

# FE Week



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# FE

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# FE Week

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**NICK LINFORD & SHANE MANN**  
 @FEWEEK

**W**e were delighted to host the inaugural Festival of Skills at Capel Manor College over two sunny days in July.

This new event is a sister to The Telegraph Festival of Education which in its seventh year attracted over 5,000 festival-goers to Wellington College in June.

Our ambition over the coming years is to nurture the Festival of Skills to the magnitude of the Festival of Education and we think you will agree this souvenir supplement shows a fantastic launch to achieve that ambition.

**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE THAT SUPPORTED US DURING THE FESTIVAL'S FIRST YEAR. TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.**

The Festival of Skills was an inspiring CPD extravaganza bringing together the best of the sector's most forward thinking advocates, practitioners of change, policy makers and educators.

Without the support of all of our sponsors and exhibitors, the festival would be a less rich and rewarding experience. The festival is a huge team effort and we couldn't produce it without our fabulous team both at Summerhouse Events, City and Guilds, The Education and Training Foundation and Capel Manor College who've worked tirelessly throughout the year to make the event the very best it can be.

City and Guilds, The Education and Training Foundation and the Society for Education and Training, provided some of the very best-in-class workshop sessions and it is this rich diversity of content that will become the hallmark of the Festival of Skills.

Thank you to everyone that supported us during the festival's first year. Tell us what you think; what we did well, what we could do better, what new topics you'd like to see on the agenda for 2017, and of course tell us if you want to speak next year. Please do engage with us via Twitter (@skillsfest) and email ([festival@feweek.co.uk](mailto:festival@feweek.co.uk)).

# FE Week

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# HOLD THE FRONT PAGE! SKILLS PLAN PUBLISHED DURING FESTIVAL



Nick Linford

**ALIX ROBERTSON**  
**@ALIXROBERTSON4**

The government wants to give learners a choice between academic and technical routes at 16, according to FE Week's editor Nick Linford.

"There will no longer be a route where you can mix and match your A-levels with other types of course from the technical space," he told delegates on day two of the Festival of Skills, during his summary of the Post-16 Skills Plan, which had been released by skills minister Nick Boles that morning.

FE Week has been following the developments leading up to the announcement of the plan, he revealed, although since a panel led by Lord Sainsbury was set up to look into overhauling technical and professional education in November, few details had been revealed until now.

He advised delegates to look at both the report from Lord Sainsbury's committee and the government's response in the Skills Plan, which confirmed that post-16 qualifications would undergo radical change.

"Up to 20,000 courses to choose from

within the technical space for those aged 16 and upwards will be done away with, as well as over 100 awarding organisations operating in this space," he continued.

"Arguably for many in the room, perhaps

within current budget constraints".

He noted that the reforms are scheduled to be implemented by 2022, though the first 'pathfinder' courses within these routes, such as those related to Hs2 development, will be

**UP TO 20,000 COURSES WITHIN THE TECHNICAL SPACE FOR 16 AND UPWARDS WILL BE DONE AWAY WITH**

one of the most controversial areas as far as our sector is concerned, is the radical idea of a single awarding organisation for each of the 15 routes young people will be able to choose from."

However, Mr Linford highlighted potential "get-out clauses" in the Skills Plan, in which Mr Boles writes that the government will "accept and implement all of the Sainsbury panel's proposals, unequivocally where that it is possible

introduced earlier.

The 15 routes will mainly consist of two-year, full-time courses at college, which will have to deliver "not just English and maths but digital skills and other core competencies along with specialisms".

The new routes will also include an "entitlement" to work experience.

Mr Linford added that "in a minority of cases" an apprenticeship will be classed as one of the 15 technical education routes.

The following four routes have been identified as primarily apprenticeships rather than full-time college-based education: Protective Services (such as the police); Sales, Marketing and Procurement; Social Care; and Transport and Logistics.

Within each route there are multiple occupations and, as Mr Linford pointed out, these vary widely — Journalism for example falls in the same route as Furniture Making.

Mr Linford picked up on Mr Boles being "very quick" to try to combat questions over whether these reforms will prove any different to what has come before, by stating in the plan that "previous attempts lacked real commitment, with government changing plans before they could have real impact".

He concluded with a poll of the audience, asking delegates to vote on whether they felt confident that the new reforms proposed by the government in the Skills Plan would succeed.

Around two thirds of delegates voted no, showing that there is still some way to go in convincing the sector that the changes will have a valuable impact.





Emily Barrell

## UNGRADED TEACHER ASSESSMENTS SOUND SCARY — BUT...

**Alix Robertson**  
@ALIXROBERTSON4

One provider's move to ungraded observations of teaching staff was not an easy transition — but according to the person who implemented the change, it would "never go back".

Speaking on Thursday morning in Bartlett Room 1, Emily Barrell, quality improvement coordinator at Realise Futures Learning and Development, told delegates that before the change, while learners were the central focus for the organisation, "we treated our staff like machines".

"It was time to stop disguising audits within teacher development," she said, noting that teaching staff had become fixated on receiving the correct grade from an observation, rather than taking a holistic view of how to improve their practice.

Realise Futures is a social enterprise that aims to help those who are long-term unemployed, disabled or disadvantaged.

It was devolved from Suffolk County Council in 2012, which now delegates its full Skills Funding Agency budget of £2.5m per year to the organisation. It reached 8,000

learners in 2014, and last year achieved a 95 per cent success rate.

Its provision includes non-accredited, entry level and levels one and two qualifications, and it was graded 'good' by Ofsted in March 2014.

But the organisation only achieved this result after deciding in 2011 that some changes were needed, when it received a notice of concern for functional skills.

