



**SOUVENIR
SUPPLEMENT**

AAC
2016
16-18 MARCH



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AAC 2016 SOUVENIR SUPPLEMENT

The FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference and Exhibition was once again an outstanding event for our sector. This special souvenir supplement provides an overview of some of the highlights from AAC 2016.

AAC took place during the last three days of National Apprenticeship Week (March 16 to 18) and was once again in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

AAC offered an array of prominent key note speakers from top politicians, civil servants, providers, employers and most importantly apprentices. There were also over 45 in-depth practical workshops for delegates to attend.

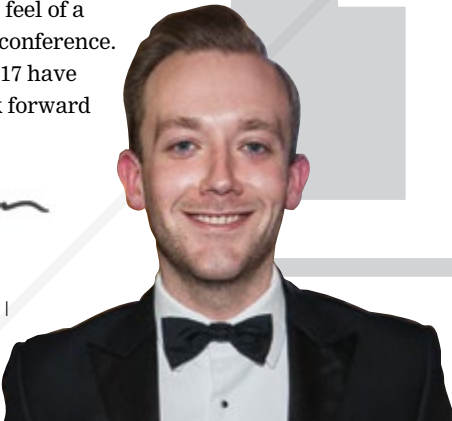
We would not have been able to stage such an event without the support of our exhibitors and sponsors. Particular thanks to our headline sponsor, OCR, strategic partner, AELP and partner BIS and our conference sponsors, City and Guilds,

NOCN and Pearson.

I would also like to say a huge thank you and well done to the Lsect and FE Week teams. Bringing together an event this size takes months of careful preparation and hard work. The FE Week editorial team provided comprehensive coverage of the event and produced edition 168 on location.

This is only the second year that the conference has taken place, however AAC already has the look and feel of a well-established annual conference. Preparations for AAC 2017 have already begun and I look forward to seeing you there.

Shane Mann
SHANE MANN
MANAGING DIRECTOR | LSECT |
PUBLISHER OF FE WEEK



AAC was such a success because it was a team effort

SAVE THE DATE AAC 2017

🕒 22 - 24 MARCH
📍 THE ICC



CHARLOTTE BOSWORTH

Director of Skills and Employment at OCR

Keeping an eye on the detail

apprenticeships frameworks have been user led. By user they were referring to employers. A number of employers disagreed with this point, including large ones, and were more concerned about the groups that had not been engaged including SMEs, assessment organisations and most importantly young people.

With young people in mind for two of our workshops we invited panellists to discuss two issues that for us are critical to the success of the apprenticeship programme – careers guidance and how to engage employers of all sizes in apprenticeship reform.

We hear frequent criticism of the state of careers information, advice and guidance, yet we seem to be no closer to resolving it. Our workshop heard about the need for careers provision to provide information and to inspire people to look at avenues they might not otherwise have considered. We heard directly from Youth Ambassadors about their previous expectations that the careers counsellor would come and tell them what career pathway they

should take. This is a perception we can only challenge by demonstrating what good careers information looks like and how it can help people make informed choices.

The Demos Commission on Apprenticeships cited statistics that showed while 92 per cent of parents think apprenticeships are a good option for young people, only 32 per cent think that an apprenticeship would be the best option for their son or daughter. These statistics are damaging to apprenticeships and particularly to those growth targets so we must challenge them.

We also heard from employers of all sizes, representing the private and voluntary sectors too. We heard widespread support for apprenticeships too and support for the role of employers, but we also heard different views about whether the existing apprenticeship system worked for their business or not. This is not as clear-cut as the reform programme would suggest. From our large employer, there was a view that their existing framework worked well for their business and they could

not see the rationale for wholesale change. They also challenged the rhetoric of ‘employer-led’ when they felt they had not been consulted and their voices were not heard. But we also heard from a sector where some changes were needed as the framework system was not fit for its purpose and for them the standards were an important development.

For careers guidance and employer engagement, it is clear that not every voice is the same, and therefore, the apprenticeship system needs to be flexible enough to deal with these different requirements.

It is getting to that critical moment where clarity is needed

Reforms to the apprenticeship system are not going to quickly end. We must ensure that we are not throwing the baby out with the bath water and losing those vital aspects of the system that work and are valued. The funding system, particularly with the introduction of the levy, needs to support all employers that want to deliver apprenticeships; it cannot just focus on those voices that support the government’s planned direction. If the relevant organisations across the sector are meaningfully engaged to use their expertise then we can deliver high quality and increasing numbers.

DELEGATE VIEWS SPLIT ON LEVY PLANS

Before the Annual Apprenticeship Conference (AAC), FE Week asked delegates for their views on the government’s apprenticeship reforms.

More than 210 representatives from colleges, independent training providers, local authorities, employer providers, awarding organisations and others responded to the survey.

At the start of AAC the interim editor, Nick Linford, talked delegates through the survey results (see picture below).

These showed a surprising lack of consensus on some of the key areas of the apprenticeship reforms, particularly around the introduction of the levy, reflecting the levels of uncertainty in the sector over the potential impact of the reforms.

Only about 50 per cent thought that

funding apprenticeships though a large employer levy was a good idea, despite the fact that it is estimated that it will bring in around £2.5bn to the sector.

Survey respondents were also evenly divided in their views on the impact of the levy on the quality of apprenticeships, which again indicated the many unanswered questions that people have about it. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents said they thought the levy would make those companies that pay it care more about quality, as it would be their money they were spending.

In terms of the impact on employers’ spending on training, a little over half — 56 per cent — of respondents also believed that employers would simply switch over their existing training budget and use the levy money instead.

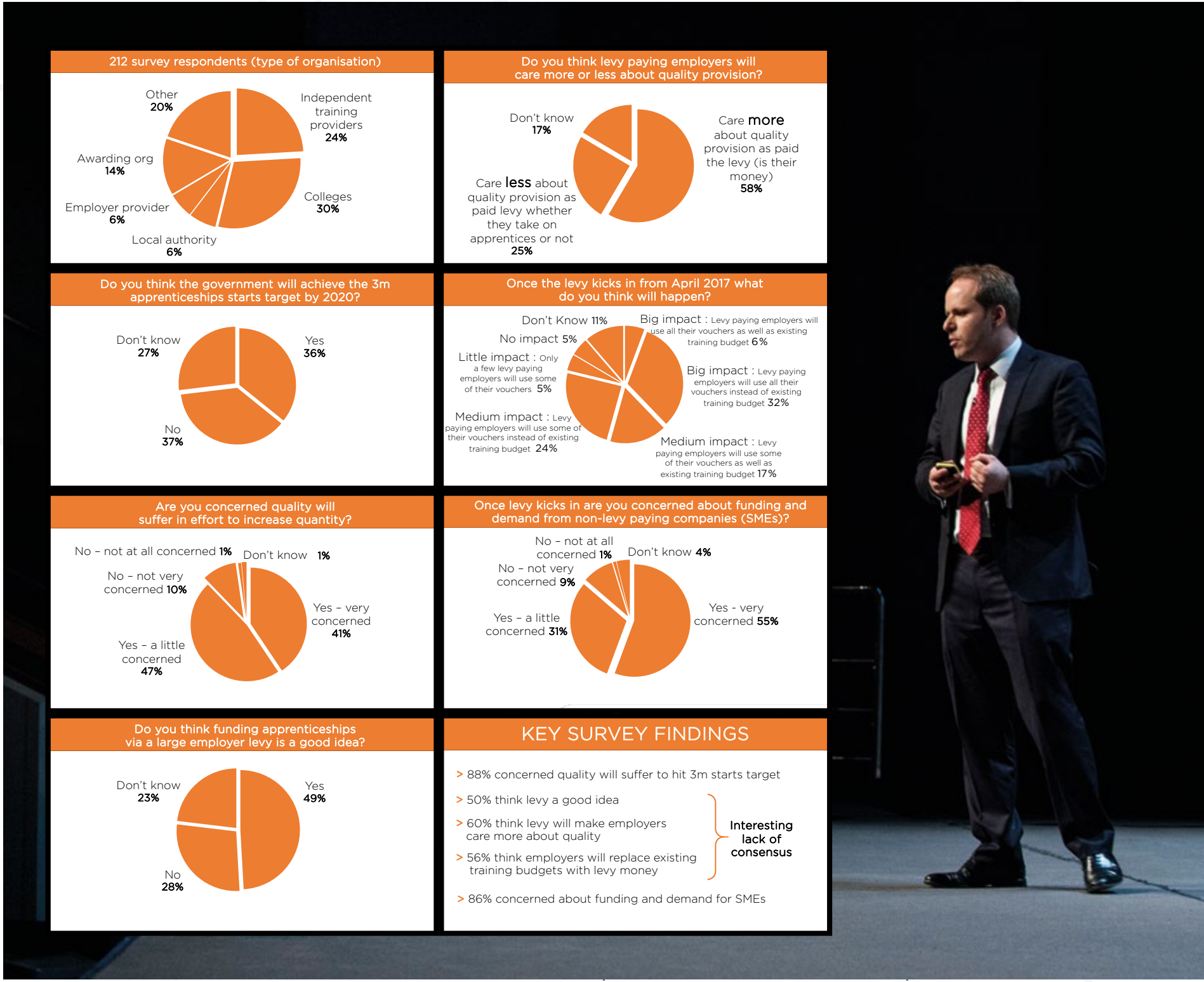
However, there was much more consensus among survey respondents in other areas of the reforms, although this agreement also reflected the high levels of uncertainty surrounding them.

