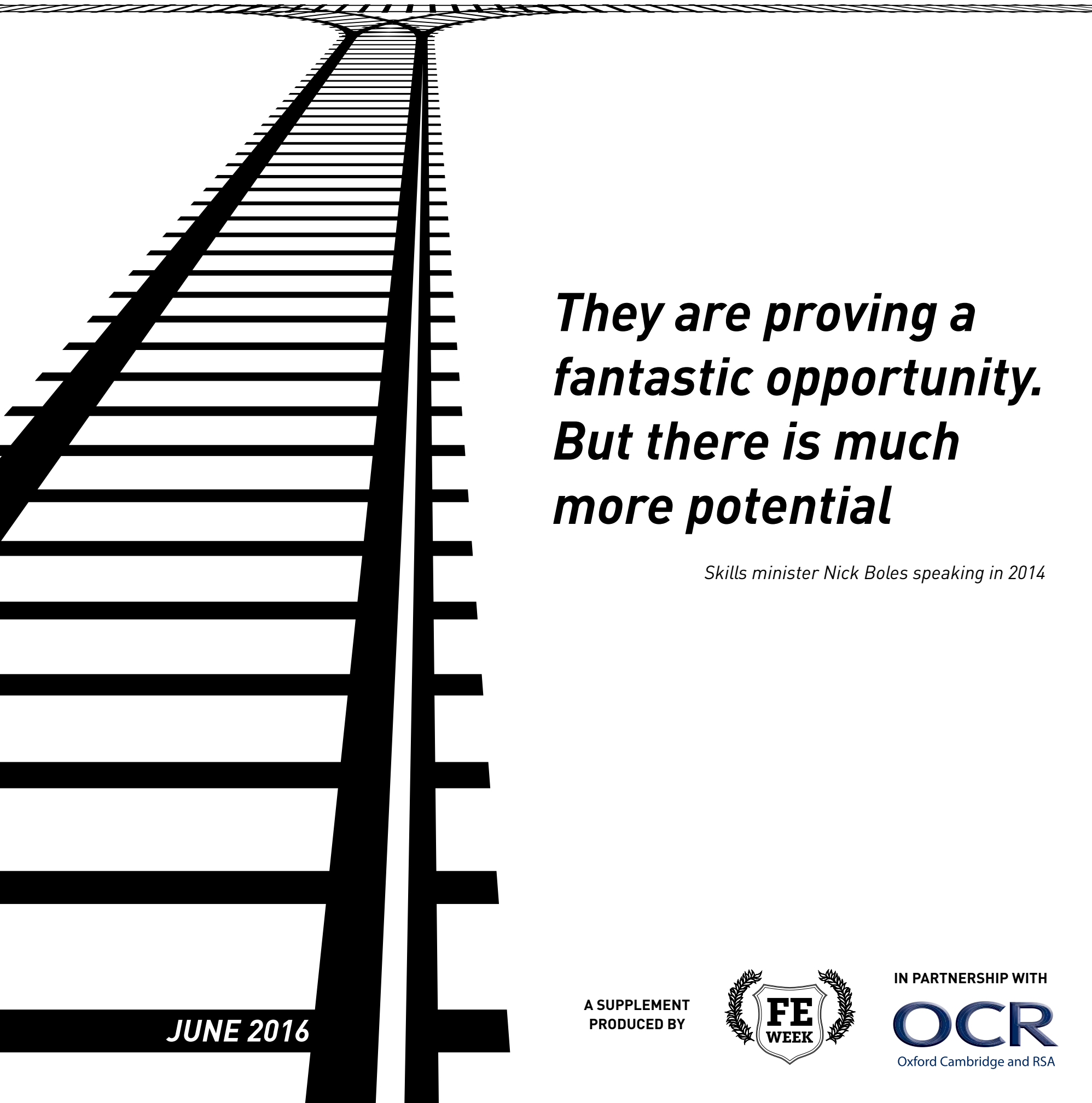




TRAINEESHIPS

TRACKING PROGRESS



*They are proving a
fantastic opportunity.
But there is much
more potential*

Skills minister Nick Boles speaking in 2014

JUNE 2016

A SUPPLEMENT
PRODUCED BY



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Taking stock — shining a light on Traineeships



ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

Our first traineeships supplement in July 2013 came out just as the programme was getting off the ground.

Traineeships were still in their infancy – the funding had yet to be established and it was unclear how success would be measured.

Now, three years on, FE Week has revisited traineeships to take stock – and while some

progress has been made, it is clear that there are still questions and challenges around the policy that need to be tackled.

On page three we look at the key developments since Nick Clegg first made reference to traineeships back in 2012.

Pages four and five cover the recent FE Week debate at the Houses of Parliament on the future and purpose of traineeships.

Our panel, including skills minister Gordon Marsden, Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, and OCR's head of policy for FE and funding, Gemma Gathercole, clashed on

several issues – most notably their preferred outcomes for trainees.

Then on pages six and seven you can

find the results of a major survey we took amongst stakeholders, which revealed a strong consensus backing reform.

It is clear, for example, that FE Week readers want to see change in areas ranging from funding to a rebrand.

We were disappointed that skills minister Nick Boles declined our request for an interview, or to write his own article on the future of traineeships.

But our editor was delighted to get the opportunity to quiz Sue Husband, director of

apprenticeships and delivery service at the Skills Funding Agency, which you can read on pages 10 and 11.

FE Week's panel of experts give their takes on the programme on pages 12 and 13, where Mr Dawe argues that traineeships should be left well alone, while Catherine Sezen, from the Association of Colleges, makes the case for pre-apprenticeships.

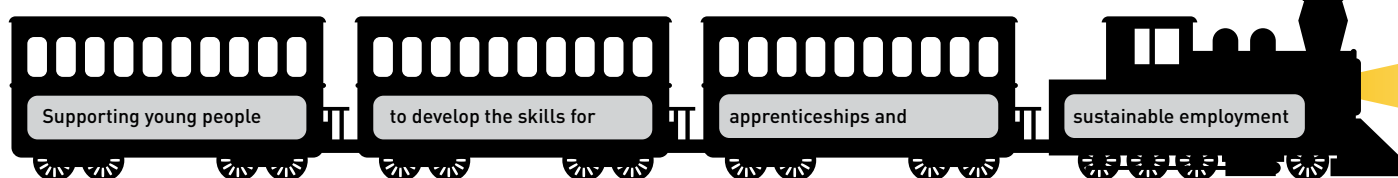
Di Fitch, from Wirral Metropolitan College, also explains how her college secured a 'good' Ofsted rating for its traineeships, and Paul Noblet from Centrepont argues it is good that traineeships aren't just geared towards boosting apprenticeship starts.

Finally, on pages 14 and 15, we hear from the trainees themselves.

Check out the experiences of young people who have taken up courses with the BBC, BT, OCR and Halfords, among others, and thrived.

And of course, keep an eye out for more FE Week reporting on traineeships in the near future, but for now, thanks for reading.

There are still questions and challenges around the policy that need to be tackled



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TRACKING THE PROGRESS OF A NEW PROGRAMME

Traineeships experienced a slow start after they were launched three years ago, and they've undergone many changes since, which have mostly been geared at opening them out and boosting participation.

