



CAPITAL

October 2020

Welcome to CAPITAL, AELP London's membership newsletter, designed to keep our members up to date with the latest developments across London's employability and skills sector.

An introduction from Nichola Hay

In my introduction to the last edition of Capital back in June, I talked about the challenges facing our sector in the capital. It's perhaps not surprising that this has been a recurring theme throughout 2020, as we look at a skills and employability landscape that has been significantly altered by Covid-19.

At the risk of stating the obvious, it's fair to say that there are going to be more challenges to overcome as the economic impact of Covid-19 begins to be fully felt, as we move through 2020 into 2021.

As I mentioned at the Strategic Forum, however, what does give me great optimism for the future is the commitment across the capital to working together to address these challenges. This was seen in the commitment from our guest speakers from the GLA and DfE to share updates, take questions and meaningfully engage with the feedback from our members throughout the Forum. In a similar vein the enthusiasm of our members to address the challenges we are facing head on, by working collaboratively and sharing insights with one another is inspiring.



Our next Strategic Forum will be held on Thursday 3rd December and, as you may expect, this meeting will be held virtually. We will share further updates on our speakers and agenda ahead of

the event, and I also encourage you to get in touch if there are topics you'd like to see us cover. After all, it's your Forum.

Warm regards,

Nichola Hay
AELP London Chair

The AELP London Strategic Forum

For the second meeting in a row, we held this month's Strategic Forum virtually... although given how used to Zoom and Skype everyone now is, it probably going to seem unusual when we're all able to get together in the same room again. Attempts at humour aside though, we do appreciate that virtual meetings can occasionally feel a little stilted and beset by the odd technical hitch, so we'd like to thank all members and presenters for coming together to make it a really productive session.

The following is a high-level 'canter' through the Strategic Forum although, as ever, we'd always recommend that our members 'attend' the Forum to get the most out of it.

James Lee and Anna Coogan – An update from the GLA

James provided us with a presentation and update on the Good Work for All Mission and the Digital Access for All Mission, respectively. These missions are overseen by the London Recovery Board, convened by the Mayor to support the capital's recovery from the impact of Covid-19.

James was keen to hear the views of our members (which is always welcome!) on the projects that he and Anna have been working on. James talked through the objective of 'helping Londoners into Good Work' and how they believe that can be achieved, through a range of approaches including establishing sector specific London Academies.

The logo for the Greater London Authority, featuring the words 'GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY' in a sans-serif font. 'GREATER' and 'AUTHORITY' are in grey, 'LONDON' is in blue, and the 'O' in 'LONDON' is red.

Anna updated members on the vital work of providing digital access for all across the capital, working towards ensuring 'Every Londoner to have access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the device or support they need to be online by 2025'. This is a comprehensive programme looking to support people from all ages and backgrounds, something that was welcomed by our members. Our members shared a range of insights and feedback with James and Anna, including the importance of good digital access for Apprentices learning in the capital and the importance of robust marketing and communications to support this agenda; feedback described by James as being 'extremely helpful'. AELP London Chair, Nichola Hay, outlined how she felt that AELP London could offer support in coordinating activity, particularly with regard to the range of organisations involved in skills and employment e.g. DWP, DFE, National Careers, Jobcentre Plus. Nichola also reiterated the access that independent training providers have to employers, through their well-established relationships, and how that has the potential to play an important role in securing employer-led feedback that can influence programmes and approaches positively.

James summarised the next steps for the Missions, which is to generate a series of clear activities to support the aims of the mission. James also kindly agreed to provide regular progress updates to AELP London members.

Sinead O'Sullivan – Department of Education

Sinead, a Director at DfE, has been responsible for leading on a range of projects including the National Retraining Scheme, the National Skills Fund, the Skills Recovery Package, and the development of the Skills Toolkit in the early weeks of lockdown.

Sinead provided an overview of activity over the last six months, which has been understandably been influenced by lockdown. With regard to the National Skills Fund, a consultation is still planned with dates to be confirmed.