Concern about the quality of apprenticeships was high, with almost 90 per cent saying they thought it would suffer in the rush to meet the government’s 3m target.

A similar proportion — 86 per cent — of respondents expressed concern over the funding of apprenticeship provision for SMEs, who won’t pay the levy.

Given that this is one of the key details of the levy system yet to be worked out — and that the vast majority of apprenticeships are currently in SMEs — such high levels of concern are to be expected.

Surprising lack of consensus on key areas reforms



APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING REFORM – SETTING THE SCENE

DAY 1
DAVID HILL AND KEITH SMITH FROM DFE/BIS

ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

Setting the scene, the first speaker of the conference, David Hill, director of apprenticeships at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), updated providers on the government's latest reform and growth aims for apprenticeships.

Mr Hill spoke about the government's target to achieve 3m new apprenticeship starts by 2020 and emphasised that the aim of the reforms was to "put apprenticeships on a high quality and sustainable footing for the future".

He highlighted the focus on putting employers "in the driving seat" in designing apprenticeship standards and supporting them to offer more apprenticeships – including through the new Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS), an online portal that will be rolled out from October, allowing employers to choose their apprenticeships and training providers and to pay for training and assessment.

The Institute should be independent of ministers

Mr Hill also referred to the new Institute for Apprenticeships, saying it would be one force to "drive up quality of apprenticeships", and said that the apprenticeship levy, due to be introduced in April 2017, would put apprenticeship funding "on a sustainable footing".

After his speech Mr Hill was joined by the new director of levy implementation for BIS, on secondment from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Keith Smith, to take questions from the audience.

Karen Bailey, head of competence development at Volvo, spoke out, describing the apprenticeship reforms as "chaos" and "ill-thought out".

"We're planning our budgets for next

year and the information changes week by week. It's an utter disgrace. It appears to be led by the Treasury as a revenue stream rather than by BIS as a way of improving



apprenticeships," she said.

Mr Smith responded: "What I say to employers like Volvo, or any employers, is we're working proactively, day-in, day-out, with businesses of all sizes on getting their input to the system.

"One of the criticisms we've often had is we don't do enough of working with the people that use the system. We're really working hard to make sure that isn't the case here."

Another question put to the pair was what role they saw for the awarding bodies in the new framework.

Mr Smith said this was a question that "employers have got to answer".

"They've been leading some really important work on changing the nature of the apprenticeship programme, the product ... it's those businesses that have been involved in developing those standards, they are the ones who are saying what is the shape of the skills, the knowledge, the technical expertise needed in those particular standards to do a particular job."

Mr Hill added that this would also fall under the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships.

"There's a very clear statement in that legislation that the Institute should be independent of ministers in the way it carries out those functions. So if anything the reforms will take ministers and the department out of the process of quality assurance," he said.

Later in the day's programme, Mr Smith returned to the topic of the DAS, introduced by Mr Hill, to provide more detail on how it would work.

The new approach, which Mr Smith said would be fully operational by January 2017, will see a radical shake-up of the apprenticeship system in which providers will have direct contracts with employers, who will pay for training through the levy.

It will also see employers being able to contract with any training provider registered with the SFA, rather than just lead providers.

He said it was important to understand that the DAS will be "an interim service" not "an IT system", and added that the focus was to make the new service as accessible as possible for employers.

"It is critical that we do this so that we create the right approach to give employers confidence they are actually going to get that interim service that matters to them," he said.

"We are doing work that we already have some capability on such as how to find an apprenticeship, how to post an apprenticeship vacancy for example.

"It is important that we post that information in a way that they find helpful to see what the new [apprenticeship] standards are about, and how to make an informed decision about these standards."

One of Mr Smith's main revelations was that FE providers may have to fulfil a new set of criteria in order to be approved by the government as fit to work with employers on delivering apprenticeships.

He said that in the coming months, the government will hold a consultation with providers about the requirements of the SFA's register of training organisations (ROTO), which providers can only access if they pass a set of capacity and capability questions.

This will include a discussion of how new criteria will be applied going forward, he confirmed.

Mr Smith said: "We're going to have to revisit [ROTO], because one thing that employers are telling us really clearly is, we need to know bits of information about the providers ... we actually want to get some confidence that these providers are going to deliver a certain set of services to us.

"What we're going to be doing over the end of spring/early summer time is we're going to have to have a big debate about this; we're going to have to have a consultation with you about the



requirements in the register and how we actually apply potentially new criteria going forward."

Outlining what this would mean for providers in the future, he said: "I'm no longer the middle man ... This new service will give capability for your employers to deal with that front-end decision making, will provide them with capability to transact on that, so they then can understand and select a provider from you guys to actually do the work.

"The main contracts are going to be between you and the employer now, not with you and the funding agency," he added.

It came on top of news from the day's budget report that the government was planning a 10 per cent top-up to monthly apprenticeship levy contributions.

The budget report stated: "From April 2017, employers will receive a 10 per cent top-up to their monthly levy contributions in England and this will be available for them to spend on apprenticeship training through their digital account. The government will set out further details on the operating model in April and draft funding rates will be published in June."



I'm no longer the middle man

LIVELY LEADERSHIP PANEL CLASH OVER NEED FOR REFORM

DAY 1
LEADERSHIP
PANEL



ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

A panel of leaders from across the FE and skills sector came together to discuss the big issues in apprenticeship reform, with the complexity of the new system proving a crucial point for debate. The government's new Digital Apprenticeships Service (DAS) was just one aspect of the system under scrutiny from panel members Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP); Dr Sue



Pember, director of Hoxex; Peter Lauener, chief executive of the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA); and Graham Taylor principal and chief executive of New College Swindon. Mr Segal raised concerns about the detail of the government's changes, saying: "Some of the things I have heard today didn't sound like a simple system." Tapping into a recurring theme of the conference, he said: "We're here, only a year away from a complete change, and there still aren't the details." When asked by chair Emily Maitlis if he saw structural problems with the new system for delivering apprenticeships,

Mr Segal said: "It would hard for me to say no."

