



**ANNUAL
APPRENTICESHIP
CONFERENCE 2018**



**SOUVENIR
SUPPLEMENT**

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LOOKING BACK ON ANOTHER BRILLIANT SHOW

NICK LINFORD
 @NICKLINFORD

Now in its fourth year, FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference is firmly established as the pre-eminent event for anyone interested in apprenticeship policy and practice.

This time last year the sector was on the cusp of its biggest change in many years: the apprenticeship levy was just weeks away, ushering in an entirely new funding system.

So this year's conference was the perfect opportunity to reflect on the levy's first bumpy year – the good, the bad and the 20-per-cent off-the-job training rule.

More than 1,300 delegates – an AAC record – filled Birmingham's International Convention Centre between March 21 and 23 to hear from keynote speakers including top politicians, civil servants and more, as well as attend in-depth practical workshops.

This souvenir supplement features

just some of the many highlights from the three days.

On page three we have a double-header from Kirstie Donnelly, the managing director of City & Guilds, and consultant futurist Keith Coats, who shared a stage on day one to talk about change and how the sector can prepare for it.

The next four pages feature highlights from the main stage over the three days.

These include Sue Husband, director of the National Apprenticeship Service, who stepped in as a last-minute replacement for Anne Milton to discuss what the government is doing to support SMEs, and why the 20-per-cent rule isn't going anywhere, and the CBI's deputy director general Josh Hardie, who explained how the "not fit for purpose" levy should be reformed.

Pages eight and nine feature a small selection of the 100 workshops held throughout the conference – focusing on topics as diverse as subcontracting, why the United States is the land of opportunity for apprenticeship providers, and that 20 off-the-job rule.

The winners of the inaugural Annual Apprenticeship Awards were announced at a gala dinner on day two; see pages 12 and 13 to find out who won.

Twenty per cent was THE hot topic of the conference. See page 15 for delegates' views on the controversial requirement.

Of course, none of this could have happened without the support of our exhibitors and sponsors. Particular thanks to our conference partner the DfE, our strategic partner AELP, our headline sponsors City & Guilds, ILM and Digital Me and conference sponsors NCFE, NOCN and Smart Apprentices. And thanks to all the speakers who made time to provide useful key note speeches and workshops. Enjoy!

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27-29 March 2019- ICC Birmingham



More information and tickets to be released in June

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT - BUT WE NEED TO PAY ATTENTION

Globalisation and rapid advances in technology make this one of the most challenging eras in history – and companies running apprenticeships will get left behind if they don't plan for the future, according to a consultant futurist.

"I'm not a fortune teller," said Keith Coats, who co-founded the consultancy firm Tomorrow Today, on the opening day of AAC. "What a futurist does is build up capacity to see and understand the implications and meaning of change. Given that definition I would suggest that everyone should be a futurist.

"We are living in a world of increasing complexity. That's why yesterday's leadership solutions do not work today. They were built to get us here, but the past is not helpful in finding solutions to help us go forward."

He stressed that good managers spend half their time looking to the future, not just "concentrating on the nuts and bolts of day-to-day running".

Mr Coats was introduced by City &

Guilds boss Kirstie Donnelly, and took part in a discussion afterwards.

"If we don't take a long-term view on apprenticeships we could be sitting her in 10 years' time with the same problems," she said.

Those in charge of developing education and training programmes "must understand how the younger people are using technology as a natural extension to their lives", he replied.

"It's a natural part of their world," he said. "I'm very hard on senior leaders of my generation who tend to be resistant to technology largely because it makes them feel incompetent."

Successful learners and provider have to demonstrate "adaptive intelligence".

"We are increasingly dealing with a world of digital natives," he added, one reason why holding onto employees with the right skills is now so hard for firms. "Failure to understand that is why the ability to attract, engage and maintain talent is such a problem in the corporate

world."

The days of concentrating on helping learners to memorise a set curriculum are coming to an end, as "information is becoming redundant so quickly".

People involved with delivering and developing apprenticeship training have to accept that computer-operated machines are becoming more intuitive, which allows them to solve more complex problems at a much faster pace than humans.

The trainees of tomorrow will have to learn to work with them rather than try to compete, and "embrace different types of knowledge".

"You are going to have to interpret what that means in your sector," he warned. "One of the key things that you are going to have to help your children deal with is transitions.

"They are probably going to have to reinvent themselves three or four times over their careers, and skills systems that predicated on information gathering are totally irrelevant."



Keith Coats



Advertorial

KIRSTIE DONNELLY

Managing director, City & Guilds Group

Learning lessons from the future

Last week I had the pleasure of speaking at the Annual Apprenticeships Conference, the third since it moved to the ICC in Birmingham, and it felt like the most important so far, given the critical juncture we are at with apprenticeships.

As you would expect, a lot of the conference was focused on the here and now. How can we as a community encourage more take up among employers? How can the government reduce the burden of bureaucracy that comes with the levy and make sure that it is simpler to take on apprentices? And how can we support SMEs who make up the majority of UK plc, and would have such a positive impact on apprenticeship numbers?

All of these are vital questions if we want to keep the dip in apprenticeship starts to a temporary blip. However, there

is also a danger in being so focused on the present that we forget to plan for the future. As educators we don't have a great track record of planning for the future, and new jobs or skillsets often appear before we have developed the education and training to support them.

We need to think more like employers if we are to make the most of apprenticeships and really start increasing numbers. Those of us in the sector who live and breathe apprenticeships know how great they are at plugging skills gaps, increasing productivity and providing real returns to business. We also know that apprenticeships aren't just an entry-to-work solution; they can be hugely rewarding and effective at any age and level across a range of occupations. But the starting point for our

conversations with employers shouldn't be how great apprenticeships are. We need to speak the language of business in terms of workforce planning for the future. What are the big skills challenges that employers are grappling with and how can we reframe the conversation around apprenticeships to show that they are an effective tool to meeting them?

Just as the FE sector is going through a big period of change, employers are also dealing with a dramatically different workplace from 10 or even five years ago. At the conference I touched on three trends that are having a big impact on businesses right now, and together with futurist Keith Coates, I looked at the changing workplace through the lens of globalisation, the impact of digitisation and AI, and the multi-generational workforce.

Globalisation has been a real force for change in the world of work for several decades now, but the amount of movement is unprecedented and new migration corridors are opening up all the time. We need to understand this change and be able to respond with solutions that support employers who are managing increasingly diverse workforces in multiple locations. It's so important that as a sector we are able to step outside of our day-to-day reality and think about these macro trends and how they affect the employers we work with.

