



'Dear Santa'... the sector's Christmas wish list

Jeremy Benson
Executive director for vocational qualifications, Ofqual




This year at Ofqual we've sharply increased our focus on vocational qualifications. We want awarding organisations to demonstrate their qualifications meet the needs of employers. We're working with vocational education partners and changing how we regulate to achieve that.

In 2015, we will continue this work, so people can value and trust vocational qualifications. There are many really good qualifications, but we'll expect improvements to be made where they're needed.

But first, we have the festive season to celebrate. I want to wish all *FE Week* readers a very Merry Christmas. We'll see you in 2015 for an exciting New Year.

Matthew Lord
Director of LMP Education, Youth Training Provider



For Christmas this year, I wish for no more NEETS. There are still thousands of young people across the UK that are aged 16 to 24 not currently engaged. And I don't think that traineeships and apprenticeships can provide a solution for them all, far from it.

There needs to be a bigger investment in short courses that will help young people gain the confidence and life skills necessary to then succeed on a traineeship or apprenticeship.

There is a huge gap that needs filling and this is something that we will be trying to do more of in 2015.

Carole Bishop
Head of vocational and technical qualifications, AQA




Thanks to *FE Week* for the opportunity to wish all our colleagues in FE a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Here at AQA, 2015 promises to be an exciting year as we continue to expand our range of vocational qualifications, starting with our new Level 3 Tech-level qualifications in Business, Engineering and IT.

We're looking forward to our continued collaboration with colleges, employers and professional bodies as we design and develop them — offering you real choice and helping you to open doors for your learners whether their destination is employment, an Apprenticeship or further study.


Ross Maloney
Chief executive, Find a Future



In 2015 it is our hope that high quality, effective careers advice remains at the top of the FE agenda.

It is simply not enough to offer careers advice. If young people are to be fully supported in their journey from education to employment, the guidance given must be delivered in an accessible, impartial and impactful way. Find a Future sees the value of this through The Skills Show and all of our products and advocates offering young people more opportunities where they can see careers in practise, try a range of skills and meet employers. Best Wishes for the New Year.

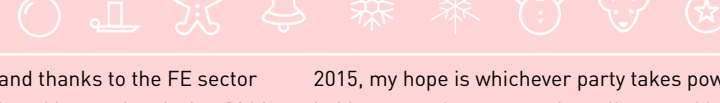
Dr Mary Bousted
General secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers



ATL is hoping hard that the FE and skills sector doesn't face any further budget cuts in the year ahead, but fear that is unlikely. FE and sixth form colleges have borne the brunt of a massive reduction in funding, particularly for education and training for the over 19s, which makes it harder for unemployed young people to acquire the skills they need to get a job.

The Government should get its priorities right, stop wasting money on school places where they aren't needed, and focus attention on a sector that that has already been battered by cuts.

David Phillips
Vice president for work based learning and colleges, Pearson UK



Congratulations and thanks to the FE sector whose great work and innovation during 2014 continues to help grow the availability of skills needed by employers in the UK — and all that under sustained downward pressure on budgets.

While we will all have to do more with less in 2015, my hope is whichever party takes power in May, uses the opportunity to listen and learn so the sector can do even more good work.

But for now, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy (and no doubt interesting!) New Year from everyone at Pearson.

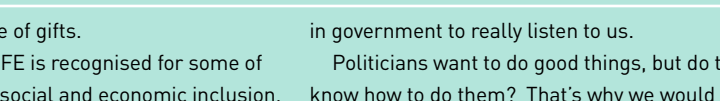
Martin Doel
Chief executive at the Association of Colleges



Here at the Association of Colleges we wish college staff and everyone in the FE sector a relaxing and peaceful Christmas. We want to recognise the contribution that colleges have made to their students and their local communities.

The New Year will bring new challenges as the country prepares for the General Election in May but I have no doubt that colleges will approach this important year with the same level of enthusiasm as they do with everything.

Mark Ravenhall
Chief executive, Further Education Trust for Leadership




Christmas is a time of gifts.

Our wish is that FE is recognised for some of its gifts to society: social and economic inclusion, and for some the only way out of poverty and neglect. For ourselves, instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh we would like our Magi in government to really listen to us.

