

FE Week

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 Designer: Russell Hardman
 Sub editor: Paul Offord
 Reporters: Alix Robertson
 Billy Camden
 Jude Burke
 Rebecca Jones
 Photographer: Ellis O'Brien
 Financials: Helen Neilly
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Contributors: Jenny Williams
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Managing director: Shane Mann

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert contact
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 T: 020 8123 4778

APPREHENSION AND TENSION BEFORE CHANCELLOR REDEMPTION



@ALIXROBERTSON4

ALIX.ROBERTSON@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The mood of this year's Association of Colleges (AoC) conference was apprehensive with the sword of the Spending Review hanging over the sector.

Little could delegates have known that a week later Chancellor George Osborne's cuts would have been nowhere near as severe as feared.

Perhaps Mr Osborne is aware of the rationalisation going on in the college sector with area reviews and does not see

further scope for cuts.

However, it's just one of the sector changes for which AoC chief executive Martin Doel said he would like his members to receive government support, as reported on the page opposite.

Skills Minister Nick Boles's earlier speech, also on page opposite, had done nothing to indicate such help might be forthcoming though as he said FE would "not be insulated" from more cuts.

Professor Lady Alison Wolf spoke before Mr Boles and her speech is on page 4, along with coverage of Childcare Minister Sam Gyimah and Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden from conference.

Wide-ranging funding changes discussed at conference, a report on AoC president John Widdowson's speech, a piece from the Education and Training Foundation, and break-out sessions' coverage on college

autonomy and localism run from page 5 to 7.

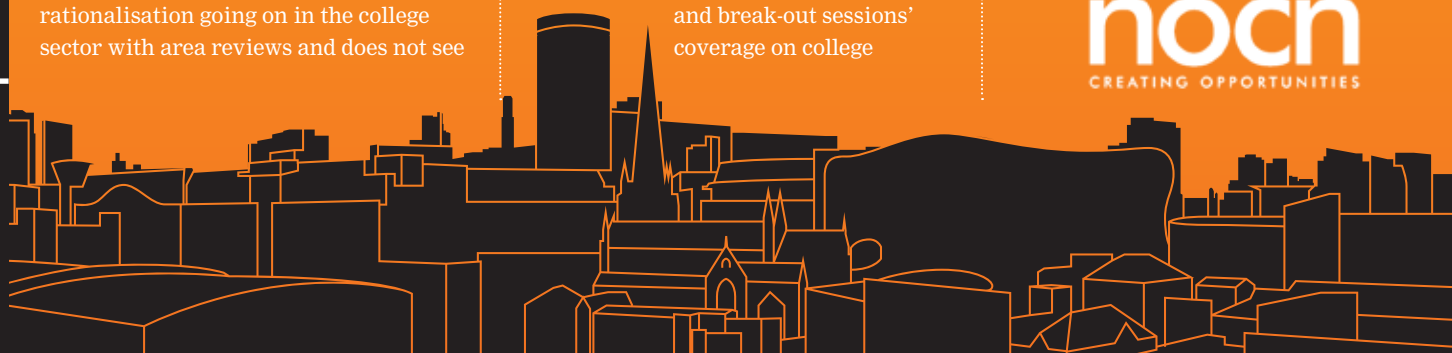
Sixth form college issues, an expert piece from a break-out session on augmented reality, awards given out at conference, a renowned science teacher's Q&A with host Naga Munchetty and then Sir Lenny Henry's appearance are on pages 8 to 13.

The final two pages are devoted to the thoughts of conference delegates on-site and online, via Twitter.



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GRAHAM HASTING-EVANS

Managing director, NOCN

What will FE and skills look like in 22 months' time?

Writing this ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review announcement on November 25 is clearly a challenge — by the time you read this article we will all know the outcome.

But the fact is colleges face massive changes over the next few years which is probably why the Association of Colleges (AoC) conference was such a sombre event. There was for instance, a lot of focus on area reviews.

Martin Doel, AoC chief executive, pointed out that at its peak the college sector had achieved only 10 mergers in a year. Now, the government is expecting more than 100 mergers within just two years, raising the question of capacity and investment necessary to manage such

significant restructuring.

Another major issue taxing many principals and chief executives was the sheer scale of the funding cuts and what they would actually have to do to facilitate the cuts.

The 'A' word — apprenticeships — was also on many people's lips. Skills Minister Nick Boles encouraged colleges to deliver two thirds of apprenticeships by 2019/20 which will mean a massive shift. He said apprenticeships would be funded from the employers' levy and colleges needed to market themselves to the employers and develop better links with the newly-devolved authorities and local enterprise partnerships.

John Widdowson, principal of New

College Durham and AoC president, said colleges need to first engage with the changes, then try to shape them and then get on with it as they have all the other changes over the last 20 years. And in my opinion, he was absolutely right.

There were some other topics also mentioned at the conference, but they did not necessarily get the attention and 'air-time' they deserve.

The first of these was 'full commercialisation'. Under government plans, Skills Funding Agency/Education Funding Agency contracts will disappear by September 1, 2017. At the beginning of the year colleges will have no income, no funds and will have to earn every penny from selling their services to employers and other customers including government agencies, like the Department for Work and Pensions. Colleges will be operating as fully commercial enterprises. This is a major cultural change and is both a threat and an opportunity.

There was a lot of discussion on apprenticeships, but very little on the fact that the reformed apprenticeships coming out of the Trailblazer programme will require delivery models which are very different from those used on the existing Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (Sase) programmes.

The apprenticeship levy which comes in on September 1, 2017, was mentioned, but there was insufficient discussion on the

detail of how it will work and the impact this will have.

Trailblazer apprenticeships and the impact of the associated levy are not the only area of fundamental curriculum change. Sixteen-plus and professional and technical courses will also be reformed, as will Functional Skills.

Some 85 per cent of the people expected to be part of the 2020 workforce, are in the workforce today. In order to increase productivity, their skills' requirements will need to be accommodated.

The market model for FE is being reformed. It will no longer receive income or funding from a few government agencies. Instead it will have to see employers as the main group of customers. Engagement with employers and understanding their priorities and needs will be essential for sustainable success.

All in all the scale of the Government's reform programme is enormous and raises major concerns about capacity to achieve such a fundamental change in the timescales envisaged.

With government plans for all of this to be in place by September 1, 2017 — just 22 months away — delegates raised concerns about the level of 'competency' of the policies being put forward and whether there is a realistic implementation programme. We will clearly have to come back to all these issues as a matter of urgency.

AoC chief demands financial backing for FE changes

Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel called on the government to support restructuring of the FE college sector with the necessary funding.

Leading the closing keynote session of the conference, Mr Doel said the government needed to show it was serious about area review plans and the shift to apprenticeship delivery by setting aside funding to reform the sector.

"I was pleased that the Minister signalled his wish to work with the AoC and with you to support growth in apprenticeship delivery that is sustainable and high quality," he told college leaders.

"But developing options is one thing, carrying them through to completion is another."

Mr Doel said calls to restructure the sector into fewer, larger and more specialised colleges and to develop new business models for meeting apprenticeship targets would cost money that colleges did not have.

He warned that 16 to 18 funding was in a "parlous" state and said any further cuts would risk "impoverishing the experience of a whole generation of young people".

The AoC has been making this argument

for over five years, said Mr Doel, and called on ministers to start taking action if they want to see successful change in the sector.

His point was illustrated with a reference to the "striking front page" of *FE Week* edition 155 (pictured below right), which was published mid-conference and on-site, with its 'Staring into the funding abyss' headline.

