

Hello – and welcome to my October newsletter. It’s hard to believe that summer has almost gone, and with it my good intentions of producing a newsletter every couple of months! Much has gone on over the last few months, so I thought I would just pick up on a few stories that made the news...

Issue 14 October 2016

A spoonful of Sugar!

Early in the summer, much was made of the appointment of Lord Sugar as an ambassador for apprenticeships and, as you would expect, such an appointment is not without controversy!

According to the now defunct BIS (the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), Lord Sugar is one of the best known names in British business, having built up two successful computer firms – Amstrad and Viglen (Amstrad, I think, is something everyone of my generation has heard of – not necessarily favourably; Viglen I have to confess, has completely passed me by!). It would seem, or at least we are told, that after leaving school at 16, his career makes him ideally placed to champion the cause of both entrepreneurship and apprenticeships. I have to say, I’m not convinced. I’m not sure that the present generation of sixteen-year-olds know much about him and if they do, it’s only for his show ‘The Apprentice’ which in itself seems to breach the Government’s own rules on when you can call something an apprenticeship and, if they are real apprentices, must reflect the worst success rates in the country!

Back in July, Ofsted carried out a review of the implementation of the Prevent duty practice across FE and Skills. One of the key conclusions of that review was that:

“The majority of providers had implemented the ‘Prevent’ duty guidance well. However, some providers viewed the duty as a list of conditions just to comply with “Prevent” duty guidance and have adopted a ‘tick-box’ approach. This goes against the spirit of the government’s guidance, which seeks to promote meaningful ways to reduce the specific risks of radicalisation and extremism for learners and the local community”.

Alongside this, we need to be clear that from 1st September, Ofsted has increased its expectations of providers to implement all aspects of the ‘Prevent’ duty, and evaluate the impact this has on keeping learners safe.

One of the unintended consequences of the Brexit result was a significant and disturbing increase in attacks on minority communities across the UK,

particularly the Polish community. Abhorrent as these attacks are, they do provide an ideal opportunity for many providers to lift their approach to radicalisation and extremism off the policy paper and put them into practice. What are you doing as a provider of FE and Skills and as a guardian of British Values to alert staff and learners to these shocking practices?

The appointment of Peter Lauener as the part-time head of the much-lauded but little understood Institute for Apprentices is hugely disappointing for a number of reasons. How can the appointment of a man that is also head of the SFA and the EFA, demonstrate the high level of impartiality and independence that the Institute must have if it is going to have any authority in the sector? Equally worrying, this is the third concurrent post held by Mr Lauener, which appears to give little credibility to the importance of an organisation that is charged with some serious duties on maintaining the quality and rigour of new standards.

Finally, I can’t help but turn to one of the most hyped non-news news stories of the year – the use of the Ofsted logo. It seems that a number of providers of FE and Skills have taken the Ofsted logo and amended it to meet their own marketing needs, usually by incorporating a grade within it, and now complaining that Ofsted has threatened legal action. When the role of the much-missed Adult Learning Inspectorate was incorporated into Ofsted back in 2007, I can remember guidelines being issued on the use of a specially created “Ofsted Outstanding” logo, with providers receiving that grade getting a post-inspection letter confirming their eligibility to use the logo.

I work with many high street names and common sense tells me I can’t take their logo and add myself into it or change it any way. I don’t need a policy document to tell me that. Why is the use of the Ofsted logo different – why is there a perception that it is OK to change any logo and then be surprised when that is challenged?

In the words of the late and much lamented Sir Terry Wogan – “Is it me”

Kevin Dowson