Politicians want to do good things, but do they know how to do them? That's why we would like to confer the gift of listening on them. To make sure they have the very best advice based on the latest thinking and not prejudice.

Kirstie Donnelly MBE
City & Guilds UK managing director



2014 was another year of change for the FE sector but an exciting one.

At City & Guilds we released our report 'Sense and Instability', reviewing the impact of 30 years of constant change in the skills sector, began pilots of the City & Guilds TechBac with our six pioneer colleges, ran two 'Big Think' events bringing together professionals from FE and the digital world and celebrated the success of learners at our fantastic Lion Awards in June — just to name a few highlights.

We feel privileged to have awarded approximately 2m learners a City & Guilds qualification in 2014 and are looking forward to supporting centres to help even more achieve their potential in 2015.

David Russell
Chief executive, Education and Training Foundation



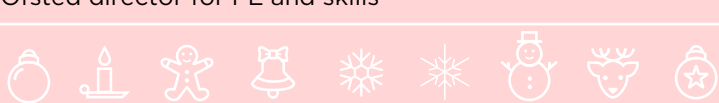
As my first Christmas as chief executive at the foundation approaches I am looking forward to a brief respite before a busy election year gets underway.

Along with the entire foundation team, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has joined us in our mission of supporting colleges and providers in their improvement work.

2014 has been a tough year for some, but also a year of fantastic success and growth, week-in week-out, for the dedicated professionals who work all across the education and training system. 2015 looks set to be even busier for the foundation, with the publication of our review of English and maths provision, and the launch of our new Professional Membership Service.

Peace at Christmas, and all our best wishes for a Happy New Year.

Lorna Fitzjohn
Ofsted director for FE and skills



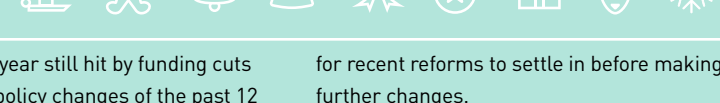
I will remember 2014 first and foremost as the year which I took up the mantle as Ofsted's director for FE and skills.

It has been wonderful to meet and work with so many committed people in the sector who are helping to raise standards.

Your achievement is evident by the fact that more learners are now in good or outstanding provision than this time last year. For this the sector needs commending.

I would like to wish everyone a very happy holiday. We have achieved many great things this year and I am already looking forward to what more we can achieve in the New Year.

Lynne Sedgmore
Executive director, 157 Group




We end this busy year still hit by funding cuts and the massive policy changes of the past 12 months — but with some signs that a more measured approach to policy making is coming to the fore, and a definite willingness on the part of politicians and officials to listen to more wide-ranging ideas about the future.

2015 will be dominated by electioneering, and we hope everyone will agree to give some time for recent reforms to settle in before making further changes.

It would be great to see a commitment to genuinely equal treatment across the education system, and to enhancing the incentives for educational leaders to collaborate in the best interests of learners and their local economies.

Best wishes to all for this festive season.


Graham Hasting-Evans
Managing director at NOCN



It's been an interesting and challenging year for the education sector and as 2014 draws to a close our thoughts turn to our Christmas wish list and what we can expect from Skills Minister Nick Boles (the man who can grant our wishes) over the next 12 months.

Our top three wishes for 2015 are more investment in skills and a re-think on funding, recognition that employability skills are essential at all levels, not just entry level and a ramping up of the number of 'reformed' apprenticeships that are approved and can be delivered.

Stewart Segal
Chief executive of the Association for Employment and Learning Providers




AELP extends season's greetings to everyone in the sector who has worked hard to help transform learners' prospects and respond to employers' recruitment and skills needs.

Despite the continued pressures on public expenditure, the new government in 2015 will hopefully recognise that employment and skills programmes are the best investment in the future success of our economy.

Better value for money will be achieved if we build on a core set of programmes which include a work preparation programme called traineeships, a structured in-work programme called apprenticeship and support programmes for the longer term unemployed including the Work Programme and the Troubled Families programme.

Sally Hunt
General secretary, University and College Union




We have considerable a Christmas wish list this year, with decent funding for FE at the top. We also want the government to extend its teacher workload initiative to FE and not treat FE teachers like second class citizens.