Another huge change to be aware of is the impact of increased digitisation and automation on businesses. There are some dramatic numbers out there showing the effect of automation and AI on workers – a recent McKinsey report said that as

many as 375 million workers, roughly 14 per cent of the global workforce, may need to switch occupational categories as digitisation, automation, and advances in AI disrupt the world of work.

While we've seen in previous industrial revolutions that new industries spring up as old ones disappear, it is clear that there will be a huge amount of retraining and reskilling needed to ensure that people don't get left behind. The education sector clearly has a big role to play here and apprenticeships are a solution that can help with retraining people throughout their working lives.

We are also living in an era of age diversity in the workplace. There is talk of a four- or even five-generational workplace and we are seeing grandparents competing for jobs with their grandchildren. Longer lifespans mean we will need to work longer, and the career for life is becoming a thing of the past. Offering support to employers who are managing multi-generational workforces and working out what training their employees will need at different stages of their careers will be a way of moving skills up the agenda.

We are on the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution and we've seen the length between revolutions shorten every time. More than ever before, people and businesses need education and training to keep up with the huge pace of change. We have a vital role to play and if we are to stay useful and relevant as a sector, and meet our responsibility to our learners and the industries we serve, then we need to stay abreast of these changes and make sure we lead and shape the future not just react to it once it's here.

SUE HUSBAND HINTS AT A NEW SME FOCUS

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

The government is not doing enough to help small businesses take on apprentices, the director of the National Apprenticeships Service has admitted.

Sue Husband said that while national leaders have “various materials” to support SMEs, a helpline and “a team of people who can guide small businesses” – “it’s not enough”.

She acknowledged that the government had focused on large levy-paying employers since the apprenticeship levy was introduced last April.

However, the appointment of Jason Holt to the chairship of the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network would help SMEs “play their full part in taking on apprentices”.

Mr Holt and his fellow ambassador Anthony Impey have already led “a small focus group of about 15 different representatives from different small businesses to look at what more we can do”.

From April employers that pay the apprenticeship levy will be able to transfer up to 10 per cent of their funds to businesses in their supply chain.



Sue Husband

This “can be a huge boost for SMEs in priority sectors and in key geographical locations across the country, helping to target and share economic prosperity” and a “great way of connecting more SMEs to apprenticeships”, said Ms Husband.

“Our SMEs are crucial to the success of apprenticeships, as well as to the success of the nation. We definitely need more employers to take on apprentices and to gain the benefits that we know that apprenticeships bring.”

Ms Husband had stepped into a speaking role at the conference as a last-minute replacement for the skills minister Anne Milton, who had to bow out due to illness.

She mounted a strident defence of the controversial 20-per-cent off the job training rule in response to a barrage of questions from presenter Kirsty Wark and members of the audience.

“The 20 per cent remains, absolutely,” Ms Husband declared, though she promised the government would “listen to what’s working, what the challenges are and continue to review how the reforms are working”.

She recognises that “a lot of ambitious apprentices will choose to do extra work outside of their work time” but that they shouldn’t be expected to do so.

“I think they need that support within the workplace,” she said.

Ms Husband’s wide-ranging speech touched on many aspects of the reform programme, including National Apprenticeship Week, the benefits of apprenticeships to employers and individuals, the introduction of the levy, and encouraging diversity in apprenticeships.

“Our priority is high-quality apprenticeships that address skills shortages for employers, critically delivering the technically-skilled workers that are increasingly important as we move to a post-Brexit world,” she told delegates.

The levy has “already incentivised many employers to start new apprenticeship programmes, and I’m confident that these will continue to grow”.

“All of us who work within apprenticeships have a duty to ensure that apprenticeships reflect our diverse society,” she said, urging the audience to “encourage employers to reach out to new talent pools from across their local communities”.

NUS: DON'T LET LEARNER NEEDS FALL BY THE

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

Delegates have been implored to listen to their apprentices’ concerns by the National Union of Students’ senior voice on FE.

Emily Chapman said that she and her team at the National Society of Apprentices, which operates under the NUS’ banner, have spoken to thousands of learners who want their opinions taken more seriously.

She told providers and employers that if they really want to deliver training that benefits their apprentices’ long-term prospects, they must be taken more seriously.

“If you can take anything away from today, please let it be that time is up on our sector not listening to apprentices and

taking their views seriously,” she said. “The sooner we rectify this the better.”

The NUS has been campaigning to give learners more say in the way the apprenticeship reforms are implemented and how the system is then maintained.

In December 2016, the government said it would establish an apprentice panel at the Institute for Apprenticeships, which the NUS hailed as a victory for learners.

“There are many things I can talk about,” she said. “Apprenticeships should be advertised honestly, so people don’t find out it is wrong for them after they’ve started.”

They should not be “taken on as a cheap alternative, so the apprentice doesn’t end up getting the training they need and want”. Many struggle to make ends meet on the apprenticeship minimum wage, which will rise from just £3.50 an hour to £3.70 from April.

SUBCONTRACTING CRASH: DIRE WARNINGS OVER

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Ofsted will expose training providers who rip off apprentices by collecting subcontracting management fees without taking “responsibility for quality”, the chief inspector has revealed.

Amanda Spielman warned prime providers that the inspectorate would not stand idly by while poor provision goes unmonitored.

“Our message here is simple: as the direct contract-holder, you are responsible for your learners,” she told AAC delegates during a stern speech.

“If you subcontract, for whatever reason, you are still responsible for making sure your apprentice gets high-quality training.

“If you are sitting back and collecting the money without taking proper responsibility for quality, you are failing your apprentices. We are determined to expose this in the system.”

Ofsted is preparing to publish its first monitoring visits looking specifically at subcontracted provision of directly funded

providers.

“We expect the first of these to be published in the next couple of weeks,” Ms Spielman said.

Subcontracting has been a hot topic across the sector over the past few years.

Lead providers often claim that steep fees are needed to cover administrative costs, but many, including the education committee chair Robert Halfon, believe that too much money is being siphoned out of frontline learning.

Some management fees have reached up to 40 per cent, as was infamously the case with Learndirect, the largest provider in the country.

Mr Halfon claimed that subcontracting had become a “money-maker” during an education select committee earlier this month.

Ms Spielman also discussed Ofsted’s approach to monitoring “untested” new providers which have entered the apprenticeships market.

“I know that many of you have concerns about the number of untested providers entering the market and the effect this could have on quality,” she said.



LEARNERS' WAYSIDE

The National Society of Apprentices is part of the wider NUS, and was formally launched in February 2014. It represents over 150,000 apprentices from across all sectors and industries, across the UK.