There still aren't the details

Commenting on the situation for small- and medium-sized employers (SMEs), he added: "If [the government] maintains the mandatory cash contributions, if

we maintain employers negotiating the price of every apprentice, every single apprentice might have a different price and a different payment structure." Mr Segal was challenged by Mr Lauener, who argued that the system was "conceptually ... very straightforward". "The employer takes the decision, says how many apprentices they want on the DAS, chooses a provider and then the SFA makes the payment to the provider. "A lot of the wiring behind that can look complicated, but conceptually it is really simple and it's important that we hold on to that simplicity," he said. When challenged on the issue of a potentially different pay system for



each apprentice, Mr Lauener said the government would be revealing more details in the coming months.

Conceptually it is really simple

"The system of pay caps — and more detail will come out about that later on in the spring — will give a lot of clarity and a framework for this new system. The extent to which employers then choose to negotiate remains to be seen," he said. However, Mr Segal argued that the system of caps could mean the government ended up paying the same for a degree apprenticeship as for a level two apprenticeship. Mr Lauener's contested this point but Mr Segal warned him: "Don't count your chickens". "You're creating a situation that might happen," he said. "We're not negative, but we think that that adds complexity. I might have introduced rates in year one ... If you talked about rates in year one and it all started to work, you might then release the cap." Mr Taylor chipped into the discussion to give a college perspective, highlighting that he saw a number of areas of concern. "I would say we will have uncertainty for at least two years," he predicted. "If you're trying to sell a product, let's



call it apprenticeships, we don't want products that cost a lot. "We're not even quite sure about the content. People have commented about the standards and the quality — are the qualifications portable to the apprenticeship?" He said the apprenticeship levy due for implementation in April 2017 would be "a payroll tax". "The unintended consequences are that we will be relabelling several job roles and several qualifications as apprenticeships to get our money back, in order to meet the target. "I am pretty concerned about the whole system. It's far too complex, unnecessary worries, increased bureaucracy ... I want to get money to the learner. I'm not interested in the wiring," he added. In response, Mr Lauener returned to the point that more information would be released in the near future. "We're at a stage in the process where a lot more of this will be set out over the next couple of months.



different system from the system that we've operated up to now." In contrast to Mr Segal and Mr Taylor, Ms Pember was optimistic about the government's changes to apprenticeships, saying to the audience: "I just don't understand why you're not all really, really excited."

The previous system wasn't sustainable

"What we have to understand is that the previous system wasn't sustainable," she said. "Over the last five or six years, we've taken money from every other pot of the skills budget and put it into apprenticeships and there wasn't anything left. "If you're going to get an injection of cash like we will after the levy, you have to give something and that's why there are the changes to the standards and the changes to the content." She attempted to offer reassurance to the teaching staff who had attended the session. "I would say that most of you are working in vocational areas where the majority of the content doesn't actually change. "I think you should be more confident about what's going to be in the standards, and more confident about what the assessment will look like in the end, because you know how to do it."

We will have uncertainty for at least two years

"There will be a lot more debate ... but let me make sure that no one is under any misapprehension; this is a radically

OFSTED A 'CHAMPION' BUT WITH COLLEGE CHALLENGES

C

DAY

SIR MICHAEL
WILSHAW
AND
PAUL
JOYCE
FROM
OFSTED

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Ofsted chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw declared himself “a champion of apprenticeships” in a speech in which he challenged the sector to deliver more and better apprenticeships.

“For too long we’ve wasted too much talent in our education system because we have not given vocational education and apprenticeships the priority it deserves,” he said.

He went on to focus on the challenge of delivering high-quality apprenticeships that provide young people with the skills employers need.

“Too few apprenticeships are delivering the professional, up-to-date skills in the sectors that need them most. And too many are of poor quality,” he said.

“Inspectors find too many trainees stuck in classrooms, or becoming experts in outdated approaches – like the mechanic who can strip an engine but doesn’t know where to start with the electrics of a modern day car,” he continued.

Where there were high quality apprenticeships, Sir Michael said, they were “found in industries that have long-established traditions of using them: the motor industry, construction and engineering.

Large colleges will be challenged

“They are few in number and are largely delivered by long-standing industries and providers.

“On the other hand, the ever-increasing numbers of apprenticeships in the care and retail sectors are not consistently reaching the same high standards,” he said.

Sir Michael criticised colleges for “not delivering high enough numbers of apprenticeships overall, and certainly not in the right areas”.

“Large colleges will be challenged [by Ofsted] about the numbers they have on roll, the liaison in place with local business and the appropriateness of the skills on offer,” he said.

He later described Ofsted’s role as being “the people who have to shine a spotlight on what’s working and not working”.

“If you look at the annual report over the last four years, we have said roughly the same thing — English and maths is poor, there are poor quality apprenticeships, three quarters of inspections of study programmes, English, maths work experience and so on, are judged to be less than good. That’s not good enough,” he said.

“Unless the training providers really meet the challenges that are going to be presented to them over the next few years, then we are not going to have the high quality apprenticeships the government wants,” he continued.

During the post-speech Q&A session, for which he was joined by Paul Joyce, Ofsted’s deputy director for FE and skills, Sir Michael defended his controversial views about post-16 education.

“The point I was trying to make is that the situation is pretty dire,” he said,

when he was challenged by incoming Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) chief executive Mark Dawe to explain his views.

“Those youngsters who don’t do well at 16 at English and maths GCSE, two to three years later it is just as bad,” he said.

“A lot of youngsters used to the very structured environment of school life need to continue with it, and do much more vocational education 16 to 19. I see an important role for university technical colleges (UTCs) [with this],” he continued.

“That’s what has to happen, so they can go much more confidently and in greater numbers to apprenticeships aged 19.”

When asked about his “publicly stated personal bias” against FE, Sir Michael responded: “It’s not a bias, it’s criticism of what we see — and have seen for a number of years”.

“You can’t tell me that the statistics

on study programmes are good. In most colleges that we see, a very small proportion of youngsters are on apprenticeship programmes — you can’t tell me that’s good. No it isn’t good.”

In response to a question from host Emily Maitlis, Mr Joyce refused to be drawn on whether he or Ofsted shared these views.

“Sir Michael made it very clear at the committee hearing that it was his personal view of 16 to 19 education,” he said.

“The criticism of FE, while 79 per cent of providers are good or outstanding overall, that does leave a chunk of providers where provision is not yet good enough,” Mr Joyce added.

During his speech, Sir Michael criticised schools for not fully preparing young people for apprenticeships, either by giving them the right skills or the right advice.

“Most young people don’t even know

about apprenticeships and they certainly don’t know how to apply for one,” he said later, during the post-session Q&A.

“They don’t know how to apply straight to the employer or go to their local training provider. We have got to recalibrate, and ensure that universities aren’t talked about as the only route to success,” he said.

Sir Michael also singled out apprenticeships in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as an area that “has got to improve”.

“Traditional industries which have produced good apprenticeship programmes for many years continue to do well, but the short term programmes that small or medium sized business run are often poor quality,” he said.

“The only way that it seems to me we will get apprenticeships to improve, is if we get employers to take ownership,” he continued.

