Publish the exam results of adult A level and GCSE candidates studying independently, says distance learning college

Thursday 21 September, 2017

Now this year's A level and GCSE results have been published and the detailed analysis of grade trends is well underway, education charity the National Extension College (NEC) is calling on all the exam boards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to publish the exam results of candidates studying independently alongside the results of young people at school or college.

An estimated 50,000 people each year, most of them adults who missed out at school, take A levels and GCSEs under their own steam, sitting the exams as so-called private candidates. To education charities like the National Extension College, the Open University and the Workers' Education Association, people who want a second chance at learning have always mattered. But this year, there are more reasons than ever for hard-working and motivated second-chance learners not to be overlooked when exam success is celebrated.

NEC Chief Executive, Dr Ros Morpeth OBE, explains: 'Increasingly, second-chance learning doesn't just make a difference to individual lives and families. It makes a difference at national level too. The UK needs to increase skills levels so that there are enough people to fill the 15 million skilled jobs on offer when Britain leaves the European Union. Access to qualifications matters to the longer term viability of the UK's publicly funded health and education provision, because people going into teaching and nursing as a second career need GCSEs and A levels. As universities work to halt the steep decline in the number of mature students in higher education, they need to be able to signpost candidates lacking appropriate qualifications to flexible provision.'

Daniel Zeichner, MP for Cambridge said: 'The National Extension College, the Open University and the Workers' Education Association are 20th century successors to the Mechanics' Institutes established in the early years of the 19th century to give working people a second chance at learning. In the 21st century, it's time to give the public examination achievements of adults equal weight to those of young people by publishing the results of all candidates, regardless of where and how they studied.'

Career change, career development, higher education – three of this year's NEC A and GCSE level students

Ellena Self, A level Biology: Ellena, who is in her mid-twenties, is exchanging working as a receptionist at a London law firm for studying full time for a pharmacy degree at the University of Nottingham. Although she left school with A levels in chemistry, history, and business and economics, all grade As, she needed biology to apply for a university place on her chosen course.

Alison Gentleman, A level French: 42-year old Alison manages an international team for Wateraid, a charity that improves access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in some of the world's poorest countries. Two of her team are French speakers from West Africa. Alison signed up with NEC last year for French A level, knowing that distance learning was the only way she would be able to fit studying around irregular work hours.

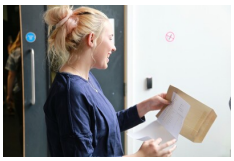
Andy Greenwood, iGCSE Combined Science: working in a primary school in Hampshire as a learning support assistant convinced 28 year-old Andrew that he wanted a career working with children and young people. With a grade B in iGCSE Combined Science under his belt, he's off to do a doctorate in psychology, the subject he studied as an undergraduate. Once he has completed his postgraduate degree, he intends to work with children as an educational psychologist or with CAMHS, the NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Second chance learning to address skills shortages and nursing and teaching recruitment

The government's industrial strategy green paper, published in January this year, acknowledges the UK's significant adult basic skills problem, and the challenge for lifelong learning in responding to the accelerating pace of technological change by enabling people to acquire new skills throughout their working lives.

Figures published last year by Offa (Office for Fair Access) showed a 50 per cent drop in the number of

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students aged over 21 going into higher education between 2006 and 2016. The same report shows that in 2014/15, universities failed to meet a third of targets relating to mature students.

Access to flexible provision at A level and GCSE is vital if candidates are to meet university entry criteria and be offered a place on their course of choice. Early this year, the government launched a recruitment drive to attract the best graduates into nursing as one way of addressing the profession's recruitment shortfall. Nurses have to have a GCSE in English language or literature, maths and a science at grade C or 4. Many universities also ask applicants for an undergraduate degree in nursing for a science or social science A level.

Like nursing, teaching is a profession struggling to recruit. The most recently published data in the government's school workforce survey in England shows a fall of 14.9% in the number of full-time classroom teachers working in secondary schools between 2010 and 2016. Figures cited in a report published by the House of Commons Education Select Committee in February this year show that one third of teachers starting jobs in English state schools in 2010 had left the profession within five years. To apply for a place on a teacher training course, candidates need GCSE English and maths at grade C (4 under the new grading system) or above.

Last year, NEC's campaign *An Exam System That Works for Everyone* was successful in bringing about a change in the way non-examination assessments (for example science practicals and foreign language orals) for the new A levels and GCSEs are carried out. As a result of the changes in procedure made by the exam boards, private candidates can now study mainstream subjects such as A level sciences, English language, English literature and history, and GCSE English Language on an equal footing with pupils in schools and colleges.

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