

AELP ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019



AELP | 2019



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The great and the good from the independent training provider sector gathered in Westminster this week for the AELP annual conference.

As was to be expected, apprenticeship policy and practice was high on the agenda as well as being the topic for many workshops. Nearly all AELP members deliver apprenticeships, compared to just two independent training providers involved in the other major reform programme, T-levels. In fact, this did not go unnoticed by AELP's chair, Martin Dunford, who blamed the DfE for T-level "institutional bias" in his opening speech (see page 3).

Tough choices ahead?

In a conference considering "social mobility", the stand-out moment for me came when the skills minister, Anne Milton, was quizzed in a Q&A session about rationing and prioritising the apprenticeship budget.

"Apprenticeship policy and practice was high on the agenda"

We now know that the current annual budget will run out (probably next year), and the minister admitted that various options for limiting usage were being considered.

Despite the 2015 and 2017 Conservative Party manifesto commitment to "young" people, the

minister was quick to reject the idea of an age cap, such as returning to the policy before 2008, when only those between the ages of 16 and 24 could be funded.

She also rejected the idea of limiting funds for degree apprenticeships, despite having previously spoken of a "middle-class grab" concern.

And in an interview with me after the speech she flatly ruled out returning to the policy prior to May 2017 when graduates were ineligible for apprenticeship funding.

However, she did say that civil servants were modelling the impact of implementing a "pre-apprenticeship salary limit", which she saw as the most "palatable" of options.

Potentially limiting employer choice and apprenticeship eligibility was bound to be controversial with AELP delegates.

You can read what some thought of the idea, and how many voted on the issue, on pages 14 and 15.

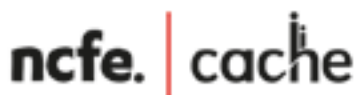
How will the landscape look 12 months from now? Fascinating, if not frightening, to consider the impact of a different ministerial team, with or without Brexit.

Whatever the future holds, FE Week will continue to be at the heart of reporting it when it comes, and in the meantime, we hope you enjoy this souvenir edition.

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AELP chair accuses government of 'institutional bias' in T-levels policy



Martin Dunford

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T-levels policy is the latest example of "institutional bias" from the Department for Education that "ignores all evidence", the chair of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers has said.

Martin Dunford delivered one of the opening speeches at the conference, in which he elaborated on the association's 10-point sustainable investment plan that has been put forward to the Treasury ahead of the government's spending review.

He told delegates there have been "nine years of austerity" and yet

the "story for our sector has been punctuated with reports of endless FE college bailouts, programme underspends, duplicating initiatives and failed policies resulting from dogmatic beliefs that were far from evidence-based.

"There have been a couple of high-profile failures on the independent side although public money still flowed to those organisations even when the warning signs would have been there," he said. "That is why we fully encouraged and supported the proposals for a more robust account management system that will help both the government and good robust providers, sitting in this room, equally".

He said a "key competitive

advantage for any organisation, in this case the ESFA, is fully understanding its suppliers" and the "lesson is that the DfE and its agencies must be deadly serious about delivering value for money from the limited funding that the Treasury does make available for FE and skills and the outlook for 2020 accentuates this need".

Dunford continued: "We would argue that such serious intent has not been demonstrated in recent years and too often policymakers have fallen back in reaching for institutionalised solutions rather than searching for what works best for the employer and/or the learner.

"Sadly despite the silver linings you might hear about tomorrow

afternoon, T-levels are just the latest example of this institutional bias, bias that ignores all the evidence."

The AELP's "shopping list" for the spending review covers apprenticeships, traineeships, adult education, the national retraining scheme and replacing the European Social Fund, but makes no mention of the new post-16 technical education qualifications set to be rolled out from 2020.

"In putting forward its policy proposals, AELP wants to make sure that programmes are available to the maximum number of employers and learners who want them, irrespective of who is delivering them, providing that the quality of delivery is good and recognising that budgets are

finite," Dunford said.

"If all these components are being considered properly at the same time, then the odds on delivering value for money must be high."

He continued: "Volumes are important, especially when there are still nearly half a million young people unemployed and automation poses real challenges for those already in work. But measuring positive outcomes is more than just counting numbers.

