FE WEEK

NAVIGATING 2017

APPRENTICESHIP REFORM AND FUNDING ⚓ AREA REVIEWS AND DEVOLUTION ⚓ STUDY PROGRAMMES AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION ⚓ PERFORMANCE TABLES AND OFSTED

A SUPPLEMENT PRODUCED BY FE WEEK

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INNOVATE AWARDING
End-point Assessment for Apprenticeship Standards

KEEPING THE GOOD SHIP FE ON AN EVEN KEEL

In 2016 the FE sector navigated very choppy waters – but for the New Year it is now full steam ahead. There is much to do to be ready for the developments 2017 will bring, and it is important to take stock of what was achieved in the past 12 months.

To help with this voyage through consolidation towards new plans, FE Week's 'Navigating 2017' supplement rounds up the big changes of 2016 and the landmarks events to keep an eye out for in the year to come.

To begin, on page three we have the new year's resolutions of FE's captain, the apprenticeships and skills minister Robert Halfon. He exclusively shares his vision for 2017 in detail, covering everything from funding reforms to the Institute for Apprenticeships and the Technical and Further Education Bill.

Then we examine the four biggest policy areas for the sector in detail and give the forecast for each over the coming year. We explore what is taking place in apprenticeship reform and funding, area reviews and devolution, study programmes and technical education, and performance tables and Ofsted.

Pages four and five address the apprenticeship levy, covering the perspectives of providers and employers, and also revisit FE Week's successful skirmish with the government in September's #SaveOurApprenticeships campaign.

On six Billy Camden delves into the dark waters of the area review process, the first outcomes of which were only revealed last November. He covers delays, infighting, and the task ahead for new FE commissioner Richard Atkins.

Page seven turns to the devolution of the adult education budget, following the announcement in the Autumn Statement that the government is continuing with plans to devolve the AEB for London by 2019/20.

On pages 10 and 11, Paul Offord proves he knows the ropes when it comes to study programmes and the Skills Plan, tackling changes to English and maths for post-16 learners and the 15 pathfinder' routes for technical education outlined by Lord Sainsbury.

The new post-16 accountability measures, which are in the offing this month, surface on pages 12 and 13, alongside a recap of FE Week's first ever ranking table released in November.

Finally, pages 14 and 15 list some of the sector's top skippers, who tell you what they see on the horizon for the coming year.

Produced by
FE Week
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INNOVATE AWARDING

JOHN MCNAMARA
Managing director, Innovate Awarding Ltd

We're here to help you fathom out the reforms

I'm delighted that Innovate Awarding is able to sponsor this very timely, and informative FE Week supplement on the future of apprenticeships and technical education in this country.

We are told the only constant is change, and 2017 will see the acceleration of a wide range of very significant developments in the world of vocational and technical education.

From early steps to implement the recommendations of the Sainsbury Review of technical education, completion of the area reviews of the FE college system, and the creation of the new Institute for Apprenticeships, to the major reforms of the apprenticeship system (and its associated levy funding process), we are on the cusp of the most significant year of reform since the 1944 Education Act.

There were approximately 65,000 apprenticeship starts in 1996/97 and following interventions by successive governments, this has risen to about half a million last year.

As we all know, the current administration has set a target of three million apprenticeships during the life of this parliament, equating to 600,000 per year compared with 2.3 million starts over the previous five years.

This is a challenging expansion, and an indication of the high priority that government policymakers attach to the need for high numbers of new technical and professional skilled workers.

The expansion of apprenticeships should help address recurrent skills gaps across the economy by increasing the quality of training provision in the job roles required by employers.

The government's plan for apprenticeships rests on the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, set at 0.5 per cent of the pay bill of all UK employers paying more than £3 million a year.

Employers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, who are obliged to pay the levy if their payroll exceeds £3 million, will see a proportion of the amounts raised returned to the devolved administrations under the Barnet funding formula.

Unlike the levy in England, this money will not be hypothecated to solely fund apprenticeships, although it is likely that governments will want to demonstrate that the funding has a positive impact on their respective skills priorities. The issue of diverging skills policies in the UK nations is not a new one, but the reforms in England are likely to accentuate those differences more strongly in the future.

In the autumn statement, the government reduced its projection for the amount it thinks will be raised, from £3 billion per year to £2.8 billion, but this still represents a massive stimulus to fund the growth of apprenticeships and the development of a more skilled workforce.

In all the debates about the reform process, funding, and the development of new apprenticeship standards to replace the old SASE frameworks, we must not forget who is at the heart of the entire system: the apprentice.

The main raison d'etre behind this swathe of reforms is to ensure that people get better training to help them obtain secure, long-term careers, that will not only boost economic productivity but also improve individual life chances and social mobility.

As a registered end-point assessment organisation in the new apprenticeship world, Innovate Awarding is directly involved with employers, training providers and regulators in designing high-quality, cost-effective end-point assessments for apprentices to showcase the skills they've acquired.

At the heart of all this activity is our strong determination that each apprentice will have an end-point assessment that will be robust and fair, and complete the apprenticeship experience in a positive way. To that end we are going to ensure that each apprentice:

- Is provided with all the briefing information at the right time in their training programme about the assessments they will undertake;
- has access to a range of support materials, including sample tests, guidance materials and appropriate contact with their assigned assessor;
- receives feedback on their performance at the end-point assessment stage.

Whatever the future holds for the sector, the pressing need for people to receive high quality training and continual development throughout their working lives, will remain. This is a vital job, and I wish you all well for this crucial work in 2017 and beyond.

I commend this excellent FE Week supplement to you, and if you would like to follow-up on any issues please do get in touch.

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Captain Halfon's New Year resolutions

The skills minister Robert Halfon wants to make 2017 the year apprenticeships and skills hit the big time. He exclusively shares his agenda for the coming months here.

2017 is set to be a hugely significant year for apprenticeships, skills, further education and careers – building on the successes of 2016. With apprentice participation at nearly 900,000 – the highest figure on record – and 625,000 apprenticeship starts since May 2015, we have made huge progress towards Britain becoming an apprentice nation.

This year I became minister for apprenticeships and skills and it is not a stretch to say that it is my dream job. Spearheading the benefits of skills and apprenticeships to people across Britain is a great honour.

I see apprenticeships as a ladder of opportunity. This is because, like a ladder, people climb to new heights, acquiring the skills and qualifications they need for current and future jobs.

Apprenticeships really do work. They give people the chance to earn while they learn, gain vital work experience and set themselves on a fast-track to a successful career for life. Importantly, over 90 per cent of apprentices who complete their programmes remain employed.

> "I look forward to being challenged by FE Week and others as we implement our programme"

In terms of skills, our ambition is to create a professional and technical education system that puts skills at the forefront of learning, and also ensures that we have the skills that employers need to move forward. While 'skills' is a broad term, what we need to ensure is that all education routes represent quality and opportunity for all.

This means ensuring technical courses are on a par with traditional academic options and that every apprenticeship offers the skills employers are looking for.

So, what is 2017 going to bring? Here are some of my New Year's resolutions:

FUNDING REFORMS COME INTO FORCE

2017 is the year that the apprenticeship levy comes into force.

For too long there has been under-investment in skills and that is why the levy is so essential – it will help to ensure a highly skilled workforce for the future.

Through the levy, £2.5 billion will be invested in apprenticeships by 2019-20, double the amount spent in 2010-11. With more money than ever, we will help people get into more, better-quality training.