"It's time government did more than simply listen. This is about more than fairness, it's about the fundamental health of our society and of our young people," he said.

Mr Doel also said consistent policy was needed, alongside financial support.

Addressing Skills Minister Nick Boles' proposition for the FE sector to increase its share of the apprenticeship market to 66 per cent [see below], he said: "Colleges have a transition to make here, but government has a duty to provide stable competent policies to make this happen. The levy was a bold political decision but there is a long way between a Think Tank Paper and detailed policy."

Mr Doel concluded his speech on a positive note, saying that he saw "implied acceptance" from the Government that



Martin Doel

its key objectives could not be achieved without "a pattern of locally responsive colleges meeting economic needs".

In praise of his audience he said: "In nearly eight years in this job there have been repeated false starts in policymaking affecting colleges."

"The place that I have found consistent and widespread competence is in the way that you have dealt with everything that has come your way."



'We won funding cut argument' — Boles

Skills Minister Nick Boles declined to give media interviews at the conference, so here are excerpts from his speech on day one.

Funding cuts

We wanted to make an argument to the British people in the run up to the general election which said their security, their economic security, their personal security and our national security depended on us taking some difficult but essential steps to restore the country's economic strength.

And we won with the argument about the deficit. We won a clear mandate for further spending cuts to bring the budget into surplus by 2019.

There is absolutely no pleasure in the process of cutting budgets that go to FE colleges or any other part of public service.

I can't give you any advanced insight into what is going to happen in the spending review, but we do not have long to wait and we can talk about it further after the Chancellor has announced it.

But you know and I know that those of us and those of you that are engaged in FE will not be insulated from further spending cuts.

Area reviews

I believe the first area review, which took place in Norfolk and Suffolk, has given us a very good model of how the process should work.

It began sensibly enough with an analysis



Nick Boles

of that area's needs — talking to the local enterprise partnership, to local employers and other groups. They then drew up different structural options involving sharing the costs, specialisation and curriculum reform.

They have now decided that Great Yarmouth College, Lowestoft College and Lowestoft Sixth Form College will merge to form one group and two other sixth form colleges are currently considering a range of possible forms of collaboration.

I did not dictate that outcome. I did not say: 'Here is the solution that central government wants' and it would not have been proper for

me to do so because colleges are independent.

But equally we were very clear in underlining there is a limit to the ability of government to go on helping out colleges with long-running deficits.

If I'm to persuade the Chancellor to give us some money to support colleges through difficult years, I need to be able to show him colleges are taking the initiative, taking some difficult decisions, reorganising themselves to be stronger for the future.

Apprenticeships

Total government spending on

apprenticeships grew by £400m, or nearly 30 per cent, between 2009/10 and 2015/16 [to £1.5bn].

Even if we hit that 3m target, we will still have fewer apprentices per 1,000 of population than almost any of our European competitors and if it works for them and makes them productive I do not think we should shrink from the same level of ambition.

So that target is going to provide further investment and the new apprenticeship levy that the Chancellor will be announcing the level for in the spending review will provide substantial additional resources to support training in the nation's apprenticeships.

So while I cannot tell you how much, I can promise you we will be spending a great deal more of taxpayers' money on apprenticeship training in 2019/20 than the £1.5bn that we are spending in 2015/16.

But the truth is that the FE sector only secures about £500m of that — 37 per cent of all funding for apprenticeship training will go to FE colleges in 2015/16, but 60 per cent goes to private training providers.

As your friend, I have to ask you this: 'Why on earth are you letting these guys nick your lunch?'

I want to ask you to raise your sights and sign up to a shared ambition that by 2020 FE colleges will be responsible for two thirds, not one third, of all apprenticeship training and will receive two thirds of what will be a much larger pot of funding.

Employers 'resisting general education' in Vet

Government adviser Professor Lady Alison Wolf criticised employers for resisting the incorporation of more "general education" into vocational training.

The author of the 2011 review of vocational education, which recommended that 16 to 18-year-olds without at least a C grade for English and maths should keep studying the subjects, said Lady Wolf during her speech to conference on Tuesday (November 17) that modern-day vocational training was "far too closely tied to specific occupations".

She said this was largely because 21st century employers were "far less enlightened" than their Victorian predecessors, who had wanted their trainees to receive a broader education.

She said: "Employers often resist general education and with apprenticeships there has been a real pushback from employers in the past against putting any general education model into the programmes."

"As a result we have [vocational] qualifications which are far too closely tied to specific occupations," she added.

Professor Wolf added that parents had been "very reasonably extremely unsure" about skills training because of this, as "their children only have one chance of education" and their future options could



Alison Wolf delivers a speech on day one of conference

be restricted if they choose the wrong course.

It comes after the government introduced a funding rule from 2014/15, which means providers must enrol 16 to 19-year-old learners onto English and maths courses if they do not have at least C-grade GCSE in the subjects or miss out on future funding, in response to Professor Wolf's 2011 review.

She was largely enthusiastic during her conference speech about the government's apprenticeship reform programme.

"I actually think at this point we have maybe got a last chance to recreate what used to be an excellent and thriving apprenticeships system," she said.

Professor Wolf added that "the current reforms have a reasonable chance of creating institutions that inspire

economic change", but warned it could be undermined by "unrealistic and excessive quantity requirements" from the government's target of creating 3m apprenticeship starts by 2020.

"I really hope that in a few years from now somebody else won't be up here talking about how apprenticeship reform went wrong," added Professor Wolf.

She delivered the warning over excessive apprenticeship numbers before giving evidence later the same day during a House of Lords Social Mobility Committee hearing, when she raised concern that that Whitehall officials would be "rushing around like headless chickens" to achieve the 3m target.

Professor Wolf also indicated during her conference speech that she thought more effort was needed to improve the public perception of FE colleges.

"We need to acknowledge and respond to citizens' educational aspirations," she said. "No-one wants to go to a second chance institution, they want to go to an institution that offers them the chance to go forward in life, which meets and responds to their aspirations."

She added that government and FE and higher education sectors "really ought to start not just pay lip service to education for life, but actually making sure that it is something we cater for".

Stand-in Gyimah struggles with FE audience

Childcare Minister Sam Gyimah was heckled by delegates in the closing keynote session of the conference as he stood in for Education Secretary Nicky Morgan.

Ms Morgan was scheduled to give the penultimate speech of the conference but failed to attend, with Mr Gyimah stepping in to face a grilling from the frustrated audience.

"Difficult decisions" proved Mr Gyimah's go-to phrase for the session, as he struggled to respond to queries such as why funding had not been protected for students up to age 18.

Shakira Martin, vice president for FE at the National Union of Students, raised the issue of cuts to provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (Esol), asking how this aligned with Mr Gyimah's comment that English and maths were vital for learners.

Mr Gyimah said: "We want to see some more employers, especially the employers who are taking up more of those people, to share the burden of funding ... That's not a decision that is taken lightly, but we have also got to prioritise where the funding goes."

Alison Birkinshaw, principal of York College, challenged the minister on why his department supported the opening of small

Sam Gyimah



sixth forms, free schools and small UTCs when the FE sector was being encouraged to move towards "larger, more resilient" colleges.

Her query received a round of applause, while Mr Gyimah's response that free schools were set up where there was a need in terms of either "basic" or "quality" provision drew complaints from the audience.

