

FE Week at AOC CONFERENCE 2014



DR DAVID COLLINS

CAROLE STOTT

MARTIN DOEL

EMILY MAITLIS

RICHARD ATKINS

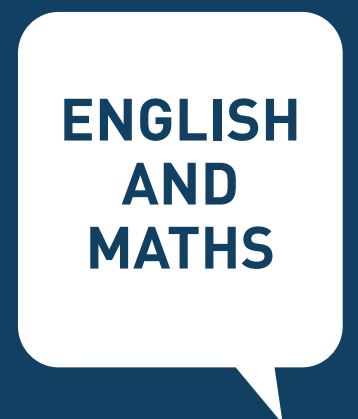
FEATURING

PRODUCED BY



CATCH IT
NOVEMBER 18 TO 20
ICC BIRMINGHAM

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



FE Week

FE Week is the only newspaper dedicated to further education and skills

Editor: Chris Henwood
 Head designer: Nicky Phillips
 Designer: Rob Galt
 Sub editor: Paul Offord
 Reporters: Freddie Whittaker, Rebecca Cooney
 Photographer: Ellis O'Brien, Dale Martin, Mark Allen
 Financials: Helen Neilly, Victoria Boyle
 Sales manager: Hannah Smith
 Sales executive: Negar Sharifi
 Administration: Frances Ogefere Dell

Contributors: Gill Clipson, Graham Hasting-Evans

FE Week intern: Rebecca Jones

Managing director: Shane Mann

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert contact E: hannah.smith@feweek.co.uk T: 020 8123 4778

FUNDING PROVES THE UNAVOIDABLE ISSUE



@FCOWHITTAKER
FWHITTAKER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

It's not unusual for the Association of Colleges annual conference to prove a key litmus test for the mood of the FE community, and with just months to go until one of the most uncertain general elections for generations, the deepest concern of college leaders could not have been clearer.

The conference remains, critically, a celebration of the fantastic opportunities our sector offers to learners. From the beacon awards, student awards, dinners

and speeches from students, it is clear that FE continues to offer more with less as funding constraints tighten.

But beyond the revelry, the networking and the positive chatter, lay a deep sense of insecurity about the biggest issue facing colleges at the moment: funding.

Money dominated the keynote speeches, with each politician unable to promise FE anywhere near what it needs to be more certain about its future, and in the breakout sessions college leaders turned to experts and colleagues for some reassurance.

In this special supplement, we aim to bring as much of the debate to you as we can. On the next page, AoC deputy chief executive Gill Clipson gives her conference verdict and we examine the AoC's pre-election manifesto, a key announcement in Birmingham.

On pages four and five, you can read speeches and exclusive interviews from

the politicians of all political persuasions at conference, and between six and 11, we bring you the highlights of the keynote and breakout sessions.

One of the speakers who will remain in delegates' minds is comedian Alan Davies, a die-hard fan of FE. Read his story on pages 12 and 13, and then turn to 14 and 15 to hear what delegates told my colleague Paul Offord as the conference closed on the Thursday.



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
nocn
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES



GRAHAM HASTING-EVANS

Managing director, NOCN

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

If we want to produce world class apprentices across all industry sectors then we need to look at the 'whole' not just the sum of the parts.

We want to be 'passing out' apprentices who are fit-for-purpose and can do what employers want — not just the employer who employed them during their apprenticeship, but other employers in their chosen industry.

Early phases of the Trailblazer Apprenticeship programme have so far focused on the 'one-page' standards and assessment strategies. As we progress with the training and skills development programmes and detailed assessments, we will need to adopt a more 'holistic' approach and bring together the assessment

of achievement in a formal 'training' or 'distant learning' environment with the development of skills competencies gained in the workplace.

Of course, the types of assessments will vary across industry sectors and job roles. But across all sectors and apprenticeship standards they are likely to fall into common categories.

In the more formal 'education and training' environment, assessments will include invigilated exams, either traditional paper-based, or secure online examinations. These will test the apprentice's knowledge in relation to the specific job they're being trained for.

Exam subjects would include the requirements of all apprenticeships such

as English, maths, IT and health and safety. Also included would be practical exercises that will give the apprentice real 'hands on' experience in a 'safe' environment before they enter the workplace, where they'll need to master work tasks further. Exercises will also need to be evidenced in a range of different formats, including video and voice recordings.

The end test will consist of an exam and for many apprenticeships also a practical exercise or exercises.

Where industries and the specific Apprenticeship Standard require it, this end test can be graded. While fully understanding the motivational aspects of including grading, for employers in many sectors the key driver will be to ensure all the workforce can deliver at the 'standard'. In an employer-led environment, the views of the employers are vitally important. And so it's important that we develop robust and consistent assessments to support this.

We must also recognise that a consistent approach to 'grading' the competency component is likely to be difficult, in some cases impossible, especially for sectors with diverse work environments and several different employers.

So far the main focus has been on the 'knowledge' examination, exercises and end test requirements of an apprenticeship. But anyone who's been an apprentice themselves knows that what happens in the workplace is essential to a successful

outcome, both for the apprentice and the employer.

Around 70 to 80 per cent of the time is spent in the workplace developing their skills under supervision. If a supervisor or mentor declares the person is 'not up to the job', yet their exam results say otherwise, then the employer will be reluctant to see the person 'passed-out' as fully qualified.

In setting our 'methods of assessment' and 'evidence of achievement' we will need to include the time where the apprentice is developing their competencies in the workplace. Supervisors or 'mentors' will need to be appropriately trained and have a clear structured system to assess and evidence the development and practical application of the competencies.

In some industries the workplace 'training' may be based on a single supervisor or mentor allocated to the apprentice throughout their apprenticeship. In project based industries such as accountancy, construction and IT, an apprentice may work in many different work locations with several supervisors or mentors. The assessment process must be able to work well in both these types of environment.

If we adopt the type of holistic approach to bring together the training and the workplace development mentioned above, I'm confident we'll be well on our way to producing excellent world class apprentices across all industry sectors.



GILL CLIPSON

Gill Clipson, deputy chief executive of the Association of Colleges

A conference with special significance

The AoC Annual Conference and Exhibition is a key event in the FE calendar, and this year it had special significance.

As a major gathering of senior figures from FE prior to the General Election, it was the right moment for our President, Richard Atkins, to launch our Manifesto 2015.

Our recommendations to the next government are set out under three themes — fairer funding, better access to a college education for students and raising the profile of what colleges can do to support economic recovery through education and training.