"AELP agrees with those that say that skills programmes must be about supporting social mobility and progression whilst having a demonstrable positive impact on productivity."

Dunford told delegates the timetable for the upcoming spending review has "slipped again" and is likely to now be "beyond the autumn", adding: "I'm told at the moment we're more likely to get a one-year carry-over rather than a three-year settlement."

The chair also used his speech to praise Anne Milton for what is expected to be her last time attending an AELP conference as skills minister.

"We're down to two contenders to be the next prime minister and civil servants are busy across Whitehall preparing briefs for the new ministerial teams in each department," he said.

"Tomorrow is possibly the last time we hear from Anne Milton in her current role and AELP thanks her for her willingness to listen and in some cases act on our concerns – and very rarely for a skills minister of any party, her willingness to ignore some of her civil service briefings and openly recognise the absolutely crucial role of independent training providers in the FE and skills system."

He added: "Let me state this: the government's ambition for apprenticeships which is fantastic and what we have been working towards for years, has only been possible because of us and will only be delivered because of us."



Pre-apprenticeship salary cap 'palatable' to limit demand, says skills minister

JESSICA FINO
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One of most "palatable" decisions the government could make to constrain the apprenticeship budget is introducing a pre-apprenticeship salary cap, according to Anne Milton.

In what could have been her last speech as skills minister, Milton was quizzed on the future affordability of the apprenticeship programme.

She told the AELP conference that there are "lots of things government could do" if the Treasury does not invest more money into the system, but she was "very uncomfortable" with the idea of "limiting by age".

"I meet an awful lot of people in their 40s and 50s who are returning to work and training up and changing careers – I would find that extremely difficult," she said.

Milton went on to say that a "pre-apprenticeship salary limit" was "one of the most palatable" solutions.

In a follow-up interview with *FE Week*, the minister confirmed that civil servants have started analysis on what impact the salary cap could have.

"We are looking at everything," she said.

"Alongside making the best possible case for your budget, you also need to see how you are going to live within your means."

But she wouldn't commit to a figure, such as the £30,000 that could be used for migrants post-Brexit as "it would be wrong to extrapolate from the migration figures any particular figure".

She explained that nurses, for example, will often come from within a trust and might drop a salary band in order to do an apprenticeship, "so you have to factor all that in as well".

Milton added that she wouldn't "restrict it [the apprenticeship budget] to a second degree because there are a people who have got

degrees, maybe they regret the fact they did that degree, and actually a lot of those people have got a useful role to play in the workplace, they've got lots of skills, but in order to do that job they have got to do another degree.

"So I am not that uncomfortable with second degrees."

Milton also used her speech to speak about small employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy, saying the DfE's "next big task" is getting them onto the apprenticeship service, in a reasonable timeframe, so that they can take advantage of the

benefits of taking more control of the provision they are buying," she said.

"But I am also very mindful of the need to get this right and have called upon small and medium size businesses to help test the transition to the service."

She told AELP members that many of them will be "keen to support this process" and that she hoped they will work with SMEs to apply to be part of the test.

But she added that "others of you will be disappointed that the test is limited to providers that have current

non-levy contracts".

"I would like to assure you that small and medium sized employers will be able to choose from every provider on the register soon. We want to work with you all to make this transition smooth, glitch free and work well."

With less than a month to go until the results of the Conservative leadership contest are known, this could have been Milton's last speech as skills minister. Boris Johnson or Jeremy Hunt – the last two in the race – are likely to shake up their Cabinet

once either one becomes prime minister.

In fact, the minister ended her speech in what sounded like a farewell. She said: "I would like to thank all of the training providers for all you have done and all that you do. You have been integral to the success of our apprenticeship reforms.

"Thank you for all your work. Thank you for the continued and extraordinary efforts you make on behalf of many people in this country. And thank you for never giving up in your mission."



Anne Milton



ESFA to focus on switching small businesses over to the online apprenticeship service

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Moving small employers onto the apprenticeship service is the “final bit of the apprenticeship reform programme”, Keith Smith told AELP delegates.