The National Retraining Scheme has collated research into the views of adults on retraining, showing that broadly speaking adults report that they are keen to retrain, but this 'will' is more likely to convert into positive action when there is a clear 'line of sight' towards an identified job opportunity. Research also identified that learners at Level 2 or below, were reluctant to engage fully with digital learning opportunities, and that there is a challenge to maintain the enthusiasm of learners, in the face of everyday life challenges that people are dealing with, particularly at this time. This was just a brief summary of an in-depth set of data that is currently being used by DfE to help shape their approach to supporting learners to retrain and reskill.

The Skills Recovery Package, heavily targeted at 18-24-year olds, has been working closely with DWP to build the case to secure the package that was identified on 8th July, including incentives for employers to recruit apprenticeships, traineeships and opportunities through the Kickstart scheme. Sinead recognised that employers now had a range of incentives available, but perhaps the clarity over each of these incentives was lacking and work is being done to address this.

Jane Hickie, AELP MD, reinforced the need for this to be a priority item given the confusion that members are reporting to AELP, regarding the complexity of the schemes available to them. Simplification is needed. Our members also shared further comments (and questions) on the progress of each of the schemes that Sinead talked about; Sinead agreed to take this feedback back to her teams.



Department
for Education

Simon Ashworth – Chief Policy Officer, AELP

Simon provided our members with a National Policy Update, providing in-depth summaries on the following topics, which we canter through below (via the medium of bullet point!):

Reflections on the Business Recovery Conference

- It was reassuring to hear Gillian Keegan talk about the key role of ITPs in the FE and training sector.
- The apprenticeship minister thought there is enough flexibility within the apprenticeship levy to adequately fund programmes and, therefore, we don't need to change the system.
- There was a consensus that there is too much focus on creating new opportunities, rather than on protecting apprentices and learners on programmes.
- It is certainly quite disappointing that providers are still not trusted on "catch-up funding."
- There was good news with a boost for apprenticeships promised in the Comprehensive Spending Review to meet the needs of employers.
- The audience agreed that every young person affected by Covid-19 should get some sort of guarantee that includes training – which the Kickstart Scheme does not offer.



- Although financial incentives for apprenticeships are certainly welcome, they are not enough on their own and further wage subsidies are needed.
- We should not lose sight of the ultimate objective of moving toward a completely demand-led system.

AELP's Covid-19 Recovery Package

- Building on the commitment to skills shown by the chancellor in his “Plan for Jobs”, AELP believes we still need to tackle immediate challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic with further short-term targeted interventions. Separate from the Comprehensive Spending Review submission process, AELP has already made the following recommendations:
 1. Provide additional support for apprentices disrupted by Covid-19 by extending funded training by 3 months to support a “catch-up” period.
 2. Protection for previously furloughed young apprentices by introducing a new targeted wage subsidy and/or an extension to the job retention scheme.
 3. Extend the current ESFA funding rules to appropriately support and safeguard displaced apprentices undertaking longer apprenticeship programmes.
 4. Supporting more apprentices to complete their programmes on time, allowing them to progress through extending the EPA and functional skills qualifications flexibilities until July 2021.
 5. Allow providers flexibility to support employed at-risk learners on AEB programmes, enabling them to continue their training as part of their transition to secure alternative employment.
 6. Recognising the efforts of all providers who over-delivered on their AEB contract in FY 2019/20 to provide continuity of service.
 7. Insuring the appropriate ESFA recognition of the impact of Covid-19 on providers and account pragmatically for this in measuring a provider's performance.

