

[Amanda Spielman at the AELP National Conference 2022](#)

It's great to be here, speaking at such an interesting time for the sector.

I really do want to recognise your work, and to acknowledge the importance of independent learning providers (ILPs) in the wider world of further education and skills.

Of course, I fully appreciate that the AELP is not just about ILPs. It has many other members, including colleges, employers and HEIs.

We also understand that AELP and ILPs aren't just about apprenticeships, although ILPs do teach most of the apprenticeship provision in the sector. ILPs are contributing to increasing the breadth of specialist study programmes for 16 to 18-year-olds. And you are doing this for a great many adult learning programmes as well, including traineeships and skills boot-camps. And so it is good to see a thriving ILP sector providing more choice for learners and for employers.

I want to say here that the ILP sector has performed reasonably well at inspection, with around 80% of providers judged good or better. But I do want to sound a note of caution. We are now seeing that some new ILPs aren't doing so well at inspection. And this is starting to reduce the proportion of ILPs that are judged good or outstanding.

But on a happier note, I am very pleased to see some great recent inspection outcomes this year, where several ILPs have been judged as outstanding. Well done to them! And there are many strengths in this sector. But while I am congratulating you, I must also talk about the fact that there are some serious issues in system quality.

I'll come on to that later, as first I want to highlight some of those strengths.

You have a valuable common set of goals, such as wanting high-quality courses and good outcomes for your learners. You want your learners to enjoy their courses and to go into jobs that are right for them.

We saw a really good example of this in a recent inspection in the East Midlands. Inspectors found an adult training provider had developed an ambitious curriculum that benefited most learners. It had introduced additional qualifications and activities to improve learners' readiness for work and to encourage them to study further.

For example, learners were working through a useful set of teacher-devised materials, which gave them a grounding in areas that would make them more employable, such as interview skills, managing their finances and setting up their own business. These were offered along with options to prepare learners for their first steps in the world of work. Many learners return to the

provider to study further or at a higher level, always a sign of satisfaction. This is really a great example of a provider going the extra mile to plan its curriculum carefully to meet learners needs.

We know that the very best providers are doing an amazingly good job. But that isn't the full picture. There are still too many who don't have the reliable data collection, the information sharing with employers, and the joined-up working practices to ensure that apprentices get full benefit from their training.

And we are aware of some system difficulties that also affect both providers and learners. Take apprenticeships for example. Some achievement rates are very low, on one apprenticeship standard as low as 16%. We often find that the apprentices who finish the course and take their end-point assessment do very well. But too often, too many leave before the end of their training.

But why is this? It could be down to money, because in the current labour market, you may not need an apprenticeship to earn more. But it could be because of pressures at work that mean apprentices do not get enough learning opportunities. Or it could be because of poor quality provision.

Now, more than ever, the answer to this 'why' question is so important. Are apprentices going into better-paid roles in entirely different sectors? Are they getting new roles, thanks to their learning, for better pay, but ending their apprenticeships early? These may be great outcomes for apprentices, but what about the wider picture? There is a real danger that poor retention rates, low achievement rates and a lack of information to demonstrate the value of training programmes will undermine the value of apprenticeships and diminish the prestige of the brand.

We are all aware of the pressures of the current economic climate, post-COVID, post-Brexit and with rising prices and inflation. It's important that policy makers know how factors like these are affecting retention rates and opportunities for young people, especially now when there are plenty of well paid, low-skilled jobs on offer.

We know from our own series of reports on COVID that many young people have struggled in the past couple of years. Some with loneliness; some with having less peer support; some with worries that their next steps won't give them the future they want. And of course, worries about money, and about having to study at home, where conditions may be far from ideal.

They've had to get used to their journey to the world of work not being what they'd expected it to be. Many young people are only just taking their first external exams. Many didn't have the framework of support and the milestones that older cohorts took for granted. Providers need to be mindful of the needs of learners, who might currently need a bit of extra help.

When we inspect an individual provider, we're making a judgement about how it's performing at a point in time, and report that publicly. But that isn't all we do. We also aggregate our inspection evidence to produce in-year and end of year reports, drawing on that detail collected by inspectors. We

inform the sector and government via thematic reports and data publications. These have information that can show you how you are performing relative to others and about how the system is performing. And the wealth of information in these reports may well help you bring about more rapid and greater improvements, and apprenticeship achievement rates at system level certainly do need to improve.