Ms Barrell asked her audience to consider: "Is it fair to grade a person for the entire year on what might be 30 minutes?"

In January 2012, Realise Futures introduced ungraded observations, alongside termly appraisals for all teaching staff. Senior teachers were also allocated to others members of staff as mentors.

Ms Barrell said that removing the grades helped to ensure observations stayed firmly aimed at professional development, rather than slipping into quality assurance.

The new observations were pre-planned with the teacher who was being observed, to agree an area to focus on and to encourage them to use their initiative and be more innovative.

After observations took place, the teacher

and coach then reflected on the session together, and around three "spotlight" questions were raised for discussion at a later meeting.

**IT WAS  
TIME TO STOP  
DISGUIISING  
AUDITS IN  
TEACHER  
DEVELOPMENT**

This gave the teacher and observer the time to reflect separately before having a professional discussion.

In this follow-up, the teacher was then encouraged to critique their own actions and record them, information that was then transferred to their appraisal.

Ms Barrell admitted that some teachers had

found this tough, as it made them wholly accountable for their practice, but added that it had also been positive to establish a system in which they felt able to "push back" and have open conversations about their concerns.

She added that it had been important for managers and observers to become "diplomats", learning a new lexicon with a focus on questioning rather than commands, and becoming familiar with giving away some control.

It also became their role to convey the strengths and weaknesses noted in observations to Ofsted, in a way that measured up with the education watchdog's grading criteria.

At one point, Ms Barrell shared feedback from staff on the new system with delegates at the session, proving its success.

Staff found it had improved innovation, allowing them to take more risks; it had boosted self-motivation in planning and development; confidence had risen because the staff knew when to expect inspections; and it had made it easier to ask for help in the areas they felt they needed to develop most.





Bill Lucas

## FE SHOULD INSTIL 'GOOD HABITS OF MIND' IN LEARNERS

PAUL OFFORD  
@PAULOFFORD

Key employability skills are habits that can be instilled in FE students before they finish their courses.

That was the key message to festival goers from Bill Lucas, professor of learning at the University of Winchester, who told delegates about the findings of a report he helped produce for City & Guilds, called Learning to be Employable.

Some teachers, he warned, become too focused on their subject – or the exams students are working towards – and forget how important it is for learners to develop broader skills that help them thrive in the workplace.

“In FE and training providers we cannot not be thinking about employability,” he said.

“We need knowledge and competency, but also something else: a habit of mind.

“I think it’s absolutely essential to what you see in a world, where nobody owes us a job-shaped job.”

Prof Lucas highlighted eight key habits

of mind for the workplace, as identified in the report – self-belief, self-control, perseverance, resilience, curiosity, empathy, creativity, and pride in the job.

He argued that these could be taught in the right environment at colleges and independent training providers, and provided a set of useful approaches to doing this.

He said that “we need to start with a common set of understandings” – so it’s important to be clear from the start what is meant by employability habits.

Prof Lucas drew a distinction between students with a can-do attitude, who want to learn more and share the benefits, and those who are non-constructive, who have unrealistic views of their progress, and “try to throw their arms around their work” to prevent others rivalling their knowledge.

He said: “Most employers want the absolute opposite of that.

“If you have growth characteristics, for a start you are much more fun to be with. More importantly, you do better on all tests we are able to come up with and over your

lifetime.”

He said the best means of teaching this was through better feedback.

“If I say to me ‘well done Bill, that is a level five piece of woodwork you have just turned in today’, I’m hearing that the teacher or mentor thinks I’ve done an okay job.

“But I’m not hearing about the level of effort I have had to put into it, the soul, the time I’ve taken, and number of prototypes I’ve had to do.”

Prof Lucas added there were “certain inbuilt no-nos” for feedback.

“These apply whenever anyone says to you that they can’t do something. You must not accept that, and inject the little word ‘yet’ – so ‘you can’t do it yet’.

“The management world has known this for a decade. It hasn’t yet, I think, found its

way into colleges and training provision, but this is exactly what employers want.”

Other key pointers included recognising the key role parents play in the development of their children’s character, and better planning and support for learners with the transition from courses to starting work.

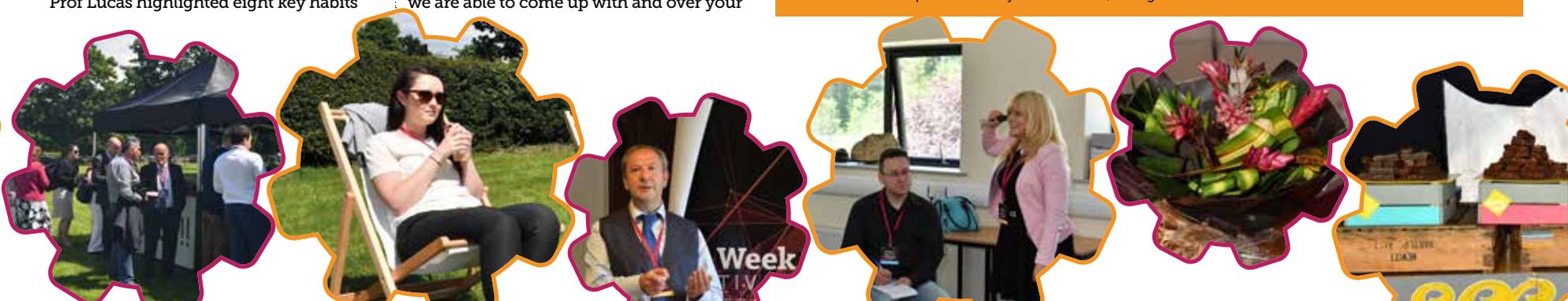
Prof Lucas also stressed the importance of institutions as a whole setting a good impression.

