

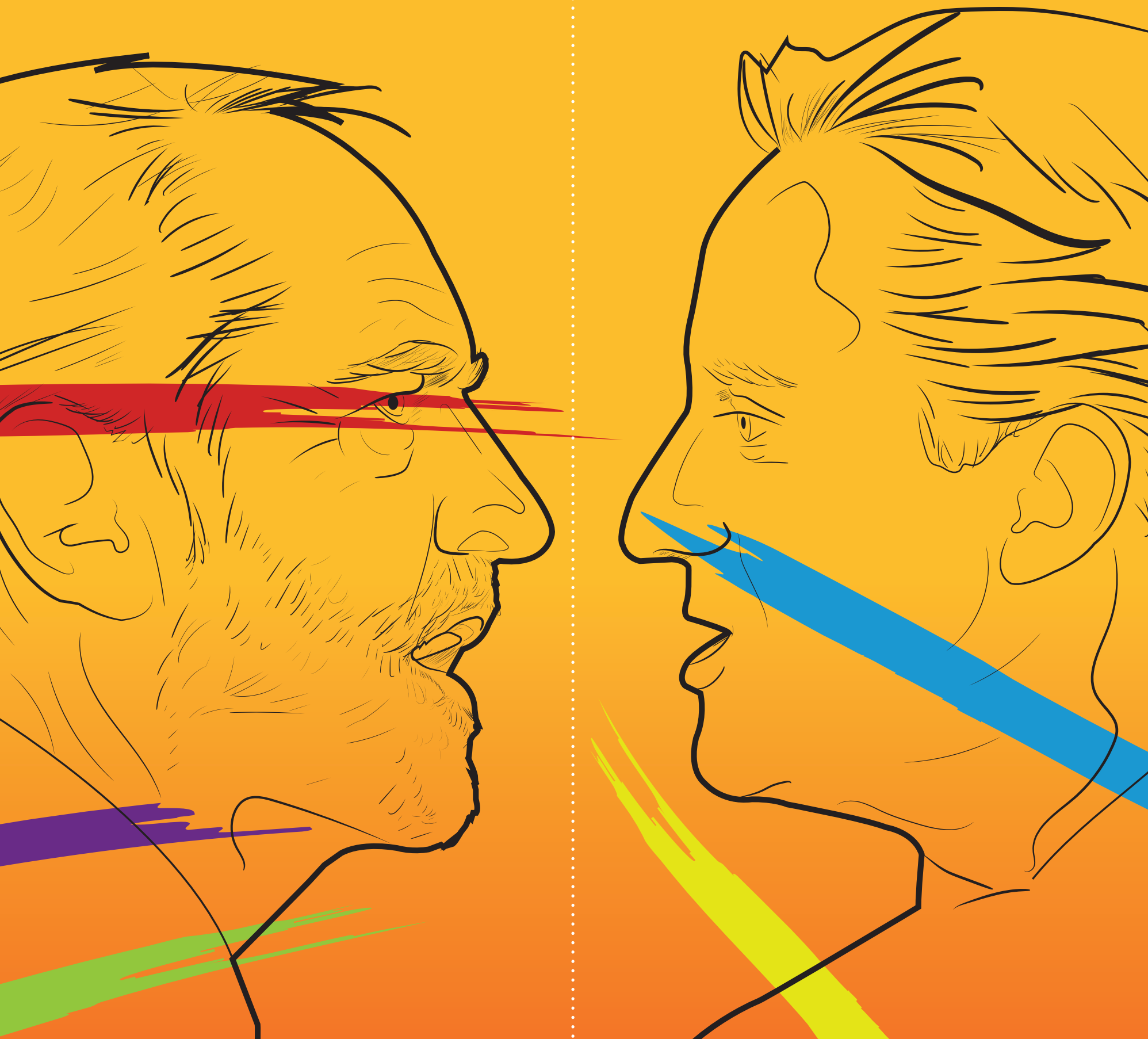


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2015
**PARTY
CONFERENCES**
On location in Brighton and Manchester

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PARTY CONFERENCE 2015



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If conference season has shown us anything, it's that one wing of the political establishment has changed its tune on education policy while the other remains steadfastly on the same track.

Given the fervour surrounding the election of new leader Jeremy Corbyn

after a heavy defeat at the polls under Ed Miliband, Labour could be forgiven for wanting to take that energy into the policy realm and adopt an apparently bolder, more radical voice in opposing Conservative education and skills policy.

Likewise, buoyed by general election victory the Conservatives could be forgiven for wanting to continue with their plans for education in England. Indeed, the party's newfound majority gives it a mandate the likes of which it has not wielded for 18 years.

In Brighton, Labour's education and business spokespeople Lucy Powell and Angela Eagle signalled the beginning of a period of stronger and more combatant opposition, ready to take on

the government over free schools and academies, post-16 funding and teacher recruitment.

In contrast, speeches by Prime Minister David Cameron and Education Secretary Nicky Morgan in Manchester demonstrated a commitment to their existing pathway of reform. The future is more free schools, more academies and an end to council control of schools. But questions about the future of FE funding remain.

In this supplement, we bring you a roundup from each conference (pages 4, 5, 10 and 11), coverage of our very own fringe events on the critical subject of English and maths (pages 6, 7, 12 and 13), and post-match expert pieces from sector leaders who attended the events (pages 14 and 15).

But first, we thought we'd recap the key education stories from the conferences of other parties and also the Trades Union Congress, which you can find on page 3.



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GEMMA GATHERCOLE

HEAD OF POLICY — FE AND FUNDING, OCR

DO WE HAVE THE CORRECT EQUATION FOR ENGLISH AND MATHS IN OUR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES?

Students returning for a new term after a long summer break; the leaves changing colour; days getting shorter — all images that might conjure up autumn.

Over the last few weeks, another annual tradition has been playing out in Bournemouth, Brighton and Manchester. It's party conference season.

We at OCR are again delighted to have sponsored both this supplement, with its extensive coverage of the education debates from the political parties and the two *FE Week* and *Schools Week* fringe events that held at the Labour and Conservative conferences.

While these may usually feel like just part of an annual cycle, this year's conferences have felt a bit different.

At the Labour conference, there was a party seeing for the first time its newly-elected leader

and his new shadow cabinet. While there was a mood of celebration as the Conservatives assembled at conference as a single party government for the first time in nearly two decades. Post an unexpected general election result came a conference season with more than a little intrigue.

Our topic for the fringes this year was English and maths — specifically post-16 English and maths. We asked simply: 'Do we have the correct equation for English and maths in our schools and colleges?' You'll see the coverage of the debates among our expert panels in the following pages, but in a few paragraphs I want to outline our view at OCR about this crucial aspect of our education system.

We believe there is a need for an alternative GCSE in English and maths that is targeted at learners post-16 — an 'adult GCSE'. We recognise

the impact of the brand GCSE and the currency that this holds with students, parents and critically employers, however, we also know that one size doesn't fit all.

We believe there is a need for a qualification which shares that GCSE name but would also retain those elements of flexibility that are critical to enabling post-16 learners to succeed.

What might this look like? It would likely have a modular approach, would require and encourage contextualised learning and would have more frequent opportunities for assessment.

