



# ANNUAL APPRENTICESHIP CONFERENCE 2020



**SOUVENIR  
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## FEWEEK

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## Industry bigwigs take AAC stage as March budget looms



**NICK LINFORD**  
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**N**ow in its sixth year, the Annual Apprenticeship Conference (AAC) once again brought together policy makers, providers and employers to share best practice and offer positive contributions to the ongoing debates into how to improve the apprenticeship programme.

This year, perhaps the issue most on the minds of over 1,000 delegates was the imminent budget, which is set to take place on March 11.

It is no secret that there is mounting pressure on the levy pot, small employers are limited in their access to it and starts are still falling for young people.

And in recent weeks even the prime minister and the secretary of state for education have said the levy needs reform.

Emma Hardy, the shadow skills minister, was first on the AAC stage to offer solutions, suggesting funds should be prioritised for young people and adults that do not already have degrees (see page 14).

Next up to speak was Amanda Spielman, chief inspector at Ofsted, who agreed that the government needed to step in and address the decline in low level apprentices for young people (see page 4).

And both Hardy and Spielman also saw a need to favour high priority sectors, such as those identified in the government's industrial strategy.

But many apprenticeship providers are naturally wary of limiting the use of funds, as are employers, which came across in a series of interviews with delegates (see page 15).

They were also unhappy that the new boss at the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, Jennifer

Coupland, had called time on the popular business administration apprenticeship at level 2 (see page 11).

But giving her first speech at AAC, Coupland impressively took up the challenge head-on, explaining why the programme could never meet the definition of a high-quality apprenticeship.

The conference was also rich with content from key officials from the funding agency (see page 6), Ofqual (see page 5), lively panels (such as on page 6 and 7) over 80 workshops (see pages 10 and 11) and a glitzy awards ceremony to top it all off (see pages 12 and 13).

My personal highlight was the main stage session in which the former skills minister, Anne Milton, and the former shadow skills minister, Gordon Marsden, spoke freely in conversation with the BBC's Kirsty Wark (see page 7).

Milton confirmed what we all knew – the Department for Education plays second fiddle to the Treasury when it comes to determining apprenticeship policy.

So all eyes now on the budget next Wednesday.

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# IfATE boss: Business admin level 2 ‘undermines’ efforts to create ‘well-regarded’ programme

BILLY CAMDEN

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The chief executive of the government’s apprenticeship quango has defended the decision to reject a business administration standard at level 2 – claiming it would “undermine” efforts to create a “well-regarded” programme.

Last week *FE Week* revealed how Jennifer Coupland had shattered hopes for the apprenticeship after she turned down a final plea from employers.

“

**We have an opportunity now to really build a high-quality, well-regarded apprenticeship programme**

Addressing delegates on the second day of conference, the new Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education boss tackled criticism of the decision head on.

She made clear it was “nothing to do with being averse to level 2”, but simply that the proposal did not meet the required length or quality of an apprenticeship standard.

And when quizzed on why she would not entertain another proposal for the standard, Coupland said she wants to be

“blunt” and not give the employers “false hope”.

Here’s what she said during her speech in full:

“I know that one of the big stories last week in the world of apprenticeships and in the conference room this morning was the institute’s decision not to endorse a level 2 business administration proposal.

“I want to talk briefly about why we made that decision. Firstly, take-up on the new level 3 business administration standard has more than doubled since it launched in 2017. That shows there is a great route into skilled employment in an administrative role via an apprenticeship and appetite from providers, apprentices and employers for that.

“And as Doug Richard said in the Richard Review, apprenticeships should not be the only skill show in town, there should be a place for other forms of vocational training and pre-employment provision, and great classroom-based technical routes too.

“We have an opportunity now to really build a high-quality, well-regarded apprenticeship programme and the more we stretch the definition of an apprenticeship the more we undermine attempts to finally achieve that.

“So when we do hand out the apprenticeship label it must be an indicator of a high-quality training programme. It must be for training for skilled occupations that require at least a year of sustained and substantial training to become competent in the role.

“The proposal for a level 2 business administration standard did not meet those tests and that is why we did not back it.

“To be really clear, this is nothing to do with being averse to level 2. There are plenty of level 2 qualifications that meet

those tests. Since our establishment the institute has approved over 80 new standards at level 2 across a huge variety of professional fields.

“We have level 2 apprenticeships for plasterers, for scaffolders, for bricklayers, for sewing machinists, for beauticians, healthcare support workers, hospitality team members, hair professionals, culinary chefs, and



Jennifer Coupland

“

**This is nothing to do with being averse to level 2**

even fish mongers, and that is just a few.

“More than half a million people across

the country have now received much better skills training because of this new and more rigorous employer-led approach to setting standards for apprentices.

“To count as an apprenticeship an occupation must take at least a year to learn, there must be scope for a minimum 20 per cent off-the-job training. It is a high bar set by both us and employers themselves, and the reality is that sometimes proposals for new apprenticeships won’t reach it.”



Kirsty Wark (left) and Jennifer Coupland





# Ofsted boss 'concerned' young people losing out as employers cash in on higher apprenticeships

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Ofsted's chief inspector is "concerned" that the rise in higher level apprenticeships is "partly" to blame for the decline in starts for young people at the lower levels.