“The apprentices said that a quality apprenticeship should be education for a career, not just job training; it should have a high level of educational quality embedded throughout it both on the job and off,” she continued.

“The education and training should be relevant to the work the apprentice is doing and the experience they have. There should be a reasonable expectation of a job role at the end of it.”

One thing that perhaps puts her and many apprentices at odds with the business end of the sector is their stance on the 20-per-cent off-the-job training requirement. It’s unpopular with many employers, but Ms Chapman insisted



Emily Chapman

learners want it, and that they “should have access to training that will benefit them as a citizen as well as an employee”.

“I hope that it will come as no surprise that I am a big fan of the 20-per-cent rule. Apprentices are big fans of it. It allows time for education to be thoughtful, apprentice-centred and relevant.”

DEVOLUTION SOLUTION: HOW LABOUR WANTS TO TACKLE SKILLS AND APPRENTICESHIPS FUNDING

BILLY CAMDEN @BILLYCAMDEN

Labour’s proposed National Education Service would look seriously at devolving apprenticeships and other skills funding alongside the adult education budget, the shadow skills minister has said.

Gordon Marsden told the conference that full devolution of FE is “the way forward in terms of community growth and cohesion” in his keynote speech on the second day.

“Tentative progress in the devolution of adult skills funding is here now – but we need a much bigger debate about the devolution of broader apprenticeship and skills funding,” he said.

“Place and sector are always critical factors in supply and demand, and the creative tension between them is often best explored and resolved in these places and sectors, not just in Whitehall.”

Speaking to FE Week after his speech, Mr Marsden said that if “you want a proper economic plan across an area, just looking at devolving the adult skills budget and not to consider the broader issue around apprenticeships is pretty daft in the medium to long term”.

Devolution is also about “changing culture” so people actually working on these issues can do so “collaboratively, locally” rather than “simply being the sort of slightly hapless instruments of a Willy Wonka chocolate factory that is proceeding down Whitehall”.

A Labour government’s NES, he said, would “turbocharge collaboration between employers, providers and other stakeholders – FE and HE – in the local economies and travel to work areas where they operate”.

“That demands an ever-giving virtuous circle of co-operation not the traditional top down micro management of Whitehall,” he continued. “Government is an enabler not dictator. Apprenticeships as a natural fit to supply – and demand – not an arbitrary figure dreamt up for a press release.”

Mr Marsden also discussed the importance of projecting a positive image of apprenticeships.

“It is vital that we highlight the opportunities and successes apprenticeships can bring and why conferences like this and week’s like National Apprenticeship Week are so important,” he told the crowd.

“However whilst we have the opportunity to celebrate our apprentices we must not be complacent about the vast amount of work still be done.”

He sees the Institute for Apprenticeships as a significant factor in the success – or otherwise – of the apprenticeship reforms.

He wants it to be “a robust, independent body with the confidence, resources and self-belief to be the effective bridge between government and the sector”.

“We want it to succeed – we championed it and thought about its structures even before the government’s civil servants produced its framework – and we like so many others across the sector have been frustrated by the time it’s taken to get going,” he continued.

He also warned of the need to be vigilant about the impact of Brexit.

“We need to understand the threat of reduced centralised funding available post-Brexit – with the disappearance of European Structural Funding which has fed growth deals which have benefitted both local apprentices and the communities they live in.”

BACKDOWN: SPIELMAN’S MANAGEMENT FEES

“Well, rest assured we are not standing idly by and waiting for new providers to fail. It is essential that poor-quality provision is spotted and tackled quickly, so that it doesn’t damage an individual’s prospects or the overall apprenticeship brand.”

She mentioned the early monitoring visits that have been used to assess the quality of these new providers, the first of which was published last week – and made for embarrassing reading for bosses at Key6 Group.

Inspectors described the Merseyside provider as “not fit for purpose”, where apprentices complained they are “not learning anything new”.

The report was so dire that the skills minister Anne Milton personally intervened to prevent it from taking on any new apprentices.

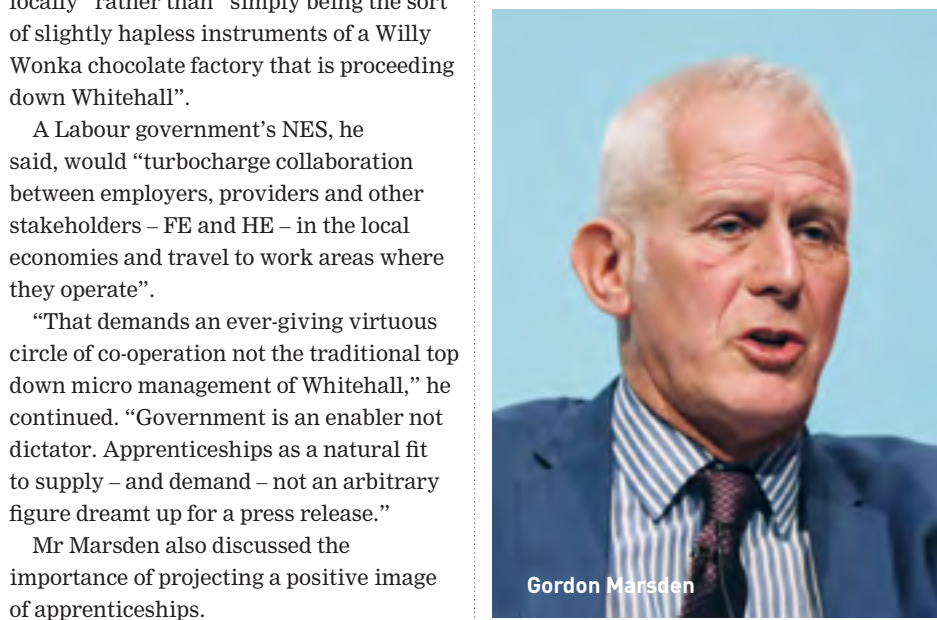
However, Ms Spielman insisted that a single report should not be taken as a sign that every new provider is similarly inept.

“It is important that we don’t over-interpret this one result as a judgment on all new providers coming on stream with the levy,” she said.



Amanda Spielman

“We are doing more monitoring visits of this type. And I very much hope that positive results will significantly outnumber the disappointments.”



Gordon Marsden



SIR GERRY BERRAGAN: SOME APPRENTICES DON'T HAVE ANY EPA LINED UP

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

A “very small number” of apprentices could reach the end of their course in the next year without an organisation in place to deliver their final exams, the Institute for Apprenticeships’ boss has admitted.

But Sir Gerry Berragan, who gave the opening address at this year’s AAC, promised the IfA was “on the case”.

