

Highlights from AoC conference 2013

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Senior college leaders listen, debate



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It had policy announcements aplenty and quite a few speeches, not to mention tears as some worthy students were praised at a glitzy gala dinner — but the Association of Colleges Annual Conference 2013 is now just a memory.

The three-day event at Birmingham's International Convention Centre, next door to the beautiful new city library (pictured on the front of this supplement), saw more than 1,000 delegates from colleges up and down the country.

A faithful taste of what they saw and

heard follows, beginning with the speech of Skills Minister Matthew Hancock on page 4.

It is accompanied by the speech of association president Michele Sutton, who wanted to give Prime Minister David Cameron a nudge on the issue of careers guidance.

Ofsted's FE and skills director Matthew Coffey was also at the conference and his speech is on page 5, along with that of Business Secretary Vince Cable, plus an overview from Shadow Skills Minister Liam Byrne of the issues from the panel debate he took part in.

Toni Pearce gave her first association conference speech as president of the

National Union of Students and you'll find that on page 6, next to extended coverage of Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt's speech in which he made a number of policy announcements from his party's Skills Taskforce.

The taskforce published its report, *Transforming further education: A new mission to deliver excellence in technical education*, on the same day as his speech and is featured next to Mr Hunt's speech.

The glitzy gala dinner was the venue for the handing out of the association's student of the year awards and also the prizes for its student photography competition.

These awards are covered on pages 10

and 11, along with the full list of this year's recipients of the Beacon awards.

Rebecca Cooney, *FE Week* reporter, got out and about on the last day of conference to speak with delegates and to find out what they thought about proceedings. Her vox-pop is on pages 12 and 13, where there is also coverage of a conference meeting between a delegation of officials from vocational colleges in China.

Pages 14 and 15 are given over to a round-up of the conference announcements and events from association chief executive Martin Doel. He spoke with *FE Week* editor Nick Linford during a webinar sponsored by Tribal.

FE Week is a newspaper dedicated to reporting on news, analysis, jobs and fun in the further education sector.

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te and discuss at AoC conference

Conference debate important, but devil in the detail

There was plenty of agreement among conference-goers over the need to drive up standards in FE. Now Graham Hasting-Evans wants to see more detailed explanation of how this could be achieved.

Another great Association Of Colleges conference last in Birmingham, where a wide diversity of issues was debated and argued — from Career Colleges for 14 to 16-year-olds, to the state of the UK economy. But, for me, there was a common theme. That was the delivery and funding of employer-led vocational skills and apprenticeships.

We heard from a number of ministers, shadow ministers and civil servants, all with the consistent message that standards of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships need to rise and employer engagement is essential.

“Delegates were concerned about what’s really happening to the Sector Skills Councils”

So, much common ground, then.

But in my opinion, the debate is not about whether we need to improve the design and delivery of vocational skills and apprenticeships, engage with employers and ensure qualifications are relevant to employment.

As they say Stateside, that’s a given.

It’s about the how (not really a surprise at a conference on apprenticeships and vocational skills that there

was much discussion over the ‘mechanics’)?

Among the most hotly-debated topics were the need for an end test to carry 75 per cent of the marks. Clearly, many delegates didn’t agree with this, neither did the employers present.

There was also a one-page standard that challenged people’s credibility. Examples from the rest of Europe appear to be nearer to careers guidance than what most engineering-based UK employers would call a standard.

Meanwhile, achievement of level two in English and maths cropped up. There were doubts about whether there is the need for this or if it’s even possible (thoughts were that if after 11 years of full-time education it’s not been achieved, then what’s going to change when they’re in employment).

Grading was another area where people saw that different industries and job roles would have different requirements. And for some, ‘grading’ and inspiring people might be achieved by progression from level two to level three and onto level four.

But delegates were also concerned about what’s really happening to the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). How will the Industrial Partnerships come into being and how will they operate?

After ‘mechanics’ came funding. We still await the results of the consultation on the three models for apprenticeship funding. These are signalled to be before the end of the year.

There were however, lots of hints that the preference is for direct funding to the employers. To some extent this is already happening, as funding is starting to go

through the Local Enterprise Boards.

But a more wide spread change is seen as very disruptive. There is a risk that the new system could work for large employers, but not small to medium-sized enterprises and put organisations off apprenticeships.

As an organisation that has been engaged on a pilot to produce a new apprenticeship (as per the Richard and Whitehead Reviews), NOCN has practical experience of what employers actually want and how that could be delivered (the employer in this case was funded via the

UK Commission for Employment and Skills’ employer ownership of skills).

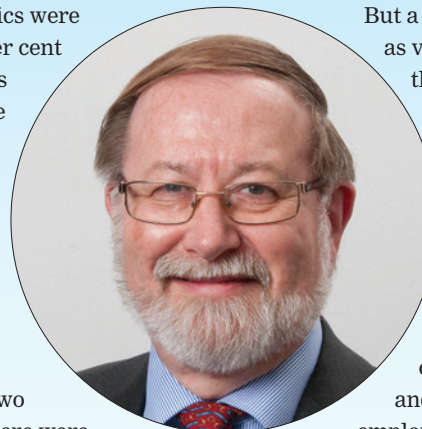
There are some great lessons. Getting the employers, FE colleges, SSC and an awarding organisation around the same table to design the A to Z of the apprenticeship (or vocational qualification) is the best solution.

Also, using a unitised approach is very flexible, not just for apprenticeships, but for up-skilling the existing adult workforce. It will deliver qualifications that are fit for industry’s needs and provide people with a worthwhile route to employment and progression.

The more challenging lesson is that ‘one size’ does not fit all. Not all apprenticeships require level two English or maths, a heavy reliance on end testing is not always best, nor is grading. In that sense people need to be clear, is it a real employer-led system or not?

One thing’s for sure, there’s still much to debate. The devil is still very much in the detail.

Graham Hasting-Evans, managing director, NOCN



Speakers hit range of key-notes, from



Matthew Hancock

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock spoke to conference delegates on Tuesday, November 19, about improving the quality of further education and skills training. Here are excerpts from his written speech.

The new National Careers Service will expand its offer to schools and colleges, making it easier for employers and educators to engage. Schools will be held to account by Ofsted for engaging with the world of work, and new destination data — with a level playing field across schools and colleges — will make it clear to all where it's not working and where it's not.