He said: “There is nothing worse than when everyone is saying one thing and doing another.

“If the college is saying it believes in this, this and this, and on a daily basis you see people being unkind, or saying ‘you’ll never be any good at this, go and disappear’, then you will know you’re in a place that doesn’t practice habits of mind.”

### THE EIGHT RECOMMENDED HABITS OF MIND:

1. Self-belief: Confidence in oneself and one’s capability, arising from past experiences
2. Self-control: Ability to forgo, voluntarily, short-term temptations, impulses or diversions in order to prioritise higher goals and activities
3. Perseverance: A set of attributes including effort, persistence, attention, focus, grit and a commitment to long-term goals
4. Resilience: The ability to adapt to challenges and seek growth in them, as well as the idea of being able to bounce back from setbacks
5. Curiosity: A strong desire to know and learn, coupled with an openness to new experiences
6. Empathy: Being able to ‘walk in another’s shoes’, identifying with and understanding their feelings and views
7. Creativity: The production and development of new and useful ideas, often collaboratively
8. Craftsmanship: Pride in a job well done, along with an ethic of excellence





Selina Stewart

## PREVENT TO ROCKET UP OFSTED'S LIST OF FE PRIORITIES THIS YEAR

PAUL OFFORD  
@PAULOFFORD

Ofsted will take a much closer interest in Prevent implementation during the next academic year, delegates have been warned – and failure will result in college interventions or even loss of funding for independent training providers (ITPs).

Selina Stewart, the Education and Training Foundation's lead on Prevent, explained how to be "confident and professional" when dealing with Prevent – which was introduced for FE eight months ago, requiring institutions to guard against the radicalisation of learners and exposure to extremism.

She said most providers would rightly not be worried about police complaining of poor compliance, but Ofsted should be at the forefront of the minds of their leaders.

Ms Stewart told delegates: "There is concern about Ofsted, which said this was a developmental year, but we are now at the end of that and clearly the concentration on Prevent has progressed."

She warned the inspectorate was already taking compliance more into account for overall inspection ratings, adding: "If Ofsted finds that an institution or ITP is not

complying with the Prevent duty then you are vulnerable.

"For a college that could mean intervention from the FE or sixth form college commissioner; for an ITP it could be three months termination of contract."

Ms Stewart said training throughout an institution was of key importance.

**THEY ARE QUITE LIKELY TO GO TO THE CLEANING STAFF**

"You must show that appropriate action has been taken to train the chief executive and principal, board members, leaders and the staff – that is, absolutely everyone within the institution – and Ofsted will look for that.

"They are quite likely to go to the cleaning staff and say 'have you been Prevent duty

trained?'"

The teaching of so-called British values was another important issue she highlighted, though she conceded it can sometimes be confusing.

"If you talk to Ofsted about it you will get varied interpretation. Some inspectors say it has to be British values, and they will ask questions to students about 'what do you understand about British values', but others will say 'we are quite happy with core values, college values'.

"You need to work on the safe side. You need to make sure that your students are aware of what the British values are."

She added: "The interpretation I'm taking is not saying these values are better than other people's values. There's no doubt that these would be represented in a lot of other parts of the world."

She believes that key values include understanding and respecting democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and respect and tolerance for those of other faiths and beliefs.

Ms Stewart said: "There is a lot of concern I find among teachers about introducing British values into teaching – some have said it is impossible in music or engineering, but there are opportunities in every area.

"They want to see this fully integrated and in depth. It is a question of finding the opportunities and making it clear to the learners that this is an area for British values. It is something that Ofsted are clearly expecting."

Ms Stewart added that the use of multi-faith rooms was another also important.

She said: "Ofsted seems to be expecting that there will be broad use of prayer rooms.

"That is quite a challenge because if you have a college where there are a large amount of muslim students, it will tend to be muslim students who feel the need to pray during the day. Most Christian students will not say 'I need to say a prayer during the college day'. Ofsted does not want to see prayer rooms around one faith."

Her speech on Prevent preceded Ofsted's new thematic review of Prevent implementation, which found FE and sixth form colleges were generally making good progress, but that a number of ITPs were struggling to implement the duty.

It concluded that Ofsted should "raise further its expectations of providers to implement all aspects of the Prevent duty, and evaluate the impact this has on keeping learners safe" from the start of next academic year.





Mike Cooper and Nick Warren

## FE SECTOR BOSSES STILL WORRY MOST ABOUT FINANCE – BUT POLICY KEEPS THEM UP AT NIGHT TOO

**PAUL OFFORD**  
@PAULOFFORD

FE stakeholders are still most worried about the sector’s funding shortfall – but the ‘general direction of travel’ should be another major area of concern for ministers too.

According to the third annual 2016 FE Week and Policy Consortium survey, industry insiders have a growing anxiety about the way FE policy is going.

Senior FE and skills experts from the Policy Consortium, Mike Cooper and Nick Warren, were key figures with polling a total of 731 people during three weeks in April, and, as they told the Festival of Skills – the picture is not rosy.

Respondents were asked to grade their level of concern on a scale from ‘no concern’ (counted as zero) to ‘extreme concern’ (counted as three) – with average numbers then calculated for each question and policy area.

It was significant but probably not surprising, they told delegates, that

funding came out as the biggest source of worry for the third year running – with an average rating of 2.56 for institutional funding worries, and 2.47 for concerns about paying for the learners themselves.

The issue of “broad government direction of travel for FE and skills” was next on the list with a 2.38 rating.

