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The FUTURE OF APPRENTICESHIPS

LABOUR CONFERENCE FRINGE
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Introduction to our special supplement

Nick Linford

@NickLinford

Welcome to this *FE Week* supplement on the Labour Party conference fringe, where *FE Week* ran its own event.

This was our first foray into the world of party conferences and frankly, we loved it.

This begs the question ‘Why didn’t we do all three conferences?’ and there’s a whole host of answers we could give you, but at some point we have to put our cards on the table and admit that we were too late in applying for the Conservative and Liberal Democrat conferences to secure a place at their fringe.

But with a bit of planning, we’re looking forward to bringing you all the action from all three party conferences next spring.

At this year’s autumn Labour conference, we were right at the heart of the action, and our own fringe event, The Future of Apprenticeships, was described as “unusual” by the BBC News at Ten as, thanks to technology, we were able to bring an unexpected guest with us.

As we were watching Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg’s speech, a few hours before our event,

we noticed Conservative Skills Minister Matthew Hancock MP had tweeted to say he had consulted government lawyers on Labour’s new flagship policy.

The lawyers, according to Mr Hancock, had declared the policy, where companies would have to employ one British apprentice for every non-EU worker they took on, to be illegal.

We knew this was too good an opportunity to pass up, and so invited Mr Hancock along to our event to explain in more detail — via Skype, of course. And, since we’re not known for being shy, we tipped off the BBC on the way.

Something we are known for, however, is enjoying an #FEparty, and this event was no exception, with fun, puns, bunting and mountains of popcorn.

The stellar line-up of big FE names included Shadow Ministers Tristram Hunt and Gordon Marsden, IfL chief executive Toni Fazaeli and Niace chief executive David Hughes.

There was also AoC chief executive Martin Doel, NUS vice president for FE Joe Vinson, UCU president-elect John McCormack and chair of South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership Dr Ann Limb.

Despite the fun, it was also a chance for these big names, along with the

Skills Minister via Skype, to discuss the serious issues facing apprenticeships, and ultimately the whole UK economy.

One of the conference’s most headline-grabbing announcements was the apprenticeship policy and you can read about that in more detail on page 3, along with the results of our fringe poll. Is £2.68 a fair or unfair training wage?

The Labour Party’s skills taskforce, chaired by Professor Chris Husbands, published its report, A revolution in apprenticeships: a something-for-something deal with employers, and the radical proposals it lays out are covered on page 4.

Commentary on the report from Steve Besley, head of policy at Pearson, and senior skills policy manager at the AoC Teresa Frith follows on page 5. Coverage of our fringe event, with the views, ideas and arguments from all of our illustrious panellists starts on page 6 and continues onto page 11.

Then if you feel you’d like to know a little bit more about the people behind the policy, you can turn to pages 12 and 13 for our profiles of two of the key figures in Labour’s skills team, shadow ministers

Tristram Hunt and Gordon Marsden.

Finally it’s back to the fun, joining roving reporter Shane Mann on pages 14 and 15 on his mission to introduce *FE Week* to a whole



new readership and meet as many Labour party celebrities as possible. So that’s the conference party debates over for us until the spring, but don’t forget you can join in the ongoing debate about skills policy on twitter with our @FEWeek Twitter handle.

Apprenticeships centre stage at conference

Paul Offord

@PaulOfford

Apprenticeships were dragged into hotly-disputed debates on immigration and the minimum wage at the Labour conference.

Party leader Ed Miliband said his government would force companies to train a “local” apprentice for every worker they took on from outside the European Union (EU).

He claimed the proposal would reduce low-skill immigration and help create a “high wage economy”.

It is understood this would only apply to firms employing more than 50 people.

Labour believes the policy would create up to 125,000 high quality apprenticeships over the next parliament.

Mr Miliband said: “In our first year in office we will legislate for an immigration bill which has secure control of our borders, cracks down on exploitation of workers coming here undercutting workers already here, and says to big companies that bring in people from outside the EU that they can do that, within a cap, but they have got to train the next generation.”

But serious question mark have been raised over how much, if anything, Labour’s extra apprenticeships would cost.

The government normally pays around £2,000 per apprentice, to cover the cost of the college or other training provider providing the formal vocational qualification.

Under normal circumstances, the government would then have to pay out

£250m for 125,000 apprentices.

However, a Labour spokesman suggested the entire cost would be covered by employers.

The announcement sparked a heated debate with Skills Minister Matthew Hancock, who was beamed into an FE Week fringe event via Skype (pictured). He interpreted the Labour leader’s comments as meaning firms would be forced to take on British apprentices. Mr Hancock said the policy would break EU laws on labour movement as member nation firms are obliged to consider workers from all EU countries — not just their own.

A spokesman for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills confirmed forcing companies to employ British apprentices would break EU freedom of labour movement laws.

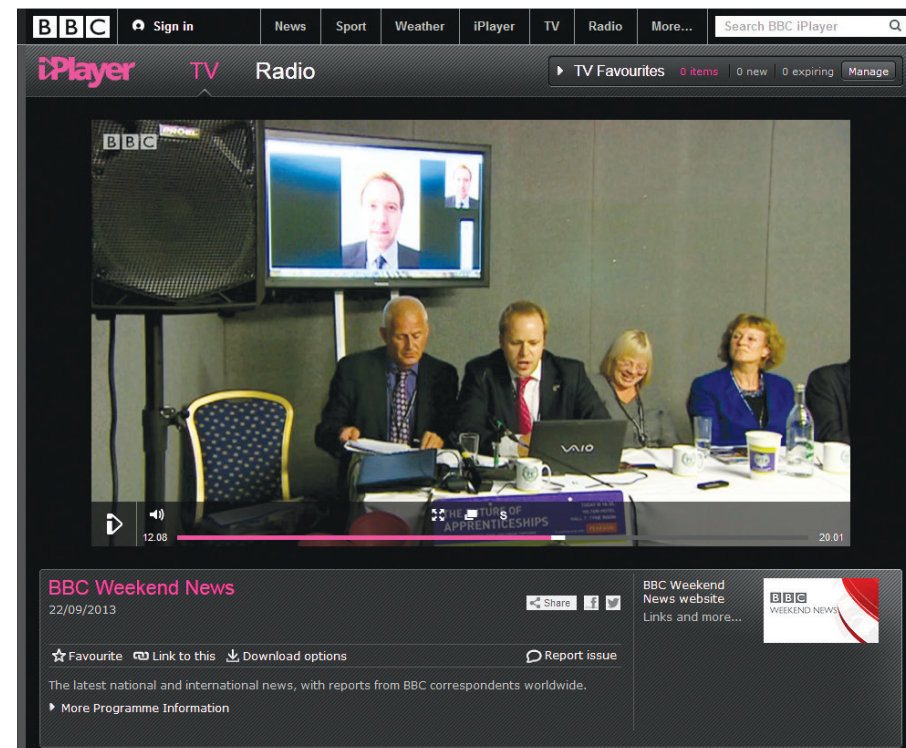
He said: “Our lawyers have advised the minister the initial policy [announced by Mr Miliband] would be incompatible with EU law.”