In statistics from the Department for Education, there is worrying evidence that the path of resitting GCSE does not lead to more young people achieving those crucial grades. In 2013, of the 42 per cent of students who did not achieve at least a C grade in GCSE English and maths at 16, 92 per cent in English and 91 per cent in maths still did not achieve the A*-C pass mark on their resit.

While early data from this summer suggests the proportion of students resitting at 17 and getting this grade is improving, it still lags far behind where we would all want it to be.

There is an interesting tension here between a desire to see all young people achieve this standard of English and maths,

but a debate that has been held many *Advertorial* times about whether increasing numbers attaining these grades means that standards are falling.

Ofqual has spoken about and published information on the comparable outcomes approach, which I don't have time to revisit here, but this approach ensures that standards are maintained and grade inflation does not occur. So it is difficult to imagine world where all students sitting their assessments could all receive those crucial grades.

We know that more learners gain these fundamental skills, and that improving these skills is vitally important to learners' ability to progress to FE or into employment as well as to the success of the UK economy as a whole. However, the current GCSE should not be seen as the only way of realising this ambition.

To conclude I want to say a few thank yous — to our panels of speakers, to *FE Week* and *Schools Week* for pulling the key stories out of a few busy weeks in politics, and especially to our fringe chair (and *Schools Week* editor) Laura McInerney who did a fantastic job keeping the panels in check.

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Term-time holiday motion passed

A motion calling for families to be allowed to take children out of school during term time to avoid expensive holidays was passed by Liberal Democrat members at their autumn conference – despite rules already technically permitting it.

The issue of term-time holidays, which are currently discouraged but allowed if permission is granted in advance by a school head teacher, was debated on the Bournemouth conference floor.

And members backed a motion calling for heads to have “discretion to grant up to ten days absence a year”.

It is not known how the motion might affect current government policy if implemented, as head teachers can already approve periods of holiday in term time in “exceptional circumstances”.

In his first conference speech as the party’s education



John Pugh

spokesperson, Southport MP John Pugh warned many families had “no choice when to take their holidays” and that “people in some areas have to work all through the summer at the height of the tourism season”.

He added: “Others simply cannot afford to go on



holiday at peak times, when demand for holidays is through the roof.

“So, it’s vitally important to offer more flexibility to schools and head teachers to help families who need to take a break together.”

Under government rules, children can only miss school if they are “too ill” to go in or if they have advance permission from the school.

The Lib Dem conference took place from September 19 to 23 and was held in the Bournemouth International Centre.

Unions make academies a key fight

Opposition to “forced academisation” was identified as a key campaign issue at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) annual conference last month.

Affiliate union groups of the TUC, such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT), Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), University and College Union (UCU), will also challenge a “lack of transparency” in academies and call for the reversal of cuts to post-16 education after a series of motions were carried.

A motion tabled by the NUT warned that schools in England faced an “out-of-control accountability system” and were becoming “exam factories”, before lamenting the fact many schools were “forced to become academies with an imposed sponsor”.

The motion called for unions to work together against “forced academisation and worsened terms and conditions in academies and free schools” and for “an end to the accountability system that undermines teachers’ ability to give children the education they deserve”.

Another motion, tabled by the ATL, called on the TUC to continue to work closely with its education affiliates in order to “challenge the government on the lack of transparency and misuse of public money which has accompanied academisation”.

The UCU tabled a motion calling on the TUC’s general council to campaign for an “immediate reversal of adult education cuts”, long-term funding commitments to allow “coordinated planning of resources in an increasingly fragmented sector” and “free and publicly



funded education for all”.

All three motions were carried. Visit tuc.org.uk/about-tuc/congress for details of these and other motions. The TUC’s 147th annual congress was held in the Brighton Centre from September 13 to 16.

Prevent is ‘not the way’ to combat terrorism

The Prevent Duty is “not the way” to combat terrorism, Green Party deputy leader Dr Shahrar Ali told his party’s conference in Bournemouth.

The government policy, in force from July, places a legal duty on schools and colleges to put procedures in place to be able to identify “extremism” and “radicalisation” of pupils and learners.

But it has been criticised by several organisations, including the National Union of Students, with concerns raised about free speech and civil liberties.

Speaking to the conference, which took place the same weekend as Labour launched its event along the coast in Brighton, Dr Ali said he understood “the anxiety associated with unconscionable acts of terror perpetrated on a civility”, but warned the Prevent strategy was “not the



Dr Shahrar Ali

way to combat it”.

“Our places of learning, from nursery through to secondary and university education, are becoming oppressive spaces, due to the institutionalisation of a UK-style Patriot Act,” he said.

“Why should a child not feel free to be able to express all their opinions, to explore their ideas, without fear of recrimination?”

He added: “Let’s have the confidence to take on ignorance through the power of speech, both to grant the misguided an opportunity to disabuse themselves and, as JS Mill understood, to avail ourselves of the opportunity to have a truth become an active, living force; omnipresent in our consciousness and helping us to remain vigilant.”

The Green Party Conference took place September 25 to 28 and was held in Bournemouth International Centre.



LABOUR CONFERENCE ROUNDUP

Trio of key education and skills issues revealed



Jeremy Corbyn

PA/WIRE

Strong campaigning on post-16 funding, teacher recruitment and early years were all signalled when Lucy Powell made her first party conference speech as Jeremy Corbyn's Shadow Education Secretary.

The end of free schools, possible powers for councils to open and run new schools were also pushed in Ms Powell's speech in Brighton as she sought to draw Labour's new battle lines with the Conservatives on various key areas of policy.

The Manchester Central MP said Labour would not open any more free schools if it entered government in 2020, and hinted that powers to open and run new schools could be transferred to councils.

Ms Powell also lamented what she described as the "deepest, most severe cuts to post-16 education that we'll have ever seen".

She has been praised by the unions for her willingness to campaign on the issues mentioned in the speech, and for her pledges to listen to the teaching profession and wider education sector.

Our reporter Freddie Whittaker met Labour's new education spokesperson shortly before the conference to speak about some of those policy areas she sees as most important to her cause.

Visit schoolsweek.co.uk to read a full profile of Ms Powell and more detailed coverage of her speech.

LUCY POWELL IN THE Q&A SPOTLIGHT

Listening to the profession

My approach is to very much be in listening mode. I think people can judge me on my track record – I have built up very good relationships I think, with the early years sector when I had that brief.

There's a huge wealth of information and knowledge and advice out there to tap into, but what I would also say is I also approach these things often, first and foremost, as a parent myself and what I want for my kids and what I want for everyone else's kids, and how we need to work together to shape that.

But I will very much be in listening mode and people can rest assured that I get lobbied every five minutes by my own family who, as I say, are head teachers, teachers, now retired, some not retired, some working as school improvement partners or whatever, so there's no absence in my life of being in touch with the profession, I can assure people of that. But I won't just rely on family for that.

Extremism in schools

What I would say generally about the government is they talk the talk but then they don't enable teachers in schools to actually do this kind of work.

So an example around this area would be they have palpably failed on personal and social education, which is the first starting point, I would say, to citizenship and responsibility in schools, so you can't have a strategy on the one hand if you've not actually given the teachers time and space to explore some

of those issues in a school context more generally.