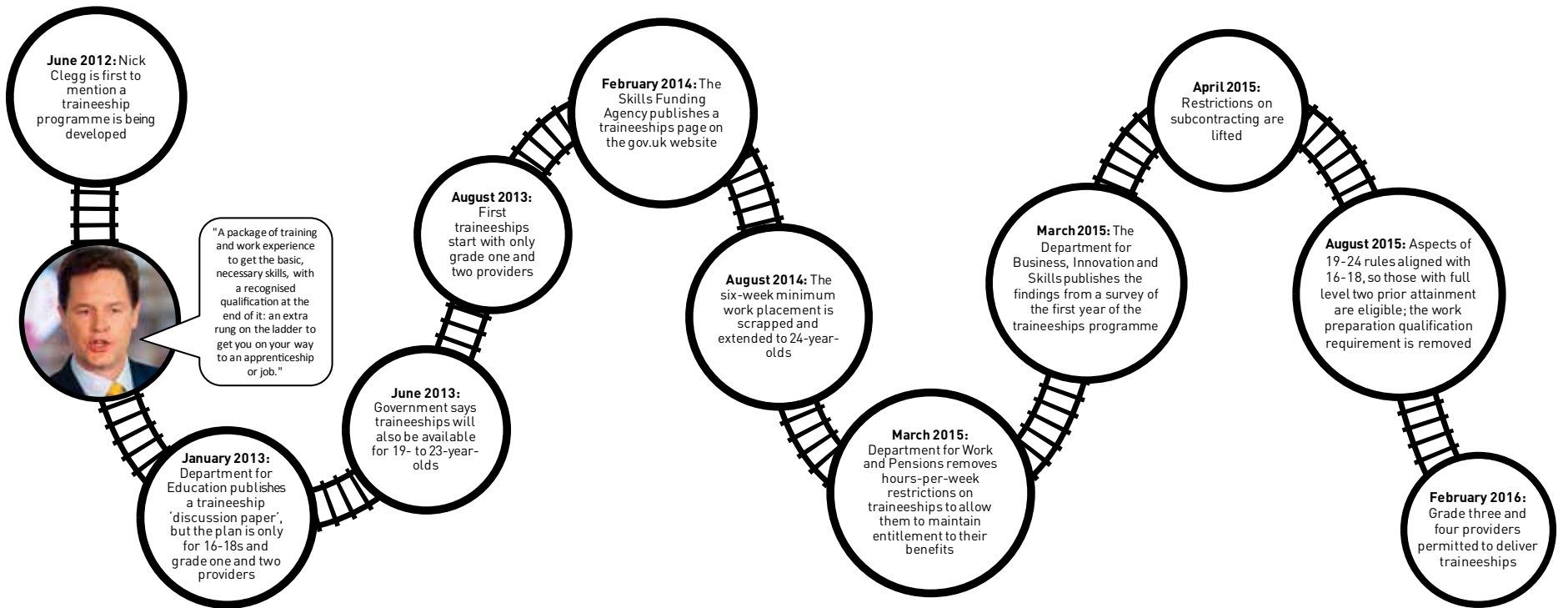
But after FE Week recently exposed serious shortcomings in the way trainees progress to apprenticeships, there are question marks about whether their purpose has become confused.

Successive steps towards aligning their funding, which currently

comes from both the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency, have also created a system which to some feels over-complicated.

Nevertheless, the number of starts increased by 86.3 per cent in last academic year to 19,430, and the scheme has the backing of a number of major players, including the Association of Employment and Learning Providers. FE Week takes a look at the way traineeships have changed since they were first conceived in 2012.

TRAINEESHIP STARTS	2013/14	2014/15
16-18	7,030	11,600
19-23	3,410	7,830
Total	10,440	19,430



Traineeships suffer from poor brand recognition and worse take-up. Gemma Gathercole explains what she believes needs to be done to make them work.

Launched almost three years ago, designed to support young people into work and grow the numbers of apprenticeships, traineeships should have been an easy sell – and we should have seen starts and positive outcomes climb. However, the scheme is still to deliver on its promise.


There are a number of reasons for this – we lacked pilots to build early success stories, late implementation restricted first-year growth, and there was inconsistent policy around age groups and the restrictions on providers that could offer them. Latched onto an already-burdened sector still dealing with the implications of budget cuts, any one of these issues would have affected growth, but together they have seriously hampered the implementation.

Amidst a maelstrom of reform across all parts of the education and skills system, traineeships have struggled to find a place. While progression to further study, onto apprenticeships or into work can all be seen as equally positive for an individual, the range of outcomes make the programme itself difficult to define and explain.

Moreover, as we have seen with many reform programmes, it takes time for a new policy to get established. At a recent event, a representative from Ofqual suggested that the recognition rate of functional skills

GEMMA GATHERCOLE

OCR's head of policy for FE and funding



Traineeships still need to deliver on their promise

among employers was 40 per cent, and while this seems like a low figure, it took the GCSE standard 19 years to reach the same figure. Functional skills is about six years old.

Traineeships have been burdened by conflicting priorities. While targeted at young people with little or no work experience, and designed to contain a significant work placement, measurements of success are often linked directly to qualifications, which puts the policy, the inspection and the funding mechanisms at odds. Figures recently obtained by FE Week which showed limited progression into apprenticeships may have been the result of these conflicting priorities.

Perhaps more worrying is the alarmingly low number of traineeship completions. The youth unemployment figure was recently calculated at 631,000. Not all of these young people would be eligible for

a traineeship given current eligibility criteria, but the underlying principle, of getting the young into meaningful employment, could and should apply to them all. Perhaps the issue with traineeships is the programme design itself.

English and maths skills are also vital, and while I'm sure you will all agree that these are critical skills, far fewer (if any) of you believe that these can be effectively delivered in six months or under. If traineeships are to deliver positive progression, then their duration should be determined by the needs of the individual.

Traineeships must not become solely an English and maths training programme. Frequent reports from employers show us that they value the development of soft skills, too. The development of these skills must also be critical to the programme's success and they are often not exclusively developed through qualifications. Funding

and inspection systems should recognise this as well.

Traineeships suffer particularly from a lack of brand awareness. For traineeships to be a success, employers need to be aware of them so that they can consider offering work placements. More crucially though, employers need to be aware of the scheme so that recruitment processes can avoid filtering out those young people who appear on paper to have fewer qualifications than other applicants, but who might have relevant experience and the aptitude to progress.

They suffer particularly from a lack of brand awareness

We're happy to be sponsoring this supplement with FE Week to shine a much-needed spotlight on traineeships. Hopefully, the next time we take a detailed look at them, the issues will have been addressed, and these programmes can really start to help support young people towards true progress.

FEATURE

PARLIAMENTARY STAND-OFF OVER

ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

Traineeships should be seen as “stepping stones for quality apprenticeships”, according to the shadow skill minister Gordon Marsden – against the advice of the boss of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

Mr Marsden clashed with Mark Dawe over how “success” for traineeship programmes should be defined during a lively FE Week debate on June 7 on the scheme’s future and purpose at the Houses of Parliament.

Mr Marsden insisted that traineeships must lead on to apprenticeship schemes, claiming that the government “should choose and must choose” to present traineeships as “stepping stones for quality apprenticeships”.

Mr Dawe, however, argued strongly against the idea of introducing a pre-apprenticeship programme.

He said: “If you go to what the minister is saying and the guidance, it says that traineeships are there to support progression into an apprenticeship, or sustained employment, or into further learning.

“It isn’t a pre-apprenticeship programme — that’s part of it, but it’s about getting these individuals active again and then getting them through to further learning, or at least just getting them into employment and engaging them so that they take up learning afterwards.”

