



Employer research into Industry Associates

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A report to the Gatsby Charitable Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

York Consulting LLP (YCL) undertook research with Further Education (FE) Industry Associates and their managers on behalf of The Gatsby Charitable Foundation (Gatsby Foundation).

This study built on previous research undertaken by YCL involving qualitative research with FE stakeholders to explore the use of Industry Associates in curriculum delivery.

On behalf of the Gatsby Foundation, York Consulting LLP (YCL) completed consultations with Industry Associates and their managers exploring their role and preparation involved in FE delivery they undertake.

In this report, Industry Associates is used to describe individuals who work in industry, and also contribute to technical education teaching through, for example, co-delivery of a session, masterclasses, or delivery of short elements of the curriculum. Individuals who themselves do not act as Industry Associates but support other staff to do so from their place of work are referred to as managers.

This research aimed to explore the following aspects of the Industry Associate role:

- Curriculum delivery
- Motivations for delivering the role
- Preparation and training
- Benefits experienced
- Challenges and suggested improvements.

Research overview

A literature review was conducted prior to engaging with FE institutions and respective Industry Associates and managers. The following search terms, appended with 'further education' were used in Google and Google Scholar search engines:

Search terms		
Industry Associates	Guest lecturers	Employers and curriculum delivery
Employer engagement	Visiting lecturers	Industry experts
Employer-college links	Industry teaching	Industry professionals and curriculum

In addition, a dialogue was held with Professor Kevin Orr (Huddersfield University) to check awareness of any additional sources of literature.

After conducting a literature review, topic guides were created for use with Industry Associates and managers to explore the role further.

Consultations with these individuals were achieved through engagement with college stakeholders who had been involved in a previous round of research conducted with the

Gatsby Foundation¹. Where survey respondents had consented to be contacted again, emails were sent inviting them to take part in a short discussion to identify any suitable Industry Associates to contact. College stakeholders sought consent from Industry Associates and managers prior to sharing contact details. A total of 11 colleges initially engaged with the research, from 7 English regions. This resulted in a total of 13 consultations with Industry Associates (8) or managers (5) across 13 employers. Consultations were undertaken between May and July 2023. A small number of interviews 2 were not analysed as part of this work as they related to employer support for workplace delivery of Apprenticeships and T Levels.

The managers' job roles covered skills, sustainability, human resources and governance. These individuals themselves did not act as Industry Associates, but instead had liaison roles with colleges and would identify staff from their workplace to take part in curriculum delivery with those colleges.

A couple of Industry Associates consulted with were dual professionals^{2,3}, where they were both employed in industry and by a college for curriculum delivery. Industry Associates included in this research were from a range of industrial sectors including finance and banking, construction, engineering and technology.

Their job roles were varied including engineers, quantity surveyor, and retail managers.

Report structure

This report consists of two sections:

- Literature review – highlighting relevant evidence identified.
- Analysis and findings – setting out the evidence from the qualitative research.

¹ Wilson, P. and Russell, H. 2022 [Research into the use of Industry Associates in Further Education](#)

² Orr, K., VET Teachers and Trainers (2019). In David Guile, Lorna Unwin (Ed.). [The Wiley Handbook of Vocational Education and Training \(pp 329-248\)](#). United Kingdom: Wiley.

³ Kidd, W., Viswarajan, S. and McMahon, A., (2022). [Reflexivity for whom? The ethics of a craft identity and the know-how of supporting reflexivity on teacher education programmes. In Teacher Educators in Vocational and Further Education \(pp. 105-119\)](#). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses the role of Industry Associates and the importance of employer engagement in the FE curriculum in the UK. However, limited literature was found relating to the role of Industry Associates in FE delivery. Other references to Industry Associate roles were made in literature relating directly to Higher Education, so fell outside of the scope of this report.

Review of this limited literature demonstrated a lack of consistency used to refer to individuals who work in industry and contribute to FE curriculum. Phrases used included industry professionals, visiting lecturers, guest lecturers and employer contributors.

A report in 2005⁴ looking at the role of FE colleges outlined business stakeholder views that FE teachers did not have a sound understanding of recent industry developments. Although continued professional development was identified as one solution, it was also mentioned that improving technical relevance could be done through sabbaticals, secondments and employing part-time teachers who are current practitioners.