Recruitment and retention

I think teacher shortage is the biggest issue facing education at the moment, especially in maths and science, and the figures support that. I think there's a growing number – is it 50,000 or something? – of teachers left the profession in the last year. The government will camp around the fact that there are small net increases, but there are huge increases in the number of people, so they are just not keeping pace.

And I know from my own kids'

school, and other schools in my own constituency, and from my teaching family, if you like, just the chronic issue this is causing, especially in maths, where there is a serious number of vacancies, even in good and outstanding schools, let alone schools that find it harder to attract teachers in the first place. So I think the government has chronically failed to deal with the issue of teacher recruitment and retention.

Ofsted

What I do think is that Ofsted and the framework that it sets has been a critically important, massive part of driving up standards, and as a parent and as a policy maker, we have to recognise the role that that framework has played in ensuring that we're constantly ensuring that children are being taught in the best



environment they can be, and that they are achieving what they should achieve.

Does that mean it can improve? I'm sure it can. Do I feel that maybe some of its remit has got too big at times? Yes, possibly. It was asked to have that remit over the early years, but has it necessarily got the skills, the capacity to do that? So we have to look at what we're asking Ofsted to do, whether we're asking it to do too much, but I certainly think that, you know, Ofsted overall is a good thing, whether you like the regime or not.

Post-16 education area reviews

In Manchester we have a very large FE college already, Manchester College, but

actually its offer is quite different from, say, Loreto and Xaverian sixth form colleges, which are both big sixth form colleges as well in their own right. I think if there was any suggestion that any of those sixth form colleges were going to have to close in Manchester there would be a major outcry from parents because I think the offer is different.

I think this is an immediate issue in this current spending review that's underway at the moment, and I will be asking ministers whether they are doing what they should be doing, which is pushing for cash protection funding, ideally in real terms, for the whole budget, as we said we would do at the last election.

BRIGHTON CENTRE - SEPTEMBER 27-30 #LAB15



Government 'dumbing down apprenticeships'

Shadow Business Secretary Angela Eagle has accused the government of "dumbing down of apprenticeships".

She warned Labour conference-goers of a "skills emergency" which, she said, threatened economic growth.

Speaking in Brighton, Ms Eagle joined Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell in marking FE out as a key policy area as she criticised cuts to post-16 funding and said young people deserved more than an "ideologically-driven recipe of cuts and neglect".

She said: "Success in the 21st Century means partnering with business to make the most of all of our talent. Yet more than two thirds of businesses now need more high-skilled staff. In construction, manufacturing, science, engineering and technology the skills shortage is at its worst.

"So what is the government's answer to this challenge? They've cut FE budgets. They're failing young people on vocational qualifications. And they're dumbing down apprenticeships.

"Conference, our young people deserve more than this ideologically driven recipe of cuts and neglect."

Turning her criticism to Business Secretary Sajid Javid, she said he "recently boasted" that he was looking for 40 per cent cuts to his department ahead of "the Chancellor's looming, ideologically-driven Whitehall cuts".

She added: "Perhaps he should concentrate more on the day job and less on his ambitions to be the

next right wing Prime Minister.

"This Tory ideological obsession with a small state is getting in the way of our national interest and leaving our economy vulnerable.

"And if this failure to support strategic industries was not enough, this Tory government is presiding over a productivity crisis."

Ms Eagle and Ms Powell's shared concern about FE was another signal that Labour planned to pursue a more joined-up approach to its opposition on the issue, with Gordon Marsden's re-appointment to a skills minister post that now straddles both departments — like that of Skills Minister Nick Boles

The new combined effort of the two shadow secretaries has been welcomed by FE sector organisations.

Chris Walden, director of communications and public affairs at the Association of Colleges (AoC), said: "We are pleased that the Labour Party has recognised the seriousness of the cuts and how they are affecting colleges."

Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), said: "We are delighted that Gordon Marsden has returned to his former post, especially as his responsibilities now mirror those of [Skills Minister] Nick Boles.

"We look forward to picking up with Gordon on Labour's apprenticeship policies and we're hoping to discuss how the party's skills policies might link up with employment programmes."



Angela Eagle

PA/WIRE

Employer levy a 'game changer'

The government's proposed large employers' apprenticeship levy is "probably a game changer," National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace) chief executive David Hughes (pictured) told a Labour Party FE fringe event.

Delegates at the Niace and Association of Colleges-organised meeting were told of the "positive and negative" implications of the government's plan, but Mr Hughes (pictured) also said more details were needed.

"The only problem is we don't know what game we're playing at the moment, let alone the game the government wants to play in the future," he said.

"The 3m apprenticeship target which the government set, which, from an organisation which tries to talk about evidence-based policy, is pretty frustrating."

He added: "It's a target which has all sorts of positive and negative implications. It's great news that the government thinks is important. It's

great news that they're thinking about investing."

However, during the same fringe it was claimed that "problems" facing apprenticeships policy

"germinated" in the New Labour period.

The claim was made by Nick Pearce, who was a policy adviser to former Education Secretary David Blunkett and former Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Mr Pearce, now director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), said Labour had "got some things wrong" as it tried to expand apprenticeships.

He said the National Apprenticeship Service was established because the government "thought the problem was that we didn't have enough of a delivery state" and set targets.

He added: "If you're then to do that you do set in train processes which allow people to say '3m apprenticeships — doesn't matter what level; doesn't matter what the quality is like; doesn't matter if people are already in work'."



Education Bill doesn't 'deal with central questions' for teachers and pupils

The government's Education Bill doesn't "deal with central questions" facing the sector such as teacher shortages and funding problems, National Union of Teachers (NUT) deputy general secretary Kevin Courtney (pictured) has warned.

Speaking at a Labour Party conference fringe, Mr Courtney said the education and adoption bill was "misnamed", and was more of a tool to allow the number of academies to "increase quickly".

He told delegates: "It's not dealing with the teacher shortage that's growing, it's not dealing with the pupil place shortage, it's not dealing with the funding crisis that schools are going to face and sixth form colleges are facing right now.

"It's not about education, it is about an attempt to increase quickly the number of academies and to do so by removing so-called 'road blocks' on the way to conversion, by which they mean the appeal rights of governing bodies and the rights of parents to even the minimal

consultation that's there at the moment."

He said the bill would result in a "massive reduction in the effectiveness in local authorities", and said it was "legitimate" for opponents to demand evidence from government for the need for the legislation.

Mr Courtney also warned that schools were turning to the "easy way" of improving outcomes by "shovelling kids around", which has reportedly become so prolific it's being referred to as "attainment-pruning".

At the same event, social geographer Professor Danny Dorling warned that England's expulsion rate was "out of control".

The University of Oxford academic said: "We are expelling eight-year-olds, nine-year-olds and ten-year-olds. There is also the hidden expulsions where parents are persuaded to withdraw their child beforehand. It is in the interests of the schools to do this and it is increasing."



LABOUR CONFERENCE FRINGE

Powell champions school incentives over fines as English and

Schools "need more carrot than stick" to solve the GCSE English and maths crisis affecting both the pre and post-16 education sectors, Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell has said.