It was his personal view of 16 to 19 education



LEARNER VOICE A KEY PILLAR

DAY

SHAKIRA MARTIN FROM THE NUS



JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Shakira Martin, the National Union for Students (NUS) vice president for FE, exhorted the government to include the apprentice voice in its reforms, in a rousing speech that elicited a number of rounds of applause from the audience.

“In government, businesses and even at this conference, a lot of people are talking about apprenticeships – but how many people are actually talking about apprentices?” she asked.

There was a lot of talk about putting employers in the driving seat, Ms Martin said, “but employers are only one of the stakeholders that matter in apprenticeships”.

“It is vital that apprentices’ rights, interests and voices are understood as one of the pillars for a successful apprenticeship system,” she said.

“We want to see apprentices’ voices integrated into the new Institute for Apprenticeships, not only because we believe it’s an apprentice’s right, but also because it would lead to better apprenticeships,” she continued.

This involvement could take the form of an advisory board, Ms Martin said, or a national survey of apprentices.

“At the moment it’s always assumed that apprenticeships are always working in the best interest of apprentices. I believe it would be wrong to leave this unchallenged,” she explained.

Uncertainty over apprenticeships meant that many apprentices did not know if an apprenticeship would be “worthwhile”, Ms Martin said.

How many people are talking about apprentices?

“The government’s approach is to consistently overstate the investment that employers make in apprenticeships and understate the massive commitment that

apprentices themselves are making,” she said.

Apprentices were often low-paid, and without access to either in-work benefits or the support that students can access, she said.

The National Society of Apprentices, part of the NUS, was campaigning for the rights of apprentices, Ms Martin said.

This included calling on the government to use leftover levy funds to top up apprentices’ wages, which would “allow apprenticeships to be more accessible and appealing, without increasing the burden on employers”, she said.

Ms Martin also expressed concern about apprentices’ progression into employment, particularly for government apprentices.

“Only three per cent of government apprentices are taken on as full-time employees after their scheme has finished. What kind of example does that set?” she asked.

“For apprentices to succeed and gain equal esteem with other forms of education and training it is vital that we are honest with young people about the real prospects and opportunity. It’s not about replacing vocational education with apprenticeships – it’s about making pathways for people to reach their full potential,” she said.

HEARING FROM THE APPRENTICES

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Youth Employment UK (YEUK)’s presentation featured chief executive Laura-Jane Rawling as well as three former and current apprentices.

“It is vital that we put young people at the heart of this policy. How the hell pale, male, stale still think they know what it’s like to be 16 is well beyond me,” Ms Rawling said.

While youth unemployment was “still a major issue in the UK”, Ms Rawling said she was “really excited about apprenticeships”.

She praised the work that had already been done to make apprenticeships attractive to young people, who are “making choices over going to FE or higher education to do an apprenticeship”, but expressed concern over some of the current changes.

With a “growing demand for apprentices”, with more employers training in-house and fewer graduate jobs, Ms Rawling warned that “the apprenticeship model does need to cater for a diverse range of people”.

These included people like herself, who “left the academic system at 16 with a D in maths”.

“You know what, that D in maths hasn’t stopped me. I don’t class myself as a failure. And this government would do well not to undermine the round, the square and the oblong pegs,” she said.

“We have got to protect level two, we have got to protect that first rung of the ladder for young people,” she urged.

“We have a duty to help these young people to understand all of the pathways and to be the success that’s within each of them and that’s something we firmly believe in at YEUK,” she concluded.

Jordan Wilks, 18, who is about to start an apprenticeship with Humanutopia, said that reducing the stigma around apprenticeships was important.

An apprenticeship and going to university were “not an either/or, they’re on an equal footing,” he said.

“If you’re an academic person, an apprenticeship is still a perfect avenue for you to take,” he added.

Daisy Taylor, 18, a recruitment consultant with Aim Apprenticeships, spoke about the difference that good careers advice can make. She said her first apprenticeship, in business administration, “wasn’t very good”.

“I could’ve done a level three digital marketing and my life would’ve been so different if I’d just got that careers guidance

at school,” she said.

For Karl Dring, 20, former apprentice and now social impact and media administrator at Humanutopia, being able to work at the same time as learning was what attracted him to an apprenticeship.

“It was just the perfect match up of everything I wanted. I got to get hands on in something I loved to do, as well getting the qualification,” he said.

We have a duty to help these young people

YEUK AND APPRENTICES



From left: Jordan Wilks, Emily Maitlis, Daisy Taylor, Karl Dring and Laura-Jane Rawling

SHADOW MINISTER CALLS FOR PROGRESSION AND EXPANSION

ALIX ROBERTSON
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Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden reiterated Labour's support for a move towards more higher level apprenticeships, in outlining his views on the government's apprenticeship reforms.

Host Emily Maitlis questioned Mr Marsden on whether it was still Labour party policy to scrap level two apprenticeships, which was a key line for Labour ahead of the May election last year.

We must emphasise the opportunities for progression

He steered clear of committing to this outright, but said that it would be necessary to "look very carefully at the existing strengths of level two and level three" and build a strong case for high skills that are "increasingly what we are going to need".

Echoing former Labour leader Tony Blair's call for "education, education, education" in 1996, Mr Marsden called for "progression, progression, progression" to establish a clear place for apprenticeships in the future.

He said: "As education, education, education was crucial for the last Labour government in expanding the FE and skills sector, progression, progression, progression must be the watchword for a flexible 21st century world of work and learning and the place apprenticeships occupy within it."

He stressed a need for more higher and degree level apprenticeships as the programme moved forward.

"To upscale and fill the gaps in the technical and professional staff ... we must emphasise the opportunities for progression and substantially increase higher and degree level apprenticeships.

"Currently we have 96 per cent of apprenticeships at levels two and three, which remain particularly important in the service and associated sectors.

"But expansion into higher and degree levels apprenticeships, must be at the heart of what we do to drive up productivity ...



and would be a crucial factor addressing the growing gap in skills amongst our workforce," he added.

Mr Marsden reiterated throughout the session that he saw "higher education and FE increasingly influencing and morphing into each other", saying that both sectors were undergoing a period of change.

He also commented that this changing landscape would mean that reaching the government's 3m target required "a kaleidoscope of a number of different types of apprenticeships", adding that "it's not going to be one silver bullet".

"We need not only to scale up areas of traditional apprenticeships in manufacturing and industry, but also grasp the potential for great expansion, including for high-quality apprenticeships in the service sector," he said.

"There are growing demands in social care, leisure and visitor services, as well as digital and creative industries, and we must do everything we can to meet these."

He stressed that Skills Minister Nick Boles was not making it easy for FE providers to move forward with plans to meet this 3m target.

"I agree with him that we need a much bigger take up of the apprenticeship challenge in FE colleges – though of course just a little in the cross winds from area reviews, slashed funds for English for Speakers of Other Languages (Esol), £360m of cuts in the adult skills budget at the moment – but he has a funny way of persuading them to do it," he said.

"If you're going to exhort people to pull their socks up it's not helpful intermittently to be pulling them down."

Another of Mr Marsden's key criticisms of the government's programme of reform was timing — describing the timescale for the apprenticeship levy in particular as "ludicrous".

"We should not be trying to shoehorn things into artificial timetables. We should have a very strong process, but we should

listen to what people on the ground tell us," he added.

He said that the Labour party supported the principal of the levy, but "the devil is in the detail".

"Is it going to need more money? Is it going to harm rather than assist businesses and is it feasible in this period of time and what will most of the money actually go into?" he asked.

The issue of timing, Mr Marsden said, has also affected the development of the new Trailblazer standards.