Mr Gyimah echoed Skills Minister Nick Boles' conference speech when he said: "We will make sure that coming out of this spending review ... that we have a sector that is viable and can thrive."

"It might mean in some cases you have fewer larger colleges, but we will make sure that stability and the ability to deliver for children at 16 continues."



Dr Alison Birkinshaw

Marsden condemns government's 'indifferent' approach to FE struggles

Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden has criticised the government for being "oblivious or indifferent" to the strain it has placed on the FE sector.

Mr Marsden said he heard delegates voice a range of concerns at conference on Thursday, and commended the sector's "adaptability and resourcefulness" in tackling challenges.

However, he added that government ministers "seem to be oblivious or indifferent to the fact that even the most elastic approach eventually can snap".

Mr Marsden said it was "excellent to be able to meet up with a cross section of principals" and praised the event for highlighting "the diversity and vibrancy of the FE and Skills sector".

But he added that concerns affecting colleges, including the ongoing worry of funding cuts, were an inevitable undertone at the event.

"Esol [English for Speakers of Other Languages], speed and lop-sidedness of area reviews, the myriad of questions about the timescale and detail of the apprenticeship level and the continued squeeze on adult skills were all mentioned to me," he said.

"It was worrying to hear the concerns not just from colleges but also from participating businesses about cuts that are already restricting the ability to grow programmes and attract young people."

College leaders told 'prepare for wide-ranging changes to funding'

College leaders were given the lowdown on what to expect from funding issues in a breakout session where they were told to prepare to fight for apprenticeships business once planned changes were implemented in 2017.

In the session, entitled, 'Everything you need to know about the current college funding issues', Keith Smith, director of funding and programmes at the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), told how the sector might be affected by then-upcoming events, such as the comprehensive spending review and the introduction of the apprenticeship levy.

The "real market failure" over the last decade, he said, had been a decline in the number of employees in the workplace that were spending time away from their job to do training, and warned his audience to prepare for the outcome of a range of funding developments designed to "stabilise, simplify and localise" provision.

One key adjustment would be to colleges' role in the apprenticeships marketplace.

"When [changes] come into play from April 2017, you guys in the current system will not automatically get funding allocation that says 'this is your market share', or 'this is your passport to that money'," he said.

"The system will be a completely employer-led system ... you will be competing in the market alongside all of the other approved providers."

He warned college leaders they were facing a "huge challenge" when the apprenticeship levy allowed subcontractors to receive funding directly from the government.

"Colleges are spending at the moment just under 20 pence in the pound on apprenticeships," said Mr Smith.

"However, in the adult world ... over 40 per cent of that you are subcontracting out.

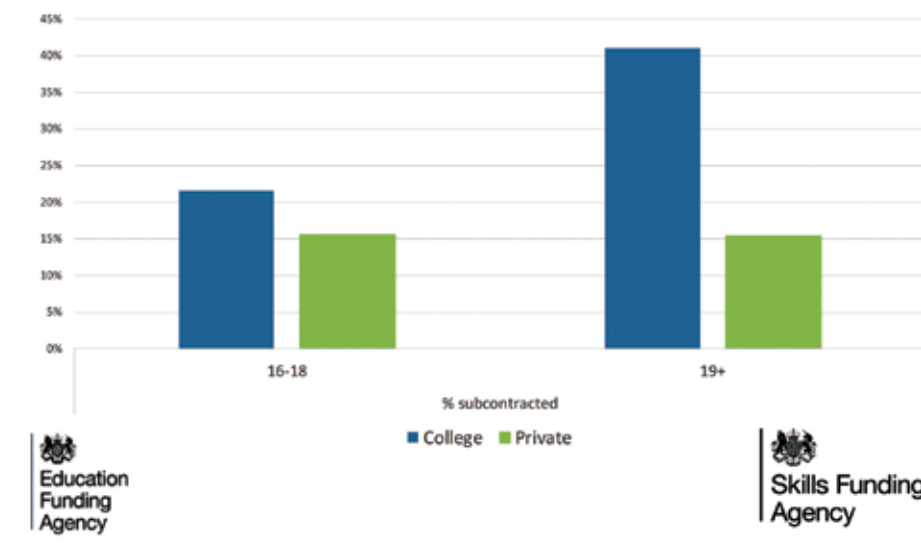
"So if you convert that into how much money is going directly to you, in worse cases it is an average of less than 10 pence in the pound.

"You might be benefiting at the moment from subcontracting bringing money in, but from April 2017 those subcontractors will take that capacity and they will get funded directly through the apprenticeship voucher system."

The changes to pathways for

Apprenticeship sub-contracting

% of apprenticeship delivery sub-contracted (14/15)



apprenticeship funding were not the only developments Mr Smith highlighted, with simplification of the adult budgets, slimmed down funding rules and the new apprenticeship standards also on the horizon.

He appealed to college leaders to take an active role in engaging with new

developments, saying for example that the government would be "doing some pretty radical things about reducing and removing some of the [funding] rules" and a discussion around these changes was encouraged.

This inclusive approach was extended to employers, with Mr Smith saying that the new system must "cover all the employers of all sizes". He added that the spending review would clarify which employers were in the scope of the upcoming apprenticeship levy, and what the levy

rate would be.

"The government ambitions for 3m apprentices has clearly got to create an environment that we can support all employers of all sizes," he said.

"That will need to cover anything from when employers need to think about employment or recruitment of people into the workforce, to around how they advertise vacancies, all the way to the point of them actually engaging and making a selection of actual individual providers."

Mr Smith promised some improvements for colleges, saying for example that they could expect the government to give attention to planning problems they had faced, due to last minute funding cuts.

"We also want to try to give you

more predictability. I know and I realise and recognise the adult skills system and the way we fund that can provide some uncertainty and it can be fairly difficult to actually plan for where you want to be at the end of the year," he said.

Mr Smith said the government's broad aim for the changes was to work towards "a very stable, very financially resilient system and sector" for FE.

Teresa Frith, senior skills policy manager for the Association of Colleges, concluded the session by highlighting the uncertainty that remained around the changes.

"We still don't really know exactly how it's all going to work, but we know that there are definitely going to be cuts — not clear quite exactly when they'll be," she said.

"We know that the allocation idea goes and it's much more about a commercial offer, going out and winning the business."

She added that 19+ funding would still go directly to colleges, meaning they retained responsibility for the quality of of provision and concluded: "Because all of these big changes are happening the chances are there will be fewer little tweaks and pulls going on in the meantime."



Proposed changes for 2016/17

- Unified adult skills budget allocated through block grants
- More income predictability for colleges' financial planning
- Further simplification of funding rules
- Stronger oversight of "city deals" and devolution agreements
- Removal of qualifications as the only 'currency' of funding
- Review of how allocations to providers are made
- Removal of national rules restricting local offer
- Local commissioning and delivery agreements agreed between providers and local partners

Widdowson 'reassured' of colleges' bright future

Association of Colleges president John Widdowson sought to reassure members they had the capacity to weather the "unprecedented" number of changes the college sector faced.

He also spoke to reassure colleges about the "further period of turbulence" on the horizon — including the government's programme of area-based reviews.

Speaking in the closing session of the first day of the conference, Mr Widdowson acknowledged that "times are tough and likely to get tougher," singling out area reviews as a key preoccupation for colleges right now.

He said reviews would affect the sector "in the most radical and fundamental way since the college incorporation in the early 1990s," but aimed to draw out positives.