In contrast to the UK, it has been previously highlighted that employers in other parts of Europe, namely Germany, Austria and Switzerland, have agreements and legal frameworks where employers play a central role in the design and delivery of technical education⁵.

More recently, Hodgson and Spours⁶ explored the changing role FE institutions should be playing in a post-Brexit nation. They called for increased collaboration with employers to support the development of local and regional skills to fit the needs of the employment market. Improved collaboration was suggested through the co-design, production and delivery of technical and vocational education with employer partners. Inclusion of locally produced knowledge through collaboration with local employers has been perceived as a necessary step to remove centralised knowledge production practices that have taken place in FE institutions through qualification delivery⁷.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development emphasised that the skills gaps holding many organisations back can be addressed through employers shaping qualifications and training courses, whilst also providing learners with a clearer path into employment⁸. Businesses rely on local talent, thus, playing a role in developing the skills and knowledge of local learners is key to improving future workplace delivery and performance. Without the integration of local skills needs into skills delivery, a centralised skills system risks causing continued nationwide skills mismatch⁹.

The Education and Training Foundation developed a programme and practical resources to support employer-provider partnerships to improve the relevance of technical

⁴ Foster, A., 2005. [A review of the future role of further education colleges](#). DfES Publications

⁵ Clarke, L. and Winch, C. (2007) [Vocational education: international approaches, developments and systems](#). London: Routledge

⁶ Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., 2019. [Further education in England: At the crossroads between a national, competitive sector and a locally collaborative system?](#) *Journal of Education and Work*, 32(3), pp.224-237

⁷ Gleeson, D., Hughes, J., O'Leary, M. and Smith, R., 2015. [The state of professional practice and policy in the English further education system: a view from below](#). *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 20(1), pp.78-95.

⁸ Chartered Institute for Personal Development, 2021. [Giving firms stronger role in shaping local FE provision is a key improvement to skills system but many employers will need support if they are to step-up](#)

⁹ Melville, D. and Bivand, P., 2019. [Local skills deficits and spare capacity](#). Learning and Work Institute.

education and training. The Teach Too programme encourages industry experts to spend time sharing their knowledge and teaching skills with providers. Suggested and observed examples of effective employer engagement outlined in the Teach Too development programme findings¹⁰ and the report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning¹¹ include:

- Joint vocational course curriculum development, programme design, review and evaluation.
- Industry Associates directly teaching their work or specialisms to learners; activities including lecturing, mentoring, running workshops, seminars, and demonstrations.
- Support opportunities for technical teachers and trainers to update their occupational expertise.
- Introducing Teach Too, a scheme to encourage working people to teach their occupation for a few hours a week.

It is more common for literature to focus on the first element, curriculum design. This covered¹²:

- Employers expressing their skills needs to colleges.
- Employers supporting the update of a curriculum to fit these needs as a form of responsive training.

In instances where learners were taught skills or knowledge by industry staff, this was most commonly reported to take place in workplace settings¹⁰¹³ more aligned with placements, work experience or apprenticeship delivery. Therefore, there are very limited reports in wider literature on direct curriculum delivery by employers in FE settings, as described in our earlier study¹⁴. Delivery within FE provider settings allows for Industry Associates to engage with entire course cohorts, rather than a small number of learners, and allows for greater opportunities for curriculum updates and assessment collaboration with FE staff.

There were reports of both a perceived lack of capacity by employers to engage with colleges on a regular basis, but also reports¹⁵ that some employers find it difficult to define their training needs and therefore do not want to lead on the design of a qualification or programme at a college.

To encourage relationships and partnerships to grow between employers and FE institutions, a variety of methods were suggested in the literature. Firstly, in 2005¹⁶ Foster called for the Government's corporate social responsibility agenda to be expanded to include encouraging employees to take active roles in training through lecturing or being

¹⁰ Education and Training Foundation, 2017. [Findings from the Teach Too development programme phase 3](#)

¹¹ Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning. 2013. [It's about work... Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning.](#)

¹² McCoshan, A. and Otero, M.S., 2003. [Further Education Colleges' Views on FE-employer Links.](#) Department for Education and Skills.

¹³ Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Wilson, P. and Russell, H., *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Huddleston, P. and Unwin, L., 2013. [Teaching and learning in further education: diversity and change.](#) Routledge.