“Of the apprentices that are due to undertake their end-point assessment in the next 12 months, 99.1 per cent are on a standard with at least one end-point assessment organisation in place,” he told the audience.

But a “very small number of apprentices”, or 0.9 per cent of those due to take EPA in the next 12 months, are on eight standards which don’t yet have an assessor organisation in place.

“In each case the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Institute are working with prospective assessment organisations to resolve this,” he said.

But Mark Dawe, the boss of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, later pointed out that simply having an EPA organisation in place wasn’t enough.

“We know of many EPA organisations registered but not yet ready to deliver, and the external quality-assurance above them also not ready,” he said during the Q&A session that followed.

The issue of apprentices on standards without an EPA organisation in place is a significant worry for sector leaders, including Sue Pember, director of policy at Hoxley, who has described it as “disrespectful” for any apprentice to start on a course without anyone to deliver the final exams.

Sir Gerry acknowledged today that there will “always be newly approved longer standards” with no EPA in place.

“We know the assessment organisations don’t want to be on the register of end-point assessment organisations too far in advance of EPA taking place because they don’t want to invest in the development of EPA materials several years before they’re used,” he said.



Sir Gerry Berragan

He also defended the early days of the apprenticeship reforms, with a speech in which he attempted to bust certain “myths” around apprenticeships.

These included plummeting starts over the past year; while admitting that starts are down, he said the fall is now closer to 30 per cent than the 60 per cent that had been feared.

In addition, starts on standards are “currently running at 800 per cent up on the previous year” and now represent 40 per cent of all starts.

Sir Gerry outlined the measures the IfA had put in place to speed up the process of standards approval.

The IfA now wants 80 per cent of all new standards “to be approved in eight months of first proposal coming forward”, he said. A total of 244 standards were currently ready for delivery.

“By the end of this year I predict we will have a total of over 350 standards approved for delivery and that figure will probably rise to around 500 by 2020,” he added.

OFQUAL WON'T GIVE TO NEW APPRENTICE

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Ofqual is not trying to catch out apprentice assessment organisations that come under its umbrella – but they will have to reach the same bar as awarding bodies it already recognises.

Any organisation that wants to deliver the final exams for apprenticeship standards where Ofqual has been named as the external quality-assurance provider “will have to be recognised by us”, the chief regulator Sally Collier told delegates on day two of the conference.

“But we’re not here to catch awarding organisations out,” she said. “We have very professional, constructive relationships with those organisations and we’re aiming to be explicitly more preventative with what we do, with more guidance and more dialogue to help awarding organisations be able to meet the

bar.”

While Ofqual is not “lowering the bar to be a recognised organisation”, it is “looking very carefully” at its processes to make them “as efficient as possible” and to “support organisations to understand what they need to do”.

Of the 125 bodies on the Education and Skills Funding Agency’s register of end-point assessment organisations, 41 are already regulated by Ofqual.

Ms Collier said the “huge depth and wealth of experience” those organisations have of “operating in a regulated environment” is a “great benefit to the market”.

“That demonstrates they already meet the high standards that we set and that will influence the overall standard of supply,” she said.

She also outlined Ofqual’s processes for when it is asked to be the EQA provider of an apprenticeship standard, and how it defines good end-point assessment.

CBI: SAVE THE LEVY BY

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

The government must “immediately loosen the rules” on how apprenticeship levy cash is used, according to the deputy head of one of the biggest business organisations in the country.

The CBI’s Josh Hardie used his keynote speech as an opportunity to ask that large employers be given more latitude on levy money – including using it to establish training centres.

“The levy’s design faults are serious, but not insurmountable,” he told AAC. “Ministers should immediately loosen the rules on what happens to the levy cash itself – next month’s 10-per-cent transfer rule simply isn’t enough.

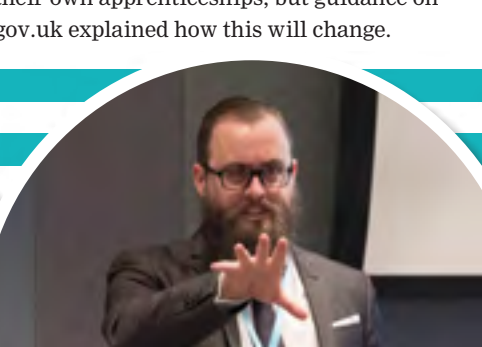
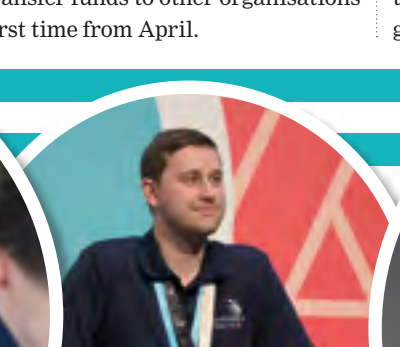
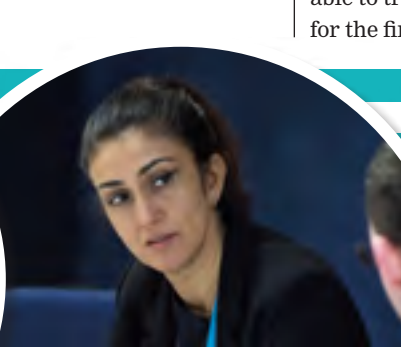
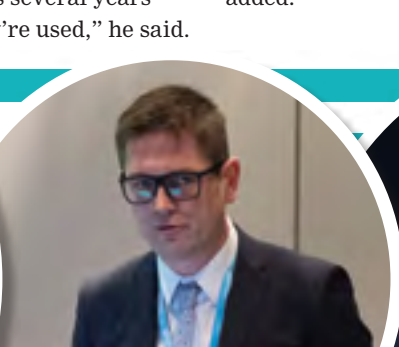
“Companies should be able to draw down far more from the levy pot – over 50 per cent – and use it to work with others to create centres of excellence for training.”

Employers which pay the levy will be able to transfer funds to other organisations for the first time from April.



Josh Hardie

Large employers had previously only been able to spend the funding generated on their own apprenticeships, but guidance on gov.uk explained how this will change.



THE GROUND RESHIP AOs

“What does quality mean in the context of an EPA? I’m going to start at the most important place – with the apprentices themselves,” she said.

An apprentice would expect the assessment “is going to do what it’s supposed to do – it’s going to test you on the things you’ve been learning”.

They also want “assessments that are comparable and consistent” that aren’t “harder or easier in another part of the country”.