Referring to the earlier speech delivered by Skills Minister Nick Boles, Mr Widdowson said: "I was reassured here this morning that the institutions which emerge from the area review process will be FE corporations built on the success of the past, recognisable as FE corporations, building upon decades



John Widdowson

of experience and service to our communities."

Mr Widdowson urged college leaders to put aside any issues with the purpose and intention of the area reviews, and see them instead as an opportunity.

"Area reviews are based around the discussion of the levy," he said.

"There is no national template, no one-size-fits-all solution, so we have the opportunity not only to make the

case for colleges but also, and perhaps more importantly, to confirm the place of our sector within the education and training landscape for the long term."

He contrasted "the market-driven college world of recent decades", with "a new world of curriculum planning and cooperation" saying that area reviews had helped to provoke an atmosphere where competition can be superseded by collaboration.

He challenged regional schools

commissioners and local authorities to engage with the area review process, saying that it was "essential" school sixth form provision was subject to the same analysis and solutions that colleges would experience under the reviews.

"Although such provision will not, unfortunately, be within the scope of area review, we have the opportunity to shine a bright light on inefficient and ineffective post-16 provision in schools, raising questions which will cry out to be addressed," he said.

Mr Widdowson's concluding message was one of determination in the face of adversity, a theme that was reiterated throughout the three-day conference.

He said: "We should be a sector which is more resilient — not put off course by shortages or changing in the funding or qualification systems.

"I for one do not want to sit back and let others outside our sector define what we should be, what values we should espouse or what vision we should have. The challenge for us is to state that vision for ourselves with conviction, with confidence, and with courage."



JENNY WILLIAMS

Director of vocational education and training,
Education and Training Foundation

Powering up college-employer partnerships

The theme of this year's conference — powering the economy — shone a spotlight on the importance of college-employer engagement.

The call to action to colleges to grow apprenticeship numbers will depend on strong employer relationships and active engagement with local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). Responsiveness to local needs will be a hallmark of the FE sector that emerges from area reviews.

But the potential of strong college-employer partnerships goes way beyond delivering on these policy priorities.

Work is changing. Business needs for skills, knowledge and innovation change with every new technology, every

new product, and every significant new customer who comes along.

With job growth likely to be greatest in small companies, we need a strong system of technical, professional and vocational education to support those businesses, and to inspire, recognise and nurture the talents of highly skilled individuals.

The good news is that some employers, colleges and providers are already responding creatively and sustainably to this challenge. A distinctive feature of their response is a collaborative approach, with industry specialists and vocational teachers co-designing and delivering innovative vocational programmes that have a clear line of sight

to work.

Our Teach Too development programme has supported around 40 such collaborations over the last two years — involving small and large employers, covering more than 22 occupational sectors from airport ground handling to web design and authoring, and supporting both full time vocational courses and apprenticeship training.

Led by UCL Institute of Education and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, the programme has developed principles and examples of practice, designed to develop the 'know-how' for more employers, colleges and providers to co-create vocational programmes fit for the future.

Our workshop at the conference highlighted one such example — Carshalton College's Teach Too project with Mirobot, a small robotics company.

Based on a live design brief from Mirobot, students on level three IT and creative media programmes designed Macrobot, a robot for older children to develop their programming skills. Working with the managing director from Mirobot, students developed the up-to-date computational and maths skills that employers are looking for in new entrants into digital industries.

There are many such examples, the challenge is to mobilise the learning from them to wider effect, including

for our new Future Apprenticeships programme. We will produce a framework with examples and short videos early next year but meanwhile, three points stood out for me in the stimulating discussions at the conference.

Employer-college engagement works when it is focused on the specific needs of particular employers and local economies. The value of the Teach Too approach is in the process of co-design and delivery of programmes rather than searching for a silver bullet to apply in all circumstances.

This is critical because realising the long term benefits of the partnership involves ongoing re-modelling and adapting programmes to reflect changes in technology, work practices, and economic conditions. We shouldn't assume that once a Teach Too project is in place, it can or should be replicated year-on-year.

Having said that, a key benefit of sustainable partnership working is the development and updating of expertise — for both vocational teachers and industry specialists, with clear advantages for students and apprentices.

**EXPERT PIECE ON THURSDAY BREAK-OUT SESSION
TEACH TOO: WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS TO DEVELOP
TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS ON
THE TWO-WAY STREET**

Localism survey reveals sector concerns

The impact of the government's localism agenda on colleges was a hot topic of debate at a conference break-out session.

The session, entitled College autonomy, localism and devolution, saw Seb Schmoller, governing board vice chair at The Sheffield College and member of the AoC Governors' Council, share the findings of an informal survey aimed at getting the sector's views on localism.

The Treasury broached proposals for greater devolution and localism in its Productivity Plan launched in July, recommending "local areas and employers to take a leading role in establishing a post-16 skills system that is responsive to local economic priorities".

The plan anticipated more college specialisation and local involvement in commissioning provision.

Mr Schmoller surveyed five chairs of governors and a dozen principals or chief executives. Eight responses were from 14 colleges among the 'first wave' of area reviews in West Yorkshire and Sheffield City.

The questions included which localism issues concerned respondents most; what they saw as strengths and weaknesses of local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and combined authorities (CAs); any challenges of dealing with more than one LEP or CA; and for those

involved in area-based reviews, how they assess the performance of LEPs or CAs.

The results revealed a fear of 'top-slicing' and conflicts of interest, with respondents concerned that local authorities could absorb funds for their own adult skills provision and in regional planning, regulation or bureaucracy.

Secondly, there were worries that changes were focused on the short term and too narrow — potentially meaning that in a drive to meet LEP priorities, learners will not be prepared for the wider regional or national job market.

Regional variations were also highlighted, with worries of a postcode lottery for vocational learning depending on local policy and locally-determined resourcing, with particular difficulties for colleges at the boundary between different LEP areas.

Finally, respondents queried the use of outcome-based success measures.

In spite of these concerns, Mr Schmoller, speaking in a personal capacity, said there was a strong sense that LEPs and CAs were getting to grips well with shaping provision in their localities.

He concluded: "There's a general view that LEPs and localism have something really important going for them ...



Seb Schmoller



done right it may finish up being more of a help than a hindrance."

Attendees at the session were eager to put forward their thoughts.

Sue Pember (pictured left), director of policy and external relations of Hoxley, sits on an advisory board for the Greater Manchester devolution process and commended the CA for their work so far, as one of the first regions to gain devolved powers from the government in 2014.

"They started with the vision and the mission for

Manchester," she said.

"In other places it's all about structural change but actually they haven't sorted out what they want to deliver. We need to think about the mission and vision and in each of these geographical patches the only people that can really help on that are colleges and providers."

She added that rolling out devolution and localism was likely to be "messy" and the FE sector should be clear what support it requires.

"I think we need to tell the AoC what we need and what sort of support we want," she said.



JOE DOCHERTY

Chief executive, NCG (formerly Newcastle College Group)

Small boat on a rough sea

NCG was never conceived of as a group and therefore was not designed to act as one. Two years ago we decided to create a strategy that would make use of the assets of the group — scale, cash generation, a strong balance sheet — while reorganising to behave genuinely as a group should.

It consists of six operating divisions, including general FE colleges, training providers and a sixth form college. It is true three of the divisions were effectively taken over at the point of financial failure. Kidderminster College joining NCG was very different and it is the lessons from that which we hope are helpful.

A group needs to do at least two things to function properly. It needs to be able to move money around and agglomerate cash flows and balance sheets, to act as 'the bank'. This, NCG does well, and money flows to divisions to respond to different recruitment trends.