They have been warmly received by college delegates, who helped to inform and shape them, and by key stakeholders who appreciate the clarity with which they are

expressed, and the thinking that is behind them.

The next six months leading up to May 7, 2015, are going to be busy as we focus relentlessly upon the recommendations in the manifesto. We will be using them in meetings with all three main political parties and urging them to ensure colleges are seen as the solution to some of this country's challenges and that in doing so they are supported to deliver these accordingly.

The college sector has taken more than its fair share of funding cuts — and arguing against them, of course, forms part of what we're asking — but we're realistic. We know we cannot simply keep asking for money when the country is in a difficult financial position.

So, we'll be suggesting solutions for where money can be saved and diverted to where it's really needed. We've already called for a once in a generation review, asking government to take a look at spending across the whole education range, from early years through schools, colleges and universities, and see if the funding can't be broken down more fairly.

Colleges contribute greatly to their local economy and they already work closely with local businesses, providing training for staff. If the skills shortages that some sectors are experiencing are to be addressed, colleges will play a key role in providing technical, professional and vocational opportunities up to and including levels three, four and five.

Equally important, colleges will be working with their local MPs and prospective parliamentary candidates to raise awareness of how policy impacts at local level. MPs are often well aware of the benefits colleges bring to their local area and keen to promote their interests. AoC will also be working with colleges to get their students engaged with politics.

There are a large number of 18-year-olds in colleges, as well as other students, who have never voted before. Their future depends on the government to maintain sensible education policies and funding levels and it is important for them to use their voice by voting. In the past five years there have been a number of policy changes, some of which we would regard

as detrimental to students, and it's time the students were given the chance to contribute to the debate.

There are a large number of 18-year-olds in colleges, as well as other students, who have never voted before. Their future depends on the government to maintain sensible education policies and funding levels

May 7, 2015, is just the beginning, however, as the following day our work will continue, with whoever is in power to secure the implementation of the recommendations we have made. Given the success of AoC's Manifesto in 2010 — we succeeded in getting seven of our 10 'asks' — we are determined again this time. For AoC, the hard work has already started to secure the best for our colleges and their students.

President launches AoC manifesto

An end to cuts FE budget cuts, equal rights to transport subsidies and more powers for colleges all featured in the AoC's pre-election manifesto.

AoC President Richard Atkins used his platform at the conference to unveil what the organisation would like to see done by whoever forms a government after May 7.

Writing exclusively for FE Week in edition 119, Mr Atkins, also principal of Exeter College, said: "Our priorities are simple — supporting student choice, sustaining economic recovery through education and training and creating a fair and effective education system.

"Fairness is the name of the game. It is simply not right that the budget available for a student aged 16 to 18 is so much lower than a school pupil. It's the first step on the road to a future career or to university.

"Education policy has moved on, young people must stay in education or training until they are 18, but the system hasn't caught up. Therefore the post-2015 Government should carry out a once-in-a-generation review of the way education is funded to help make spending fair across all age groups.

"Pupils at school are supported to travel to and from school, but once they leave

school and attend college, a whole new set of less favourable rules apply. The rules need updating to ensure that local authorities carry out a full assessment of 16 to 18 students' travel needs.

"Young people should choose where they want to study based on the course they want to do, rather than the distance from home.

"Poor careers advice means young people are often not aware of the best option to choose and are, instead, urged to stay in school to study A-levels when that isn't necessarily appropriate.

"A big chunk of what we're asking for comes back to funding. We make no apology for this."

Visit feweek.co.uk for more.



Richard Atkins

The AoC's manifesto demands

- A systematic careers education for 11 to 18-year-olds and careers hubs led by local enterprise partnerships
- New education accounts, giving all adult students equivalent access to grants and loans
- Same transport rights for 16 to 18-year-olds in education as for school children
- Reformed higher education system and FE colleges given power to award higher technical and professional certificates
- Reform of assessment to move away from end of year exams. As-levels to continue in their current form
- Colleges to continue to have freedom and flexibility to respond to the needs of their community and local businesses, not ruled from Whitehall
- New English and maths qualifications which allow students, aged 16 to 19 and adults to gain skills businesses need
- Education of 16 to 18-year-olds should be brought within the government's protective ringfence
- New schools should only be approved where there is genuine local demand

Colleges reminded of 'crucial role' as leaders duck funding questions

Colleges have a "crucial role" to play and will see a "growing demand" for what they do, leading Coalition politicians told the AoC conference.

Business Secretary Vince Cable and Skills Minister Nick Boles both addressed conference hoping the promise of opportunities for growth would make up for the lack of FE funding pledges.

Dr Cable said: "I think there will be growing demand for what you do. I sometimes describe the role of FE colleges as having a dual mandate, and actually you have multiple ones, but two in particular.

"I think there is rapidly growing and powerful demand for high-level skills, contrasting, there is a lot of the remedial work you have to do with skill level one and two, teenagers who frankly haven't done well in the school system and you're having to pick up the pieces.

"Those are two key roles, but there are others. I think it's very clear to me that the demand for those things is continuing and growing and we have to meet it somehow."

Dr Cable spoke about the need to raise taxes to protect funding for FE budgets, a call that conflicts with Conservative tax-cutting proposals.

He said: "Predominantly, the burden of deficit reduction has fallen on public spending. It's something in the order of 20

per cent of the burden has fallen on tax and 80 per cent on public spending. I personally don't think that's sustainable.

"I have been making the case for high tax relative to public spending. That is not a fashionable view. It's not a popular view.

Dr Vince Cable



But I will continue to make it."

Instead of words of comfort about the financial security of colleges, Mr Boles sang the praises of colleges.

He said: "With the next general election only six months away, this may be the only chance I get to address this fantastic community of FE colleges.

"I want to start by taking a step back from particular issues of funding requirements and curriculum design, and talk about the crucial role you play in our long-term plan to secure a better economic future for the British people.

"I'm not one of those people who things the only purpose of education is utilitarian, that its only goal is to make people economically productive. But we need to be honest with the young people in our charge.

"They are a lot more likely to have a chance to enjoy sport and the arts and the wonders of nature, to know the happiness of time spent with family and friends, to build a life full of meaning and purpose if they have the security of a regular salary and a decent pension, and these are things that only productive employment can provide.

Nick Boles



"The preparation of young people for working life has to start with a grasp of the two languages without which a person's access to modern life is grievously constrained, English and maths.