Addressing delegates on day one of conference, Amanda Spielman said it was "worrying" that starts at level 2 in 2018/19 were 45 per cent down on 2016/17.

Meanwhile, higher level apprenticeships are "up – massively up – and they have doubled from 16/17 to 18/19, admittedly from a low base".

She then stated: "We're concerned that this many new apprenticeships at level 4 or higher is partly why those at level 2 and 3 aren't coming through. It's certainly the case that apprenticeship programmes now have an older demographic.

"It is important we increase the numbers of level 2 and 3, as well as increasing the number of young apprentices, as this helps with levelling the playing field."

Her comments come a week after education secretary Gavin Williamson ordered a review of the level 7 MBA apprenticeship as he is "unconvinced" it provides value for money.

He said he would "rather see funding helping to kick-start careers or level up skills and opportunities".

The Ofsted boss echoed Williamson sentiment, saying "we need to level the playing field".



Amanda Spielman

"For some people, this ladder [of opportunity] is broken; in fact, some of the lower rungs are missing. For so many young people, this is their entry level into the workplace. Getting the basics right is vital. Going into some occupations at level 4 without a

grounding in the basics can set some people up to fail.

"I'm concerned about level 2 apprenticeships more broadly."

**For many young people, this is their entry level into the workplace. Getting the basics right is vital**

She noted how the higher-level apprenticeships are "overwhelmingly in the fields of business administration" and "we are concerned about the trend in big, levy-contributing organisations to offer apprenticeships to existing staff, many of whom will have worked there for a while".

"This effectively turns apprenticeships into a staff development

programme. They may well be mitigating skill gaps in management and team leadership, and this may be an initial response to spending the levy, but I would hope that this doesn't become the norm. If the levy develops mainly to help those who are already in work, it doesn't help those at the bottom of the ladder."

Spielman also reiterated concerns first raised in Ofsted's 2018 annual report, which warned the levy was being spent on apprenticeships it called "rebadged" graduate schemes.

"We know that relabelling existing programmes as apprenticeships to allow them to be paid for by the levy fund is a practice that is sucking money into one place at the expense of another," she said at conference.

"We've seen very different funding allocations for different sectors. I am concerned that in some instances levy funding is not being used as the policy designers expected."

The shadow skills minister, Emma Hardy, went even further in her speech at AAC, calling for an end to full funding for adults enrolling on a degree apprenticeship (see page 14).





# Ofqual's 8-point plan for EQA

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Ofqual's chief regulator announced an eight-point plan on how the body will move forward with its proposed expanded role over external quality assessment (EQA) for apprentices during a keynote speech at conference.

Last week, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) launched a consultation on plans to hand the whole job to Ofqual within the next two years, with the exception of integrated degree apprenticeships – which would be overseen by the Office for Students.

“

**Each and every organisation plays an important part in the apprenticeship and EQA system**

Currently, there are 20 EQA organisations which monitor the end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) that run examinations for apprentices.

Sally Collier said the change would bring a “simpler, more cost-effective and time-efficient regulated approach,” which would benefit all stakeholders.

She offered reassurance to employers that EPAs will have “been designed

well to properly assess the things that matter” to them while apprentices will “know that you can rely on us to ensure that your EPAO is doing things properly, putting things right if they go wrong and that the outcome will be fair”.

She added the proposal would be better value for money as Ofqual would not charge for EQA – it would be paid for by the government in full.

Her eight-point plan was as follows:

**1) Do not expect any change from Ofqual in regards to what makes “credible and capable” EPAOs**

Collier insisted the regulator will ensure that EPAOs have “the confidence to design and deliver valid and reliable assessments,” with checks to take place with regard to robustness, finances and governance.

**2) Ofqual appreciates that EPAOs “come in all shapes and sizes”**

She stated that Ofqual understands employers want diversity and occupational experts, citing examples of the recognition of standards in sales, finance as well as professional development in the last year.

“The bar is high but, if you can demonstrate you have what it takes, it is entirely achievable and we want you to be successful.”

**3) Expect Ofqual to examine “exactly” how EPAs are being delivered**

Assessment materials will be scrutinised to check EPAOs have interpreted the standard correctly and designed with “sufficiently valid” materials.



**4) Do not expect the body to treat an EPA as if it were a GCSE**

Collier said there are “a whole range of valid assessment methods” available to assess occupational competence, including practical observations, showcases and professional discussions.

She added Ofqual was “flexible enough” to regulate using different approaches.

**5) But expect Ofqual to regulate EPAs “with the same seriousness and focus” as GCSEs**

Collier claimed the regulator had put a “bespoke set of rules” in place and that Ofqual also draws on industry.

**6) Expect Ofqual to take a “risk-based approach”**

Collier called this an “established, evidentially proven method” of regulation and assurance. She added: “It gets us to focus our efforts on where we have more concern and that reduces the burden on

the system.” For example, Ofqual are currently undertaking a “deep dive” into how EPAOs are operationalising requirements of assessment plans.

**7) Ofqual will continue to work with other government agencies**

These include the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the IfATE, OfS and Ofsted.