DWP's Kickstart Scheme

- The full details and guidance behind the £2bn commitment in the Kickstart Scheme has been published.
- The online application process for employers and representatives for Kickstart grants was launched on 2 September.
- Young people aged 16-24 years on Universal Credit will be referred to the scheme by their Job Centre Plus work coach with referrals to start in November 2020, with the scheme initially open until the end of 2021.
- Although guidance on the scheme is evolving, the key information currently available states that:
 - Kickstart jobs must be new jobs, with a minimum of 25 hours per week for 6 months, and should not require people to undertake extensive training before they begin the job placement.
 - Funding for each job will cover 100% of the NMW for 25 hours a week, plus the associated employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.
 - A Kickstart Scheme grant application must be for a minimum of 30 jobs. An employer who can provide at least 30 jobs can apply directly to the DWP for a grant. If an employer does not have 30 jobs, an application for a grant can be submitted to the DWP via a representative for a group of employers.
- Representatives groups get £300 of funding per job to support with the associated administrative costs of bringing together these employers.
- The jobs need to have been identified at the point of application and must meet the scheme criteria, but the requirements on this for representatives could be flexed.
- The DWP will aim to respond to applications within 1 month and if successful applications, the employer or representative for a group of employers must have a signed agreement before the jobs begin. For unsuccessful applications, feedback will be given and these can be re-submitted.
- There is £1,500 per job placement available for the employer in setup costs, support and training. Employers may choose to use this funding themselves or can buy support from a representative/other body who offers this (e.g. wrap-around support and exit support).

- Initial set up costs will be paid when it is confirmed that the young person has started work. The grant will be paid in arrears via a series of payments (for wages, NI and automatic enrolment contributions).
- Representatives will be responsible for administering payment of both the £1,500 and the wages etc to each employer covered under each of their grant agreement(s).
- The ESFA have told us that AEB is a standalone programme so if Kick-starters meet the standard AEB criteria, age, circumstance (unemployed/employed), previous qualifications then they can access AEB.

AELP's View of the Kickstart Scheme

- When the scheme was first announced, AELP expressed concern that the wage incentives for Kickstart might lead to new apprenticeship opportunities being crowded out although employer behaviours will determine whether the concern is justified.
- AELP remains convinced that young people on Kickstart should be allowed to progress on to an apprenticeship during the six-month scheme and at the same time the employer should be able to utilise the remainder of the wage subsidy that has been committed.
- A sustainable economic recovery is as much about young people acquiring new skills as it is about securing a job - therefore a young person on Kickstart should be receiving as much training as possible while on the scheme to increase their chances of progression.
- Better coherency needed between DWP and DfE provision

Traineeship Framework, In-Year Growth and Autumn Procurement

- The framework for the delivery of traineeships, which covers the period between 1 September 2020 and 31 July 2021 was published at the end of August - reformed programme: level 3 eligibility, longer duration, digital skills etc.
- The ESFA is launching an additional performance management review for 19-24 traineeships and those with a 16-18 traineeships standalone contract (without wider 16 to 19 mainstream funding).
- The ESFA told us this will be in addition to the performance review planned for December and will be a chance to increase traineeship allocations in accordance with the government announcement to grow number of traineeships. The Agency will be increasing allocations for those with a 16 to 18 traineeships with a standalone traineeship contract and for those with a 19 to 24 traineeships & will calculate increases "using a nationally consistent methodology taking into consideration previous years delivery and current allocations."
- Providers with ESFA funded AEB who do not currently have a 19-24 traineeships allocation can request an allocation of up to £25k using the AEB request form. The deadline for requests is 29 September.
- N.B this performance management review does not replace the procurement opportunity, providers will need to tender for funding in the upcoming ITT for 19-24 traineeships for the opportunity to continue delivery of 19-24 traineeships beyond 31 July 2021, in particular those who have a contract for service that expire on 31 July 2021.
- In terms of this growth opportunity providers should be informed of the outcome on 23rd October.

FE Reform & White Paper

- The AELP Policy and Funding Advisory Group has been in discussion with the DfE on the FE Reform programme. We have been told that the FE Reform white paper is still on track for publication in the Autumn of 2020.
- Jane Hickie, AELP Managing Director, was invited with other stakeholders to the Education Select Committee to discuss the suggested scope of FE reform.
- When asked what AELP's priorities are for the FE Reform:
 - Putting the apprenticeships funding on a long-term sustainable footing - which is about letting levy-payers use the funding as they wish and having a standalone budget for SMEs.
 - Better support for level 2 provision and young people.
 - Greater investment in the adult education budget (AEB)
 - Continue to move the FE system to being demand-led with funding following the learner.