"Initially, the government had intended all new apprenticeship starts to be on the new standards by 2017/18.

"Their December 2015 document announced the government's intention for a 'migration from apprenticeship frameworks to standards over the course of the Parliament, with as much of this to take place in 2017/18 as possible'. What this means in practice we wait to see," he said.

Concluding his speech, Mr Marsden

focused on the importance of all groups coming together to help achieve success with the apprenticeship reforms.

"Everyone – local authorities, the LEPs [Local Enterprise Partnerships], colleges, independent providers, the voluntary sector and the trade unions, sectors, professional bodies, universities all have parts to play," he said.

"We owe it to the apprentices of today and tomorrow to make sure their high hopes, their enthusiasm, their raw creativity is channelled and not blighted by the frameworks we provide for them."

What this means in practice we wait to see



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SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIR FURIOUS WITH LEVY UNKNOWNNS

DAY

IAIN WRIGHT
CHAIR
OF BIS
SELECT
COMMITTEE

ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

The chair of a group of influential MPs slammed the government's progress on apprenticeship reform in a question and answer session, saying he doesn't see a "hope in hell" of the target for 3m new apprenticeships by 2020 being achieved.

Iain Wright, chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Committee, said he had moved from feeling concerned about the situation, to being alarmed by the government's slow progress after George Osborne failed to finesse the details in his budget.

"I don't think we've got a hope in hell of achieving that 3m target," he said.

"I really worry about this and think we are getting to the stage where we really need to question the minister [Nick Boles]," he said.

Mr Wright's speech was applauded by the audience as he told host Emily Maitlis of his concerns, raising the apprenticeship levy as a key area where the government's plans lacked clarity.

"I'm particularly worried that 98 per cent of employers who aren't going to pay the levy — how are they going access skills funding?

"I have heard that it was all going to get sorted in the budget ... the word apprenticeships didn't come from [George Osborne's] lips."

He also criticised the government's plans to make further announcements on the levy later in the year.

"Further work will be outlined in April and further details in June. They are making this up as they go along! They have announced the policy and now are frantically thinking: 'How on earth are we going to do this?'" he said.

Mr Wright said he thought the levy could end up being delayed from its planned start date in April next year.

"We want him to achieve the 3m, we want to see an improved skills workforce, but given these huge delays and the massive uncertainties that he hasn't been able to answer — are you going to delay delivery until April 2018 in order to make sure that this isn't botched, that it is put in correctly?" he asked.

Mr Wright raised one of the key questions of the conference, in asking how small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) would be involved in delivering the 3m apprenticeships target.

"Given both the restructure in skills and the economy that small firms don't train

apprentices, for a variety of reasons, how are they going to access the money? There

are so many questions here about the implementation," he said.

"How do we shape this levy? I would have thought small firms would be brought into this, how does it work for them? This is meant to be employer led."

He commented on "frustration right across the board" about a lack of dialogue between experts in business and education — a point which seemed to chime with members of the audience.

Another key issue Mr Wright raised was impact of devolution, saying that if the skills agenda is a devolved issue, there needs to be a clearer outline of what input is expected from devolved administrations.

"The devolved agenda with LEPs [Local Enterprise Partnerships] and combined authorities increasingly, if they want deals with government, they are asking for skills to be part of that devolution agenda.

"That is all very well and good, I passionately believe in devolution, but if you are a multi-national company thinking about investing in this country, and thinking about skills and training providers, you have no idea what you are going to do in the levy."

Mr Wright also spoke about the work

of the BIS Committee in its joint inquiry with the Education Committee, as the Subcommittee on Education, Skills and the Economy.

He outlined the sub-committee's two inquiries, into careers information advice and guidance and apprenticeships.

Not a hope in hell of achieving that 3m target

On careers he said it is "absolutely essential" that individuals are provided with clear information on the different routes they can take, and added that is

vital to emphasise the importance of apprenticeships "as a means of filling the [skills] gap and achieving our potential".

He highlighted that with a workforce in the country of around 31m, where 12m will retire in the next decade and only 7m will be coming through the education system, "there is going to be a massive shortfall and we need to fill that gap".

He said: "Looking at particular sectors, engineering for example, 830,000 new engineers are required in the next eight years, these figures are astonishing and that is if we keep still, not letting the economy grow.

"Apprenticeships are therefore really crucial to address this."

Mr Wright echoed earlier comments made by Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden, who said that "the devil is in the detail" when it comes to the future of apprenticeships.

"There's absolutely no detail, frighteningly so close to the implementation date," he added.

"The government really needs to think what it means. To pause, reflect, and get this right."

They are making this up as they go along!



PM ADVISER REVEALS STAGED LEVY MIGRATION FOR SMEs

E

DAY

SUE
HUSBAND
FROM
SFA
AND
NADHIM
ZAHAWI MP
THE
PM'S
APPRENTICESHIP
ADVISER

Only companies that pay the apprenticeship levy will have access to the levy system when it launches, Nadhim Zahawi, the co-chair of the apprenticeship delivery board, revealed.

"The core offering that we will be launching in April 2017 will effectively be delivering the levy for the two per cent levy payers, while maintaining stability in the rest of the system," Mr Zahawi, who is also the Prime Minister's apprenticeship adviser, said.

"What you want is a core offering and make sure it worked and delivered for those companies who are paying the levy, and then it'll start to migrate to the rest over a period of time," he continued.

This was confirmed by Sue Husband, the director of apprenticeships and delivery service at the Skills Funding Agency, who joined Mr Zahawi on stage. She said: "The digital apprenticeship service in the long-term will absolutely be the place where all businesses will be able to access funds for apprenticeship training in the future," she continued.

We will maintain stability in the rest of the system

"To put people's minds at ease in terms of SMEs, they will still have access to funding for apprenticeships," she concluded.

Earlier in his speech, Mr Zahawi – who described his as "the best job in government" – said the government's 3m apprenticeship target was both "challenging" but also an opportunity.

"If I tell you that only 15 per cent of employers have a formal apprenticeship programme currently, to me – as someone who came out of the world of entrepreneurship – that's an opportunity. It means we have a market to grow into of 85 per cent," he said.

The apprenticeship delivery board would help to grow apprenticeships in "those sectors where we think we need to spend more effort and more emphasis into", Mr Zahawi said.

"There are many sectors who are doing brilliantly, engineering being one of them.



Nadhim Zahawi

There are other sectors where we think we can do better – construction, the media, the creative industries for example, in the hospitality industry, in banking, financial services – and so what I have tried to do is to get leaders from those industries to join me in the apprenticeship delivery programme," he said.

"They are putting together groups of their peers, of their competitors, their supply chain. We have roundtables with them, and we effectively work together to see how they could collaborate to deliver that 3m target of high quality apprenticeships," he continued.

Diversity in apprenticeships was another focus, Mr Zahawi said, as "not only are apprenticeships good for

business, but diverse backgrounds of apprentices is also good for business".

His team had been set a target to increase the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) apprentices by 20 per cent by 2020, he said, "and the way we're doing that is by engaging with the BME community to understand better how we can reach those communities. We're also talking to the BME businesses to understand what their needs are".

"I am confident that we will hit our target when it comes to diversity as well as great apprenticeships all round," he added.

During her speech, Ms Husband addressed the question of quality, which she said everyone agreed had a "pivotal role" in apprenticeships.

"Because to achieve 3m quality apprenticeship starts we need to increase the number of starts by 20 per cent from current levels. Improving quality is therefore essential to boosting the trajectory of starts and engaging the commitment from businesses to do more," she said.

"With employers now at the heart of apprenticeship reform, I believe employers will drive forward continuous improvement," Ms Husband said.