Careers Academies, Inspiring the Future, and business in the community are part of the answer: helping real employees engage and inspire.

More than 500 training providers are taking on trainees this year. Household names have already signed up to offer work experience.

Since August, we've made an extra £20m available for young people of 19 and above, and for under 18s we've made clear that if you recruit more students than you are funded for, this will be recognised in the allocation you receive in the next year.

Next, apprenticeships.

Lengthy, convoluted, unnecessarily complex frameworks will be gone — replaced by new, short, clear standards, written by employers not bureaucrats.

Work on the first eight trailblazers is well underway with closer collaboration than we've seen for generations.

English and maths are particularly vital. Yet England's performance is terrible in both. The new requirements to be in education longer, and if you're in education, for those without English and maths GCSE

to keep studying to 18, bear heaviest on FE.

Over the last year, we've brought in new policies specifically designed to support you: new bursaries up to £20,000 for talented graduates wanting to become maths, English, or LLDD teachers within FE colleges and independent providers.

Support for professional development for up to 2,000 teachers wanting to improve their skills in teaching maths and English.

Support for the new Core Maths — supporting schools and colleges to teach new high-quality maths qualifications for students between 16 and 18.

New maths and English GCSEs — with a closer focus on essential skills like spelling, grammar and problem solving — will I hope replace other qualifications as the single, gold standard level two in all settings across the whole of FE.

Reducing emphasis only on completion, important as it is, and focussing as well on destination and progression. Removing funding per qualification under 18, and funding per learner instead.

Putting the funding for apprenticeships through employers so they can demand the high quality training they need.

Recognising excellence through the proposed chartered status scheme, to be launched in the New Year. Chartered status will recognise colleges most responsive to the needs of their learners and employers.

Around the world, teachers are embracing new technology, not as a replacement for the human teacher, but as a hugely empowering tool. I will play my part — funding capital, incentivising the use of new technology, breaking down barriers.

The Further Education Learning Technology Action Group report will be published shortly, for a full, interactive, online conversation — in the true spirit of new technology.



Michele Sutton

Association of Colleges president Michele Sutton, principal of Bradford College, addressed conference-goers on Tuesday, November 19. Here are excerpts from her written speech.

If we compare this year's marked improvement for college Ofsted outcomes to some employer-led apprenticeships outcomes, I think there should be some questions to ministers around the fitness for purpose for some large employers to be a lead position in the new employer-led landscape.

In one hotel group — 23 hotels — Ofsted said not one single apprentice had qualified since it began training in 2012 and the other employer, a major contractor to the government, has received its second consecutive 'inadequate' inspection grade.

So while we congratulate and welcome the appointment of Dr David Collins as the first FE Commissioner, we hope he will not be kept too busy.

I would like to ask him to consider how we can help principals who have taken over failing colleges to improve their colleges rather than heap opprobrium on them.

I also hope he will look into the failure of the other parts of the system, for example, inspection and financial monitoring and ask why some of the issues new principals have to face have not been dealt with before they arrive.

I also believe that colleges are now playing a more vital role in both higher education and transitional and overseas education training.

The changes in the QAA ensuring that indi-

vidual colleges subscribe in their own right, the changes to the Quality Code and Reviews and to the processes involved in the submission for degree-awarding powers all point to colleges being able to have the destiny of their higher education development in their own hands.

There are also many more colleges involved in international provision, many working in partnership with overseas partners.

Wherever I go, whoever I speak to — principals across the country all agree that quality of impartial information advice and guidance is nothing less than appalling.

Although ministers have issued an action plan we would like it to have gone further.

The Prime Minister himself noted that too few young people are advised about their vocational options, including apprenticeships and that policy changes are needed.

I would say to the Prime Minister — please get a move on. The longer this disgraceful situation exists, the longer term effect there is on the young. Too many young people, usually those who need advice the most, miss out.

They end up in the wrong institution, often sixth forms in schools, doing the wrong course and recently published Education Funding Agency data shows that schools lose 50 per cent of their pupils between Years 11 and 13. How many will end up not in education, employment or training?

The number of young apprentices is already falling in some areas — no wonder when so few young people and their parents don't know about the opportunities that are available to them because we are not allowed into schools to give the information they need.

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock recently wrote to chairs of colleges and acknowledged the challenges of the pace and scope of change.

We know how much it means to make a difference, we understand the need for ministers and government to make their mark, demonstrating their need to reform and creating better futures for the people of this country.

However, I believe that we do not need any more fundamental changes to our system.

If it's essential to drive up the standard of vocational courses, it's even more important to recognise those higher standards in well-assessed, well-respected qualifications.

Poor value qualifications for 14 to 16-year-olds have already been filtered out, leaving only those which represent real achievement. Now we're doing the same for 16 to 19-year-olds. New Tech Levels will be taught from September 2014 and will provide a high quality vocational alternative to A-levels, with clear and explicit employer support. And we will shortly be publishing the first lists of approved level three qualifications — those which have won the backing of universities and employers.

New Tech Levels will count towards the

TechBacc. Consisting of a Tech Level, a level three 'core maths' qualification, and an extended project, the TechBacc will be unambiguously challenging — and finally give vocational education the high status it deserves. We're going through the same process for adult vocational qualifications too. In August this year, we removed more than 1,800 qualifications from the scope of public funding.

We are now drawing up new rules — based on Nigel Whitehead's excellent report — to ensure that a qualification is only funded if it is recognised by employers, has a clear purpose and appropriate content, and will only keep its funding if there is real demand.

careers advice to capital funding



Matthew Coffey

Ofsted FE and skills director Matthew Coffey addressed the Association of Colleges conference on Tuesday, November 19. Here are extracts from his written speech.

In last year's annual report, Sir Michael Wilshaw asked whether the FE system was fit for purpose. The argument is now well-rehearsed and has been challenged on many fronts.

The question is still relevant today — what is the point in learners completing qualifications that may fund the provision, but may not add anything to their future job application forms?

Our survey on local accountability and autonomy, published in March, showed that most of the 32 colleges sampled for the survey offered a broad range of courses at different levels that led to nationally-recognised qualifications.