“Each and every organisation plays an important part in the apprenticeship and EQA system,” Collier said.

**8) Also expect Ofqual to work “extremely closely” with employers and the professional bodies**

The chief regulator concluded the plan by promising to receive “input” from trailblazer groups and to take feedback on how Ofqual’s approach is working.

In signing off her speech, Collier said: “By taking a regulated, collaborative and simplified approach to EQA, we can deliver a better outcome”.





# The 'final big piece' of the apprenticeship reform journey

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**M**oving small businesses on to the digital apprenticeship service will enable the Education and Skills Funding Agency to be more "responsive to employer demand", Keith Smith told conference.

The director of apprenticeships in the agency said the transition will also increase transparency on funding so that employers are "better informed" on the levels of public investment in apprentices in their businesses.

As announced last week, all apprenticeship starts will be managed through the government's digital apprenticeship service from November 1, 2020.

It will bring an end to provider funding allocations, secured through a procurement process, being used to train apprentices with small non-levy-paying businesses.

Only larger employers with an annual total pay bill of over £3 million who pay the

apprenticeship levy can draw down funding for an unlimited number of starts from the online service.

Smith said the move will be the "final big piece of our [apprenticeship reform] journey together".

"What we've been doing is to really finish this reform journey by making sure employers of all sizes have the same opportunities, have the same control, and can actually demand from us together a quality apprenticeship need," he told delegates.

"So this year, we've started to roll out the apprenticeship service for small businesses. That's gone live publicly in January.

"We've been doing a lot of really hard work, about understanding what employers have been telling us and using the apprenticeship levy system and actually designing it specifically for small businesses.

"That does mean some of the features are the same. But some are very different. We put together some sort of early testing controls. So again, I've heard some conversations about the cap on

three apprentices. Those were designed specifically to make sure that we can test the system in a live panel scale."

Smith said the ESFA's job is to make the change "look easy" but, "of course, behind the scenes, they're far from easy, and they involve lots of technology" – and that is the reason they're scaling up the system over a transitional period.

"None of us wants to be part of a system that doesn't get the really best experience to employers," he added.

"Employers of all sizes really deserve that. So those things we will review. But the important thing is that by autumn this year we will be completely out of provider contracts and completely operating a system online and a new digital system.

"We think it will bring huge, important benefits. And of course for us, that does mean we have to pay real attention to the way we deliver our programmes to employers."

Smith then told conference the ESFA is getting "some really interesting data" back from employers and apprentices about their satisfaction levels, and about how they

are feeling the shift from apprenticeship frameworks into standards.

He didn't provide figures but said: "It is fair to say there is work we must do to understand how to put together high-quality programmes. Apprenticeship standards don't just tell you how to deliver something: it requires you, listening to the voice of business, to put together programmes that are responsive and will drive quality."



Keith Smith

# Panel: All subcontractors should be inspected by Ofsted

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**O**fsted should inspect all subcontractors, a panel of sector leaders agreed on the first day of the conference.

FE Week editor Nick Linford, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe, Learning Curve Group chief executive Brenda McLeish, and Exeter College principal John Laramy addressed delegates amid a government consultation on strengthening subcontracting rules.

The consultation, which is running until March 17, is asking whether to bulk up controls on the volume and value of provision that can be subcontracted by a prime provider; and if the aggregate value of a subcontractor's delivery exceeds more than £3 million of ESFA-funded provision, the agency should refer them to Ofsted for a full inspection.

Laramy thought "all of us want high-quality provision with checks from Ofsted so we know and the public know that money is being well spent".

Linford agreed with him "entirely" as he

has given the watchdog "a very hard time for many years" for having "backed off and said we only inspect following funding, and subcontracting is the problem of someone else. They recognise that's not sustainable now."

Ofsted launched its own research into subcontracting in November, with the intention of carrying out pre-arranged visits this autumn to a variety of subcontractors that have contracts with providers who have been recently inspected.

The support for Ofsted inspecting subcontractors was echoed by McLeish, who thinks "if you are receiving public funding to deliver education you should be inspected, 100 per cent".

One area where the panel diverged was over the question of whether funding should be given directly to all providers.

Linford wondered what would happen if the subcontractor was given 100 per cent of funding by the ESFA – "would the sector need subcontracting?"

But Mark Dawe said this would mean a lot of grant-funded organisations would lose a "chunk" of money, and if there was a proper set of rules laid out, the ESFA and Ofsted



Nick Linford, Mark Dawe, Brenda McLeish and John Laramy

could monitor it and management fees ought to be capped at 20 per cent.

Laramy said the priority should be getting as much of the funding to the frontline, and if subcontracting is a barrier to that "why not make it direct?"

"It shouldn't ever be a financial transaction; it should be something done on a values basis to make a difference to a locality."

On the ESFA's proposal that, as a "rule of thumb", subcontracting partners should be no more than one hour away from the prime contractor by car, Linford said the agency has a valid point that the further away a

subcontractor is geographically, or whether provision is delivered on evenings or at weekends, oversight of the provision "is not as strong as it would be if it was more locally delivered".

"It should be local," Laramy argued. But it should not be as arbitrary as a distance, it should be "more of a values conversation" and "the values the agency wants are those of working locally and making a difference to the community".

