

**Written Evidence, FE and Skills Inquiry, Education Select Committee**

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## Written Evidence by Charlynn Pullen (FES0061)

### Education Committee

#### Further Education and Skills

I am an academic focusing on post-16 education, with recent publications on apprenticeships, skills forecasting, and generic skills in the 14-19 curriculum. I have worked in research on Further Education (FE) and Skills for nearly 20 years at organisations including the Learning and Skills Network and City & Guilds. I worked in research at the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) from 2014-2020, where in the latter years I was Head of Research and Evaluation. That role involved leading on the FE workforce data collection (now run by DfE), a training needs analysis for staff in the sector, and overseeing all the evaluations of our continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. Further to this, I was a Governor at Milton Keynes College Group from 2017-2023, where I chaired a range of committees. I was a Governor at the University of Bedfordshire in 2020-2023. At both organisations, I was the link governor on apprenticeships. I have produced this document based on my research and experiences.

#### Curriculum and qualifications in further education

1. The quality of provision is affected by the continuing professional development (CPD) available for FE teaching staff. Our evaluation of the post-16 maths CPD programme led by Mathematics Education Innovation (MEI) finds that a tailored approach is particularly valuable for maths departments (publication forthcoming). Our evaluation of the Greater Than Network run by Milton Keynes College found that the programme was starting to support teachers to effectively share practice and establish a network but struggled with changing expectations from DfE and was closed early<sup>1</sup>. In commissioning effective CPD for post-16, longer contracts and constructive quality assurance and management would help ensure high quality and effective CPD.
2. The inclusion of generic skills in the curriculum would be in line with international practice, and better support young people into employment and further study. We conducted a comparative international review of the delivery of generic skills in the 14-19 curriculum. The project was designed to comparatively review how generic skills are understood and delivered across 10 different jurisdictions, while considering the policy implications for England. The project was commissioned by the Centre for Education Systems. Our research highlighted that the most common generic skills are communication, collaboration, personal qualities, ICT-related, creativity, critical thinking, and citizenship. It also highlighted that England is an outlier in only including generic skills for learners on study programmes, who are most likely to be on vocational courses, from 16-19, with no compulsory generic skills in the remaining 14-16 and 16-19 academic curriculum. The implications for England are to learn from the experience of those delivering study programmes, to support teacher autonomy in integrating generic skills more explicitly into existing teaching and learning, and

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<sup>1</sup> Pullen, C., & Boodt, S. (2024). *External evaluation of the Milton Keynes College Group Greater Than Network*. Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/sheffield-institute-education-research/projects/evaluation-of-the-greater-than-network#:~:text=The%20evaluation%20ran%20from%20March,working%20effectively%20prior%20to%20closure>

to seek to agree a consensus amongst policymakers to include generic skills in the curriculum<sup>2</sup>.

3. There have long been reports about the cycle of Level 2 qualifications for those aged 16-18<sup>3</sup>. The proportion of young people who achieve only a Level 2 qualification has not changed in 20 years - it is typically around 20-25% of every cohort. Reaching Level 3 is often seen as the enabler which makes it more likely that individuals will gain higher skills. Finding a solution for this group that allows them to progress through Level 2 and to Level 3 by age 19, likely through a college-based programme, should be seen as a priority. One solution could be this idea from a report I co-authored in 2016<sup>4</sup>. Some colleges provide a programme for Level 1 students to offer a small amount of a few vocational options alongside literacy, numeracy and employability. A programme for Level 2 learners over 2 years with sufficient support and opportunities to try a range of options and then specialise in the second year could help young people stay engaged and avoid making decisions at 16 that make it more difficult to change interests later on.

### **Delivering further education**

4. Funding has been a continual challenge for colleges in the past 15 years, mostly due to frozen funding rates or cuts. However, other concerns include the time lag system which means that if you are planning for growth over time, you will always receive less than it costs to teach the learners that year. The frozen funding rates, that do not include uprating for inflation, makes balancing budgets difficult.
5. Accurate and timely workforce data is crucial to being able to understand challenges of recruitment and retention, as well as pay. I ran the Staff Individualised Record (SIR) from 2014 to 2020<sup>5</sup> and supported the team at DfE who took over the collection in 2020. This collection moved around several organisations since starting in 1993 and was often ignored or poorly used. This data identified the around £10k per year difference between schoolteacher pay and college teacher pay in every year it was published. The median pay for teachers in colleges did not change between the 2012/13 data collection and the 2019/20 data collection. This data was provided to DfE and BIS (FE changed in terms of responsibilities between 2014 and 2020), and at points was provided to Ministers and No. 10 in response to specific requests during that period. It was imperfect but it was also the best available and provided a longitudinal perspective. It showed the challenge of recruiting teachers when industry salaries in the relevant sector are significantly higher – often colleges use agency staff to fill these gaps or pay a market premium for certain sectors. I would implore policymakers to make better use of the data available, including the historic reports, to help identify problems sooner.