We are also continuing to help those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through the levy, we are investing £60 million in training apprentices from the poorest areas in the country, as well as providing an additional £150 a month for training providers to give extra learning support to those with learning or other disabilities to ensure social mobility for all.

In addition, we are investing in STEM qualifications for apprentices, and giving significant financial incentives to both employers and providers to employ 16- to 18-year-old apprentices and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Over the last parliament, we had 2.4 million apprenticeship starts and participation is at its highest figure on record. I want to continue to build on this enthusiasm and momentum this year and reach three million starts by 2020.

THE INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

Quality sits at the core of all our changes. We are working hard to make sure the Institute for Apprenticeships will be up and running by April 2017 to ensure just that.

Its ultimate goal will be to give employers a stronger role in the apprenticeship system, ensuring they and employees get the skills they need to succeed.

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK 2017

One of the highlights of the year will be National Apprenticeship Week in March. I hope to be traveling around the country alongside the National Apprenticeship Service, meeting brilliant apprentices across many diverse fields of employment.

The week is designed to celebrate the positive impact apprenticeships and traineeships have on individuals, businesses and the economy. The theme is 'ladder of opportunity', and it's a fantastic opportunity to showcase the amazing work of employers and their apprentices.

There has never been a better time to be an apprentice, and throughout the week we will be highlighting how apprenticeships allow people to climb the career ladder and get on in the world of work.

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION BILL

2017 will see the Technical and Further Education Bill continue its passage through parliament. The bill brings fundamental reforms needed to build a high-quality skills system to rival the best in the world.

This bill will extend the role of the Institute for Apprenticeships to cover technical education, expanding the Institute for Apprenticeships into the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Subject to passing in parliament, it also protects students in the event that colleges face extreme financial difficulties due to insolvency.

Robert Halfon MP

Above all, the Institute will ensure that technical training is of the highest quality and based on the needs of employers.

FURTHER EDUCATION

I want 2017 to be the year we celebrate the brilliant work that FE colleges do.

It is right that excellence in FE is now being recognised through the Chartered Institute of Further Education, with Furness College being the latest institution to be accepted for membership. We need to learn from the best colleges both in terms of teaching and their financial acumen.

> "I see apprenticeships as a ladder of opportunity"

Through the area review process, we have been reforming FE so that local communities, learners and employers get the skills and training they need to help their area thrive.

The process has been vital in putting colleges in the best position possible to deliver high-quality teaching to meet the needs of all young people and adults, enabling them to succeed.

CAREERS, THE FIRST RUNG ON THE LADDER

Careers advice is something I am extremely passionate about – it is the first rung on the ladder of opportunity. Good careers advice is essential to opening opportunities and jobs for people of all backgrounds.

It is also critical for the success of our reforms to apprenticeships and to technical education which will transform the skills base of this country. That's why 2017 is all about making sure that careers advice encourages people to pursue professional and technical education and apprenticeships as much as university.

This year I'll be pushing ahead with plans to ensure that everyone, no matter what age or what background, can rely on excellent and consistent careers advice. Careers advice and guidance should be available everywhere, from schools to colleges and universities. The Careers and Enterprise Company will continue to support mentoring and work experience, including through its growing network of Enterprise Advisors.

Last year its funding supported over 250,000 students, focused in the areas of the country with the least provision.

2017: A HUGE YEAR

Careers, apprenticeships, skills, social justice, quality and jobs are my priorities for the coming year. The direction of travel is clear; the levy will change behaviour, and the new Institute will ensure quality.

The Sainsbury reforms will also guarantee excellent professional and technical education, and the area reviews will help provide strong leadership in FE and strong further education colleges.

I look forward to being challenged by FE Week and others as we implement our programme. Whatever our differences in opinion, we are united in the need to ensure we provide the apprentices and skills that our nation needs.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone in the skills, FE and apprenticeships world a happy new year!

FULL STEAM AHEAD FOR APPRE

Levy tax signals a change of tack in April

ALIX ROBERTSON
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Employers with an annual payroll of more than £3 million will have to pay the new apprenticeship levy from April 2017. This is expected to involve less than two per cent of all UK employers, who will be charged 0.5 per cent of their annual pay bill.

At a breakout session on funding at the Association of Colleges annual conference in November, senior civil servant Keith Smith, who is in charge of implementation, confirmed that while 20,000 employers are expected to fall within the scope of the levy, just 400 employers, or two per cent, will cover "about half of the entire levy".

While some of these employers have said they are happy to be named, the Skills Funding Agency has refrained from releasing a list, as others do not want to be identified.

Employers which aren't connected to another company or charity will have a levy allowance of £15,000 each year, and will not be able carry any unused allowance over into the next tax year.

Once the levy comes into play, employers must tell HMRC how much they owe each month through an employer payment summary.

They will also be expected to report how they've allocated their allowance the first time they pay the levy.

The levy should be paid every month through PAYE, in the same way income tax or national insurance contributions are paid, and those who have overpaid during the year will receive a refund as a PAYE credit.

The apprenticeship levy was first announced in

Keith Smith

the summer budget in 2015, and later that year it was revealed that it would come into effect in April 2017, followed by a consultation that heard employers' views on how the levy should work in practice.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing, however. Fears were sparked in November 2016 about the amount the levy would actually raise, after Phillip Hammond's autumn statement revealed government forecasts suggested that the levy would only drum up £2.8 billion by 2019/20.

This compared with the Treasury's prediction of £3 billion in last year's statement. Meanwhile, the Office for Budget Responsibility had already revised the Treasury's original figures down by £100 million for 19/20 during its economic and fiscal outlook in March.

At FE Week's Festival of Skills in July, Mr Smith also discussed other reforms to apprenticeships that will hit the FE sector next year.

These included the new Register for Apprenticeship Training Providers, although we will have to wait until March before finding out which providers are included.

The Digital Apprenticeship Service will also launch soon, allowing employers to choose which training providers to work with in delivering apprenticeships.

In October, FE Week revealed that the government expects to spend at least £12.5 million on delivering it.

The Institute for Apprenticeships, the body the government plans to have police the delivery of apprenticeships, is also expected to go live in April 2017.

The government has launched a consultation about the draft strategic plan, which ends on January 31.

Apprenticeships minister Robert Halfon announced in December that an apprentice panel will be established to challenge and make recommendations to the board of the Institute, when he spoke at the sixth sitting of the public bill committee for the Technical and Further Education Bill.

Despite the draft strategic plan, questions still remain about the IfA, which will have its remit extended in 2018 to incorporate broader technical education.

And although Peter Lauener, the shadow chief executive of the Institute, has confirmed that it will eventually have 90 employees, these have yet to be appointed, while it still has no confirmed headquarters.

EMPLOYERS FEAR CHOPPY WATERS AHEAD

Concerns about how the apprenticeship reforms will work for employers have mounted throughout 2016, as the government gradually drip-fed us information on its plans.

The ripples of dissatisfaction began early in the year, when the matter came up at FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference in March.

Karen Bailey, head of competence development at employer-provider Volvo Group, complained that details were changing "week by week", and the "ill-thought" reform programme was in a state of "chaos".

In April the government released details of the apprenticeship levy operating model – but the document was met with criticism when Neil Carberry, director for employment and skills for the CBI, said it "raises more questions than it answers".

Then, in May, Carolyn Fairbairn, the director-general of the CBI, declared that the launch date for the levy needed to be postponed, in front of an audience of bosses in the City of London.