Mr Cooper, who was the Learning and Skills Development Agency’s regional director for the south-east from 1999 to 2006, warned that the government ought to take careful note of this – as it was only the seventh biggest cause for concern last year.

He said: “Remember that the 2015 survey was done before the general election [in May], and therefore before a full-scale Conservative government.

“There were anxieties and concerns about direction of travel before – of course there were – but in the year since then, with policies like area reviews, this has shot up.”

His colleague Nick Warren, a marketing

specialist with over 30 years of experience in the sector, reflected on the nature of ongoing money worries.

He said: “We identified that where people were worried about funding it wasn’t about redundancies, job losses, salary; it was about what people describe as systemic failure, the starvation of oxygen to the system was threatening to cause a complete collapse.”

A new issue for 2016 was worry about “the potential impact of the apprenticeship levy” due for launch next April, which was the eighth biggest cause for concern (with an average rating of 2.27).

But apprenticeships were also, and perhaps rather confusingly, the second highest cause for optimism among respondents.

Mr Cooper explained: “This year, we very particularly put in a question asking what is giving you cause to be optimistic – what is the good stuff?”

“About a ninth of those talked about the positives around apprenticeships (11 per cent).

“Roughly one in seven [the highest proportion at 14 per cent] talked about the learners they are involved with – what they get from them.”

Mr Warren noted a growing crisis of confidence over the last three years –

culminating, for example, in three quarters of respondents in 2016 admitting they felt uncertain about the sector’s role and reputation.

He said: “I think Ofsted has to be up there as one cause of this; [Sir Michael] Wilshaw made some extraordinary comments about FE, over this period.

“The chief inspector’s report [last December] was pretty good on the sector, yet he himself was highly critical before MPs.”

The results emerge after Sir Michael caused outrage across the sector when he told the Commons education select committee in March that FE was “in a mess” and that 16- to 19-year-olds should be taught in schools not colleges.

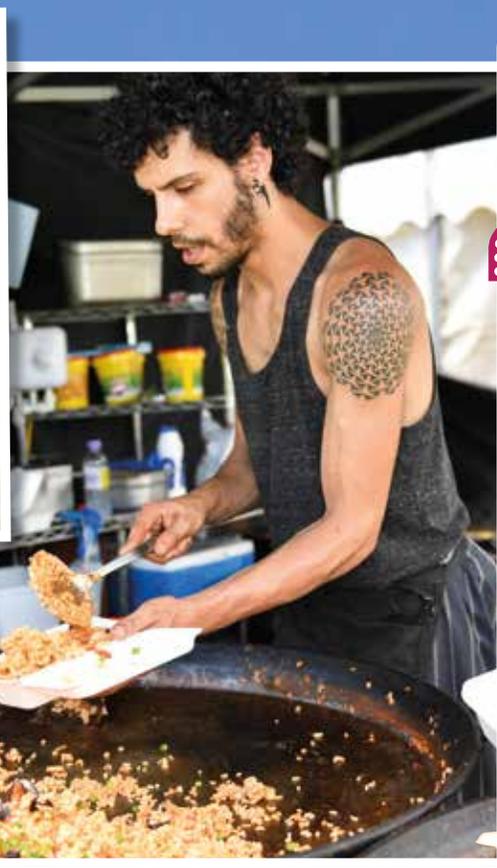
Mr Warren also referred to widespread anxiety about the pace of change in the sector – which he said was nothing new.

“I have spent 36 years in FE and every single new policy or skills review was sold as the panacea that would solve all problems. But the minister changes, and it all changes again.”

The Policy Consortium’s full report on the survey’s results and their analysis is available at <http://policyconsortium.co.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/160705-PC-Survey-16-report-low-res.pdf>.





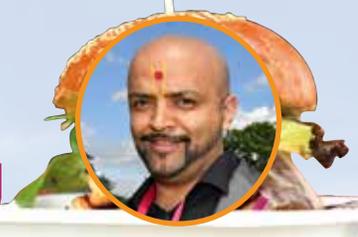


# FESTIVAL VOXPOPS:

NEEL VALAND



The event has been great, I found it very informative. It has cemented what we already knew and helped us to find out that bit more, and it is a great venue and site too.



Business development manager, PDS Group

HELEN SANSON



It's been a good event. I've been both days and it's been really informative. I have learnt so much. I'd definitely come back and would do both days again.



Manager of London services, Shaftesbury Young People

NICK CHANDLEY



I have found the event very interesting. It has been well organised, I love the idea of being outside. I like the marquee events and it is a beautiful setting - I don't think we could have had a better one.



Consultant, Central Bedfordshire College

SUKI RAI



I found it very useful, really informative. Having the event in a beautiful location like this is really nice on a sunny day too. The food's been great and it has been worth my while to come here. I would recommend it.



Assistant director of MIS, Hackney Community College



# AREA REVIEW SUMMIT TOOK CENTRE

## FE COMMISSIONER PREDICTS UP TO 80 COLLEGE MERGERS

JUDE BURKE  
@JUDEBURKE77

With the government's area reviews of post-16 education and training well underway, Thursday's area review summit was an opportunity to take stock of how they were going, and to look forward to the next stages.

The morning sessions were given over to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and included a lively update from the FE Commissioner Sir David Collins on the reviews' progress.

The afternoon sessions looked at some of the more technical legal and accountancy details of the review, before a panel of sector leaders closed the day with a spirited debate on the area review opportunities and threats.

The number of FE colleges could drop by a third once the post-16 area review process has completed, the FE Commissioner Sir David Collins has said.

Sir David's "best bet" for the size of the sector was based on his estimate of up to 80 mergers resulting from the reviews.