The new Institute for Apprenticeships would also have a role to play in driving quality, she said, as it "will support the development and delivery of high quality

apprenticeship standards and assessment plans".

At the same time, she emphasised the role that providers – "everyone here" – had to "positively influence the quality of apprenticeships".

"I think one of the steps of the levy about putting control into the hands of the

employers is that employers will know what they're buying and they will demand more," she said later, in response to a question from the audience on quality.

"Ultimately the people who are delivering those apprenticeships are the employers and the providers and the colleges and you have the capability to improve quality," she said.

She also challenged the idea that quality would suffer in the drive to quantity.

"If you think about successful businesses around the world, many successful businesses do things on a huge scale and still have really high quality. In fact, sometimes, doing things on a big scale allows companies to get economies of scale, and actually coming together can drive quality that way.

"So no, I don't think that just by having more of something means it's not as good quality," she asserted.

"We need apprenticeships to be relevant, resilient and respected," she concluded.

Employers will know what they're buying



Sue Husband



From left: Sue Husband and Nadhim Zahawi

GALA DINNER AT AAC

Over 500 conference delegates, sponsors and guests attended the AAC gala dinner at the end of day two.

Diners enjoyed a drinks reception, three-course meal, a after dinner speech by conference presenter and leading BBC journalist Emily Maitlis. The evening closed with guests packing the dancefloor as top covers band The White Keys played a string of funk, soul and disco classics.

A highlight of the evening was the after dinner speech by Ms Maitlis who reflected on life as a top political reporter — including her recent experiences of covering the contentious 2016 USA presidential primary elections.

Ms Maitlis said during her speech: "I sometimes think I've done everything backwards. I worked in the Far East before I worked in local news, I made long documentaries before I worked in daily news. "My first long piece for television was about Cambodian prisons. I ended up in one. Overnight."

But having interviewed the last four UK prime ministers, and famous figures including David Beckham, Usain Bolt, Steve Coogan and Kevin Spacey, she added "for the last twelve months all anyone has wanted to talk to me about is Donald Trump".

"He says extraordinary things. My favourite

tweet said 'he's what you'd get if the comments section of an online article suddenly ran for office."

She also recalled meeting leading Democrat contender Hillary Clinton in New Hampshire and reflected that she was a "curiosity", with "a vast array of expertise and experience, yet she comes with a marketing problem even in her own party".

Managing director of FE Week's publisher Lsect Ltd, Shane Mann, also led a vote of thanks for the "outstanding contribution" done by outgoing Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) chief executive Stewart Segal during three years in the post.

AELP chairman Martin Dunford OBE was also invited on stage to deliver his own vote of thanks on behalf of AELP.

He said: "Thank you Stewart for your commitment, your hard work and for the great job that you have done.

"Our membership and influence has continued to grow since we started AELP, and the last three years have seen that growth continue apace. "The only reason government can have the ambition for vocational skills and apprenticeships it now has is because of what we as a sector have achieved.

"AELP and Stewart in particular has been a very big part of that achievement."



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TREASURY SIMPLY SQUEEZING RESOURCES OUT OF BIS

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Former Business Secretary Sir Vince Cable outlined his concerns around the apprenticeship levy – including his fear that it is simply a “revenue raising measure” for the Treasury.

Sir Vince said he had set the levy “in train” during his time in office, from 2010 to 2015 as part of the coalition government, “but it’s turning out rather differently from what I envisaged”.

“We’ve got a good concept that could work, but the detail is incredibly hazy,” he said.

“What the government has done is to come up with a big idea hoping that the details will sort themselves out. I’m not sure that’s true!” he continued.

Sir Vince said he believed that his former department, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) saw the levy – as he had done – as “a mechanism to transfer resources to good trainers from companies”.

However, he said, the Treasury view was different “because they are obsessed, as we saw in the budget, with their deficit target”.

“I get the impression they [the Treasury] think they can squeeze resources out of BIS and the apprenticeship levy which, I fear, may simply be a revenue raising measure,” Sir Vince said.

The detail is incredibly hazy

“The more it’s a revenue raising measure, the more businesses will be disillusioned, the more businesses will cynically gain in the system – and who would blame them?” he warned.

“I think what we need reassurance on is that this is a genuine mechanism for supporting training and apprenticeships particularly.”

Sir Vince also questioned where the money raised through the levy was going to go.

“I get the sense that what the government will do is continue to provide government support for training for small businesses that are not part of the levy scheme, and

will use it out of the revenue from the bigger companies. So you will have cross-subsidy, with an overall reduction in government contributions,” he said.

“If that is happening it’s a backwards step, not a forwards step,” he added.

“There are technical questions about what happens to the unused money that employers don’t claim through their vouchers, there are question marks over what happens with existing levy scheme in construction and engineering, but the big question is where will this money go? I don’t think we yet have a clear answer on that,” he said.

Another “big question” Sir Vince said he wanted answering was what training could be accessed through the levy system.

“What seems to be happening is that existing employer training is going to be taken out of the scheme, it will be difficult if not impossible to use vouchers for it.

“And if that happens there is a real danger of gaming by the private sector who

will simply switch from providing training on their own account, as they do at the moment, to switching it under the voucher scheme, and we’ll have no net increase,” he said.

Sir Vince also spoke about the “uncertainty” within the FE sector over the current area review process.

“It is possible that in the area reviews quite a lot of good quality FE provision is going to be effectively dealt with through amalgamation of colleges,” he said.

“All our lessons from government and the private sector is that bigger isn’t necessarily better. Mergers and acquisitions often lose value rather than gain value. And a process of forced mergers, which I think many people worry will be a consequence of the reviews, again could take us backwards rather than forwards,” he said.

Sir Vince also reiterated his vision – which he had set out in a green paper shortly before last year’s general election

– of the ‘dual mandate’ for the sector, “in which vocational education at both entry level and higher level is built around the very excellent FE colleges”.

Bigger isn’t necessarily better

“One option is for people who do not want to go down the academic route, is to

use FE colleges as centres of excellence for vocational training, to have that as their central mission, built around apprenticeships. And some of the FE colleges have really bought into this in a big way,” he said.

“The other half of the dual mandate is to do what polytechnics used to do which is higher apprenticeships, degree equivalent level four, five, six,” he continued.