Ms Fairbairn said businesses were experiencing "deep frustration over the levy plans", and told FE Week editor Nick Linford that a "radical rethink" was necessary.

In July, the CBI followed up these comments by unveiling the results of a survey, with nearly 500 companies admitting widespread concern about the rushed implementation of the levy.

The survey, by the CBI and Pearson indicated that almost half of all medium-sized businesses believed they would have to absorb the levy as an additional tax – but would make no changes to their training arrangements.

Complaints also arose about the lack of clarity for non-levy-payers.

Confirmation in the guidance, which was released in April, that 98 per cent of employers would pay mandatory cash fees, prompted Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, to warn the government that it needed "to think very carefully" about the effect on smaller employers.

He said: "If the financial contribution they have to make is too high and the payment system is too complex, we will lose them."

In September, apprenticeships minister Robert Halfon dismissed the findings of an FE Week investigation that showed widespread support for a delay to the apprenticeship levy launch.

Yet none of the 10 major professional bodies, representing a variety of sectors, which responded to our call for views, supported pressing ahead with the April launch date.

For example Tim Thomas, the director of skills and employment policy at the manufacturing and engineering body EEF, said the plan "lacks flexibility", while the boss of the Institute of the Motor Industry, Steve Nash, complained that guidance had so far been "sporadic and untimely".

Then at the AELP autumn conference in November, FE Week asked delegates whether a lack of guaranteed funding for non-levy-payers was a concern for them.

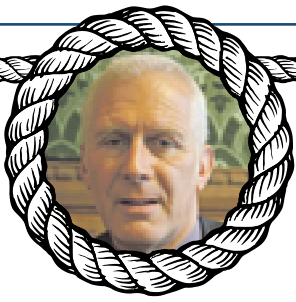
Delegates were apprehensive, commenting for example that "the smaller guys are just being penalised each time without fail" and "the employers themselves don't recognise the reforms properly yet at SME level".

In the same month, FE Week reported that a quarter of apprenticeship providers had declined the opportunity to compete for an SFA contract to deliver training to small and medium sized businesses next year.

While 1,753 providers applied to the register to be able to deliver training directly or as a subcontractor to large, levy-paying employers, just 1,310 – or 75 per cent – of these also applied to deliver training to smaller, non-levy paying employers.

NTICESHIP FUNDING REFORMS

More money for new rope? Views from the top



Gordon Marsden,
Shadow FE, HE and skills minister, May 16.

"The more we hear about how the levy will now need to fund the top-up, the devolved administrations, English and maths at level two, and disadvantaged learners, incentive payments and non-levy-payers, the more it seems inevitable the government will end up raising the levy."

Petra Wilton,
Director of strategy at the Chartered Management Institute, September 9.

"In the uncertainty of post-Brexit, it has become very clear that the UK needs to invest far more in skills to boost its productivity and international competitiveness. Now more than ever businesses need more certainty around the levy, as opposed to further delays."

Robert Halfon,
Apprenticeships and skills minister, August 12.

"Our businesses can only grow and compete on the world stage if they have the right people, with the right skills. The apprenticeship levy will help create millions of opportunities for individuals and employers. This will give our young people the chance they deserve."

Andrew Cleaves,
Principal at Birmingham Metropolitan College, June 5.

"In the West Midlands alone it is estimated there will be in the region of £150 million to £180 million brought into skills training, and because it is raised from employers, the levy will change the way businesses think about skills and the way they relate to skills providers."

STILL TIME TO #SAVEOURAPPRENTICESHIPS IN 2017

ALIX ROBERTSON
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FE Week's first official campaign, #SaveOurApprenticeships, successfully challenged what would have been devastating funding cuts for young and disadvantaged learners.

We launched in September at the Houses of Parliament to a packed gathering of sector leaders and senior politicians – including the apprenticeships minister Robert Halfon.

Theresa May had set the scene for the event, after she said that she did not "recognise" that the cuts could happen, during Prime Minister's Questions that very morning.

She was wrong; in August, exclusive FE Week analysis revealed that proposed funding changes for 16- to 18-year-old apprentices would result in cuts to FE providers by around a third, rising to more than 50 per cent for apprentices living, for example, in the most deprived areas of central London.

At the event, Mr Halfon admitted that "we need to look at all of those figures".

More than 50 MPs, led by Tottenham's David Lammy, signed a letter urging Mr Halfon to reverse the cuts.

Gordon Marsden, the shadow HE and FE minister, who hosted the event, warned that the cuts were "an elephant trap in his [Mr Halfon's] in-tray", which could "undermine" overall faith in the new system.

So when the final apprenticeship funding levels were revealed on October 25, it was clear that #SaveOurApprenticeships had made an impact on government thinking.

The government's update on its reform plans indicated a U-turn – without ever using the word itself – introducing "help for training providers to adapt to the new funding model through an additional cash payment equal to 20 per cent of the funding band maximum, where they train 16- to 18-year-olds on frameworks".

It also made available a simplified version of the "current system of support for people from disadvantaged areas", to "ensure the opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship is open to everyone".

Celebrations were soon tempered, however, by further FE Week analysis showing that while the cuts weren't quite as steep as before, most frameworks would still feel cuts of 20 per cent or more.

For instance, before the U-turn, we calculated cuts of between 27 and 50 per cent to construction skills at level two. After it, the cuts ranged from 14 to 37 per cent – figures which would still devastate training in the sector.

Another issue FE Week has followed closely this year is the approval of new apprenticeship standards, as the old frameworks are gradually turned off.

There are currently 204 occupations approved for the development of an apprenticeship standard, and 155 apprenticeship standards that have been approved for delivery.

The former top skills civil servant Dr Sue Pember, who is now director of policy at adult learning-provider membership body Holex, said in June that it was "morally wrong" of the Skills Funding Agency to let learners begin new apprenticeships without an approved AO for their end-point assessments.

Our analysis in October showed there were only 63 standards with an approved AO for the end point assessment – out of 147 standards that had at the time been granted final approval by the government and were therefore available for learners to start on.

Subsequent checks of government data in December showed that there were still 78 standards without an AO, which amounted to just over 50 per cent of the total approved for delivery.

This lack of progress undermines the assurances Mr Halfon gave last month, as well as those from the Skills Funding Agency boss Peter Lauener, that the government was working hard to speed up the approval process.

LAND AHOY: AREA REVIEWS TO FINIS

NEW COMMISSIONER TAKES THE HELM

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Despite a shaky start to the nationwide programme of post-16 education and skills area reviews, they should all be completed comfortably before the start of this summer, according to the fromer FE commissioner Sir David Collins.

Sir David, who stepped down at the end of last year, conceded to the education select committee back in October that while waves two and three had finished on schedule, there had been lengthy delays with the first.

He told MPs: "The first ones were slower than one might have anticipated and liked, because in the first area reviews, dare I say, we picked the areas where there were a number of problem colleges."


George Osborne
PA/WIRE

Attention is now turning to the fourth and fifth waves.

Wave four will involve 46 FE colleges, 12 sixth form colleges and one sixth form, taking part in seven separate reviews.

The fifth and final wave will cover 48 FE colleges, 10 SFCs and one higher education institute, across eight separate reviews.

Both started on time – September for wave four and November for number five – and are expected to be finished by the end of March, under the new FE commissioner Richard Atkins.

The government initially wanted reviews to take three or four months to complete – but extended this up to six months last March when it became clear many areas would not be able to hit the initial target.