However, Labour clarified its position by claiming apprenticeships would be available to people across the continent, but it expected the vast majority to go to people from the UK.

Gordon Marsden, shadow minister for FE and skills, accused Mr Hancock of “scaremongering”.

“Theoretically, people from across the EU could apply for apprenticeships, but in reality the vast majority of people will come from local areas,” said Mr Marsden.

Mr Miliband also told conference delegates Labour would “crack down” on companies that failed to pay workers the minimum wage and would look at setting



The *FE Week* fringe event featured on the BBC News at Ten

a higher minimum wage in certain sectors, such as finance.

Party sources confirmed Labour plans to boost the basic wage would also apply to apprentices.

Mr Miliband said: “This next election is going to come down to the oldest questions in politics — whose side are you on and who will you fight for?”

“The National Minimum Wage is now paying people £20 less per week after inflation than it did when David Cameron came to office. That’s just wrong.”

Mr Marsden added: “We have a review coming up into the minimum wage –

which will be called the Buckle Review — I anticipate that apprentices will be included in this.”

The party also unveiled the first of three reports by its taskforce, led by Professor Chris Husbands, on the future of FE.

It called for the number of “gold standard” apprenticeships to be doubled.

It also called for more government funding to be made available to firms that took on trainees to improve the standard of on-the-job training.

For the full story on the Husbands Review see page four.

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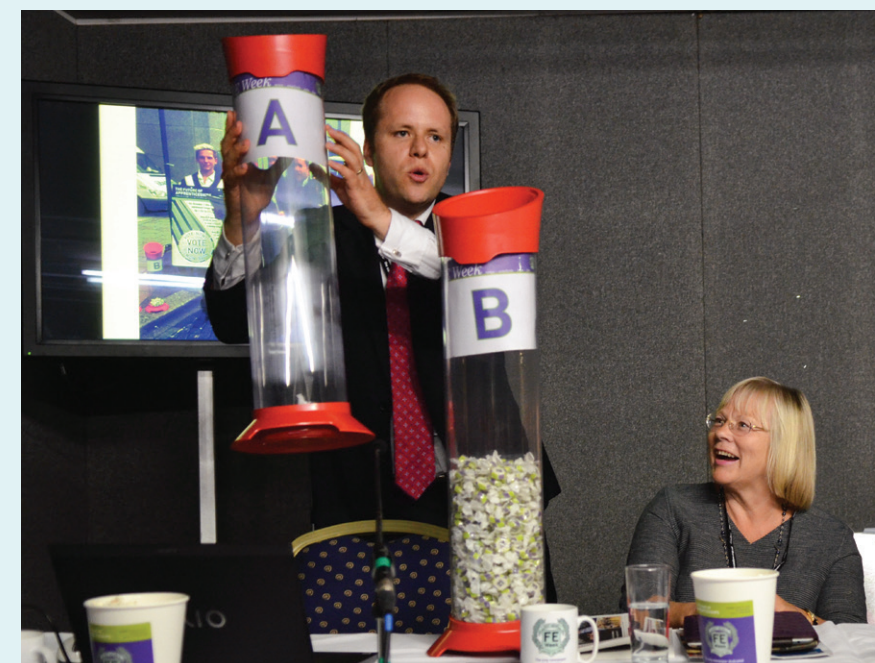
Minimum wage rejected in FE Week poll

FE Week held a poll on the apprenticeship minimum wage on the opening day of the Labour conference.

We reminded people the minimum wage will increase by 3p — which works out at 1 per cent — on October 1, to £2.68 per hour.

They were invited to vote ‘A’ if they thought £2.68 was fair, or B if they thought £2.68 was unfair.

The results were a resounding 376 votes for option B — and just eight votes for option A.



FE Week editor Nick Linford holds up a voting tube as Dr Ann Limb looks on



Len McCluskey, general secretary of the Unite union, votes

Revolutionary report?

Paul Offord
@PaulOfford

Labour unveiled radical proposals to improve the standard of apprenticeships ahead of its annual conference.

The party's skills taskforce, chaired by Professor Chris Husbands, published a report on apprenticeships called A revolution in apprenticeships: a something-for-something deal with employers.

It set out plans to make all apprenticeships level three or above, making them worth at least equivalent value to A-levels.

The report stated: "Given that two-thirds of all apprenticeships in England are now at level two, these measures would inevitably lead to a dramatic fall in apprenticeship numbers if introduced suddenly.

"Employers and providers should therefore be given time to improve the quality of their apprenticeships over an agreed period.

"It is also vital that young people achieving at level two are able to progress to higher levels, so level two apprenticeships should be redesigned, as well as renamed, to ensure courses provide a platform for progression to a level three apprenticeship."

The taskforce added a Labour government would double the number of apprenticeships.

It identified huge demand, with more than 1.4million online applicants for just 129,000 vacancies posted online last year, up 32 per cent on the previous year.

However, its members warned two thirds of all apprenticeships were currently only level two and 20 per cent of all apprentices had reported receiving no training at all.

The report stated: "Australia, Austria, Germany and Switzerland have between three and four times as many apprentices as England, where just 8 per cent of

all employers and less than a third of very large firms offer apprenticeships."

The taskforce conceded the previous Labour government did not focus enough on apprenticeships. It called for more effort to help the "forgotten 50 per cent," which has become a key priority identified by Ed Miliband across the policy spectrum.

The report stated: "The last Labour government's target to get 50 per cent of young people into university expanded opportunity. But not enough attention was paid to the options available to those who do not go to university.

"The forgotten 50% of young people are faced by a complex mix of vocational courses, too many of which do not offer any progression to good jobs or further study. A universal gold standard for apprenticeships would reduce much of the low quality provision that is of no value to either employers or learners."

The taskforce also called for more involvement from employers, trade unions and professional bodies with formulating apprenticeship schemes.

Its members hoped this would ensure trainees learned more skills which are lacking in the current labour market and boost their long-term employment prospects.

The report added more of the £1.5bn budget for youth and adult apprenticeships should be made available to firms prepared to take on apprentices. They would be expected to invest the cash on measures to improve the training they provide.

Professor Husbands' team criticised a



lack of apprenticeships within the public sector.

It also called on a future Labour government to force private firms given government contracts to take on apprentices. Gordon Marsden, shadow minister for further education and skills, was proud of the report and all of Labour's FE announcements during conference.

He said: "In both traineeships and apprenticeships our focus was on clear progression and quality career paths for younger people, which recognised the importance of sectoral and local input.

