

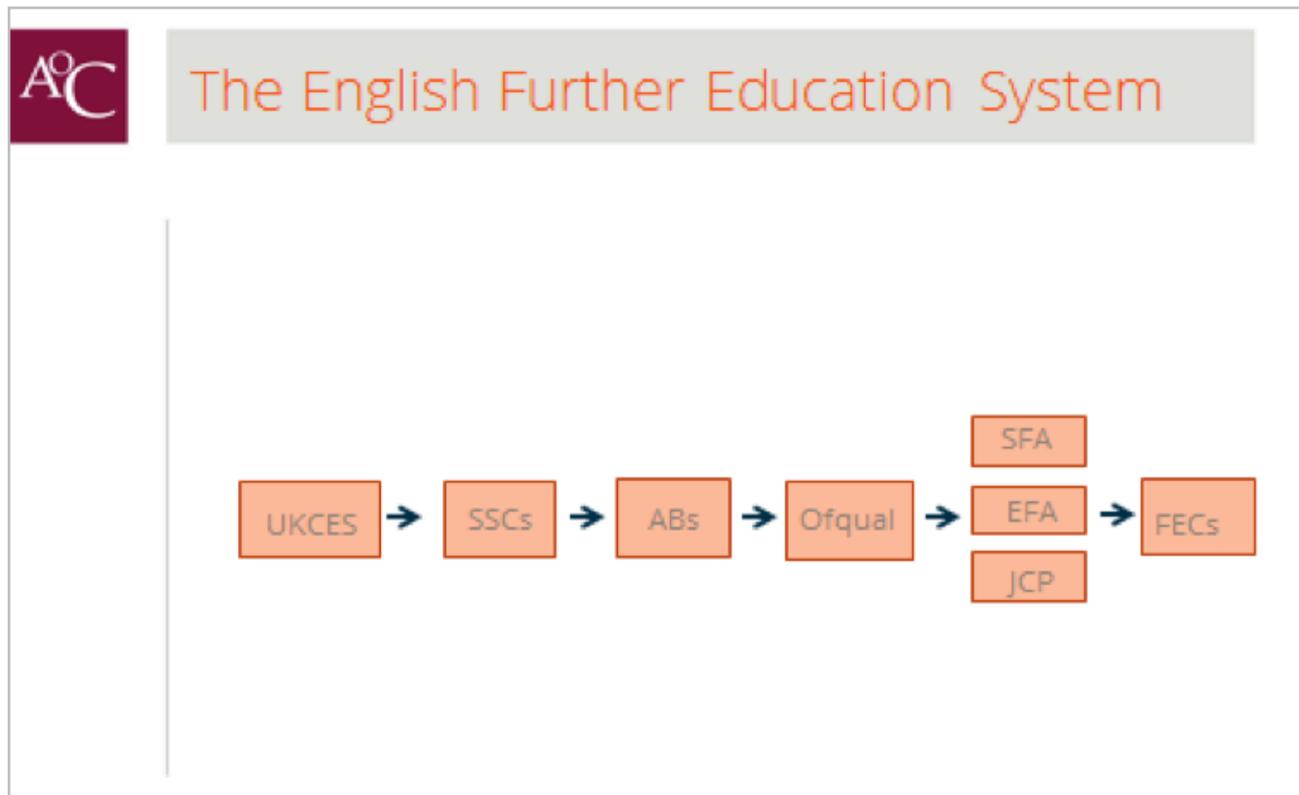


JOHN MOUNTFORD, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES ENGLISH COLLEGES' ROLE IN SECURING THE SKILLED WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

A fundamentally important question for TVET providers is how do we best train and prepare our learners to have the skills they need for employability whilst meeting the needs of the employers, industries and communities that we serve. To work towards achieving this ambition, the English model has several features that I feel are worth sharing: the FE system itself, college governance and leadership, approaches to curriculum, dual professionalism, links with industry and a growing acknowledgement of the importance of transferable and global skills.