A group also must performance-manage divisions, and this is pretty straightforward. A third function — which NCG does perform but which a surprising number of private sector companies do not — is to provide certain functions centrally where scale or volume allows efficiencies.

The benefits of this are best demonstrated by Kidderminster College which joined NCG in August 2014. It was generating small but regular surpluses on a turnover of just under £10m and had improving quality. However, it was operating in a very competitive local environment and funding cuts were limiting its ability to develop further. It was a small boat in a rough sea.

So in spring 2013 the board of Kidderminster undertook a Structure and Prospects appraisal that resulted in a formal selection process from which it chose to join NCG.

We always set out to treat this addition to

the group as a merger and not a takeover. It palpably wasn't the latter as Kidderminster was in control of the process, but culturally and ethically we wanted to ensure colleagues felt they were equals.

The basic benefits are clear. In the last year as a standalone college, Kidderminster made a surplus of £150k on a turnover of £10m. In the first year of joining NCG it made £600k of savings, £400k in back office cost reductions, and £200k in procurement savings. Crucially, not a single learner-facing role was affected.

However, the current regulatory framework for FE does not support the creation of groups and could act as a barrier. To act as 'bank' NCG operates under single Funding Contracts. This allows movement of money across divisions but comes at a critical cost — NCG as the parent FE Corporation, has a single Ofsted inspection with a single grade. This grading applies to all NCG provision, but of course is useless to a learner or parent studying construction in Kidderminster or business in West Lancashire College.

To be fair, officials in the education (DfE) and business, innovation and skills (BIS) departments and Ofsted recognise this barrier and for this year the Skills Funding Agency has agreed to provide six funding contracts to NCG including a protocol which allows us to move money between contracts.

The Education Funding Agency plans to follow suit from August. This means data is captured and held at division level and this rather nerdy detail is crucial, as it will allow me, as chief executive and accounting officer, to delegate genuine responsibility for quality and curriculum to principals.

Governance, where local governors have delegated responsibility for overseeing quality and curriculum and can ensure local stakeholders are genuinely engaged, will follow.

Currently data management is held centrally, which creates inefficiency, bureaucracy and blurs ownership. From August next year this will be held in divisions.

So NCG becomes a national platform from which operating divisions hang. Driving up efficiencies — note the Kidderminster results — and acting as the bank, performance-managing each college and training provider. However, responsibility for curriculum and quality will rightly sit with each principal, supported by a board. A transparent Ofsted regime needs to follow — and we are assured by colleagues in BIS and in Ofsted this will happen.

EXPERT PIECE ON THURSDAY BREAK-OUT SESSION THE FUTURE OF FE — GROUP STRUCTURES IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



We're with you

TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL
ASSESSMENTS **AWARDS**

QUALIFICATIONS
ACCREDITATIONS

APPRENTICESHIPS
ENDORSEMENTS

TRAILBLAZERS
EXAMINATIONS

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'Emperor' Boles won over by merger claims

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Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College principal Chris Thomson compared Skills Minister Nick Boles to the deluded "naked emperor" from a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale as he questioned the MP's belief that FE mergers would create significant savings.

Mr Thomson (pictured far right) spoke out during a breakout session on the conference's opening morning (November 17) looking at "the place of sixth form colleges (SFCs) in the future education landscape".

He suggested Mr Boles may have been wrongly convinced by civil servants that post-16 education and training area reviews and subsequent college mergers could achieve significant savings.

It would leave the Minister, he warned, "naked" having achieved little through the process — like the lead character in The Emperor's

New Clothes fairytale, who was tricked by thieves that promised to make him a stylish new suit that would only be visible to the well-informed.

He said: "I think the emperor is completely naked on this — total emperor's clothes. We should all be very, very wary of joining in the dance.

"I think Nick Boles has been told by civil servants merger of colleges will be the panacea for what is coming with the spending review and I think he believes it," he added.

"He will carry on believing it until the evidence of the past couple of decades is borne out — there are no huge savings in merger."

Brighton Hove and Sussex is one of three sixth forms and eight general FE colleges involved in an area review for Sussex Coast launched at the start of 2015/16.

It is one of seven English regions involved in the first official wave of area reviews, launched since September, which also

cover West Yorkshire, Tees Valley, Sheffield City, Solent, Birmingham and Solihull, and Greater Manchester.

The seven area reviews cover 33 SFCs and 50 general FE colleges in total and are being overseen by FE Commissioner Dr David Collins.

Mr Thomson added: "The temptation for the first wave of colleges involved will be to start very expensive, in terms of management time, conversations about merger and federation, which will get going just in time for the spending review to distil into a much-reduced national funding rate," he added.

"Colleges will at this point think: 'We are not going to make the kind of savings we need through this', which will be done through economies within individual colleges."

Yolanda Botham (pictured left), principal of Lowestoft Sixth Form College (LSFC), reflected during the session on her experience of working towards closer ties with neighbouring providers while "trying to preserve a distinctive SFC mission".

It comes after LSCF, Great Yarmouth College, and Lowestoft College announced in

July they were looking at forming a "partnership, designed to combine their strengths but still protect the individual identity of each college".

It followed an area review for North East Norfolk and North Suffolk during the first five months of this year.

"We have considered offers from various partners, but chose the option that will enable us to survive and keep our identity," she said.

However, she advised: "If you're big enough, have no debt, and you are the market leader in your area, then the sensible advice would be to hang on and see whether you can ride this out [area reviews].

"We don't have that option. Our cash is reducing and therefore we have to find a [merger] solution that preserves our mission to serve the young people of Lowestoft.

"We don't know what we're going to save. We are working through that very process at the moment very carefully with an FE adviser."



RICHARD BOOTH

Information learning technology (ILT)
coordinator/developer at Shrewsbury College

What is today's reality for classroom teaching and learning?

The use of augmented reality (AR) has helped to reinforce the learning process and provide a mechanism to personalise learning, allow learners to work at their own pace (inside and outside of the classroom/workshop) and choose the activities or resources they need to focus on.

It has allowed tutors across all curriculum areas to gain new skills and adopt new ways of employing technology into the learning process, giving a rich interactive experience.

Tutors have developed innovative ways of providing instruction, theory, assessment collaboration and personalisation of learning. Providing

new activities and visual resources has allowed learners to be involved at the heart of the learning process and consolidate and extend their learning in their own time. Learners receive a blended and more flexible learning experience. The use of emerging technologies in teaching, learning and assessment, has resulted in increasingly positive feedback from learners regarding their all-round learning experience at the college.

They use AR to learn in bite-size chunks, taking into account their previous experience and knowledge. AR resources have been developed that provide all learners with information,

advice and guidance on topics such as equality, diversity, safeguarding, finance, health and well-being. Staff have incorporated AR into much of the college's work, including pre-course advice and guidance for learners, parents and carers; academic and pastoral support; and preparation of learners for higher education and work. It has benefited subject areas for specific needs and cross-college generic topics/subjects have prevented duplicated resources where appropriate. The identified uses for individual subject/curriculum areas has had great benefit in learners' progress through teaching, learning and assessment, and increasingly positive feedback from learners regarding their all-round learning experience at the college.