The FE Commissioner, who has been leading the process, also revealed that all the areas in wave one and many in wave two had now reached the recommendation stage.

"In general terms, what's emerging is



Sir David Collins

### General comments

- ▶ There has been good collaboration between colleges, local authorities and the LEP leading to workable solutions in all areas
- ▶ Different areas have come up with different proposals
- ▶ History and personalities have occasionally got in the way of the best solution
- ▶ Overall there is likely to be a significant reduction in the number of colleges (50 +)
- ▶ There is no 'grand plan' as to the outcome of any area review
- ▶ However savings are likely to be in excess of £250m per year (based on the 3%-5% annual cash surplus target for all institutions going forward)

certainly quite a number of mergers," he said.

In terms of numbers, he said: "I would start somewhere in the region of 50 mergers upwards, possibly 70 or 80, on the basis of what's happening at the moment."

When pressed later to put a figure on the size of the sector once the reviews had completed, he said: "We're at 243 colleges now. My best bet is that we'll come down to 170."

The government first unveiled plans for the area reviews in July 2015, with the first areas announced in September.

Sir David said that 10 reviews — all of those in wave one and a number of those in wave two — had so far been "completely

signed off" by the areas involved.

He added: "We're not behind, and we'll complete very happily by March 2017".

Wave one had taken "a bit longer than we would have hoped" in part because it had included "the most complicated cases — the ones where it was clear there was going to be a bit of an issue".

The FE Commissioner reported on the outcomes from "half a dozen or so" of the reviews that have so far completed, including Birmingham and Solihull, Tees Valley, and Sussex.

These were intended to "give reassurance that we're talking about locally driven not top-down demanded" outcomes, he said.

He confirmed that the long-delayed Manchester review had definitely completed, although its recommendations were not included in his presentation.

He also acknowledged the delay, and said that it was because the combined authority was "very ambitious" and "they saw this as a real opportunity to make sure that the skills coming out of the colleges were linked to the Manchester priorities".

But, he added: "Clearly the combined authority had to adjust a little bit to what was and wasn't on the table."

The solutions that had finally emerged from the review "are very good solutions," he concluded, "although longer-term there may be more that's happening".

## BIS OFFICIALS PUT PROCESS IN CONTEXT OF 'WORLD CLASS' SKILLS SYSTEM

The first speaker of the morning was Mike Keoghan, the director of vocational education at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, who set the scene with an overview of skills and FE policy, and where the area reviews fit in.

He opened with an acknowledgement that the current skills system was not meeting employer and learner needs, before outlining the steps the government was intending to transform it into a "world-class system".

As well as the apprenticeship agenda and reforms to technical and professional education, the area reviews were a "key element" of the government plans.

The government recognised the transformative potential of the FE sector, Mr Keoghan said, but "certain things have to happen for that promise to be fulfilled and the area reviews are a key element of making that happen".

He also touched on the planned insolvency regime for colleges, which was one of a number of policy areas expanded upon later by Bobbie McClelland, the deputy director of reforming FE provision at BIS.

She focused on the implementation phase of the area reviews, and the different ways that

government was supporting colleges through this "critical phase".

Ms McClelland outlined the financial support available to colleges to implement the area review recommendations, including the restructuring facility and the transition grants, admitting that "recognising that short-term change requires proper management and planning".

She also covered upcoming BIS guidance on implementation and due diligence, and for local authorities

and local enterprise partnerships — all of which was expected to be published within the next few weeks.

Through this guidance, the government wanted to "support best outcomes", she confirmed.



Mike Keoghan



Bobbie McClelland



# RE STAGE ON FIRST DAY OF FESTIVAL

## NITTY-GRITTY OF COMPLETING YOUR COLLEGE'S RESTRUCTURE



Chris Mantel

The potential legal and accountancy pitfalls of the area reviews were the focus of the early afternoon sessions.

Chris Mantel, a partner at chartered accountancy and business advisory firm RSM, outlined a number of issues to consider for a successful merger, including cultural fit and joint working, management resource, governance, and combined financial and curriculum planning.

He urged colleges to remember that any merger would be for the "benefit of learners" and that effective governance was "vital" for a successful partnership.

He also warned that mergers are about more than just potential cost savings. While he said there might be immediate savings through the removal of duplication, there are likely to be extra costs — and any savings are likely to be in the medium to long term.

"Do not underestimate the costs associated with mergers in both time commitment and cash requirements, as well as the impact on quality," he concluded.

He was followed by Glynne Stanfield, a partner at Eversheds law firm and an experienced merger adviser, who gave an overview of the lessons learned from navigating the legal minefields of area reviews.

He opened with a reminder of the relevant powers and

duties for colleges going through the review process, which include legal and governance duties.

He then outlined the different possible collaborative outcomes for colleges, including soft federation, hard federation and merger. For each, he described what shape the collaboration could take, and included some possible benefits or disadvantages of the collaboration.

For example, while a benefit for a full merger might be that there are "more options for cost savings and efficiencies", it would also mean the college would

"lose its independent legal status" and any decision to merge would be "irreversible".

Finally, Mr Stanfield reminded colleges not to "lose sight of long term objectives" and the "need to future proof" the college.



Glynne Stanfield



The panel from left: Nick Linford, Carole Kitching, Martin Doel and David Hughes

## PANEL AGREE AREA REVIEWS WERE LAUNCHED WHEN FE AT 'PRECIPICE'

At the end of the day, a panel of sector leaders came together to close the summit with a debate over some of the big issues in the area reviews.

The reviews' purpose, apprenticeships and employer involvement were just some of the topics touched on when Martin Doel, the CEO of the Association of Colleges, came together with the Learning and Work Institute's boss and future AoC CEO David Hughes, Lewisham and Southwark College principal Carole Kitching, and FE Week editor Nick Linford.