However, it was not clear how these colleges ensured that the courses and qualifications they offered equipped learners with the necessary skills to progress successfully to training and employment.

Only a small number of them had easy access to meaningful labour market information to help them adapt the provision they offered so that it would directly tackle some of these issues.

Surely, this is where the local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) should come in? But we identified significant variations across the country in how well the LEPs were established and taking a lead role in local

planning. Far too few LEPs were sufficiently well-informed about the extent and range of college provision in their areas.

In recent months, attention has turned to careers guidance. There should be one priority: young people must get the right opportunities to make informed choices about their future — from Year 8 and to the age of 18.

However, reports have concluded that access to independent and impartial careers guidance was wanting.

The Department for Education's guidance for schools must provide much more specific guidance to help schools understand exactly what was expected and how to evaluate the impact of their information, advice and guidance. We found the facilities provided by National Careers Service (NCS) were poorly promoted in schools and grossly under-used.

I'm sometimes asked what incentives schools have for guiding their students to other providers, rather than their own six forms. I believe the answer is in the changing landscape for post-16 education and training, and more specifically in the new 16 to 19 study programmes, including traineeships. The principles for this provision are very clear. Each learner's programme should be tailored to their individual needs and support their plans for future learning and employment. Retention is now the main performance measure for this provision, alongside the achievement of qualifications. So surely it is in the interest of schools and colleges to ensure that young people are on the most suitable programme, at the appropriate level that will support their planned next step? However, if vocational training is to be promoted better, then it needs to be of a much higher quality.

The initial recruitment to traineeships is disappointing. They were designed for young people who need just a step up to increasing their employability so that they are ready for apprenticeships or other employment with training. I fully support the full-time provision for 14 to 16-year-olds in colleges. The number of colleges offering this provision is low this year, and I sincerely hope that many more will decide to open their doors to younger learners next year.



Vince Cable

Business Secretary Vince Cable spoke at the Association of Colleges conference on Wednesday, November 20. Here are excerpts of his written speech.

Getting the industrial strategy off the ground has been my main project over the past 12 months, and colleges have been an important contributor.

Skills, of course, are a key theme running through all the sector strategies.

It is also a specific pillar of the International Education Strategy, launched in July, as we seek to export UK expertise, including in FE provision and management, to markets around the world.

Representatives of Local Enterprise Partnerships [LEPs] are taking up seats on college boards, and vice versa, as a means of forging more productive links.

As part of the spending round in June, we made a £500m skills contribution to the Local Growth Fund for 2015 to 2016, including £330m of capital funding for LEPs to use in tackling local skills priorities.

A further £330m of skills capital funding will be available through the Local Growth Fund in 2016 to 2017 for the same purpose, addressing specific skills needs currently holding back economic expansion.

It is imperative for colleges and LEPs to join forces now on strong proposals for skills investment, ahead of LEPs' Growth Deal negotiations with central government; including for a share of the Local Growth Fund.

Taken together, the college capital invest-

ment funds and the skills capital element of the Local Growth Fund represent a government commitment of more than £1.5bn since May 2010; of that, £730m from the capital investment funds has enabled projects across the country worth more than £2.2bn.

Research conducted by the Association of Colleges, Jisc [formerly the Joint Information Systems Committee] and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has found that many colleges currently have problems, not so much with insufficient bandwidth, but with the resilience of their broadband connections.

Which is why we have agreed to finance improvements to broadband in colleges.

We are currently finalising the detail with Jisc and the AoC and hope to launch the scheme before the end of the year.

Demand for apprenticeships continues to grow, with a third more online applications to the National Apprenticeship Service last year than the year before.

In 2012 to 2013, the provisional figures show almost 3.25 million adult learners taking FE courses.

And, as I happily acknowledged at the Association of Colleges' higher education in FE conference back in March, foundation degrees are proving extremely popular and successful.

We must continue to forge ahead. For instance, we need to work with colleges; and with universities and employers, to achieve further growth in high level apprenticeship numbers.

We often talk about what FE does to reach out to the disadvantaged and the vulnerable.

But I want vocational education to be attractive to everyone, to be seen as a route to professional success and an excellent preparation for life.

Higher education is not just about academic university degrees. It encompasses advanced vocational courses designed by employers, which are frequently delivered at an FE college and taken by students on an apprenticeship programme that might run all the way from HND level through to a Masters degree.



Liam Byrne

Shadow Skills Minister Liam Byrne took part in a panel discussion at the Association of Colleges conference on Wednesday, November 20. Here, he gives an overview of the issues he discussed.

As the grandson of a college principal, the son of a science teacher and MP for the community in Britain with the highest youth unemployment, I'm a passionate believer in the power and potential of FE.

So, let me put some ideas — and some questions — on the table to get the debate started.

First, how do we make FE a much more important crossroads for the communities we serve? For many, one road will lead off to university.

But if we want FE to play a bigger role in helping a wider range of people make it to higher education, then we need to expand colleges' role in providing degree level qualifications.

Lots of things impede this today. So how do

we clear a way?

A second road leads off to very high quality apprenticeships. Travelling around Britain over the last year with our youth jobs taskforce, I've seen hugely impressive apprenticeship agencies where colleges and councils work together with employers to raise demand and give young people a track through education to work.

How do we radically expand this kind of model?

Second, how do we ensure that colleges are crucibles of enterprise for what I think is the most entrepreneurial generation of young people coming through school right now?

Great colleges are great at fostering the enterprise spirit.

That's vital for our country's future and it's a great booster of for young people's chances to work. How do we build on what's best?

Third, I want to see colleges as a critical part of our region's economic infrastructure.

Right now, we have a crazy situation where we have widening skills gaps in areas where unemployment is rising. That tells us something is broken. The answer is more local flexibility over skills funding decisions — and a much better on-the-ground partnership with councils and the Department for Work and Pensions. How do we make that happen?

There are few places where you can change more lives for the better. So I'm looking forward to giving the sector the profile it deserves and a policy agenda to match.

Supporting the 'democratic and expert voice of students

As the government grants colleges more and more freedom to tailor their offers, they should also be sure to remain fully engaged with the learner voice, says Toni Pearce.