In what he labelled as a “positive session”, the director of apprenticeships at the Education and Skills Funding Agency has said he “really wants” the UK’s apprenticeships system to be “the best in the world”.

But that is not going to be achieved in one day, he said, adding that “we are in a journey”.

Currently, only big employers with an annual total pay bill of over £3 million who pay the levy can use the online apprenticeship service to access training funds generated through the policy.

Small employers were originally expected to be added to the service in April this year, but was delayed for another year to “ensure a more gradual transition”.

After the delay was announced in August last year, the ESFA extended contracts for providers delivering training for small employers until March 2020, which is how non-levy-payers train up their apprentices.

Smith said the agency is now starting to move small businesses onto the online service through a trial. Showing a timeline of the service roadmap, Smith said the first pilot phase has begun with training providers and non-levy paying employers being invited to test the system.

An expressions of interest went live earlier this month.

“It is an important opportunity for us to get volunteers in, which I know some of you have applied to,” he explained.

“We will be able to test the pipework in the system with real providers, real employers, recruiting real apprentices.

“That phase will continue throughout this year and we hope that very early on in 2020 the system will open. That means it will open to anybody regardless of their contract status and whatnot.”

He said that he would not be giving the specific date for the full move in 2020 because “it depends how the testing goes over the coming months”, but “certainly for us we are ambitious to get to a position where we have this new system in place by summer/autumn next year”.

During his speech, Smith also focused on the need for training providers to engage with end-point assessment EPA organisations much earlier that they are doing at the moment, after finding only half do this at the start of an apprentices “journey”.

“In terms of EPAs, this is super important and super critical, and probably is the next big test and challenge for the programme,” he said,

“We’ve been talking to employers about understanding where they are and the behaviours. It is really critical that the discussion of EPA and the EPAO is introduced really early into the apprentice journey.”

According to a survey shown to delegates, only 52.6 per cent of

employers plan to engage with the EPAO of their apprentices at the start of the programme.

“At the moment too much, in terms of the conversations of who is the right EPAO, has been happening too far into the programme. We really need you guys to get that 52 per cent as high as possible.”

Smith also urged providers to record the progress that apprentices make more robustly.

Another ESFA survey found that reporting on apprentice progress

was the area where most providers said they needed to improve (21.2 per cent), followed by the need to improve communication with the ESFA (19.2 per cent).

“These are surveys we constantly do with employers and I thought we’d reflect on some important takeaways about how we engage with employers throughout the lifetime of the apprenticeship,” he said.

“Many employers want to be much more engaged and closer with you in understanding the progress that

apprentices make.”

In a Q&A session following his speech, Smith also said the ESFA is reviewing a funding rule that is preventing smaller employers from receiving levy funds from large employers

“I was talking to a colleague in the audience about this earlier today and they asked the same question, and on that I think that is absolutely fair, I think we need to look at that,” he said.

Read FE Week’s full story on this here: <https://bit.ly/2LgfaQQ>.



Keith Smith



Apprenticeship quango reveals extra £40 per learner charge

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The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will start charging £40 for every apprenticeship external quality assurance check it does from September.

Robert Nitsch, the quango's chief operating officer, told the AELP conference during a keynote speech that charging for their work, which is currently free, is the "right thing to do".

In the same session, Ofqual's director for vocational and technical qualifications Phil Beach, confirmed his organisation would continue not charging for the service and called for an extension of its duties in this space.

There are currently 18 approved external quality assurance (EQA) bodies that monitor end-point assessment organisations, to ensure the process is "fair, consistent and robust".

The EQA bodies are allowed to apply a charge as long as it is on a "cost-recovery basis" – the amount of which is taken directly from the government funding given to training providers to deliver the apprenticeship.

FE Week revealed the "ridiculous variability" in these charges in February, which were criticised by sector leaders for ranging from a free service to £179 per apprentice.

The IfATE recently re-tendered for an organisation to conduct EQA on its behalf, which was once again won by Open Awards.

Tender documents for the new contract, seen by FE Week, stated that "legislation allows the institute to charge end point assessment organisations (EPAOs) a fee per apprentice that undertakes an end-point assessment and it is these fees



Rob Nitsch

that will pay for the EQA service".