Chaired by Kirstie Donnelly, the panel agreed that the reviews had come at time of crisis in the sector — when it was, according to Mr Doel, at the "precipice".

But he insisted that being so close to the precipice had made the government realise how much it needed colleges to deliver its skills and apprenticeship agenda.

"You wouldn't have done area reviews if you didn't think you needed colleges," he said.

Ms Kitching said she felt the reviews were too concerned with structures, "and that's not what the purpose should be," she said. But she also saw positives from the reviews: "If the government is not sure what it wants from FE, this is our time to tell them."

Mr Hughes expressed concern that the reviews were "taking people's focus away" from key

growth areas — including apprenticeships and learner loans.

But Mr Doel challenged this view, saying: "What's integral is the ability of institutions in the review to respond to the apprenticeship agenda."

He also responded to complaints from employers that they were not involved, arguing that they had been the "predominant voice" in "that which the reviews are intended to enable" — namely the Sainsbury review of professional and technical education, and the apprenticeship reforms.

The debate closed with a reminder from both Mr Doel and Mr Hughes that there was more to the reviews than just meeting employers' needs.

If "colleges just deliver the skills for the local labour market, we're doing a disservice to individuals who might not want to work in the local labour market," Mr Hughes concluded.



Kirstie Donnelly



# APPRENTICESHIPS REFORM SUMMIT

## FIRST LOOK AT THE NEW DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIP SERVICE

**ALIX ROBERTSON**  
 @ALIXROBERTSON4

Following the success of day one's area review summit, day two of the festival saw the focus turn to apprenticeships and the government's ongoing programme of reforms.

The morning brought a unique insight into the never-before-seen Digital Apprenticeship Service with Keith Smith, director of levy implementation at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), followed by the employers' perspective from the Industry Skills Board.

In the afternoon, delegates heard a BIS update on frameworks, standards and assessment, then concluded the day with a heated debate on the progress of the reforms from Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, and Karen Bailey of Volvo Group.

In a first for the sector, delegates attending day two of the Festival of Skills were treated to a sneak preview of the prototype of the Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS).

Through a live broadcast of Keith Smith's government laptop, the audience benefited from a walkthrough of the alpha-test version of the system.

Conference delegates, who will have to learn how to use the DAS when it comes into play, were reassured by the



Keith Smith  
 Inset: Demonstrating a prototype of the DAS system from his laptop

opportunity to see it in action.

In a speech preceding the demonstration, Mr Smith outlined the key changes on the horizon for providers, including a new, "simpler" apprenticeships funding model using price bands; financial year funding for all employers; a new register of apprenticeship training providers; and a new contracting model for providers covering levy and non-levy paying employers.

One important revelation was that all organisations that want to deliver apprenticeships must apply to the new register of apprenticeship training providers.

Mr Smith said categorically that there would be "no free passes" and "no automatic transfer" from the current RoTO [register of training organisations] system.

There will also be three types of provider on the register – 'main', 'specialist' and 'employer-provider' – and these groups will all be tested for financial health, due diligence, quality and readiness to deliver.

Mr Smith admitted that measuring quality in particular will be "contentious", but said that a grade four, or 'inadequate', from Ofsted and a financial notice of concern from the Skills Funding Agency could each potentially exclude colleges

from the register.

A representative from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers asked how providers could best advertise themselves once they were on the new register, and Mr Smith confirmed that Ofsted's information and learner and employer satisfaction rates would all be made available, alongside feedback that will be given in the style of the travel website TripAdvisor.

A further point of debate was whether the apprenticeship funding bands would prevent a "race to the bottom" for training costs, where employers hunt out the provider with the cheapest offer.

Mr Smith said: "Employers will take control over the amount they think is valid to pay for something.

"We are saying there should be an upper ceiling to that, otherwise employers will want to use crazy amounts of money from their levy to pay for something, in order to use and consume it."

He added: "In terms of the lower end, our thinking is in essence that we want the employers to be the arbiter of that.



## MORE ASSESSMENT ORGANISATIONS SHOULD NOW MAKE IT ONTO THE REGISTER

Not enough attention has been given to helping groups get onto the register for assessment organisations, a session from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) revealed on day two of the Festival of Skills.

Dan Foster and Fariba Carr from BIS and the Department for Education Apprenticeship Directorate spoke at the festival's apprenticeships summit, discussing standards development, assessment plans and the withdrawal of frameworks.

Mr Foster admitted that ensuring assessment organisations got onto the government's register had initially not been a key focus.

He said: "The register that all assessment

organisations have to get on to is necessarily robust and quite difficult to get onto.

"In some ways, in the early days especially, we were not too concerned that too many organisations weren't getting through, because we wanted only the best to be on there."

However, he added that this had now been accepted as a problem.

"We do recognise it is a concern. We don't want apprentices to get to the end of apprenticeships, or even anywhere near the end of apprenticeships really, without an assessment organisation to deliver it."

Mr Foster said work is now being done together with the Skills Funding Agency to be "more proactive" in terms of reaching out and stimulating demand.

He added: "I think initially we'd assumed that a lot of assessment organisations would come forward. We're trying to see if we can actually do some work now to help organisations, including professional bodies, training providers and people who aren't necessarily doing training or assessment at all at the moment, to get them in a place to apply for the register so that we can have better coverage."



