

Post-election dream

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For many years the FE sector has suffered the biggest cuts from central government due to its status as a secondary back-up education sector, despite the fact that many of the skills needed for the future to enable growth are taught in FE. Recently we have seen some attempts to reverse some of these cuts due to the cost of utilities such as gas and electricity increasing massively and impacting on other areas of the budget.

Talking shop

After the election I would like to see the FE sector brought fully back into the state system, with collective bargaining and an Association of Colleges (AOC) that not only recommends pay rises and policies but has the power to implement them as well. Currently colleges can be members of what is just a talking shop with no power. We need to see all FE colleges have the same terms and conditions like the Red Book across the sector, not the 160-odd different terms and conditions that now exist. Centralisation would make it much easier to attract and retain staff, with no shifts to the college paying more than other colleges in the area. This would mean stability for students as well as not seeing a constant revolving door of agency and permanent staff, which creates a poor learning environment. I would like to see national pay scales which have parity with the pre-16 and sixth form pay scales, which can only be achieved with collective bargaining.

On funding, I would like to see a minimum of a three-year funding plan, from one government stakeholder, which would be renewed before the end of the second year for both revenue and capital costs, allowing the sector to plan better

for the future. I would like to see an end to forever changing the curriculum and introducing new qualifications before the other qualifications that have been introduced have had time to bed in and for employers to recognise them. I would like to see the apprentice levy used more imaginatively, instead of billions being unused and sent back to the treasury when we have a national skills shortage.

The current rules on GCSE retakes need to be changed; there is nothing more demoralising than sitting the maths GCSE each year and still not achieving a pass mark. It is cruel and torturous to put young people through this each year. It can also lead to them becoming disaffected from their vocational choice. What we want is a choice in the Study Programme and the funding model currently used. Let the student decide if they want to do the GCSE or a Functional Skill appropriate to their current ability. This would, I believe, lead to a better pass rate in the FE sector for GCSE, and also allow the student to see progress in Functional Skills, learning something that they will use in life rather than an academic GCSE.

I don't hold out much hope for the funding, but hopefully the latter will come to pass and students will be learning areas that will come in useful for later life.