They added: "The institute's budget is limited and we are seeking to work with a supplier who will deliver a high-quality service at a price that offers strong value for money."

The IfA is currently the EQA provider for over 200 apprenticeship standards.

Addressing delegates, Nitsch said: "The institute has been introducing a charging mechanism for end-point quality assurance where the institute

has been nominated as the EQA provider.

"We currently aim and expect that charging will commence for EPAs from the September 1 this year at the agreed rate of £40 per EQA."

AELP chief executive Mark Dawe challenged Nitsch on this decision, and insisted it seemed "unfair", especially where an apprentice has already started their training.

Nitsch replied: "There is a real challenge when you start charging

– what time do you turn it on remembering that some standards take some time to deliver? But we think the right thing to do is to move into this paradigm.

"I will also say that we always said we were going to charge, it's not a new phenomenon, it has always been there. But it has taken us more time to get to this stage because we needed to assure ourselves the data accuracy was there."

The IfATE chief operating officer

also used his speech to announce that the institute's new EQA framework would be published the following day.

Once released, it revealed that apprenticeship end-point assessment organisations are to be graded by quality assurance providers from now on and given a "risk rating" – but the results won't be published or made available to them.

Visit <https://bit.ly/2LhWpwB> to read FE Week's full story on this.



Ofqual says 'yes' to IfA when offered broader role

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The "simplest, most streamlined and consistent delivery" of quality assurance for all non-degree apprenticeships would be through Ofqual, according to Phil Beach.

The exam regulator's director for vocational and technical qualifications told AELP delegates that his organisation "strongly" supports the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education having "statutory responsibility" in this area.

"But," he added, "the external quality assurance (EQA) options and arrangements are complex".

As revealed by FE Week earlier this month, the IfATE recently wrote to Ofqual and asked how it might work as part of an optimised system for EQA, and particularly how it might work with professional bodies and employers.

"Our response reaffirms our view that the simplest, most streamlined and consistent delivery of quality assurance for all non-degree

apprenticeships would be through Ofqual regulation," Beach said.

"We have signalled that we are prepared to extend our role as EQA provider."

Approved external quality assurance bodies monitor apprenticeship end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs), to ensure the process is "fair, consistent and robust".

"We have signalled that we are prepared to extend our role as EQA provider"

Ofqual currently does EQA for over 65 approved apprenticeship standards. Many in the FE sector have called for the exams regulator to be the only provider in this space.

However, its remit does not expand to degree apprenticeships, which are the responsibility of the Office for

Students, so Ofqual could not take on all EQA for every apprenticeship standard.

Beach said where EPAOs are "already recognised members of the regulated community", an extension of Ofqual's role in EQA "can be done quite quickly".

"Where EQA is currently provided by professional bodies and other groups – we could (and would wish to) work in partnership with those professional bodies," he added.

"That way we can combine our assessment expertise with their sector and subject expertise; together we can be more than the sum of our parts.

"We have also committed to further developing our EPAO fora, so that they better reflect the depth and breadth of EPAO delivery. We remain committed to sharing best practice."

Beach also used his speech to announce the introduction of a "field force" to "look at how assessments are working in practice at the point of delivery".

"We'll be undertaking on-site monitoring of EPAs, to gather intelligence from employers and

apprentices and to strengthen the evidence base for our risk-based, targeted interventions," he explained.