“And like any good qualification, you want the thing you’ve got at the end of the apprenticeship to have value and currency and to take you on to your next steps,” she said.

Quality from an employer’s perspective means ensuring the EPA isn’t “adding too much bureaucracy but neither is it inadvertently not testing the things that employers want”.

Ofqual is happy to give “context” to an assessment plan and ensure an assessor is



Sally Collier

“guided” to make the right judgement.

Changes like these are minor, according to Ms Collier, they’re “happening again and again, which just shows how tricky some of this stuff is”.

“For employers, our work and others’ work in helping to get a quality product for the EPA means that they can concentrate on what they can do best,” she said.

‘DELIVER ON THAT TRAVEL COSTS PROMISE,’ HALFON TELLS THE GOVERNMENT

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

The government must deliver on its promise to cut travel costs for apprentices, the chair of the education committee has said.

“In its manifesto the government pledged to help apprentices with transport costs – it must deliver on this,” he told the crowd on the final morning of the AAC conference last week.

The former skills minister, who was elected chair of the influential Commons education select committee after last year’s general election, also returned in his speech to a familiar motif from his time as minister: getting “more people to climb the ladder of opportunity that apprenticeships offer”.

Warming to his theme, he discussed five rungs on his ladder. The first rung of these is social justice, “because for many people an apprenticeship is not simply a job, not simply training – it’s a chance for them to build a better life”.

Delivering on the travel pledge is just one way that social justice can be achieved through apprenticeships, he claimed.

He also wants a specific social-justice fund for disadvantaged apprentices, and for the government to “commission a social-impact study into how the benefit system helps or hinders people becoming apprentices”.

He also wants “high-quality careers advice” to ensure that “everybody knows about” apprenticeship opportunities – the second rung.

The current system is “still far too complex and confusing”.

Instead, he urged the government to create a “unified national careers and skills service” and to deliver on its election promise

for a “UCAS-style system for FE and skills”.

The third rung on the ladder, is the government’s target of three million starts, which he supports “because it concentrates the minds of the treasury”.

“But these starts must be high quality,” he said.

Mr Halfon said he was “particularly concerned about subcontracting”, and welcomed a pledge made by Ofsted’s chief inspector Amanda Spielman to crack down on providers that subcontract purely for the money without taking responsibility for the quality.

Progression is the fourth rung on the ladder: research shows that too many people were “getting stuck” at level two, he claimed.

“Instead there should be an expectation that people keep learning and keep moving from level to level, increasing their skills and deepening their knowledge year after year.”

Degree apprenticeships are “an incredibly important part” of enabling people to “keep climbing the ladder of opportunity”.

He told the government to “incentivise” the growth of degree apprenticeships, and to do more to promote them.

The final rung on the ladder is job security: “The aim should be to help everyone in this country, no matter their background, gain the skills that will get them a good, secure job.

“That is what this is all about – an apprenticeships and skills nation of rising productivity with social justice for all.”

RELAXING THE RULES

There are “no restrictions about who you can transfer funds to”, except that “they have to be registered on the apprenticeship service”.

Employers were told they could transfer a maximum of 10 per cent of their annual funds, which is “worked out from the total amount of levy declared”.

“The levy in its current form isn’t fit for purpose,” Mr Hardie warned. “Recently, a big investor in R&D told me they pay the levy and want to get more apprentices on board.

“They’re based in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor – so you’d think they’d be spoilt for choice when it comes to local training. But they aren’t: it’s all retail apprenticeships, and the levy doesn’t allow them to fund a local business initiative to change that.”

Mr Hardie did acknowledge that the government had started building an “effective English skills system” through T-levels, the incoming new technical qualifications to be rolled out from 2020.

He also praised the National Retraining Partnership.

This high-level advisory group is made up of top government officials and industry

and union leaders. It met for the first time in March, to start planning how to drive up adult learning and retraining.

Chancellor Philip Hammond was joined by the likes of Carolyn Fairbairn, the boss of the CBI, and TUC leader Frances O’Grady.

“Business loves these developments because they can help shape their results,” he said.

Mr Hardie wants the government to “redouble its commitment to quality provision” as it pushes ahead with the reform programme.

This should include giving the Institute for Apprenticeships “proper teeth as an independent skills regulator”.

“We need a system where business and people are able to influence changes, and a real focus on the commercial understanding that people and companies are customers, and providers are suppliers,” he said.

“Providers should lead from the front and make sure that they’re offering high-quality apprenticeships that suit local businesses – reacting to employer demand, not going back to an old system.”



Robert Halfon

Kirsty Wark



COMPLY WITH OFF-THE-JOB OR LOSE YOUR PLACE ON ROATP

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Providers could have their ESFA funding removed or find themselves removed from the apprenticeships register if they do not comply with the 20-per-cent off-the-job training rule, AAC delegates were advised.

Bryony Kingsland, the UK funding manager at City & Guilds, warned the audience they could face severe sanctions as she outlined what does and does not count towards the policy.

“If the ESFA decides a provider is not meeting the requirement there are a variety of different punishments the ESFA could go for, depending on the severity of what they’re looking at,” she said.

“If you’ve missed it in one or two apprenticeships but you were delivering 200, they’re more likely to just point out this is not acceptable,” she said. “However, if there is more than that they might remove funding, and if they see it across the board they will probably remove you from RoATP.”

Ms Kingsland was asked what happens if an employer obstructs the delivery of the policy.

She claimed that the provider is



Bryony Kingsland

responsible for ensuring the off-the-job training is delivered, and insisted it would be them who are penalised in such circumstances.

But she did point out that there is a legally binding contract – the commitment statement – that is signed between an employer and a provider at the start of an apprenticeship.

“If you are a provider and find yourself in an instance where an employer is for

whatever reason refusing to meet the 20 per cent, then there are potential legal consequences,” she said, adding that in extreme circumstances the case could end up in court.

Ms Kingsland talked delegates through what can be counted towards the 20 per cent.

She said it must be “directly relevant to the apprenticeships standards, e.g. support the apprentice’s journey towards end-point

assessment”.

It can include theory teaching (lectures), simulated exercises and roleplay, attendance at competitions, manufacturing and practical training.

Shadowing or being mentored can also count, as well as online learning such as webinars or blended learning, visiting the employer’s other departments, industry visits, and the time spent by the apprentice writing assessments/assignments.

One other practice that can also count towards the rule, which many didn’t believe was allowed, is inductions.

“Inductions that include an educational element that provides some basics of the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are core to the apprenticeship, can count towards off-the-job training,” said Ms Kingsland.