"I know that you embrace this responsibility and I want to thank you for everything you are doing to help your teaching staff to help young people who have left schools with D grades re-take their GCSEs."

Boles on traineeships

Skills Minister Nick Boles denied that the role of traineeships as a "stepping stone to work or apprenticeships" was being abandoned following his announcement that providers would get full funding even if trainees failed to subsequently get a job.

Speaking to *FE Week* at the AoC conference after his announcement that, like 16 to 18 traineeships, a final 20 per cent of funding for 19 to 24 traineeships could be paid for learners who stayed in education after their programmes, Mr Boles said the scheme remained employment-focussed.

He said: "Would I like everybody who does a traineeship to walk out on day one and walk into a job or apprenticeship? I would. Are there the apprenticeships in the right places for all the right people? Are there the jobs they require? Are we saying it's completely invalid for them through the apprenticeship to discover a genuine interest in a qualification you can secure at a university or an FE college?"

"While the fundamental essence of traineeships is as a stepping stone to work or apprenticeships, I don't want to be overly-prescriptive. We will be quite testing. If people are ending up on pretty

low-grade qualifications which don't take them into the world of work, we will look closely at that, but I don't want to be overly picky."

Mr Boles also hinted that despite rejecting plans for a new, unified funding system for traineeships based on job outcomes, he remained committed to closer work between the Skills Funding Agency and Education Funding Agency, including a possible future merger.

He said: "Ultimately what we looked at was, are colleges, who let's face it are the main providers of traineeships and likely to remain so, are they really finding it that hard? Yes it's a bit messy, yes it's a bit of a pain, but actually, is this such a block that it's a change we should be committing to now at the end of a parliament?"

"I'm not saying there will never be a time when those funding systems will be aligned. It's no coincidence that we've just appointed Peter Lauener to be chief executive of both institutions, so you could conclude that we want the two agencies to be very well co-ordinated in their approach to their responsibilities. One can look at what the further logic of that is after an election in the next Parliament."

Umunna in quality pledge

A race for more apprenticeships should not result in a compromise on quality, Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna has warned.

In an effort to silence critics of Labour's party conference pledge to bring apprenticeship starts in line with university starts, Mr Umunna used his speech to the AoC conference to call for quality to remain at the forefront of apprenticeship reform.

It comes after Labour's proposal, unveiled by Labour leader Ed Miliband at his party's conference

in Manchester in September, was criticised across the sector as an "arms race", along with David Cameron's promise a week later to boost apprenticeship starts to 3m by 2020.

In a demonstration of an intention for closer working between the Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills if Labour wins in May, Mr Umunna joined Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt on stage for the final keynote session of the conference.

Mr Umunna said: "I'm not into this whole arms race of apprentice numbers. We have got to make sure we aren't compromising on quality."

He added that he was optimistic about the future of skills, but if principals were hoping for funding pledges to allay their concerns, they would have left disappointed.

He said: "I am incredibly optimistic in many respects. I think our country has huge potential, and I am incredibly lucky in my role that I get to see that in many of our incredible companies and institutions across the country.

"We have a big problem with our labour market in the sense that we do not have enough decent, highly-skilled secure jobs which pay people a wage they can live on, and the big thing which is currently standing in the way of so many people realising their opportunity is the fact that although we made a lot of progress in getting people into higher education during our time in office, we have a big skills gap in terms of vocational and technical education.

"That is why I say that this sector, your time has come. It is through this sector primarily that we are going to be able to resolve this. We have seen the huge difference that our FE institutions make in our constituencies."

Chuka Umunna



Labour will consider single funding agency, Hunt tells *FE Week*

A future Labour Government would look at the possibility of a single funding agency for FE, Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has revealed.

Speaking to *FE Week* ahead of his speech to the AoC conference, Mr Hunt said he would consider merging the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) if he got the keys to the Department for Education (DfE) in May.

But he admitted he had concerns about the capacity of the agencies, which are now under the same leadership after Peter Lauener, the EFA chief executive, was appointed to the same role at the SFA.

Mr Hunt told *FE Week*: "I would consider merging the two agencies. I think everyone is concerned by bureaucratic divides and areas where funding falls away and you need bridges and all that, and the division between the DfE and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

"What I would say is that we're very keen for much stronger working relationships between DfE and BIS and that will obviously affect the agencies as well. So making sure we've got efficient overheads and making sure we've got quangos working together is something we will look at.

"We are beginning to talk to the civil service, and that is something we are happy to take a look at. We also note recent

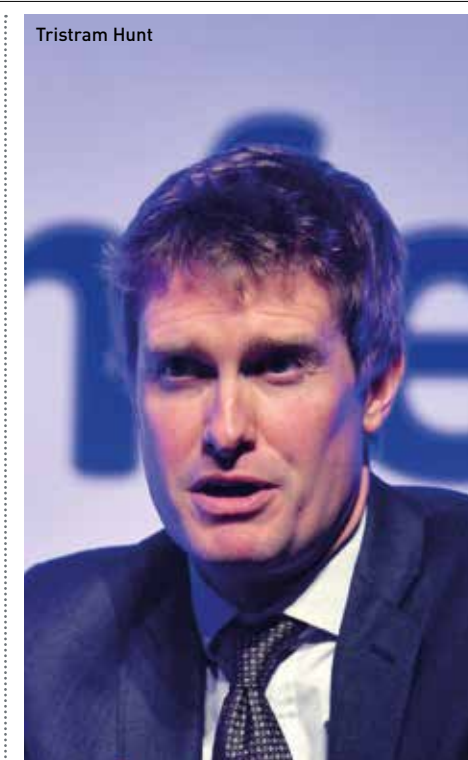


From left: *FE Week* reporter Freddie Whittaker interviews Tristram Hunt

reservations by the National Audit Office about capacity, and so that's a concern as well."

Mr Hunt also criticised the 17.5 per cent cut to the funding rate for full-time 18-year-old learners imposed last year.

He said: "It is a substantial cut and it has hit FE hard and it has hit young people who had taken a choice and then wanted to



move down different pathways, and I think what we would say is part of the solution to that is some decent and effective careers guidance so young people aren't necessarily pressured to go on the AS/A-level route which they then drop after a year and begin again.

"We are going to have a very, very tight budget and financial settlement so we can't

give any guarantees at the moment on specific spending pledges, but I think what we would say is that funnelling all the cuts in the DfE to the post-16 sector is not fair and not ultimately cost effective, and certainly isn't socially just.