"We want to drive up the quality of apprenticeships at all levels.

"It is important to remember this is the first of three reports. The second will be on the future role and importance of FE (not just quality) and the third on the implementation of our TechBacc proposals for young people."



Agreement over core objectives

We agree with the core objectives of the Labour taskforce paper:

We too think employers need to be at the centre of the process.

They should set the standards for each sector and must have the power to choose who to employ and what structured programme they will adopt.

However, the drive to set up new funding bodies in each sector will not help deliver these changes and improvements.

They may well put off many employers who want to avoid bureaucracy and red tape, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

Clearly, there is a lot of detail to be developed within the proposals, but it is hard to see how the funding will be targeted at priority groups, such as those aged 16 to 19 and those requiring additional support with English and maths.

We do not believe changing the name of level two programmes will do anything other than confuse employers, as most level three programmes have level two skills built in.

We do believe all apprentices and employers should aspire to level three training and job roles, but the system must allow for progression from entry level programmes and jobs.

It should not penalise those that do not reach level three.

We would also be concerned if programme duration became a barrier to flexible delivery, so there should be flexibility in the way that is managed.

There must also be an acceptance of different ways of delivering off-the-job training, particularly with the introduction of online and internet-based learning.

Employers must have the flexibility to deliver the training their apprentices need in a way that suits the different sectors.

The development of an all-age programme across all sectors is also key to the continuing success of the apprenticeship programme.

We welcome the continuing discussion about the future of this important programme that underpins the development of the UK workforce.

Stewart Segal, chief executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Major challenges ahead to make Labours plans into reality

Steve Besley offers a Policy Watch perspective on Labour's proposals on apprenticeships.

We've had world class qualifications for the academic system, now we have a call for "a universal gold standard for apprenticeships".

This would be based on a level three threshold with minimum durations, dedicated time for off the job training and greater employer control over funding and standards.

Details can be found in Labour's independent skills taskforce's first report on apprenticeships, published at the start of this year's party conference.

The Taskforce's two other reports, due in the autumn, will cover school-work transition and vocational learning in FE, but for the moment the emphasis is on apprenticeships.

This report supports the growing trend towards direct funding for employers, calling for a large chunk of the current £1.5billion apprenticeship budget to be handed over, but with two conditions.

These are firstly that the funding should be used to develop sector-led workforce development strategies, with apprenticeship targets thrown in for good measure, and secondly, that employers should work with local bodies.

The local join aspect needs a bit more working up and there's no mention of how 16 to 18 year old provision would fit in, but the message is clear and reinforced in the report's title - "A something-for-something deal with employers".

Renaming level two training would require considerable work to ensure such a credible route can be put together

In the long-term, the report's sympathies lie with the use of tax incentives.

National Insurance relief for small employers, many would argue, would be a better bet than the current youth contract approach.

The report is also keen on employers and employees, rather than ministers, leading on training policy.

This is a tricky area, as it needs some structures for this to happen and the skills system is not short of structural



change.

The report's answer is to give the UK Commission for Employment and Skills a leading role in making the current system work better, rather than attempt to create anything particularly new.

As the architects of the current Employer Ownership Pilots, there is an obvious logic here although the commission may need support.

The model proposed is a hub and spoke one where the UK Commission for Employment and Skills builds the capacity of sector bodies, which in turn work to improve training at a local level.

The third core proposal is the development of a universal gold standard to help re-define just what an apprenticeship is.

There's been lots of concern recently about the apprenticeship brand and whether it has been tarnished by being allowed to drift into other forms of training.

The report's answer is to pull in the esteemed Rhineland model of a high-quality, employer-defined, level three qualification and use that as the model to aim for.

Given that so many apprenticeships here at the moment are at level two, this raises the question "what should happen to such training?"

The report states level two training should be renamed as a traineeship or similar and re-designed to ensure all young people who want to progress to higher level training are able to do so.

This may happen in due course, but it would require considerable work to ensure such a credible route can be put together. The government is already circling this area, partly through its work on 16 to 19 accountability and partly through its review of adult vocational qualifications. However, it remains the next big challenge for policy makers.

Steve Besley, head of policy at Pearson and author of Policy Watch

Why create a barrier to apprenticeships?

Teresa Frith compares different visions for the future of apprenticeships.

The Husbands Review of apprenticeships is, at first glance, wife of the Richard Review.

It also takes what, by all measures, is a successful government-supported initiative and seeks to introduce radical change.

It would be a brave person who claimed there is nothing wrong with the current apprenticeship system.

But equally, it would be unfair to say that there are not quite a few babies in this particular bathwater.

It appears the Government and Her Majesty's Opposition are united in their belief apprenticeships are very important, and in their desire for radical change.

The recommendation to call only programmes at level three and above apprenticeships clearly deals with the wish to seek parity with A-levels and higher study, as well as the need to have a system that compares favourably with our European neighbours.

As with the Richard recommendations, doesn't this just further expand choice for the academically able?

But, as with the Richard recommendations, doesn't this just further expand choice for the academically able?

If at 16, a young person is capable of study at level three, they may well look more favourably on a route that takes them straight into employment.

But what of those who are aged 16 to 24 and not ready to study at this level? They will be unable to access an apprenticeship and need to take what could be perceived as an inferior route towards their goal. Will employers view these young people, who need extra time and support to become job-ready, as equally worthy of their efforts?

If we want to smarten up the apprenticeship brand, there needs to be a comprehensive, funded offer that ensures young people have a range of access routes that feed directly into the apprenticeship, without fear of additional stigma.

The development of employer-led bodies that genuinely represent the needs of businesses and young people across a sector would be a fantastic achievement for any administration.



Those of you who have been around a while can probably remember numerous attempts by past ministers to achieve this with limited degrees of success.

Husbands and Richard both agree on a key role for employers in the design of apprenticeships and giving them a strong say in funding. The basic design would be undertaken by "sector employers" in both visions. Richard favours more "company-specific" input, but there is little to choose between them.

So what about the money? Again both agree that a significant shift is needed here.

Employers need to become embroiled in the funding process in the Richard vision; Husbands favours the employer-led institutions, or similar:

So we can create more than 150,000 funded bodies (Richard) or a bunch of sector-led mini-skills funding agencies, as suitable replacements for the existing single structure — well "single" if we just consider apprenticeship funding, all of which comes via the Skills Funding Agency.

If all £1.5bn is transferred from the existing system to support employers in either vision to deliver the beefed-up apprenticeships, I'm struggling to see how we will fund the level one and two provision that will be needed to help young people to progress to an apprenticeship.

Like the current apprenticeship system, there is much to be applauded in both the Husbands and Richard reviews and maybe, just maybe, we might get what we seek if we take some serious time to test and evaluate what is being suggested, recognise the need for partnership rather than control and try to keep our eyes on the prize, rather than the cash flow.