The AR resources can be shared, evaluated and utilised by others, providing a wider level of dissemination. It has increased the flexibility and opportunity to access information. Further development of AR resources are currently in development to provide generic resources, where applicable, across a wide range of curriculum areas, where shared resources can have benefit, impact and practical reuse. Potential sharing & collaborating with others could provide a wider range and access

of resources. As part of continual quality assurance and evaluation of the use of AR, both formal and informal quality reviews take place throughout the academic year. This has resulted in good feedback from the observation team, tutors and students. Commendation from Ofsted has been documented and resulted in the award of a best practice case study. Students are continually asked for their feedback on their views of AR, its use and benefit to their learning, so that further development can be undertaken.

With the success gained with the use of AR in the teaching and learning process, Shrewsbury College envisages that this interactive resource will continue to be explored for many more years to come. Any use of technology and embedding into teaching and learning takes time and more innovative and targeted use of this resource is perceived for the foreseeable future. Moving forward, the college is already investigating and piloting the use of virtual reality and immersive environments to give further engaging processes for staff and students within their subject areas and provide a wider and richer learning experience.

**EXPERT PIECE ON THURSDAY BREAK-OUT SESSION
ON THE USE OF AUGMENTED REALITY IN TEACHING
AND LEARNING**



Eleven Beacon Award winners

The Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Awards for excellence were handed to eleven FE colleges for providing high quality technical and professional education and training for students.

The winners were announced by Skills Minister Nick Boles and Lady Sharp on the first day of conference in the opening keynote session.

The annual awards, now in their 22nd year, are given to colleges which demonstrate exceptional teaching and innovative thinking and create positive opportunities for staff and students.

Dame Pat Bacon, chair of the Beacon Awards, said: "It is a privilege to oversee these awards which allow us to celebrate the exemplary and innovative work colleges are developing to support their students, staff, employers and local communities, as well as helping to support our recovering economy."

The award winners were Abingdon and Witney College for development of transferable skills, and City of Wolverhampton College for college engagement with employers and also for outstanding leadership of improvement.

Weston College scooped both the award for careers education and guidance and for effective integration of libraries/learning resource centres in curriculum delivery.

The award for staff development in FE was given to Reading College and the award for practical teaching and practical learning was presented to Rotherham College of Arts & Technology.

Barking and Dagenham College was recognised for widening participation in learning and South Eastern Regional College won for efficiency through effective use of technology in FE and skills.

Leicester College collected the award for inclusive learning, and Exeter College was honoured for innovation in FE.

The final winners announced were City College Plymouth, for the promotion and delivery of successful apprenticeships, and Bridgwater College won for sport in the curriculum.

An AoC spokesperson said: "We praised the colleges for providing young people with the soft skills they need to join the workforce alongside the high-quality technical and professional education and training they provide."

Roger Marriott, chief assessor for the Beacon Awards, said: "Every year the Beacon Awards receive a large number of excellent submissions and the high standard made it hard for assessors to determine the winning application in each category."

He added that "all the entries demonstrated the commitment of colleges to create the best possible experience for their students" and the colleges can be "rightly proud to be named as the winners".

Learner pictures of success

Isle of Wight College student Alice Armfield was named at conference as the Association of Colleges (AoC) Student Photographer of the Year.

The 18-year-old, who completed photography, English literature, and psychology A-levels over the summer, was chosen ahead of more than 700 entries from college students all over the country who all took photos on the theme What Matters Most.

She was announced as winner at the conference gala dinner on Wednesday (November 18).

Talking about the winning photo of two family friends, she said: "They are just really amazing people and have an amazing history together and I wanted to capture that in a photo."

Debbie Lavin CBE, principal of Isle of Wight College, said: "I am absolutely delighted for Alice. This is a wonderful achievement and a great accolade for Alice to add to her CV."

Alice's photo was picked out by judge Michael Pritchard, director general of the Royal Photographic Society, who said: "I can read multiple layers into this image. At one level, the couple are surrounded by things that matter to them, each other included, but more deeply the image says to me more about their life history together in that environment."

Second Prize went to Jasmine Nicholls, aged 21, who recently finished a degree in creative media practice at Northbrook College. Mr Pritchard said of Jasmine's photo of a young woman wearing a gas mask connected to a pot which contained a sprouting plant that "the photographer has come up with an interesting idea that is well executed".

Third place went to Jamie Brown, 18, who completed A-level maths, physics and chemistry over the summer at

Alice Armfield's winning photo



Jasmine Nicholls's photo



Jamie Brown photo

Peter Symonds College, in Winchester, for his photo of two women sat down together that Mr Pritchard said made "the point that friendship matters most".

From left: Alice Armfield collecting her award with Graham Hasting-Evans, managing director of the National Open College Network, and Carole Stott, Association of Colleges chair



Reece's reward

WorldSkills hero Reece Taylor was named as Association of Colleges (AoC) Student of the Year at the conference gala dinner.

The 22-year-old was handed the award on Wednesday (November 18) in recognition of his achievements with Derwentside College, in County Durham, and with representing his country at WorldSkills in Sao Paulo in August.

Reece, who left school with no qualifications, completed an advanced apprenticeship with the County Durham provider and local firm Dyer Engineering in fabrication and welding with flying colours earlier this year, before jetting off to Brazil for WorldSkills.

Reece endured a broken bone in his hand during the competition, but continued in pain through four gruelling days to receive a medallion of excellence, achieving an international standard score but just missing out on one of the top three spots.

After collecting the AoC award at the Gala Dinner on Wednesday (November 18), he said: "I'm speechless to have won this award, I didn't expect it at all."

"Being out in Brazil [for WorldSkills, in a foreign country where I didn't speak the language, it was a really tough experience," he added.

"But it's helped me grow as a person. It was the best experience of my life."

An AoC spokesperson said that Reece had also "become an ambassador to his fellow students and Derwentside College, helping other students who are struggling, and speaking to prospective students at open evenings and



Reece Taylor, Carole Stott & Nishall Garala

community events".

AoC president and New College Durham principal John Widdowson said: "I congratulate Reece on winning this prestigious award. He's a great advocate for the North East."

Second place for the Student of the Year awards went to Nishall Garala, aged 19, from Harlow College.

An AoC spokesperson said that he had "taken an active role in the Harlow community, showing a tireless commitment and outstanding service by working as a volunteer with over 20 organisations — including Harlow Youth Council, being a police ambassador, Waterhouse Moor Residents' Association and the Harlow Neighbourhood Action Panel".

Nishall has also been actively involved in raising the profile of Hinduism and represents Hindus and young people in the local interfaith forum, the spokesperson added.

At the same time, he has been a student governor and ambassador at Harlow College, while also achieving a triple starred distinction for the BTec level three extended diploma in business that he completed at the of 2014/15.

Teaching in Dr Spencer's DNA

Further education science teacher Dr Richard Spencer was the focus of a key note conference session on Thursday (November 19).

The Middlesbrough College head of science has worked as an A-level biology teacher in Teeside for 23 years.

He has won numerous awards for his innovative approach to teaching, which includes setting some of the most complicated material to music and dance.

In 2010 he was given an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to science communication and he is also a chartered biologist, chartered science teacher, and a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

In 2014 he was named as one of the UK's Top 100 scientists by the Science Council and his latest achievement was being named as one of the world's Top Ten Teachers in the Varkey Foundation's inaugural Global Teacher Prize this year.

Broadcaster and conference chair Naga Munchetty spoke to Dr Spencer about his path to success.

Dr Spencer is interviewed by Naga Munchetty



that time and effort put into the planning really makes me enthusiastic as a teacher, it engages the students and the response from them is fantastic, it really works.

NM: How tough is it to be innovative, continually?

RS: I can't say I do it all the time. There are certain things I think, particularly things in A-level biology, which are very complicated, but actually really do lend themselves to innovation. I try to think, how could I teach something like DNA structure or the biochemical pathways of respiration, in a way that gets the complicated science across? So it isn't just about having fun, but also makes it an enjoyable experience.

I bumped into a student in the street the other day who I taught 15 years ago. She said: 'You know what I remember about biology the most?' I thought it would be a song or a dance but it was actually a poem about, believe it or not, that exciting topic: 'plant growth hormones and their commercial use'. I didn't believe her, it was 15 years down the line, and she could still remember it and she recited the whole poem.

They have very fond memories of the learning, they've enjoyed the learning experience, and overall it works. I really

believe that passionately, it does work.

NM: What's next for you?

RS: My heart is in the classroom with my students, so their success is the most important thing to me, but I am working with Phoenix Dance company in Leeds on a project about dance and science with proper dancers, so that should be interesting. They've already created a contemporary dance called 'tearfall' which is about tears and an enzyme in tears and we're looking at how we could engage students in the Leeds area with dance and science.

RS: Hold your nerve and stick together. Keep highlighting the important job that FE does in our society. We are taking students, quite often, that have fallen off their road to success for whatever reason and we're putting them back on that journey. So it's an invaluable sector and it needs to really stick together and make sure that message is out there. I love working in the FE sector and obviously like everybody else here I want to see it continue and succeed.

Naga Munchetty:

You were chosen as a top 50 finalist in the global teacher prize. How has this changed your life, or changed your career?

Dr Richard Spencer:

It's certainly been a busy year. I think possibly the highlight was meeting Pope Francis at the Vatican... But also meeting the other top ten finalists, and I've been invited to conferences as diverse as the Society of Experimental Biology — to encourage research scientists to work with teaching — and a science workshop in Denmark, so it's been a very varied experience and I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

NM: What is it that makes you an effective teacher?

RS: I think really see an effective lesson as being crafted. It's the time and effort that you put in at home in planning... I always look for diversity and variety of learning experiences. So if I have a two-hour lesson to plan, obviously there's content to deliver, there's skills to deliver — what's the best way of engaging the students? I find that



'Doc Spencer' teaches student the 'DNA Boogie'



The whole class gets involved

NM: How important is it to shine a spotlight on the teaching profession now?

RS: The Varkey Foundation and their global teacher prize would say

we're not trying to make celebrities out of teachers, we're celebrating teaching. Over the next couple of months I'll be working with young finalists as part of the Varkey Ambassadors scheme, and teaching is such a valuable job, teachers matter. I've met lots and lots of fantastic teachers in FE and really for the future of FE we need to make sure that those teachers are nurtured.

NM: What's your message now as a teacher, in light of the spending review next week?

'It had to be 'U'
It had to be 'U'
Uracil 'U'
Thymine 'T'
is DNA, see
It just wouldn't do
In mRNA
Adenine 'A'
Cytosine 'C'
Guanine 'G'
But Uracil 'U'
Transcription must be
An 'A' for a 'T'
A 'C' for a 'G'
A 'G' for a 'C'
But 'U' for an 'A'
'A', 'C', 'G', 'T' in DNA
mRNA is 'A', 'C', 'G', 'U'
So give me a thrill
U-Uracil
It had to be 'U'

A Doc Spencer Special on making an mRNA copy of DNA during protein synthesis

Sir Lenny lifts college leaders' spirits



The spirits of college leaders were lifted by comedian, actor, writer and presenter Sir Lenny Henry after a conference featuring stark funding warnings.

He delivered a closing speech and Q&A sporting his usual cheeky grin as he took to the stage with an apology on behalf of the absent Education Minister Nicky Morgan, who had been replaced by Childcare Minister Sam Gyimah.

He said: "She had a fantastic speech prepared and everything, but apparently the dog ate it."

Although there was plenty of laughter, Sir Lenny also spoke earnestly about the role education had played in his life, including his time at WR Tuson College (now Preston College) in the 1980s.

At college he was inspired by a tutor named David Emery, an "old school" educator who guided him through texts he had previously found terrifying.

"I thought an iambus was something you find in the transport museum, and I thought blank verse was a poem that hadn't been written yet," he said.

Sir Lenny said studying at college opened up a new world in which he began to thrive.

"David Emery taught me that Shakespeare didn't just write his plays for the high born theatre-goers. He wrote them for the working classes people like me. Once I started with Shakespeare there was no stopping me," he said.

"I passed my O-levels with flying colours and I was so pleased to have achieved something that seemed utterly impossible when I was at Bluecoat Secondary Modern."

After college, a rollercoaster ride took Sir Lenny through a BA and an MA, alongside his showbiz work and commitment to the charity Comic Relief.

He was so excited to collect his first degree in 2006 that he couldn't help but steal the limelight at the graduation ceremony — even though TV star Ray Mears turned up to give the opening address.

"People told me that I cartwheeled onto the stage, did the moonwalk and then

French-kissed Ray Mears. Apparently I was in the middle of a show stopping rendition of 'New York New York' when I was knocked off the stage by a boomerang Ray had cobbled together using just a floorboard, a sock and his own spleen," he said.

Sir Lenny will add a PhD to his achievements next year, but has no plans to stop there. "For me education is like a speech by Neil Kinnock, it just goes on and on," he said.

He is grateful to his tutors for encouraging him to aim high. "You guys have been totally inspirational to people like me," he told the audience.

The auditorium was bristling with questions for Sir Lenny after his speech, including how Comic Relief had taken off and how he first learned to act.

"I was always scared of theatre because at my school ... drama consisted of us running around the hall pretending to be The Avengers," he said.

There were a couple of superfans present too, including a Walsall College employee who shares Sir Lenny's birthday and asked what was next for Comic Relief.

"It's Sports Relief this year and we're doing the [BBC drama] Luther sketch," he replied. "I've always wondered why you don't see John Luther's family. If you watch Sports Relief you're going to find out why."

The colourful life of Sir Lenny

- Sir Lenny was born on August 29, 1958, in Dudley, West Midlands. He was one of seven children and the son of Jamaican immigrants
- He went St John's Primary School and his Auntie Pearl enrolled him in Dudley Library so he could learn to read. "It wasn't a particularly well-stocked library, but if you didn't like one book you could always read the other one" he said
- Sir Lenny went on to study at The Blue Coat Secondary Modern School, which he left at 16 years old. He has described it as a "tough place", but was inspired by science teacher Mr Brooks who helped him make comedy tapes in his spare time
- Sir Lenny made his TV debut on talent show New Faces in 1975, winning with a Stevie Wonder impersonation
- This kick-started his comedy career, and he went on to appear in sitcom The Fosters and children's show Tiswas in the mid-1970s
- It was while performing in summer season in Blackpool in 1980 that he decided to study for his O-levels at WR Tuson College, in Preston
- Sir Lenny met would-be wife and fellow comic Dawn French the same year and spent three years as a DJ on BBC Radio 1 before The Lennie Henry Show appeared on the BBC in 1984

- A year later Sir Lenny co-founded Comic Relief in response to famine in Ethiopia
- At the age of 48 he gained a BA in English Literature from the Open University, after being inspired by his role as head teacher Ian George in BBC drama Hope and Glory in 1998
- This was followed by an MA in screen writing at Royal Holloway, University of London in Egham
- In 2009, Sir Lenny received critical acclaim for his role in Shakespeare's classic Othello at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds

- Sir Lenny is now working towards a PhD from Royal Holloway in race class and gender in the sports film, with Professor John Hill. He is due to finish next year



AOC - VO

STEVE LOGAN

PRINCIPAL, CITY COLLEGE COVENTRY



I've really enjoyed it actually. Certainly the first day was really stimulating, it got off to a great start and we had some great speakers. Clearly there's a lot of doom and gloom around, but I think what's encouraging about conference is, mixed in between that is all the passion and enthusiasm about teaching, learning and assessment. I've got my students here from City College Coventry and they've had a wonderful morning this morning being part of it and it was great to see all the students involved in the events and helping out and contributing. The dinner on Wednesday night was great, the gala was great and again it was all led by students. That's what you want to come to conference to do, to get a bit excited again about the work that you do and remind yourself that it's not all about the finances and the funding — it's about how we're changing lives

AS THE CLOCK TICKED DOWN ON THE END OF ANOTHER A
WENT OUT AND ABOUT TO FIND OUT WHAT DE

SALLY CHALLIS-MANNING

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, CHICHESTER COLLEGE



It's been absolutely amazing. I've attended some really good sessions. I think some of the keynote speeches were really inspirational this year. I particularly enjoyed the sessions that I went to on Tuesday — Lord Ian Blair and Lucy Adams, who was the HR director at the BBC, I thought she was very good. It's been great. We've just delivered a breakout session ourselves which was very well attended. A lot of people have been following up from that. It's been great and I think the networking opportunities have been really valuable; they're one of the most important parts of it. People are here from all of the country and you catch up with people you've not seen for a long time. It's being able to have that kind of cross-fertilisation where we can all share what we're doing. I'm looking forward to next year

JOHN CONNOLLY

PRINCIPAL, NORTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COLLEGE



I think it's been a very interesting week. It's a difficult time with the comprehensive spending review coming up and everybody anticipating what might be the good or bad news coming out of that, but I think there's been a lot of interesting and challenging speakers, some good exhibitors and it's been very useful

VERITY HANCOCK

PRINCIPAL, LEICESTER COLLEGE



It's been one of the best conferences I've been to actually in terms of content and discussion, and just the quality of thinking that's been going on. I'm really impressed



TWEETS FROM #AOCCONF 2015

@CathyEllis121

'You'll all be better off if there are fewer bigger colleges' Nick Boles & Area Reviews #AoCConf

@PaulEeles

Hold tight, stick together & hold your nerve today's key message to #FE leaders from inspirational teacher Dr Richard Spencer MBE #AoCConf

@MargueriteHogg

Nick Boles: No further money available for bursary schemes for students who have to travel further if colleges merge #aocconf

@AndyWKC

Pleased Nick Boles at least recognises role of FE colleges in persuading young people away from violent extremism. @Westking #AoCConf

@Sarah_Stannard

#AoCConf Martin Doel reminds us that UK 16-18 year olds already have lowest hours of teaching in Europe pre CSR ...

@Sue_STC

Martin Doel #AoCConf FE needs resources to provide a well-rounded curriculum because that's what builds character

@sebschmoller

Thus, says Wolf, we are robbing Peter (FE) to pay Paul (HE). And ignoring older part time learners. #aocconf

@penncheryl

'One size only' tertiary education is both expensive and highly unusual - Prof Wolf #AoCConf @Activate_Learn

@KarenPrincipal

"An Apprenticeship means a job - this involves employers & time to create the economic opportunity" #AoCConf John Widdowson

@CaileanUK

Powerful quote from Dr Richard "to be an effective teacher, you need to be an effective learner" #aocconf

@jim_carley

Keith Smith summarises @skillsfunding FE funding reform as a drive to stabilise, simplify and localise #AoCConf

@JulianGravatt

Govt spends less in 2015 (£1.5 bil) on apprenticeships than it spent in 2009 on apprentices (£1.1 bil) & train to gain (£0.8 bil) #aocconf

OX POPS

AOC CONFERENCE, *FE WEEK* REPORTER ALIX ROBERTSON
DELEGATES THOUGHT ABOUT THE 2015 EVENT.

IAN ASHMAN

PRINCIPAL, HACKNEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



I particularly enjoyed this morning because I had a student here and I think one of the things that's impressed me about the conference is that each year we succeed in getting more students involved every time so not only the work experience people but having students as speakers on the main platform is brilliant. And also I went with my student up to the event for students, which was focused around encouraging them to volunteer so I think that side of it's been really encouraging. It was good for her to talk in front of an audience of 100 students. It's all good for the confidence building, so she really enjoyed it

FIONA MOREY

VICE PRINCIPAL LEARNING AND QUALITY, AYLESBURY COLLEGE



The conference ended on a high with Lenny Henry, who was fantastic, and Anthony Seldon was also absolutely inspirational. Education is at the heart of FE and we're delighted about that

PROFESSOR JAMES CRABBE

GOVERNORS' BOARD CHAIR, CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COLLEGE



I think Nick Boles' speech showed a politically-astute awareness of the state of the nation, the state of the government and the state of funding. He also, I think, was very astute in the relationship that he has with the Association of Colleges. It was lovely to hear Alison Wolf. One of the great strengths of her talk was the breadth of the portfolio that this country can offer, right through from the highest of universities through to the highest of skills and vocational learning — it should not be a competition. There should not be a class one class two, we are in the same state that the country was in when I was in the sixth form — that's a few years ago. We haven't closed the skills gap and it needs the sort of Alison Wolf thinking to get us there

DAWN WHITEMORE

NEW COLLEGE NOTTINGHAM (NCN) PRINCIPAL



It's a while since I have been to the AoC conference but was surprised how little had changed. I think as a sector we need to be far more demanding, challenging and yes, a little disruptive. I personally think we missed an opportunity to have a more honest and open debate together as a sector about what we want and need our sector to look like before we get accused of giving the rest of our lunch away. The AoC has a key role in helping us achieve this. The key benefits of the conference for me and my team was through networking; that was great and really useful on a number of fronts.

@ipryce
#AoCConf politicians bemoan "tough choices" but protecting base rates & unfairly cutting other college 16-18 pots is cowardly not tough

@Samwhi
Quite disappointed that Nicky Morgan didn't turn up for her keynote speech at the #AoCConf Something really important must have come up...

@StockdaleJ
Appreciate @SamGyimah put into a position coming to #AoCConf -but he's mastered the art of answering questions in a politician way #AoCConf

@emfec_group
@LennyHenry tells delegates that people like you have been hugely inspirational to me #AoCConf

@ayubkhan65
Character education means building mental toughness & resilience in young people preparing them for life. @SamGyimah #AoCConf

@AmyLalla
@LennyHenry just what we needed. Funny, relevant and inspiring #aocconf

@IanRule
@LennyHenry sums up... Good luck with the future, if indeed you have a future. And we all laughed! #AoCConf

@sewdarngood
One of my favourite things about #AoCConf is how they always have students learning and training throughout the event

@spirotte
Let's state our vision for FE with clarity and with confidence says John Widdowson @AoC_info @ #AoCConf

@StellaMbubaegbu
#AoCConf students are the 'magic' & stardust of #loveFE and the reason we exist & fight -Rianne Chester & Edward Harrington great examples

@LMP_Education
Thank you @AoC_Create - we really enjoyed the #AoCConf this year! Very insightful as always

@ShelaghLegrave
#AoCConf thanks for an excellent conference. Inspiration, passion, enthusiasm abound despite no money and ministers avoiding answers



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