"And when you have got a government that spends £45m on a free school in the city of Westminster, those are not decisions that a Labour Government would take. We would allocate our funding on more progressive principles."

He added: "We will fight very, very hard for a very effective settlement with the Treasury but issues with ring-fencing specific budgets relative to the health service, defence budget and the rest of it, those are conversations we are going to have to have with Ed Balls."

Finally, Mr Hunt said he would look at an apparent divide between Ofsted and the FE Commissioner Dr David Collins after *FE Week* revealed that Bournville College had been criticised by Dr Collins over its finances just months after it was rated as outstanding for leadership by the education watchdog.

Mr Hunt said: "We don't want to overload Ofsted, and the most important element that Ofsted delivers is about quality of teaching, leadership and attainment. But I will look carefully at what the commissioner has said."

BREAKOUT, TUESDAY

Taking advantage of FE loan opportunity

Colleges should take advantage of a shortfall in FE loan payouts, AoC assistant chief executive Julian Gravatt has said.

Mr Gravatt, who admitted he had in the past been labelled as a “loan enthusiast”, told a breakout session at the AoC conference that colleges could increase their involvement in the scheme as the government seeks more providers to take on learners backed by loans.

The loans were introduced in April 2013 for learners aged 24 and above who wanted to study in FE at levels three and above.

Mr Gravatt said: “For the year we have just finished, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) allocated £220m [for FE loans], and about £150m of that has been used or slightly less than that.

“So there has been a bit of a shortfall in terms of activity, but I haven’t really got my head around where the students have been lost in terms of level three provision.

“SFA officials are exploring ways to grow activity and it’s all a bit reminiscent of the Train to Gain growth plan. There’s money available and they’re looking at ways to bring new providers into the market and new courses.

“The new providers they’re generally looking for are existing SFA providers, universities and other private training providers which haven’t made use of loans so far.

“An obvious question then is whether colleges themselves could do some of that work. What is it potentially that new providers might bring in that colleges can’t already do?”

He said some colleges had managed to increase their numbers of learners backed by loans but that “nobody seems to have the complete secret” to making them work. He also spoke about the advantages of the scheme.

He said: “The colleges were offered 27 per cent growth in 2014/15, which is effectively doubling the activity.

“I think we are in a situation where there is loan money available which the sector isn’t fully able to use at the moment, and I think there are probably some very good reasons to why people are nervous about taking on a substantial debt even though it is a soft debt with reasonably favourable terms because it does build up interest and repayment sticks with you regardless of all sorts of circumstances. The only way to



escape it is to die.

“I’ve been described sometimes as a loan enthusiast. I have been selling people the concept of loans for three and a half years now, I don’t know why, but I guess there are some advantages.

“They do genuinely help people change

careers and make progress, there aren’t any up front payments or credit checking. The repayments are relatively soft. Systems and rules are fairly well-established. It puts the individuals as the customer rather than government and there is currently no caps on expansion.”

BREAKOUT, WEDNESDAY

Better engaged employees ‘stay in their jobs’

The importance of employee engagement formed a key discussion at AoC conference.

During a breakout session, college leaders and others discussed how they could better engage with staff.

Joe Dromey, from the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA), told delegates that better-engaged employees were more likely to stay in their jobs and more likely to be positive about their bosses.

He said: “There is evidence from other sectors that organisations with higher levels of engagement have higher levels of retention and lower levels of turnover, and this seems to be reflected in FE.

“This is particularly important given, all the colleges we spoke to, the challenges they told us about in terms of recruiting the right staff and the kind of costs involved in that, and AoC data does show that turnover seems to be increasing.

“Then there’s sickness absence. Again, evidence from other sectors [shows] that organisations with higher levels of engagement tend to have lower levels of sickness absence. Again this seems to be reflected in FE. And this is particularly important considering sickness absence appears to be on the rise in the sector.

“Then there is advocacy. Evidence shows engaged staff are far more likely to speak



highly of their organisation, and this link is visible in FE too.

“This is particularly important for college reputation locally, having staff who will be willing advocates for the institution, but most importantly it’s really about

learner outcomes. There does seem to be a consensus that having an engaged workforce is absolutely vital to high-quality teaching and learning and therefore for learner outcomes.”

And delegates were given a college’s

viewpoint by Andrea Greer, head of HR at Weston College.

Ms Greer said: “I have to say it has been a long journey. Our principal, Dr Paul Phillips, took up the role about 12 years ago and it has taken that time to have a real shift in our cultural ethos.

“I think it’s absolutely key that all staff are aware that they are individually accountable for their performance and their actions, but that they are working together for a common purpose. Learners come first at the end of the day and we never forget that.

“I think it’s important that you have a belief that even before you have an Ofsted inspection, if you think you are outstanding it is absolutely key that your staff have a belief in that. And I think in terms of colleges as organisations and businesses are a brand. Part of my role is reputation management and it’s very important to me that our college is seen as the employer of choice, not just in the local area, but in the regional area and potentially nationwide as well.

“There has to be a focus on continual improvement and self-reflection. Getting an outstanding Ofsted is actually the beginning of the journey. The hard work really does start from there because you’ve really got to maintain it at the end of the day.”

BREAKOUT, TUESDAY

Ofsted issues ‘talk to us’ plea on inspection shake-up plan



Ofsted leaders made a direct appeal to principals and other college staff to take part in a consultation on its new proposed common inspection framework.

Paul Joyce and Karen Adriaanse from the education watchdog addressed a breakout session at AoC conference, and

tried to encourage FE providers to respond to a consultation on the framework ending on December 5.

The proposals, if approved, would see Ofsted’s FE and skills inspection regime merged with that of schools and early years providers.

Ms Adriaanse, an inspector and Ofsted’s national lead on careers guidance, said she understood concerns about relatively regular changes to the framework.

She said: “I do appreciate that having been in the post-16 sector myself, not just as an inspector but certainly for the last 30 years or so it’s very easy to think: ‘Oh no, not another framework’, and as I’ve just gone through the dates of the frameworks it does seem that recently it’s been about every three years.

“But actually, now, even in three years, a lot can change with the economy, in communities you’re working in, where you do your outreach and your supporting, so there will be a shift of focus in those areas, but also a shift of focus of individuals and what their expectations are and what their needs are.

“One of the whole approaches of the new change is that Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector, really does want to make sure that it’s easier for parents, carers, learners, employers, all our stakeholders to make sure that we can compare and have

an accurate view of the quality of learning in their communities.