I now want to talk a little more about system quality, and to acknowledge that there is a lot going on in the sector. We hear a lot about the levy in many conversations. For instance, in a recent episode of our podcast – it's called Ofsted Talks, please have a listen if you haven't already! – we heard from an ILP CEO who believed the levy had given them great opportunities and was very valuable. Ian Bamford from Paragon Skills talks in the episode about working with the southern apprenticeship hub to expand Paragon's programme with levy funding.

But we also hear of providers and employers wanting change. We've heard from some employers that want more freedom for their levy spending. Some providers are unhappy with aspects of the apprenticeship system. And frustratingly, we are still finding evidence that the levy is warping parts of the system, and that this may be one reason for poor-quality training.

We hear about how it's enabling some organisations to take the cash with little substantial learning or training in return. And we're also aware that in some cases, apprentices are on a course that is too easy for them, perhaps accrediting what they can mostly do already.

And despite recent hopeful figures, there's still a concern about the range of training and whether it's right for the skills needs of the economy. We are crying out for staff in the higher skilled service industries, construction and many other areas. Have we got the right training in the right places? There's no clearly signposted overview of what apprenticeships can lead to. And they need better careers advice and guidance; apprenticeships are not a second-class route to success.

It is right that policy makers consider whether the levy system is meeting the needs of apprentices, employers and the economy. But it is equally important they consider what the effect of any change will be to avoid any unintended consequences.

And now I want to say something about what we are seeing on inspection and during our monitoring visits to new providers. Of significant concern are the staffing difficulties that many of you are having, especially in relation to recruiting and retaining specialist teachers and trainers, including in subjects like English and maths. We are also seeing fewer learners achieving revised functional skills qualifications.

These and other matters are absorbing leaders' time and drawing their attention and focus away from thinking longer term about the learner experience.

We're watching with interest the introduction of Ofqual recognition for end

point assessment organisations. We think that confidence in the system will grow with this change, though there could be some short-term instability. In the medium and longer term, Ofqual recognition should lead to higher confidence in the end point assessments on offer.

And now onto new provider monitoring visits: it does concern me that around a quarter of new providers are still not making sufficient progress in a least one theme.

The best practice we see is from providers who perhaps focus on one or two areas, have a clear intent, employ and retain expert staff, provide high quality off-the-job training and have strong relationships with a small number of employers.

Providers like this make a real difference to learners' lives and provide the training that employers and the economy need. There's so much in this sector that's valuable and we will continue to support your good work. It's making a great difference to the lives of many, many people.

And apprenticeships are a multi-layered system. I've talked about the economic need for higher skilled workers. But apprenticeships are also a way in, especially for young people who didn't do particularly well at school, people who need to retrain, and others who are furthest from joining the workforce for many different reasons.

Good literacy skills are essential here. If you can't read and write, you can't read the job ad, fill in the form or study on your own. So you won't get the most from the opportunities on offer. In some cases, you won't be able to access them at all.

And having mentioned the complexity of the apprenticeships landscape, I want to end by talking briefly about [our new 5-year strategy](#), which we published in April. There are several commitments that relate to FE and skills. Perhaps the most interesting of these for this audience is a commitment to review the inspection methodology in further education and skills providers – not an easy task, given the complexity and diversity in the sector.

We will review how we gather the evidence on inspection, how we deploy our inspection teams, how many inspectors we allocate for different sizes and types of provider, and what we write about in reports. But what we are not proposing is changes to the education inspection framework (EIF) itself. We know it works well – it's a strong, quality-focused framework, using data and metrics to inform judgements but not to determine them. I want to reassure you that we will continue to inspect through EIF.

Within the strategy, we have a commitment to inspect all of you with a full rather than a short inspection by summer 2025. We know it's helpful for you when we express our views and concerns to ministers, policy colleagues at the Department for Education, IfATE, ESFA and employers' representative bodies.

We understand the challenges you face. We will continue to do our job and inspect and report on what we find, without fear or favour. The strong and

productive working relationship that we've built with you helps us do this important work every day. Please, let's keep the dialogue going!

And thank you again for everything that you do.

[Better mental health support for people in crisis](#)

People experiencing a mental health emergency will be able to access more care in the community, such through as crisis houses and safe havens, and those detained under the Mental Health Act will benefit from landmark reforms which provide patients with more control over their care and treatment.