Things that do not count towards the 20 per cent include enrolment, diagnostic assessments, English and maths up to level two, which is funded separately, or the progress reviews needed for an apprenticeship framework or standard.

Non-mandatory qualification time spent off the job also does not qualify, and nor does training that takes place outside the apprentice’s paid working hours, or off-the-job training only delivered by distance learning.

AoC: ‘TAKE MORE RESPONSIBILITY FOR EXPOSING DODGY SUBCONTACTING’

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

The sector as a whole must take more responsibility for reporting and policing bad instances of costly subcontracting, according to a senior skills manager at the Association of Colleges.

Teresa Frith recognised that while there is a good side to the practice, where providers can use subcontracting to build capacity, bring in new markets and keep niche provision. It also creates a “one-stop shop for employers” and recognises specialisms, she insisted.

However, there is also an undeniable dark side to subcontracting, in which it becomes “all to do with money”.

She was chairing a session on the dos and don’ts of subcontracting, in which she branded unscrupulous providers as “profit centres” who use it for revenue protection and as a way of making cost efficiencies.

She discussed the culture of rumours which surrounds dodgy subcontracting, in which people whisper about primes which “fleece off money that should be going to the front line”.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency struggles to take action, however, as it does not have the evidence to launch investigations, only “innuendos”.

She urged delegates to take more “shared responsibility” and start “policing ourselves” by reporting every bad example of subcontracting to the government to help wipe out weak practice, and to stop organisations which are only in it for the money.

“If subcontracting is so bad and if there are a lot of lead providers fleecing off money that should be going to the frontline, why isn’t there a queue of people going around the block complaining to the ESFA about that?” Ms Frith said.

“Why do I hear other people saying they’ve heard of a lead provider who was



Teresa Frith

successful in the non-levy tender going around and telling potential subcontractors that they could subcontract with them but it would cost them 35 per cent – why 35 per cent? ‘Because I can charge that’

“Why isn’t that going immediately back to the ESFA to be investigated?”

“I don’t get why there all these little notes flying around about terrible behaviour but nobody seems to be coming forward and saying ‘such and such approached me, here’re their contact details, we’d like you to investigate that’.

“What I am putting forward here is that there is a level of shared responsibility that we need to take for this. If we do

want to help wipe out weak practice and people fleecing money off we need to step up and let the ESFA know – through your associations or directly.”

She stressed the importance of embracing this shared responsibility, in the interests of saving the system as a whole.

“If we do not start policing ourselves we will get some politician who will stand up on a platform and say ‘no more subcontracting’ – and if that happens tomorrow, quite a lot of wheels will fall off quite a lot of organisations and we’d see some real negative impact on our ability to train the nation,” she said.

THE USA IS THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY ONCE MORE

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

The US apprenticeship market is “wide open” and desperately needs people who can work with employers, an expert has admitted.

There is “a dearth” of people in the US who are able to work with employers on apprenticeships, according to Robert Lerman, a researcher with 30 years of experience in the field.

The “biggest problem” in America is that “we lack the capability to sell and organise apprenticeships”, he claimed. “This is one problem that you guys can solve.”

Mr Lerman, an institute fellow at the American think-tank Urban Institute, was speaking at a workshop on ‘Taking your apprenticeship offer to the United States’, led by Tom Bewick, founder of the Transatlantic Apprenticeship Exchange Forum (TAEF).

“Why should you try to do something in the US? Well, first of all the market is wide open,” he said.

“It is a matter of reaching out to companies, showing them how an apprenticeship can work with them, maybe even showing them your standards for a

particular occupation and getting them to sign up, and helping them through the paperwork process which you can do fairly quickly.”

Mr Bewick, who has experience of running apprenticeship organisations in both the UK and US, founded the TAEF in 2015 to help UK apprenticeship providers to access US market opportunities.

The US is still in the “early days” of its apprenticeship programme, he said.

It currently has around 500,000 registered apprentices, just 0.2 per cent of the country’s overall workforce.

Rather than a single, unified system, the US has “in effect 50 apprenticeship systems” – one for each state – in addition to a federal system overseen by the US Department of Labor.

While around \$250 million (£175 million) has been invested into 46 federal expansion grants to pioneer apprenticeships in non-traditional sectors, the “action around apprenticeships is very much at state level”, Mr Bewick believes.

These include the California state apprenticeship initiative, a fund set up by the state governor to expand apprenticeships into new fields.

One UK provider taking advantage of the opportunities in the US is

MiddletonMurray, which has set up a US business, Elite Apprenticeships, in San Francisco.

Since launching last summer, the firm already has 16 apprentices at four employers, working on three apprenticeship programmes that had taken just “six weeks for the state apprenticeship board of California to approve essentially English apprenticeship standards”.

Derrick Ramsey, the secretary of the Kentucky Labor Cabinet, responsible for employment issues in the state, said he was keen to develop more apprenticeships – and to learn from the UK system.

Germany and Switzerland’s systems are “too rigid”, he explained.

“One of the things I’m more than impressed by is how you upscale and upscale,” he said.

The number of apprentices in Kentucky had already doubled since Mr Ramsey took office in January 2016, and he plans to “double this number and double it again and continue”.

Dr Eunice Bellinger, president of BridgeValley Community and Technical College in West Virginia, is also keen to work with UK providers to develop new apprenticeships.

Her college already runs a number of “earn and learn” programmes with companies including Toyota, but these aren’t “codified enough to be transferable easily”.

One of the recommendations she wants to take back to the US is to “look to the standardisation that you’ve done and be able to hopefully partner in a way that will allow us to develop in a cohesive manner”.



(l-r) Derrick Ramsey, Robert Lerman, Dr Eunice Bellinger and Tom Bewick

THE FUTURE OF ENGINEERING LIES IN ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE EARLY

JUDE BURKE
@JUDEBURKE77

Reaching out to young people as early as possible through careers advice and decent work experience opportunities is vital to sparking their interest in engineering and manufacturing, employers have agreed.

Representatives from BAE Systems, Jet2.com, EEF and the Institute for Apprenticeships, along with members of the audience, discussed engagement during an engineering and manufacturing route summit panel on day one of the conference.

“Work experience is really important to give people an understanding of what the job might be like,” said Richard Hamer, the education and skills director at BAE Systems.

“We do a lot of work in local schools to paint the picture of the routes into the business, and in our community they do know that.”

This view was echoed by an audience member, Nikki Jones, the director of the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre at the University of Sheffield.

“We need to get into primary schools. They need to see what engineering is all about,” she said.

Bhavina Bharkhada, the education and skills policy adviser at EEF, said that teachers often “don’t know enough” and “don’t feel comfortable giving advice” on routes into engineering and manufacturing.