¹⁶ Foster, A., *op.cit.*

assessors in colleges. Other calls were also made for devolution of responsibilities to local and regional levels for FE institutions and partners to have discretionary powers for collaboration to take place¹⁷. Another suggested governmental responsibility centred around the development of frameworks and incentives to encourage employer collaboration with colleges through tutoring, lecturing or other curriculum activities.

The report of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning¹¹⁸ suggested that colleges would need to clearly demonstrate and advertise the added value of working together with employers. Demonstration of the two-way benefits including developing employees' skillsets and qualification levels and raising the standards and ambitions within industry which would create higher quality outputs. Additionally, collaboration can act as a means for employers to fill skills gaps within their workforce through shaping the content of qualifications.

A recent report by the Lifelong Education Commission¹⁹ called for The Treasury to consider providing incentives, such as tax breaks to encourage the release of members of staff to deliver higher skills teaching as a way to bring FE teaching up-to-date with current industry skills practices and needs.

In summary, there is limited literature available surrounding the roles and responsibilities of Industry Associates and the benefits and challenges of this role. The following sections highlight findings from consultations with industry staff with current Industry Associates roles.

¹⁷ Kidd, W., Viswarajan, S. and McMahon, A., *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning. *op.cit.*

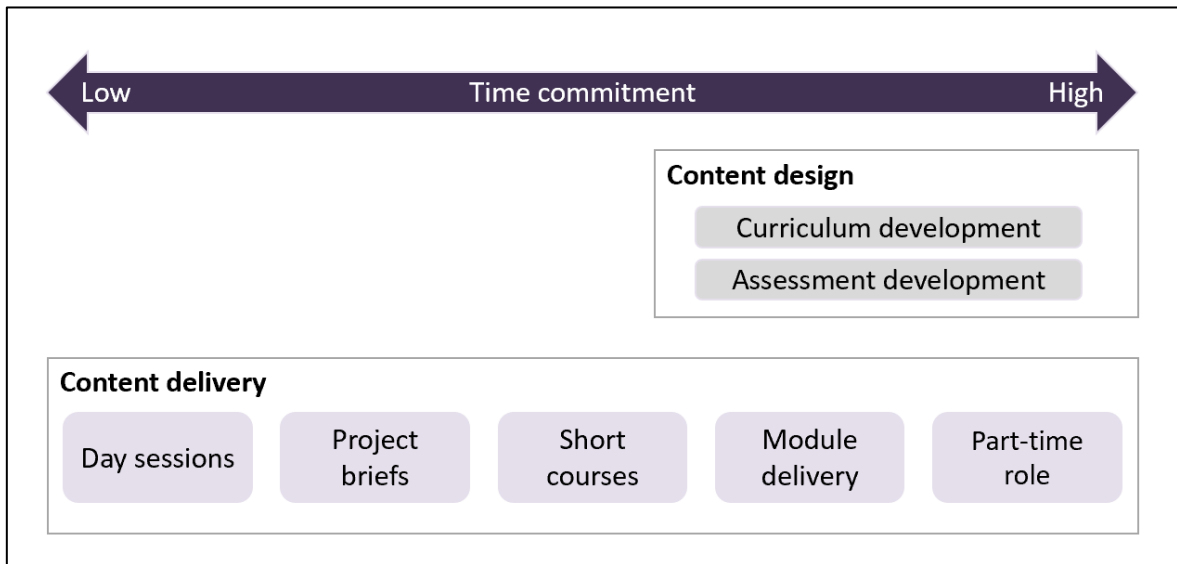
¹⁹ Lifelong Education Commission., 2023. [Developing Industry-Expert Teaching For Higher Skills](#). Respublica.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Delivery and role

The role of Industry Associates varied between colleges and employers. Figure 1 outlines the range of delivery modes explored in this research against a time commitment continuum. The time commitment required from each consulted individual varied depending on the delivery and support they offered to the college. Each of these is described with examples in the section below.

Figure 1 Industry Associates delivery modes



Content design

Curriculum development

Examples were identified of Industry Associates supporting a college with the development or updating of their course curriculum. This involved updating knowledge and skills in the curriculum to reflect industry standards and skills gaps. This relationship was maintained between college staff and an Industry Associate through email communication, in-person and video-meetings. This was an involved process that took place over a year.