A £150 million investment over the next three years will bolster NHS mental health services, better support people in crisis outside of A&E and enhance patient safety in mental health units. These were all recommendations from Professor Sir Simon Wessely's independent review of the Mental Health Act which will now be implemented to improve patient care.

The funding includes £7 million for specialised mental health ambulances across the country to reduce the use of general ambulance call outs for those experiencing a mental health crisis and prevent the inappropriate use of police vehicles as a way to take people to hospital. This will ease pressure on services, improve response times and outcomes for people in crisis which will help save lives, as well as ensuring patients experiencing a crisis are treated with dignity and respect.

The government has also published its draft Mental Health Bill today setting out wide-ranging reform to the Mental Health Act to ensure greater choice and autonomy for patients in a mental health crisis. They will also aim to tackle the racial disparities in mental health services, better meet the needs of people with a learning disability and autistic people and ensure appropriate care for people with serious mental illness within the criminal justice system.

The draft bill is now subject to pre-legislative scrutiny where a parliamentary select committee will examine the draft in detail before the government publishes a final version.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This is a significant moment in supporting people with serious mental health issues.

We're investing more money to ensure NHS patients have tailored

services and support, so people in a mental health emergency get the right care at the right time.

Our reforms to the outdated Mental Health Act are another important milestone in better supporting those with serious mental health issues and giving people greater control over their treatment, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds who are disproportionately detained under the Act.

Funding will also support local communities to invest in alternatives to hospital admission for people experiencing a mental health crisis, such as 'crisis houses' run by the voluntary sector which will ensure people can access the treatment they need within their community.

Increasing local capacity will reduce avoidable hospital admissions and inappropriate out of area hospital placements. This will result in improved patient outcomes as people in crisis will be able to receive specialised treatment in appropriate environments, reducing the risk of readmission to hospital.

Ensuring patients are receiving the appropriate care from the start will help to free up hospital beds, assisting the government's continued mission to bust the Covid backlogs.

Minister for Mental Health Gillian Keegan said:

It's crucial NHS's mental health care and treatment works for people.

I've heard first-hand the anguish of patients and their families when they have been subject to inappropriate care. Bolstering the mental health support available to people in a crisis will ensure patients are at the centre of decisions about their own care if they're detained under the Act.

I look forward to receiving the committee's feedback on the draft Bill so we can bring the Act into the twenty-first century.

NHS Mental Health Director Claire Murdoch said:

This is a significant and welcome milestone towards the much needed reform of the Mental Health Act and I look forward to working with the Government on developing a plan for implementing these changes.

The NHS Long Term Plan is expanding and improving mental health services across the country – from specialised mental health ambulances, opening new buildings, and refurbishing older ones – this much needed funding will modernise facilities and most importantly, ensure mental health patients get access to the best

and suitable care when they need it.

Reforms to the Mental Health Act will help tackle deep seated health disparities, ensuring everyone is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve and ending the stigma of mental illness once and for all. This includes the disproportionate number of people from black, Asian and ethnic minority communities detained under the Mental Health Act. Black people are over four times more likely to be detained under the act and over 10 times more likely to be subject to a community treatment order.

Work is already underway – improved culturally appropriate advocacy services are being piloted in four areas in England so people from ethnic minority backgrounds can be better supported by people who understand their needs and NHS England are developing a Patient and Carer Race Equalities Framework to provide mental health trusts with practical steps to improve the experience of care within mental health services for people from ethnic minority communities.

The reforms will also change the way people with a learning disability and autistic people are treated in law by setting out that neither learning disability or autism should be considered reasons for which someone can be detained for treatment under section 3 of the Act. Instead, people with a learning disability or autistic people could only be detained for treatment if a mental health condition is identified by clinicians.

The benefits of reform will also be felt by people with serious mental illness within the criminal justice system. A 28-day time limit will speed up the transfer of prisoners to hospital, ending unnecessary delays and ensuring they get the right treatment at the right time and the outdated practice of using prisons as ‘places of safety’ for defendants with acute mental illness will end. Instead, judges will work with medical professionals to ensure defendants can always be taken directly to a healthcare setting from court.

Prisons Minister, Victoria Atkins, said:

It is essential that those in the criminal justice system get the right mental health support, so we can keep them and the public safe while also cutting crime.