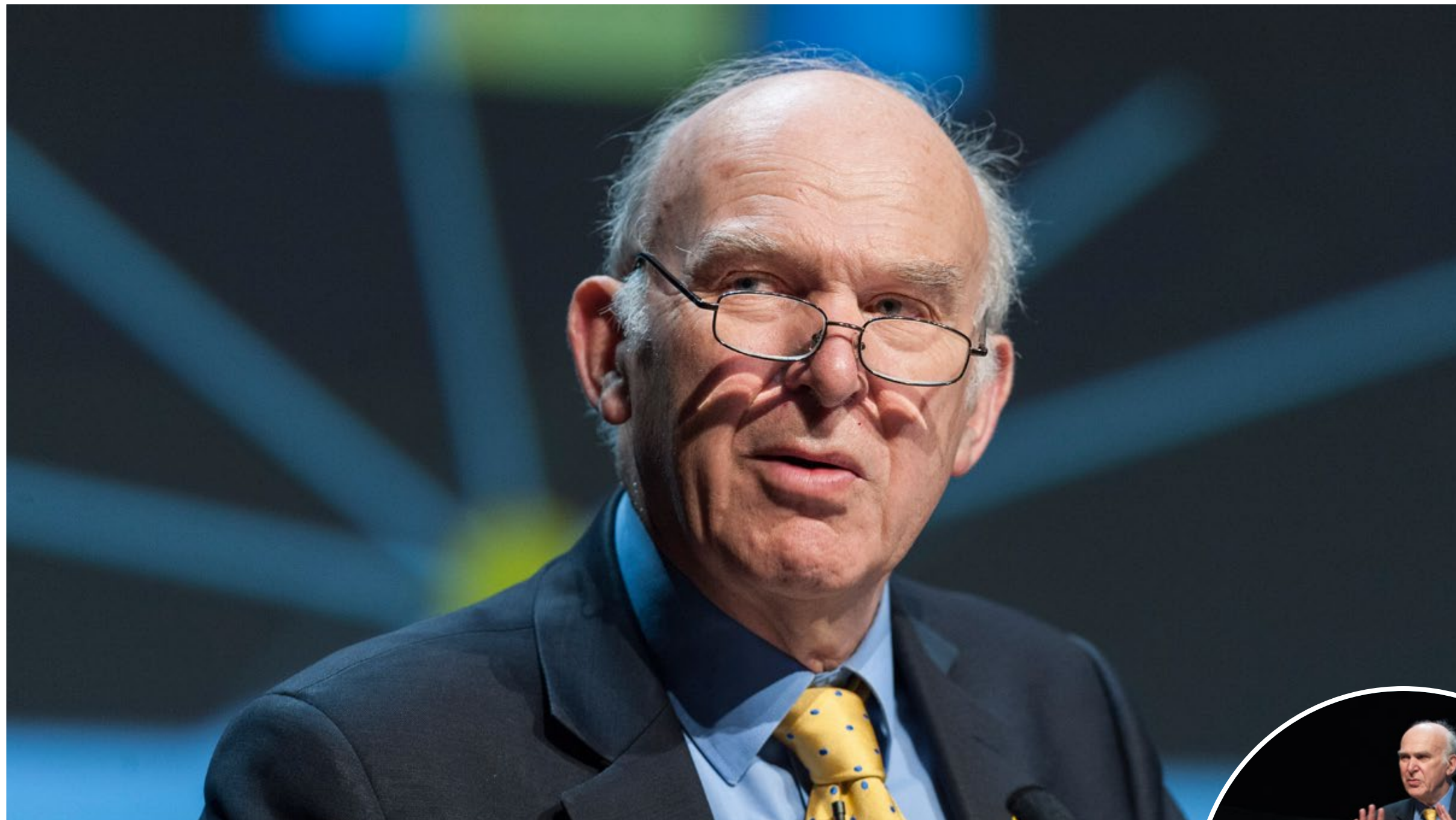
“I think it is possible to have a very good vision of vocational excellence developing particularly on the back of the FE sector,” he added.

In relation to this point, Sir Vince said that Ofsted chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw’s recent comments about the FE sector had been “very, very unhelpful”.

“I saw this in government, the snobbery of the British establishment towards FE had to be seen to be believed,” he added.

“Anything that reinforces that traditional stereotype is deeply unhelpful,” he said.

Snobbery towards FE had to be seen to be believed



Employers and their programmes

E

DAY

INDUSTRY
SKILLS
BOARD

From left: Nicky Taylor, Mike Thompson, Ann Brown and Emily Maitlis

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

The vital role of apprentices in ensuring that businesses have people with the right skills and the support those businesses offer to apprentices was the subject of the Industry Skills Board panel discussion.

"We use the apprenticeship route to bring people into key roles that enable our business to be competitive," said Nicky Taylor, head of training at Ginsters.

"Using the apprenticeship scheme that we've designed, it really puts quality at the heart of what we do. It's qualification-linked, it's behavioural-linked and we worked out that it's about 158 hours of internal management and learning and development time that goes into every single person that goes through that programme," she said.

Ms Taylor said the selection process for apprentices, which saw around 30 per cent of applicants being declined, was "really key" to their programme.

"There are particular qualities and skill and aptitudes that we will be looking for that we can build on as part of that apprenticeship programme," she said.

Mike Thompson, head of employability programmes at Barclays, said their apprenticeship programme, which was launched in 2012, was designed to increase the diversity of Barclays' workforce.

The levy is encouraging us to think more broadly

"When we first started looking at the issue of workforce diversity we saw very few young people in the organisation. We had less than 200 people under the age of 21, and that's in a workforce of 70,000 in the UK," he said.

"We felt there was a lot of talent that wasn't being tapped into," he added. Mr Thompson said they introduced

traineeships as a way for applicants to "try before they buy". The introduction of this "two weeks of work experience first, of what we do" meant that apprenticeship completion rates had gone up from around 75 per cent to 95 per cent, Mr Thompson said.

The first apprentices were taken on board at Nationwide in 2013, and they're paid the living wage, said Ann Brown, HR director.

"If you join Nationwide as an apprentice your contract is exactly the same as if you were a permanent employee," she said.

"We don't want to be in a place where we have a workforce that is our emerging entry talent people paid or treated in a different way," she added.

While Nationwide has "absolute engagement inside" with apprenticeships, Ms Brown spoke about the challenges that the levy would bring in terms of engaging with providers across the country.

"The levy is encouraging us to think more broadly and we're doing more relationships with multiple colleges, multiple providers, and I'm not sure yet that we've really thought through how we do some of those interventions and particularly from a quality point of view," she said.

Higher apprenticeships critical

MARY
CURNOCK
COOK
FROM
UCAS

Lack of progression from intermediate to higher level apprenticeships was a key theme of the speech given by UCAS chief executive Mary Curnock Cook.

She said that her organisation backed the government's apprenticeship expansion programme and was putting "an enormous amount of resource" into promoting them — including through the UCAS Progress service which advises post-16 students on all their options including apprenticeships.

But she stressed the importance of encouraging people to view apprenticeships as a means to progress to higher level training including at degree level.

"I think the really big question here for us today, particularly in my case with higher level and degree level apprenticeships, is will this increase in lower level apprenticeships, will that be a progression pathway?" she said.

"When we are recruiting apprentices, is that for them a single point in time, or is it part of that wider journey [to degree level apprenticeships]?"

She warned that current success rates "do not make a very happy picture".

"Around a third of intermediate starts are failing to complete, in fact if you

look across all the levels, the issues with failure to complete suggest there is some sort of market failure.

"Somewhere between the apprentice, training provider and the employer, something is going wrong.

Universities need to work with schools and colleges

"Certainly if you had these failure rates in the higher education sector people would be jumping up and down and I guess that would be true for secondary education.

"It isn't creating that pipeline for progression."

Speaking more widely about public perception of apprenticeships, Ms

Curnock Cook said that "parents and I would say the general public on the whole think apprenticeships are a good thing".

"I certainly know that from talking to taxi drivers who on hearing I work in education tell me 'oh apprenticeships are the thing to do'," she added.

"But of course it isn't quite as simple as that because those same parents often don't think apprenticeships are right for their own children."

The UCAS boss also said schools needed to make more "meaningful links with employers" and improved careers advice was needed to help boost apprenticeship starts.

She added: "I would also suggest we have an issue with school sixth forms. For the best of reasons for the school, but not necessarily for their pupils, they are trying to hold on to their kids at sixth form and are perhaps reluctant to give advice on taking up apprenticeship opportunities."

Ms Curnock Cook also said that "universities need to work with schools and colleges to both understand vocational qualifications and make sure that students doing these BTECs and other qualifications are doing the right thing and the structure of grading is understood".

E

DAY

AAC | 2016

AAC VOX POPS — HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE CONFERENCE?
WHAT WILL YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THE WEEK?**NIGEL HARTLEY**
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
TOTAL PEOPLE

I attended two of the three days and found it very positive.
I am very concerned about where the government is at in terms of timescales, in terms of ongoing delays, but the conference itself has been excellent.

**MARK DAWE**
INDEPENDENT ADVISOR,
[CHIEF EXECUTIVE DESIGNATE, AELP]

It was a fantastic conference because it covered so many aspects and there were a lot of people attending who were both finding out and also contributing.
So it's been really good to be here and talk to all of them and listen to the presentations. A really good conference. We're a bit early in terms of things that haven't been decided, but I think there was a little bit of giving away around how SMEs [small- and medium-sized enterprises] may be treated and things like that.
But it was more about just having those discussions and seeing where people were at.

**GEMMA GATHERCOLE**
HEAD OF POLICY – FE AND FUNDING,
OCR

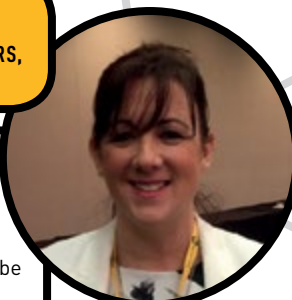
I think it has been a fantastic, well-organised conference. It's been really interesting to come and get all the different perspectives. I hoped for the sector that we could have got a little bit more detail, I think all the messages about publishing something in April or publishing something in June doesn't help anybody. We're essentially a year away from the launch of the levy and there are more questions than there are answers and I think that is a problem for the sector.
It is also a problem for employers, we heard from Karen Bailey from Volvo who described the situation as 'chaos', and that's coming from a large employer. I think we all know that apprenticeships are a great thing so I think what we need to focus on is getting the information out there for providers and especially for employers – if we are saying we are putting employers at the forefront of these reforms they need to have the information to be able to lead.

**GRAHAM TAYLOR**
PRINCIPAL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
NEW COLLEGE SWINDON

It has been a terrific conference, with far more questions than answers. The government's indecisiveness is final. The whole of the proposed system is an absolute dog's breakfast, but the levy as a payroll tax is absolutely fine.

**JOANNE ICETON**
HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
SEMTA

It's just all the confusion around the apprenticeship levy. I really thought we would come here and find out a lot more about the detail of what it means and I don't think we're any further forward. I think I agree with what Ian Wright said. The fact that he thinks that it may be delayed to 2018 – I don't think he's far wrong, from what I've seen. I expected to come here and to be told 'this is how it will be this is what it means', and I'm going away still as confused really.

**STEPHEN RAM KISSUN**
HEAD OF MARKETING AND MEMBERSHIP, ASSOCIATION
OF EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

I thought the conference was very informative and well-balanced – Sir Vince Cable was amazing, though I'm not sure about Sir Michael [Wilshaw, Ofsted's chief inspector], but I'll take that as it is.
It was great for AELP, especially at the time of the handover of our CEO role from Stewart [Segal] to Mark [Dawe]. It's been a good few days.

POST-CONFERENCE
ONLINE FEEDBACK

”

I very much enjoyed the conference.

The speakers prompted thought and debate amongst delegates. Everyone was friendly and helpful. As a single delegate I felt included and not isolated. The venue was excellent and range of speakers well balanced.

Anita Baldock, Partnerships Manager, New College Swindon

I was able to obtain clarification in matters that previously had been hazy. Information was up to date and current and gave us the knowledge to develop our offer and support employers in the apprenticeship reform.

Valerie Maddox, Contract Manager, Shrewsbury College

Excellent workshops from people who were generous in sharing their knowledge and insights about their experiences of the reforms.

Noel Dunne, Director, Creative Alliance

An extremely well ran event that provided a topical agenda and plenty of workshops to choose from to add to the great discussion and networking opportunities.

Rosalyn Allen, Learning & Employment Sales Director, Interserve

I liked obtaining the updates in relation to apprenticeship reforms and levy directly from those responsible in BIS in its implementation. Networking with other colleagues in the sector.

Lindsey Biggs, Apprenticeship & Workplace Manager, Canterbury College

Good opportunity to network, gather other peoples options and views.

Janet Francis, Group Qualification and Partnership Manager, Firstgroup plc

PATRICK CRAVEN
DIRECTOR OF ASSESSMENT, POLICY, RESEARCH,
COMPLIANCE, CITY AND GUILDS

I've found the conference really interesting. One of the things about this year is that, although it was perhaps a little disappointing that we didn't get more detail out of the budget announcement which would give a bit more clarity around some questions, I think we've still managed to secure a good range of speakers on a variety of topics that allowed the audience to engage in the right sort of conversations. I thought there was quite a refreshing perspective on the apprentice point of view of apprenticeships, which I think is long overdue. I think it is something that we can't afford to forget – that ultimately what we are trying to put in place has to be a benefit to the apprentice and the employer.

**TERESA ADDINELL**
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS SERVICES, SOUTH AND CITY
COLLEGE BIRMINGHAM

I thought it was a tremendous conference. I thought the fact that there were some really good people who gave policy inputs and some other who challenged policy, and also some great workshops. Facilitators were good and the content of the workshops was good, so I felt that – I've taken three days out of the business – but I think I've got a return on that, it was worthwhile.
There are about 14 action points that I will be talking away. There are people to go and visit and there are things that I have to start to put in place, such as modelling out how we could deliver a pilot of the new standards, because we have not done that yet.

**CARL JOHNSON**
DIRECTOR OF TALENT AND LEARNING,
INTERSERVE

The gap between what the Skills Funding Agency and the apprenticeship levy people know today and what we need to know is bigger than I thought it was going to be, and they need to really help us to understand what is going on.
There were so many questions where they said 'we will have to come back to you in June' and organisations like ours need answers now, because the size of the levy is such that it is a board level risk and so going back with no answers isn't a very helpful thing to do. It's the practicalities of how we make it work.

**DANNY TAYLOR**
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR,
SMART E-ASSESSOR LTD

I think, as an exhibitor, lead generation for us has been quite good. I think the conference has been well-attended, which is a big tick in the box for us – we've come away with a lot of demo leads and have had chats with a lot of customers.
As far as the conference itself, I think with what is going on in the sector I think it has been a little bit more about more questions than answers in terms of what is happening with the levy, the funding, and everything else.
From that point of view, a bit disappointing – a lot of training providers and colleges when they come over and speak to us are feeling a little bit frustrated that the sector is not quite moving at the pace they want it to move, to get some clear decisions and directions on the table.
But from an exhibitor point of view it has been great for us. We've had some really good leads, booked six or seven appointments from it to go out to see clients. It has done what it was intended to do.

**WALI RAHMAN**
SENIOR DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (EMPLOYMENT AND
SKILLS), WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

It has been really informative and interesting. I learnt a bit more about the levy and I'm hoping to find out even more from the Twitter and Facebook posts – I'll be going home to catch up on other parts of the conference from the Twitter feed and information that has been put out there.
I found hearing from Vince Cable really useful and quite inspirational and the chief executive of Ucas' presentation was also really interesting, to see how higher education and apprenticeships can work together. It was good to learn about how Ucas is trying to help promote apprenticeships as well, because that's something that a lot of people probably aren't aware of. It was good to see how Ucas want to help promote apprenticeships and work with them – it is not all about competition.

**MARIANNE BURRELL**
ADMINISTRATION MANAGER, UNIVERSAL LEARNING
STREAMS

I found the conference really, really interesting. I'm looking forward to April now, because apparently there are going to be so many announcements then!
But generally it has been really good, I got a lot out of the workshops and we will definitely be back again next year.



DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS, THINK OCR

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