"If we start going down the arbitrary route of an hour, I think we get ourselves caught up because we don't focus on the quality of education."



# Milton and Marsden ponder their past roles

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Former skills minister Anne Milton and former shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden sat down on the last day of conference to reminisce and give their guidance on what ought to happen next in apprenticeships.

The pair discussed their time in office with host Kirsty Wark, who started by asking Marsden if he regretted backing Jeremy Corbyn as Labour's leader.

"No," he replied, after having nominated Corbyn for the leadership contest in 2015 because he had spoken in support of lifelong learning, a cause Marsden said he has pursued for 15 years.

FE Week editor Nick Linford had spoken immediately before the two came on and said government had realised it can no longer afford to fund all apprenticeships, so a "mature" sector had to be "at the heart of a debate" about what public money should prioritise.

Marsden said he had been flagging that up for the past two to three years.

Before becoming shadow minister, he



Anne Milton and Gordon Marsden

had sat on the education and employment committee when it was looking at Train to Gain – which collapsed in 2010 and, he said, came under "precisely the same sorts of criticisms about rebadging that we are having about the apprenticeship levy".

Wark then asked Milton if she regretted resigning as skills minister over the threat of a no-deal Brexit, to which she replied: "Walking away from the ministerial job I really loved was quite hard.

"I always said it was the best job of

government and it was an area I really cared about. But there was a bigger issue at stake and I felt quite strongly about it."

She admitted her chances of winning her Guildford constituency at the last general election after losing the Conservative whip were "very small" – she ended up winning over 4,000 votes and coming fourth as an independent MP.

Milton said she did not miss much about government as the last year was "pretty bruising", after receiving death threats

and infighting within the Conservative Party, but the high point was "meeting recipients of an apprenticeship who had otherwise not done it".

"If we care about skills, you've got to put your money where your mouth is," she said.

Milton protested she had spoken about certain restrictions, like a pre-apprenticeship salary cap, while she was in office.

Gordon said the discussion needed to go back to "first principles" – what are apprenticeships there to do? What are colleges there to do? What are small employers there to do?

"Obviously they're there to provide employment, but what are the outcomes for those people?"

"Government has never articulated a vision for FE," Milton said, but making ad-hoc decisions about the future of programmes "is not the way to have a peaceful system".

Wark wrapped up by asking the two who their favourite ever education secretary and prime minister are.

Milton said as a mother of four children she "doesn't have favourites, but they are all good in their own way".

Wark asked if that also goes for Boris Johnson, to which Milton answered: "I couldn't possibly comment."

Marsden picked Angela Rayner for his favourite shadow education secretary as she "has got the grasp of the whole area". His favourite Labour leader is former prime minister Clement Attlee, who led a Labour government from 1945 to 1951.

## WorldSkills UK boss 'overwhelmed' by Back A Bid support

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WorldSkills UK's boss used his conference speech to give a "big thank you" for the "overwhelming" support his organisation had received towards bringing the international skills Olympics to the UK.

After Neil Bentley-Gockmann told FE Week in January his organisation was "interested in exploring a bid", this newspaper launched the Back A Bid campaign to gauge sector backing for hosting in 2027.

On the second day of AAC, the WorldSkills UK chief executive said after expressions of support from the likes of shadow FE minister Emma Hardy, Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman, and City & Guilds' interim chief executive Kirstie Donnelly, he will be meeting with education secretary Gavin Williamson to discuss the potential bid this week.

Bentley-Gockmann will be emphasising to Williamson that "we, as a sector, are

interested in the UK hosting WorldSkills not for the glitz", but to use it as a platform for "global Britain" and to show investors "we are all developing the skills our economy needs and helping more and more young people succeed in working life".

When quizzed by conference presenter Kirsty Wark about which competition they would be aiming for, Bentley-Gockmann confirmed they are aiming to host the one in 2027.

The next competition, in 2021, is set to be held in Shanghai; while the following one, in 2023, it will be held in Lyon.

On whether the bid would not just be centred in the south east of England, Bentley-Gockmann said they were "conscious" of location, as they are a "UK-wide organisation" and "we've got to make sure that wherever we bid to host, the whole of the UK is part of that bid".

The WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, being run for three years in partnership with awarding body NCFE, was also brought up by Bentley-Gockmann, who said this, the "first of its kind in the UK", would use his organisation's expertise in training

young people up to help create a new cadre of "world-class educators".

After registration for the WorldSkills UK skills competitions opened on Monday, which gives young people the chance to represent the UK at the Lyon tournament, Bentley-Gockmann asked the audience to encourage as many young apprentices "as possible" to get involved.

Immediately after his speech, he was joined on stage by City & Guilds interim managing director Kirstie Donnelly to present a BBC clip from 1961 featuring Prince Philip, the former president of City & Guilds, talking about a national apprenticeship week.

He picked up on the idea while in Australia, where a similar event saw prizes being given to the best apprentices to give them "some feeling they were important to the community".

"The object is to induce the parents and the teachers and children to find out about the possibilities of technical training.

"In the future, I think it's going to be more and more necessary we make the best use of technically trained people. I don't think we

can continue to rely on unskilled labour," the prince said.