Teresa Frith, senior skills policy manager, Association of Colleges

Key recommendations from the report

- All apprenticeships should be level three or above, which is the norm in Germany and other countries with strong apprenticeship systems

- They should last a minimum of two years for level three (equivalent to A-level) and three years for level four (university level)

- They should include at least a day a week (or the equivalent) of off-the-job training, ensuring young people receive broader theoretical to boost their long-term career prospects

- Apprenticeships should be focused on new job entrants rather than existing employees

- Employers should be more involved in the design of

apprenticeship schemes, to ensure the skills trainees learn better suit industry needs.

- Responsibility for the £1.5bn youth and adult budget should be passed to employers, who would work collectively to improve training standards

- Trade unions and professional bodies should have more involvement in developing better quality apprenticeships

- More apprenticeships should be created in the civil service and other publicly-funded bodies

- Procurement contracts could be used to ensure companies that provide apprenticeships are more likely to be hired to carry out work for the public sector

Debate and fun at the fringe

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE AT NIACE
MARTIN DOEL
CEO OF ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES

Our impressive panel of experts from across the sector and the political spectrum made many good points and at times engaged in passionate debate. Below and on pages 7 to 9 we've published much of what they said.



Ronald Grahame, Labour Party councillor for Burmantofts and Richmond Hill



Tristram Hunt, pre-19 Shadow Education Minister

On his role in opposition: "It is a great pleasure to be here. My job as junior shadow education spokesman focuses on careers education, on technical vocational education for 16 to 18-year-old and youth services.

"I like to think of it as everything Michael Gove is not interested in, so it's a free reign.

"I've just had a very interesting week visiting Sheffield College, Manchester College, Walsall College and youth services in many of those cities.

"What was so inspiring about Walsall College was it is an outstanding college, delivering top-class vocational education, which is very much employer-focused, but it also runs a brilliant foundation degree in arts and fashion.

"I asked one of the tutors at the end of quite a big Power Point presentation, 'do they leave you alone up there. Are you allowed to be creative and do what you want? He said: 'yes'.

"To be able to combine that belief in creativity and at the same time focus on employer outcomes seemed to me to be really inspiring."

On the Husbands Review: "This has

thrown out some really compelling ideas about how we take apprenticeships forward.

"Really, it is partly about undoing some of the mistakes the government made when it came into power that damaged the quality of our apprenticeships.

"What we are very focused on is making sure the apprenticeships we end up with meets the gold standard.

"The major point is governments have a focus, an energy. We can clearly see where Michael Gove's energies lie, for better or worse.

"When we come into power, our energies will focus on implementing the most effective aspects of the Husbands Review. This will place an emphasis on having a gold standard technical baccalaureate, having a real FE strategy for careers education and reviving our youth policy, which we regard as vital for academic attainment. That's where our

energy will be.

"What I would urge you to do, as colleagues and commentators, is look at what is coming out of Chris Husbands' review, see what does and doesn't work and respond to that as we continue our journey towards the manifesto."

On concerns about the effect abolishing level two apprenticeships would have on less academic trainees: "What we want is a more rigorous system of traineeships to get them up to the apprenticeships.

"I represent Stoke on Trent and the potteries, where you have a brilliantly skilled workforce in the over 50 demographic. It seems to me it is also up to the trade bodies to ensure they get their acts together, to ensure they sort out proper apprenticeship and training systems, in conjunction with FE colleges and the rest of it."



Gordon Marsden, 19+ Shadow Education Minister

On accusations that Labour's plans to force companies to take on "local" apprentices for every worker they take on from outside of the European Union: "The issue that's raised on the proposal Ed Miliband put out will obviously be looked at in considerable detail.

"But we have to remember this is a government that has got it wrong on procurement before now and I'm not very keen on taking advice from a minister who has introduced the traineeships for 19 to 24-year-olds without getting any money for them from the Department for Work and Pensions to do it."

On the legacy from the previous Labour government: "It is true to say

this government took on great chunks of the successful programme of the previous Labour government.

"There is though a significant difference between Labour and Coalition policies in that we are focused on progression and quality.

"The truth of the matter is the government is rebadging much of what was done before. It is not significantly advancing the number of apprenticeships in terms of quality."

On the Husbands Report: "It's important to remember this is only the first of three reports. There is a major FE report coming out in the autumn and also a report on TechBacc.

"In all these reports, the aim is to build bridges, rather than erect

barriers. One of the problems we've had in the past is we've always looked at these things in terms of top-down management.

"What I think is really important about what Ed Milliband challenged us to do last year, which was to go away and think about what we should do to expand the options for the forgotten 50 per cent — is we are producing a framework that actually incorporates that bridge building.

"One of the problems was we talked about the importance of sectors — of delivering increased apprenticeships, or central governments setting targets.

"We have not always focused enough on the intersection of local labour markets with the growth of skills and everything that goes with that. That I think is one of the key elements of the Husbands Review.

"We have to make sure there is a focus on quality, on where we are going with the sorts of apprenticeships we are approaching.

"You can only have that if you have informal structures of collaboration that match the needs of local labour markets, where you are responding to demand and FE colleges and other providers are responding to that process.

"That's why earlier in the summer, we put together a series of 17 examples of where Labour local governments are already taking into account local labour market needs and skills training.

"That needs to go with what we do in terms of government departments collaborating with each other.

"The inability of putting together the skills and business agendas have been greatly restrictive in the past."

On decentralising policies: "We have to recognise active intelligent government sets the framework — nudges, pushes — but ultimately a lot of the success will be delivered in regional, sub-regional and local areas.

"What we should be trying to do —

and what the Husbands Report is very good at setting out a roadmap for — is to reach a situation where there is a gradual creation of a virtuous circle of collaboration and self-interest, in the best sense of the word, between providers, employers and the unions.

"Then we can create a situation not dissimilar to some of the best aspects, which weren't always there in all of them, of the informal collaboration within the regional development agencies, which had a decent stab at skills transmuting into industrial partnership and policy.

"That's what we should be aiming for with the next Labour government."

On criticism, from a floor speaker, over a lack of procurement contracts forcing private firms to take on apprentices, in exchange for winning contracts with the public sector: "I think the gentleman is absolutely right to express the frustration there has been with many procurement projects in the past. That is one of the reasons we have said that we will have procurement policies which would mean companies would have to recruit locally, with apprentices.

"But it's not just a question of central government, it is a question of it also being done at local level and as I've said already there are some very good examples of local authorities and indeed local enterprise partnerships as part of the city deals doing that."

On Britain's relatively poor record with apprentices, compared to many other European countries:

"If you look at most of our continental competitors, they have built their apprenticeships systems over a long period of time, with a strong core principles being taken through.