“That’s where we – organisations like EEF and big companies, or even small companies – can support them,” she added.

But it’s not just about ensuring that potential apprentices know about what’s on offer – it is also important that they have the

right skills and knowledge.

David Sampson, the team leader for the engineering and manufacturing route at the IFA, said that an apprenticeship was “about developing competence for a new entrant” – so skills in maths, physics and chemistry are “helpful” but not essential.

In contrast, Neil Tomlinson, the engineering apprentice supervisor at Jet2.com, said the company wanted its apprentices to “have the maths and the physics because when you start talking about aircraft engineering you need to have a good basis of understanding”.

Problems arise when an apprentice’s understanding doesn’t match their GCSE grades, he continued.

Mr Tomlinson said he gave all the company’s new apprentices a “skills test and one of them came in at entry level three maths” even though he had a B at GCSE.

“We’re having to work with them to show them how to apply their maths,” he said.

Getting more young people into working into engineering was “important”, Ms Bharkhada said, because the average age of the current workforce is “around 55”.

The way that young people “communicate, the way they think about problem solving – which is essentially what engineering and manufacturing is – is very, very different” from older people”, she said.

“And that’s going to help solve some of the problems we’re going to have 10, 15 or 20 years down the line.”

The panel also underlined how important it is to increase the number of young women entering the field.

Mr Hamer said that 27 per cent of BAE Systems’ current intake of apprentices is female: “It’s getting there, but it’s taking time.”

He said it was vital to get teachers to understand that “engineering is a high-quality route and not just about old-fashioned, dirty environment” while Ms Bharkhada said that having “the right role models” mattered.

“When a young female can see another female they think, oh actually, I can do that too,” she said.




(l-r) Kirsty Wark, Richard Hamer, Bhavina Bharkhada, David Sampson and Neil Tomlinson

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The Mini Big Band



Shane Mann, Robert Halfon and Nick Linford



Shane Mann and Mark Dawe



Shane Mann



Kirsty Wark and Robert Halfon

INAUGURAL AAC AWARD

PAUL OFFORD
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The winners of the first ever Annual Apprenticeship Awards were crowned at a glitzy gala dinner at this year's AAC.

The ceremony was attended by 500 people and proved to be one of the highlights of this year's conference.

"I would like to say a huge congratulations to all of our winners," said Shane Mann, who runs the awards as managing director of FE Week's parent company. "Each is a tremendous example of the outstanding work those within the apprenticeship sector contribute. They truly deserve the recognition.

"We were stunned by the number of applications we received this year and will now commence preparations for the 2019 awards."

Mr Mann and Mark Dawe, who runs FE Week's awards partner the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, co-hosted the evening, referring to themselves

as FE's answer to television's Ant and Dec.

The ceremony was followed by a disco which gave everyone the chance to let their hair down and celebrate their successes.

Former skills minister Robert Halfon, who is now chair of the Commons education select committee, took home this year's 'Special recognition' award.

It also happened to be his birthday, so he was presented with a special cake, modelled on his favourite "ladder of opportunity" motif – and a badge that he is usually seen wearing.

It signifies, among other things, the opportunities for self-advancement that the FE sector can provide to less advantaged people.

"He fully deserves this," said Mr Mann. "He has been a staunch supporter of apprenticeships before and throughout his time as skills minister, and has continued to fight their corner as chair of the education select committee."

The shortlists were announced in association with CMI in February, while the regional winners who would go on to the grand finals were announced last

month in Parliament.

"The future for apprenticeships is bright and the awards this year and beyond illustrate why apprenticeships have become the country's flagship skills programme and why other countries are now tapping into UK expertise and experience to build their own programmes," said Mr Dawe.

Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Apprenticeships (individual) – Phil White

Phil White was recognised for years of dedication to apprenticeships culminating in his role in the development of new employer-led training programmes.

He started with United Utilities in 1997 as a mechanical engineer apprentice, and worked his way up to head of learning and development.

The judges recognised that trailblazer apprenticeship standards "for water process technician and utilities engineering technician were only ready for delivery thanks to his unique, sustained input".

Promoting Apprenticeships Campaign of the Year – Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group

NSCG's application covered both their annual apprenticeships marketing campaign plan and promotion activity for National Apprenticeship Week.

"They demonstrated a planned and effectively carried out a campaign, showing how teams had worked together to deliver, providing evidence of apprenticeship achievement above the national average, with data showing high rates of positive outcomes. Their activity covered a range of media, events and recruitment activity," said the judges.

Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Apprenticeships (employer or provider) – Learning Curve Group

This award went to Learning Curve in recognition of its "all-encompassing" support for the roll-out of the apprenticeship levy from April last year.

Their entry stressed the importance of "investment, insight and innovation".



The awards ceremony



Robert Halfon MP receiving his special recognition award



Derby Business College Ltd receiving the business and administrative apprenticeship provider of the year award



Babcock Skills Development and Training Ltd receiving the engineering and manufacturing training provider of the year award



Construction Industry Training Board receiving the construction training provider of the year award



LSECT's Victoria Boyle handing a copy of FE Week to Carole Stott



Phil White receiving the outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships individual award



Firebrand Training receiving the digital training provider of the year award



Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group receiving the promoting apprenticeships campaign of the year award



Gen 2 receiving the apprenticeship provider of the year award



Clarkson Evans receiving the apprentice employer of the year award



Learning Curve Group receiving the outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships employer award

S WINNERS TAKE A BOW

“It demonstrated a partnership relationship with employers to support it with the introduction of the levy, but also continuing those relationships beyond the levy, where apprenticeships were not the right avenue,” judges said.

Apprenticeship provider of the year – Gen 2

Cumbria-based Gen2, part of the City & Guilds Group, was praised for commitment to apprenticeships across its whole business.

“They provided data that demonstrated the quality of their provision, including through the employer satisfaction survey, which gave high scores, significantly above national average,” the judges said.

“Timely success rates are consistently high and in 2016/17, 94 per cent of apprentice learners had a positive destination outcome.”

Apprentice Employer of the Year – Clarkson Evans

Gloucester’s electrical specialists Clarkson Evans employs over 230 apprentices, who were recognised for being “the lifeblood” of the company.

“They demonstrated how they have been extending apprenticeship opportunities, broadening the range of subjects over the last two years,” the judges said.

Their training programme was actively developed “to support business growth”. It provides “exceptional support services” to learners.

Apprenticeship Provider of the Year: Business and Administrative – DBC Training

This provider stood out because of its special efforts to work in partnership with every customer.

