It was with great excitement that the AELP conference opened with a speech from the new minister.

‘Skills and apprenticeship minister’ is still a title the DfE has yet to confirm, but what was clear is that Anne Milton has not waited long to make important decisions.

Ten days ‘into the job’, the minister made a series of technical but hugely important announcements in an attempt to deal quickly with a very sluggish start to the apprenticeship reforms.

As outlined on page four, the non-levy allocation business cases will be answered within days, and the paused tendering round will be scrapped and rerun in July.

It will be fascinating to compare how the new tendering round, for contracts from January 2018 to April 2019, differs from the original.

Will more funding than first planned be ring-fenced for non-levy employers, or are we setting ourselves up for further disappointment?

Whilst the minister should be applauded for her enthusiasm to take questions from delegates, she may regret saying she is only planning to implement existing reforms, rather than invent new ones –nevertheless that will have been welcomed by many.

Sadly the minister wasn’t willing to do interviews with any of the media at the conference, or even introduce herself to the trade media with whom she’ll need to work. I hope this changes.

I also want to highlight Keith Smith’s comments on funding compliance, as reported on page 10. His words follow our significant expose of a training provider on this week’s front page.

We warned in March about mixed messages in the funding rules, which on the one hand rule out cash inducements to employers, yet rule in cash payments when subcontracting to employers.

It seems likely that further guidance will be needed in this area, as providers compete to make their offer as attractive as possible to employers unfamiliar with paying for apprenticeships.

At the end of a packed day, Peter Lauener gave a keynote speech, primarily about the Institute for Apprenticeships, which you can read about on page 12. Peter lost one of his chief executive hats with the merger of the EFA and SFA, and will be shortly retiring – so this was one of his final major conferences.

As we wait to hear news of his replacements (ESFA and IfA), I would like to end this editorial by thanking him for his support. We’ve often written uncomfortable things, and had no mercy with our cartoons, but Peter has always been Peter.

That is, a civil servant at the front line of policy, always open to challenge and ways of improving the sector against a backdrop of complexity and competing agendas.