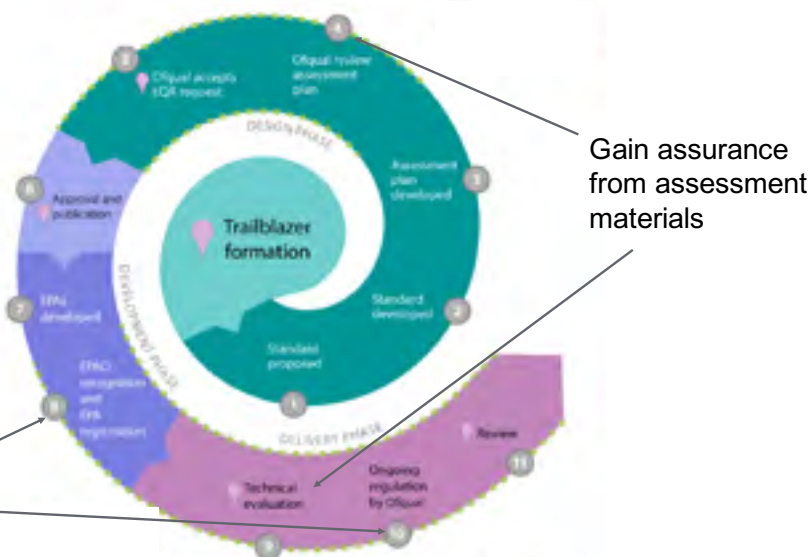
"We want employers and professional bodies to be confident that EPAs provide an accurate measure of occupational competence. And we want to ensure that the assessment is fair for apprentices."

Beach continued: "This field force will also inform our views of the delivery of other types of qualifications. This is a natural extension of our proposals to strengthen controls over centre-based judgements and the moderation and verification of assessments."



Phil Beach

Two high level objectives



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SEND students to benefit greatly from T-level industry placement flexibilities

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Learners with special educational needs and disability (SEND) will benefit hugely from the new flexibilities being introduced to the industry placement component of T-levels, according to a top Department of Education civil servant.

Sarah Carter, a learning difficulties and disabilities manager within the department, delivered a wide ranging workshop on SEND in further education on day one of conference.

She said changes to T-level placements have been designed to have a “really positive” impact on the 15 per cent of students with learning difficulties.

The biggest flexibility added was that placement opportunities can be offered with up to two employers, as opposed to one long one, as originally planned.

The DfE also confirmed placements will be formally recorded in hours – a minimum of 315 – as opposed to 45 days, which Carter said will help when SEND students and people who “have conditions that limit them from working longer hours or have caring responsibilities”.

Specifically for students with SEND, they will now be allowed to use on-site facilities, such as a college-run restaurant or hair salon, for a maximum of 105 hours of the placement.

“About a third of the industrial placements can be done on site with the training provider,” Carter explained.

“For example for a catering student, if you have a canteen, they can start off working and doing part of their placement in the canteen.

“For a learner with a learning difficulty it might well be a good



Sarah Carter

place to start, before they go off site and have that additionally hurdle.”

Carter also used the workshop to share the results of a recent DfE research report into the barriers to widening participation in recruitment.

The research found there are five key intervention points when recruiting SEND apprentices, with the first area being pre-recruitment.

She said that, when thinking about diversity in recruitment, this stage was outside of the scope of employer thinking.

“There was a thought that the requirements and needs for widening participation needs to happen at that point,” Carter added.

“There is quite a lot that can be done around recruitment in that pre-recruitment stage.”

This might include interventions

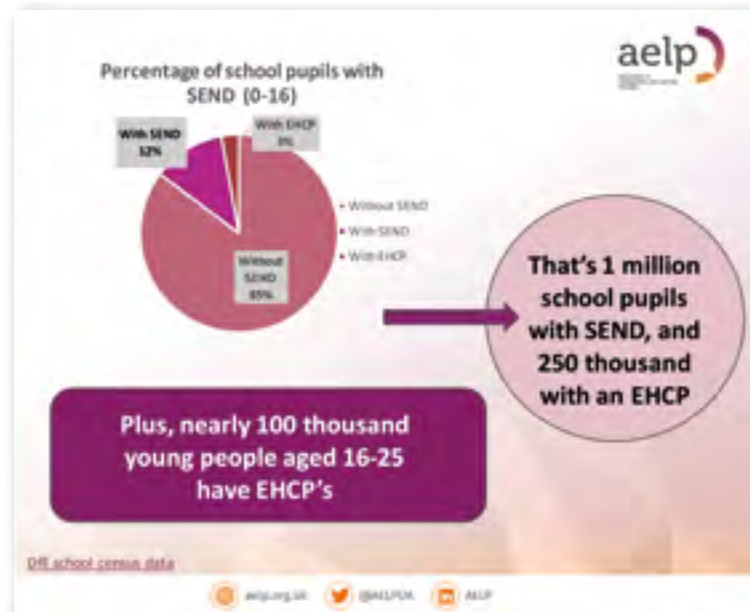
by going out and working with schools and improving the offer of work experience.