It has been widely noted that I am the first president of the National Union of Students [NUS] to come from an FE background, and rather more sensationally, that I do not "believe in university" as a result.

It is nonetheless true that some outsiders may not realise that NUS represents students in FE or that this is in fact the majority of our membership.

We should be aiming for an education sector without the arbitrary divide between 'further' and 'higher'.

And it is imperative, now more than ever, that we help overcome those outdated barriers that students face in transitioning from one education mode to another which typecasts them as certain types of students forever.

At the moment, all things are not equal because FE is incredibly underfunded.

"At the moment, all things are not equal because FE is incredibly underfunded"

We exist to ensure that students have a voice about how public money is spent and it's clear that FE is a sound investment for individuals, communities and society as a whole.

Colleges have to rise to so many complex challenges, which is why we actively want to maintain and develop our relationship with the Association of Colleges to work side by side to develop sustainable and affordable strategies for student engagement.

The relationship between colleges and students' unions is one of partnership and reciprocity, both locally and nationally.

At a national level, much has been achieved through collaboration between the college movement and the student movement.

Colleges have collaborated with students' unions on many campaigns, like winning student loan concessions for access to higher education students and the No Free Lunch campaign.

We simply would not be able to bring these important issues to light without students' unions.

But more needs to be done to ensure the long-term sustainability of student representation within the FE sector.

Students' unions are crucial to education quality and should play an integral role in shaping the student experience.

A strong, supported class representatives structure should be the bare minimum re-



quirement for student voice in education.

Students' unions are key to getting the student experience right in FE.

We need colleges and students' unions to work together to help overcome the longer-term impact of cuts to enrichment funding.

Young people are being starved of the societal and cultural experiences once funded by this entitlement, which is an enormous threat to employability and academic progression.

Colleges should harness the power of their students' unions in the messages about the quality of their institutions.

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock is keen to see college data shared openly, something which we wholeheartedly support, but we need to improve the quality and accessibility of learner satisfaction data. The student voice should be nurtured, but it also needs to be evidence-led.

That is not to say that student representation isn't taken seriously in the sector.

The Education and Training Foundation has recognised that the student voice is crucial to the development of our institutions, and that decisions relating to policy and practice can't and won't be taken without the expert view of students, whether in a governance or advisory capacity.

In recent years, colleges have been given significantly more freedom and autonomy, which is very much welcomed.

I know that the sector is capable of demonstrating excellent practice, in leadership, governance, and in quality assurance.

But equally, I believe in the need for safeguards to protect students, some of whom are the most vulnerable members of our society. Their disadvantage should not be compounded by a poor experience at college.

Learning to work with student leaders is challenging, but supporting the democratic and expert voice of students is key to equipping those students and their peers to face the future.

It is a key contribution that colleges can make to their communities and society, and one that should not be ignored.

Toni Pearce, president, National Union of Students

Shadow minister sets out h



The Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt, chose the Association of Colleges conference as the venue for his first speech since taking on the role in early October. He used the opportunity to outline policies laid down by his party's Skills Taskforce in its second report, entitled *Transforming further education: A new mission to deliver excellence in technical education*. Here are extracts from his pre-prepared speech along with some of the key recommendations from the Skills Taskforce report, published on November 21.

In government, it will be an early and vital priority to rebuild our careers service for young people.

They are being failed at the moment — and we can see the social and economic consequences all around us.

And these failings particularly hurt vocational education — where the routes to qualifications and accreditation are often harder to decipher.

I want to make it very clear that raising the status, the standing and the standards of vocational education will be a signal task of Labour's time in office.

It is why I chose to come to this conference to give my first speech as Shadow Education Secretary.

For there can be no transformation of vocational education in this country; no change in the fortunes of the forgotten fifty per cent; no improvement on social mobility, without the hard work and dedication of the people in this room.

If that were not already clear, then the shocking findings of two recent reports — from Alan Milburn on social mobility and from the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] on our numeracy and literacy skills — have made it so with devastating emphasis.

When social mobility has ground to a

halt; when older age groups have better numeracy and literacy skills than our young people; and when the long tail of underperformance wags hardest in the 14 to 19 age range; then none of us can afford to be complacent.

But this is not just about social justice. It is also a matter of absolute economic urgency.

Just as in 1997 we saw that higher education expansion was vital for our future competitiveness we now realise how vital vocational excellence is for the same reason.

Byzantine funding regimes; perverse incentives; shambolic co-ordination; central government and its agencies have a lot to answer for when we consider the proliferation of qualifications and the breadth of provision.

Where academic rigour is strong it is absolutely right that colleges continue to deliver A Levels and send students to higher education.

But the most important thing we can do to deliver vocational excellence is to bring about a transformation in apprenticeship provision, both in terms of quality and quantity.

We will say to business: 'If you want a major government contract you must provide apprenticeships for the next

is vision for the future of FE

“But this is not just about social justice. It is also a matter of absolute economic urgency



Photos by Andy Whitehead

generation’.

But we will give employers more control over skills standards and funding.

And we would guarantee quality by ensuring that apprenticeships are all level three or above qualifications and last a minimum of two years.

Of course mandating that apprenticeships should be of level three standard does not remove the need or demand for level two qualifications.

But that is what I would call a real traineeship.

Indeed, the truth is that too many apprenticeships in this country are delivered at a level that would not be recognised as an apprenticeship in places like Germany.

And in far too many cases they are a cover for the repackaged re-training of existing employees.

But changes to apprenticeships are only one half of the equation.

Alongside delivering the off-the-job training component of apprenticeships, this must be where FE applies its focus.

Alongside compulsory English and maths, our Tech Bacc would be accredited by business and contain a work experience requirement.

However, a gold-standard must be seen that way by all — by parents, businesses, colleges and, most of all, by young people themselves.

So the Tech Bacc must only be delivered by highly qualified lecturers, who understand how to tailor curricula and pedagogy to the needs of learners and employers.

So I can announce today that as part of Labour’s new mission for FE, colleges who demonstrate strong performance

in specialist vocational teaching; strong links with local employers; and high quality English and maths provision would be recognised as specialist Institutes of Technical Education.

And only Institutes of Technical Education would be licensed to deliver our gold-standard Tech Bacc and the off-the-job component of apprenticeships.