Fariba Carr  
 and Dan Foster



# REVEALING IN THE MAIN MARQUEE

## BREXIT IS THE 'ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM' FOR APPRENTICESHIP REFORM



From left: Kathryn Porter, director of youth strategy for Europe, the Middle East and Africa for Hilton Worldwide; Ann Brown, HR director at Nationwide; Mark Maudsley, chief executive of GTA England; Dominic Gill, apprenticeship lead at Microsoft; Anthony Impey, founder and chief executive officer of Optimity; Andy Smyth, development manager vocational learning at TUI Group; Kirstie Donnelly, managing director of City and Guilds.

**A** panel of important employers came together on the second day of the festival to share their thoughts with providers on how to work together and move forward with apprenticeship reforms.

The chair, Kirstie Donnelly, managing director of City & Guilds, introduced the representatives from the Industry Skills Board, which was established in October 2014 to provide a space where employers could discuss what is most important in putting apprenticeship reforms into practice.

The members of the board turned to Brexit – the “elephant in the room” – and its impact on productivity and skills to kick off their debate.

Anthony Impey, founder and chief executive officer of Optimity, saw it as a potential driver for change and a “major motivator for employers” to follow through on reforms.

“We have a productivity problem in the UK,” he said. “We have to address that now more than ever and I do think that Brexit provides that trigger event.

“It means that the government has to make some major changes in how we approach the productivity gap and really that is rooted in how we approach skills in the workplace and apprenticeships.”

Andy Smyth, development manager for vocational learning at TUI Group, said he felt the referendum outcome should increase the focus on working together, adding that employers are “part of the sector” too.

He commented: “We need the sector to work together; we don’t want infighting, we need everybody to try and make their best contributions.

“We need to support the skills needs – we know how to do it but we need your help.”

Focusing on the apprenticeship levy, Ann Brown, HR director at Nationwide, said it offered “the opportunity to spend

money that I would not have spent before in skills development”.

However, she voiced concerns about the practicalities, saying: “I don’t want multiple suppliers, local relationships with colleges here and there. That is going to be really difficult for me to manage.

“I need to be able to spend in a way that doesn’t put a massive bureaucracy on the process.”

Conversely, Kathryn Porter, Hilton Worldwide’s director of youth strategy for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, said that her company had realised that taking a national approach to working with providers could sometimes be restrictive.

She said: “In a lot of locations and a lot of situations, it is the local providers that know the local markets, that know the local communities, who are best placed to support us.”

“The colleges and providers in the room will be very heartened to here you recognise that local relevance,” she observed.

Mr Impey added that from his perspective as chair of the Federation of Small Businesses skills and policy board, “the single most important thing that the FE community could do is build better relationships with small and medium sized businesses”.

He said that he had experienced reluctance from colleges to train apprentices at smaller firms, and this was discouraging small and medium sized companies from getting involved.

“Both employers and the FE community need to work together better to overcome that obstacle,” he concluded.

Wrapping up the debate, Mark Maudsley, chief executive of GTA England, advised providers to “listen, hear, respond and look to the long term”, while Dominic Gill, apprenticeship lead at Microsoft, added:

“It’s about responsiveness, reflecting what industries want but also not having a one-size-fits-all approach.”



Mark Dawe and Karen Bailey

## KAREN BAILEY WARNS – DON’T GET “BULLIED” BY EMPLOYERS

**T**he festival ended with a warning from one large employer, which cautioned that the FE sector is in danger of being “bullied” by employers who are not fully invested in delivering the apprenticeship reforms.

Karen Bailey, head of competence development at employer-provider Volvo Group, began the final debate by referring to comments she made previously at the FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference in March, when she warned the “ill thought-out” apprenticeship reform programme was in a state of “chaos”.

Now, she said, the situation had “only got worse”.

“What I’m hearing is employers are leading things within parameters that haven’t been defined,” she said. “We’ve got frameworks that have been developed that may well be thrown out and we’ve still got very little information about how this is actually going to work.”

She warned that employers who are not properly engaged in the process could be a hazard, saying: “They are just going to want use up their employment levy, and for FE I think that’s a massive threat.

“I think you are going to be bullied by employers who want it as cheap as they can possibly get it, as fast as they can possibly get it, and teach to the assessment.”

Responding to her comments, Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, tried to look on the bright side, saying: “There’s £2.5bn there, and there was £1.5bn – that’s a plus.

“I think the funding mechanisms will work, there will be bumps but it will work through.”

However, he admitted that the lack of detail is a problem.

“My members will happily get on with the job once they have the details, but they don’t

know what they are working to,” he said.

“I think what we are suffering from at the moment is an enormous vacuum where the guidance is in draft; all the people that are speaking have seen the guidance but are unable to say anything. We just need the information out there.”

He added that AELP providers are used to working with employers and negotiating effectively.

He said: “They won’t drop their prices and start fighting with each other, but our worry was always that some provider might come along and say ‘I will do a two-for-one.’”

Importantly, as a former chief executive of assessment organisation OCR, he said that standards and assessment are causing him “more worry” than the possibility of infighting.

He commented: “I put myself through a gruelling year course on assessment and the three words that were said upfront around any assessment were ‘validity, reliability and manageability’.

“I don’t hear those words being said when they’re talking about end-point assessment, and that scares the hell out of me.”

He added: “It does not fill me with comfort that these assessments are going to generally assess the standards that are being set.

“That really, really worries me, and there is still no guidance on who can be an end-point assessment organisation in terms of conflicts of interest.”

Despite his concerns, Mr Dawe ended on a high point, saying: “There are lots of positives about this, absolutely more money and more and employers talking about it.”

Ms Bailey concluded by saying: “I have the Japanese for chaos tattooed on my back, and on one side it’s danger and on the other side it is opportunity.

“I’m hoping that this is an opportunity not a danger.”