"The more we can induce people to at least prepare themselves for the chance to work in technically-trained occupations the better."

Donnelly linked his comments to her support for bringing WorldSkills to the UK, saying it would "bring the element of competition Prince Philip was talking about".



Dr Neil Bentley-Gockmann OBE

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# Learning and Work Institute seeks to ease levy budget pressure

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**A**n extra £900 million needs to be spent on apprenticeships to “bridge the funding gap”, according to the Learning and Work Institute (LWI).

In a workshop entitled Where Next For The Levy?, the research organisation called for apprenticeships for 16- to 18-year-olds to be fully funded from the core Department for Education budget (as with A-levels), at a cost of £400 million.

An additional £150 million should then be directed specifically towards small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs), while increased employer contributions for higher level apprenticeships for those aged 25 and over, at an estimated cost of £318 million, should be introduced.

The proposals follow warnings from both the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education and the National Audit Office that the apprenticeship budget is at risk of being overspent.

All of the options being tabled to prevent it from going bust from sector leaders, including further public spending, increasing the levy, expanding it to all employers or restricting spend based on age, level or salary, would be “deeply unpopular” with some people, according to Joe Dromey, deputy director of research and development at LWI.

He added that the suggestion of co-payment by employers may result in “the most unhappiness”, but the LWI believes half of the cost for a higher apprenticeship should be from outside the levy fund, as should three quarters of the cost for a degree apprenticeship.

Dromey said it was worth noting that this would leave most apprentices aged 25 and over unaffected because most of them are on level 2 and 3 programmes, while higher and degree apprenticeships for younger adults would still be fully funded out of the levy.

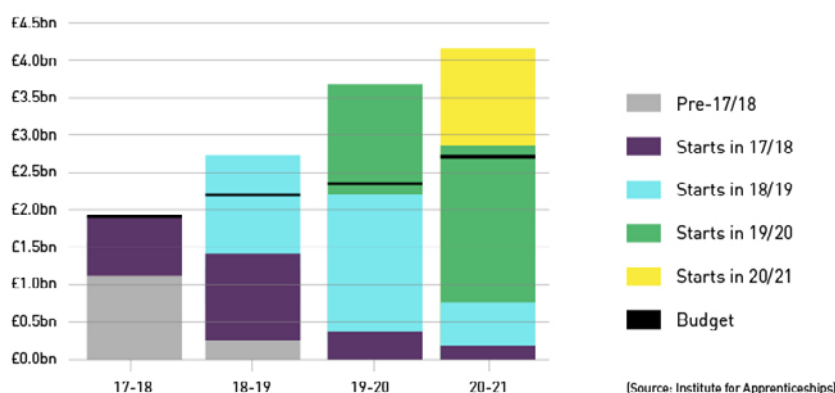
“What that would do is take some of the pressure out of the apprenticeship levy budget,” he continued.



Joe Dromey

## BUT – busting the budget...

Yearly cost of starts by year of start, 17/18-20/21



## Our recommendations for bridging the gap

Figure 5: Proposed apprenticeship changes



In response to a question on age discrimination, Dromey admitted the proposal could “cause issues” because there would be different rules in place for people of different ages.

**“A lot of levy payers are feeling like they’re not getting value out of the system”**

Moreover, as a result of claims that the SME budget is being “squeezed” at the moment, with providers having to turn some of those that want to recruit apprentices away, the LWI suggested extra funding could be put into a non-levy tender.

Dromey said the institute’s main recommendations could be implemented in “different mixes”. It is “not completely wedded to these proposals” and their aim was to set out some of the options “in the hope that the chancellor and the secretary of state recognise the challenge and do something about it at the upcoming budget”.

However, due to the amount of

competing areas for public funding after a decade of austerity, as well as the government’s strict fiscal and taxation rules, he claimed the chancellor will “probably be wary of plugging the gap with too much public funding”.

In response to further questions, Dromey said increasing the requirement for fee-paying SMEs could be looked at as the institute does not believe the reduction from 10 to 5 per cent is a “big barrier” in recruitment.

Another audience member queried government claims of levy underspend and blamed a lack of transparency, preferring it to be called a “tax”.

Dromey agreed that “a lot of levy payers are feeling like they’re not getting value out of the system” but said that, at the same time, “employers are spending much more than the government had forecast of their levy”.

He also criticised the government for “rowing back” on telling employers they can spend the levy as they wished, with many currently using it on existing staff and older workers “to meet the skills gap that they have”.

Earlier in the talk, Emily Jones, LWI’s head of research, said the budget was at risk despite a reduced number of starts, due to a shift towards the “far more expensive” higher and degree apprenticeships as well as the increased cost of apprenticeship standards.



# IfATE funding consultation

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The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education ran delegates through their consultation on setting funding rates during a workshop at conference.

Last week, a new model for setting apprenticeship funding rates for standards was put forward by IfATE based on three models: core method, core with sector subject weighting, and core with employer input.

IfATE's deputy director for funding Anna West, said in the Monday workshop they welcomed people's views on the new approach, which they intend to launch over the summer.

An impact assessment, published alongside the new models, showed funding rates could be cut by as much as almost half.