“Therefore, the other thing we’re doing to make sure we’re keeping an eye on the provision which is timely and of course it has to be of value, and to be of value it has to be quality, and therefore what we hope we are continuing to do, and that’s one of the reasons we’re consulting with you, is that we continue to have the credibility.”

Mr Joyce, an inspector for Ofsted, said: “To date we have had over 2,000 responses to the consultation, and of those, approximately 82 per cent of those who have responded agree with our proposal to introduce that framework across all phases of education.

“Our intention is to produce a handbook for each of the phases of education, which will in effect be that age-relevant or context-relevant application of the handbook. So certainly there will be an FE and skills handbook which will set out very clearly the expectations for FE and skills providers, as opposed to what might be a different interpretation of that framework for early years providers.”

Visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/futureofinspection to take part.

PLENARY, WEDNESDAY

Finances ‘trigger more commissioner visits than Ofsted grades’

FE Commissioner Dr David Collins has revealed he expects his college inspections to be triggered mainly over financial problems rather than poor Ofsted results.

The commissioner has reported on 13 college visits, as of November 27. Eight of these colleges were visited over finances, three because of inadequate inspections results and two had received both.

He said: “There will be more cases referred because of funding than because of quality issues, but, going into colleges at the moment, if they have a reasonable class size, and by reasonable [I mean] if you’re operating at somewhere around 16 for workshop classes, 18 for mixed economy and 20 for classrooms, and if you’ve got your staffing costs somewhere in the region of 63 or 64 per cent of budget then you’ve got nothing to worry about.

“I would hope that, bearing in mind what I’ve just said, that most of the things we’re talking about are about the lack of basics, and colleges are re-examining the way in which they do simple processes to make sure they have got those right, because if they have got those right there will be no more failed inspections and no major financial problems.”

Dr Collins also warned colleges against getting wrapped up in competition and



external projects, echoing previous communications in which he warned principals not to get distracted with things besides the day-to-day running of their colleges.

He said: “There is a danger that competition will drive every institution to provide the cheapest product and therefore some of the more expensive provision won’t be available, and that’s dangerous.

“It’s not in the best interest of the learners if everyone’s offering business studies and nobody’s offering engineering.”

He added: “The focus of colleges should be for the local learners and local employers. That’s their job, and they’ve got to get that bit right first, and that means getting the cost of the income right for that. Then if they want to go and make money somewhere, that’s fine, as it will support local learners and what happens in their community.

“But many of these ventures are not really undertaken on the basis of careful cost-benefit analysis, and indeed, working out what would happen if it goes wrong.

There is always an assumption that you would have the gold at the end of the rainbow, and the jackpot will be hit, but if that goes wrong, does that affect the core business? If the answer is ‘it could do’, then I don’t think they should be doing it.

“It’s about risks, and college principals and boards do not own their colleges. It’s about being guardians of a public resource over a short period of time. Therefore they do not have the right to put that core business and that core support for the local community at risk.”

HELPING TO BUILD A BETTER, **SAFER**, WORKFORCE

The new **NOCN Level 1 Award in Health and Safety in a Construction Environment (QCF)** qualification is aimed at learners who want to learn the skills and knowledge needed to work safely in this sector.

Learners don't have to be already working in the construction environment. The qualification can also help anyone wanting to move into this area of work. It is suitable for anyone aged 14 or over.

The **NOCN Level 1 Award in Health and Safety in a Construction Environment (QCF)** covers areas such as: risk assessment, manual handling, working safely at height, as well as around plant and equipment, with specific awareness of risks to health within a construction environment.

It also teaches the principles of risk assessment, including legal requirements, hazard management in relation to plant and equipment, as well as dealing with potential risks to health for example, from handling asbestos, safe manual handling and working at height.

A learner logbook is available free of charge to centres who sign up to the qualification. This is used to evidence the assessment of the qualification. An online assessment tool will soon be available too.

Learners will gain a qualification they can use to further their training and/or which could lead to an apprenticeship in the construction sector, such as the **NOCN Level 2 Diploma in Steelfixing Occupations (Construction) (QCF)** or the **NOCN Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Steelfixing Occupations (Construction) (QCF)**.

The **NOCN Level 1 Award in Health and Safety in a Construction Environment (QCF)** can be used by learners as evidence towards obtaining or renewing their green card (the card needed before workers can enter a construction site). However they will still need to complete the CITB Health Safety and environment test.

Call us on **0114 227 0500** or visit **www.nocn.org.uk** to find out more.
Follow us on Facebook **NOCN1** and Twitter **@nocn1**.



PLENARY, WEDNESDAY

'Employers deliver what's needed' as FE cuts bite

Businesses will have to spend more on creating a skilled workforce in the face of further FE cuts, a leading academic has warned.

Professor Ewart Keep, director of the Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance at Oxford University, made the warning during a panel debate on developing a workforce to compete globally at the AoC conference.

He joined Gatwick head of engineering Dawn Elson, Brompton Bicycles managing director Will Butler-Adams, and American Honors chief academic officer Dr David Finegold in conversation with Newsnight presenter Emily Maitlis.

During the debate, Professor Keep said: "In each different sector you will find employers, and it's not always the big employers, who are getting off their bottoms and delivering what's needed.

"But you find that in every sector, large swathes of employers say the same: 'No it's not our job, the colleges need to turn out people job-ready'.

"We're basically a relatively passive recipient of a welfare system. The education and training system is there to do what we want, and we just watch and then grumble when it doesn't do what we



Ewart Keep

hope and expect it to.

"Over time, government has allowed employers to actually step back and say 'training is nothing to do with us, the government does that through FE and university and we just sit back'.

"With the funding crisis that is going on for FE, it seems absolutely clear to me that in the future more employers are going to have to do more and spend more and that is going to be an exciting moment. It's



Will Butler-Adams

going to be a shock for all different sorts of people."

But Mr Butler-Adams warned that small and medium businesses were not engaging because of concerns about bureaucracy and because they didn't know the value of taking on learners.

He said: "I don't disagree with the fact that there are many employers, particular small and medium-sized employers, which are not engaging. I'm not sure it's because

they're wilfully not engaging, I think it's because, particularly in small businesses, you tend to have succession problems.

"Somebody hands the business over to somebody who is technically able but perhaps not very good at setting out strategy, setting out vision, thinking about how they're really going to expand outside their comfort zone.