Alongside Mr Marsden and Mr Dawe, the debate panel included the director of Duprez Consulting, Jean Duprez, as well as OCR’s head of policy for FE and funding, Gemma Gathercole.

Ms Duprez was there to present the employer’s point of view, focusing on the fact that traineeships are aimed at

individuals aged 16 to 24 who lack skills or experience, and that they should therefore be geared towards providing routes into work.

She said: “The progression of any learning, any education, should be the pathway to work. It’s our duty.

“We all get paid an amount of money and the end result is yet more training.

“A traineeship, even if it’s going to be called pre-apprenticeship, is another form of getting young people that were being missed into a job.”

Ms Gathercole noted that a pilot traineeship scheme carried out by OCR three years ago demonstrated that the majority of trainees do progress onto further study.

She said: “Our figures were great in term of positive progression; I think it was 99 per cent positive progression.

“Some went on to apprenticeships but the majority went back into FE.”

The debate was chaired by FE Week editor Nick Linfood, and drew insightful questions and comments from the packed hall.

Catherine West, the MP for Hornsey and Wood Green (pictured left), was in the audience, and raised particular concerns about the collapse of a construction industry scheme in her constituency.

The event was the second of its kind chaired by FE Week in Parliament this term, with the

previous session in May focusing on apprenticeships.

The traineeships debate came hot on the heels of a front-page story in FE Week which exposed worryingly low progression rates from traineeships to apprenticeships, and showed there are still many questions to be resolved.

There were 19,400 traineeship starts in 2014/15, an increase of 86.3 per cent on the previous academic year, when concern was raised about the disappointingly low level of interest in the courses.



But a Skills Funding Agency (SFA) response to our Freedom of Information request showed that just 450 (nine per cent) of 19- to 24-year-olds who completed traineeships in that period went on to start an apprenticeship – out of 5,200 trainees in total.

Overall progression to apprenticeships for all ages stood at just 22 per cent, with the rest moving on to jobs, further full-time education or other training.

These figures raise questions over the confused purpose of traineeships, and have provoked Richard Atkins, the former president of the Association of Colleges, which called last year for traineeships to be converted into specific pre-apprenticeship programme, to demand a review.

OVER THE DEFINITION OF SUCCESS



Mark Dawe: Pre-apprenticeship programme would be a backward step

Changing traineeships into a pre-apprenticeship scheme would be “a backward step”, according to the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP).

Creating another new programme “to serve the sole purpose” of getting young people onto full apprenticeships would undermine the progress of the traineeship scheme so far, Mark Dawe told FE Week ahead of the parliamentary debate on the matter on June 7.

He said: “Despite modest beginnings, traineeship starts grew by over 80 per cent last year, and although government budget constraints have limited growth, the numbers continue to increase.

“Awareness of the brand is starting to build and vacancies are now advertised by the government alongside apprenticeship opportunities.”

He insisted that traineeships were never going to be an “overnight success story”, but that it would be “foolish” to undo the work invested in them so far.

He said that “providers strongly support this programme and want to deliver more opportunities on it”, but admitted that with almost 20,000 starts last year, traineeships remained a “modestly-sized programme” for helping young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

He also stressed that successful progression should be measured through parameters set out by the government.

He said: “The guidance makes it very clear that achievement funding is paid ‘based on the learner progressing to one of the successful outcomes [not just apprenticeships], rather than the achievement of a qualification’.”



Age	All traineeship completions in 2014/15	Positive progression (e.g. job, apprenticeship, further full-time education)	Progression to an apprenticeship	
Under 19	7,400	5,400	2,280	31%
19 to 24	5,200	2,270	450	9%
Total	12,600	7,670	2,730	22%

EXCLUSIVE SURVEY RESULTS EXPOSE APPETITE FOR CHANGE

A significant majority of traineeship stakeholders want to rename the scheme, according to an exclusive FE Week survey.

A total of 70 per cent of those questioned said traineeships should be renamed — with 29 per cent favouring calling them “pre-apprenticeships” and a quarter preferring “access to apprenticeships”.

The results come in the wake of figures obtained by FE Week through a freedom of information (FoI) request, which revealed shockingly low progression rates from traineeships to apprenticeships — an outcome that’s supposed to be a key aim of the programme — leading to calls for the programme

to be reviewed.

Concerns about these figures were reflected in the results of the survey, with 78 per cent of respondents admitting that they saw poor progression onto apprenticeships as a problem.

However, there’s little appetite for another scheme; only 16 per cent of survey respondents supported the idea of creating a new pre-apprenticeship programme in addition to the existing traineeships scheme.

Funding proved to be a topic that respondents were particularly concerned about, with 80 per cent saying the government should create a single funding pot for

traineeships, as they have done for apprenticeships.

A further 71 per cent said that the funding arrangements for traineeships, which receive money from both the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency, make the financial situation overly complex.

We also asked participants whether they thought it was a good idea to devolve the funding decisions for traineeships for 19- to 23-year olds from the Adult Education Budget, but only 26 per cent agreed with the idea.

The survey received responses from 204 FE Week readers from a range of backgrounds, including independent training providers, colleges, local councils and charities.

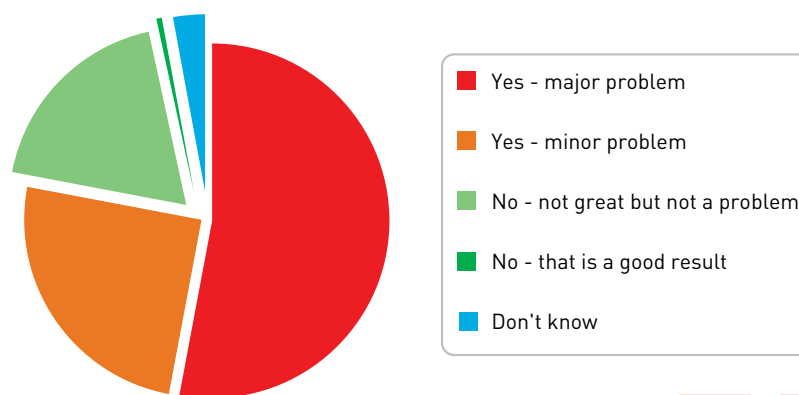
1. Traineeship progressions to apprenticeships remain below 25%. Is this a problem?

Traineeship progressions to apprenticeships remain below 25%. Is this a problem?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - major problem	53%	108
Yes - minor problem	25%	51
No - not great but not a problem	19%	38
No - that is a good result	1%	1
Don't know	3%	6
TOTAL		204



It is a problem in terms of driving up apprenticeship numbers, but we need to look at overall progression to see the bigger picture

Jessica Rexworthy
Head of learning and skills at Fair Train



For older learners it is the wrong programme. Job Centres use it to offload their clients

Mark Pike
CEO at Develop

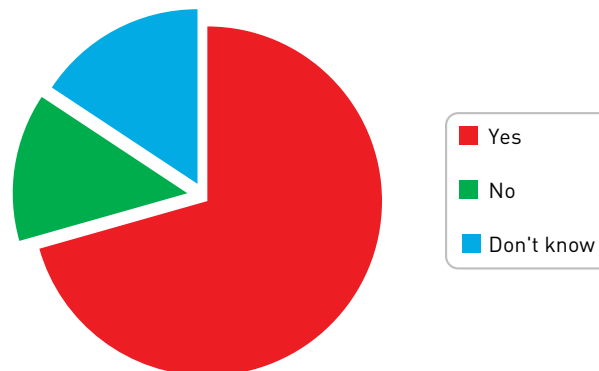
2. Do different funding arrangements from EFA and SFA make traineeship funding overly complex?