What is more, to make absolutely sure that business buys-in to our gold standard, we will take advice from the UK Commission on Employment and Skills responsible for determining the exact criteria for awarding the licenses.

With this comes a renewed focus on English and maths.

Numeracy and literacy are the most basic 21st century skills. Contrary to the government, we think it is right to follow the lead of our international competitors by making English and maths compulsory to 18 for all students.

And part of the answer certainly lies with improving teacher quality. Better teaching equals better standards.

So, unlike the Government, we would require that all FE lecturers hold a teaching qualification and because English and maths is so important to our educational performance, we would ensure that all FE teachers hold a teaching qualification at level two or above in English and maths.

We would allow the Education and Training Foundation to set tough minimum standards on qualification and CPD requirements for teachers in FE colleges.

And we would improve vocational excellence by ensuring that teachers spend a period of time in their industry each year, developing their specialist area.

Key recommendations from the Labour Skills Taskforce

1 Give FE colleges a new mission to provide Labour’s gold-standard vocational qualifications

Eligible FE colleges would be known as Institutes of Technical Education and as such permitted to deliver Labour’s proposed Tech Bacc, as well as the apprenticeship off-the-job component. Eligibility would require specialist vocational teaching and expertise; high quality English and maths provision; and strong employer and labour market links. One option would be to give UKCES responsibility for determining the process and eligibility criteria as part of a more simplified approach to funding and quality assurance.

2 Raise standards in vocational teaching and pedagogy

FE lecturers teaching young people would hold a teaching qualification and level two or above in English and maths. Teaching qualifications would incorporate expertise in curricula design and pedagogy to ensure vocational teachers are able to work with employers to tailor courses to local economic needs. Lecturers not actively working in their specialist area would also be required to

spend a period of time in industry every year. Qualification and CPD requirements should be set by the Education and Training Foundation.

Skills competitions would be mainstreamed to motivate excellence in vocational teaching and learning by enabling students to compete regionally and nationally on the basis of their vocational skills across different sectors.

3 Strengthen links between colleges and local employers

In return for more tailored training and services, colleges would seek to establish something-for-something deals with employers — asking that they contribute through participation on governing boards, capital expenditure, contributions to course costs, or by providing opportunities for work experience, on-the-job training, staff secondments and industry placements. To promote a more integrated approach with local growth strategies, Institutes of Technical Education would be guaranteed a place on the Local Enterprise Partnership board.

Colleges would play a far more dynamic and active role in providing research and consultancy to support innovation, growth and new ways of working in their local economies, as is the case in many northern European countries.

Sector leaders speak out over Labour announcements

Martin Doel, chief executive of the Association of Colleges (pictured below), said: “We will be examining the detail of the proposals laid out by Tristram Hunt, and we are keen to know more about the plans for new technical colleges and where these will stand within the current, rapidly evolving post-14 education landscape.

“Colleges already provide high quality vocational provision so it will be interesting to see how this can be enhanced via these proposed new institutions.”

Lynne Sedgmore, executive director of the 157 Group, said: “We are interested in the idea that colleges that demonstrate commitment to high quality in pedagogy and work with employers would be able to secure privileges in relation to funding opportunities, and are especially pleased with the aspiration that this will apply to all colleges.”

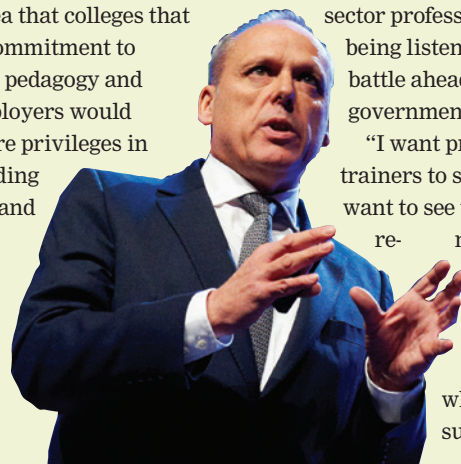
Peter Rob-

erts, chair of the 157 Group and chief executive of Leeds City College, said: “Plans to secure the professionalism of teachers in FE and the place of colleges in local enterprise partnership arrangements are positive steps, and there is a strong sense that these plans are motivated by a genuine desire to raise the status of vocational teaching and learning.

“We look forward to continued close involvement with the formulation of these detailed policies.”

Joe Vinson, National Union of Students vice president for FE, said: “We’re excited by this announcement as it shows that sector professionals and students are being listened to, but we’ve still got a battle ahead of us to get the coalition government to change their position.

“I want professional teachers and trainers to stay at the heart of FE. I want to see their professional status re-main, and I want them given the recognition and support they deserve, because great and skilled teachers are what makes achieving and supported students.”



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STON

Students snap up camera honours and

Rebecca Cooney
@RebeccaKCooney

After the discussion and debates of the first two days of conference, the gala dinner on Wednesday night offered a chance to digest some ideas — along with a

three-course meal, prepared and served by students.

Another student provided the entertainment for the evening — 18-year-old classical singer Megan J Ingham held the audience spellbound with famous arias and her own new single.

But the dinner wasn't just for delegates to relax — the winners of the Student of the Year and the Student Pho-

tographer of the Year awards were announced, celebrating the hard work and creativity of learners this year.

Colleges which have excelled in the past year were recognised earlier in the conference, during the opening speeches, when Skills Minister Matthew Hancock handed out the Association of College's Beacon Awards for high quality FE.

Lonesome goalie shot scores photo winner



Paul Hands, student photography competition winner, with NOCN chief executive Graham Hasting-Evans and AoC chair Carol Stott. Inset: Paul Hands's winning photo

A North Warwickshire and Hinckley College student snapped up first place in the Association of Colleges' student photographer of the year award.

Paul Hands' image of a lonesome goalkeeper on a frozen pitch caught the judges' eyes because it was "an atmospheric shot, where the viewer can almost feel the cold".

The photo came out of a project for Paul's level three art and design course, called the Back Side of Football.

"I set out to photograph everything about football except the ball," said 38-year-old Paul.

As a mature student, Paul said he was really embracing his time at college.

"I'm just really pleased to be back in education,

studying something I have a passion for," he said.

"The first time in education I found it boring and rubbish.

