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Language: English
Type of Presentation: Workshop

About the Presenter:

Heidi Agbenyo is the Senior Stakeholder Manager of the Centre for Skills Development (CSD). CSD is a not for profit, research and development organisation focusing on vocational education and training worldwide. The organisation works to ensure that skills policy and practice is grounded in a strong evidence base.

Heidi Agbenyo has managed a range of international research and skills development projects (covering the UK, India, South Africa and Ghana) on behalf of CSD. Her most recent work includes a joint project with CfBT India. This project explored careers advice and guidance within schools in Hyderabad. Other work includes a research project which explored how best to provide careers advice to adults who are disadvantaged in the English labour market.

Heidi is currently working on a project which examines young people's perspectives on vocational education and training in the UK, South Africa and the Netherlands.

Title of Paper: Listening to Learner Voices: A Study of Vocational Aspirations and Educational Choices among Young Learners

Abstract:

Studies show that lack of clarity regarding the steps required to reach specific career outcomes can result in a growing gap between aspiration and achievement. This can ultimately lead to disillusionment with and exit from education and training (Alexander, Entwisle & Bedinger, 1994). It is therefore important that learners develop a realistic understanding of career options and the educational paths available to enter these careers. Vocational educational pathways are valuable routes for many young learners, yet they are often not well signposted or understood.



Instead, there is a widespread assumption that young people need to engage in higher education, rather than vocational education and training, for their future progression into work and prosperity. As a result, messages aimed at young people are often skewed towards promoting HE options rather than VET. The resultant poor perceptions of vocational education can lead young learners to discount this route prematurely and unfairly (Raffe, Brannen, Fairgrieve & Martin, 2001).

While much research conducted from a policy maker perspective explores a range of contributory factors such as poor careers advice and guidance provision (e.g. Wright 2005; Stanton, 2006) and the role of key influencers such as parents and teachers in the decision making process (e.g. Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005), there is a lack of research which explores young learners' perspectives on the barriers to engaging with vocational education and training.

CSD is undertaking a qualitative survey of young people in three countries (England, South Africa and the Netherlands) which examines these issues by listening directly to young learner voices and putting forward their recommendations on how the issues can be addressed. This paper will present the results of this survey, with the aim of highlighting how young people perceive vocational options, how these options might be better signposted to them, and how different culturally embedded attitudes towards vocational education relate to these perceptions.