West stressed this was an "interim" impact assessment, so its findings should be taken "with a pinch of salt".

Their proposals were constrained by certain factors, she admitted: as funding bands were a single numerical value assigned to an apprenticeship, they cannot account for cost variations.

"What we've tried to do to recognise those differences is use averages, and most of you have agreed that is the fairest way we can do it – but I accept that means the outcome is not perfect for every single apprentice."

She said they had tried to make the proposed approach "absolutely, 100 per cent transparent," by setting out every calculation. IfATE has, in the past, faced

criticism for a lack of openness in its funding band decisions.

West said the "core model" of the proposed framework was designed to be "easy to understand" and to be more flexible to respond to better, up-to-date data.

**We are very much open to using a different set of weighting factors**

On the sector subject weightings, with five different teaching rates rather than one, she explained: "If you're an engineer with a manufacturing standard, it might have a higher rate than a business administration standard." Those rates would range from £130 to £220 per month.

"We are very much open to using a different set of weighting factors if people could suggest one to use across all apprenticeships."

The second, "less transparent" model would allow trailblazer groups – which design apprenticeship standards – to input on varying teaching costs.

Under this model, IfATE would apply a different rate to reflect trailblazers' assumptions about class size and whether it's a group or one-on-one session.

West said: "We are conscious we place



Anna West

a huge burden on trailblazers asking them to send us so much information at the moment," so IfATE wants to balance reducing that burden with continuing the dialogue.

"We want to reflect the variation of the cost in various apprenticeships, without losing the transparency we are trying to develop."

There was some disquiet from delegates about the proposals, as one audience member said comparing a poor provider that runs provision cheaply with a good one that runs provision well would give a "skewed perspective".

West said they tried to get a good spread of different providers during their research and testing so that variation in costs would be reflected.

On the core model, another delegate

**We are conscious we place a huge burden on trailblazers**

asked whether there had been a "sense check" over the amount they would receive under the core model, which would be a "fraction of the amount" the higher-level apprenticeships in their sector get at the moment.

## Call for 20% off-the-job rule to be reviewed

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) used the event to launch a research paper into perceptions of the minimum 20 percent off-the-job training rule.

The qualitative research, sponsored by City & Guilds, involved interviews with a dozen providers, employers and end-point assessment organisations and led the association to conclude that the rule needed to be reviewed.

The off-the-job training rule was introduced alongside the levy in May 2017, but the researchers found a call for on-the-job training to also warrant recognition.

In the 'value of on-the-job training' workshop on the second day of AAC, the

AELP director, Paul Warner (pictured) talked delegates through the five recommendations in the report:

1. Rename both off and on-the-job training as "Apprenticeship development time"
2. The benefits and advantages of on-the-job training should be promoted by the sector
3. Review the one size fits all" approach of 20% of contracted working hours in all sectors at all levels, which is unhelpful
4. Support employers with on-the-job training and "remove artificial delineations between on- and off-the job"

5. The funding rules should be "reviewed to consider relaxing the restrictions on out of core hours study being ineligible as off-the-job training."

Patrick Craven, director at City & Guilds, said: "We should also stress that this is not a criticism of a system that requires dismantling or demolition, a reaction that we have seen far too often in the history of the UK's technical and vocational education system.

"Instead this is an informed critique from communities that wish to improve and refine our apprenticeship programmes to make them the best they can be, and perhaps the envy of the many countries that we are so often compared to."



Paul Warner





# APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
**FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

The winners of the Annual Apprenticeship Awards 2020 were crowned at a glittering gala dinner in Birmingham on Tuesday night.

More than 500 sector leaders, staff and apprentices gathered to find out the results of the awards, which are run by *FE Week* and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

Forty-four organisations and individuals had been shortlisted in 22 categories after more than 350 entries were submitted by colleges, training providers and employers.

New apprenticeship and skills minister Gillian Keegan was in attendance to celebrate the winners and said it was a “huge pleasure” to be there.

She paid tribute to her predecessor Anne Milton, who was in the audience, saying it was “fantastic to follow in the fabulous

footsteps of my friend and mentor”.

The minister also said it was “brilliant” to see former shadow FE minister Gordon Marsden there as well.

Taking home the provider of the year award was Leeds College of Building, and the group told *FE Week* they were “thrilled” to be winners.

Judges said it was “clear” from their application and evidence that they “were enthusiastically dedicated to helping apprentices achieve their full potential, and absolutely committed to steering the next generation of innovators”.

Employer of the year was awarded to Hays Travel, which took over Thomas Cook this year.

“Hays Travel is a true believer and champion of apprenticeships,” the judges said. “It was evident from their application that apprenticeships are embedded within their organisation’s culture and thus valued and supported by stakeholders.”

They were “so delighted” to win the

award, said apprenticeship delivery manager Carole Hodgson, considering they were up against some “prestigious” companies.

“**We’ve had another fabulous evening celebrating all that is best about apprenticeships**

“Shocked,” was how Hays’ assessor and trainer Gemma Morrell reacted to their win: “We were surprised and absolutely buzzing when we were on stage.”

As well as being praised by Gillian Keegan, Milton and Marsden also

walked away joint-winners of the special recognition awards.