"We have to do that and we have to make sure the employment side of that, the labour market side is properly integrated as well."

Matthew Hancock, Skills Minister (via Skype)

On Ed Miliband's Labour's plans to force companies to take on "local" apprentices for every worker they take on from outside of the European Union: "With regards to this idea that for every non-EU migrant a company employs, they should employ a British apprentice — that didn't sounds like it fitted with EU law to me, so I sought legal advice. "The government legal advice was very clear — that is illegal under EU law.

"I think — when we are trying to support and promote apprenticeships — to push an idea that is simply impractical without a renegotiation of EU law, which Labour is opposed to, it is completely impractical.

"We need to focus on increasing apprenticeship numbers and how we reform to ensure they are higher quality and employer-led. I think all parties are signed up to this, rather than unworkable gimmicks like the proposal."





David Hughes, chief executive for National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education

On plans to scrap level two apprenticeships: “The level three idea seems to be a sensible thing. I’ve always thought apprenticeships should be of higher esteem.

“The debate needs to shift. We define apprenticeship quality very badly in this country. Lots of people go into apprenticeships and don’t get a job at the end of it. What does that mean?

“We need to define better what a level three apprenticeship means for learners. I think there needs to be a guarantee about progression and education, so it is not just about the job they are in today. It often ends up being cheap labour for people, where they just keep them on for a year or two. They are not all like that, but too many are.

“There has to be some government

investment in level two in the workplace, to meet inclusion and equality issues. Otherwise, businesses will carry on with the inequalities.”

“The best apprentices learn about the whole business, not just the individual job.”

On payments and subsidies for apprentices and FE students: “With the apprenticeship wage, it is a massive barrier and source of inequality. For example, it is harder for care leavers who can’t rely on the bank of mum and dad. That is a massive barrier and there are other examples like that.

“Finally, we need a much more thorough review of the subsidies that go into young people, aged 18 to 25.

“If you look at the subsidies going into HE for the learner; they are very different to those that go into apprenticeships.

“The loans that go into maintenance are a fantastic subsidy. They are going mainly to middle class people. Apprentices going in at the £2.68 minimum wage is shocking.

“I think there has to be a step back from this. If you go into level three or four, or in FE colleges, you get no subsidy to live to do it. At level four or five in HE, you get a subsidy to do it.

“We’ve got to look at that.

“If we don’t, we will continue to see apprenticeships and FE education as the

second class citizen of skills learning.”

On improvements in recent years: From a historical perspective, when I started in this world looking at apprenticeships, they were appalling.

“Success rates were down about 20 per cent and it was driven by supply, by providers. So there was a provider that held the whole apprenticeship framework.

“The numbers were very low, the quality was very poor. Labour came in with a top-down ‘let’s get the quality up’ approach and it improved.

“This government has come in and said ‘we have got to the end of that, let’s hand it over to the employers’.

“The obvious answer — and everyone who has taken a trip to the continent will tell you this — is that it’s a partnership. We haven’t achieved a partnership between the employers and the learners — and the trade unions often representing them — the government and the suppliers.

“That’s what we need to get to. We need a sensible partnership approach where everybody comes together.

“The Husbands Report talks about that partnership.

“I don’t think it represents learners strongly enough. It kind of pushes them to the side a bit.

“But if you could get that partnership, you would get to that Holy Grail.”



Ann Limb, chair of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership

On how employers will view the Husbands Review: “I am here as a chair of a local enterprise partnership. In a sense, wearing an employer’s hat in response to this is a pretty good idea. I think this will be very well received by employers.

“From all I hear, many people still in employment, but rapidly going out of the workforce, recall apprenticeships of their day were a jolly good thing.

“There was a gold standard, even if we didn’t call it that, and it was higher than level three actually, in terms of what an apprenticeship really meant.

“I live near Wolverton, which is one of the homes of the railways in this country still well-serviced by its local FE college.

“The local college and universities would have done those higher level apprenticeships, with good off-the-job training, as well as learning on-the-job in what was considered to be a really, really good grounding for your industry. The same could be said of Vauxhall Motors and I could go on.”

On how Britain compares in this sector with other nations: “I know we always compare (badly) with other countries. We have got so far behind other countries and that is successive governments’ fault, including the last Labour government.

“The comparison with Germany is helpful because we all know their economy is good. We have to create a much stronger and well-regarded apprenticeship system.”

On the need for more co-operation: “I wanted to make the point about the need for a lot of local employers and sectors to work together in a much more strategic way.

“In my local enterprise partnership, we absolutely want to get local employers engaged with local skills providers in a way that creates local jobs.

“What I do know, from the local enterprise partnership employers, is that they want high quality training from their local FE college or training provider.

“FE colleges are bloody brilliant in my view. They do their best to provide for the community and local employers. I don’t think we have to worry about them.”



Toni Fazaeli, chief executive at the Institute for Learning

On plans for a new “gold standard” for training: “We have tens of thousands of trainers and assessors, who we know in our membership are hugely committed to a gold standard to the highest possible training and assessment with young people and adults in apprenticeships.

“I think the notion of a gold standard applies equally to our expectations and celebration of trainers and assessors.

“Interestingly, in many countries in the world, if someone is teaching or training at level two or three, as a minimum that person training should be qualified up to at least a level higher than the person they are training.

“I think we have a big challenge with English and mathematics. Many trainers or assessors may have an O-level or GCSE, depending on their age, that would read across.

“But actually, the modern version of applied English and mathematics in a work context and the modern version of

the new GCSEs, as they are now, or will be under planned reforms, will be different.

“A lot of professional development and support is needed for trainers to make sure they are providing the gold standard.

“The money, qualifications, rates of pay for individuals on apprenticeships — all those are important.

“But the most important thing is to ensure the relationship is effective between the training or workplace supervisor and the apprentice. We must get that right.”

On long term employment prospects for apprentices: “My friend’s son was on an apprenticeship. There were 30 or 40 of them taken on by quite a well-known company, but by the end there was only one left.

“Although the information was passed on through the supply chain about successful apprentices (emerging from this), it did not necessarily lead to employment.

“The issue of educational experience is also important. The idea that somehow, for example, by simply working at a coffee bar, I would pick up English and maths skills is simply not going to happen.

“This needs to be taught by qualified teachers. Qualified staff are also needed to help people with special needs, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. Somebody working at a bus stop or at Kwik Fit would not understand how to help bring the best out of them.

“It’s about proper support.”

John McCormack, president-elect of the University and College Union

On barriers holding many people back: “I think the one thing we all agree on is that with any plan for economic growth, an important element of that has to be a skills base.

“If we want to see the country progress, it has to be built on something solid, not on shifting sand.

“I have got concerns about how apprenticeships are operating now. One, which was addressed by *FE Week*, is many providers and employers are placing greater criteria on entry at level two, which is the level they are supposed to come out of the apprenticeship with.