In one instance, an employer who had been involved in curriculum development, organised virtual drop-ins for students to discuss with Industry Associate aspects of the course content that had been recently updated and linked to current industry practice.

Assessment development

In some cases, Industry Associates worked with college staff to develop assessments based on contemporary expectations in a workplace. This helped ensure that assessments were relevant and up-to-date.

Content delivery

Day sessions

These sessions, which took place in-person, involved varying time commitments by Industry Associates, from one-off delivery of a few hours to on-going regular year-round support.

Some Industry Associates delivered sessions lasting from a couple of hours, up to one day. These sessions were formulated around elements of the curriculum that college staff deemed appropriate to be delivered by Industry Associates. Examples mentioned by Industry Associates included sessions relating to budget management and coding for a specific piece of equipment. This aspect of delivery required dialogue between college staff and employers to highlight their needs for the sessions, and preparatory work on the prior knowledge of the students to ensure delivery was appropriate to their levels of understanding.

Example: Day sessions

A banking and finance organisation provided multiple day sessions to colleges throughout an academic year. For successful implementation of these sessions the organisation asked for the colleges to communicate what is being taught in the one month lead up to the session. This ensures the staff deployed as Industry Associates to the college are aware of students' prior knowledge and are able to build on this.

Where the college required larger elements of the curriculum to be delivered by the Industry Associates, over a number of sessions, the organisation asked for 6 months' notice to be able to plan and prepare the session to link in with their specific curriculum.

Project briefs

A few employers created project-briefs, representative of industry tasks and challenges. Students were required to complete the tasks using the theoretical knowledge gained through previous course input from the Industry Associate, or regular teaching staff. Industry Associates would then also be present during the presentation of findings to assess the students' work and give them feedback.

Example: Project briefs

A technology and logistics organisation had been working with a local college to deliver project briefs to students. This involved a few members of staff creating a marketing brief with real-world examples for students to problem-solve.

Communication took place with college staff to ensure briefs were suitable to the knowledge and experience level of the students and to ensure a suitable fit with the college curriculum. Staff at the organisation also undertook mid-way check ins and discussions with students to review progress and understanding of the task. The same

staff are also involved in the presentation of findings by the students and are able to provide feedback.

Overall, this required around 5 hours of staff time. It also provided resource and learning opportunities for the college students that could be used over an extended period.

“It has been a great way for students to be able to apply learning to a real-world example linked to their curriculum and gain feedback from current industry professionals.”

Short courses

Where some colleges wanted to deliver teaching related to specific skills or equipment, they called upon local employers to deliver short elements of curriculum, commonly through a short course. This involved Industry Associates agreeing the short course content with college staff and then attending the college for short intensive periods to deliver the learning. They often provided or demonstrated the necessary industry-specific equipment needed for delivery. Industry Associates reported the importance of a flexible model of teaching as they would deliver the basic skills and knowledge needed, whilst also providing practical experience for the students. College staff would be present during this type of delivery.

Example: Short courses

Short courses had been delivered by Industry Associates from a management and construction company to a few local colleges. These short courses included flying a drone safely around a construction site, these were delivered by Industry Associates to college students.

Students initially learnt the theory behind the technology, before having practical experience in flying the drones during a few sessions.

Module delivery

One Industry Associate outlined their role in more intensive delivery of a qualification module to students on a regular annual basis. This involved a time commitment of a few hours each week for one academic term. This arrangement had been in place for a number of years, so the Industry Associate had built a strong relationship with the teaching staff.

Example: Module delivery

An Industry Associate working in a construction company had been delivering an engineering-based module at a local college for many years. Due to this individual’s ongoing professional expertise, they were able to provide real-world problem-solving activities throughout the module.

This individual also emphasised their impact upon curriculum development due to longstanding connections with consultants and contractors in industry. As a result, the

Industry Associate and teaching staff have developed and adapted the college curriculum to meet sector needs.

“Students gain knowledge and skills required to fill industry need and are able to present to me as if they would a client.”

Part time role

In a couple of cases, individuals had been attracted to take on a part-time role at a college whilst also remaining in employment within industry, sometimes referred to as a dual professional. These individuals generally worked a pattern of four days in industry and one day teaching at college during term-time. In these cases, colleges had delegated roles to these individuals including module delivery, qualification oversight or mentoring for specific students.