Speaking at a fringe event organised by *Schools Week* and *FE Week*, she dismissed calls from Policy Exchange for schools to be fined for pupils who leave at 16 without achieving passes in GCSE English and maths.

The proposal was unveiled by the right-leaning thinktank in response to a booming learner numbers crisis created by new rule that learners without at least grade C in GCSE English and maths must continue to study them.

Asked about the possibility of fines aimed at incentivising schools to achieve more passes for learners or plugging the funding gap where FE providers have to provide more teaching, Ms Powell said: "I don't think that's the right route to go down personally."

She added: "Anyone who works in a school, has kids in a school, knows no-one is more devastated than a child's teacher if they don't get the grade C in English and maths that they've been really working for."

"I don't think the schools necessarily need more stick on that, they probably need more carrot. English and maths are the cornerstones of pathways to most careers and rightly so. But we should ensure the curriculum is not continuing to narrow."

Association of Teachers and Lecturers general secretary Mary Bousted told the fringe she had "no problem" with GCSE retakes for learners who "nearly got there but didn't quite", but warned repeated retakes were "compounding the error".

Dr Bousted said: "We've got some evidence on this now from the 17-year-olds who re-took their maths and English this

year, and it's difficult to disaggregate the figures but we think most of the 17-year-olds were re-takes.

"Essentially one third got the qualification on the second time around but two thirds didn't. So that's just yet another failure. It's one failure compounded by another, and you have to ask 'would these students not be doing better by doing a different qualification'."

"If you're going to take pupils who have already failed, put them on a course which they're going to have to take again, not necessarily give the college the support to do that and then they fail again, that just compounds the error. What a lot of these young people need is something different."

Delegates also heard from Gemma Gathercole, head of FE and funding policy at awarding organisation OCR and also a primary school governor.

"One of the things we are constantly told is that GCSE is the level to which all young people need to get because it's the qualification that employers recognise," she said.

"If I ask a room full of employers if they know what the content of a GCSE was, maybe two hands go up – maybe."

"The thing about GCSE is it's a qualification which has been in existence for long enough for it to have entered people's comprehension. They recognise it as something young people come to them with. It becomes a filtering mechanism for recruitment, but doesn't necessarily guarantee them the skills that employers are looking for."

She said OCR had been arguing for an "adult GCSE", more "flexibly-assessed" and including "contextualisation and work-related focus".

Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden told delegates he still heard employers "grind their teeth" over the government's decision to remove the key stage four work experience



From left: Lucy Powell, Mary Bousted, Natasha Porter

requirement, and said the implementation of the new English and maths rules had "clearly caused problems" in the FE sector.

He said: "I'm not here to tell you we should be soft on people being taken on without grade C, but surely this is an illustration of how un-coordinated and how un-joined-up this process has become."

"We are in a catch 22 situation here. What we need is to get away from some of the detailed focus on structures and actually think about outcomes."

Natasha Porter, deputy head of education at Policy Exchange, said the reality was that people's lives were "dramatically more challenging" if they

didn't have GCSEs in English and maths, and said all children should study the subjects until they were 18.

She said: "I think if a pupil got a D in their GCSE they should probably carry on studying a GCSE, I think otherwise they should probably do a stepping stone qualification to work out what skill they're missing and what they need to be taught."

"Should all children continue studying English and maths to 18? I think they should. Universities have said recently that 50 per cent of undergraduates who arrive don't have the maths skills they need to access the course because some of them haven't done any maths for two years



Maths 'retakes' crisis hits FE



Powell's priorities



Teacher recruitment and retention problems and arguing against further cuts to post-16 education would be the "focus of early opposition," Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell told delegates at the *FE Week* and *Schools Week* fringe event.

She warned "huge numbers" of teachers were leaving the profession and recruitment numbers were "down on what they need to be" as she accused the government of "not really noticing, let alone doing anything about it".

She said: "When you look at the kind of numbers of people leaving the profession, the government have to ask themselves what that is about.

"If you spend your whole time doing down teachers, change the goalposts constantly in terms of curriculum, exams, the whole framework, and at the same time effectively cutting pay, then if you've got a first in maths or physics or chemistry or a 2:1 in French, why wouldn't you go and do a different job?"

Flanked by her newly-appointed Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden, Ms Powell also signalled a new focus on FE by listing it as one of her top three policy priorities, in addition to early years and teacher recruitment issues.

She said: "We have said we would protect the whole education budget. The

Tories have said they would just protect schools budgets, and in fact they're not really doing that. It's going to put massive pressure on early years and post-16.

"We've got a comprehensive spending review coming up, and we need to be pushing on these issues, especially in a world where we are now asking post-16 to take on many more pupils who are having to re-sit English and maths."

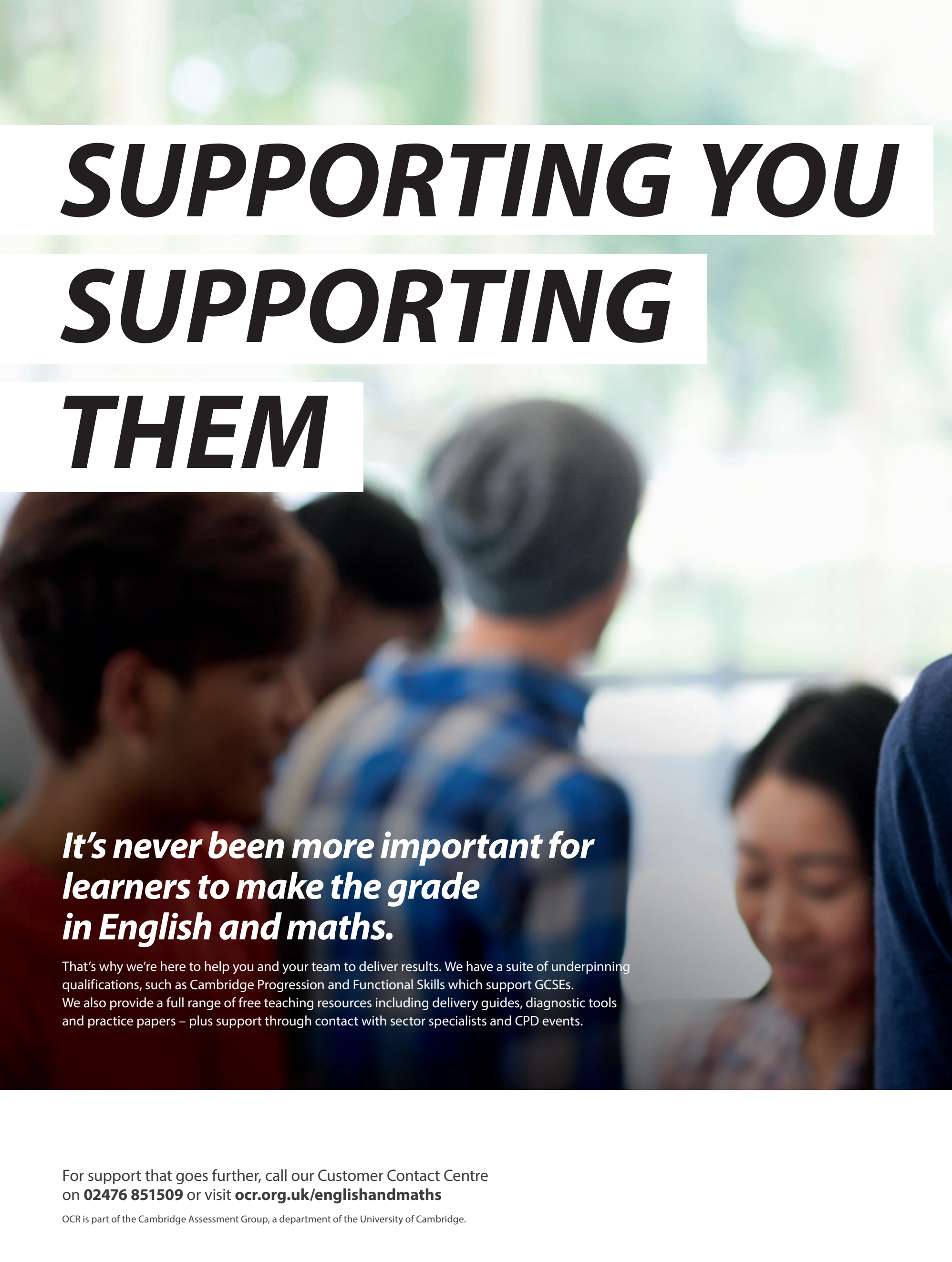
Speaking about the upcoming FE area reviews, she warned there were "loads of institutions being left out".

The Manchester Central MP said: "In my constituency the studio school, the University Technical College in Salford, is not included.

"I've got a free school sixth form college in my constituency which is under-subscribed and not actually doing very well, that's not included because it's classed as a school. It's not a comprehensive review of the post-16 environment in greater Manchester at all. It's about half the provision, if that.

"Is that really going to be the legacy of David Cameron and George Osborne in the northern powerhouse — the closure of good sixth form colleges in greater Manchester?"





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CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE ROUNDUP

Sajid Javid gives nothing away for FE

Business Secretary Sajid Javid remained tight-lipped about his spending plans for the FE sector at his party's conference.

The sector's financial plight did not get a mention in the Bromsgrove MP's speech, although he did use the podium to promote the government's apprenticeship programme.

And when approached by *FE Week* for comment, Mr Javid's spokesperson said he would not comment on possible further cuts — having seen adult skills budget cuts of 24 per cent — because it was "spending review territory".

Mr Javid said the government was "going further" in its bid to hit its 3m apprenticeship starts target by 2020, saying: "Our targets are not just numbers. Our targets are people."

He added: "Someone filled with drive, dedication and determination. The sort of person that this one nation government is unashamedly on the side of, and will always be."

Mr Javid also celebrated his party's win in May's general election, and even heaped criticism on his Liberal Democrat predecessor, Sir Vince Cable.

He said: "It's been nearly 20 years since the last Conservative secretary of state left the Department of Trade and Industry.



Sajid Javid



Nick Boles

Two decades of countless Labour ministers. Two decades of side-lining and marginalising business, including five years of Vince Cable, and believe me, that was more than enough."

His comments come after Skills Minister Nick Boles revealed apprentices could be asked to sign contracts upon enrolment requiring them to return to school to

deliver careers advice.

Leading a panel including an apprentice, Josh, and Crossrail chair Terry Morgan, he called for help from delegates in Manchester in persuading young people to take up apprenticeships and in convincing employers to create vacancies.

He said: "One of the things we're thinking about is asking every apprentice

to sign a simple contract. We are going to ask people in that contract to agree to go back to that school and talk to the youngsters coming behind them about the opportunities of apprenticeships, so everybody really understands from the horse's mouth what a great thing this is."

Mr Boles called for the help of Conservatives in reaching the government's apprenticeship target.

He said: "I need your help as parents, as grandparents, as friends and neighbours to persuade young people like Josh that an apprenticeship is a great thing for their future.

"And I need your help as councillors, as businesspeople, as members of rotary and round table, in persuading employers like Terry that they should be investing in apprenticeships to create those opportunities for young people.

"We have a lot of work to do, but it's good work and it's very exciting to be a part of it."

'Corbynist' accusation over 3m target

The government's 3m apprenticeship starts target for the period of this Parliament has been denounced by a former high-ranking Conservative staffer as "Corbynist".

Andrew Haldenby (pictured), ex-head of the political unit at the Conservative Research Department, addressed an Association of Colleges and National Institute of Adult Continuing Education fringe on apprenticeships in Manchester.

And he described the central government-set target to a "big state, central government, rejecting the market" approach and likened it, along with plans to fund apprenticeships with a large employers' levy, to the policies of the new Labour leader.

Mr Haldenby said the government did not "really care about the conditions of the labour market" and wasn't bothered

"whether small firms can create jobs for young people".

He said: "This is obviously not a criticism of apprenticeships or colleges but I really want to question the

idea that a target and an arbitrary levy on employers to do something they wouldn't otherwise do is actually going to work.

"The 3m target is I think just a distraction from the real question of what it is that will help employers create jobs for young people. And then in terms of quality I personally think the quality of government policy on vocational qualifications has been one of the worst areas of British public policy for years.

"What I'd like to suggest to you is to reject this Corbynist approach, please. Of course we want more young people in work and more young people in proper training, but the question is how are we going to encourage employers to take on those young people?"



Morgan loses grammar schools focus

The government is focusing on improving schools rather than the "older argument" of whether to create new grammar schools, Education Secretary Nicky Morgan told Conservative-conference-goers.

Ms Morgan, speaking at a fringe event organised by Policy Exchange and the Association of School and College Leaders, refused to be drawn on her upcoming decision relating to the Weald of Kent grammar school's proposed expansion to a separate site.

She claimed instead to be focusing on improving schools not currently rated as at least good.

Ms Morgan has declined to set a date for a decision on the expansion, amid warnings the approval of one "satellite" selective school could open the floodgates to other such applications.

But when faced with a question from a delegate at the fringe, Ms Morgan said



she wanted to focus on the "majority of schools which are doing a fantastic job by and large".

She said: "Actually I think that focusing on that [grammar schools] is an older argument than the one I've got in front of me which is how I make sure that the 18 per cent of schools which are not currently rated

good and outstanding become so.

"I think that's what's going to transform the lives of the next generation and represent the best way of making our investment in our education system."

Ms Morgan insisted there was variety in the school system, adding that there was "no one-size-fits-all model that works".

The fringe also heard from author and columnist Fiona Millar (pictured), who called for initial teacher training fees to be abolished and for Ofsted to be replaced with a new "slimmed down inspection service" with a "culture of support and trust rather than denigration".

MANCHESTER CENTRAL - OCTOBER 4-7 #CPC15

Religious teaching comes into Cameron's view

The "intensive" teaching of children by religious institutions including madrasas, Sunday schools and yeshivas will be subject to registration and inspection by Ofsted, David Cameron has announced.

The prime minister used a section of his party conference speech on extremism to announce powers for the Department for Education to register and for Ofsted to inspect any institution said to be "teaching children intensively" in a bid to clamp down on "segregation".

Mr Cameron told delegates in Manchester that there were some children in Britain who "spend several hours each day at a madrasa", but said he wanted to be clear that there was "nothing wrong with children learning about their faith, whether it's at madrasas, Sunday schools or Jewish yeshivas".

He added: "But in some Madrasas we've got children being taught that they shouldn't mix with people of other religions, being beaten, swallowing conspiracy theories about Jewish people."

He said children should be having their minds opened, their horizons broadened, not "having their heads filled with poison and their hearts filled with hate".

Announcing the clampdown, he said: "If an institution is teaching children intensively, then whatever its religion, we will, like any other school, make it register so it can be inspected.

"And be in no doubt, if you are teaching intolerance we will shut you down."



David Cameron

The announcement has sparked a mixed response among religious campaign groups, with the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC) welcoming the measures and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) raising concerns.

JLC chief executive Simon Johnson said his organisation was "proud" that Jewish faith schools were "amongst the top performing schools in the country", and therefore welcomed "measures to encourage those Yeshivos not currently in the system to become part of the system".

He added: "Tolerance is at the very

core of Jewish teaching and belief and all schools, particularly faith schools, should be at the forefront of promoting tolerance within the communities where we live."

An MCB spokesperson commended the prime minister's comments in favour of a "multicultural and multi-faith Britain", but said she was "concerned at the Prime Minister's targeting of the supplementary schools".

She said: "It is neither Islamic, nor prevalent in madrasas to be isolationist or to preach hate of other faiths. We would hope that these serious allegations can be

substantiated and the evidence brought forward, so that appropriate action can be taken."

She said the council recognised that there was "room for improvement" as many establishments were "under-resourced, understaffed and are often not properly trained and supported", adding: "In that regard, we welcome the government's interest to support them in these provisions."

The Catholic Education Service and Church of England were also approached for comment.

Morgan expects 'accommodation' of childcare requests



Nicky Morgan

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan's "expectation" that schools accommodate requests for full-working-day and school holiday childcare provision have prompted concerns among teaching unions.

She told her party conference that parents would be given the right to childcare before and after school and in the school holidays.

Ms Morgan said she was "proud of everything we've done to put parents in the driving seat" and wanted to give "more working parents something the best schools already do".

"If enough parents call for childcare at their local school, we will expect the school to take reasonable steps to accommodate it, in a way that works for them," she said.

"Because we want working parents to have the confidence their child is in a happy and safe environment."

But Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, raised funding concerns and said he was "concerned that schools

should not be distracted from their core duties in educating children and improving standards further".

Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers also raised concerns.

She said: "If schools were funded to stay open longer many would be happy to do so. The problem is, with a 12 per cent reduction in funding where will schools find the money to pay for wraparound childcare? Good quality childcare cannot be done on the cheap."

Russell Hobby, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said that although wraparound childcare was "generally a good idea", there were "many reasons" why some schools were currently unable to offer it.

He added: "Extending provision beyond 38 weeks, providing care outside of term-time, can also prove very difficult for schools because of staffing and a lack of private provision."

A source close to Ms Morgan told *Schools Week* that details of her childcare plan would have to be worked out, and declined to comment on what proportion of parents would have to request the childcare to trigger action from a school.

CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE FRINGE

Gibb lashes out over 19th Century

Schools Minister Nick Gibb has accused Association of Teachers and Lecturers general secretary Mary Bousted of harbouring “the soft bigotry of low expectations” after she questioned whether studying 19th Century novels was right for English GCSE resitters.

The pair clashed at a *Schools Week* and *FE Week* fringe meeting on English and maths at the Conservative Party conference.

“I do not agree with you at all that there are some sections of society who should not be introduced to 19th Century novels,” Mr Gibb told Dr Bousted.

“The whole cohort should have access to the whole curriculum.”

Mr Gibb had earlier said children needed to learn “fundamental, abstract mathematics” such as Pythagoras’ theorem, which he described as “useful if you are buying a tall fridge in a house that has low ceilings”.

He said it was “absolutely key” to give young people a strong grounding in maths and English as he defended changes which require learners to continue to study the subjects in post-16 education if they do not get at least a GCSE grade C.

But he clashed with Dr Bousted after she criticised new English literature GCSEs and warned of a “cycle of failure” among those who failed to reach grade C before they turned 17.

Dr Bousted said: “The fact that you may be an expert on Wordsworth and 19th Century novels – which I would question is a suitable curriculum for an awful lot of young people – there’s no guarantee that will put you through to the functional skills of literacy and numeracy that employers want.”

“I was an English teacher and from that experience I know that a diet of Shakespeare and 19th Century novels, which is overwhelming, will not light the flames for many

young people who absolutely need them lit to be literate and numerate.”

Mr Gibb said the purpose of the re-takes was “to have more teaching”, adding that “the qualification doesn’t actually matter, really, deep-down. What matters is the underlying mathematical and reading and writing ability. That’s what matters.”

He said he was “annoyed” by Dr Bousted’s comments, adding: “It isn’t about children become experts in 19th Century novels, it’s about them being able to read them and be taught them.

“And to say, as you did Mary, it’s not a suitable curriculum for a lot of people is precisely the soft bigotry of low expectations that we are trying to challenge.

New GCSEs – with gradings numbered from one to nine – also came in for some criticism from Mike Cox, operations manager of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP).

He said his 14-year-old son was going to leave school with “a combination of letters and numbers to show his achievement”.

“If he’s going to present those to an employer at 16 or 17, I wonder how many will actually understand what they mean,” said Mr Cox.

He also raised concerns about the impact of the new requirement to keep learners studying English and maths with employers demanding C grades as an entry requirement, and thereby sidestepping the need for their apprentices to take extra time for lessons in pursuit of a pass.

He said: “I looked at over 50 job applications, and the only ones I found that actually asked for maths and English GCSE were apprenticeships.”

Mr Cox said that although work was needed to improve their “robustness and rigour”, Functional Skills



Nick Gibb



Mary Bousted

qualifications did “seem to be working in a vocational setting, and especially for older learners”, and he called for a “greater recognition” of their role as a GCSE alternative.

Natasha Porter, deputy head of education at the right-leaning think tank Policy Exchange, said in an ideal world, children would be able to get a C grade by the age of 16 and wouldn’t need re-takes.

But, she said: “What I found working in secondary schools was often children

arrived at secondary school at such a low level that actually to catch them up to a grade C by the age of 16 was almost impossible.”

She called for more to be done in early years, and referred to the “great work” of the National Literacy Trust with parents in maternity clinics “where they’re teaching them about basic language development, numbers development, at the point that the child is born”.

She added: “Home support is really



novels 'bigotry'



David Hughes

important and a lot more needs to be focused on what good practice looks like."

Ms Porter also defended the thinktank's call for a levy on schools for every pupil leaving without their C grades in English and maths GCSEs, in a proposal aimed at boosting funds for general FE colleges trying to accommodate growing retake learner numbers.

She said: "They take between five and six times more students who have failed GCSE maths and English than

schools and sixth form colleges, so the bulk of children who fail will choose to leave the school system and go to those FE colleges.

"That's hundreds of thousands of children who are arriving with the need to retake and they tend to not have Ds, they tend to have lower qualifications. It's a massive burden on the FE college system who actually have less experience of this than schools and sixth form colleges."

College 'extraordinary' English and maths efforts praised

Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel called for an "adult GCSE" as he praised colleges' "extraordinary efforts" to cope with booming the English and maths learner numbers.

Speaking at the *FE Week* and *Schools Week* fringe event at the Conservative Party conference, he backed calls by awarding organisation OCR for an "adult GCSE" for older learners, and said "contextualisation and relevance" were important for those who had struggled earlier on in their education.

He also said providers were doing "extraordinarily well" in the face of new rules that mean learners without at least GCSE grade C in English and maths must keep studying the subjects – but told delegates at the conference that the FE sector needed more money to take on the resulting extra learners.

He said: "If you go and talk to a college like City of Norwich College which had 1,400 people sit down to do maths and English on the same day to do their retakes and the pass rate was 34 per cent, only down 3 per cent on the preceding level when not everyone had to do it. The cohort size has more than trebled, but the success rate has remained pretty much the same.

"That's an extraordinary achievement for colleges in the last year. To swing effort that way to achieve that kind of success is extraordinary."

He added: "I do think we need, as the OCR paper talks about, an

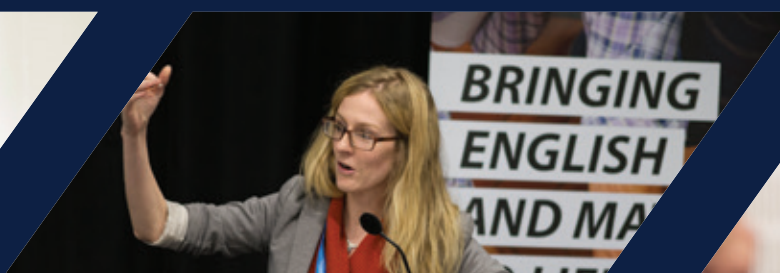


adult GCSE. Whether that kicks in at 16 or at 18, 19 or 20, I do think we need to think about a different form of provision, but the same standard, for older learners."

Mr Doel said colleges were being asked to deal with the additional pressure "within a funding envelope which is £1,000 less than 11 to 16". He added: "If you're asking us to do so much and make such a difference, we're up for doing it but we need the support."

Margaret Kerry, OCR chief development officer, said a "cycle of re-sits" needed to be avoided, and added that "structured learning pathways" with "stepping-stone qualifications" were needed to pave the way for GCSE success.

She said: "They need a qualification which makes it possible for them to demonstrate the understanding that they have acquired. My colleague has talked about contextualising. I would agree."



#LAB15 SCHOOLS SECTOR EXPERT



NATASHA PORTER

Deputy head of education,
Policy Exchange

'There is insecurity on both sides about where Lucy Powell will position herself'

Since Jeremy Corbyn's dramatic rise to the leadership of the opposition earlier this month, there has been a feeling in Westminster that this year's Labour conference was going to be a fascinating spectators' event.

This sense of intrigue was present at all the fringe events I attended during conference, and there was hesitant uncertainty about where Labour's education policy might be going. All wings of the party have good reason to believe that their side will triumph, yet both have equally strong evidence that it could go the other way, too.

The other reason to watch this conference closely was that it was a chance to observe the new shadow cabinet. *Schools Week* hosted Lucy Powell's first fringe event as Shadow Education Secretary and there were some

hints about where her interests lie.

In both this fringe and the others I saw her at, she opened by referring to her family, almost all of whom are teachers, and linked this to an ability to represent and listen to the teaching profession. As part of this, she spoke about wanting to be more collaborative in policy making, and about her own state school roots, marking herself out explicitly from both her opponent, Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, but also her predecessor Tristram Hunt.

What is curious about Ms Powell, which was so apparent at this conference, was how unpredictable she is as a politician.

Despite having joined Mr Corbyn's shadow cabinet, she is a vice chair of Progress, the Blairite group which counts Mr Hunt and Liz Kendall among its members. This would imply that she is

strongly in the reform camp in education policy terms.

However, she supported Andy Burnham in the recent leadership race, and was vice chairman of Labour's 2015 general election campaign for Ed Miliband. These contradictions mean that there is no straightforward answer to where her policy will fall.

This is further fuelled by the tension between her language and Mr Corbyn's on reforming school structures. Ms Powell explained to the BBC Radio 4 Today programme on Wednesday morning (September 30) that Free Schools would not return to local authority control, arguing instead for "local oversight" rather than "local government control".

Only a few hours later, Mr Corbyn said Ms Powell wanted "every school accountable to local government". This is partly semantic, but these semantics matter, and there is insecurity on both sides about where she will position herself.

Perhaps some hints can be seen in her positioning on early years. Ms Powell held her ground with the audience about whether children should start school later at one fringe event, arguing that allowing parents to delay was just a way for the government to fudge the school capacity issue, and that the real solution was earlier intervention especially for the most disadvantaged.

This didn't come across as her just taking an opposition position to the government; it was clearly an area she was knowledgeable in and passionate about. She knows early years policy well, and her pragmatic approach to this may give hints as to where she will position herself on the rest of schools' policy.

Throughout the conference there were concerns from fringe event audiences about school structures, and this was despite repeated calls for politicians to focus on something which isn't just structural. Some (including the National Union of Teachers) were calling for a return to local authority control, while others were arguing for Labour to continue the academies programme. At most events I attended there was also general support to continue pushing a school-led system, although there were some grumblings about the accountability measures, and whether there was too much focus on academics, or not quite enough.

Mr Corbyn has been explicit about his desire to build a cabinet which accepts disagreements as part of a new, more collaborative approach to party politics. This means that even though we know where his education beliefs are, it's now all about where Ms Powell and her other ministers will come down, and she is proving remarkably tricky to second guess.

#LAB15 FE SECTOR EXPERT



DAVID HUGHES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION (NIAACE)

Glum faces few and far between as Corbyn effect trumps election defeat

Party conferences after a general election defeat are usually pretty glum places, but things were different at the Labour conference in Brighton this year.

The energy injected by the election of Jeremy Corbyn was evident among much of the membership and it did make for a lively conference.

Our joint fringe event, with the Association of Colleges, drew an energetic crowd, keen to discuss how to drive quality through the apprenticeship programme, rather than simply hitting the target of 3m. It was a timely debate, given the strong focus on post-16 education and skills set out in speeches by shadow cabinet members Lucy Powell and Angela Eagle.

It was refreshing to hear Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell say "investment in, and focus on, post-16 education is vital for young people getting decent jobs and for creating a productive

economy." The optimist in me thinks this might herald a more joined-up vision about lifelong learning, because this chimed well with Shadow Business Secretary Angela Eagle's speech in which she warned of a productivity crisis and a skills emergency.

For Ms Eagle, the skills emergency can be evidenced by the two thirds of businesses needing more high skilled staff and emphasis on key growth sectors for an inclusive economic future. None of this was surprising or new, but that doesn't make it unimportant or untrue. The skills emergency is a line we and others have been warning about for some time now and it is critical that steps are taken.

There was also a different tone in Ms Eagle's speech, though. She made a strong call for a focus on empowering women, saying that we need to "simply make the most of women's talent and abilities".

A useful reminder, if we needed it, of

an issue which runs through our concerns about the apprenticeship programme. Whether it is the 22 per cent gender pay gap in apprenticeships or the stark gender bias in different sectors, there is a burning need to do more about fair and equal access to apprenticeships. Our proposal to government is to use a modest slice from the new levy to pay for an Access and Quality Fund, similar, but clearly not as high as, the £1bn spend in higher education for the same ends. Not surprisingly, neither speech had any detail about how these issues need to be addressed. With a Labour Party finding its feet on where it now sits on most key policy areas and with five years until the next election, that would always be unlikely.

It will be interesting to see how the party's promise of a new policy-making process could offer the FE sector and learners new opportunities to have their voices heard more powerfully.

With little detail from the conference speeches, there was room for ideas to emerge in the fringe events. The consensus emerging from our fringe was that the best and possibly only way to hit the 3m apprentice target is to focus on ensuring that the experience and the outcome of every apprenticeship is as good as it can be.

The other strong theme of our fringe event, but not the conference overall, was devolution and how important local labour

markets are to achieving a higher quality apprenticeship programme. Engagement of employers locally was viewed as a great role for local enterprise partnerships and combined authorities. Our work in the Humber with science, technology, engineering and maths (Stem) employers has shown that new pathways for traineeships and apprenticeships can be opened up quickly with the right engagement.

If you were looking for debates about FE at the Conservative conference, you had to search out for code words that suggested the sector might get a mention

So, a lively conference notwithstanding the general election outcome and probably helped by beautiful autumn sunshine on the sea. At the time of writing, the Conservative conference was yet to take place. Hopefully it can deliver some sun as well, particularly with the black clouds of the Spending Review very much on the horizon.

#CPC15 SCHOOLS SECTOR EXPERT



RUSSELL HOBBY

General secretary, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)

'Precious little' to tackle money, teacher and pay challenges

The political context for education over the next five years can be summed up crudely as 'more pupils and more demands — with less money, fewer teachers and lower pay'. So what did we hear from the Conservative Party conference to tackle these genuine challenges? Precious little.

The debate in our governing party is still stuck on the Maginot Line of accountability and autonomy; preparing to fight yesterday's battles when all the challenges of the future concern capacity. Building places where they are needed, developing and encouraging great teachers; ensuring sufficient resources to meet the demands and allocating them fairly.

I was astonished to hear the Prime Minister claim 'head teachers are growing in confidence'. They are not even confident they can put a teacher in front of every class or balance their books next year. I was however cynically impressed to see the reduction of resources and support painted as throwing off 'the shackles of local council control'. Instead we have more free schools and compulsory Ebaccs. This is John Hattie's 'politics of distraction' at its finest.

When we asked school leaders what would best help them weather the coming financial storm — other than more money — they all asked for a period of stability.

Constant change carries a high price. For example, every year of students in today's secondary school faces a different set of exam reforms. If ministers want to keep busy — in support of a leadership bid for instance — the DfE needs to stop interfering inside the classroom and move its attention to the 'second circle' of forces surrounding schools: governance, teacher supply, parental engagement, health and social care.

And on the topic of parental engagement comes the most dispiriting rhetoric of the conference. A theme of this conference was provocation — setting schools and parents against each other. This includes the docking of child

benefit for truancy and a parental right to ask for wraparound childcare, with schools having to justify their refusal.

At the NAHT, we are strong on attendance. Term time is for education, but docking child benefit seems to punish the children for the decisions taken by the parent.

As for an ability to demand childcare provision, if the government doesn't think this will be used to exert undue pressure, then it needs to see our casework file on parental complaints to Ofsted and the Department for Education. The top prize goes to the threat against a head teacher if they did not professionally endorse a local anti-fracking campaign. This right can and will be misused. Wraparound childcare is a good thing and many schools judge it the right thing to offer — if you want more schools to offer it, support them and fund them properly.

A theme of this conference was provocation — setting schools and parents against each other

It is, incidentally, ironic to see the government championing parental rights when it has recently legislated to remove their rights to consultation during academy conversion.

This has been a harsh response to a conference long on populism and short on practicality. School leaders may not be confident in their government but they are certainly heroic in their ability to keep things going amid such challenging times. They should retain their confidence in their own judgement to determine what will work in their school.

#CPC15 FE SECTOR EXPERT



MARY BOUSTED

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS (ATL)

'Conservatives display a dismal lack of engagement with FE'

If you leafed through the fringe guide at the Conservative conference, barring the event run by *FE Week*, which asked: 'Have we got the correct equation for English and maths in our schools and colleges?', you would be hard pressed to find another mention of the FE sector.

This should, perhaps, not be a surprise. Conservative MPs and party delegates will have had little experience of, or any meaningful contact with, FE — despite its importance as the sector which educates and trains 2.9m people.

Although FE is an essential component in the government's drive to achieve 3m apprenticeship starts by the end of this parliament, the Conservatives display a dismal lack of engagement with the sector.

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan was obliged recently to acknowledge that FE is in a 'fragile' state. But what to do about this fragility — beyond area reviews — was not a hot topic of debate at their conference.

So, if you were looking for debates about FE at the Conservative conference, you had to search out for code words that suggested the sector might get a mention.

Words and phrases like 'competitive economy', 'skills crisis' and 'preparing young people for the 2020 work place' might mean that FE would be talked about. So it was that I attended an early morning fringe with the snappy title: 3m apprenticeships — quantity over quality?

On the panel was Chris White MP, chair of the parliamentary manufacturing group, who wondered if the target had been 'written on the back of a very big fag packet?' An employers' representative argued that 'putting employers in the lead' and giving them purchasing power for apprenticeships was the answer.

I balked a little at this, and made the point that, with only 11 per cent of employers offering apprenticeships, two-thirds of which were at levels one and two, and with only 6 per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds in apprenticeships (contrasting with 40 per cent of apprentices being aged 25 or over), there is strong evidence that many employers are being subsidised to convert existing employees into 'apprentices' and accrediting them for skills they already have.

Most refreshingly, a young apprentice spoke to the fringe meeting. She

argued that, although the quality of her apprenticeship had been excellent — as shown by her progression from level two to four — too many young people were being exploited by employers, used as cheap labour and, upon completion of their apprenticeship, finding themselves unable to find employment (and listening to her story I mused that the government's drive to give employers the lead role in vocational training could be akin to putting Herod in charge of the crèche).

More of the same, in the form of maths and English GCSE retakes was the order of the day

At another fringe meeting, Skills Minister Nick Boles was tackled about the 24 per cent cuts to the adult skills budget. His answer — in summary — was that UK PLC needs to reduce the budget deficit, and that non-protected areas of spending, including FE, had to take their funding hit, although the apprenticeship levy would, he argued, bring substantial new revenues into skills training.

And finally, the highlight of the fringe events was the *Schools Week* and *FE Week* fringe on English and maths.

I was a speaker so my account here is partisan, but it would be impossible for me not to conclude that there is a dangerous disconnect between the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills when it comes to 14 to 19 education policy.

Schools Minister Nick Gibb was there also, and displayed his obsession with powerful knowledge and timed linear exams. He showed no understanding of, or engagement with, the needs of learners for whom that approach, during their school years, had failed. More of the same, in the form of maths and English GCSE retakes was his order of the day.

It was a conclusion that left me profoundly depressed.

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