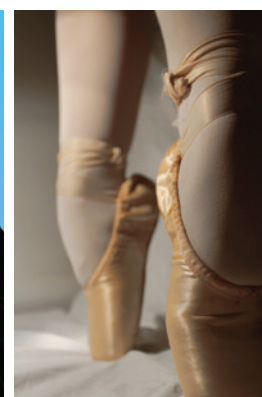
"Now I've moved on to the foundation degree and I really want to push myself by going on to do the BA and the Masters."

He added: "Winning the award really brilliant... it was nice to have someone recognise my work."

In second place was Joanna Sartain, 17, from St Brendan's Sixth Form College, with her picture of a ballerina's feet in ballet shoes, while Brockenhurst College student Lucie Grisdale, 18, clinched third wither shot of a rugby player's legs and the ball as they line up to take the kick.



Second-placed Joanna Sartain. Right: Joanna's photo



Third-placed Lucie Grisdale. Right: Lucie's photo



college efforts praise

Student of the year



The Association of Colleges student of the year award was won by Barking and Dagenham College student and charity founder Vicky Knight.

Vicky suffered 33 per cent burns in an arson attack on her parents' pub when she was eight, leaving her with scars and low self-esteem.

Now, aged 18 and studying health and social care, Vicky has founded Scar Quality, a charity dedicated to offering support to burns victims.

"It has been an adventure," said Vicky, who is still hospital regular because of her terrible injuries.

She said it was "amazing" to be student of the year, which comes with a cash prize of £1,000.

"I was shocked but I'm so happy that I've won, I've done the college proud, I hope," she said.

Vicky wasn't the only student in line for recognition — students in second and third place were also honoured.

Following Vicky was Warwickshire College student Luca Frondella, 18, who, despite dyslexia which troubled him at school,

achieved three starred distinctions in his level three BTEC in 3D design.

He has been wowing visitors to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, where his design for a solar and wind-powered portable charging station is on display.

Luca, who won £650, said: "It means a lot because it shows hard work pays off and it's good to get recognition that's bigger than just your tutors or your college."

"It was great to hear about other people's achievements too, though I was very nervous standing in front of those people."

Kieran Beavis, 19 and from South Gloucester and Stroud College, came third and won £350. He struggled with behavioural issues before discovering his love of performing arts through helping out on a performing arts course for adults with learning and physical difficulties.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do," said Kieran.

"So I threw chairs and shouted and things like that. It sounds childish to say it now and looking back, it was childish."

He added: "It was pretty great to get where I got — third, second or first, it doesn't really matter, it was just amazing."

From left: Keiran Beavis, Luca Frondella, Carole Stott, Vicky Knight and Joe Vinson



Photo by Andy Whitehead

Colleges from across the UK have been honoured for their excellence and innovation

Paul Offord

@PaulOfford

The 16 winners of this year's Association of Colleges' (AoC) Beacon Awards — known to some in the sector as the "FE Oscars" — were announced at the annual conference in Birmingham.

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock (pictured) and Lord Willis of Knaresborough, president of the AoC's charitable trust, announced the winners.

Roger Marriott, the Beacon Awards' chief assessor, said: "I have been greatly impressed by the initiatives which have been identified."

"The dedication and passion shown by these winning colleges to ensure that individuals are given the opportunity to realise their full potential is inspirational."

The winners included Kingston College, in Surrey. It was recognised for its student support programme, which features an induction event involving theatrical performances looking at issues such as drugs and racism.

John Wheatley College, in Glasgow, was awarded for its youth access programme, which aims to raise the aspirations of deprived 12 to 19-year-olds.

City of Bath College, in Somerset, was recognised for its practical approach to transforming learners into skilled craftsmen. For example, stonemasonry students learned new skills by helping to restore a Nineteenth Century Victorian gothic mansion in the Cotswolds.

The Beacon Awards were launched in 1994 to highlight the quality of education in FE.

Beacon award-winning colleges

The 1st4sport qualifications and sports coach UK award for sport in the curriculum — Salford City College

The AQA award for college/school partnerships — Loughborough College

The AoC award for college engagement with employers — Birmingham Metropolitan College

The AoC award for outstanding leadership of improvement — Walsall College

The CoLRiC award for the effective integration of libraries/learning resources centres in curriculum delivery — Northern College

The City & Guilds Award for staff development in FE — Chichester College

The Edge award for practical teaching and practical learning — City of Bath College

The Jisc award for efficiency through effective use of technology in FE and skills — Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor

The JLT employee benefits award for health and community care — Northbrook College Sussex

The Microlink and AoC Charitable Trust inclusive learning award for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities — East Kent College

The NAMSS award for student services — Kingston College

The OCR award for innovation in FE — Harlow College

The Pearson Award for widening participation to lifelong learning — Southern Regional College

The UCAS award for higher education in FE — Grimsby Institute

The University of Southampton award for 14 to 19 widening participation — John Wheatley College

The Welsh Government award for development of literacy and numeracy — Coleg Cambria



VOX POPS

Rebecca Cooney
 @RebeccaKCooney

More than 1,000 delegates flocked to the conference, and on Thursday morning, with just a few hours left, *FE Week* got out and about to see what their highlights had been.

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE CONFERENCE?

ROBERT POWELL
 SENIOR PARTNER IPS LLP

It has been very interesting. It has been very enjoyable as a commercial organisation to listen to the student and skills side of FE. We have gone to vice principals for finance to get paid for our work but we rarely speak to curriculum managers or those who deal with students.

The highlight for me has been the ideas that have come out of it.



LEDA LOPES
 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
 COORDINATOR AT SPORTS LEADERS UK

It has been brilliant, it's been a great opportunity for networking, and getting our theme out there. I'm sure it's helped to be able to answer questions people might have about what we do.

The highlight for me has been that chance to network with other organisations.



HELEN CRISOSTOMO
 FE ACCOUNT MANAGER UNIT 4
 BUSINESS SOFTWARE

Really good opportunity for us to see and talk to new people and meet up with our existing clients. The highlight for me was the gala dinner — I thought the performance was amazing.



DAVID HUGHES
 CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NIACE

It's been good, I have been pleased because people have started to talk about older people and we need to talk about unemployed adults as well as focussing on young people.