# HOSTED AT THE FESTIVAL OF SKILLS



**BILLY CAMDEN**  
@BILLYCAMDEN

Outstanding FE and skills achievers were honoured on day one of FE Week's Festival of Skills for this year's City & Guilds Lion Awards.

Known as the "Oscars of skills education", around 400 guests attended the glamorous ceremony to recognise the efforts of the sector's very best students and tutors.

Hosted by BBC breakfast and Celebrity MasterChef presenter Louise Minchin (pictured right) and Kirstie Donnelly, the managing director of City & Guilds, the evening began with a tasty BBQ on the lawn of Capel Manor College's Manor House Garden with entertainment from hula-hoopers Gypsy Pixie.

International singing sensation Bashiyr 'The Voice' then put guests in a soulful mood with some belting vocals before official proceedings got underway.

The awards ceremony itself was the culmination of the annual City & Guilds Medals for Excellence programme.



Fourteen awards were on offer, including international learners and tutors, with more than 200 nominations submitted across the five main categories: Tutor of the Year, Outstanding Achiever of the Year, Apprentice of the Year, FE Learner of the Year, and Employee Learner of the Year.

This year's nominees and winners demonstrated a "wealth of talent" in FE and skills, said Ms Donnelly, who was "incredibly proud" of their achievements and dedication.

Michael Felse from the Professional Skills Academy in Salford took home the award for Tutor of the Year.

A City & Guilds spokesperson said Mr Felse had helped more than 200 health trainers achieve their qualifications, who meet the needs of more than 1,000 clients in communities every year.

He was also awarded with an honorary membership of City & Guilds for "outstanding work" which involved collaboration with health and cabinet ministers.

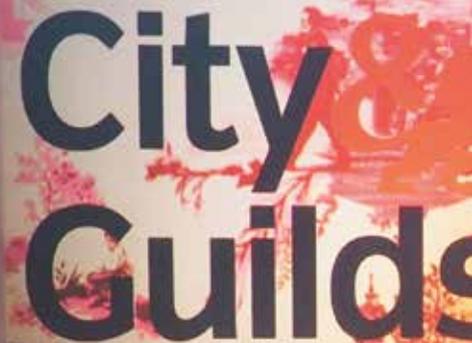
Outstanding Achiever of the Year was picked up by Gary Doyle, a student at Newry & Kilkeel Institute of FE, in Northern Ireland.

Since starting a level two diploma in plumbing in 2011, Gary has gone on to represent the UK at the WorldSkills in Sao Paulo Brazil last year, where he won a gold medal.

Next to be honoured was India Ratcliffe, the Apprentice of the Year, from North Lancs Training Group (NLTG), in Accrington.

Since taking a level three

# A GLOBAL CELEBRATION AT PRESTIGIOUS



#LionAwards



NVQ diploma in upholstery and soft furnishings, India has achieved an "extremely high" level of skill to meet not only modern techniques but also to specialise in traditional techniques that are "rare in today's upholstery trade".

FE Learner of the Year went to Daniel Kearney of Kerry ETB Training Centre, in the Republic of Ireland.

Daniel had spent 20 years working in menswear before being made redundant and enrolling on a diploma in media techniques (radio) in 2014.

He has since produced his first independent documentary in collaboration with RTE Radio 1, for which he was given a rating of 4.2 out of 5 by the broadcaster's rating system.

And lastly, Alexander Fu Lam Chan from Professional Skills Academy in Salford was awarded Employee Learner of the Year.

Alex enrolled on an NVQ level three

course for gym instructors and personal trainers after university, and achieved subsequent qualifications in life coaching and diet and nutrition.

The City & Guilds spokesperson said that Alex not only achieved his certificate, but helped the awarding organisation

to identify a new "thematic community of potential candidates" for the level three qualification.

Ms Donnelly said this year's Lion Awards was a "real spectacle".

"The stars of the night were the award nominees and winners,"

she said. "We heard so many inspirational stories from learners and colleges throughout the night which demonstrated the true value of the FE sector in helping people to achieve their potential. This really will be a night to remember."



Bashiyr 'the voice' singing



# CELEBRATION OF SKILLS & LION AWARDS



Lion Awards winners 2016

## LION AWARDS WINNERS

CATEGORY:	WINNER:
International Learner of the Year	Sivasankaran Sarawanaraj
International Tutor of the Year	Thusitha Sameera Bandaranayake
Apprentice of the Year	India Ratcliffe
FE Learner of the Year	Daniel Kearney
Employee Learner of the Year	Alexander Chan
Tutor of the Year	Michael Felse
UK Centre of the Year	Exeter College
People's Choice Award	Soe Hlaing
Outstanding Achiever of the Year	Gary Doyle
International Centre of Excellence – Middle East	International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai), United Arab Emirates
International Centre of Excellence – Africa	Institute of Culinary Arts (ICA), South Africa
International Centre of Excellence – Asia Pacific	Wellington Institute of Technology, New Zealand
International Centre of Excellence – South Asia	Sri Lanka Telecom Training Centre, Sri Lanka
International Centre of Excellence – Europe and the Caribbean	Ballyfermot Training Centre, Ireland



Alexander Fu Lam Chan



India Ratcliffe and Kirstie Donnelly



# SEE YOU NEXT YEAR



SARAH TOMLINSON



Apprenticeship curriculum manager, City Gateway

I have found the festival very interesting and exciting. I would absolutely come back next year. It's been a really good event and has complemented the FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference in March as well.



NEEL VALAND



Business development manager, PDS Group

The festival has been great, I found it very informative. It has concreted what we already know and helped us to find out that bit more, and it is a great venue and site too.