Devolution White Paper & AEB

- Nationally the current ESFA procured AEB contracts expire in July 2021, with no facility to carry forward learners from that point forward or for the contracts to be extended any further.
- The ESFA are preparing for an AEB procurement which they want to follow on with once the Traineeship Procurement has been delivered. On that basis it is likely the national procurement could be towards the end of 2020 or in early 2021, with award being given in April 2021, with delivery starting in August 2021.
- Contracting likely to be on a flexible terms to mitigate the outcome of the Devolution White Paper.
- We are still expecting the Devolution White Paper to be published this Autumn – this was confirmed by Simon Clarke MP at the LGA annual conference in July this year.
- FY20-21 has two significant devolution deals in transit:
 - Sheffield City Region (SCR): Anticipated Adult Education Budget: c£35m
 - West Yorkshire: Anticipated Adult Education Budget: c£63m

Ofsted: New Provider Monitoring Visits & 'Interim' Visits of Existing Providers

- Ofsted are shortly to start a series of 'interim' visits to existing providers and restarting new provider monitoring visits.
- Paul Joyce, deputy director for further education at Ofsted, explained to the AELP Business Recovery Conference how specifically these new 'interim' visits will entail.
- While inspectors will be carrying out interim visits from September under the Ofsted's inspection powers, these will not be inspections but an opportunity to "support the sector."
- Interim visits focus on three questions - the visits will be based around:
 - What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and adapts to changed circumstances?
 - What steps are leaders taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the needs of learners?
 - How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?
- Ofsted confirmed that on the visits, they will not:
 - Evaluate measures put in place at point of lockdown or during lockdown or judge providers on their response to Covid-19 during the spring and summer terms of 2020.
 - Use the EIF and further education and skills inspection handbook to make any graded or progress judgements.
 - Look for evidence of the impact of actions since September.
 - Carry out lesson / workplace observations or deep dives.
 - Expect leaders to prepare for anything beyond what is part of the normal business of the provider.
 - Ask providers for documents or records in a certain format.
 - Require staff to prepare any additional work.
 - Review self-assessment, quality improvement plans, points of improvement from previous inspections or visits or achievement data.

[Simon's presentation can be accessed here.](#)

Useful information, guides, resources and more

With so much happening across the sector, we thought it would be useful to provide a quick a summary of a few things that you might find useful. And remember the [Resource and Information section](#) of the AELP website is regularly updated with useful resources.

[Covid-19 \(Coronavirus\) Guidance and Patron Support](#)

Covid-19

(Coronavirus) Guidance and Patron Support - Response Resources

AELP has pulled together set of resources to help support providers, their employers and their learners in the response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

[AELP News](#)

AELP's latest press releases provide a great summary of the latest news and responses to what's happening in the Skills sector. They often link to useful AELP papers and other sources of guidance.

[Ask Ashworth](#)



Simon Ashworth is the Chief Policy Officer at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). Through the Ask Ashworth blog, Simon provides key policy information and answers to FAQs

[AELP Webinars](#)

AELP hosts regular webinars that address the key issues and challenges of the day. Please use the link above to check in on the latest webinars.

[Index of Briefing Papers and Submissions](#)

View a range of policy documents relating to key topical issues and consultations.

The AELP London Strategic Forum

Our next Strategic Forum will take online on Thursday 3rd December.

Please be aware that only full members of AELP London are able to attend our Strategic Forum meetings.

Date	Time	Venue
Thursday, 3rd December 2020	9.30am – 11.30pm	<u>Online</u>

Please continue to let us know your thoughts on the Strategic Forum, and advising of us of agenda items that you'd like covering by emailing aelp-london@aelp.org.uk

Continuing the conversation

We're committed to engaging with our members, working with you to understand how we can best support you and designing services 'with you, not for you'.

You can also talk with us via Twitter @AELPLondon, or the more 'old fashioned' way by email at aelp-london@aelp.org.uk or over the phone at 0117 440 9525 / 0117 986 5389

Best wishes,

Jane Hickie
AELP Managing Director
janehickie@aelp.org.uk



We want to make sure that CAPITAL evolves to meet the needs of our members. If you have any feedback, or are interested in writing a comment piece, then we would love to hear from you. Please email us at aelp-london@aelp.co.uk.



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