Motivations

Industry Associates consulted in this research shared their motivations and reasons for becoming involved in college technical education. These motivations spanned both personal and organisational reasonings.

Most commonly, individuals expressed **feelings of giving back** by sharing their knowledge and experiences to the next generation.

“It’s nice to give back to a local area by supporting students’ education and their journey to careers in the near future.”

Other reasons influencing organisational motives included **corporate social responsibility** and **social value**. Individuals described how their involvement as an Industry Associate supported their organisation’s commitment to corporate social responsibility. In other cases, individuals made connections with the potential social and economic impact their involvement can have for a local area. Commercial organisations are increasingly focused on the social value of their activities as public sector clients expect contractors to demonstrate their contribution to local communities and the environment.

“All businesses are thinking about social value now. Sharing your expertise and knowledge gained through employment in industry is a direct way to support local communities.”

Some employers and Industry Associates drew links with **marketing and brand awareness**. This was also connected with future recruitment through contact with students who might be interested in employment when they leave college.

In one case, an organisation had created a formalised voluntary role within their company as a development opportunity for staff, directly linked to **annual performance reviews**. This had led to a greater number of staff undertaking these voluntary roles, through day sessions and short courses, to support local schools and colleges.

Preparation and training

The extent of advanced preparation and training, prior to delivery activity, varied across colleges and individuals involved. In some cases, preparation was formalised whereas in others it was more ad hoc. For example, in one college preparation and training was delivered on request. Where methods were shared, these have been divided into internal employer-based and external college-based preparation.

In all cases, where Industry Associates were not employed by the college (i.e. had not transitioned to part-time working in the college) training was not compulsory.

Employer preparation

Prior to conducting sessions with students, a variety of internal preparation took place for several Industry Associates. This covered:

- Meetings between the employee acting as an Industry Associate and the employee responsible for managing the relationship with the college. This mainly communicated college requirements for sessions to the individual creating or delivering the resources.
- Discussions between 'new' Industry Associates and those who had delivered sessions previously as confidence building.
- Creation of a bank of learning materials where an organisation worked with multiple colleges or an individual college on a regular basis. These resources were then shared and adapted by different employees acting as Industry Associates.
- Attending a college as a pair of Industry Associates for an individual's first experience. This was described as providing support for the first time Industry Associate to build their confidence in classroom settings and to engage with learners appropriately.

College preparation

Some colleges had more structured approaches when engaging with new Industry Associates whereas others would offer support, when or if it was requested. Support and training included:

- Internal, non-accredited training and certifications covering planning, pedagogy and assessment, and classroom management. These were delivered virtually or in-person with materials adapted to the needs of the Industry Associates and the curriculums they were supporting.
- Delivery of instructions by teaching staff to Industry Associates covering students' prior knowledge and what they are hoping to get out of the sessions delivered.
- Liaison between teaching staff and the Industry Associates to plan activities, aided with pedagogy or the checking of pre-planned materials to ensure they fit.

The benefits gained from undertaking an Industry Associate role was explored in consultations. These benefits broadly fit within three categories: personal, company and college benefits.

Personal benefits commonly described by Industry Associates included improvements in presentation, communication and training skills. Individuals stated these skills were easily

transferrable to their everyday job roles. Many referenced increased general self-confidence. A small number expanded on this, explaining that the development in these skill areas supported evidence towards performance reviews and changes in workplace responsibilities.

“I feel more confident presenting to larger groups and have gained skills in how to present information more effectively to a wide variety of stakeholders.”

The majority of Industry Associates also stated that they found the role both enjoyable and rewarding. They conveyed feelings of satisfaction relating to supporting individuals early on in their career journeys whilst also giving back to local communities.

A couple of individuals drew connections with the potential for future training and development opportunities with the colleges they were working with.

“Having connections at the college is beneficial for if I want to complete any training or qualifications for myself in the future.”

Company-based benefits included social value and corporate social responsibility outcomes. Individuals discussed that engaging in these roles would help the company meet their strategies and targets in relation to engaging with their local area. For some companies, these were contractual requirements for doing business with public organisations such as local authorities.