A common claim from principals involved in the wave-one reviews was that the delays were caused by unexpected government announcements – that sixth form colleges could apply for academy status, and that a restructuring facility was to be made available to fund review recommendations.

The announcement on SFC academies was first made by the former chancellor George Osborne during his spending review in November 2015. A key attraction was that SFCs would no longer have to pay VAT, which currently costs colleges an average of £317,000 per year.

The government then published guidance on the restructuring facility in March. It said cash would be available to FE and sixth form colleges to "support recommendations arising from all waves".

The DfE was initially coy about divulging the sums of money involved, but it finally came clean in December, after FE Week made a series of Freedom of Information requests.

A spokesperson said: "We have estimated the cost of implementing area review recommendations will [be] no more than £726 million over the Spending Review period [ie up to 2020] – consisting primarily of loan funding – and expect it could be far lower than this amount."

And £12 million of this has been reserved for transition grants, which colleges can use specifically to bring in the specific expertise they need to put in place any changes.

The most contentious area review so far has been Greater Manchester, which took more than nine months to complete, amid reports of clashes between college leaders and Theresa Grant, the chief executive of Trafford Council – who was appointed as chair of the steering group on behalf of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

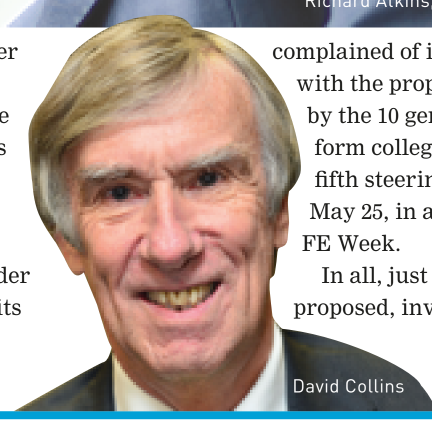
Area reviews are generally overseen by the FE commissioner or the sixth form college commissioner Peter Mucklow.


Richard Atkins, the new commissioner

But Manchester was one of a small number of areas with devolved powers to be given responsibility to work with the Depart ment for Education, in order to ensure the review met its priorities.

The authority still complained of its dissatisfaction with the proposals that were made by the 10 general FE and 11 sixth form colleges at the review's fifth steering group meeting in May 25, in a statement leaked to FE Week.

In all, just two mergers were proposed, involving five colleges.


David Collins

IMPLEMENTING FIVE WAVES OF STRUCTURAL C

Once each of the five waves of area reviews are completed, focus will turn to implementing the recommendations.

In a whirlwind afternoon in late November, the government published all 13 of the long-awaited reports and recommendations from the first two.

The only missing areas in waves one and two were for London (west) and London (central), which had been delayed "to ensure that the recommendations and outcomes of the four London reviews are coordinated during wave three."

Just 21 mergers, involving 45 colleges, were proposed – while 45 institutions planned to stay as they are, and a further 29 sixth form colleges were said to be investigating a conversion to academy status.

Reports from wave three are expected to follow in early 2017, with the rest due soon after, with waves four and five projected to finish on March 29.

But what can we expect once all the recommendations are out?

During FE Week's area review summit in July, the former FE commissioner Sir David Collins said he expected the number of FE colleges to drop by a third once the full review process was completed, with his successor Richard Atkins anticipating a similar change.

"We're at 243 colleges now," Sir David said. "My best bet is that we'll come down to 170" once the reviews have completed.

Many sixth form colleges are also expected to convert to academies.

Since the former chancellor George Osborne announced that SFCs could become academies, around 70 per cent of the 93 SFCs in the country have started exploring academisation "as plan A or B" following recommendations in the area reviews.

The first conversion could come as soon as this month, and the applications for both Hereford SFC and New College Pontefract are currently being reviewed

SH AHEAD OF FUNDING DEVOLUTION

Compass points to AEB going local from 2018

Meg Hillier

PA/WIRE

Philip Hammond

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Control over FE funding is to be further decentralised as the government looks to press on with plans to devolve the adult education budget across the nation.

Local enterprise partnerships already control most of the funds available to providers for capital spending – while last month's autumn statement confirmed that the government still plans to devolve the AEB for London by 2019/20.

A document published on gov.uk following the chancellor Philip Hammond's speech to the House of Commons on November 23, said that the government "remains committed to devolving powers to support local areas".

It added: "We will devolve the AEB to London from 2019/20 (subject to readiness conditions)."

The government will be under pressure in 2017 to provide more clarity on the way FE devolution will work for providers that cross regional boundaries.

The Association of Colleges called in May for a delay to the wider devolution of the AEB for this reason, after it emerged that provider groups based in multiple regions had been lobbying the SFA for different treatment under the now-imminent devolution plans.

An SFA spokesperson said it would look at how "funding and commissioning arrangements will operate for colleges and other providers which deliver in multiple areas" in 2018/19.

The AoC's chief executive David Hughes told FE Week that decentralising the AEB should be a "powerful force for good", although more work would be "needed to prepare".

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, argued that devolution would give LEPs the opportunity to commission all their provision, rather than just work on a grant allocated basis.

But he was concerned with "early indications" that the "same old" grant system will be maintained in some areas, despite it "being clear this hasn't achieved the best outcomes and value for money in the past".

Mr Dawe added: "We need reassurance that national priorities for adults such as digital skills, English and maths, and pathways into employment and training are maintained across the country and we don't re-enter the era of postcode lotteries for adult provision."

Concern about potential conflicts of interest with LEP funding decisions emerged in early December, after an investigation by the Daily Mail alleged they had made more than 270 payments to companies or other projects connected with their own board members.

Devolution plans were subsequently labelled "high risk" in a special report unveiled by the Public Accounts Committee.

A spokesperson stressed: "This includes the 'opaque' nature of accountability for the activities of LEPs – designed to bring together the public and private sector – which are now negotiating local growth deals funded by a £12 billion fund over a five-year period".

The committee's chair, Meg Hillier MP, insisted that "every pound of public money" spent by LEPs and other relevant local bodies "must be a pound parliament can trace".

A LEP-funded report published in October by Metro-Dynamics, called 'Leading the way', also came out in support of greater transparency.

It said: "LEPs need to continue to ensure that they are known for having the best possible approach to transparency and governance in terms of decision-making and spending."

The chairman of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership, Mark Reeve, told FE Week on behalf of the LEP Network Board, that "all LEPs take any allegations of improper conduct extremely seriously".

HANGE: NOW THE HARD WORK REALLY BEGINS

by the Department for Education and their regional schools commissioners.

Priestley college in Warrington and Hereford SFC have also announced formal proposals for academy conversion.

But according to a graph charting the various change recommendations, the most common suggestion made in the area reviews was for colleges to alter their apprenticeship delivery, and in particular, "the development of local 'apprenticeship companies' by colleges working together".

These companies want to increase their market share of apprenticeships, which is lower this year than last.

The former skills minister Nick Boles had set a challenge to colleges at the 2015 AoC annual conference to stop letting private providers "nick your lunch".

But analysis by FE Week in November last year showed colleges had broadly failed to take up the challenge.

The proportion of all apprenticeship funding going to colleges dropped from 37 per cent in 2015/16 to 32 per cent in 2016/17.

Whether colleges will step up to the challenge this year remains to be seen.

A number of reviews also ended with recommendations to establish 'institutes of technology', to deliver skills at levels four and five.