Shane Mann, managing director of *FE Week*’s publisher Lsect, said: “Tonight we also recognise the contribution made by two former MPs, Anne Milton and Gordon Marsden. As frontbench MPs for government and opposition they made significant contributions to the apprenticeships sector in the UK and globally.

“Regardless of whether you agree with their political decisions and positions, it is undeniable that they placed enormous energy into improving the apprenticeship sector. They are both worthy recipients of this year’s awards.”

Marsden called the gong a “really fantastic award” and he was “very, very touched” by this “great tribute” to the sector.

Milton felt “completely overwhelmed” and said it was a “pleasure” serving across the Commons with Gordon, but their





British Racing School receiving the Agriculture, Environmental & Animal Care Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Derby Business College Limited receiving the Business & Administration Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Lifetime Training receiving the Care Services Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Lifetime Training receiving the Catering & Hospitality Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Skills Group receiving the Construction Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Manchester Metropolitan University receiving the Digital Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Aspiration Training Ltd receiving the Education & Childcare Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Abingdon and Witney College receiving the Engineering & Manufacturing Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Truro and Penwith College receiving the Hair & Beauty Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Performance Through People receiving the Health & Science Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Paragon Skills receiving the Legal, Finance & Accounting Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Remit Group receiving the Sales, Marketing, Procurement Apprenticeship provider of the year award



Performance Through People receiving the Transport & Logistics Apprenticeship provider of the year award



WhiteHat receiving the Apprenticeship Diversity Award



Eastleigh College receiving the SEND Apprenticeship Champion Award



Newcastle & Stafford Colleges Group receiving the Promoting Apprenticeships campaign of the year award

# 2020 WINNERS HONoured

thanks must always go to the sector who do a “fantastic job”.

Apprenticeships expert and veteran Beej Kaczmarczyk received the lifetime achievement award.

“We were delighted to award Beej with the lifetime achievement award,” said Mann. “Beej has given so much to education throughout his career.

“He is also one of the great characters of the FE sector, regularly putting the ‘fun’ into funding analysis and has a magic way of entertaining those who he supports and informs on sometimes the driest of subjects.

“As he nears his retirement, and the possibility of finally realising his aim of getting in more golf, it is perfect timing, and massively well deserved.”

Kaczmarczyk said he was “really pleased” but also “very surprised” by this “great honour”.

“Hopefully this reflects on everybody I have ever worked with.”

AELP chief executive Mark Dawe said: “We’ve had another fabulous evening celebrating all that is best about apprenticeships and the hardworking people who offer bright futures to learners who embark on our flagship skills programme.

“Congratulations to a great set of winners and it’s really pleasing that Gillian Keegan has been here with us to hear about these wonderful success stories.”



Jane Hadfield, Health Education England receiving the Outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships – Individual award



Little Inspirations Ltd receiving the Outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships – Employer award



South Devon College receiving the Outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships – Provider award



Hays Travel receiving the Apprentice employer of the year award



Leeds College of Building receiving the Apprenticeship provider of the year award



# Restrict access to degree apprenticeship funding for adults, says shadow skills minister

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**D**egree apprenticeships should only be fully funded for people aged under 25, those without a first degree and in sectors with skill shortages, Labour's shadow minister for further education has said.

Emma Hardy, speaking on day one of conference, said she supports their expansion at higher education providers across the country, but a decline in opportunities for the "most disadvantaged" needs to be addressed.

"The government's rushed implementation of the apprenticeship levy has resulted not in an increase in apprenticeship opportunities for the most disadvantaged, but quite the opposite," she told delegates.

"They [degree apprenticeships] have the potential to be real drivers of social mobility and address current occupational shortages.

"I believe that degree apprenticeships should continue to be fully funded from the levy for people 25 and under, occupations on the shortage occupation list and adults

who do not already have an equivalent qualification."

Her proposal comes after warnings from the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education and the National Audit Office that the apprenticeship budget is at risk of being overspent.

Hardy highlighted concerns, which have been raised by Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman among others, that companies have been rebadging existing training schemes as higher apprenticeships.

Hardy also brought up the latest report on the apprenticeship system by former Department for Education adviser Tom Richmond, where he said 23 higher education institutions have developed an apprenticeship which requires a PhD, or another level 8 qualification, to start.

Hardy said: "Surely this should not be considered an apprenticeship," and in her opinion, "the government should end the 100 per cent use of the apprenticeship levy for courses equivalent to a Master's degree."

This comes after education secretary Gavin Williamson last week ordered a review of the level 7 senior leader MBA apprenticeship standard.



Emma Hardy

In his letter to Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education boss Jennifer Coupland, he wrote he was "unconvinced that having an apprenticeship standard that includes an MBA paid for by the levy is in the spirit of our reformed apprenticeships or provides value for money".

Hardy has stressed though that this is not the fixed policy of the Labour Party, as they

are in the midst of a leadership election, but rather this is something for the next leader to consider.

She concluded her speech by saying: "As your shadow representative and future minister, it is my ambition to work closely with you to focus that desire for true equality of opportunity relentlessly at the government until we see the changes that young people and the sector needs."

