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NEW CENTRE TO DRIVE FORWARD RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE UK

The UK needs:

- **A more agile, relevant and needs-based vocational education sector**
- **More high-quality apprenticeships, which are vital to investment, economic growth and social mobility**
- **To address past inconsistencies of quality in the UK's existing vocational education system**
- **A vocational route in education which is – and is seen to be – a good alternative to an academic route and not a poor relation.**

Tuesday 24 March: Today, Nick Boles MP, Minister of State for Skills & Equalities, will be launching the **Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER)**, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Skills Minister Nick Boles says:

“A skilled workforce, able to meet the needs of employers and industries, is vital to our continued economic growth.

I'm delighted to be opening the Centre for Vocational Education Research, bringing together experts from universities and colleges to build on our work driving up standards in skills and training. Creating new ideas for skills provision, rooted in analysis and rigorous research, will help the UK create a world-class workforce of the future.”

In 2014 there were nearly 1.4 million adult learners¹ and over half a million apprentices in England, with over 2.1 million apprenticeship starts in the last 5 years. Sandra McNally, founding director of the new Centre, says:

“While there are many excellent routes available to young people in vocational education, many do not get the high quality education they need to fulfil their own potential and to contribute to economic growth.

The new Centre aspires to become a world-class research hub to generate a step-change in our understanding of the nature, significance and potential contribution of vocational education to individuals and the wider economy.”

As well as McNally from the LSE's Centre for Economic Performance, the new Centre brings together partners, all with significant and acknowledged expertise in vocational education: the University of Sheffield (Dr Steven McIntosh); the Institute for Employment Studies (Dr Stefan Speckesser); and London Economics (Dr Gavan Conlon).

At the launch, Professor Alison Wolf of King's College London, author of the Review of Vocational Education (the Wolf Report) in 2011, will be on the panel for a question and answer session.

Professor Wolf, Chair of the CVER's advisory board, said:

“I am absolutely delighted that the Government is establishing this Centre. It is an opportunity to transform our understanding of vocational education, and its role in society, and to create better education policy at all levels as a result.”

Professor Wolf will be joined for the panel discussion by Frank Bowley, Deputy Director for Skills Policy & Analysis, BIS, CVER Director Sandra McNally, and Professor John Van Reenen, Director of LSE Centre for Economic Performance.

ENDS

¹ Skills Funding Agency & BIS, Statistical First Release, Further Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held, [SFA/SFR27](#), January 2015.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The launch will be held on Tuesday 24 March at the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, 32 Lincoln's Inn Fields, Room 1.04, from 11:00am to 12:00pm
To attend RSVP to Jo Cantlay at j.m.cantlay@lse.ac.uk.

Media enquiries to Romesh Vaitilingham 07768 661095; Sandra McNally 07779 078933

ABOUT THE CENTRE

The **Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER)** is a newly established research institution, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The Centre brings together four partners, all with significant and acknowledged expertise in vocational education: the Centre for Economic Performance at the LSE (Professor Sandra McNally will be CVER's Director); the University of Sheffield (Dr Steven McIntosh); the Institute for Employment Studies (Dr Stefan Speckesser); and London Economics (Dr Gavan Conlon).

WHY A CENTRE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH?

It has been long recognised that significant improvements in the vocational education and skills of the UK labour force are essential for stronger and more sustainable economic growth. It is also well established that there are long-running structural problems and inadequacies in our existing vocational education system (as highlighted in the Wolf Report of 2011). Our aim is to create a research institution that will advance our understanding of the requirements for vocational education in the UK today, identify the challenges in provision of vocational education, and develop and strengthen the knowledge-base to enable a more agile, relevant and needs-based vocational education sector to become a driving force for economic growth and social mobility, as it is in other countries.

In our research we will address the following fundamental questions facing vocational education today:

- How does vocational education generally (and more specifically, 'high quality' vocational education provision) affect individual prosperity, firm productivity and profitability, and economic growth?
- How can the quantity of 'high quality' vocational education provision be improved?
- How do the costs and benefits of vocational education influence individuals' participation decisions?

WHO ARE WE?



[Prof Sandra McNally](#) is the Director of the Centre for Vocational Education Research and is based at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics (LSE). McNally also leads the Education and Skills Programme at CEP and is a Professor of Economics at University of Surrey.

Her expertise lies in the economics of education and she has considerable experience of evaluating programme interventions using both non-experimental and experimental methods. Recent work includes research on the effects of school resources on student outcomes and the role of careers-related information on students' attitudes to future educational decisions. Sandra is an adviser to different government departments and gives regular presentations to policy-makers. She is Co-Editor of the Economics of Education Review and member of the ESRC Peer Review College.



[Dr Gavan Conlon](#) is a Partner at London Economics. He has an extensive understanding of economics of vocational education and training having spent the last two decades researching the area using quantitative analysis.

Gavan has provided expert evidence to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee enquiry into higher education fees and funding and is an OECD expert on methodologies for assessing the economic impact associated with education and skills proficiencies. He is also a named Research Associate at the UK Commission for Employment and Skills; a technical advisor to the BIS and HM Treasury on the valuation of income contingent student loans and has provided advice to BIS on data matching across the public sector. He also provides specialist advice to the Department of Education on evaluation methodologies and cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis.



[Dr Steven McIntosh](#) is a reader in the Department of Economics at the University of Sheffield. He is an applied labour economist, with a particular focus on education issues and how they relate to labour market outcomes.

Steven has produced a large body of work looking at the wage returns and rates of return to qualifications, particularly vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. A second body of research has considered the match between the demand for and supply of skills, and the extent to which employees work in jobs appropriate for their skills and abilities. This work has looked at the wage effects of being in mismatched employment, but also tried to establish the reasons why an individual ends up in mismatched employment.



[Dr Stefan Speckesser](#) is an empirical economist specialising in evaluation methodology, programme and policy impacts and the returns to investments in vocational education. He has been Principal Economist of the Institute for Employment Studies since 2010.

Stefan has an academic background in Applied Econometrics and Political Science and has published extensively on the economics of education and the theory and practice of causal impact assessment. He has been involved in more than 50 applied research projects both in the UK and internationally, with a focus on vocational education research. Recent projects include a study on youth transitions, the evaluation of the *Apprenticeship Grant for Employers* and the impact of *Learning below Level 2* (for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), the Evaluation of the *Youth Contract* (for the Department for Education) and the costs of low skills to the European economy (for Cedefop). He has been an advisor to the Home Office and the European Commission and is currently an Analytical Associate to the Department for Education.

CONTACT US

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