IoTs were first outlined in the government's Productivity Plan, launched in July 2015, which said they would have a specific focus on delivering high-standard, high-level professional and technical training.

At the time, the government said it expected there to be one IoT per local enterprise partnership following the area reviews.

The government is however yet to announce more detail on what form these institutes would take, leaving questions remaining about whether they will be implemented or not.

Apprenticeship Standards

High Quality End-point Assessment and Support

What is Innovate Awarding?

Innovate Awarding is a national awarding organisation regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA, with a passion for doing things differently. We are working alongside FE colleges, training providers and employers to revolutionise the way in which qualifications and assessment services are delivered.

We are on the Skills Funding Agency register for apprenticeship assessment organisations and have a rolling programme of applications for 57 apprenticeship standards as soon as they become 'ready for delivery'.

We will be offering assessment services for apprenticeship standards in the following sectors:

- Adult Care
- Business
- Children, Young People and Families
- Community Sport
- Customer Service
- Early Years
- Education and Training
- Hair and Beauty
- Healthcare
- Hospitality
- Leadership and Management
- Public Service
- Retail
- Sports and Physical Activity

INNOVATE AWARDING
End-point Assessment
for Apprenticeship Standards

Why Innovate Awarding?

- High quality and cost effective end-point assessments, provided by current and professional staff drawn from the relevant sector – managed by assessment experts
- Available on-demand
- Outstanding customer service
- Comprehensive system support through our EPA portal – minimising paper, unnecessary bureaucracy, and complexity
- Full suite of support materials provided for assessment readiness including diagnostics, detailed guides on grading, sample test papers and mark schemes
- Seamless processes to ensure timely cooperation between the individual end-point assessor, and the employer/training provider/apprentice
- Support throughout the assessment process
- Provision of Innovate Awarding eCertificates for assessment achievement

Possible Partnership Opportunities for End-point Assessment

Innovate Awarding is developing a bespoke IT system for the management of end-point assessment which will also include a full range of support materials for assessment preparation. Employers and training providers that are acting as apprentice assessment organisations themselves will be able to partner with Innovate Awarding and have access to our full range of assessment and support materials for their learners.

For more information,
please contact John, Cathie or Andy on 0117 314 2800
businessdevelopment@innovateawarding.org
innovateawarding.org/apprenticeship-standards
@innovate_awards

STUDY PROGRAMMES ARE ALL AT S

GCSE English and maths policy U-turn?

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

With ministers dropping firm hints that the Department for Education is planning to revise its English and maths requirements for post-16 learners, a change of direction is widely anticipated in 2017.

In 2014, it was made a condition of funding that all 16- to 19-year-olds who did not already have at least a grade C in GCSE English or maths should be enrolled in courses in these subjects.

The government's attempt to reverse years of decline in national numeracy and literacy levels went a step further the following year, as all those with a grade D in the subjects were required to resit a GCSE, rather than an equivalent stepping-stone course.

However this year's GCSE results saw huge numbers of learners aged 17 and older failing to get the necessary C in English and maths – provoking widespread calls for the government to take a more employer-focused approach to resit qualifications.

Apprenticeships minister Robert Halfon gave hope at November's Association of Colleges annual conference to providers – many of whom fear the worst again with for 2017 – that change is coming.

He told delegates: "It is clear that we need a credible, high-quality option for students for whom GCSEs are not appropriate or achievable.

"This is why we are reforming Functional Skills to make sure that they are genuinely relevant to employers, and consequently have credibility and prestige in the jobs market."

Education secretary Justine Greening struck a similar note on English and maths to AoC delegates.

She said: "We all need to think quite carefully about how we strike the right balance between a system that really pushes people, so we're not giving up on someone being able to reach their potential because it's hard for them to do that – but also a clear sense of getting them from A to B quickly so they're not spending time running upwards against a brick wall that they're not going to get over."

Figures released in August showed just 34,486 – or 26.9 per cent – of the 128,201 learners aged 17 and above who sat English GCSE got at least a C.

And of the 173,628 learners from the same age group who sat maths, only 51,220 – or 29.5 per cent – achieved C or above.

These results were significantly down from 35.1 and 35.8 per cent respectively the previous year.

Oftsed's annual report, launched in Westminster in early December, blamed government policy for these disappointing results.

However, during a Q&A at his final launch event, the outgoing chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw made it clear that he thought colleges were to blame.

"There's simply no excuse for a college letting down large numbers of students who just narrowly missed getting those benchmark grades," he said.


Justine Greening

It was the latest in a series of blistering attacks on the performance of FE throughout 2016, and providers are hoping his successor Amanda Spielman will be more sympathetic towards them over the coming 12 months.

The Education and Training Foundation has been commissioned by the government to review how and whether alternative maths and English Functional Skills qualifications should be reformed by 2018.

The former skills minister Nick Boles explained over the summer that the idea was to produce "more rigorous and respected Functional Skills qualifications".

The ETF submitted a confidential report of recommendations for reforms in November, after carrying out a series of consultations.

No date has so far been given by the DfE as to when it is likely to respond in 2017 to ETF's recommendations.

However, Ofqual will be running its own related consultation in early next year.

A spokesperson told FE Week: "We will be playing our part in ensuring that Functional Skills have greater relevance. In particular, our focus is on securing valid assessment."

LOST AT SEA: WHERE NEXT FOR TRAINEESHIP FUNDING?

The debate over the long-term future role of traineeships made it all the way to the floor of the House of Commons in 2016, after FE Week forced the government to admit that only a small proportion of students who finish them move on to start an apprenticeship.

Traineeships were launched in 2013 as part of the government's drive to help low-skilled young people onto apprenticeships – but publicly available statistics only provide overall "positive" progression numbers to a job, apprenticeship, further full-time education or other training.

The government had repeatedly refused to answer questions about how many progressions there were from traineeships to apprenticeships — so FE Week lodged a Freedom of Information request with the Skills Funding Agency to find out.

We reported on the response in June. The figures showed that just 450 (nine per cent) of 5,200 completions for 19- to 24-year-olds in 2014/15 went on to start an apprenticeship.

The figure was slightly higher for under-19s – with 2,280 (31 per cent) of 7,400 completions progressing.

However, this still means that overall progression to apprenticeships stands at just 22 per cent.

This raises serious questions about the value the government is getting out of the programme, as it pushes for three million apprenticeship starts by 2020.

Before he was made FE commissioner, Richard Atkins told FE Week that there should be a "review of traineeships undertaken this year, so that more young people are able to fill the employer vacancies for apprentices.

"I believe it is critically important that a high quality pre-apprenticeship programme is developed in this country."

In the Commons, shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden raised the issue during Business, Innovation and Skills questions in June.

Citing our figures, he asked: "The Labour party has consistently supported traineeships for getting many more young people into quality apprenticeships, so why has the government wasted three years failing properly to promote, explain or target them?"

Nick Boles, who was skills minister at the time, accused him of trying to "narrow this programme whose great strength is its versatility".

Mr Marsden told FE Week shortly before the Christmas recess that he planned to push for reforms of traineeships in 2017.

He said: "They should allow for what was intended from the beginning – a natural progression to apprenticeships.

"We are worried if you don't get this right, apprenticeships will increasingly go to people who are already well trained, which will undermine the drive for better social mobility."

SEA AS POLICY OVERHAUL BEGINS

Technical education plans set sail ahead of 2019 launch

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

The Skills Plan will dramatically transform the post-16 technical education landscape, though a number of key questions need to be answered on how the slimmed down system will be implemented, according to major players in the sector.