## Social media reaction to Hardy's proposal

What about those who's 25 and older? Don't we deserve a chance too. Life is though for everyone, adults have dreams too.

Zama Phungula, website

Right that we might explicit choices about priorities given funding crunch. @LearnWorkUK analysis suggests sliding contributions for level 4+ apprenticeships for over 25s (similar to idea suggested by @EmmaHardyMP) would limit levy spend by c.£300m per annum.

Stephen Evans, chief executive of Learning and Work Institute, Twitter

Emma, really? This would stop the NHS and police forces using THEIR levy to train nurses and police constables. Many are 25+. Is providing 95 per cent subsidy to private business to train level 2 staff more important? Let's support our NHS use its levy to deliver services the public expect.

Centre for Degree Apprenticeships, Twitter

Emma, use the NHS levy to train nurses and healthcare staff of any age. Surely more important than providing a 95 per cent subsidy to private businesses to train apprentices. Overspend could be solved by asking SMEs to provide a 25 per cent contribution. A much better 'explicit' choice?!

Adrian Anderson, chief executive of the University Vocational Awards Council, Twitter

What about the 25 and over? Do they not get a chance to try and advance into a career they actually want? I just turned 30 and would to change my life and get a career I am passionate about but once you are over 25 it seems there is no apprenticeships/ internships for anything else outside apprenticeships to be an engineer, construction worker etc.

Nicole, website

It can take one three years before they know what's good for them and take another three years to

complete the degree by then he/she will be 26 so what about that... come on ladies and gentleman... your call is totally unfair

Kenneth, website

If you don't succeed by 25, you don't succeed?

Rachael Johnstone, Twitter

Mmmmm thats not quite how social mobility works though?

Jane Lowe, Twitter

They cannot afford to come out of full-time education. The apprenticeship wage is lower than the family benefits they receive.

Tracey Fitzgerald, Facebook





# Do you agree with Emma Hardy that degree apprenticeships should only be fully-funded for people aged 25 and under, occupations on the shortage occupation list, and adults who do not already have an equivalent qualification?



**KAREN CHRISTIAN**

Assistant principal at Wirral Met College

"If the funds are being pulled away from level 2 and level 3 learners, then we do need to review it. With that said, I do think it should all be funded because I think those people over 25 who haven't had a university education are likely to be from deprived backgrounds as well and therefore they will also benefit from degree apprenticeships."



**KAM DEHAL**

Vice principal, business development at East Surrey College

"We are beginning to see a real decline in and around the areas that I think are critical for apprenticeships. I think we need to have a fair balance in funding and if the funding is running out I think the priority has to be in national skills, and [the] national skills required are level 2, 3 and 4."



**JACQUI MCINTOSH**

Apprenticeship business development manager at VTCT

"If you are working, you are already contributing to the pot so why should you be penalised because you want to advance? It is just not fair. If we are talking about equality then apprenticeships should be available for everybody... And if people don't rise, you don't make room for the next sector to come up."



**NICOLA SCARFE**

EPA contracting manager at the NOCN Group

"I think if the employer is using the levy, if they are paying into the levy, it's up to them what they do with the levy. It's their money. It's for the employer to reinvest. To stipulate what they should do with it, it's not really for us to say. It is based on their business need."



**ALEX FORD**

Chief executive of CT Skills

"Apprenticeships were always a tool to level things up. To take the option for an apprenticeship away at the expense of the apprenticeship budget being spent on high level degrees, for those people in society who have already had a chance at high level education, is going to cause further divides and further disparity in terms of educational 'haves' and 'have-nots'."



**BRYONY KINGSLAND**

Senior manager, City & Guilds

"The reality is, if that's what employers want, then employers should be able to use that to upskill their workforce. However, I think there are some areas where there are some degree apprenticeships that are being delivered not in a way that's conducive to the policy as it was laid out in the beginning."



**KAREN TUCKER**

Head of apprenticeship, Education and Skills Partnership

"Personally, no. I think it does inspire young people to have that aspiration to go further. There's work to be done in terms of going from a low level to the degree programme but that's work with the employers as well as with providers to make sure that there's a clear and transparent route."



**JASON HARGREAVES**

Managing director, The Education and Skills Partnership Ltd

"I think it would be a shame to lose them because I think a lot of employers are looking to be able to hang those standards in the same way they do career progression. It would be a shame not to have that aspirational target. With NHS clinical programmes, they are bringing a lot of people in at levels 2 and 3 and developing them through that progressionary route."



**STEVE GANNON**

Head of apprenticeships, Kirklees College

"Adult apprenticeships, or the higher-level apprenticeships, seem to be used for people already doing that role and it's a way for employers to spend levy funds. We're haemorrhaging younger people with probably not the right entry criteria who don't fit in the box of an apprenticeship standard now. I think that money would be better off spent providing for school leavers in preparation for an apprenticeship."



**REBECCA TAYLOR**

Vice principal, East Surrey College

"It depends what the perception is that it's taking away from others. Is there an idea that somehow if the full funding ended that would somehow fund something else? It feels like a bit robbing Peter to pay Paul and I think I heard this idea of level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships declining somehow because of the higher-level apprenticeship. I feel like that could be a bit of a red herring."



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