The new Mental Health Bill will speed up access to treatment, enshrine important protections for vulnerable people and ensure prisons are not used as an alternative to hospital treatment.

Reforms will also take steps to ensure parity between mental health and physical health services. The government is already investing over £400 million to eradicate dormitories in mental health facilities as part of its response to Sir Simon’s recommendations so people admitted to hospital can receive care in a modern and genuinely therapeutic environment.

More widely, the government is expanding and transforming mental health

services to meet rising demand by investing an additional £2.3 billion a year to expand and transform services in England, which will help 2 million more people to access mental health services by 2023/24.

Honorary Queen's Counsel nominations: deadline Monday 29 August 2022

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is inviting nominations for the award of Queen's Counsel Honoris Causa.

Nomination forms must be completed and returned to MOJ by 12pm on 29 August 2022.

To make a nomination, please [submit your nomination here](#)

QC Honoris Causa or Honorary QC

This is an honorary award unique to the legal profession. It is a dedicated opportunity, made by royal prerogative, to recognise those in the profession who have made a major contribution to, and impact on, the law of England and Wales outside the courtroom.

The award is not a working rank, and is separate to substantive QC appointments administered by Queen's Counsel Appointments. Where someone is eligible to apply for substantive QC in their role, we would not normally consider them for an Honorary QC award.

Please note that anyone nominated may be subject to criminal record checks with ACRO Criminal Records Office.

What is the award for?

The award is for:

A significant, positive impact either on the shape of the law of England and Wales, or on the profession. This is for work outside the courtroom.

This criterion can be interpreted broadly, either as:

- a major contribution to the development of the law of England and Wales (for example, by dedicated research, influencing case law/ legislation and promoting initiatives), or,

- to how it is advanced (for example, by positively impacting the shape of the profession).

What is most important is that nominations clearly evidence the significant, positive impact an individual's efforts have had.

It is not a long-service award. Honours may be awarded for a significant impact over a long period of time, but they may equally be awarded for such an impact over a shorter period – it is the scale of impact that is important.

We are keen to recognise diversity within the profession, with awards that reflect the range of different legal careers that make up the profession. You can see examples of previous successful nominees by viewing their [case studies](#).

Examples of what these different contributions may look like

Influencing legislation

- Making an impact on the law by influencing legislation or case law (e.g. through outcome of research, creating awareness or campaigning, pro bono work or other advocacy outside the courtroom).

Social mobility and Diversity

- Making a considerable impact on the legal profession (e.g. through initiatives that have an impact on social mobility or diversity, and increase the competitiveness of the sector).

Innovation

- Making an impact through a standout achievement or through innovation (e.g. by breaking through into new territory, such as making an impact through work on Lawtech, innovation in legal education, or that promote UK legal services overseas).

Academic work

- Making an impact through outstanding academic work that makes a positive contribution to the law and/or legal system

Who is eligible?

- To be eligible for the award, the individual must be a qualified lawyer or legal academic.
- The nomination must be for achievement outside practice in the courts. In other words, an award would be made for non-advocacy work.
- The award is open to foreign qualified professionals. There is no residency requirement.

Examples of those eligible may include (but are not limited to):

- Solicitors without higher rights of audience
- Legal executives
- In-house lawyers, including Counsel
- Non-practising lawyers
- Legal academics

Holding a fee-paid judicial office in addition to normal practice would not exclude lawyers who meet the eligibility criteria above.

How are awards made?

The process is administered by Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Nominations are considered against the criterion by a panel of representatives from the legal profession, civil service, judiciary, and academia, which is chaired by MOJ.

The panel of representatives provide the Lord Chancellor with recommendations of appointable nominees. The Lord Chancellor, whose role is to ensure that the process has been carried out in a fair, open and transparent way, will then consider and decide the final recommendations. The recommendations are then referred to the Queen for agreement, who grants the awards under the royal prerogative.

How is the information about nominees used?

In order to assess suitability for the award and as part of the selection process, information about the nominees will be used to carry out:

- Cross-Whitehall checks to confirm whether the individual or their work may be known by, or of interest to, another government department
- Checks against nominees on the main honours system as per the eligibility criteria
- Evaluation by the selection panel of the individual's legal qualifications and evidence of their contribution and impact on the law of England and Wales
- Shortlisted nominees will undergo a criminal record check

Nominees from outside the legal profession

Where someone from outside the legal profession has made a significant impact on the law of England and Wales, or how it is advanced, they would not qualify for this award. We would welcome those nominations as part of the [main honours system](#).