### **Skills and apprenticeships**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.shu.ac.uk/sheffield-institute-education-research/projects/generic-skills-in-the-14-19-curriculum-an-international-review>

<sup>3</sup> <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/new/PUBLICATIONS/abstract.asp?index=5119>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ippr.org/articles/earning-and-learning-making-the-apprenticeship-system-work-for-16-18-year-olds>

<sup>5</sup> All reports can be found here: <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/resources/research/workforce-data/>

6. The current apprenticeship system is predominantly built for adults<sup>6</sup> and those with prior work experience. Degree apprenticeships are difficult to access for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, although there is some evidence that individuals can progress through apprenticeships to obtain Level 6 and 7 qualifications<sup>7</sup>. Foundation apprenticeships may be helpful here to provide an earlier entry point for individuals but this would be most effective if combined with apprenticeship pathways showing young people how they can progress, while enabling employers to meet skills shortages.
7. Skills forecasts are more effective if they are developed through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, allowing for the discussion of projected skills demand with industry experts<sup>8</sup>. Simply using quantitative data modelling and analysis often misses elements that are unobservable within the data, so including qualitative review is recommended.
8. Apprentices over 18 should receive the relevant age-related minimum wage, as they often live independently, and this is not currently reflected in the apprenticeship minimum wage<sup>9</sup>. This would align the apprenticeship minimum wage with all age-related minimum wages and so the apprenticeship specific rate should be abolished.

### **Supporting young people, widening access, and narrowing the attainment gap**

9. Many learners receive negative views about vocational options at school. Our report on the apprenticeship minimum wage for the Low Pay Commission<sup>10</sup> found that every apprentice who had been told about apprenticeships at school (and not all had been told they were an option) had been given a negative view of apprenticeships.
10. Much of the promotion about degree apprenticeships, from UCAS and others, considers them to be a useful option for disadvantaged young people. Getting a degree apprenticeship can be a more difficult challenge than getting a place at university, because the degree apprentice must meet both the requirements of the employer and the university<sup>11</sup>.
11. In many cases, young people need neutral advice that provides all the information about the respective challenges of different options. More generally, we have a relatively flexible labour market in the UK but limited options for adult education. Enabling individuals to switch and change options or return to learning at different points in a lifetime, as is beginning to exist through apprenticeships<sup>12</sup>, would reduce the stakes for young people making decisions about academic and vocational routes.

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<sup>6</sup> Pullen, C. (2024). *Apprenticeships - a system build for adults?* UVAC. <https://uvac.ac.uk/apprenticeships-a-system-built-for-adults-uvac-publishes-new-concept-paper/>

<sup>7</sup> Pullen, C., Jeffery, R., & Griffiths, T.-L. (2024). *Experiences and Perceived Impacts of the Apprenticeship Minimum Wage: A Qualitative Scoping Study*. gov.uk. [https://minimumwage.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2024/02/Pullen-et-al-2024\\_Apprentice-Experiences-2.pdf](https://minimumwage.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2024/02/Pullen-et-al-2024_Apprentice-Experiences-2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Pullen, C. (2024). *Future Skills Projections and Analysis. Research report*. Department for Education, UK Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-skills-projections-and-analysis>

<sup>9</sup> Pullen, C., Jeffery, R., & Griffiths, T.-L. (2024). *Experiences and Perceived Impacts of the Apprenticeship Minimum Wage: A Qualitative Scoping Study*. gov.uk. [https://minimumwage.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2024/02/Pullen-et-al-2024\\_Apprentice-Experiences-2.pdf](https://minimumwage.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2024/02/Pullen-et-al-2024_Apprentice-Experiences-2.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Pullen, C., Mccraig, C., Emms, K., & Laczik, A. (2024). *Widening Participation and Degree Apprenticeships*. Edge Foundation. [https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/520/DD1576\\_-\\_Edge\\_SHU\\_widening\\_participation\\_report\\_2\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/520/DD1576_-_Edge_SHU_widening_participation_report_2_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Pullen, C. (2024). *Apprenticeships - a system build for adults?* UVAC. <https://uvac.ac.uk/apprenticeships-a-system-build-for-adults-uvac-publishes-new-concept-paper/>

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