Lord Sainsbury's 'Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education' was a key influence on the government's skills plan, which was published in its wake in July last year.

Among the drastic changes outlined in the document was the plan to replace 20,000 post-16 vocational qualifications with just 15 new "high-quality routes", as FE Week exclusively revealed two months before the report was published.

These first 'pathfinder' routes are set to be taught from September 2019, and will take the form of two-year college-based programmes suitable both at 16-year-olds, but also available to those aged 19+, which will be closely aligned with the new apprenticeship standards. All 15 routes are planned for launch by September 2022.

The report controversially wants each of these routes only to be available through a single awarding organisation.

But this plan was thrown into doubt when Warwick Sharp, the deputy director 16-19 strategy at the Department for Education, claimed in November it was a "myth" that the streamlining – which many in the sector worry is too drastic – would result in limited outcomes".

There has been considerable confusion over the simplifications, and many worry that winnowing down to just 15 qualifications would leave some in the range of subjects as awkward bedfellows.


Lord Sainsbury

The 'Creative and Design' route, for example, includes training as an audio-visual technician, a journalist or a furniture maker.

"There is myth that there are 15 qualifications because there are 15 routes," Mr Sharp told the Association of Employment and Learning Providers' autumn conference delegates in November, adding: "I think it will look different across each route."

He suggested the routes could branch, using 'Legal, Finance and Accounting' as an example: "I'm not saying it will happen – but we could see three clear branches; something like engineering or manufacturing is probably much more diverse."

Lord Sainsbury was branded an "elitist" after he claimed in a speech to that certain jobs, such as retail assistant, should not be counted as technical education.

His comments prompted Mark Dawe, the boss of the AELP, to claim he was ignoring "a vast swathe of the population".

The peer also urged ministers to take a more realistic view of the cost of high-quality technical education and increase funding, as it implements recommendations on a slimmed-down system.

With Justine Greening indicating repeatedly in the autumn that the government plans to shift its focus from improving schools and universities to FE, the sector will be eager to see if more funding is forthcoming.

Another policy proposal that needs fleshing out over the coming months is the transition year proposed in Lord Sainsbury's review.

It may actually last anywhere from three months to the full 12, and is apparently aimed at enabling young people "to gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need for progression" to one of the 15 pathways.

The peer's report, recommended that "individuals who are not ready to access a technical education route at 16 (or older if their education has been delayed) should be offered a flexible transition year tailored to their prior attainment and aspirations".

WORK EXPERIENCE NOW FIRMLY ON OFSTED'S RADAR

The quality of the work experience aspect of FE provision will appear on the FE radar once more in 2017, and Ofsted is expected to increase its focus on quality over the coming months.

The government announced last summer that every 16- to 18-year-old on a college-based technical education programme, introduced through the Skills Plan that followed Lord Sainsbury's review, will be "entitled" to a "quality work placement".

Study Programmes, inspired by Alison Wolf's influential 2011 review of vocational education, fund a work experience element, but the results have been mixed.

FE Week editor Nick Linford quizzed Paul Joyce, Ofsted deputy director for FE and skills, on how inspectors will be tracking work experience in 2017 during an exclusive interview.

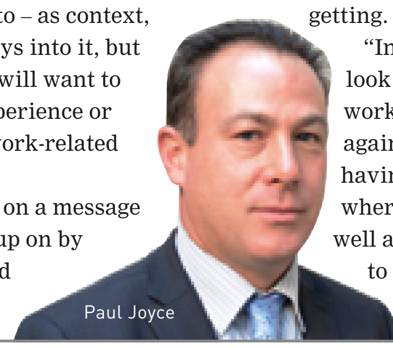
Mr Joyce said that the inspectorate had focused on improving the maths and English element of study programme over the last two years, but was vague on how this expertise could now be applied to work experience.

He said: "Work experience as part of study programmes is something that inspectors do clearly look at.

"It's a very difficult thing to give categorical answers to – as context, course, all of that plays into it, but certainly inspectors will want to know about work experience or the contribution of work-related learning."

Asked to comment on a message increasingly picked up on by the sector, that Ofsted will be attempting to highlight examples of inadequate work experience, Mr Joyce said: "What inspectors will do is look at the study programme package the learner is getting.

"Inspectors will certainly look at work experience and work-related learning and again in some cases that is having a detrimental impact where that is not being done as well as it could be to contribute to a learner's overall programme."


Paul Joyce

NEW LEAGUE TABLES

DFE PUSHES THE BOAT OUT WITH NE

ALIX ROBERTSON
@ALIXROBERTSON4

In January, the government will introduce the new 16-19 accountability measures – which were first announced in 2014.

The new accountability system came into force in 2016 (excluding substantial vocational qualifications at level two which will be introduced next year), and the first performance tables under the new system are expected in January 2017.

Headline measures will be picked out to show all the key indicators of performance for colleges and school sixth forms much more clearly.

These five measures are student progress, attainment, progress in English and maths GCSE, retention, and destinations.

A separate score will be published for each of these for every type of qualification offered by a school or college, including academic programmes, applied general programmes and tech-level programmes at level three, and substantial vocational qualification programmes at level two.

Alongside these headline measures, national averages will be published.

Additional measures will provide details of specifics such as attainment in qualifications below level three and A-level attainment, while underlying data will be allow people to explore things such as attainment in specific subjects.

In 2014 the government stated its aims for the new accountability measures, mentioning things like informing student choice and helping schools and colleges better assess their own performance.

The Department for Education said that the additional measures and underlying data on performance will be made available to students, parents and other interested parties. The new data is also expected to help Ofsted in its judgments.

Although not explicitly stated in the guidance, the measures should have the added benefit of making it easier to compare school sixth forms and colleges, by broadening the range of performance indicators that are reported, and moving away from focusing on success in exams.

When the new measures were first announced, concerns were raised by some groups such as the Association of School and College Leaders, which argued in a report in our sister paper Schools Week that the performance tables might reflect badly on colleges working with students who haven't already achieve a grade C in maths or English.

The National Association of Head Teachers also suggested at the time that the in the new measures might not adequately reflect the attainment of students working at entry level or level one, and that it might not be possible to accurately and fairly employ destination data as an accountability measure.

Under the new system, the progress measure will carry the greatest significance as the basis by which minimum standards are measured. This represents a change from the use of attainment to judging whether minimum standards have been reached.

The second progress indicator, focusing specifically on English and maths GCSEs for students who had not achieved a grade A*- C in one or other of these subjects by the age of 16, will also be important.

Separate average progress grades will be reported for each of these subjects for every institution, following on from the new rules introduced this year requiring students with only a grade D or lower in English or maths to continue studying them until the age of 18.

EXPLAINED: THOSE

STUDENT PROGRESS

+0.5

Students average this many more grades per academic qualification compared to the national average

ATTAINMENT

B

Students average this grade in their academic qualifications

ENGL AND MA GCS

+0

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FE WEEK FLOATS THE NICDEX

In November, FE Week released its first ever rankings table, in which Exeter College came out on top.

The ratings were based on four measures: 2016/17 adult apprenticeships allocations as a percentage of all adult funding, employer and learner satisfaction scores, and destination data – specifically a college's success at getting unemployed learners into work.

All 213 colleges in the country were awarded a score between zero and three based on their performance in each category, with a volume-based bonus point available per measure.

