

# Countdown

a weekly email briefing distributed  
to work-based learning providers

Issue 478 9<sup>th</sup> July 2010

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## **'One voice' representing the providers of quality workforce development skills**

Working with government and employers to develop policies and deliver high quality, learner centred, employer focused, demand-led skills development, valued by all.

### **ALP responds to Minister's request for ideas**

In response to Skills Minister, John Hayes', challenge to ALP to tell him what should be done to maintain high quality performance within the FE system during times of financial restrictions, he was sent a brief paper outlining half a dozen critical issues to be considered. The paper has been posted today on the [ALP website](#).

These thoughts were also presented (again) this week when ALP Chairman Martin Dunford, Chief Executive Graham Hoyle, and several ALP members articulated their views over dinner in the House of Commons. The Minister was accompanied by several members of his staff, including policy adviser, Scott Kelly, and declared himself in substantial agreement with the many points raised.

Specifically, he reiterated his sympathy for the ALP line on functional skills, and was hoping to be able to come to an early decision on this critical issue. He was also supportive of our arguments for the need for properly designed 'pre-Apprenticeship' provision and was grateful for our offer to help in designing such a programme, and understood how important it would be to ensure independent providers were able to access Government funding for any eventual delivery.

He was also much taken with our arguments to strip out all the unnecessary expense of justifying how we deliver and have to account for our training programmes, such as guided learning hours and other activities focused solely on training 'processes'. ALP members argued that they should be rightly held accountable for delivering successful outcomes – frameworks, qualifications, etc – but given the flexibility to deliver the desired end products based on their own professional expertise.

Members assessed the evening as highly successful, with a new Minister who was clearly well informed and demonstrably listening to opinions and proposals from the front line. It augured well for future dialogues, and there is no doubt that members are looking forward to hearing what he has to say at next week's ALP conference.

### **Chris Banks' report on fees published this week**

This important review of the 'co-financing' of further education programmes was published this week and delivered to ministers. The objective was to review the extent to which skills and other training are, or should be, co-financed between the Government, employers and individuals. It follows on from the previous Government's earlier skills strategies declaring their intention to develop a more obviously shared responsibility for funding skills development. It is well known that co-funding assumptions for much FE provision, including for example 19+ Apprenticeships, has not resulted in the assumed contributions actually being made – or certainly not as cash contributions. The many examples of providers undercutting each other with offers of 'free training' has done nothing to establish the expectations of direct employer/individual contributions, and the imminent likelihood of budget reductions all conspired to commission a review of what was necessary/desirable/feasible.

The review calls for a much more transparent declaration of the actual costs of provision (it's never free) indicating much more clearly the maximum contribution that the Government is prepared to

make. The recommendations suggest that the employer's or individual's minimum contribution should be confirmed prior to triggering the Government contribution, and that this minimum contribution cannot be reduced or waived by providers – so preserving a genuine level playing field in this controversial area.

The new Government's reaction will of course be awaited with real interest, and is likely to be finalised after a formal consultation. The way forward is unlikely to be determined until all providers are given the opportunity to comment on the recommendations.

## **W2W sector out in force in Liverpool**

It seemed that just about everyone who was anyone was in Liverpool last week for the annual Inclusion Welfare to Work Convention.

In contrast to some recent years the event was clearly sold out with standing room only for some plenary speakers in the huge main auditorium of the convention centre. After an attention-grabbing opening video, Dave Simmonds OBE, Director of CESI, opened proceedings talking of the "seismic shift" currently underway in the sector, and introducing Minister for Work Chris Grayling MP to the stage. For his part the Minister set the tone of many presentations to come - short on some areas of detail, but impressing delegates with the tone and direction of current thinking which clearly owes much to Work and Pensions Secretary of State Iain Duncan-Smith. Adam Sharples, Director-General (Employment) of DWP gave a broad analysis of the "state of the nation" which contextualised the landscape in which current welfare to work reforms are taking place.

Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, spoke late on the first day, noting that in his three previous visits as a speaker to the convention he had been a Labour adviser, a Labour spokesman, a Conservative spokesman, before now assuming his role as a Minister! Of particular note was a full answer that he gave to a question from the audience about the place of skills training in employability contracts, saying that the welfare to work system had been "schizophrenic" about the place of training and skills, but he had no doubt that the twin tracks of skills and employability had to converge.