"So many of these businesses are just running around like headless chickens trying to get through the next week. The idea of filling in some form to have some sandwich student is just a complete distraction.

"But if you look at businesses, it's a great bargain to have a sandwich student. You pay them piddle-all, you get free stuff from the college, from the school, university. It's a great way for small businesses to take a toe-in and get a bit of knowledge. There are businesses which don't see that.

"In our business we have about 25 people going through an apprenticeship but it's not a formal apprenticeship because no college or anyone else will deliver that, but we don't care. It costs us £25,000 a pop but we've got to do it otherwise we won't grow."

PLENARY, WEDNESDAY

Gatwick engineering boss suggests female-only classes

Single-sex classes and workshops at college could be the answer to engineering's image problem, a senior manager from Gatwick Airport has said.

In her address at the AoC conference, Dawn Elson, head of engineering at the airport, used her own experience as an engineer to set out ways the gender gap in the field could be tackled.

She said: "What was actually the difference between me and the other girls who had a flair for science, but chose not to follow into engineering? It was actually at an event a couple of weeks ago that I stumbled across the answer.

"I was surrounded by other women, who had entered scientific and technical roles and we realised we all had one thing in common. We had all gone to single-sex schools and we all had members of our families who were technical in some way.

"So maybe there is something to be said for not necessarily single-sex schools or colleges, but maybe some single-sex classes or workshops, especially as a taster, to see what it's really like and to see whether we really like it.

"For me, engineering definitely suffers from an image problem. This puts off both boys and girls alike. Whenever I visit schools or colleges to talk about engineering, I start off by telling them I

work at Gatwick Airport, and I ask them what they think I do at Gatwick.

"Pretty much the first guess is air stewardess, we then go through check-in lady, cleaner, managers, I even get pilot far more frequently before I get engineer."

She added: "I think the fundamental question is, if so few girls are attracted to an engineering career in 2014, what on earth possessed me to embark on an engineering career some 25 years ago.

"For me, it was simple. I just did not realise that I was taking a career up that was somehow taboo or not something that girls were actually supposed to do. By the time I did have this epiphany, it was a little bit too late. I had arrived at Bath University and realised there was only a couple of other girls on the course.

"The reason it was well and truly too late was that I had already signed up with a permanent commission to the Royal Air Force, and I was signed away to the age of 38. I was actually 17 when I signed up to this sponsorship.

"For me, my logic at the age of 17 was absolutely flawless. At the time, the military kicked you out if you got pregnant or wanted to start a family, so to my mind, I thought, the only reason I would wish to stop my career would be to have a family, so it wouldn't really matter."



Dawn Elson

BREAKOUT, THURSDAY

iHighbury providing tech innovation

Colleges have to lead the way when it comes to the implementation of the recommendations of the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (Feltag), FE leaders were told at an AoC Conference breakout event.

Leaders from Highbury College, in Portsmouth, shared advice on how to respond to Feltag's report and the government's response to it, including a proposed requirement for 10 per cent of learning to be delivered online.

Cathy Ellis, Highbury's director of enquiry and emerging practice, and Paul Rolfe, head of technology and innovation at the college, explained how Highbury was already using initiatives like iHighbury, an online learning delivery service, to improve the use of technology.

Mr Rolfe said: "We have an aspiration that technology is a key distinguishing feature of Highbury College. We are on the South Coast and in a very competitive environment, and what distinguishes us as a college is two things. First is our entrepreneurial outlook for our staff and students and second is this use of technology.

"I think it's important that management at all levels are very proactive in horizon

scanning, not waiting for reports to land in inboxes. What we have internally is this culture of going out and looking for information and best practice."

He said the college was using TED, Twitter and the Skills Show, among other resources, to find information about new ways to innovate.

Ms Ellis said: "I went through recently the response from government to Feltag and a lot of you may have heard about the recommendation which came up which was to mandate a percentage of online delivery. Let me tell you the word mandate only appears in the government response in reference to the recommendation.

"And if you think about it, the current government we've got, their policy is not about targets. They say very clearly this isn't about having targets. The word encourage or encouraging appears over 30 times and the main message is removing these inhibitors.

"We are very keen to take account of emerging research and practice and again I would like to put a plea out to you all. I fight the corner for FE in my own way at university when I spend some time at Newcastle, and we can do our own inquiry, we can do our own research, we can do a



Paul Rolfe

lot, we just need to have the confidence sometimes and the support of leadership.

"If a business didn't review its products and then didn't look into why it's working and not working, it would risk going out of business."

But she added that personal contact would always remain an important part of teaching.

She said: "I have to say, part of the journey I'm on is this PhD research,



Cathy Ellis

which actually looks at how can we replace traditional delivery, and I have to say maybe we should think more about education, across each part of the system, and rather than say to people 'teachers are resistant to change, lecturers don't like change, they're stubborn', maybe we should give ourselves some time to explore the core principles of teaching and learning, and some of it is that really important personal contact."

BREAKOUT, THURSDAY

Differing answers to same English and maths problem

From using volunteers from the existing workforce to rejecting Functional Skills entirely, colleges are taking a varied approach to their new responsibilities for English and maths teaching.

Under the government's new study programmes, learners from who do not have a GCSE at grade C in the subjects have to continue their studies, either at GCSE if they got a grade D, or other qualifications if they got a lower grade.

In a breakout session at the AoC conference, leaders from Harlow College, in Essex, and Runshaw College, in Lancashire, shared their approaches to tackling the extra pressure put on colleges by the new requirements.

Harlow principal Karen Spencer told delegates that 1,900 of her college's 2,800 16 to 18-year-old study programme learners did not have one of the qualifications, with around 600 learners arriving with neither, and that she had resorted to upskilling her existing workforce.

She said: "We looked at our volumes and thought we need at least 20 groups of GCSE maths. Where are we going to find all of those teachers?"

"What we decided to do is have a very small central team but we actually asked for volunteers from across our academies who had some interest in maths, some



From left: Karen Spencer, Joy Mercer, Robert Jones and Lucy Turner

love of it, some competence in it, and we decided to train them. We went through the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics enhancement programme. We got 20 volunteers and we got another set lined up to do more training.

"Our main premise was that we wanted to upskill our vocational staff. We didn't want to go through putting at risk of redundancy trying to recruit maths teachers because we couldn't afford it any other way."

She said her top team led by example, with her deputy teaching GCSE maths while

she teaches level one Functional Skills.