Exeter College, which was led by FE Commissioner Richard Atkins CBE until he retired in March, scored a perfect 16 in the new survey, making it officially the most successful college in England based on a number of key criteria decided on by the Department for Education.

Three other colleges narrowly missed out on the top spot, with Kendal College, Selby College and Eastleigh College scoring 15 points each.

All four of the top-scoring colleges have been rated 'outstanding' at their most recent Ofsted inspections.

Exeter's current principal John Laramy told FE Week that he was "delighted" that the college's "unremitting focus on outstanding teaching, learning, employer engagement and the student experience has been recognised by this accolade".

Selby College was the best in the country at helping its unemployed learners into work, according to the latest destination data published by the DfE, which helped it to take joint-second place in the rankings.

Kendal College's employer and learner satisfaction rates were among the highest of any college, according to the latest FE Choices data, placing it squarely in joint-second.

Meanwhile, an adult apprenticeships allocation of more than £11.5 million, alongside employer and learner satisfaction rates of more than 90 per cent propelled Eastleigh College to join the others in second place.

At the bottom of the table were Hereward College and Central Bedfordshire College, which both managed only two points, followed by Stanmore College with three.

The points system was devised by Nick Linford, FE Week's editor, who is a former director of performance at Lewisham College.

This kind of balanced scorecard for colleges was what the Framework for Excellence had previously been intended to be, but it was gradually simplified down into a satisfaction survey through FE Choices.

EW 16-19 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

FIVE KEY MEASURES

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16

RETENTION

93%

% of all students retained to the end of their studies

DESTINATIONS

80%

% of all students going on to sustained education, employment, or training at the end of their course

* Not an official measure, yet

CALCULATION OF AN INSTITUTION'S ATTAINMENT SCORE

In this fictitious example, Sanctuary Sixth Form has nine students, who each take one A-level. The sixth form's attainment under the existing, and the new system, are as follows

Point scores under the existing and new systems

	Fail	E	D	C	B	A	A*
Existing system	0	150	180	210	240	270	300
New system	0	10	20	30	40	50	60

Calculation of an institution's attainment score

Existing system

Student	Grade	Point score
Nicky	A	270
Michael	C	210
Ed	A*	300
Alan	B	240
Ruth	B	240
Charles	U	0
Estelle	D	180
David	Withdrawn	
Gillian	U	0
	Total	1,440
	Average =	1,440/8
	=	180
		GRADE D

New system

Student	Grade	Point score
Nicky	A	50
Michael	C	30
Ed	A*	60
Alan	B	40
Ruth	B	40
Charles	U	0
Estelle	D	20
David	Withdrawn	
Gillian	U	0
	Total	240
	Average =	240/8
	=	30
		GRADE C

Withdrawn students do not count for attainment measures under either the existing or the new systems

AMANDA SPIELMAN PLOTS A CHANGE OF COURSE

Amanda Spielman has now taken the reins at Ofsted from Sir Michael Wilshaw, a move which promises to be a positive one for the FE sector as a whole.

Last June the new chief inspector pledged to remove the "blanket of concern" over FE that many believe had been left by her predecessor, who repeatedly talked the sector down.

And it looks like the inspectorate could be in for radical change, starting with a U-turn on its controversial policy that exempts providers rated 'outstanding' from routine inspections.

Currently, 'outstanding' providers are "not normally subject to routine inspection", but FE Week understands the watchdog is looking to review the policy after some providers were revealed to have gone a decade without inspection.

It will also bring into question whether the outstanding grade should be dropped altogether, as Ms Spielman said she would look to do during a parliamentary hearing last year.

Her appointment also comes at an interesting time for English and maths.

Ofsted's annual report pinned the blame for the controversial policy, which obliges students to resit if they do not achieve grades of A* to C in GCSE English and maths at level four, on the government.

It took the spotlight off colleges, who had been blamed for the failure by Sir Michael.

Ms Spielman will also play a key role in the talks that have begun between Ofsted and the government over extending the inspectorate's remit to cover degree apprenticeships, which are currently only inspected by the Quality Assurance Agency.

Amanda Spielman and Michael Wilshaw

WHAT'S ON DECK FOR 2017? WE A

RICHARD ATKINS

FE COMMISSIONER

Before taking up the role of FE Commissioner at the end of October, Richard Atkins was an FE and skills consultant.

He had served as a college principal and chief executive for an impressive 21 years - at Exeter College between 2002 and 2016, and at Yeovil College from 1995 to 2001.

He improved Exeter from an Ofsted 'satisfactory' rating to a sustained 'outstanding' grade.

He was also president of the Association of Colleges and chair of AoC Sport.

LOOKING TO 2017

By the end of March 2017 we will have completed our 37 area reviews of FE and sixth form colleges and, 10 of which I am currently chairing.

I believe that the reviews are largely proving successful, in both consolidating provision where necessary and bringing colleges, LEPs and local authorities into closer working relationships.

Of course, this work will continue well beyond the formal reviews as the colleges sector implements the recommendations and adapts to the new environment.

My team of deputies and advisers also continue to carry out interventions whenever colleges are judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted or have serious financial concerns.

> **"My hope for 2017 is that learners in our colleges are getting a better deal"**

My hope for 2017 and beyond is that this work reduces, so that my diary becomes more manageable and, more importantly, the learners in our colleges are getting an ever better deal.

Happy New Year!

SHAKIRA MARTIN

VP FOR FE AT THE NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

Shakira Martin has held her post at the NUS for almost two years, having been re-elected with 152 votes after running uncontested to retain the role in April 2015. She represents 4.1 million FE students across the UK.

She is a regular speaker at key FE events and sits on the Education Training Foundation board for professional standards and workforce development, and is a youth ambassador for Youth Employment UK. Ms Martin is also currently completing a teacher training diploma.

LOOKING TO 2017

2016 was a big year for FE, but it looks like 2017 will be even bigger.

In the autumn, NUS will announce the recommendations of our Students Shaping Further Education project with Sir Vince Cable, which aims to put the needs of learners at the heart of FE policy.

The area review process will also finish – with its outcomes completely changing the experience of FE for learners. I hope to see their concerns and wishes, as highlighted during our area review roundtables, included in the recommendations.

We will also start to see the announcement of post-16 Skills Plan policies and strategies, we will discover the impact of the apprenticeship levy, and we should finally get the chance to read the government's Careers Strategy. All of these things will undoubtedly cause challenges for the sector, but they provide exciting opportunities too.

> **"I hope in 2017 they put their money where their mouths are"**

We appear to have the support of MPs; I just hope that in 2017 they put their money where their mouths are and finally provide FE with the investment it needs to effectively support these changes.

SUE PEMBER

DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS AT HOLEX

Dr Susan Pember previously worked as a governance advisor for the Association of Colleges, and from 2000-13 was a senior civil servant at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

This year she took a stand against the government's lack of planning in apprenticeship end-point assessment. After FE Week analysis showed there were no approved awarding organisations for over 40 per cent of learner starts on new standards Dr Pember spoke out against the "diabolical" situation, saying it was disrespectful to apprentices.

LOOKING TO 2017

The autumn statement 2016 was a mini-budget for infrastructure. The spring budget 2017 should be a budget for the people.

The chancellor should use it to set out a comprehensive adult education, skills and employment funding plan designed to grow our own resident workforce, whoever they are and whichever country they originate from.

Adult education must be central to a 'growing-our-own' strategy. Setting up a strengthened apprenticeship programme is fantastic, but not enough to meet the UK's challenges.

