

BBC Radio 4 PM Interview with Pat Harrison

Alison Wolf	professor of public sector management	Kings College London
Pat Harrison	director of young people	Bolton College
Christine Blower	general secretary of NUT	

pm	<p>If at first you don't succeed failure may be your style</p> <p>The words of Quentin Crisp are not acceptable to England's education secretary though. Michael Gove wants to make sure that pupils who fail to achieve at least a grade C in english and maths GCSEs will keep trying until they pass.</p> <p>The idea was put forward initially by Professor Alison Wolf from Kings College London</p>
aw	<p>We have been pretty much unique in the world letting people stop english (well their own language) and maths as early as 15, which is after our GCSE exam</p> <p>That's pretty much unheard of anywhere in the whole world because people realise you need to keep these skills up, there's more and more demand for them, they're more and more important.</p>
pm	<p>The general secretary of National Union of Teachers, Christine Blower, supports the change</p>
cb	<p>It's critical that government works with schools and colleges to make sure that what is on offer for those young people is not marching them in and out of the exam room but actually making sure they are developing this by having appropriate curriculum.</p> <p>Whether that is improving their GCSE grade or actually doing something different</p>
pm	<p>The question is how do teachers get teenagers to pass english and maths after they have already failed.</p> <p>Pat Harrison has some ideas, she's the director of young people at Bolton College</p> <p>Thanks for taking the time, Let's talk through this</p> <p>For people who have perhaps only just failed to get the right grade, and they come back to you what do you do? How do you help them.</p>

ph	Well, good afternoon
pm	Good afternoon to you too
ph	<p>Well first of all we try and fully re engage the learner.</p> <p>If they have just failed, getting a D, then they will normally go straight on and resit the GCSE in their first year with us.</p> <p>If they are a lower failure then we will assess them very clearly and very quickly to make sure we put them on the right level of program.</p> <p>But a lot of the priority is to ensure that we do raise their aspirations and they are clear that there is an expectation they will achieve their GCSE.</p>
pm	I wonder how you do that..., I suppose part of the problem you face is that they have already failed and perhaps they are convinced they are always going to fail.
pm	<p>That's right</p> <p>First of all, something that FE colleges have been doing for quite a while now, but we do have our experienced staff who are qualified in the subjects and in the subjects they are teaching. So it's the positive attitudes and role models of our staff are really important.</p> <p>We raise aspirations, we make sure the learners do know they will achieve but clearly what the main thing is to make the learning relevant to the subject that they're studying.</p>
pm	Ahhh now how do you do that?

<p>ph</p>	<p>Well there are several ways you can do that</p> <p>In a vocational subjects, for instance in motor vehicle, very early on we introduce the scale drawings of an engine and start putting on maths classes and our maths learning around that.</p> <p>There is a lot of customer service in many of our vocational areas, so we try and develop very early on english, and make english seem to be communication in the way that they learn.</p> <p>maths again can be used in the hair ratios for mixing tints and dyes for hair studio, hair dresser. Painting and decorating can be how much for my bedroom.</p> <p>So we set exercises very quickly and try an re-engage these learners very early on.</p> <p>Once they understand the relevance of english and maths in the subjects they want to learn, then the learning will take place somewhat quickly.</p>
<p>pm</p>	<p>but do they come to you and say "I don't need to english and maths because I want to do job x,y,z"</p>
<p>pm</p>	<p>yes yes</p> <p>That's pretty common some think</p> <p>"why do I have learn english and maths I want to be a chef, I want to be a joiner"</p> <p>As I said before it is really important part of work to ensure we have positive attitudes from all our staff so we work at the pace of the learner, but we make sure that it's small steps of achievement. And once they get these small steps of achievement in the vocational area of their choice, and the english and maths is contextualised within that learning then there is a positive achievement and pathway towards the GCSE.</p>
<p>pm</p>	<p>and do you see, I'm sure some people succeed and some people don't, but what's it like watching somebody succeed when in all their schooling up to that point they've perhaps considered themselves a bit duff at english and maths</p>
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<p>ph</p>	<p>It's the realisation that just how important these skills are in everyday life for them as well, a lot of our learners may want to start their own business one day. So we talk to them about how they do the books and manage a business. We try and bring it into their social life, so if you are going out for a meal how do you split the bill.</p> <p>Once they have engaged on the importance of english and maths and the skills that they are, we are able to see the uses in their everyday life then the teaching and the learning does become easier.</p> <p>Many are reflective, they do say</p> <p>I wish I'd known this at school, I wish I had known this way of learning at school.</p> <p>But we use it in a positive way at college</p>
<p>pm</p>	<p>I wonder then how you reflect on what failings or shortcomings there are at schools if by the ages of 13, 14, 15 some of these basics aren't getting through?</p>
<p>ph</p>	<p>I think for me, it's the contextualisation, if you learn... if a young person understands where communication, english, communication sits in their lives they will learn those skills. They do want to learn and I think it's getting the relevance into the lessons as early as possible</p>
<p>pm</p>	<p>but why, but why are some children having irrelevant lessons do you think?</p>
<p>ph</p>	<p>I think because in some ways when you are studying at school, you're studying a specific subject where what we are doing is contextualising it into the whole of the program. So in school you'll go to a maths lesson and then go to a history lesson what we've got is the english and maths embedded into the vocational training. So it becomes part of every day life. And I think that's the significant difference.</p>
<p>pm</p>	<p>Thank you very much for that.</p> <p>Pat Harrison Director of Young People at Bolton College.</p>