Individuals also discussed the positive impact that engaging with students in their industry area was helping with brand awareness and marketing for job roles. Although not the direct purpose of their activity, Industry Associates are able to relate the learning to their business or everyday job role, thus increasing students’ awareness of their company. A few also mentioned the potential to observe students in a learning or practical environment to be able to target certain students for future job roles.

Engagement with a generally younger audience has seen additional benefits for some companies where Industry Associates have learnt new techniques and ideas from students. This generally surrounded new technologies and recent advancements in using artificial intelligence tools to support business activity.

Similar to the personal benefit of potential future training, individuals reported the positive impact that engaging with colleges can have on accessing future training to satisfy skills and qualification needs for their workforce. A few instances were mentioned where employers have been given access to college equipment and facilities as a result of providing some curriculum delivery.

Individuals were also able to report **college benefits** in addition to the specialist curriculum input they were providing. This mainly centred around opportunities for students such as future placements or employment due to the strong relationships built with curriculum or administrative staff at colleges.

Challenges

In consultations with the managers and Industry Associates, a number of challenges were raised as potential barriers to undertaking the role of Industry Associates. These challenges had either been faced by individuals, or they perceived them as challenges for other employers to offer the role.

Some concerns were shared that individuals were nervous to take up the role due to anxieties surrounding their responsibilities for safeguarding and classroom or behaviour management. Several managers described discussions with their college contacts about expectations in these areas. Managers would then share with potential Industry Associates, that neither safeguarding nor classroom management were their responsibilities, but instead the responsibility of regular teaching staff. In a couple of instances, Industry Associates described where regular teaching staff had left the room during delivery which made the Industry Associates nervous and contemplate whether they wanted to do the role again.

Managers were generally cautious about the time commitment that would be required to undertake the role. Although the managers were willing to make staff available to support college teaching, they wanted to stick to a time-limited commitment including preparation time. For example, where a college had requested a few hours of session delivery, managers were aware of additional preparation time that would be needed, taking that individual away from their primary job role. A couple of managers also described a challenge where colleges requested delivery at short notice. This sometimes resulted in Industry Associates having to rush preparation or withdraw their involvement.

An additional challenge many Industry Associates came across was knowing how to pitch their sessions. This is something they had to discuss with college staff. Some were not confident in how much detail they should include. They were cautious of not wanting to either over complicate or oversimplify their teaching.

A few managers and Industry Associates discussed challenges relating to communication with colleges. This normally surrounded having multiple contacts, such as administrative and curriculum, and being unsure who to communicate with at certain times. A couple of instances were described where college staff had left their positions and new contact details had not been passed on.

A few Industry Associates also discussed the potential gap in knowledge of teaching staff in relation to industry skills and knowledge. They felt that the college staff appeared to have limited knowledge on what could be added to a curriculum or delivered in sessions by Industry Associates. These individuals felt there could be greater communication between the companies and colleges to explore what could be delivered, rather than just asking for specific elements.

Some challenges specifically related to the attraction of industry staff into part-time Industry Associate roles with colleges e.g. employed for one day a week. These included difficulties matching annual leave with academic holidays and their interview focussing on lesson plans and delivery, something they were not qualified in.

Suggested improvements

A set of suggested improvements are outlined below based on suggestions from interviewees to overcome barriers to engagement with Industry Associates.

- Publish a list of colleges wanting Industry Associate input, and for which curriculum areas. Designate a staff member at each college for communication with employers around Industry Associates. Ensure this is clear on the college website.

- College staff members to play a more active role in developing and reviewing resources used by Industry Associates.
- Agreeing input with employers well in advance of delivery to support preparation (ideally this would involve creating a plan at the start before the academic year).
- Colleges approaching employers using hooks such as social value and corporate responsibility and for employers to engage with future talent pool.

A couple of Industry Associates and managers discussed the added benefit of working with different FE providers, and learners. They identified learners such as those in special education (SEND) settings and prisons as a group who tend to be forgotten by employers, but who could be future employees in certain industries. Therefore, they saw great benefit in working with these settings to deliver specialist curriculum input and wanted to encourage other employers to engage with these learners.

In addition to the above, there would be merit in sharing and promoting these different modes of delivery of Industry Associate support, which may benefit both colleges and employers.