> **"Setting up a strengthened apprenticeship programme is not enough to meet the UK's challenges"**

We need to use adult education to raise productivity, strengthen community cohesion, increase social mobility, reduce unemployment and inactivity, enhance progression into well-paid jobs, extend working lives, and tackle health and mental health problems.

I hope that in 2017 we don't hide from these issues and we put people and their education and training needs first.

MARK DAWE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

Mark Dawe was appointed chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, succeeding Steward Segal.

He was previously the chief executive of OCR for almost five years, and before that served as principal of Oaklands College from 2005 to 2010.

AELP held two successful and engaging conferences this year with Mr Dawe at the helm, covering hot topics such as the apprenticeship levy, the impact of the Brexit vote, chartered status, and the role of LEPs.

LOOKING TO 2017

2017 has to be about a successful implementation of the apprenticeship levy.

In terms of the sector's reputation with employers and learners, so much rests on the apprenticeship reforms getting off to a good start. This is not just about the funding system working well for levy- and non-levy-payers, but proper standards and assessment arrangements in place for apprentices.

Taking forward the technical and professional education reforms is important too, and there are other opportunities such as a better approach to the rehabilitation of offenders.

> **"So much rests on the apprenticeship reforms getting off to a good start"**

We also want to see traineeships grow at a much faster rate and the whole area of careers advice for young people really has to be sorted.

We are expanding AELP's capacity nationally and regionally to strengthen the provider voice across almost 20 policy areas – it's not just about apprenticeships!

ASKED THOSE IN THE KNOW

DAVID HUGHES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES

David Hughes took on the leadership of the AoC when Martin Doel left the post in September 2016. He had previously been the chief executive of the Learning and Work Institute (formerly Niace) since September 2011.

Before that, Mr Hughes was a provider services director at the Skills Funding Agency.

At this year's AoC conference in November, Mr Hughes told a packed audience that despite the challenges FE had faced in 2016, "it's time to be confident about our place in the education system".

LOOKING TO 2017

The past year has witnessed remarkable and incredible events from the Brexit vote to Trump, and it has also seen big changes for colleges with the new prime minister focused on social mobility, the Sainsbury Review, and the post-16 Skills Plan and area reviews involving every college in strategic changes.

I am looking forward confidently, ambitiously and optimistically to the coming year as colleges take centre-stage in helping prepare the country for a successful post-Brexit economy and a society that really does work for everyone.

2017 will be an interesting time for the further education sector with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, curriculum reform and the implementation of the Skills Plan, to say the least.

> “I am looking forward confidently, ambitiously and optimistically to 2017 as colleges take centre-stage”

AoC will be working with members to ensure that we are raising their key priorities with the government.

SAM PARRETT

PRINCIPAL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF LONDON SOUTH EAST COLLEGES

Sam Parrett is principal of London South East Colleges Group, formed through the merger of Bromley College, Bexley College and Greenwich College in August 2016. Prior to that she was principal of Bromley College from 2010, having previously been vice-principal at Plymouth College for a number of years. A stint at the Association of South Eastern Colleges was preceded by six years at Bracknell and Wokingham College, beginning in 1997, which saw her rise from business development manager for work-based learning to vice principal. She was awarded an OBE for services to FE in the New Year's Honours list in December 2015.

LOOKING TO 2017

2016 has been an interesting and challenging year both for the sector and for us as a college - the last 12 months have certainly been eventful.

One of my main concerns for the coming year is how well prepared funding agencies and employers are for the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. Such a dramatic reform will not come without its issues.

The impending Brexit is also a worry, and protecting ESF funding is key if we are to further improve social mobility and inclusion.

The sector must also work to strengthen its maths and English provision in 2017.

> “We need a more flexible approach to growth”

This is no easy task, what with the increasing demand of GCSE resits and the challenges we face in finding well-qualified, good-quality teachers.

We are celebrating the successful formation of London South East Colleges, resulting from Bromley College's merger with Bexley College and Greenwich Community College in August.

The coming year will be one of consolidation as we work to strengthen the new college brand and continue to improve delivery of FE and skills across the region.

BILL WATKIN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SIXTH FORM COLLEGES ASSOCIATION

Bill Watkin took the helm at the SFCA in April, following the retirement of David Igoe.

He had worked for SSAT, a membership organisation for schools, since 2006, leading its work on the academies programme. He started his career as a teacher of modern languages in secondary schools and became a national consultant on the curriculum.

He says 2016 brought success for SFCA members, including in Ofsted inspections, English and maths resits, and engaging with the area review process.

LOOKING TO 2017

2017 promises to be another critical year.

To begin, 16-19 funding needs to be reviewed, so we can continue to offer a broad curriculum and enrichment programme and remain globally competitive.

Applied general qualifications must continue to be offered alongside A-levels, as part of a blended academic curriculum, and 16-19 leaders must have a voice in head teacher board discussions when changes to sixth form provision are under consideration.

Student governors, whose outstanding contribution to college governance is also an important development opportunity for young

> “Close costly small sixth forms, point the students to colleges and save money”

people, should be allowed post-academy conversion – and the 18+ rule in academies should be waived.

Finally, schools face two big challenges: inadequate funding and a growing population.

The solution? Close costly small sixth forms, point the students to colleges, thereby saving money and increasing 11-16 capacity in schools.

DEBBIE GARDINER

CEO OF QUBE LEARNING

Debbie Gardiner has led Qube Learning as its CEO since 2009, having worked at the independent training provider in a variety of leadership and management roles since 2000. She is on the board of directors for the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, and also plays an active role in its Quality Forum. She is also an Education and Training Foundation leadership and governance programme assessor, and is on a Digital Apprenticeship System panel working with the Department for Education and Skills Funding Agency.

She's a campaigns ambassador for Cancer Research UK.

LOOKING TO 2017

Apprenticeship funding reform is critical. We have more clarity about the concept and four months to turn strategies into reality.

Securing the quality of 16-18-year-old apprenticeships, under the proposed funding rules from May 2017, requires hard work. The funding won't cover costs, could reduce quality and providers may leave the 16-18 market.

As an AELP board member I've voiced my concerns, and AELP continue to have conversations with government. We must protect this high priority group and ensure good information, advice and

> “Dramatic reform will not come without its issues”

guidance directs young people towards apprenticeships.

It's key to ensure organisations are reform ready and carrying out risk assessments and contingency plans.

Traineeship funding is a challenge, contract values are comparatively low and demand is increasing which means we need a more flexible approach to growth.

In early 2017 the tendering process will be opened for the devolved adult education budget, another important milestone, and providers must ensure they are ready.

INNOVATE AWARDING
END-POINT ASSESSMENT FOR APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

Apprenticeship Standards

High Quality End-point Assessment and Support

What is Innovate Awarding?

Innovate Awarding is a national awarding organisation regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA, with a passion for doing things differently. We are working alongside FE colleges, training providers and employers to revolutionise the way in which qualifications and assessment services are delivered.

We are on the Skills Funding Agency register for apprenticeship assessment organisations and have a rolling programme of applications for 57 apprenticeship standards as soon as they become 'ready for delivery'.

We will be offering assessment services for apprenticeship standards in the following sectors:

- Adult Care
- Business
- Children, Young People and Families
- Community Sport
- Customer Service
- Early Years
- Education and Training
- Hair and Beauty
- Healthcare
- Hospitality
- Leadership and Management
- Public Service
- Retail
- Sports and Physical Activity

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