“It demonstrated high employer-satisfaction scores, timely achievement rates and high levels of learner satisfaction,” the judges said of Derby-based DBC Training.

It designs all its apprenticeship programmes with the employer,

learners and parent or carer in mind, and “continually monitors feedback throughout the programmes”.

Apprenticeship Provider of the Year: Construction – Construction Industry Training Board

CITB was recognised for its unwavering commitment to employers.

It designs its apprenticeship programmes “specifically to enable the construction industry to be as efficient and effective as possible”.

“We are relentless in our efforts to improve learner retention and success rates and have sector leading achievement rates across nations,” it wrote in its entry.

Judges also recognised its “well-developed recruitment and selection strategy for learners”.

Apprenticeship Provider of the Year: Digital – Firebrand Training

The London provider was credited for impressive skills training in support of the UK’s digital sector. Firebrand is

“dedicated to delivering apprenticeship training to small, medium and large enterprises”.

“The provider boasts 87- to 92-per-cent achievement rates for apprenticeship frameworks and a 95-per-cent retention rate for trailblazer apprenticeships, paying testament to high-quality delivery provided throughout the duration of an apprenticeship,” judges said.

Apprenticeship Provider of the Year: Engineering & Manufacturing – Babcock Skills Development & Training

The judges were impressed with Babcock’s “exceptional” success rates and commitment to diversity.

“Success rates are exceptional, 95 per cent timely success for 2016-17, with the bespoke technical solution delivering work-ready year three apprentices to their workplace,” they said.

Impressive dedication to increasing diversity was also demonstrated, while its approach to training is “an extension of the employer’s place of work, inducting the apprentices into a work ready ethos”.



OUT AND ABOUT



20% RULE: LOVE IT OR HATE IT?

The 20% off-the-job training rule was predictably a hot topic at this year's AAC (see page 8). We asked delegates for their thoughts on the issue of the day



Garrie Owens
Manager of apprenticeships,
Pearson TQ

I think apprentices should have off-the-job training but where does this 20 per cent come from? It's an arbitrary figure that's been plucked out of the air. There should be off-the-job training – it's not an apprenticeship without it – but it shouldn't be a stick to beat quality down, and that's what it's being used for at the moment.

The 20 per cent has come around as a result of one-day release and that isn't the model of how most people are going to work. There's got to be a level of flexibility built within it.



Joanne Ritchie
Professional qualifications manager,
KPMG

The 20-per-cent rule provides an excellent opportunity for employers to ensure that apprenticeships are delivered to a high-quality standard. I do believe employers should release their apprentice to make sure that they're getting sufficient and adequate learning opportunities.

I can understand how this can be incredibly difficult for some employers, but I believe block bookings could be an answer to that – so if you aren't able to release for one day per week, what we have certainly done at KPMG have done is organised one week off every quarter to account for that.



Jo Pritchard
Degree apprenticeship manager,
Liverpool John Moores University

We haven't had feedback from our employers that the 20-per-cent off-the-job rule is an issue for them, but it might be because of the types of sectors we're working with.

Prior to degree apprenticeships, we ran, and still do run, a number of part-time degrees within the construction sector. So we've got a lot of civil engineering, quantity surveying – popular part-time degree programmes where learners join us with an employer sponsor, where that element of day release seems to be quite common. So maybe that's why we're not getting the feedback that it's an issue for them.



Amber Bardell
Quality manager,
City Gateway

I find the 20 per cent quite frustrating, but on the other hand, I think our employers are dominating us – in the fact that they're saying 'we don't want to release them on day release', 'we don't want to do block release' – I don't think they're understanding the importance behind it.

I think the employers don't want to see it as a free day. As long as the providers are being really specific about what they're going to be doing, and the apprentices understand it's not a day off work – it's going to make your apprenticeship stronger – I think you can't go wrong.



Nick Smith
Chief executive,
TTE Training Ltd

I would just like to see some more flexibility from the ESFA. At the moment, they don't appear to be prepared to adapt or amend the requirements in any way. And they're also making it worse in terms of their audit approach – when they go in and audit an organisation and expect a very pedantic application of those rules, this reinforces the idea that they're inflexible over the whole concept.

Everyone wants apprenticeships to work but unless there's some flexibility it will exclude a whole tranche of employers and we need to engage and include as many as possible.



Emily Chapman
Vice-president FE,
National Union of Students

As vice president for FE of the National Union of Students I also support the leadership team of the National Society of Apprentices. The reason I am such a big supporter of the 20-per-cent off-the-job part of apprenticeships is that the feedback we've been getting from apprentices over the past few years is that they are big fans of it. It allows them to get involved in college life and become parts and members of society and actually get to have the student experience and see what students get, as well as what apprentices get.

UT AT AAC 2018



Fayzeh Mohamed
Customer service manager, Sheffield City Council

We've found the apprenticeships to be really beneficial – both for our existing employees and also to bring new people into the service, young people in particular. So we commit to the 20-per-cent time off the job to do the training because we know that we'll get that back in new skills, in support and in development of staff, who hopefully will stay with us for longer because they know we invest in them.

They all go off-site for half a day and the other half day is flexible, when they might go to another team, for example.



Corinne Brown
Business development manager, Shrewsbury Colleges Group

I have mixed views about the 20-per-cent off-the-job. I think for some sectors it's proving to be increasingly difficult, in that they can't backfill in sectors such as health and social care. Just when is that training supposed to be delivered?

My mixed views are because I also think that it does guarantee some form of quality, and there are some employers out there who may take advantage and insist that their apprentices learn everything in their own time. That would be grossly unfair.



Ann Minton
Academic lead for apprenticeships, University of Derby

I think 20-per-cent off-the-job is good for apprentices because it gives them time to think how they're going to apply their learning in the workplace. It's good for providers because it gives them protected time to be able to really work with that apprentice. And it's good for employers because it ensures the apprentice has time to think about how they will use their learning in the workplace to benefit the employer.

If employers struggle with it, they can use technology, or place their apprentices in different parts of the organisation – it's about thinking creatively.



Nichola Hay
Director, Outsource Training & Development

The off-the-job rule is just about needing more flexibility – but there are more challenges that need to be addressed. For example, the issue of standards being approved. Also, some support around management information systems – we're being asked to demonstrate distance travelled, but we haven't been given time and the software companies haven't been able to get their systems up to speed, so that's slowing things down.

The end-point assessment is another issue. So there's much more to focus on than the 20-per-cent rule!

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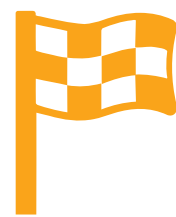
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