focus on the delivery of level 2 and 3 qualifications (including T levels) associated with up to two of these routes.
 - They should retain their strong links with industry and university partners, and provide a high-quality pathway into university, work or an institute of technology.
 - Only UTCs with a positive Ofsted rating and good pupil outcomes should be permitted to remain open as 14–19 free schools.
- **There should be a block on the creation of new studio schools after 2017/18. In order to remain open, existing studio schools should be required to join a local multi-academy trust (MAT) in order to safeguard their future viability.**
 - MAT-level reporting should be more widely introduced in order to minimise incentives for the 'streaming' of pupils into studio schools within MATs.
 - The performance of pupils who transfer to a studio school should be reflected in the key stage 4 performance metrics of the school from which they have transferred.
 - Studio schools unable to identify a local MAT with which to partner should be required to convert to an 11–16 mainstream secondary school, or merge with an existing FE provider to deliver post-16 provision only.

For the full report, including all references, data sources and notes on methodology, see: www.IPPR.org/publications/tech-transitions

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