Do different funding arrangements from EFA and SFA make traineeship funding overly complex?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	71%	144
No	14%	28
Don't know	16%	32
TOTAL		204



A single pot would ensure that providers treat all students alike and make it easier to plan and implement delivery. In essence, it would help level and uneven playing field

Ahmed Masood
Traineeship co-ordinator at City Training Services



No, the problem is not traineeship logistics, it is that clients don't want it. Think about the people not the procedures!

David Smith
Managing director at Acorn Environmental Solutions

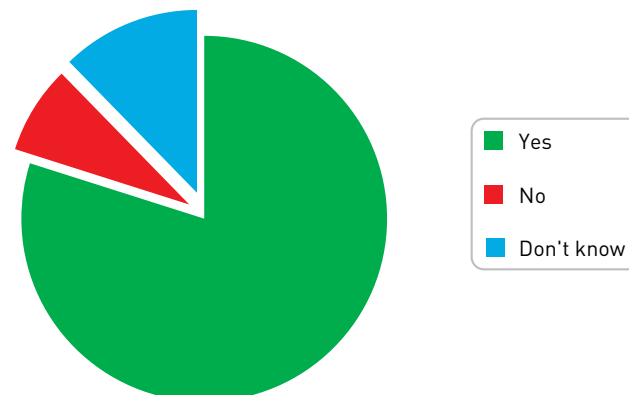
3. Should the government create a single funding pot for traineeships, like they have for apprenticeships?

Should the government create a single funding pot for traineeships, like they have for apprenticeships?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80%	163
No	8%	16
Don't know	12%	25
TOTAL		204



Having a single pot would be easy to manage, control and identify if further funding is needed

Ian Day
MIS officer at Big Creative Education

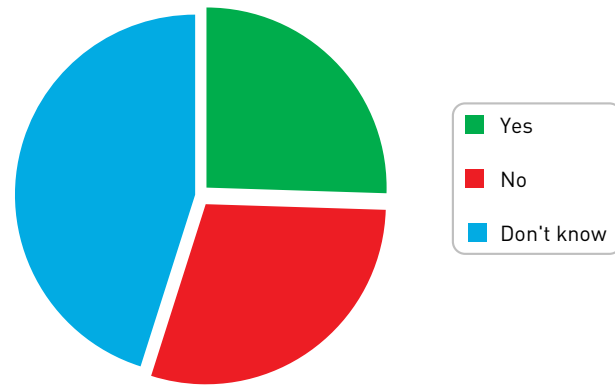


It wouldn't help because a failure to recruit to traineeships would see colleges lose allocation as they do with apprenticeships. At the moment we have the flexibility to meet employers' and students' needs

Mike Daykin
Interim MIS manager at Great Yarmouth College

4. Is it a good idea to devolve the funding decisions for 19-23 traineeships as part of the Adult Education Budget?

Is it a good idea to devolve the funding decisions for 19-23 traineeships as part of the Adult Education Budget?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	26%	52
No	29%	60
Don't know	45%	92
TOTAL		204



It's a great idea in principle as it offers young people the chance to trial a work placement, and it allows the employer to get a feel for the candidate before they both commit to a full apprenticeship agreement

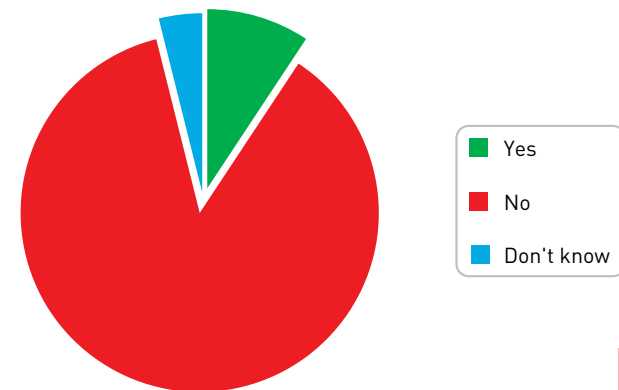
*Louise Beizsley
Key account manager at Riverside Training*

Not if it means having different rules and funding methodology to whatever will be in place for 16-18 year olds. A definite NO

*Laura Smith
Contracts and compliance officer at Broadland District Council*

5. Has the government done enough to raise awareness of traineeships with the public?

Has the government done enough to raise awareness of traineeships with the public?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	9%	19
No	87%	177
Don't know	4%	8
TOTAL		204



Learners do not aspire to traineeships, they want apprenticeships. They do not see the need or value in a staged approach to learning

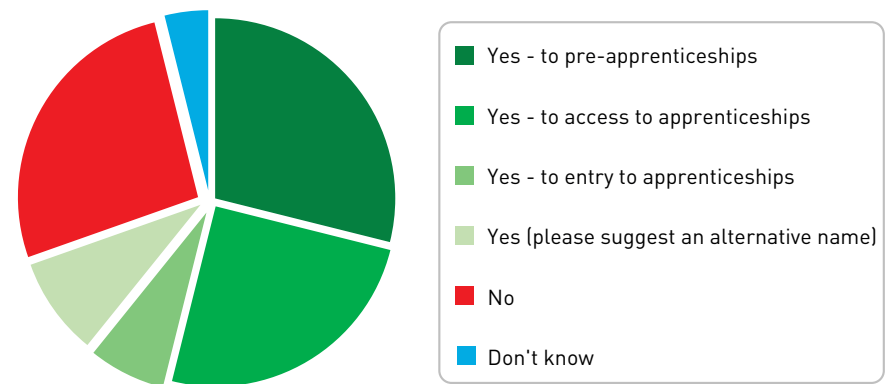
*Isabel Booth
Curriculum manager (foundation learning) at Isle of Wight College*

Unless I am mistaken, I have not seen any adverts. They should be linked to the apprenticeship adverts and perhaps described as a form of taster to prepare people for an apprenticeship

*Rita Lynam
Data management team leader at Leicester College*

6. Should traineeships be renamed?

Should traineeships be renamed?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - to pre-apprenticeships	29%	59
Yes - to access to apprenticeships	25%	51
Yes - to entry to apprenticeships	7%	14
Yes (please suggest an alternative name)	9%	18
No	27%	54
Don't know	4%	8
TOTAL		204



The name 'traineeships' is too general, and not many people understand the concept of such a programme. It should be sold as a pre-apprenticeship programme to entice more learners and employers

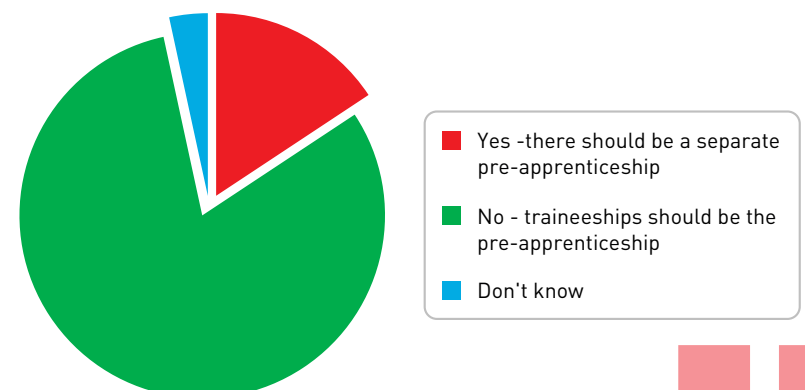
*Nicole Dunn
Traineeships tutor at TEAM Wearside*