“If you are requiring video interviews or multiple choice on the computer, that helps some types of conditions but for other type of conditions it’s a barrier.”

Other key intervention points include the recruitment stage, pre-joining, induction, and support/retention.

Carter told delegates that, on the Find An Apprenticeship website, there is a “shockingly poor uptake” of employers ticking the “I am a disability confident” box even though a large percentage of them have signed up to the government scheme designed to encourage the recruitment of disabled people.

Moreover, some employers are putting in English and maths



T-Levels:

NAS are introducing a series flexibilities for the industry placements that will benefit students with LDD.

- Part-time work** – Occupationally relevant part-time work can be counted toward the total number of placement hours
- Multiple Employers** – Placements can be with up to two employers, carried out as day release, in one solid block, multiple smaller blocks or a mixture of any of these models, depending on what works for the provider, student and employer.
- Work Taster days** – Up to 35 hours of work taster activities can be counted towards a student’s total number of placement hours in addition to those 2 employers.
- Hours** – Placement requirement of 315 hours (minimum) and average 350 rather than 45 – 60 days. This will allow for shorter days while still ensuring that students with SEND or caring responsibilities receive the full benefit of an external placement.
- On-site facilities** – A maximum of 105 hours can be spent at provider commercial facilities where it is in the best interests of the student and aligns to their learning and development needs. There will need to be documented evidence of need.
- Travel** – We are exploring ways to enhance physical access (travel) for those in remote locations, or who have SEND/LDD, or face cultural barriers to travel.



requirements that they don’t need, asking for a GCSE grade 4 or above for a level 2 apprenticeship when actually there are no entry level requirement for a level 2.

“Although obviously employers can specify what they like, they should make sure they are not making it harder when it doesn’t need to be,” she added.



DfE policy adviser talks through the do's and don'ts of RoATP applications

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A senior policy adviser from the Department for Education held a question and answer session on the new register of apprenticeship training providers on day two of the conference.

The register finally reopened for applications in December, following a year-long review with more “stringent and challenging entry requirements”.

One of the first queries to Sheila Sturgeon was around delays to the outcomes of applications, which she admitted had come about because the system was “more complex than perhaps we would have imagined”.

It comes after FE Week revealed last month that new applicants trying to get onto the refreshed register had been left hanging by the government six months after its launch.

One provider that applied at the end of March asked Sturgeon when they would be notified, adding they were conscious about delays.

“There have been delays but we’ve more or less caught up,” she replied.

“What we said in our original guidance is that we planned, and it very clearly said planned, that we would be able to tell people the result of their application after about 12 weeks. The reality is the first ones took us longer because we wanted to make sure we got the right decisions.

“I believe if you applied in March and April it will now run on about a month’s cycle, so March applications should be a few weeks away.”

Most of the session centred on the do's and don'ts for applications.

Sturgeon would not be drawn on the success rate of reapplications from established providers, but

said the DfE's RoATP guidance is “quite specific I don't see how anyone can fail” if the provider is “of the appropriate quality and has been trading for 12 months and has all the policies in place”.

But she did state that her “personal” opinion was that the application was more likely to fail if it was not written internally and a bid writer was brought in “to write it for you”.

“The reason I say that is because we ask for specific examples,” Sturgeon explained.

“You need to tell us how your provider has made this policy real and live. It is really important that you find a good example and you use it because that is probably where providers who aren't as on the ball are likely to fail.”

Sturgeon continued to list the most common flaws in applications.

“Claiming the wrong exemption has happened a lot,” she said.

“Proof reading is another – I've seen some great ones where the word count on Microsoft Word and the word count on Bravo are different. If you cut and paste directly from Word and you're right the word count you will lose your two or three sentences, I've seen lots of them where people have cut and pasted but not proof read.”

“Not uploading the right documents,” was another regular mistake, but “worse than that, in my opinion, not having a particular policy, nicking one from somewhere else and forgetting to change the provider name”.