“They are creating a barrier. The fear is if this is allowed to continue, about 40 per cent will be barred because of this artificial barrier. We need to ensure this doesn’t become the norm.

“We have got to look at how we support young people and indeed over-24s, because apprenticeships are for older people too.

“Sadly, another barrier has been placed on over-24s, in that they must now take out loans to take out an apprenticeship.

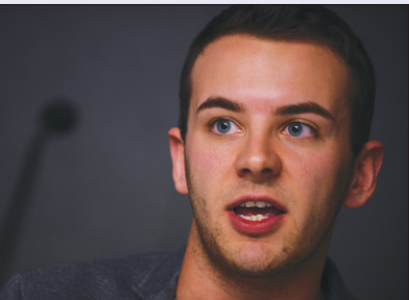
“The government is on the one hand saying people should be looking at developing new skills, but every single barrier is being placed on them doing that.”

On possible changes to the minimum wage: “In terms of funding. I am absolutely appalled apprentices are paid at the level they are.

“My union has huge concern about the national minimum wage and the different rates of that for young people. The minimum requirement should be that apprentices are paid at the national minimum wage.

“The concern is that certainly intermediate apprenticeships — that generally last a year — are seen as YTS mark two and viewed as cheap labour.

“I have examples in my region where big organisations and some public organisations are taking on a whole cohort of intermediate apprentices and letting them go after a year. That is not what apprenticeships are about and there



Joe Vinson, vice president for FE at the National Union of Students

On the value and perception among students of apprenticeships: “I think it’s really important we start from a place where we are thinking about the parity of esteem.

“The National Union for Students has done extensive research on what the value of apprenticeships is among learners, employers and indeed politicians

“I think aiming to start apprenticeships at level three is really positive. But we should look at some of the issues around that — for example, 20 per cent of apprenticeships have never received information from their careers advice service. That is truly appalling. How on earth can we direct people into the right careers and qualifications without giving them the right information in the first place about what their options are?

“Further on from that, 50 per cent of undergraduate students at universities today were never told about what their options were, in terms of apprenticeships,

before starting their courses.

“It is all very well talking about raising standards of apprenticeships, but why don’t we just tell people about them first?

“Less than five per cent of undergraduates today think that apprenticeships aren’t high quality, but many of them believe they are not as well valued as undergraduate degrees are. That is disgraceful.”

“There is obviously a clear problem with how apprenticeships are perceived.”

On ‘rigour’ in the FE sector: “I do worry maybe what came out today (the Husbands Review) slightly buys into the Michael Gove school of thought on rigour: “Rigour used to be based around people knowing the right things and being able to talk about it in the right way.

“It now kind of means you should sit exams at the end of two years and recite endless reams of Shakespeare — then recite them on the hills, probably to Michael Gove’s face.

“That is not what rigour is about and I hope the sector doesn’t respond to all apprenticeships in the same way Michael Gove has to GCSEs and A-levels.”

On concern about what will happen to people who will struggle to reach level three: “If we scrap level two apprenticeships, then we are leaving a gap for thousands of learners who might have gone in at that level.

“We have got to find a way to make sure those people don’t fall off the ladder.”



are major abuses we have got to address.”

On ensuring trainees aren’t exploited: “We need more monitoring. We have a government that keeps saying ‘we can’t burden employers with bureaucracy’. It is a sort of reverse euphemism isn’t it? It’s a catch-all that allows proper checks and balances not to take place.

“I don’t think we have got to be afraid of saying ‘we want proper checks and balances’.

“If employers are prepared to take the money from the government to run apprenticeships, then they have got to

do it according to proper checks and balances, not just for their own ends.”

On investing in training: “British industry is probably one of the worst in the world for investing in training.

“My personal view is we should bring back a training levy that all employers pay. That would generate the money to pay for good training.

“We need to give people the skills they need to take the country forward. To do this, we need good, proper, quality apprenticeships and I’m not convinced we’ve got them at the moment.”



Martin Doel, chief executive of the Association of Colleges

On the lack of stability with apprenticeships policy: “I think the hopeful point is the degree of consensus reigning around apprenticeships being a good thing, which gives you some hope of continuity of policy.

“But it’s true to say the skills system in England, and I say England advisedly, has changed at least 30 times in the last 30 years.

“We’ve had a new skills strategy, new funding system, new qualifications every year, just about, and it is hardly surprising if young people, parents and employers say they don’t quite know how to navigate the system.

“If you change anything that quickly, then no-one is going to get a grip of it.

“I think integrally, it will be an important thing for an incoming Labour government or the coalition to establish a baseline, then to evolve a system, but do it in a way which preserves what is good and adds extra

quality as you go.

“You refine the model, don’t completely destroy it every couple of years. That way you get a more refined, higher performing system. I think you need to go back and do some proper policy making, based on evidence. I am, for instance, asking for some hard questions about the success of employer ownership pilots that are currently running.

“I haven’t seen how many people have been trained. I haven’t seen how much extra employer investment is being leveraged in by the employer ownership pilot.

“I hope and I believe there may be some extra investment, but until someone demonstrates to me how many people have been trained, to what quality and what investment there has been, I have got to stand on the sidelines and say ‘Is it worth doing it, until someone demonstrates the value that is being delivered?’

On efforts to improve the quality of apprenticeships:

“There is a measure of cross-party consensus, as the Richard Review (of apprenticeships) does also talk about level three being the prime level for apprenticeships.

“I think the challenge I would make to the government — which also applies to the Husbands Report — is if that is the prime level for apprenticeships, then you also need to have a comprehensive level two and level one offer.

“The point made at the meeting we’ve just been at was that with the Association of Accounting Technicians, you learn double entry book keeping at level two and can’t progress to level three until you’ve mastered the prior levels of skill.

“If you want to make the apprenticeship brand stand out at level three that’s fine, but we need to think about how we get people to the point of departure for level three.

“If it is now as competitive getting on a BT apprenticeship as it is to get into Oxford and Cambridge, then we have got to help young people reach a competitive position for getting into those positions.

“We also need to better understand that term ‘employer-led’. We also hear all the time about ‘employer-owned’ — we need to articulate better what this all means.

“The point I keep making is student demand is different to employer need. We need to think about things like advice and careers guidance for young people, to ensure they get the right skills to progress to employment.”



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FE Week profile of the pre-19 Shadow Education Minister; first published May 20, 2013

Shadow Ministers Tristram Hunt and Gordon Marsden



relationship with employers, businesses and industry but you want them as local drivers of skills.”

He says that localising budgets for skills and training through local enterprise partnerships, is “not a bad policy” but FE colleges need to “step up to that”.

“They’ve got to get the basics right,” says Hunt who lives between Stoke-on-Trent and North London with his textile designer wife, Juliet.