No - this is half the problem with government initiatives; they rename things just as people are starting to become aware of them

*Lisette MacCormac
Head of apprenticeships & subcontracting at South Essex College*

7. Should a new pre-apprenticeship programme be created in addition to traineeships?

Should a new pre-apprenticeship programme be created in addition to traineeships?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - there should be a separate pre-apprenticeship	15.7%	32
No - traineeships should be the pre-apprenticeship	80.9%	165
Don't know	3.4%	7
TOTAL		204



The traineeship programme is not just for people to progress to apprenticeships; it's employment and substantive learning

*David Ruddy
Director of employability and community learning at West Suffolk College*

The traineeship design is wrong; it is trying to do too many things. A separate English and maths employment-based programme needs to be introduced for those who need it

*Tim Buchanan
Owner of Apprenticeships Explained*



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TACKLING TOUGH QUESTIONS ON

EDITOR ASKS...



NICK LINFORD
@NICKLINFORD

As you will have read in the previous pages, FE Week ran a survey on traineeships on June 13 – and the results were striking.

A huge 80 per cent of respondents said that the government should create a single funding pot for traineeships, and 70 per cent believe the programme should be renamed.

And only nine per cent feel the government has done enough to raise awareness that this kind of training even exists.

A day after collecting the results, it seemed important to raise these views in an interview with Sue Husband, the director of apprenticeships and delivery service at the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), and get her take on the feedback.

We started with the basics. Ms Husband insisted that she believes the traineeship programme is working so far.

She said: “Traineeships are there to provide young people – who are looking for work to gain the skills, the confidence, and most importantly that work experience that employers are always asking for – with what they need to be ready to go into employment and

apprenticeships.

“They have already successfully helped thousands of young people to achieve that outcome.”

She continued: “The employers that we’re working with also say that traineeships are giving them the opportunity to widen participation in their programmes.”

When something’s new and changing some people are a bit apprehensive until they see it is stabilised

to apprenticeships as a key problem with the scheme.

Ms Husband said the focus should be on the outcomes for individuals, including returning to education or entering employment, but admitted the SFA could revisit the way this is measured.

“I would go back to the purpose of traineeships,” she said, “which is helping those young people who are not

necessarily in education employment or training to get back to being able to enter the workforce or education.

“The evaluation of the first year showed that half of them were going into employment, and around 17 per cent were going back into FE.”

However, she said “there is definitely an opportunity for us to get to a point where more people are going into an apprenticeship from a traineeship”.

What does she think can be done to improve progression? For Ms Husband, apprenticeships are the answer.

She said: “With the levy coming in we’ll have even more organisations involved in offering apprenticeships.

“I think that will lead to them thinking of traineeships as a way to bring young talent into their organisations.”

She thinks that for some providers, a slow start on traineeships may simply have been early caution.

“When something’s new and changing some people are a bit apprehensive until they see it is stabilised.

“I feel that as people see that it’s something that’s growing, and that more employers are looking to it as a way of attracting talent, it will build confidence.”

Asked if the agency had any firm targets for traineeships, or any plans to

review the programme, Ms Husband said no on both counts.

She said: “We don’t have targets, but you’ll know about some of the challenges around the 3m [apprenticeships by 2020] commitment.

“After these initial years of the traineeship programme, to allow it to establish itself, I’m sure we’ll develop our expectations for traineeships in the long-term.”

From there, we moved onto funding, which had provoked a number of concerns in the survey. Namely will anything be done to streamline the funding process for traineeships, which is currently split between the Education Funding Agency and the SFA?

“We are always striving to make things more straightforward,” she said. “One of the things Peter Lauener has looked at is simplification. We have to strive towards getting to a point where this system is simpler to use.”

She was reluctant to be drawn on whether direct changes to the funding of traineeships would happen, insisting that apprenticeships are first and foremost for the agency at present – and that this will be the case for the next couple of years.

She said: “Our priority is the levy and apprenticeships, but everything that we do, including traineeships, comes under that banner of simplification.”

I asked Ms Husband why – compared to the apprenticeships scheme – such little attention had so far been given towards promoting traineeships.

We don’t have traineeship targets

“The priority during the first stage was to engage young people with apprenticeships, and to help the decision-makers, primarily their parents, to understand apprenticeships as they are today.

“In the future I am confident that we will move on to look at things like traineeships and those entry routes.”

Currently, more than 11 people apply for each apprenticeship on average. I asked if it’s not time to change focus?

Ms Husband said that she feels many young people are still coming to apprenticeships too late, and that the number of applicants often depends on the area.

She admitted the government “could do more”, but reiterated that “apprenticeships are the priority”.

We discussed possible options for raising awareness of traineeships, and

OVER FUTURE OF QUALIFICATIONS

she stressed that providers must take more of a role in the process.

She said: "Colleges and providers often tell us that they do the bulk of recruiting into apprenticeships, so I'd see this as being their role too - working with employers and getting a great traineeship offer."

"We do have a part to play, but I think the government's role in the future will be less than it is now."

I then raised the issue of the naming of traineeships, a subject that a number of survey respondents brought up, claiming that branding has been a hindrance to promoting the scheme.

A total of 29 per cent of survey respondents wanted to rename traineeships as 'pre-apprenticeships', while 25 per cent said the scheme should be called 'access to apprenticeships'.

Does she not think that the current name means providers miss out on the chance to piggyback on the extensive efforts that have been made to market apprenticeships?

A traineeship is "not just a pre-apprenticeship", she insisted, saying: "It is a programme that is helping young people to get the skills they need to be able to get into work, possibly do an apprenticeship, or even go back into study."

"It's about taking some people who are that distance away to the right level."

She was also wary of renaming the scheme after just three years.

"They are still relatively young, and I think there has been criticism in the past about rebranding things and changing things too often."

"I would personally say 'don't change the name now because we're establishing a new brand'. It does offer people a route into work or an apprenticeship."

Ms Husband also disagreed with the idea of creating a new pre-apprenticeship programme to run alongside traineeships.

She said: "Traineeships can fulfil a few roles; I don't think we need an additional programme."

I asked whether she felt that traineeships have suffered at the expense of apprenticeships.

She was clear that she feels both schemes are progressing well, saying: "They are growing; we are seeing more businesses interested in offering traineeships - I think this is a great opportunity."

She concluded: "You always have to look at what your priorities are and at the moment our priority absolutely is apprenticeships."

"But I see traineeships as an integral part of that whole piece of work, and they will be key in the future."

PAST COVERAGE OF TRAINEESHIPS:

Edition 66: May 13, 2013

In 2013, when traineeships were still in development, FE Week reported that then Skills Minister Matthew Hancock had announced they would only be available to 16- to 19-year-olds.

The programme could also be accessed by young people with learning difficulty assessments up to the age of 25.

These restrictions were a let-down for those who were under the impression - as Nick Clegg had suggested previously - that the scheme would benefit any 16- to 24-year olds who qualified.

David Hughes, then chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said: "It is disappointing, but understandable given the split of funding between government departments, that the statement is only about 16- to 19-year-olds."