Scotland and Northern Ireland

There is no exact equivalent in Scotland or Northern Ireland. However, this does not mean that achievements of a similar nature cannot be recognised in those jurisdictions. If you would like to nominate someone for an honour whose work is in Scotland or Northern Ireland, you can contact the [Scottish Government](#) or the [Honours Secretariat for Northern Ireland](#).

Nominees and recipients of national honours

Someone who has been honoured in the main honours system within the last two years, or who has been nominated for such an honour this year, would not be eligible to receive an Honorary QC award. Where someone was awarded an honour more than two years ago, the panel will consider the individual's contribution to and impact on the law since that honour was awarded.

How to make a nomination

Please [submit your nomination form](#) using our digital form.

If you are unable to use our digital form, or have any other questions, please get in touch on HonoraryQC@justice.gov.uk.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

1. What is the process and timelines ?

These dates are provisional and subject to change:

- 27 June 2022: applications open
- 29 August 2022: applications close
- October 2022: Panel meet and shortlist nominees
- Early November 2022: ACRO criminal checks are conducted
- Late November 2022: Lord Chancellor makes final recommendations to the Her Majesty The Queen
- December 2022: successful nominees are informed
- March 2023: Ceremony awarding the appointment of new Honorary Queen's Counsel

2. Who can make a nomination?

Anyone can make a nomination. You do not need to have a legal background or reside in the UK.

3. Do I need to be a practising barrister or solicitor to be nominated?

No. You do not need to be practising, although you do need to be a qualified lawyer or legal academic to be eligible. The award is for achievements outside the court room

4. Can I make more than one nomination?

Yes. You may nominate as many people as you like, but please ensure that you submit separate nomination forms.

5. Is there a limit to the number of nominations for an

individual?

No. An individual can be nominated by many people

6. Can I nominate a foreign national?

Yes. There are no nationality or residence requirements for the award.

7. In order to be considered for the award, do I need multiple nominations?

No. The scoring is not based on how many nominations an individual has received.

8. What happens if I miss the deadline to apply?

Unfortunately, we cannot consider any nomination past the deadline. We encourage you to submit your application when the next round of nominations open.

[SLC introduces new feature to help customers avoid over-repayment](#)

Press release

The Student Loans Company (SLC) has introduced a new feature to its Online Repayment Service (ORS) to make it easier for customers to avoid over-repayment.



In the final months of the loan term, customers are notified by SLC and encouraged to switch to Direct Debit repayment to ensure they don't make unnecessary over-repayments. As part of a range of improvements to the ORS, customers no longer have to call SLC directly to switch to the repayment method as they can update their preference using the new feature in their

online account.

ORS was launched in July 2020 to make it easier for customers to check their balance or refund, keep their contact information up-to-date and manage the end of their loan options. Since launch, over 3.6 million customers have used the service.

Bernice McNaught, Executive Director for Repayments and Customer Compliance, at SLC said: “SLC is committed to improving the customer experience, and our strategy is to ensure our services are supportive, intuitive, and trusted by customers. We have made a number of improvements for our repayment customers in recent years as we want our customers to be able to do more in their online accounts. This includes having essential information in the one place and being able to access a number of self-serve tools at their fingertips.

“This new feature is another welcome enhancement and will help our customers to take control of their end of loan repayments.”

Customers can log into their online account 24/7 at a time that suits them by visiting: <https://www.gov.uk/sign-in-to-manage-your-student-loan-balance>

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[Joint outcome statement: India-UK round four FTA negotiations](#)

News story

Round four of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between the Republic of India and the United Kingdom.



On 24 June 2022, the Republic of India and the United Kingdom concluded the fourth round of talks for an India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Negotiation officials undertook these technical talks in a hybrid fashion – with some of the teams meeting in London and the majority of officials joining virtually.

For this round of negotiations, detailed draft treaty text was advanced across the majority of chapters. Technical experts from both sides came together for discussions in 71 separate sessions covering 20 policy areas.

The fifth round of negotiations is due to take place in July 2022 in New Delhi.

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