The English FE system is based on a 'demand driven' approach that helps to ensure that the industry set standards are reflected in vocational qualifications, curriculum and provision. A starting point is with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) that compiles labour market intelligence and international comparators. Alongside this 'macro' level view UKCES also works closely with the UK's Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) who are industry owned organisations that work to define National Occupational Standards (NOSs) in their sector and describe the types of skills that employers are looking for. In turn, these NOSs are picked up by private sector Awarding Bodies (ABs) who articulate them into awards. The quality of the contents and administration of these awards is monitored by Ofqual. The government will then fund Further Education Colleges (FECs) (via one of its funding agencies (SFA, JCP, EFA) based on the students they have enrolled on programmes that leads towards an accredited award. The quality of leadership, teaching and learning colleges is also independently assessed by England's

education inspectorate, Ofsted. Although it appears a rather complicated system it does allow for a direct path to be taking from UKCES' macro view of the national and international skills market via the sector specific skills requirements of SSCs into the qualifications and curriculum that students study. This system allows learners to study on courses that help them to develop the skills industry needs whilst gaining qualifications that employers respect and trust.



English colleges are allowed a large degree of autonomy from the government which allows them to take a flexible approach in their strategic direction and in responding to local and national skills needs and employers' demands. This is further strengthened by the presence of local employers on college boards meaning that industry has a strong voice in the governance and strategic leadership of colleges. This allows colleges to better respond to skills gaps and employer needs through the input of their governing body. This blending of industry with education within the English college system is also demonstrated in the classroom where teachers are expected to demonstrate their 'dual professionalism'. This means that they have to have both the pedagogic skills they need to deliver inspiring teaching to their learners and an up to date knowledge of the sector in which their students will be working. This means that colleges have a commitment to hiring teachers from industry and keeping their current staff up to date on the latest industrial practices. Colleges also work hard to forge close links with local employers, for example, through inviting local companies in for informal meetings with teachers. There has been a large growth in apprenticeship programmes which blend learning and working. These represent a close partnership between employers, colleges and students where students are in paid employment and study at the same time allowing for an authentic learning

experience. This is underpinned by the philosophy that learners should study on meaningful programmes that allow them to develop and progress. Colleges are committed to using up to date equipment that allows learners to replicate their working environment in the classroom. These types of programmes allow for the type of ‘real life’ study experiences that help ensure a skilled workforce for the future.

Colleges also acknowledge that in this uncertain world, the specific jobs skills we are equipping our learners with may not be relevant even in the near future. We need to prepare our learners to be successful in a changeable and fluid job market. Consequently, we have a responsibility to provide them with the transferable skills that will help them to be employable for the rest of their lives. These could be gained through programmes that encourage learners to develop confidence in team work, taking the initiative, and dealing with customers, skills which are often highlighted by employers as the type of attributes they look for in employees. Equally, colleges have devised programmes and a college culture that encourages students to develop skills in entrepreneurship and enterprise which they can use to set up their own businesses or to be proactive employees. There has also been a growing commitment to helping learners to develop global skills and confidence by internationalising their study experience. As the world grows more uncertain and more global with need to produce learners who are flexible, entrepreneurial and global in their outlook which will give them a true skill set for the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Mountford is International Director of the Association of Colleges (AoC), representing and supporting colleges as they develop their international work. This includes leading on the AoC's International Charter, meeting international stakeholders and policy makers and supporting a number of groups focused on international education including: Department of Business Innovation Skills' International Education Advisory Group, British Council's Skills Advisory Forum and AoC's International Portfolio group. John is also a board member or representative for EUproVET, World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics, Technical and Vocational Education and Training UK, UK Council for International Student Affairs and the Training Gateway. He has also represented Colleges in the planning process for a number of key Government funded initiatives including UK India Education Research Initiative 2 and Prime Minister's Initiative 2.

John has twenty years of experience working with international students and international partners. This has included time working as a teacher and teacher trainer in Mexico, Czech Republic and Greece and in the private sector as a Director of Studies for a large language school chain.