Martin Dunford, ALP's Chairman, led a well-attended seminar on Day two which he co-hosted with Alan Cave, Delivery Director of DWP, and Rob Murdoch, Chair of ERSA, outlining provider views of the new Work Programme and reinforcing ALP's position as the leading representative body in this area. Paul Warner, ALP's Director of Employment and Skills, also took a well-received seminar analysing the impact of age and demographics on skills and employability policies.

To close the day, the previous Minister for Work Jim Knight - now Lord Knight of Weymouth - addressed delegates thanking them for their hard work over the previous years and set out a considered position for effective and constructive political opposition.

Overall, this was once again an excellent event which is a highlight in the calendar of the employability sector's year. Hopefully this time next year, the new concepts of the coalition government will be well under way and we can begin to truly evaluate their impact on the economy at this crucial time.

## **ALP SMT meet work-based learning's Regional Chairs.**

As part of a regular cycle of meetings, ALP's senior management team were in Birmingham earlier this week to discuss current issues and developments with the chairs of regional work-based learning networks. The issues themselves will come as no surprise - functional skills, minimum contract values, inspection and PLAs were just some of the subjects covered - but all agreed that the chance to compare notes from across the country helps all of our individual operations greatly and adds huge collective weight to our lobbying abilities.

ALP Conference 2010 – July 14<sup>th</sup> /15<sup>th</sup>, Riverbank Plaza, Central London

# alp The Forum for Employment & Skills

## LAST CHANCE TO BOOK!!

As Countdown was going to print it was clear that only the very last few places for Day One are still available, with only a few more available for Day Two - indeed it is likely that before the weekend is out the event will have completely sold out.

With such a strong speaker line-up coming at such a key time, we should of course hardly be surprised! As mentioned earlier **John Hayes MP**, the new Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, will be speaking to delegates to outline his vision for the future of the sector under the new coalition government, as will **Lord David Freud**, Minister for Welfare Reform. At what is thought to be their first joint public appearance together, **Geoff Russell** CEO of the Skills Funding Agency, **Simon Waugh** CEO of the National Apprenticeship Service and **Peter Lauener** CEO of the Young People's Learning Agency will address delegates. Other speakers include:

- **Martin Dunford**, Chairman, ALP
- **Chris Humphries**, CEO UKCES
- **Christine Gilbert**, Chief Inspector, Ofsted
- **Matthew Nicholas**, Director, JCP
- **Martin Doel**, CEO, AOC
- **Judith Rutherford**, Director, London Skills and Employment Board
- **Gary Tovey**, EDI
- **Peter Butler**, Director of Learning, BT

There is also a packed two-day itinerary of interactive workshops from all over the vocational skills landscape, including contributions from the likes of BIS, DWP, YPLA, UKCES, CESI, and SFA, plus an extensive exhibition area. At the end of Day One there will be a free drinks reception, followed by a Gala Dinner which may be booked separately, providing excellent networking opportunities.

Hosted by the BBC's **Susanna Reid**, this is set to be one of the most important events in our sector this year. This may be your very last chance to ensure that you and your organisation are amongst the best-informed as we enter what is likely to be the most challenging economic climate that the sector, under a new coalition government, has had to face for decades. Full details of the agenda, accommodation, speakers, workshops and an online booking facility are now available using [this link](#) or click the main logo above.

Held in association with:





**ALP Member Events** are internal meetings organised by ALP and restricted to **members only**. To attend, please register your interest by clicking on the meeting link below.

If any Member experiences difficulty registering online, please contact [Marilyn Harper](mailto:Marilyn.Harper@alp.org.uk) via email.

The following ALP Special Interest Groups (SIG) & Sector Strategic Issues Meetings (SIM) are now open for registration:

[Care](#) 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010, 9.30am – 3.00pm (Tea/Coffee on arrival, lunch provided) Sheffield

[Welfare to Work](#) 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010, 1.30pm – 3.30pm (Tea/Coffee on arrival) London

[14-19](#) 4<sup>th</sup> August 2010 9:30am (Tea/Coffee) 10:00am – 3:30pm (lunch provided) Sheffield

### **Provider Focus Workshops**

[How to win Open and Competitive tenders and Succeed in the Prime Contractor Environment](#)

12<sup>th</sup> August 2010 – Maple House, City Centre, Birmingham

[Critical Business & FAM Compliance Practices for Providers of WBL](#)

19<sup>th</sup> August 2010 – Maple House, City Centre, Birmingham

*And don't forget **The ALP Conference 2010** on July 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> 2010 at the Plaza Riverbank, Central London - [book now!](#)*

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