The time has come for the sector to phase out unpopular graded lesson observations.

Finally, we would like to see an end to FE loans, which are behind a shocking drop in adult learner numbers, and a complete rethink of the entire FE funding system.

We will be very interested to hear what politicians of all stripes have to say ahead of the election.

Ruth Silver
Co-chair of the Skills Commission



"For starters we'd like to see greater recognition of the growing uncertainties around the responsibility for training in an increasingly flexible labour market, and action to tackle declining social mobility owing to a reduction in the alignment of skills provision to work.

"Key to addressing these points are concerted measures to overcome the fragmentation across the system that is making it difficult for employers to engage, and the alarming policy dissonance between different central Government departments.

"As the commission has been good this year, we also ask that the DfE's new Careers Company works in step with the many existing providers at local level."

David Hughes
Chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education



Giving people more control over their learning would be the perfect Christmas gift.

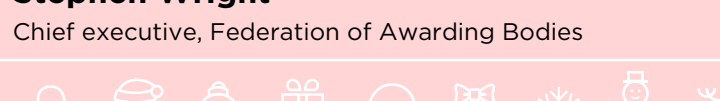
A nicely wrapped skills account for every adult would empower them to make the right choices over the learning that they want and need to do.

People of all ages and stages need to train, retrain and stay in work longer.

Incentivising people to build the skills and confidence they need to progress in their careers will help employers improve productivity and will also increase pay.

Good news for the economy and people's life chances.

Stephen Wright
Chief executive, Federation of Awarding Bodies




Looking ahead to 2015, while domestic funded vocational provision declines, there will be continued growth in international markets as well as continuing expansion of employer funded qualifications as more companies use national standards and qualifications to underpin their corporate learning and development strategies.

Domestically we hope that the stronger initiatives from 2014 are allowed to bear fruit and that new policies and initiatives are informed by experience, made effective through dialog and focussed on the impact on learners.

FAB would like to wish all *FE Week* readers a happy Christmas, we are certainly going to enjoy an "interesting" new year.

Sue Husband
Director of the National Apprenticeship Service



Merry Christmas everyone.

It was recently announced that we, collectively, have supported two million apprenticeship starts during this parliament. There is a wonderful momentum in apprenticeships now and it is something that we all need to capitalise on next year.

I am optimistic about 2015 and beyond; building stronger and closer relationships with providers, colleges and of course, employers.

My new year's resolution is to ensure we are a true service, supporting providers, colleges and employers to offer high quality and valuable apprenticeships. Apprenticeships that lead to continued employment and great futures, so our apprentices can truly get in and go far.

Joe Vinson
NUS vice president (FE)

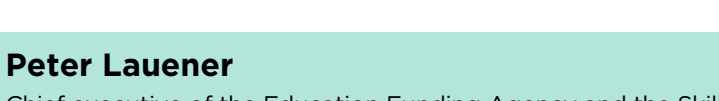


I'd like to say a big Merry Christmas to the five million FE students I represent.

This Christmas I'd like to see fair financial support available to FE students, so all students can get to college and afford resources and I'd also like to see apprentices being able to access financial support as £2.73 an-hour isn't enough to live off.

Most of all I'd like to see a Government committed to investing in FE. FE provides important skills and second chances for millions of people and I want it to be the top priority for all the parties.


Peter Lauener
Chief executive of the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency



It's great news for the nation that there have been two million apprentices in this parliament. This could not have been achieved without a lot of hard work by colleges and other training providers across the country, so well done to everyone involved — and enjoy a good break over Christmas.

It's great to see the difference that good skills training makes to young people and adults alike and to businesses.

Harvey Young
Director at NCC Skills



In 2015 I'll be urging Government, commissioners, and colleges to focus on getting the basics right.

We know that the lack of basic skills in English and maths amongst employees is a major concern for UK business. But the system is failing.

We are seeing year-on-year falls in both participation and achievement of adult learners. That needs a rethink - this is a specialist issue that requires a specialist solution.

Next year, I'd like to see dedicated providers able to access funding directly rather than being subcontracted and funding made conditional on performance-based rather than aspirational targets.