"The need for traineeships is as compelling and urgent for young adults as it is for 16- to 19-year-olds and we are looking forward to an announcement on their offer soon."

The extension of the traineeship programme to include 19- to 23-year-olds was announced by the government just one month after FE Week's report, in June 2013.

Edition 163: February 8, 2016

INVESTIGATES

GOVERNMENT SILENT AS ONE IN THREE TRAINEESHIP PROVIDERS FAIL TO ACHIEVE GOOD OR BETTER

By David Hughes

Investigates

February 8, 2016

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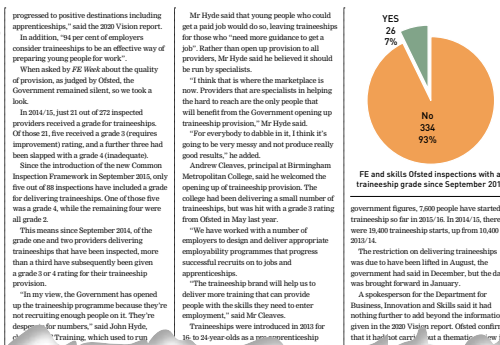
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Grade	Count	Percentage
Grade 1	1	5%
Grade 2	2	10%
Grade 3	3	15%
Grade 4	4	20%
Grade 5	5	25%
Grade 6	6	30%

Grade	Count	Percentage
Grade 1	0	0%
Grade 2	0	0%
Grade 3	1	1%
Grade 4	2	2%
Grade 5	5	6%
Grade 6	12	14%

Edition 176: June 6, 2016

FE Week's latest reporting on traineeships, earlier this month, focused on problems with progression.

Following a freedom of information (FoI) request to the Skills Funding Agency, FE Week discovered that fewer than one in ten 19- to 24-year-olds who complete a traineeship course move on to start an apprenticeship.

Publicly available statistics showed overall "positive" progression numbers to a job, apprenticeship, further full-time education or other training - but the FoI data told a different story.

The figures revealed that just 450 (nine per cent) of 5,200 trainees aged 19- to 24-year-olds who completed courses in 2014/15 went on to start an apprenticeship.

The figure was slightly higher for under-19s - with 2,280 (31 per cent) of 7,400 completions progressing - but it still meant that overall progression to apprenticeships stood at just 22 per cent.

The findings raised serious questions about the value for money the government is getting out of the traineeships programme, particularly in the context of the target for 3m apprenticeship starts by 2020.



EXPERTS

MARK DAWE

Chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers



Traineeships must be left alone to grow and thrive

Three years in, it's a critical time for traineeships. Mark Dawe argues that we need to leave them be to let them flourish.

Traineeships last an average of between 12 and 16 weeks, according to feedback from providers.

This enables quicker progression into an apprenticeship or work, and the young people themselves say that they feel more valued as they are not working so long "for free".

The average duration relates to a discussion which the AELP has been having with Ofsted and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) over the provision of remedial English and maths within a traineeship.

The experience of an increasing number of AELP members is that despite achieving outstanding outcomes in jobs, apprenticeships and substantive FE, they are finding themselves threatened by the

SFA with contract termination.

This is due to statistics based solely on qualification outcomes. They are often given required to improve grades by Ofsted based solely on their trainees' English and maths results, as the regulator is not willing to accept destination data as robust evidence.

This is causing many providers start to scale down or withdraw from involvement in traineeship delivery, when the apprenticeship reforms and wider skills programme desperately need them to stay engaged.

It is not that there aren't the learners, and it isn't that there aren't providers with excellent programmes achieving the desired outcomes; it is because the funders and the inspectorate are looking at the wrong things and punishing providers unfairly.

We are therefore calling for traineeships to be removed from the standard SFA minimum performance qualification statistics, with the focus instead on jobs, apprenticeships or

further substantive learning outcomes.

Similarly, we want future Ofsted inspections to reflect this approach.

Our members are desperate to drive this agenda forward – instead they are being driven away from it.

The SFA data for 2014-15, which FE Week published on June 3, showed that 61 per cent of trainees had a positive progression from their programme last year.

Looking at these figures reminds us what traineeships are about.

They are not exclusively a pre-apprenticeship programme and ministers made this very clear when the original framework was published – sustainable employment is also considered an equally successful outcome.

The clearly stated aim of the BIS/DfE guidance Traineeship Framework for Delivery 2015 – 2016 published in March 2015 is "to support progression into an apprenticeship or sustainable employment ... or undertake further learning".

The skills minister added that "we owe it to these young people to retain this focus on quality outcomes, which is why we have strengthened the use of performance data in 2015/16".

For a programme that's less than three years old, a progression rate of 61 per cent is a respectable beginning.

Its importance will grow in the context of the apprenticeship reforms being introduced next April.

With an additional 100,000 apprenticeship

places a year expected to come on stream, traineeships should play a major role in getting more young people prepared for them, if they are backed by the required funding.

But we should not also forget that 865,000 young people are still classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training), which is far too high given that an economic recovery has been underway for over two years.

Talk to most young people not going down the higher education route and they will tell you that they want to be earning money.

So those trainees landing a job should have their success celebrated just like others securing an apprenticeship.

Of course we would want to see many of those young people have access to more training once in work, but when supporting those who frequently come from very disadvantaged backgrounds, we should be realistic about taking one step at a time.

In fact, once in employment, many young people then find the motivation to undertake FE and training.

Over the longer term, the funding of traineeships under the English devolution arrangements and the Sainsbury Review recommendations may pose further challenges.

So for now, we need a period of stability and sustained investment in a national programme which enables providers to grow traineeships as a significant stepping stone to apprenticeships and employment.

Traineeships are useful, but pre-apprenticeships could be a better fit suggests Catherine Sezen.

The concept of a traineeship is a good one. It provides education, training and work experience to help a young person who is perhaps not quite ready to go into employment.

The benefit of a traineeship is that it gives an opportunity for the young person and their employer to gain experience of each other through a short-term agreement rather than a permanent job. The student gains work skills and the employer has a chance to judge the trainee's potential. At the end of the placement the employer should

Traineeships, as they stand, need to meet the needs of a wide range of young people

offer the young person an interview and feedback, regardless of whether or not

CATHERINE SEZEN

Policy manager for 14-19 and curriculum at the Association of Colleges



Developing a better pre-apprenticeship offer

there is a suitable vacancy. This may lead to a job, but at the very least provides the young person with an employer reference.

What a traineeship doesn't include, however, is any flexibility to extend. It is a maximum six-month course and the student, college and employer must stick to that. However those of us who work in education know that some young people learn faster than others. For some six months will be more than enough, but others may need longer.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) has always said that while traineeships are a good package, what is needed is a pre-apprenticeship programme tailored to meet individual needs. Traineeships, as they stand, need to meet the needs of a wide range of young people; those who are work-ready and those who would like

to get into work but need to develop their employability skills.

Students enrolling on a traineeship could be at any level – some will have qualifications at level 2 or 3 – the equivalent of GCSE or A-level – and simply require help to find an apprenticeship to suit their employment aspirations; some may have level 1 skills and may need more preparation time to develop their written English, maths, communication skills and teamwork.

What we need is a more flexible style of programme with a wider range of options – where colleges can decide on the length and content of the course to suit the trainee and the employer.

Lord Sainsbury has been leading a review of post-16 technical and professional education, but it is not yet

clear how traineeships will fit into his plans.

All in all, the post-Sainsbury Review landscape needs to have flexible pre-apprenticeship training, which can be tailored to the needs of the young person and their employer. The government wants to create three million new apprenticeships by 2020 but it must remember that not all young people are ready for a job plus training. It needs

What we need is a more flexible style of programme with a wider range of options

to create a solid training scheme to support a variety of young people into work.

If colleges are to deliver two thirds of apprenticeships – as it has been suggested by the skills minister Nick Boles that they should – then the government needs to create the right entry routes into employment.

PAUL NOBLET

Head of public affairs
Centrepoint



Steer clear of trapdoors

Paul Noblet, from Centrepoint which recently carried out research into how traineeships are being implemented, argues that it is a good thing that traineeships aren't just geared at helping to boost apprenticeship starts.

The government's ambitious plans for creating three million apprenticeships must not lead training providers into the trap of chasing outputs rather than responding to the ambitions and needs of the young people we want to support into training and employment.

FE Week reported recently that only 22 per cent of traineeships led to an apprenticeship.

This is OK. In fact, because they provide an opportunity for intensive, tailored support that is funded by the government, they may be the best way of providing young people furthest from the job market the soft skills and routine they need to find employment.

Access to apprenticeships is important, but satisfying an arbitrary number should not be our sole motivator.

Through almost 50 years of working with

homeless young people, we know a key part of escaping homelessness is the ability to find a meaningful job that provides a sufficient income to leave it behind.

That is why Centrepoint has begun to provide traineeship programmes, working with young people we already accommodate to bring them closer to work.

We shouldn't assume that all young people on traineeships necessarily want to go on to do an apprenticeship.

Our research shows that only one in five homeless young people are interested in pursuing an apprenticeship.

Perhaps this is because they have endured chaotic childhoods, so are often keen to get into work quickly, in an effort to become independent and enjoy the stability with their housing and income they lacked growing up.

A low-wage apprenticeship is unlikely to be able to provide that. Often it is only at the point of reaching some stability that young people will again consider FE.

The advent of the new Youth Obligation could push young people into traineeships.

Our concern is that if traineeships morph

into pre-apprenticeship programmes we will effectively be pushing young people towards apprenticeships, when they may prefer to start work immediately.

The situation is further complicated by the low level of the apprenticeship minimum wage, which as a sole source of income could well cause young people to fall behind on their rent.

With the government focusing a great deal of its resources on apprentices in more glamorous, high-skill sectors, rather than engaging with companies who are able to offer a lower entry point accessible to disadvantaged young people, there is a real danger that vocational education itself will become a two-tiered pathway.

Research by Centrepoint and the Institute for Employment Studies bears this out.

Just four per cent of companies we spoke to said they target traineeships at the group, disadvantaged young people, they are designed to help. And, given their lack of promotion, who can blame them?

Traineeships should form the foundations of the government's ambition of helping young people into work.

But that foundation needs to be much more accessible for those who are furthest from work.

Traineeships have an intrinsic value for young people, particularly those furthest from the job market, and they have clear benefits for companies too.

The job market has been especially competitive for young people since the

financial crash of 2008. Most of the vulnerable young people we work with need little incentive to start work; they crave the independence it could bring.

What they need more than their peers is the type of intensive support that a traineeship can provide.

Our research shows that only one in five homeless young people are interested in pursuing an apprenticeship

But we can't rely on the enthusiasm of young people alone.

The government needs to actively promote traineeships to disadvantaged people to show them how it can help them get into work.

The sector is in danger of missing the real point of traineeships, if we keep chasing arbitrary outputs that ignore young people's real aspirations.

We should be relaxed that only 22 per cent of trainees go on to an apprenticeship. What really matters is not the current focus on traineeships as pre-apprenticeship programmes, but on supporting young people into work.

Wirral Metropolitan College is the only college to have had its traineeships rated in a headline field under the new Ofsted common inspection framework, and received a "good". Its director for traineeships, Di Fitch, explains what makes a good traineeship programme.

Wirral Metropolitan College was keen to take up the opportunity to provide traineeships when they were introduced. Employers immediately understood the need for a programme that focused on the basics of employability. And although there has been a sense of uncertainty in the sector about the purpose of traineeships, we very much consider them a pre-employment programme.

Ofsted's five-day visit was tough and rigorous. They focused on destination data for traineeships and were also quite rightly concerned about English and maths, but with only 13 weeks to bring students up to the required level, this is a much greater challenge. The inspectors also talked to students, phoned employers, and visited our training subcontractor.

We were pleased to be rated as good, as we have worked hard to build a successful traineeship programme, based on three key pillars.

DI FITCH

Director for traineeships,
Wirral Metropolitan College



How to get a good Ofsted rating for traineeships

Firstly, it is employer-led. We have always designed our traineeships around what employers need – first finding employers with vacancies, then designing a suitable programme – not the other way round.

The employers we work with are an integral part of our training programme. They participate in the initial interview to select candidates. They then interview the trainees again, just before they go out on placement after four weeks, which is a great opportunity for us to show the employers how much they've grown. Their tutors will also visit them on placement, to maintain consistency. Then the employer will often come back to talk to the group in the final week, when we're exploring students' next steps.

Secondly, we hold our students to very high standards. From day one, we tell them what is expected of them, which includes maintaining a good punctuality and attendance record that will be shown to their potential employer. Students on our traineeship programmes have a 60 per cent chance of being offered either a job or an apprenticeship at the end – which means that they have a strong incentive to prove themselves. But it works both ways – if we didn't set such high expectations from the start, I don't think we'd have such great outcomes.

Thirdly, we offer tailored provision wherever possible. For our larger employers, such as the local teaching hospital, or large hotels, we run entire cohorts just for them. This allows us

to prepare students for the specific environment they will face, and integrate the company ethos and values into our initial employability training. We can also invite the employer to offer sessions during the initial four weeks of induction.

These three elements have allowed us to build a programme that delivers excellent results for students and employees.

Over 30 per cent of our trainees go on to apprenticeships, compared with the national average of nine per cent. Around 80 per cent end up in positive destinations, meaning jobs, apprenticeships, or FE.

But despite all this, the biggest problem for traineeships is awareness-raising. Employers may be calling out for trainees, but young people and parents are rarely aware of the scheme. Traineeships have received nothing like the promotion apprenticeships have, and consequently lack the same high profile.

We suggested to the Department for Education that a "Have you ever done a traineeship?" button be added to the National Apprenticeship Service website, so that young people who may not be quite ready to go directly onto an apprenticeship have the opportunity to fast-track their skills to get them ready. We would welcome anything that helps parents and young people understand traineeships, and share the enthusiasm of our employers.

TRAINEESHIP CASE STUDIES

TOM MENDELSON
@FEWEEK

TRAINEESHIPS SUCCESS STORIES

From unemployment to apprenticeships, jobs and even management, FE Week speaks to a few people who took a chance on a traineeship - and thrived.

BBC TRAINEESHIPS

The BBC's mammoth Make It Digital programme is aiming to shepherd 5,000 young people through its doors.

It's a huge partnership, between everyone from the BBC Academy, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Skills Funding Agency, and the Scottish and Welsh governments, as well as a whole host of training providers from all over the UK.

So far, more than 1,000 learners have benefitted from Auntie's generosity, gaining valuable digital skills and experience in crucial, future-facing areas like social media, multimedia content production for the web, search engine optimisation, branding, budgeting, marketing and project management.

Trainees spend four weeks learning the skills, before venturing out into the world

for a three-week work placement with a local employer, before a final week of training.

The idea is that they will then hopefully be equipped to go out into the workplace and find an apprenticeship or other employment with the small and medium sized enterprises who need these digital skills.

Claire Paul, head of new talent at the BBC Academy, said that the scheme was "all about teaching young people how to professionalise the digital skills they already use prolifically outside work".

She added: "There have been 1,500 young people who started on the traineeship since we began in August last year, and it's had a positive impact upon them and the organisations they've been placed with right across the UK."

MERCEDES GOMEZ

Mercedes Gomez only came to Britain from Guatemala three and a half years ago, and she credits the BBC's Make it Digital traineeship programme with turning her life around.

The skills the 22-year-old learned on the course allowed her to go from working as a junior at a private medical practice to the managerial fast-track.

Work placements are an integral part of the BBC's traineeship ethos and she did hers at the Custard Factory, a Birmingham arts hub.

Mercedes explained the reference she received from them convinced the medical practice to take her straight back on after she finished her studies.

She quickly rose to the role of practice manager at the clinic, which she said was a huge step up in terms of skill and responsibility.

She said: "I also learned a lot of personal

skills like how to speak in public, which really helped me feel more confident about my own potential. In my new role I am in charge of bringing new clients to the clinic, so I need to be successful in promoting the business that I work for."



Mercedes Gomez



JOE EMBERTON

Joe Emberton dropped out of university in his third year, admitting that he didn't enjoy it at all.

He ended up in a series of unsatisfying administrative and retail jobs – and said he lacked the experience and confidence to get through the job interviews he did score.

He said: "I knew I had to look for something or someone that could help me find what I was missing and gain the confidence in myself that I sorely lacked."

He started the BT traineeship scheme in May 2015, which lasted six weeks.

It covered everything from CV building to

teamwork and interview skills, and led to an apprenticeship at the telecoms giant.

Joe, now 24, from Cardiff, has progressed to an advanced apprentice data analyst, at the start of what he hopes will be a long and successful career. He couldn't speak highly enough of his traineeship.

"It changed my whole life completely," said Joe. "Without the massive boost in confidence I got, or the interview skills, I wouldn't have been accepted for the BT apprenticeship. Without it, I would still be looking for a job and I would still be feeling lost and a bit clueless."



halfords

KIM BARRY

"I'd had a few false starts after school and was having difficulty finding a suitable career," says Kim Barry, from Thornton Heath in south London.

"I had been applying for jobs for months and wasn't getting anywhere, but found about the traineeships through my Job Centre advisor in the end."

Kim said that the traineeship with Halfords, which he started late last year in nearby Croydon, really helped him "learn skills" and "regain confidence".

He admitted he didn't do very well at school, so "the pre-employment training

enabled me to brush up on classroom skills, including maths and English, and now I feel as though I'm up to the same level as everyone".

The 24-year-old finished the traineeship in February 2016, and he's now focusing on becoming a bike technician with Halfords, which requires on-the-job as well as external training.

He said: "Without a doubt, the traineeship opened the door to a career for me and I have it all mapped out ahead of me – a new direction and I am fully committed to making it a success."



OCR TRAINEESHIPS

Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Way back in 2013, OCR launched the first pilot traineeship in England, dubbed the Cambridge Traineeship.

It was considered a success; many of those in the first intake went on to take up permanent employment at their placements, or to secure full-time work elsewhere.

The Cambridge Traineeship was delivered in partnership with the training provider Profile, which is based in Kent, and was advertised through JobCentre Plus.

Thus, young people across Kent were the first to be given the opportunity to start their careers under the pilot.

A considerable amount – 80 per cent – of the learners came from the care system,

according to Andrea Webb, Profile's managing director.

That meant "tackling emotional, mental and skills wellbeing issues", she said.

"Part of our service is to get our students to learn what it means to take responsibility for themselves and learn about the workplace, such as how to behave in a professional environment, and how to get along with others."

She continued: "The Cambridge Progression and Employability pilot scheme was hugely successful for the 15 candidates that took part at our centre in Kent because it was supported by a structured framework."

CLAIRE MOORE

Claire Moore (pictured) was one of the first to benefit in 2013. She had been unemployed for a while, and suffered from a depressive illness, and lacked both confidence and office-based work experience, making it harder still to get work. She credits the scheme for her subsequent success.

She said: "Over 12 weeks, I learned how to juggle workloads as well as how to deal with a variety parties including claimants, removal companies and brokers, which really improved my confidence."

"I received on-the-job training during my work placement as well as completing OCR's Cambridge Progression qualification."

"Once the programme ended I was kept on, and am proud to have been trusted with the

opportunity to train others, allowing me to develop my own leadership and management skills."



JAMES BUCKLEY & LIAM COX

UKRS is a railway engineering training company based in Coventry.

It has developed a 10-week course which covers basic maths, English, health and safety, emergency first aid, and fire safety amongst other things – as well as a whole suite of railway related qualifications.

Employers are in place from the start, and work experience is integral to the whole programme.

James Buckley, aged 23, is one such trainee. Ex-army, he applied in order to get civilian work experience and qualifications.

He reckons the course will set him up for a better job than he'd be able to get otherwise – and wants to progress onto an engineering apprenticeship.

Liam Cox, 21, was also in the army, and left after he was injured. He also hopes to move on to an apprenticeship, saying: "My rail qualifications are the basic stepping stones that will enable me to gain my long-term job."

He expects to finish many more courses as he progresses as a rail engineer – a high-skilled job with good prospects. "Education will be a big player for me," he said.



JORDAN MCHENRY

Jordan actually left school with decent GCSEs and started a BTEC at college in his home town of St Helens, but he soon realised that IT wasn't the path for him, and left, resulting in months of unemployment. He eventually came to the Skills Company in Manchester for a traineeship in retail.

The 19-year-old admits that he had been very shy when he came in to be interviewed, and that he lacked confidence, and interpersonal and communication skills. Nevertheless, he was placed at a Savers Health and Beauty store in March 2014, where he was buddied with an existing staff member, whom he could come to if he needed help.

He took to the placement like a duck to water, and within a few weeks of first being trained on the till, he won the company-wide Savers Star Salesman of the month for achieving the most impulse buys from customers. Just four months into the traineeship, he was taken on full-time.

"My traineeship helped me to gain confidence within myself," he says. "I have learned a wide range of skills which have helped me progress in my retail training".



BOLANLE LAWAL

The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London ditched traineeships - but is encouraging students onto a pre-apprenticeship programme.

It initially launched a traineeship programme to run alongside a separate pre-apprenticeship scheme.

But after a couple of years, senior managers decided traineeships didn't suit the needs of its students so well in terms of progression.

Bolanle Lawal, 21, found the college's pre-apprenticeship invaluable while pursuing her dream to become an accountant.

The course she took was designed to hone her "skills and potential" ahead of the level three accountancy apprenticeship she landed with Berg Kaprow Lewis LLP.

The comprehensive level two course lasted four months, finishing in December, and taught her everything from how to write a CV to how to excel at interview.

She said: "When I applied, I didn't know too much about basic workplace communications or writing a personal statement, and the college helped me show my potential."

Bola had achieved good A-levels, and considered university before research convinced her that the best route to getting chartered and straight into the workplace was through the college programme.

"More needs to be done so people realise what options they have after college apart from going to university," she said.



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