“I cannot count the number of those we have seen and I am not joking,” she added.

One provider told Sturgeon that one of their policies, about record keeping, is not in place as they are still developing its software system. Asked if they would fail because the policy isn't yet live, the civil servant said there could be some “flexibility”



Sheila Sturgeon

and the ESFA could still pass them if the rest of the application “is absolutely perfect”.

Another provider said they did not receive a notification telling them they needed to reapply to the register until last week, but were told they need to do so by July 31.

“If you didn't get the first notification then apply for the

extension until the end of August, that should be fine,” Sturgeon told them.

She added that one of the problems has been the ESFA's Bravo portal, which she described as an “awful system” that will soon be replaced.

“Unfortunately, because Bravo is such a pain if you have had someone

leave, or changed your email address for lots of different reasons people don't keep it up to date. Not everybody has seen their notification when it has gone because it has gone through Bravo.

“We do get it is an imperfect system and if you contact us using the register mailbox it should be possible for you to get an extension.”



Delegates have their say with interactive

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Delegates attending this year's Association of Employment and Learning Providers conference had the chance to interact with speakers across the two-day event, by taking part in electronic surveys in real time.

Often before a plenary speaker came

on stage, delegates were asked to answer a question related to the session's topic.

Attendees were quizzed on topics including what factors are holding back apprenticeship starts, on whether the Greater London Authority should be devolved more responsibility for skills, and what concerns they had while waiting for an Ofsted inspection team.

We've pulled out the responses to the different questions over the next two pages.



Active votes covering the main topics

If the call comes about the impending arrival of an inspection team, which issue concerns you the most: 1 3 7

That we still do not have a robust and tested method for identifying apprentice's individual starting points on standards 26%

The team might not understand how apprenticeship delivery works with employers in the driving seat 23%

That Ofsted will focus on counting off-the-job hours as opposed to checking the real quality of our provision 18%

Our data will mean that the inspection team will have already made up its mind before it arrives 17%

Our true understanding of Ofsted's new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) 15%

Should the Mayoral Combined Authorities / Greater London Authority be devolved more responsibility for skills in addition to the Adult Education Budget (AEB)? 0 8 3

No 34%

Maybe - it depends on how well they initially deal with AEB 31%

Undecided 19%

Yes 16%



What do you foresee as the greatest challenge to overcome to ensure the moving of non-levy paying employers to the apprenticeship service is a success? 1 1 2

Ensuring there is enough funding to meet the needs of employers who do not pay the apprenticeship levy 63%

Getting smaller employers to embrace the technology behind the apprenticeship service system 11%

Lack of awareness from employers about the change in system 10%

Contracting arrangement in regards the funding agreement that non-levy payers will need to enter into for the first time 10%

Government not harnessing the established provider community as the "sales force" to support employers with the transition 7%



What's the best way to prioritise

Delegates dismiss Milton's 'palatable' salary cap to curb apprenticeship spending

If you were minister and had to restrict access to levy funding would you: 0 3 6



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The government's idea of introducing a salary cap to limit apprenticeship spending hasn't been welcomed by sector leaders.

Skills minister Anne Milton said the proposal was one of the most "palatable" ways of constraining the budget during her keynote speech on day two of the AELP conference (see page 4).

It received opposition from different sides of the FE world, with Adrian Anderson, chief executive at the University Vocational Awards Council, saying it would "undermine" the principle that apprenticeship was an employer-led programme, while AELP boss Mark Dawe warned of "major implications" for public services.

Anderson said that, to make a "real dent in the predicted overspend" of the apprenticeship budget, any cap would have a "massive and detrimental impact" on the ability of employers to raise productivity and

enhance the delivery of public sector services.

He added: "Surely the government should welcome employers using apprenticeship to raise management skills in line with its own policy?"

"Or is apprenticeship no longer a training programme focused on productivity, but instead a tax on employers (disproportionately paid by the public sector) to fund level 2 training provision for young people let down by the schools system?"

Anderson argued that a salary cap would impose a "significant constraint" on the ability of the NHS, police forces and others to use their apprenticeship levy funds, and undermined the principle that apprenticeships are an "employer-led programme".

Dawe said that a limit on the earnings of an apprentice would, for example, have "major implications" for the levy spending efforts of the NHS trusts.

"So unless the limit was raised significantly, we believe that the proposal is probably a non-runner," he added.

He also pointed out that while 25 per cent of conference delegates supported the introduction of a pre-apprenticeship salary cap, 36 per cent supported a level cap.

"This would prevent some apprenticeship levels being publicly

funded," Dawe said. "So the higher, more expensive levels would have to be funded by other means."

"We believe the opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge should be open to all"

He added: "The simple truth is that without a hard choice being made, the money for apprenticeships will soon run out for everyone."

During the electronic polling, 36 per cent of delegates thought prioritising sectors could be a

good way to restrict access to levy funding, but only 3 per cent agreed with an age cap.

Jon Bouffler, director of learning development services at Anglia Ruskin University, said a salary cap "could be seen as being at odds with the aim of encouraging lifelong learning".

He added it is "also contrary to the widening participation mission, as we believe the opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge should be open to all".

On Twitter, Tony Allen, chief executive of Allen Apprenticeships, said: "I don't know how this would work. There are huge differences in salaries across industry for similar roles. This will result in management apprenticeships being subject to an apartheid regime."



Prioritise apprenticeship funding?

The skills minister, Anne Milton, said that she was considering a pre-apprenticeship salary cap (see page 4). For example, staff on a £30,000 salary or above would not be eligible for levy funding. We asked some of the AELP conference delegates whether, if they were minister and had to restrict access to levy funding, would they:

1. Introduce a pre-apprenticeship salary cap
2. Introduce an age cap
3. Introduce a level cap
4. Prioritise sectors

Here's what they said...



Sarah Marcello
Apprenticeship relationship manager, Health Education England

"Option 4. I'm pretty clear there are challenges in certain sectors, you can't go broad-brush across the entire economy, and you have to focus on where the needs really are. Health and care is one big area where there are challenges but banking for example, isn't as much a problem. It's about focusing on where the skills shortages are."



Rani Rathore
Curriculum manger, Kent Community Learning Skills

"I would select sectors because I am aware there is a disparity in terms of engagement and there is a need for engagement in certain sectors, particularly care for instance. By prioritising them, you may get that level engagement to get that workforce flow that we require."



Stewart Segal
Chief executive, Aegis Management Services Ltd

"I would not use a salary cap. It is too crude a limiter. There are many other ways they could look at the budget, for example they could put an additional 10 per cent on all levy payers. I would personally look at a level out of the four options, but it may not necessarily be a cap, it may be a contribution level that an employer might want to make."



Gail Rochester
Head of business development, NCFE

"From the options looking at age I would certainly rule that out because at every stage of your life you should have access to an apprenticeship. I would prioritise sectors, which would mean we could ensure we have apprenticeships happening in the workplaces that have potentially not been invested in in the past, and ensure we have the right people with the right skills in the jobs that we see are sustainable, and that we invest in areas where jobs are at risk."



Paul Eeles
Chief executive, Skills and Education Group

"I would introduce option 3 and 4. Looking at a level cap ensuring that funding was directed to those that need first chances and develop from there. And I would prioritise sector, ensuring the right sectors where we need the skills and training development is implemented."



Mark Taylor
Partner, Eversheds Sutherland

"I'm afraid none of the above. The reason being the FE and HE sectors are already chronically underfunded and the country needs more apprentices. Introducing any kind or arbitrary cap would work contrary to the policy the government wants."



Sue Williams-Lee
Head of educational services, Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation

"I think the introduction of a level cap is probably the best one. I definitely think degree level apprenticeships and levels 6 and 7 should be funded separately. I do think the levy funding should be concentrated on reskilling those who have never had the opportunity before. Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 are what the levy should be spent on."



Steven Mitchell
Director of research, innovation and development, Skills Training UK

"I don't believe in a cap full stop. It should be open to the market and let the market decide effectively what skills employers need. If I had to pick an option I would be looking at a level cap with a view that degree apprenticeships, for example, would be taken out of levy funded provision or that there would be a contribution from the employer."













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