“We’re not where we need to be on English and maths. Forty per cent of kids don’t get level two at 16 in English and maths and only 20 per cent of that is achieved at 18. That 16 to 18 gap in terms of achievement is really worrying.

“Is the teaching capacity there? And is the focus there? There should greater focus on functional skills teaching. It’s increasingly important with the raising of the participation age . . . and it’s what employers want,” he says.

Hunt, who has two sisters, went to his local Cambridge primary until the family moved to North London, where his lecturer father took a job as a meteorologist. While his mother started work as a landscape architect, he moved on to University College School, an independent school, where teachers fostered his love of history.

“History is really important,” he says. “It’s one of the few academic syllabuses that everyone has a view on; it goes beyond its own perimeters because it’s about citizenship, national identity, understanding — it affects everyone. It’s even more important in a multi-ethnic age when you don’t have those traditional levers of understanding outside the classroom.”

He adds: “It’s also fun. Learning of human failures, achievements and weaknesses give a greater understanding of ourselves.”

He says that although he was politically aware as a youngster – his father Julian was a leader of the Labour group on Cambridge City Council and was made a lifelong peer in 2000 — he was not politically active through school or university. That came after his year in Chicago.

After completing a doctorate in civic thought, he returned on and off to the party in between presenting programmes on the English Civil War, the theories of Isaac Newton, and the rise of the middle class. He also appeared regularly on BBC Radio 4.

Yet despite all this, the former lecturer in modern history at Queen Mary, University of London, writer for the Observer and Guardian and, most recently, biographer of Friedrich Engels, says the “most stressful thing” he’s done is candidate selection.

“At elections you’re the candidate and you’ve got the machinery. If you lose, well you’ve lost, but in selections you’re in a

struggle with your own side and it’s more edgy,” he says.

In 2007 and 2009 he failed to be selected for safe seats in Liverpool and Leyton and Wanstead. When he was finally selected for Stoke-on-Trent in 2010, there was controversy over him being “parachuted in” at the last minute. He won by 5,566 votes.

“The consolations of history are rather good because you look back at all sorts of people who’ve been through similar processes and it’s a truism that you have to go through various elections and selections before you’re successful. It’s the battle and grind of it,” he says.

“I was delighted with the end result; it’s great to be representing Stoke.”

He has argued that the Staffordshire city should make the most of its famous but dwindling pottery industries and has criticised the local council’s decision to “try to obliterate the past, and sort of ‘cleanse’, removing the old bottle ovens and other relics”.

He says that his favourite era is 1750 to 1850 when the Industrial Revolution gave rise to great urban civilisations in Manchester, Liverpool and Stoke-on-Trent, creating with it a “British identity”.

“We have wonderful facilities in Stoke but they really need more money and support and talent drawn to them because everything is sucked into London,” he explains.

“A rebalancing of economic and cultural capacity across Britain is a strong priority for me, which is why the 19th century is so wonderful — there was a period of great equality across the country because of the industrial power that places such as Manchester and Birmingham had. They were places you really had to reckon with.”

He says that production of Spode [an English brand of pottery] is coming back to Stoke from China, but that skills shortages are a problem.

“You go into a pot bank and there’s no one there under 50. Thankfully all the local pottery firms are joining with the British Ceramic Confederation to work out a skills framework. Wedgwood has a good apprenticeship programme — we’re trying to push for that,” he says.

He says Stoke-on-Trent is a city where you can see “capacity and potential not being delivered”, because the right educational and skills results are not being achieved.

“That’s a real social justice issue and is where governments can and should help,” he says.

“It’s where we can make a difference — that goes right through to children’s special educational needs, children in care. It’s fundamental to what being in Labour should be about.”

Eleanor Radford
@EleanorRadford

Picture the young Gordon Marsden on his first day as a tutor for the Open University. It is the early 1980s. He is standing in a hall in Tottenham, North London, and no one is taking much notice of him. He is 20 years younger than most of the others in the hall. What to do?

“I went to the front and heavily put my files on the desk and said: ‘I am Gordon Marsden and I am your course tutor’. We took it from there,” says the Shadow Skills Minister.

It may have been a shaky start, but it was the start of a long love affair between the now 59-year-old and the university. So much so that he went on to tutor part-time in history for the next 20 years. But it wasn’t his first – or only – job. He’d already worked in public relations before editing History Today, as well as New Socialist.

This was after graduating from the University of Oxford and completing postgraduate research at Harvard University, all before he was 30.

But it is the ethos of the Open University — education for all — that has resonated most with Marsden.

“Giving people life chances is very important to me; it is at the centre of my political beliefs,” he says.

“Socialism is what Labour governments do, but for me it was always about practical things to improve people’s life chances.”

Marsden won Blackpool South for Labour in the late 1990s, a seat that he retains today.

“I knew Blackpool as a child and I thought that seaside and coastal towns had had a raw deal in terms of small businesses and tourism,” he says.

“But these things are important because of the cultural and historical resonance so I asked, ‘how do we get this town regenerated?’ How do we get skills? I also pushed the position of small businesses.

“In 1997, I became the first Labour MP in Blackpool. I thought whatever else happens to me, I’ve always got a little piece of history here.”

Marsden, who lives in Brighton with his partner of 28 years, Richard, grew up in a Labour household.

His father had been a trade union shop steward and, by the age of 10, the schoolboy from Romiley, just outside Stockport, had already stood for Labour in a mock election.

“I knew it was the party for me then, so when I was 17 I decided to join,” he says.

“I tracked down the local secretary who lived with his mother nearby and was

literally signed up there and then in his front room.

“His mother gave me a hand-knitted Labour rosette, which I still have. My involvement with the party from those days really coloured my view of what I thought politics was about.”

Marsden, born in Manchester, describes his railway engineer father and housewife mother as “ordinary working-class” people who “thoroughly supported him” through life.

He went to grammar school and was the first of his family to win a university place, giving his parents “very quiet pride”.

He describes his days studying history at Oxford as a “very important experience”.

“I met a huge range of people from different backgrounds and there were lots of opportunities to get involved with things — the debating society, historical society, literary groups and the Fabian Society,” he recalls.

“It focuses you sharply when you come from a background where no one had gone to university, let alone Oxford.

“I was there in the mid to late 1970s and I was very grateful, but there were a lot of people who I felt had come from much more privileged backgrounds who were playing at being revolutionaries. I used to call them mini Marxists.”

He got to know many well-known figures, including Peter Mandelson and Benazir Bhutto [Pakistan’s only female Prime Minister, who was assassinated in 2007].

“Benazir was a close friend,” says Marsden.

“It was difficult at the time because the situation in Pakistan was so complex and we were all very concerned about what would happen in the future for her. It was a great loss, not just for her friends and family but also for her country.”