Runshaw head of A-level studies Lucy Turner said her college had opted for a very different approach.

She said: "In terms of our college mission, we put the learning needs of our students first, and it was this in particular which led us to make quite a radical decision two years ago that from 2013 we no longer offered Functional Skills at the college.

"We did decide we would enter all our students for GCSEs, and fortunately, the

results last year indicated it really was the right decision for us as a college."

Joy Mercer, AoC director of education policy, also spoke about the challenge facing colleges.

She said: "The logistics are enormous, the timetabling is frightening, the workforce requirements are very testing, and then you've got what happens in the classroom. Karen was just saying to me, getting students there who are attending consistently, sometimes that's what you're aiming for as a first stage."

‘FE saved my life’ says comedian Davies

Comedian and actor Alan Davies told principals how he went from a school life of “Latin, bullying and rugby” to a general FE college education in which male teachers wore earrings and he was called “Alan, not Davies”.

Once a pupil at the smart and expensive Bancroft’s School, in Woodford Green, Davies told delegates that he struggled in education until he found the FE sector, and challenged the view that a traditionally “good public school” was right for everyone.

The 48-year-old said he ended up at Bancroft’s as a result of family tradition, but that it put a halt to any positive development that happened while he was at primary school.

He said: “The sad thing was, the school just let me sink. I’d done well at everything at primary school, and ironically the only thing I’d done badly in was the school play.

“Don’t go thinking, as David Cameron seems to think, that if all schools were like the best public schools there would be no failures. They failed me entirely because everything I do today was lost. It wasn’t discovered. I didn’t do any performing, I didn’t do any writing, and I certainly didn’t do any comedy.

“I didn’t do anything. They had plays but I wasn’t in any of them. I absented myself and they continually put me in detention. Fourteen times in one term is my record, and in the end I was considering arson. I had really had enough.

“I was smoking and stealing and vandalising the common room and bouncing off the walls of this place, and all it meant was that I was a bad person.”

Mr Davies discovered FE when he ended up at Loughton College of Further Education, now Epping Forest College, after leaving school and working for a short time in a green grocer’s shop.

At college, he studied A-levels in communications and theatre studies and immediately warmed to the more informal relationship between learners and lecturers and the grown-up nature of education there.

He said: “I met the sociology teacher, who was called Dave, and he had an earring. If he’d come to Bancroft’s he



Davies tweets his support for FE after his speech



Davies as a theatre student on stage at Loughton College of FE

wouldn’t even have been allowed over the drawbridge. He’d have a detention. He called me Alan, and not Davies. He was quite earnest, but the earnestness slightly put me off. He turned out to be a really lovely bloke. Really funny.

“I went to meet Piers, the drama teacher,

and he said: ‘Try it for a week, if you don’t like it, do something else’. I said: ‘You can change?! If I don’t like it, it doesn’t mean it’s my fault and I won’t get a detention? It might just not be right for me?’

“They said: ‘Yeah, we’re going to try to match you up to the course you’re interested in so you can achieve well while you’re here. There’s no punishment regime, we don’t have detention. You’re free to go’.

“No one left. Everyone came every day apart from the bloke who didn’t come in on a Thursday because he was signing out. They helped him do that wasn’t even one of the lefty ones, he just sympathised with him because he had a baby and he was skint.”

To this day, Mr Davies still hates the

stigma which surrounds at least one of his choices of subjects.

He said: “It still breaks my heart when I see media studies derided. I can’t stand it. I have worked in television now 20-plus years and I hear people all the time saying: ‘Oh, I suppose he’s done a media studies course’ and I always think: ‘I hope so. I really hope so, because he’ll be stimulated and interested in the very thing which envelops and surrounds us 24 hours a-day’.”

Mr Davies is persistent in his praise for FE, which changed him from school dropout to university applicant within a year.

He said: “By the end of my first year, I wanted to go on to higher education, which would have been unthinkable for me before.



Above: The old Loughton College buildings.



Mr Davies re-united with college friend Winston Hayles at the Epping Forest campus in 2010

“FE college completely saved my life. I liked the fact there was a refectory. I liked the fact the teachers were called lecturers. I liked the fact they took us to the common in a beat-up BMW with the peace-loving lesbians. I liked all of it.

“I had so lost interest at school that I wanted to burn it down. After one year at FE college I had a quote from Chekov on the front of my notebook. Makes you laugh and cringe when you think about your teenage self. ‘It always baffles me to see religious people among the intelligencia’. I thought Chekov was so on the money in 1840.

“But I had completely changed. I felt

like none of the good things in my life that happened would have happened if I hadn’t had college.”

He added: “Steve Keighley was my lecturer in communications and he was in touch with me a few years ago. He was a real enthusiast, 29 years old. He’s still in FE colleges now. A few years ago I was in touch with him because I talked about my college on television. He wrote me an email and I saw it yesterday. He said ‘Epping Forest College is in all sorts of trouble with the staff and the budgets, although it does look good from the outside’. The new building is amazing.

“He said ‘I’m always amazed Loughton/



Mr Davies at the AoC conference with broadcaster Emily Maitlis

Biog of an FE success story

- Alan Davies was born in 1966 in Loughton, Essex, and grew up in Chingford
- He attended Staples Road School, in Loughton, and the private Bancroft’s School, in Woodford Green before attending Loughton College of FE, now Epping Forest College
- He left college with A-levels in communications and theatre studies
- He has a degree in drama from the University of Kent
- He is best known for his role as the title character in the crime drama Jonathan Creek and as a regular panellist on the quiz show QI, hosted by Stephen Fry
- In 2010, he took part in a documentary about his political upbringing and visited his old college to meet learners running for election to the students’ union
- He won the Edinburgh Festival Critics Award for Comedy in 1994 and the Best Actor award at the 2001 Monte Carlo TV Festival for his performance as Robert Gossage in the comedy drama Bob and Rose
- He lives in North London with his wife, the writer Katie Maskell. They have two children

Epping Forest College didn’t keep in touch with you to help promote FE to others. For many teenagers, FE allows a fresh start or a clean sheet to re-think and re-direct lives that perhaps have become over-complicated’. It’s such a nice turn of phrase I think.

“He said ‘you could play a great role in helping young people take advantage of a sector which is still largely not recognised’. So Steve, that’s why I’m here.”

Davies enjoyed a reunion with the college he was so fond of in 2010, but found it was barely recognisable after extensive redevelopment.

He spent the day at the college filming for a TV adaptation of his autobiography My Favourite People and Me.