I have been concerned about funding because normally there would have been a chance to find out more about funding before the autumn statement and discuss it at conference. I think the singer at the gala dinner was the highlight — it was such a professional piece of art.



CHRISTINE BULLOCK
 CHIEF EXECUTIVE APT AWARDS

It's been our first time as exhibitors. It's gone really well, it's been really well organised, but I would say it's been a bit disappointing that there haven't been any big announcements. People come to hear the latest news about the sector and there hasn't been anything major announced. The highlight has been the students — the singer at the gala dinner last night, the apprentice who talked about her experiences on the first night, and the student of the year award winners last night.



DR CATHERINE RICHARDS
 DEPUTY PRINCIPAL AT EAST NORFOLK
 SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

It's gone really well. I've found it really interesting trying to measure the scope of what's happening in FE at the moment. I had the opportunity to work with Tristram Hunt and that was great, feeling that he was listening to me just as we were listening to him and being involved in shaping FE policy.

That was the highlight for me, along with the speech by Sugata Mitra.





CLAIRE GILL
 DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
 THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING
 FOUNDATION

I think it's gone really well. It has been a really positive event and we've had the opportunity to affirm the foundation. The highlight has been being able to show that foundation is here for the sector with its new chief executive.



ANTHONY BRAVO PRINCIPAL
 BASINGSTOKE COLLEGE OF
 TECHNOLOGY

It was very enjoyable — it was great catching up with old friends. The politicians were politicians, but it's been great for planning for the next year.

The best thing about the conference for me has been *FE Week* [Mr Bravo was the newspaper's profile interview subject the week of conference].



SARAH PHILLIPS
 MANAGING DIRECTOR WISE PAY

It has been really good for us, it's been great to hear everything that's been going on in the sector. This was our third time exhibiting and we've found it really valuable every time.

I think the highlight has been meeting existing clients and new people — the delegates have all been really friendly and approachable.

MARTIN DOEL
 CHIEF EXECUTIVE AOC

It's been tiring, really hard work but really enjoyable. I've only heard about three people talking from the point of view of what I call a deficit agenda, and that's good because we should be talking about what we can do to support colleges.

The highlight? Surviving to fight another year. Actually, it's as much an opportunity for the sector to come together to talk with each other as it is to hear from the main stage.



Conference attendees from the Chinese delegation (photos by Andy Whitehead)

Principals in China collaboration talks

College principals met delegates from China for talks on collaboration.

The UK-China Vocational College Principals' Dialogue event, at the Association of Colleges conference, took place under the heading of Building Partnerships for Competitiveness, Mobility and Prosperity.

More than 70 vocational college principals and senior staff from the UK and China attended, along with senior representatives from the British Council, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Chinese Embassy in the UK.

They looked at areas for collaboration and issued a joint statement pledging to strengthen and improve college partnerships.

Xu Rongkuan, principal of Yangzhou

Vocational and Technical College, said: "Both sides agreed to further strengthen cultural exchanges, explore college to college enterprise, co-operation in personnel training, curriculum development, professional development and aspects of a professional qualification system."

Michele Sutton, president of the Association of Colleges, said: "It was very interesting to meet with the Chinese delegation to talk about the challenges we both face."

"We are looking forward to working with them in future to benefit both our students and theirs through the joint statement we signed."

"We are also investigating ways that we can learn from each other to develop transnational vocational and technical education systems."

The talks took place on November 19.

The AoC chief executive shares his th



Rebecca Cooney
@RebeccaKCooney

After an exhausting few days, Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel shared his thoughts with *FE Week* editor Nick Linford.

The pair talked all things conference in a 45-minute webinar, sponsored by Tribal. Here are some of the key moments.

Nick Linford: So, we heard from the president of the Association of Colleges, Michele Sutton, who was shortly followed by Skills Minister Matthew Hancock.

There were two main things that came out of that. Let's start with careers advice, and the Careers Guidance: Guaranteed campaign. How's that going, and what vibes did you get about this from Mr Hancock?

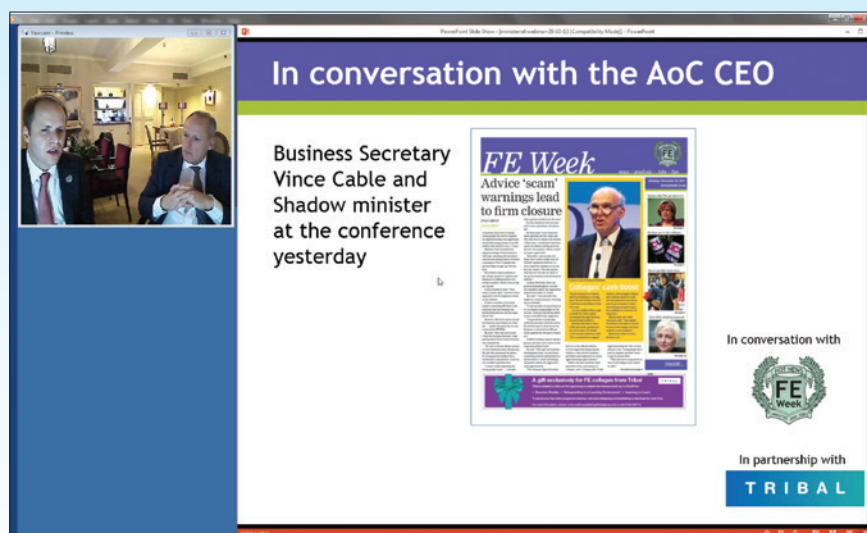
Martin Doel: There are students who start courses inappropriately in schools, and then have to transfer to a college. So we are paying for longer training/education than young people need and affecting their futures, because that advice is leading them to the wrong choices for them. That's the personal, social and human impact.

I think we're getting movement. This is sometimes, I think, how things get changed. At that one stage, we get back

from the Department for Education [DfE]: "There isn't a problem with careers education." So, no problem ... or the DfE doesn't think there is. Then suddenly you get this select committee saying: "There's a problem."

NL: We need to see Ofsted reports that are very critical where that doesn't happen.

MD: That would be the turning point — clear accountability.



Then you get Ofsted saying "there's a problem". There's an acceptance there is a problem.

Ofsted-reported colleges need to be judged on the effectiveness of the careers education they are providing.

Ofsted ought to be asking "have you invited partners into your school to actually give young people the widest range of choices?"

As far as I'm concerned, Ofsted has put careers advice and guidance in special measures — declared it inadequate. When they declare a college to be inadequate, they go and re-inspect in a year's time.

NL: Let's switch a little bit — Mr Hancock ... did say the apprenticeship funding will go to employers. What's your view on this reform, and do you think it's go-

ing to happen?

MD: The consultation is still out, so clearly the minister may have made his mind up.

Mr Hancock could do these things theoretically, but practically it's a whole other world. You can make proposals in Whitehall — most people think Universal Credit, in a sense, is a good idea. It's one allowance. Doing it? It's hugely different.

What we'd do, is we would approach it in a very careful, considered way. If it were with PAYE, I would struggle to see how you can do a pilot.

NL: We potentially have a minister here who wants a very significant change on his watch, it relates to the treasury, which is his background, and the chance is fantastic — if it's successful. But they are not around forever, and what sort of mess may we be left in if we do get whole-sale change?

MD: I am very concerned about that. I mean, we have corresponded about it ... I am concerned about not only the idea, but how you implement an idea. If the employers are getting the money directly, they've got all the same accountabilities, the same audit requirements, the same quality requirements for them to actually do it.

Thoughts after the three day conference



From left: The webinar attendee view of Nick Linford interviewing Martin Doel from the FE Week hotel room on the top floor of the Hyatt Hotel

NL: We had Business Secretary Vince Cable make an announcement on capital. It sounded to me like it's not new money but there's an opportunity to get colleges to get their hands on it sooner.

MD: I am assuming people know that there is a problem with cash flow between this year and next year. I imagine that was achieved in the face of a lot of opposition.

NL: Tristram Hunt, our new Shadow Education Secretary, has announced that, in office, the Labour Party would introduce something called Institutes of Technical Education. In a sense it would be a badge, wouldn't it?

MD: The word 'technical' connected to a college has a long history, and you still go to some towns and they still talk about 'the tech' — the technical college. It's got a ring, it's something you might recognise from the sector, so... it's interesting.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is meant to be a social partnership, I think it is, but it needs to involve all its partners in deriving whatever criteria they might come up with in the proposals. I think they could probably go to no better source than Frank McLoughlin's review from the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning.

He came up with four criteria for good vocational teaching and learning, which are: dual professional staff, industry-standard facilities, a clear line of sight to work and a two-way street of continuing conversation with industry

NL: The core point here is: is the system broken? These are very radical proposals ... it's a very big system and we are not starting from a blank piece of paper. So if it's not broken, the question is, how radical does it need to be? And some of these things look quite concerning, unless you think we need a huge shake-up. Do we?

MD: No. I would argue that any college doing its job right, which is the very, great majority of all colleges, should be able to represent themselves, should they wish, as an institute of technical education.

NL: So, onto this closing speech. You had this metaphor of the 'burning platform'.

MD: Yes ... creating a burning platform. There is a tendency, if you want to get change, to create an emergency. A crisis. Children being failed! Young people being failed! We've got to do something — NOW! [The conference] was refreshingly absent of that. There wasn't a lot of criticism about what colleges were doing.

NL: Let's look at one of these — we've just had these new numbers from the DfE, saying colleges are failing young people who nearly get their English and maths GCSEs.

MD: Many colleges tell me, even if the student has got GCSE grade C, their functional numeracy isn't good enough to start their vocational programme.

Employers recognise GCSEs, only GCSEs are testing the wrong things. So what do you do? Do you call it functional skills, key skills, which doesn't get the bite with employers, or do you actually go back to the qualification and use that?

I actually think there is a lot of room for, say, breaking the GCSE down into two and calling it pure and applied maths. If a young person doesn't achieve the applied part of the maths GCSE by 16,



- Creating a burning platform
- Pushing water uphill
- Boiling the ocean

then it's the college's job to get them through applied maths. That's what the OECD report was actually reporting — that functional numeracy and literacy was not of the required standard. Getting kids to bang their heads against the wall for 11 years, and then giving us the job to keep banging their head against the wall for another two years, thinking something different is going to happen seems a bit nonsensical to me.

Employers tell us contradictory things. They want GCSE maths and English. But they want numerate students in order to do a job and apply their skills. Let's go back and think about what we're producing, and actually use their time best at 16 to 18 to meet the needs of employers.

NL: What's the highlight for you?

MD: The 'do we have too many hairdressers?' debate — I was really pleased that it wasn't about 'do we have too many hairdressers?' It was about vocational education, and its core.

There were two elements. One, student demand doesn't equal employer need. If someone turns up at college... at Bridgewater College, who are doing really great work with the nuclear industry ... and says, "I want to do performing arts," it's no good telling them that we're doing nuclear engineering, that's what we're open for today, because they would either

become disengaged or they would just go somewhere else. So, you know... it's that breadth of opportunity that we do need. Every college wants every young person to have the most prosperous and most stretching career that they can have. Colleges, I think, work as hard as they can to reconcile student demand with employer need. You don't do it on your own. It's a co-operative enterprise. And it's actually something you achieve over time. So just saying, "There are too many hairdressers, do me more engineers," it doesn't work that way.

The other thing that came out very strongly ... is what I call 'education through the vocational' — developing transferrable skills so the student may progress into other areas. I was interested in the audience. Emily Maitlis, the presenter, asked how many people in the audience are doing the career for which they trained, and if what they started is where they ended, and just about no-one put their hand up. Everyone put their hand up and said, "I ended up somewhere else," which I didn't expect.

You know, universities over-train huge numbers of archaeologists against what the museum sector requires — and they don't seem to be questioned about that. This is not just so simple as to say, "too few engineers, too many hairdressers." Let's work together to match the needs of the employer, and get student demands shaped to where the nation needs it.

This is a whole system change. Taking one part of the system, which is colleges, and holding them to account solely for this isn't the answer.

It's about funding mechanisms, it's about accountability mechanisms, advice and guidance, about employers articulating better what their offer is, it's about social media.

It's about the media portraying certain activities as attractive to women... we've got a deficit of women engineers in this country.



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