Marsden continued to pursue his love of history — handed to him, he says, by his grandfather — researching medieval religion for the Warburg Institute after university. But he crossed the Atlantic when the chance came up to take a year out to look into US politics.

He arrived on the eve of Jimmy Carter’s presidency, and was soon involved with an inquiry on human rights in Eastern Europe.

On his return, Margaret Thatcher was taking power for the Conservatives and academic jobs were, he says, “thin on the ground”.

Although the young academic landed the “dream job for a historian”, editing History Today, at his heart Marsden was still a political man, worrying about the



bigger picture and the country in which he lived.

“The 1980s were a very difficult time for the Labour Party and a very frustrating time for me,” he says.

“I felt a lot of posturing and sloganising was getting in the way of the big issues to improve people’s lives and the things that we should have been doing to fight Thatcherism and the Conservatives.

“I never thought of leaving the party because it was in my family, but it was only when Neil Kinnock became leader in the mid-1980s that I thought we were getting somewhere.”

He said Lord Kinnock inspired him so much that he wanted to “step up to the plate”.

It was then that he started putting himself forward for a seat in Blackpool.

“When Neil Kinnock made his famous speech, ‘why am I the first Kinnock in a thousand generations to go to university?’ he said it wasn’t because his ancestors were not strong — it was because they had no platform on which to build,” says Marsden.

“That’s how I feel when I think of my grandfather and mother.”

Would local enterprise partnerships go

some way to addressing this?

“The principle that skills policy should have a very strong local and sub-regional input is essential,” he says.

“We want the highest possible democratic participation in that process of decision-making.

The students in FE, the apprentices, their families, local authorities have all got to have a say in that.”

But he adds that engagement between colleges and partnerships varies and his “top priority” is to create “strong, transparent structures and frameworks in education that will allow people to dip in and out.

“We should keep doors open and build bridges, not barriers,” he says.

How does he feel he was able to create his own platform?

“You just have to keep at it. You get disappointments and knockbacks, but you have to pull yourself up and not think that simply because you got on the ladder, that everyone else can get on the same one,” explains Marsden.

“I want to create exciting new frameworks in education that will make Britain prosper — at the same time giving people life chances.”



FE Week's Shane Mann took in the sights and sounds of the Labour party conference in Brighton. Here are few highlights from what turned out to be quite an adventure.



Here I am putting my cycling skills to the test at PTEG's stand, who represent the metropolitan Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) in Great Britain. You had to cycle exactly 200m in 60 seconds, my maths skills were put to the test in order to calculate the speed I would need cycle. I beat Nick Linford - that's the main thing.



I had to have a play with the giant Operation game which IOSH, the Institute for Occupational Health and Safety were using to highlight the importance of health and safety in the work place. I was never good at this as a child, I have not improved.



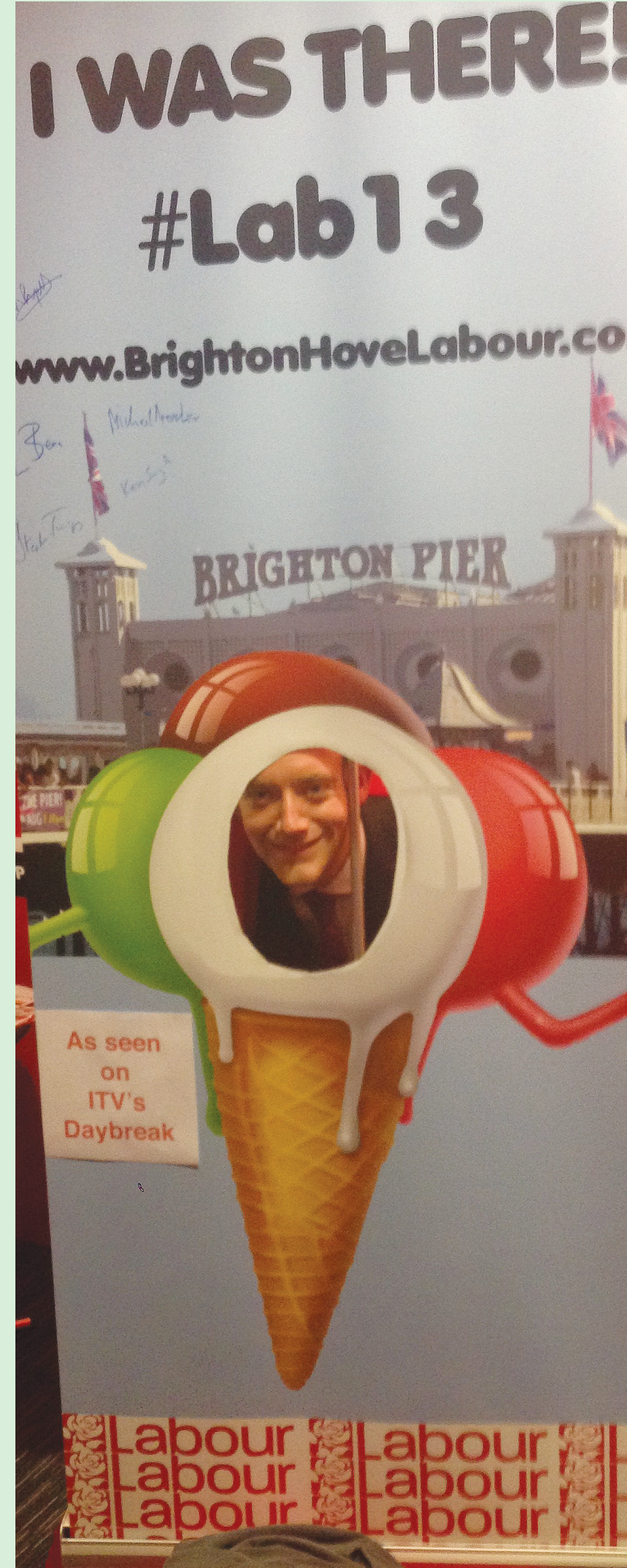
I'll admit that I am a bit of a Dr Who geek, so I had to get my picture taken with Tom Baker at the BBC exhibition stand... even if made of cardboard.



Here I am with the news editor of the popular politics blog Guido Fawkes (order.order.com) and contributing of The Spectator Harry Cole, he was mischievously carrying around his copy of the recently published Damian McBride diaries during conference.



Comedian Rob Bishop was at party conference to take part in a comedy fundraiser, here we are outside the Hilton Metro pole hotel following his gig.



The local Labour group had the this terrific banner up, which by the end of conference was filled with the parties big guns signatures.

EYE SPY



Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna MP reading FE Week following a fringe event at the Thistle hotel



Shadow Minister for Public Health Diane Abbott MP catching up with the latest edition of FE Week



From left: Charlie Buirski promotions assistant for FE Week, Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg and Nick Linford FE Week editor by our poll outside the entrance of conference



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