A college spokesperson said: “Much of the filming centred on the campaigning by candidates standing for positions within the Students’ Union. Alan observed the candidates making speeches and spoke to them afterwards, reflecting on his time at the college when he stood for election to a Students’ Union post.

“It was at Epping Forest College that Alan discovered his talent and love for performing and those staff who remember his time here have some amusing tales to tell.”

AOC - WHAT DID THE DELEGATES THINK?

ALASDAIR DOWNES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REED NCFE



"The highlight for me was when students got on stage to speak. It's true that they always steal the show. I particularly enjoyed the Student of the Year awards ceremony. There's no doubt that the FE sector needs to do more to improve employability to help our young people."

CHRISTINE BULLOCK CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF APT AWARDS



"The conference is the best opportunity in the year to meet a broad range of people from the sector. It's good to get everyone in one place and there has been lots and lots of good engagement this year. I have been coming to conference for about 18 years and it hasn't changed much, which is a good thing. There is though more choice with the break-out groups now."

ZOE LEWIS PRINCIPLE OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE



"I have been to around seven conferences and found this one to have a feel that was quite different to many of the others. I sensed a real change of mood with great acknowledgement of both the reality and seriousness of the situation and also a feeling that there was simply no one left fighting our corner, after the seemingly farewell speech of Vince Cable."

CAILEAN HARGRAVE EDUCATION LEAD AT IBM AND PORTAL



"I've heard that there was a significant rise in the number of people with a three-day pass which shows a lot of interest in colleges. This event is really great for networking and mixing with a wide variety of people. I have really enjoyed myself."

TONI PEARCE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS



"It is always excellent when organisations like the AoC show that they take students seriously. They showed that by letting them speak on the main stage [on November 20]. I really enjoyed listening to what they had to say and thought they all did very well."

JERRY TAPP CHAIR OF GOVERNORS AT MIDDLESEX-BASED BROOKLANDS COLLEGE



"As always, the conference was extremely well organised. The overall message that came through was 'there will be no more money from government' which was not a surprise. It was all about facing up to reality. The politicians who spoke concentrated on the short term, which has been reflected more generally in too much chopping and changing to our sector."

JACQUELINE GRUBB DEPUTY PRINCIPAL OF CURRICULUM PERFORMANCE AND INNOVATION AT BASINGSTOKE COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY



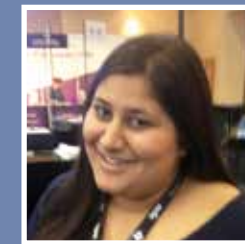
"The highlights for me were hearing students talk about their experiences [in the main hall on November 20] and Alan Davies speaking about how FE changed his life. That's what it is all about for colleges, transforming people's lives for the better. I've only been in my job a few weeks and this has made me feel even more fired-up."

FRANCESCA ROBERT AN A-LEVEL STUDENT FROM BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN COLLEGE



"I'm proud to go to a college and purposely left my old school because I wanted more freedom, so it was inspiring to come to this conference. Our teacher brought a group of us [students] here. I would quite like to be a politician one day and it was nice to hear Tristram Hunt speak. I was impressed with him."

SHERRY IQBAL PRESIDENT OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE STUDENT UNION



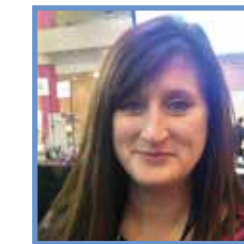
"I was nervous about speaking on the main stage to so many people who are mostly high up in their organisations, but they were really, really welcoming. It's important that the voices of students are heard at these events. I also went to the gala dinner and the after-party was certainly a lot more fun than I expected."

STEWART SEGAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING PROVIDERS



"The conference has been really good. For me, it has provided opportunities to look at understanding the concerns of colleges and how we can change things for the better for the wider sector. It has been nice to see a number of independent learning providers represented here. It all helps promote the message that the best way to achieve things is through working together."

JAC INGRAM NCFE DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS



"I think we've seen that the message is getting across that there are so many different types of exciting job opportunities out there. It's not just about training to be things like doctors and accountants [through higher education]. It has been good to talk to so many people who support vocational training. The conference is a great chance to celebrate everything that's good about FE."

DR LYNNE SEDGMORE CBE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE 157 GROUP



"As ever, it was an excellent opportunity to celebrate the excellent work of colleges across the country and the sector more widely. Six months before an election, the lack of major political content was unsurprising, but the minister's softening on functional skills was most welcome. What the conference did provide was an opportunity for all of us to hone our messages and agree our priorities at this very vital political time."

JILL COLLINS WIRRAL METROPOLITAN COLLEGE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT MANAGER



"This has been my first conference and it has been fantastic. I brought some students along to give them the opportunity to see the good work that is done by the AoC. I think that they found it very inspiring and so did I."

LORRAINE COLLINS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ENTERPRISE AND DEVELOPMENT AT UXBRIDGE COLLEGE



"The workshops were very good this year, with a lot of them focusing on innovative methods of delivery in times of austerity. I thought a lot of the politicians said the same old things they tell us every year. They were also very party-political, but I suppose that is what you would expect so close to an election."

LEVEL 4 DIPLOMA IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PRODUCTIVITY (QCF)

Working with the UK Institute of Productivity and a UK professional membership management institute, NOCN has developed an essential management development programme structured into 27 short-course modules for people who are working in all industry sectors.

This structure allows attendees (and their employers) to tailor a programme of training to their particular needs. All modules are designed as practical, interactive workshops that will develop both knowledge and the skills necessary to manage, assess, improve and develop productivity and competitiveness.

Alongside the technical management and productivity skills, attendees will develop a range of personal and communication skills and build the confidence they need to tackle complex real-world problems and situations.

Employers benefit from better managers who are practically based and can drive improvements in management, productivity and competitiveness.

Attendees complete a selection of optional programmes to build up to either the Diploma or Certificate.

The Level 4 Diploma in The Management of Productivity (QCF) will run in the UK as well as India and Mauritius.

Call **0114 227 0500**

Email **business-enquiries@nocn.org.uk**

Visit **www.nocn.org.uk**

Follow us on Facebook **NOCN1**
and Twitter **@nocn1**



NOCN IS ONE OF ONLY 21 ORGANISATIONS, AND THE ONLY AWARDING ORGANISATION, TO ACHIEVE LEVEL 3 IN LEADERS IN DIVERSITY PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY