

FE Week

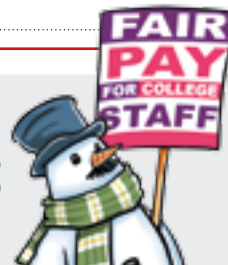
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- **Tax office drafts crack team of 20 special investigators onto the case**
- **Officials expect to claw back tens of millions looking back up to 20 years**

Exclusive

BILLY CAMDEN @BILLYCAMDEN

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NEWS

IfA boss admits fears for tight T-levels timescale

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

The boss of the organisation that will be responsible for T-levels has admitted he has deep concerns at the “worryingly tight” delivery timeline.

Sir Gerry Berragan, the chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships, made his fears known during a keynote speech at an Ofqual conference for vocational education awarding organisations in Birmingham this week.

He discussed the need to “articulate” what T-levels are and how they fit into the technical education landscape, saying it was pivotal that the IfA has “success” with the wider rollout.

But his unease at the viability of the government’s proposed 2020 timeline for the first three routes was clear.

“The last thing we should do is start the first three on the wrong footing and give them

a bad reputation,” he said. “We need to deliver these successfully from the outset. I think the timeline for delivery of the initial three pathways is worryingly tight in that regard.”

He is the latest – but perhaps most significant – industry figure to admit concern about the tight timescale for T-levels, given the IfA’s central role.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education admitted its timetable is “ambitious”, but said it remains confident of meeting the 2020 rollout.

“We know that the timetable for T-levels is ambitious,” she said. “We are working closely with Ofqual and the IfA to make sure we get these reforms right.

“New T-levels are going to give young people a high-quality technical education, equal in esteem to A-levels, and we’re on track for teaching to start from September 2020.”

T-levels have been designed to increase the prestige of technical qualifications, as match

for A-levels. The first three subject areas to go live in 2020 will cover digital, childcare and education, and construction. It was announced last October that a further eight subject “routes” should be launched from 2022. Ofqual’s boss Sally Collier also discussed the regulator’s concerns about T-levels. The body released its response to the government’s T-level consultation two weeks ago, in which it brought up various worries about plans for a single awarding organisation per qualification, and the FE sector’s ability to cope with yet another set of reforms.

“It is absolutely essential that the majority of the content is set before we turn to assessment strategies and qualifications design,” Ms Collier told the conference. “The government quite rightly is wanting to get on with it and deliver on its commitments, and to see these qualifications fundamental for improving our skills base.

“That means our timelines are very ambitious. We all need to be competent of those risks.”

Her organisation has been working with the IfA and DfE for “some months” about the role Ofqual will play in helping deliver the programme, and she described “extremely good progress”.

The Confederation of British Industry shares Sir Gerry’s opinion that the current delivery timetable is unviable.

In its own response to the T-levels



Sir Gerry Berragan

consultation, representatives went so far as to say they think the full delivery should be delayed further, until 2023.

These views will no doubt heap pressure on Anne Milton to delay T-levels further, after she pushed them back from 2019.

In July last year, the skills and apprenticeships minister announced first three routes would be delayed until September 2020 – a year later than planned.

Sir Gerry: ‘Vested interests want our reforms to fail’

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

The IfA’s boss has hit back at “vested interests”, who he claims want to see the reform process fail.

Sir Gerry Berragan admitted at Ofqual’s recent vocational learning conference that some criticism levelled at the IfA was “fair”.

But the organisation was only launched last April, and he insisted there were important mitigating circumstances relating to the tardy approval of new employer-developed apprenticeship standards.

He claimed “the institute was trying to perform this while still building its own capability”, by “using processes inherited from when the DfE previously performed the function”.

This process meant waiting for officials to check standards criteria, and then for ministers to sign them off.

“You should also understand some of this criticism is a convenient proxy, used by those who resent paying the levy, but wouldn’t want to be seen as reluctant taxpayers, and also by some delivery organisations who will lose out with the reforms and have no interest in branching into standards,” he said.

“There’s no shortage of vested interests here, so when you hear such criticism be just a little bit sceptical.”

The IfA launched its Faster Better initiative before Christmas specifically to “streamline the approvals process”, he said.

The initiative that kicked off Sir Gerry’s reign was billed as an assault on government red tape, with a promise for “faster standards development”.

He also accepted that there had been a “wobble” with apprenticeship starts since the levy was launched last April, but he predicted this would redress itself as increasing numbers of large levy-paying employers start recruiting.

The slowdown could be partly attributed to the adjustment process, as significant numbers of employers and providers shift from old apprenticeship frameworks to new employer-developed standards.

“Given that this was always the aim to transition from frameworks to standards, we shouldn’t be surprised or disappointed by this outcome,” he said. “This is actually a manifestation of a plan working.”

He did acknowledge a “sense of frustration among some employers”, and accepted that some employer groups had criticised the IfA “for being slow and bureaucratic with approving new standards”.

“The period between now and the summer is critical,” he went on. “The service improvement Better Faster work is being rolled out and trailblazers I’m sure will see a higher quality and more consistent service enabling new standards to be approved much more quickly.”



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Job switches stall for former Carillion apprentices

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Efforts to find alternative employers for former Carillion apprentices have stalled, because it's proving difficult to match them with companies close enough to where they live.

Skills minister Anne Milton announced in late January that over half of the 1,400 affected trainees had been found alternative roles since the outsourcing giant collapsed.

This was down to the matchmaking efforts of the Construction Industry Training Board, and the plan was that every learner would be able to complete their apprenticeship.

But the CITB has admitted that while a total of 1,200 construction firms have now offered alternative employment to the apprentices, only a handful of learners have actually been able to accept since the minister's announcement.

Gillian Cain, the organisation's head of apprenticeships, explained that this is because these employers are not local enough to the trainees, who are mostly aged 16 to 18, and can't afford to travel the extra distances.

"While we have over 1,200 construction firms who have offered employment, those opportunities are not always in the right places for the apprentices," she told FE Week.

"So while there has been fantastic industry



support, we really need more employers to step forward and offer these talented young people stay in the sector."

To date, 725 of the affected apprentices have found new firms.

One of those still in limbo is Luke Pearce, aged 17, from Manchester.

He started with the construction firm in August 2017 and had completed a level one in bricklaying before moving onto level two.

He spoke to FE Week about his disappointment of the collapse and still being out of work.

"I've obviously been upset about the whole situation since it happened," he said. "I was enjoying working and getting my qualifications but that suddenly all went up in smoke. To still be out of work is

frustrating but it is good that I still get paid until I find a new job."

In an answer to a parliamentary question on February 22, Ms Milton said the CITB was working "progressively" on finding new work for all the affected apprentices.

The board has "established a dedicated helpline for apprentices seeking support and has also delivered a series of workshops for learners, which have taken place in the localities of the 11 Carillion training centres".

Meanwhile, cash incentives of £1,000 are being offered to every employer who takes on apprentices caught up in the collapse.

The payments are part of a £1.4 million package that sees firms receive £500 up front, and a further £500 after six months, provided

they've retained the displaced trainees.

Ms Milton also reiterated that "at present", all former Carillion apprentices will continue to be paid while alternative employers are being sought.

Around 1,400 trainee bricklayers and carpenters were left with uncertain futures when the UK's largest employer of construction apprentices entered liquidation on January 15.

They were being taught at the company's skills division, Carillion Training Services, which held a £6.5 million ESFA contract last year.

Education secretary Damian Hinds has promised to ensure every apprentice affected by the collapse Carillion would be found new employment to complete their training.

DfE is 'plain sloppy' at policing apprenticeship minimum wage adverts

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

EXCLUSIVE

Providers on the government's apprenticeship search site are not being effectively policed to ensure they advertise legal wages – and the shadow skills minister has accused it of being "plain sloppy".

The apprenticeship national minimum wage is rising from £3.50 to £3.70 per hour in April, but FE Week has discovered that this detail is often overlooked on the DfE's Find An Apprenticeship site.

There are many vacancies with start dates after April 1 which are illegally offering the old minimum rate – and beauty therapy apprenticeships at various levels are particularly culpable.

Of 17 vacancies with April start dates FE Week found, 10 were offering to pay the old minimum wage, a shocking 58-per-cent rate of non-compliance.

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general

secretary of the National Education Union, is appalled that history appears to be repeating itself, after similar errors have appeared in adverts before previous minimum-wage rises.

"It's disgraceful that the government is allowing apprenticeships with wages under the national minimum to be advertised on its own website, particularly when it has been alerted to the fact in previous years," she said.

"It is time that the government got its act together to ensure that it advertises apprenticeship programmes at the legal rate of pay."

Shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden also laid the blame squarely at the DfE's door.

"It is plain sloppy," he said. "The DfE should be monitoring its website carefully to prevent this from happening, but I fear the problem lies with a lack of resources available to do the checking. It's not the first time this has happened either."

FE Week has pointed out numerous examples of apprenticeship vacancy adverts



failing to recognise minimum-wage rises in past years, inevitably around the time that an increase is introduced.

A DfE spokesperson responded to complaints last year by insisting that "as soon as we become aware of any adverts which do not comply, we ensure these are taken down".

We went back this week to ask about the raft of non-compliant beauty therapy adverts.

"We are working to ensure that all vacancies advertised on Find An Apprenticeship show the correct minimum-wage rate in time for the new rate coming into effect on April 1," said a spokesperson.

Yet even though the DfE was alerted to the

illegal adverts on February 26, only three of the 10 had been updated to £3.70 an hour as FE Week went to press four days later.

The national minimum wage for apprentices also rose from £3.40 to £3.50 per hour in April 2017.

This year's increase to £3.70, announced in last November's budget and based on a recommendation made by the independent Low Pay Commission, represents a 5.7-per-cent boost.

Dr Bousted warned that in spite of this "some employers continue to put profit first by exploiting low-paid workers" and that more stringent enforcement is needed from the government.

11th National Apprenticeship Week celebrates best of earning and learning

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
@PIPPA_AK

The very best of what earning and learning means for learners and employers will be celebrated during the eleventh National Apprenticeship Week.

The theme for 2018's event, running from March 5 until March 9, is 'Apprenticeships work'.

Events will showcase the ways apprenticeships produce huge benefits for individuals, businesses, communities and the wider economy.

Sue Husband, director of the National Apprenticeships Service, has asked apprentices and employers to join together and "help celebrate the brilliance of apprenticeships".

"Apprenticeships offer real career opportunities and National Apprenticeship Week 2018 will showcase how apprenticeships work across all industries, sectors and job roles, from school leaving age to older apprentices," she said.

"There's no better way to mark apprenticeship achievement than



Sue Husband

by the apprenticeship community coming together and shouting loudly about the difference apprenticeships are making."

National Apprenticeship Week will be marked by events around the country.

There will be a special launch event at BBC Broadcasting House, hosted by the BBC's home affairs editor Mark Easton and its director of leadership development and new talent Claire Paul.

They will celebrate the positive impact apprenticeships have had on improving social mobility.

A parliamentary reception for FE Week's inaugural AAC Apprenticeship Awards, in conjunction with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and the Chartered Management Institute, will also be held on the same day.

Hosted by Robert Halfon MP, the event announce the regional winners, and which nominees will go forward to the national awards.

The national award winners will be announced during a dinner at FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference in Birmingham on March 22.

Other highlights include an event at the National Gallery in London, coinciding with International Women's Day on Thursday.

This will acknowledge the positive impact of female



apprentices and discuss how to encourage women into well-paid apprenticeships.

The '10,000 Talks' movement is aiming to have former and current apprentices share their experiences with ten thousand young people around the country, through talks at over 150 schools.

Graduation ceremonies will also be held throughout the week to praise apprentices who have completed their training in the past 12 months.

The skills minister Anne Milton said the week is "a chance for everyone to show their passion and commitment to apprenticeships".

FE Week will publish a supplement alongside next week's edition with a round-up of the highlights of National Apprenticeship Week, which will feature editorial contributions from Ms Milton.

The first National Apprenticeships Week was held in 2007 in an effort to draw more attention to the benefits of apprenticeship training around the country.

It was followed in 2009 by the launch of the National Apprenticeship Service to oversee delivery of apprenticeships.

For more information about what is on during National Apprenticeship Week, visit www.naw2018.co.uk



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NEWS

Stockport College hit with third ‘inadequate’ in five years

PAUL OFFORD
@PAULOFFORD

A college has been hit with its third ‘inadequate’ Ofsted rating in the space of just five years.

Stockport College was put at grade four overall and received the worst possible rating for effectiveness of leadership and management; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; outcomes for learners, and 16-to-19 study programmes.

The report warned lessons had not been learned from the previous ‘inadequate’ inspection findings in November 2016.

“Leaders and governors have not reversed the decline in standards since the previous inspection,” it said.

The college, which taught just over 4,000 learners last contract year, was actually rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted back in 2008.

But the next inspection verdict saw it drop to ‘inadequate’, before an improvement to grade three in 2014, and the subsequent two grade fours.

The latest report warned that “the financial status of the college is weak and the college remains in administered status”.

It did recognise that “partnerships with local employers and key stakeholders are good”, and accepted the board had been strengthened since the last report and “governors have been recruited with a good range of skills and expertise”.

“Achievement rates for learners on 16-to-19 study programmes declined further in 2016/17 and are inadequate,” it warned.

It added although the new leadership team “has implemented changes, the rate of improvement in teaching, learning and assessment is too slow”.

Stockport College announced plans last summer to merge with Trafford College, which is rated ‘good’ by Ofsted.

FE Week revealed last February that plans to merge Tameside, Oldham and Stockport colleges had been called off after intervention from the FE commissioner, Richard Atkins.

“While naturally disappointed at the latest Ofsted inspection result after all the hard work that staff and governors have put in over the past 16 months, and that the two previous Ofsted reinspection monitoring visit reports have noted that there has been reasonable progress in most areas identified for improvement, we recognise that there is still further work to be done,” said Dr Mike Potter, Stockport’s transition principal.

‘Ghost learner’ football scammers jailed for over 25 years combined

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Two former professional footballers and four of their colleagues have been sentenced to a total of over 25 years in prison for defrauding colleges out of £5 million in apprenticeship funding.

Mark Aizlewood, who played for Wales 39 times in the 1980s and 1990s, and Paul Sugrue, who played for clubs including Manchester City, Middlesbrough and Cardiff City, were both sentenced at Southwark Crown Court for their part in a scam involving “ghost learners”.

Two of their former colleagues at the now-defunct provider Luis Michael Training, Keith Williams, 45, from Anglesey, and Jack Harper, 30, from Southport, were also sentenced on February 26 after being found guilty earlier this month.

A further two men who were also involved in the con, Christopher Martin, 53, from Newbury, and Steven Gooding, 53, from Bridgwater, had pleaded guilty before the trial began in September and were also sentenced this week.

It marks the end of a five-month trial that was brought to court by the Serious Fraud Office.

Luis Michael Training used its well-known footballing names to defraud the taxpayer between 2009 and 2011 by persuading nine colleges to use it as a subcontractor, using cash they got from the government to deliver apprenticeships.

The provider hoodwinked over 3,000 learners over this period, all aged between 16 and 19. Some were “ghost learners” – a situation where the personal information of real people was used to claim apprenticeship funding without their knowledge.

Those actually enrolled were under the illusion that they were doing an apprenticeship in NVQ activity leadership, which would lead them to a career in football coaching.

Sentencing the men, Judge Tomlinson said this was a “shameful exploitation” of taxpayers and colleges.

“You misappropriated eye-watering sums of government money on the pretence of helping disadvantaged young people,” he added. “You all exploited this sad state of affairs and your involvement was dishonest from the outset.”

Using this lure of a career in football coaching, LMT even employed other high-profile former players, such as Welsh international Neville Southall, the Republic of Ireland’s Alan McLoughlin

and Manchester United player Russell Beardsmore, as tutors to deliver some of the training. They too were unaware of the con.

The provider also used almost 150 professional and semi-professional football clubs as part of the scam, roping in big teams like Manchester City, Leeds United and Nottingham Forest.

“These men stole public money intended to give young people a start in life – these were cynical crimes for which they have been held to account today,” said the Serious Fraud Office’s general counsel Alun Milford.

Mark Aizlewood was sentenced to six years.

Christopher Martin was sentenced to two years and three months, and five years and three months, to be served concurrently.

Keith Williams was sentenced to three and four years’ imprisonment, to be served concurrently.

Paul Sugrue was sentenced to three and seven years’ imprisonment, to be served concurrently.

Steven Gooding received a 20-month prison sentence.

Jack Harper received two 18-month sentences, to be served concurrently.

Jack Harper and Steven Gooding were also disqualified as directors for seven years each.

UTCs will start recruiting one year earlier

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
@PIPPA_AK

EXCLUSIVE

Two university technical colleges will start recruiting students a year before the standard starting age of 14 from September, and another is planning to follow suit in 2019.

The JCB Academy in Staffordshire and UTC Sheffield have both confirmed plans to recruit year 9 students from the start of next academic year.

The London Design and Engineering UTC intends to do the same from the start of 2019/20.

This represents a major new development for the UTC movement, which launched in 2011 with the backing of former Conservative education secretary Lord Baker.

These specialist technical education colleges that have so far only taught 14- to 19-year-olds.

However eight have closed so far as a direct result of problems with recruiting at that age.

The colleges switching to earlier recruitment all claim they wants to harmonise with ordinary comprehensive schools, which transition to teaching the GCSE curriculum from Year 9.

“It makes sense for UTCs to consider

following suit by changing their age range,” said a spokesperson for the Baker Dearing Trust, which represents UTCs.

A spokesperson for the JCB Academy, which is rated ‘good’ by Ofsted and is currently running at full capacity for learners, said it had received 666 applications for 264 available places this year.

It claimed this made it the most oversubscribed school in Staffordshire “by some margin”, though it is still taking on 66 year 9 learners from September.

“The year of transfer from middle to high school is year 9 and therefore learners have, in the past, spent year 8 in the middle school, year 9 at the high school and then transferred to us,” a spokesperson explained.

“The change has therefore been to facilitate these learners joining the JCB Academy at their normal point of transfer. This is the motivation for the change and it has been well received by parents.”

UTC Sheffield has also been given the nod to recruit 200 students at the age of 13 across its two campuses from September.

The ‘good’-rated provider, which is currently teaching just over 700 learners but which has the capacity for 1,200, held a public consultation on whether to change its recruiting age.

Sixty-eight per cent of respondents agreed with the plan.

“On the basis of the consultation results and a wide range of other evidence, the DfE has now authorised the trust to proceed,” a spokesperson said.

“As a result, a cohort of year 9 students will be admitted from September 2018 onwards.”

The London Design and Engineering UTC held its consultation into recruiting earlier shortly after it opened in late 2016.

The specialist technical provider, which has not yet been rated by Ofsted, had 179 pupils in 2016/17, set against its capacity of 600 learners.

Its principal and chief executive Geoffrey Fowler said the response to a consultation of its own was “overwhelmingly positive” in favour of the move.

But the change had been postponed until 2019 due to “delays” on a building project that will not be completed until December.

Other UTCs consulting on extending their admissions to include year 9 are Aston University Engineering Academy in Birmingham, Cambridge Academy for Science and Technology and Liverpool Life Science UTC.

FE Week recently revealed that 39 of the 44 UTCs still open in 2016/17 were forced to hand money back to the government because they missed recruitment targets, leaving them with a combined debt of around £11 million.

HMRC VAT crackdown spreads to subcontracting

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

FROM FRONT

EXCLUSIVE

HMRC has launched a major investigation into subcontracting that could result in tens of millions in fees and fines after it discovered many colleges and training providers are ignoring VAT rules on management fees.

FE Week understands that the tax office has put together a team of around 20 special investigators, who will find out why primes have not been applying the 20-per-cent charge to their top-slices, per the rules.

HMRC plans to investigate up to six years, with the power to look up to 20 years, of unpaid VAT and will attempt to claim it back.

This could rise to 12 years if evidence is found that prime providers knew about the charge and failed to apply it anyway.

Substantial fines are also likely, according to one VAT expert who spoke to FE Week.

The news will send shockwaves through the sector, and providers fear the business and ramifications of any fresh charges.

Government rules – VAT Notice 701/30 (pictured) – state that while vocational training is exempt from the tax, management services in subcontracting relationships are not. This comes alongside the top-slice primes generally charge subcontractors, which is usually around 20 per cent of the government’s funding.

However, evidence seen by FE Week suggests the VAT rule is unknown to most providers, and has not been applied for years, meaning that hardly any has been claimed.

Around a £1 billion of funding per year is subcontracted across the ESFA post-16 funding streams, which FE Week estimates



would generate around £40 million per year in VAT for HMRC.

For its own part, HMRC claimed the guidance has always been in place and in force.

“Vocational training management fees charged by a prime provider to a subcontractor are chargeable with VAT at the standard rate of 20 per cent,” said a representative.

“This applies regardless of whether the charge is netted off against government funding or whether the prime provider is a college of further education or a private provider.”

The spokesperson added that any under-

declarations of VAT will be dealt with under the tax office’s usual compliance procedures.

The sector will be worried that any fines or attempts to retrieve years of unpaid tax would plunge many small training providers into financial trouble.

Shane Mosley, a partner at accountancy specialist Malcolm H Preece, has offered advice to providers who have not complied with the rule and what the next steps are to take (see box-out).

“Prime providers should look back over their records and ascertain both how much VAT is involved and crucially who this VAT should have been charged to,” he told FE Week.

“They should also consider making initial contact with HMRC to put on record that they are aware of the potential problem and are currently looking into their own compliance –

this will potentially mitigate penalties due to the cooperation of the taxpayer.”

If HMRC does come knocking, as well as any VAT that should have been charged, inspectors may be looking for penalties and interest.

“For a situation like this which appears to be an industry-wide error, rather than any individual concealment, I would envisage the initial fine to be at the lower end, perhaps 10 to 15 per cent.”

This is the second VAT crackdown HMRC has made against FE providers in the past two weeks.

On February 13, FE Week revealed that private providers were being let off millions of pounds in unpaid tax because HMRC had given them incorrect advice.

ITPs believe the crackdown will mean learner volumes will drop significantly.

Advice from a VAT expert: Expect 10- to 15-per-cent fines

Shane Mosley, a partner at accountancy specialist Malcolm H Preece, spoke to FE Week about what actions HMRC is now likely to take, and offered advice for affected providers.

“Prime providers should look back over their records and ascertain both how much VAT is involved and crucially who this should have been charged to,” he said.

“Are these subcontractors VAT registered themselves enabling to (potentially) claim back some or all the VAT from HMRC? Do they still exist?”

“They should also consider making initial contact with HMRC to put on record that they are aware of the potential problem and are currently looking into their own compliance – this will potentially mitigate penalties due to the cooperation of the taxpayer.

“If HMRC comes knocking, as well as any VAT that should have been charged, it will be looking for penalties and interest.

“Penalties are anything from zero per cent to 100 per cent, on the following bands: zero to 30 for a lack of reasonable care; 20 to 70 for a deliberate mistake; or 30 to 100 for something

deliberate and concealed.

“For something like this which appears to be an industry-wide error, rather than any individual concealment, I would envisage the initial fine to be at the lower end, perhaps 10 to 15 per cent.

“It would then be down to the individual provider to prevent this going any further by conversing with HMRC in a timely and honest manner.

“In some cases, where an industry-wide problem has been identified, HMRC has levied at zero per cent as long as the other party acts in a transparent way, but management charges will be looked at by HMRC as an ‘error’ as opposed to a ‘lack of understanding’, and therefore it is my belief that at least 10 to 15 per cent will be levied as mentioned above, should HMRC pursue this.

“Finally in terms of time, HMRC actually has the power to go back 20 years in some cases. Standard procedure, which I believe will prevail here, is the normal four-year window open to HMRC without opening a specific enquiry.”

How payment is meant to work for £10 million government funding

Subcontractor invoices prime £10 million



Prime invoices subcontractor £1.5 million for a 15% management fee, plus £300,000 VAT



Prime pays £8.2 million to subcontractor and £300,000 VAT to HMRC

NEWS

Two colleges fall foul of the FE commissioner

PAUL OFFORD
PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS

@PAULOFFORD
@PIPPA_AK

Two more colleges bailed out for millions of pounds have received highly critical reports from the FE commissioner.

Bradford College, which required two separate bailouts of £1.5 million in December alone, was in such a poor financial state that its governors – who were apparently unaware of the scale of the problem until very late on – have been ordered to “undertake finance training”.

“The college now finds itself with a serious cash shortfall and inadequate financial health,” warned Richard Atkins, in a damning report published on Thursday.

According to board minutes he discovered, “there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate questions being asked, actions being taken, and challenges being made to address the deteriorating financial position of the college”.

“Management accounts were consistently late, and papers are confusing and unclear,” he added.

The two bailouts, both of which were recorded as “exceptional financial support” only came to light after they were accidentally published by the Department for Education.

The commissioner was forthright in his recommendations to the college.

He said the board should urgently

commission “an independent piece of work to enable governors and the executive to understand what went wrong in 2016/17 and why it was not reported until after the year end”.

The management team, to include all budget holders, should also “undertake finance training to enable them to effectively monitor their own budgets and the whole college financial performance, as a team”.

The report concluded that the college has “some serious financial challenges to overcome”, and is currently working on developing a strategic financial recovery plan.

It warned of a “lack of ownership of the financial problem” as there “seemed to be a

consistent view of blaming others” during interviews with the intervention team.

The college was unavailable for comment ahead of publication.

The FE commissioner’s report into Kirklees College in Yorkshire also followed a request for exceptional financial support from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The college received £1.4 million in emergency cash – a sum that Mr Atkins believes leaves it in urgent need of “significant improvements in governance and leadership”.

In his report, also published on Thursday, he described severe concerns about the “effectiveness of governor oversight of finance and risk” and whether the college had the “capacity” to deliver “imperative” financial improvements.

“Significant improvements in the governance and leadership of the college are now urgently required, which demonstrate evidence of action to improve financial performance and give greater confidence that a standalone solution for Kirklees College

remains a realistic prospect,” he wrote.

The college had apparently pinned its hopes for financial redemption on receiving a “substantial” sum from the government’s restructuring facility – a pot not designed to bail out ailing colleges.

However, although the college spent “considerable time and effort” on its application for the money, which it assumed would “underpin a long-term recovery plan built on growth”, the ESFA decided it was not eligible for any funding, as the west Yorkshire area review had recommended that it stayed as a standalone college.

As a result, it lodged a request for exceptional financial support, which it received at the end of last year.

Mr Atkins made a series of recommendations to the college, including that it should strengthen the effectiveness of governors’ financial oversight, ensure its board has the “skills, confidence and capacity” to lead it to recovery, develop a “robust and comprehensive” financial recovery plan to address the operating deficit and “stem the rapid decline in cash”, and address issues such as small class sizes.

He added that if Kirklees were able to “demonstrate sufficient evidence of improvement in leadership, governance and financial recovery” by a stocktake in January this year, consideration should be given to review the area review recommendation.

If, however, the commissioner’s team did not believe sufficient progress had been made, Atkins said “the need for structural change will need to be considered”.

The Department for Education and Kirklees College had not revealed the result of that January stocktake by the time FE Week went to press.



Richard Atkins

Bradford College

Grade one FE college underwriting improvements at schools it sponsors

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
@PIPPA_AK

EXCLUSIVE

An ‘outstanding’ FE college is having to bankroll improvements to struggling schools in its new academy trust.

Two of its schools are rated ‘inadequate’, one just five months after the chain launched.

The Dudley Academies Trust, sponsored by Dudley College of Technology, was handed four schools by the Department for Education last September.

One of these, Holly Hall Academy, received the lowest-possible Ofsted rating last month amid criticism of teaching, leadership and behaviour, causing the resignation of its headteacher.

Another of the trust’s schools, Hillcrest School and Community College, had been rated ‘inadequate’ by inspectors in January last year, before the trust took it over.

The other two schools, the High Arcal School and Castle High School, were rated ‘good’ and ‘requires improvement’ when they were still standalone academies.

Lowell Williams, the chief executive of Dudley College, who also chairs the MAT, said that the college was funding extra remedial maths and English lessons for all four schools,

as well as a “big injection” of ICT equipment, and had even planned a restructure of central support services.

He would not reveal the total spent on school improvements so far.

Government guidance says any potential sponsor for a multi-academy trust must demonstrate “a strong track record of school improvement”.

And although Dudley College is an ‘outstanding’ college, it does not have school improvement experience.

A spokesperson for the DfE would not comment on the rationale behind the decision, but said officials are working to ensure the academies are “fully supported and their pupils have access to the education they deserve”.

In its report on Holly Hall, Ofsted did acknowledge that the “newly formed trust has swiftly gained an accurate view of the quality of education in the school” and said there were “early signs” of improvement.

“This was a routine inspection of an academy that had been judged to require improvement in May 2015,” an Ofsted spokesperson said.

“It did not become a new school when it joined the Dudley Academies Trust in September 2017 because it was already

an academy. In our inspection report we recognised the impact that the trust was beginning to make.”

Dudley became the first general FE college to receive a grade one Ofsted rating in 14 months last June.

But Mr Williams admitted that the college’s “biggest fear” when taking on the schools had been whether it had the skillset to work with school pupils.

He said he had been “shocked” by how much translated across between the two sectors, which are “not dissimilar at all”.

The college had been approached by the schools for “support”, and he hopes the initiatives will improve pupil outcomes.

The trust is still hoping to grow to include primary schools and wants to open an alternative provision free school, and aims to have all its schools achieving the national average progress score within three years.

“It’s not going to be easy, but I think there’s every opportunity to make this work,” said Williams.

Colleges have had mixed success with forming multi-academy trusts in the past.

Three of the four schools run by Midland Academies Trust, which is sponsored by North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College, are rated ‘requires improvement’;



Lowell Williams

two have fallen from ‘good’ since the trust took over and another only recently rose from ‘inadequate’.

In 2015, the trust also shut down two studio schools, the Midland Studio Colleges in Hinckley and Nuneaton, due to low pupil numbers.

However, the Bridgwater College Trust, sponsored by Bridgwater and Taunton College, now has four ‘good’ schools on its books after two improved from their previous ‘requires improvement’ and ‘inadequate’ ratings.

That’s special treatment all right: Accounts committee chair lays into Learndirect

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

Learndirect was indeed given special treatment because the government considered it too big to fail, the Public Accounts Committee has concluded in its final report on the saga.

The scandal engulfing the nation’s biggest FE provider has engrossed the sector for nearly a year, and the PAC’s round-up asserts that it still “holds the whip-hand” over Whitehall and demanded more definitive action.

The PAC’s chair Meg Hillier told FE Week that there had been a “shocking message” to taxpayers and learners when the government “propped up” a “failing education provider” instead of stopping its funding.

She had put the wheels in motion for an investigation back in September when she referred the case to the National Audit Office.

At this point, Learndirect had been given an ‘inadequate’ rating by Ofsted in a report published in August, following a long legal battle to suppress it, including an injunction.

The Department for Education then allowed it to retain its contracts for almost a year – much more than the usual three-month termination period – and Learndirect is expecting to receive over £105 million in

2017/18.

The government and Learndirect have attempted to defend themselves ever since, denying it received “special treatment” and claiming it acted in the best interests of the tens of thousands of learners involved.

Seven months on and after the NAO’s report on the debacle, Ms Hillier has laid waste to this flimsy defence insisting that the provider leveraged its sizeable contracts across Whitehall to stay afloat.

She believes Learndirect’s failure should act as a wake-up call for the government to get a grip on individual contractors that grow so large they become too big to fail.

“In the case of Learndirect, thousands of learners have been let down amid poor oversight by the government and at significant public expense,” Ms Hillier said.

“There has been disruptive legal action and, finally, a scathing Ofsted report. Yet still Learndirect appears to hold the whip-hand.”

Having awarded the provider several vital contracts for a variety of public services, including with the Home Office, the PAC found the government had been restricted in its ability to take “decisive action” when the company’s apprenticeships provision began to fail.

Its achievement rate has dropped considerably over the last four years: since 2013/14, Learndirect has trained 58,283



Meg Hillier

apprentices but 24,712 of them have failed to achieve their qualifications.

During this time the provider was given over £150 million to deliver apprenticeships.

Ms Hillier said it “cannot be right” that individual contractors should command such large sums of public money regardless of their performance.

“No commercial provider should be allowed to become so essential to the delivery of services that it cannot be allowed to fail,” she continued.

“The government has a duty to manage taxpayers’ exposure to risk diligently and we urge it to act on the recommendations set out in our report.”

Learndirect’s funding comes to a halt at the end of July, but it remains to be seen as to whether the provider will even survive until then.

Its latest set of accounts, published in November, it showed that its long-term survival hinges on the success of its sister companies, including Learndirect Apprenticeships, over the next 12 months, as it is saddled with debts of more than £50 million.

In February, Learndirect entered redundancy talks with an unknown amount of its staff.

The PAC used its report to publish five recommendations (below) for government and Ofsted to take action on to ensure a scandal like this is not repeated.

A DfE spokesperson said Learndirect’s contract to provide apprenticeships and adult education was coming to an end “because of its failure to meet the high standards expected”.

She reiterated that the department’s priority “has always been to protect learners” and make sure they “do not lose out and get the opportunity to complete their courses”.

Learndirect declined to comment.

Best of five: The PAC’s recommendations

1 Develop a new framework for identifying providers who are too big to fail

Having awarded Learndirect several vital contracts for a variety of public services, the PAC said the government was later restricted in its ability to take “decisive action” when the provider’s apprenticeships provision began to fail.

In 2016/17 it received £121 million in total in government contracts.

The DfE and other government bodies should now “develop a framework for identifying any risk that a commercial provider becomes so large and essential to the delivery of public services that it cannot be allowed to fail, or requires special treatment if it begins to do so”.

The PAC wants the Cabinet Office to report back on this progress by December, and the DfE to do so separately by the start of the next academic year.

The DfE told FE Week it would respond “in detail” to the PAC’s recommendation in “due course”.

The Cabinet Office did not respond to requests for comment.

2 The ESFA should publish its expectations on management fees

Learndirect has charged “unusually high” management fees to its subcontractors for years, which means a “large amount of funding is not available to be spent on teaching and learning”.

Top slices ranges from around 15 to 40 per cent, depending on the level of support offered. Learndirect has said that around 30 of its subcontracted providers pay the full 40 per cent management fee.

Even though the ESFA requires all providers who subcontract their provision to be transparent about management fee rates, it provides no guidance on the levels of support that “might be merited by different levels” of top-slices.

The PAC said that the ESFA should therefore “formally publish”, in time for the next academic year, its “expectations about the services that should be offered to subcontractors, and the associated management fees that are reasonable”.

3 Ofsted must urgently review its plans for assessing risks of private provider failures

In assessing when to reinspect Learndirect, the PAC said Ofsted did not “take full account of the company’s size and the consequences for learners of its declining performance”.

It was nearly two years after first expressing concerns about Learndirect’s declining performance that Ofsted finally, in March 2017, conducted another inspection.

The PAC also pointed out that a full inspection of Learndirect requires Ofsted to commit around 15 per cent of its total inspection capacity for the FE sector.

It wants the watchdog to “urgently revisit how it prioritises its use of resources and the different type of risk attached to a private sector failure, in a way that takes account of risks to high numbers of learners and the changing provider-base in FE”.

Ofsted said it keeps its inspection processes “under regular review, particularly as the skills landscape changes and new risks emerge, and will study the PAC’s recommendation”.

4 A new inspection deferral policy is needed for commercial providers

Ofsted’s policy for deferring an inspection “risks putting providers’ business interests ahead of learners’ interests”, the PAC said.

The watchdog defers inspections if “the provision is due to merge, close or move, and it is decided that no useful purpose will be served in inspecting it”.

It originally planned to reinspect Learndirect at the start of November 2016, but agreed to defer when the provider claimed it was negotiating the sale of its apprenticeships business.

This sale never actually went through but delayed inspection for four months.

To prevent a situation like this from happening again, the PAC says that by June 2018, Ofsted should develop a “specific deferral policy for commercial providers, to ensure that learners’ interests always take priority over the pursuit of profit”.

Ofsted said it will “always put the interests of learners before any commercial considerations, which is precisely what we did in this case”.

5 The government needs not to hand so much power to private giants

The PAC concluded that Learndirect had received hundreds of millions of pounds of public money while “neglecting its learners in pursuit of profit and frustrating the Ofsted inspection regime with delaying tactics and spurious legal action”.

It pointed out that the ESFA gave Learndirect almost £500 million in the academic years from 2013/14 to 2016/17, during which time the quality of apprenticeships provision was in decline and the provider failed to achieve the ESFA’s minimum standard. Yet, despite this downward trend, the company waited until September 2016 to develop an improvement plan.

The PAC believes the government should “learn the lessons” from the failure of Learndirect, in particular “concerning the need to understand how many government contracts a company holds at a given time and how well it is performing against each of those contracts”.

The Cabinet Office did not comment.

EDITORIAL

The incoming subcontracting tax bombshell



Our front-page story will make for very uncomfortable reading for principals, chief executives and accountants at hundreds of colleges and training providers.

In fact, a mild panic may set in after reading that HMRC has tasked over 20 of their specialist inspectors to sniff out unpaid VAT on management fees for subcontracting.

And all the evidence we've seen suggests this will come as a huge bombshell to the sector, especially for colleges, as very few of them chargesubcontractors the required VAT.

It is honestly quite shocking to me that so few people in the sector knew that VAT was meant to be applied in this way. Perhaps HMRC should bear some of the blame for leaving the situation so murky?

Exactly how much unpaid VAT and over how many years is not known, but some basic analysis of the few subcontracting figures that are available suggests the tax office should expect to receive around £40 million per year in VAT on top-slised management fees.

This guestimate is based on 20 per cent VAT for £200 million in management fees on £1 billion in subcontracting. And I've arrived at that last amount because, as in May last year, the ESFA's list of self-declared subcontracting for apprenticeships, ESF and AEB amounted to just over £800 millionacross 504 prime providers and 1,308 subcontractors. Plus, in 2015/16 there were over 27,000 16- to 18-year-olds on study programmes across 317 prime providers and 627 subcontractors according to the ESFA's list published last July.

There is no way to sugar-coat this: the final VAT bill over the past six or more years, plus fines, could run into the many hundreds of millions of pounds.

Nick Linford, Editor

news@feweek.co.uk

CORRECTION:

In last week's Movers & Shakers column we reported that Ian Peake was leaving his role as principal and chief executive of Herefordshire and Ludlow College to take up a principal post at North Shropshire College. He will in fact remain the principal of both colleges in the lead up to a merger.

COLLEGE STRIKES TWEETS:

Chris Roberts @OneEyeGrey

Mildly disappointed that UCU strike types didn't leave picket snow person outside college. #mundane "snowshallist worker"

David Lammy @DavidLammy

Proud to join @ucu members on the picket line at the College of North East London in solidarity with their strike this morning. College staff have had pay cuts of 26% on top of these pensions cuts. A lot of the media attention has been on HE - let's not forget FE colleges!

Alastair Gordon @alastairgrdn

Solidarity with the amazing #MarchForEducation stretching the whole length of Whitehall. #USSStrike #ucustrike



Strike action escalates on a second day of college walkouts

PAUL OFFORD

@PAULOFFORD

More than 1,500 staff from at least a dozen colleges and college groups have taken part in a second day of strike action, while more walkouts are planned up to the end of April.

The dispute is over what a spokesperson for the University and Colleges Union described as “a disappointing” pay offer of one per cent, made last September by the Association of Colleges, which represents the colleges on pay.

The first walkouts took place on the last day of February, and UCU’s head of further education Andrew Harden is looking ahead to more industrial action.

“Strong action was reported from all the colleges on strike yesterday, with many members in London joining the thousands marching through the capital to a rally in Westminster,” he said.

“We’ve already notified the bulk of those colleges that there will be three further days of action between now and the end of April. The ballot paper was explicit that

what members were being balloted on was escalating strike action.”

The union said it was expecting more than 1,500 staff from colleges across the country to take part in strike action on March 1.

It did not elaborate on what degree heavy snow across the country had undermined picket lines or efforts to disrupt college life – considering how the icy conditions would have negatively affected many lectures and decisions to attend anyway.

But a spokesperson for New City College in London claimed the strike had made very little impact.

“The strike action – and snow – have caused very little disruption,” they said. “All NCC campuses are fully open and students are attending timetabled classes.”

The union announced last month that staff at more than a dozen colleges had voted overwhelmingly to strike over pay.

The UCU said staff at all the London colleges that voted and Sandwell were taking part in the second day of the strike.

The AoC expressed “regret” that it was unable to offer more last September.

The National Joint Forum, made up of

the unions representing college staff, had submitted a claim for an across-the-board rise of around six per cent in April.

But the final offer was just one per cent, or the sum of £250 “where this is more beneficial”.

“When we made the recommendation of one per cent, or a minimum of £250, we were clear that this was the maximum we believed was affordable by colleges, given the severe funding cuts which they have been subject to in recent years,” said AoC boss David Hughes.

But the mood will have darkened further among general FE college staff, after it was announced yesterday that teachers in sixth-form colleges in England will get a pay rise of up to two per cent, backdated to September 2017.

The agreement will give those on points one to six of the national pay scale an extra two per cent, while those above point six will get one per cent from the same date.

“Sixth-form college teachers will be pleased that their pay will increase in line with school teachers for another year,” said Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union.

COMMENTS

Adult education budget used to bail out struggling colleges

It really isn't better that this money is spent on bailing out colleges than not spent – unless the money is funding real change.

Sadly, the area reviews, which were supposed to reduce the chronic overcapacity in the sector and create more specialisation, were bungled. Provider capture of FE policy will take a long time to dislodge.

Andrew B

Even more shocking when you consider that new providers are capped at 50 per cent of the initial contract award as a result of the Public Contracts Regulations.

David Lee

Colleges needing a bailout surely suggests a problem with viability, and if this is the case shouldn't they be closed?

Albeit anecdotally, as a small company I can identify 300 people that could have benefited from AEB funded training, but we don't have access to it.

Multiply this across the country, it's shameful!

Noel Johnson

Apprenticeship funding bands set to change

Employers are completely able to negotiate with suppliers on price. However an open-book costing approach which considers EPA cost, completion rate, risk, cohort size, expenses and 20-per-cent support usually leads to higher price than the cap. Usually the employer does not want to pay higher than the cap and hence the cap is settled on.

It is microeconomics that is driving this rather than an unwillingness to negotiate. The ESFA should look at new profit margins in the sector and make a judgement on if there is profiteering going on (I think I know the conclusion).

The situation is also completely analogous to university tuition fees where the “cap” is nearly always charged, again because to charge less usually means lower quality.

Andy Cheshire



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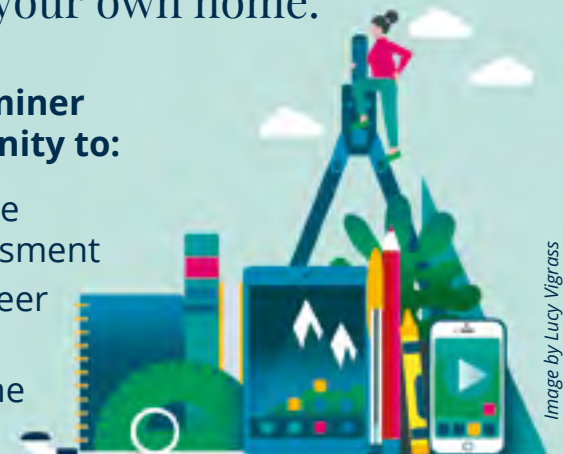


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- Experience of successful project management from inception through to completion, with the ability to work with people at all levels
 - Experience of the development of learners' technical skills attainment, employability, work experience and progress
- In return we offer a friendly, modern working environment, a diverse employee reward scheme, childcare voucher scheme, pension scheme, continued professional development and a generous holiday allowance, along with many other benefits.

Our vision is

'To provide Worcestershire with high quality further and higher education and training.'

To do this we believe in raising students' aspirations, self-confidence and significantly improving their employability prospects. We want our dynamic workforce to share our passion and enthusiasm. We believe in providing employers access to on the job training to develop their workforce. We are also committed to working with key stakeholders to enhance the economic prospects in the area.

As one of the largest employers in the area we pro-actively support and invest in our workforce to attack a wide range of specialist skills. We pride ourselves on our progressive and flexible approach and in our investment in our workforce, and as we enter the next phase of our growth strategy, there's no better time to join us and to help us deliver our clear vision for the future of further and higher education.

Closing date for this post is: Monday 19 March 2018

Interview date: Monday 26 March 2018

To apply please visit www.howcollege.ac.uk

This College is committed to equality of opportunity and to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults, and expects all staff to share this commitment. All successful applicants will be required to complete and pay for a Disclosure & Barring Service check. The costs of this check will be deducted from the applicant's first salary payment from the College.

We reserve the right to close this vacancy early if sufficient applications are received.

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- **Ongoing investment in you** – everything you need to stay at the leading edge of the industry.

In short, we can offer you a career environment that few other organisations can match. As long as you have the right technical qualifications and experience, including proven ability to support and mentor apprentices, you will discover the kind of personal and professional growth you've been looking for.

JTL is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people and expects all its employees to share this commitment.

We welcome applicants from all sections of the community. Please note: an online application form must be completed, we cannot accept CVs. Strictly no agencies please.



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Her Majesty's Chief
Inspector, Ofsted



Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select
Committee, House of
Commons



Sir Gerry Berragan
CEO, Institute for
Apprenticeships



Rt Hon Anne Milton MP
Apprenticeships & Skills
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BROADCASTER & JOURNALIST, KIRSTY WARK, WILL BE
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Image: BBC broadcaster & journalist Kirsty Wark chairing AAC Conference in 2017.

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Great expectations for careers strategy and the Baker Clause

Now the Baker clause is law and schools are obliged to inform pupils of non-university routes, Anne Milton is expecting a careers revolution

Next week we are celebrating National Careers Week and National Apprenticeships Week. Both give young people a nudge to start thinking about what they do next. I am really pleased that this year, more employers are getting involved, with the likes of RBS and the BBC giving their backing.

“Please get in touch with your local school and find out how you can support them

One of the most common ways for people to get careers advice and guidance is during their time at school or college. I launched the government’s careers strategy at the end of last year to set out how we expand the breadth and effectiveness of careers advice for young people. We need to make sure that whatever a young person’s background, they get good advice and information.

We want that advice to properly outline the full range of opportunities that are out there, so young people know how to get the skills and qualifications they need – not just for now, but for the future, too. One of the key ways to do this is through contact with employers and training providers. This could be through work experience, talks from education providers and employers in the area, as well as class visits or mentoring, for example.

In order for this to be a success, it’s really important that schools and colleges understand the responsibility they now have to provide their pupils with a fuller picture of all the options out there. For too long there has been too much focus on the traditional university route.

Under the new laws we introduced in January, schools now have a duty to make sure they are providing opportunities for a

range of education and training providers to come in to talk to pupils about technical education and apprenticeships – according to what’s known as “the Baker clause”. Under the laws, schools must also publish a statement on their website which sets out how training providers can access the school in a practical and supportive way.

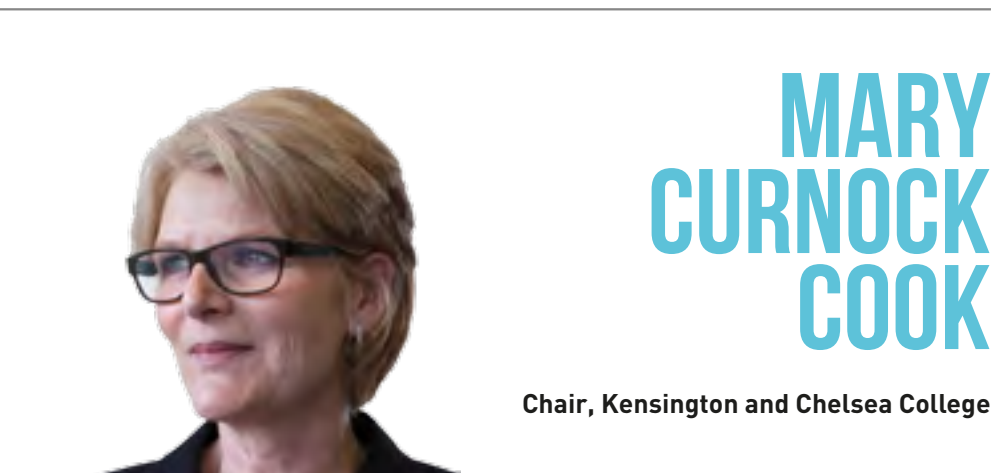
I expect to see schools setting up careers events, assemblies and options evenings so that providers can talk to pupils about what they offer and what it is like to learn in a different environment. It’s really important that every young person, no matter their background, has a good understanding of both the technical and academic routes to a rewarding job.

There is no exception to who can participate. We all need to work together to expand the breadth of information that young people get on all education and training options. It is only by talking directly to a range of providers, including FE colleges, university technical colleges, and apprenticeship providers, that young people can truly appreciate the opportunities available to them.

The focus on careers and apprenticeships this week demonstrates the government’s commitment to supporting everyone to get the skills they need to get ahead, fulfill their potential and in doing so help to boost the economy of the future. I want this new legislation to be the start of a change in how schools and parents look at what young people do in future, and give all pupils access to these exciting career options.

“For too long there has been too much focus on the traditional university route

Do have a look at the careers strategy. I hope this will help you to highlight the opportunities available. Please get in touch with your local school or college and find out how you can support them, and if you have any problems do let me know.



Kensington and Chelsea College will emerge stronger from these troubles

After local campaigners successfully prevented an unwelcome merger, the college’s chair explains how the board intends to take things forward in a more amenable fashion

An FE Week headline recently cast me as the “embattled” chair of Kensington and Chelsea College, but that’s not what it feels like to me. There’s no doubt that this college has been through a difficult period, and I was sorry in many ways that the merger with our neighbouring Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College did not proceed.

But a successful college always needs the support of its students, staff and the community it serves, and we were not able to secure that support for this merger.

The recent history of KCC has seen student numbers fall, a grade three rating from Ofsted and an unpalatable level of financial operating losses. The FE commissioner’s assessment makes it clear that KCC does not have a future as a standalone college. Add to that the sale of our north Kensington site to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and the terrible toll wrought on our community by the Grenfell Tower fire last summer, and it’s not hard to see why charting the college’s future is challenging.

The fact that the proposed merger is not going ahead tells us that we need to tread more carefully in our quest to steer ourselves to a sustainable future, and the board of governors agreed a number of measures at our last meeting which should ensure the success of the new, commissioner-led merger process on which we are now embarking.

We are in the process of commissioning an independent review of the 2016 sale of the Wornington Road site to RBKC, which took place before I was brought into the college. It’s important that the full facts about this transaction are in the public domain because the building is of deep importance to the community and its sale has raised important questions which need to be answered. In parallel, we are working with RBKC to agree terms for the long-term use of the Wornington Road site for future provision.

We are also planning to bring together a new community engagement group to ensure that there is a forum for dialogue between the college and its community.

Although there are statutory requirements for consultation about any future merger, we want the dialogue to go much further than this, to give our community a voice in the wider issues of provision and community services that the college can offer now and in the future.

“We are also planning to bring together a new community engagement group to ensure that there is a forum for dialogue

In all of this, it’s important that we continue to put our primary stakeholders, our learners, at the forefront in considering the future. Our new principal Andy Cole brings long experience of FE provision in London and a background in curriculum and quality improvement. Andy’s top priority is driving up standards in teaching, learning and achievement for the students who rely on the college to underpin their future ambitions and career development. His appointment has been unanimously welcomed by the governors, who are already working closely with him to ensure the college can meet the future skills needs of local employers and the community.

KCC is emerging from one of the most difficult periods in its history for both staff and students. Many lessons have been learned and tough decisions taken, but I have been struck by the tremendous commitment that exists to improving the quality and breadth of opportunities available to residents in the area.

It was wonderful to see our recent open day so well attended by young people from across the community and we are more determined than ever to build a further education institution that everyone can be truly proud of.

EXPERTS

In last week’s FE Week webinar, the skills minister insisted the 20-per-cent off-the job training rule for would be sticking around. Neil Davies explains why not all employers are in favour

While some employers might not welcome the financial cost of the levy, most undoubtedly want to maximise their return. For most, the levy is for spending on upskilling, and in the companies we work with it is seen as a huge, beneficial opportunity, even though some have been slow to formulate their approach and prioritise spend.

Across our two main businesses, Watertrain and Intelligencia Training, we are seeing significant increases in current and planned apprenticeship numbers. The level three water process technician standard and the level four apprenticeship in intelligence operations provide significant new knowledge and skills to improve the effectiveness of staff. While of great value to individuals and their organisations, the vast majority of these new starts would simply not happen if it were not for the levy.

There have been various claims about red tape and bureaucracy affecting both the roll-out and start numbers. These in our view are overstated. We are finding no process blockages at our employers, and indeed have found the whole digital apprenticeship service set-up surprisingly easy to work with.

Nor do we recognise the argument that the levy is responsible for the “collapse” in apprenticeship starts. This makes little sense



NEIL DAVIES

Director, Watertrain Limited

The apprenticeship levy is not to blame for the fall in starts

when the government has money available and a relatively simple system to enable firms to spend it. If a levy employer was previously offering apprenticeships, it’s only the payment methodology that has changed – not the decision to do apprenticeships.

We no longer operate in the non-levy-paying sector, so it’s difficult to comment on what impact the employer 10-per-cent financial contribution may be having on starts. But from my experience, I suspect it will affect the ability of some SMEs to take on apprentices or upskill staff.

The new 20-per-cent off-the-job (OTJ) training requirement is a big change to the historical apprenticeship delivery model. We are fortunate that our water sector clients are using the new standard to upskill their operational teams and there are plenty of opportunities under “skills and behaviours” to capture OTJ activity. The high percentage is however still a real challenge. Freeing staff for the knowledge and skills elements affects operations, so to rota the release of staff from the front line, in essence, for one day a week is costly and problematic.

The rule may sound like a good idea, particularly for a 16- to 18-year-old in their first job. However, it is upskilling that accounts for the vast majority of starts, and the OTJ policy makes a huge assumption that businesses can afford to lose a member of staff’s output for one day every week. For example, in one large tier-one contractor to the water sector, the operations director has stopped using apprenticeships to upskill in the operations side of the business given the staffing limitations. Many businesses will

not have the resources to manage the OTJ. This can only mean that many thousands of potential starts will be lost.

There is a material risk that some employers, in their determination to fully spend the levy, will not necessarily commit to the intent of the OTJ. Equally, I suspect many on upskilling programmes would rather be doing their day job than trying to create an activity log that may have little or no actual value. Politicians state that the new apprenticeship standards are about giving employers ownership of their own skills agenda. Why then do policymakers impose an arbitrary percentage insisting it is about adding quality?

“ Many businesses will not have the resources to manage the off-the-job training rule

Perhaps the rule-makers need to actually give employers that ownership and control, and let them decide what percentage of OTJ best suits their needs, because currently the rule constrains employers and their staff development.

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CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King*



Finally an excuse to waste time on Twitter

A UK-wide competition is seeking the most social media-savvy people working in further education.

The FE Social Media Superstars 2018, run by Jisc, is looking for anyone from marketing staff to college principals who are making a positive difference to the sector using social media.

Applicants will be judged on how they use social media to address specific needs and challenges, the impact their social media prowess has had on their institution or the wider community, and how they have used social media in an innovative way.

Ten winners will be named, and each will win a visit for their college or institution from Jisc's Digi Lab, featuring a robot, a brain reader, and augmented reality software.

Previous winners include Bedford College CEO Ian Pryce, for upbeat tweets which draw national media attention, and Hull College Group's Amanda Reeve, a theatrical make-up tutor who uses Instagram to show off her students' work and secure them work placements.

Entries should be submitted before midnight on March 29. To apply, visit: <http://bit.ly/2BTQh8Y>

Fox ferrets out fresh film talent



Creative media students have enjoyed a week-long crash course in movie marketing with representatives from film studio, 20th Century Fox.

The learners from Manchester College were told to build a digital campaign around the studio's upcoming film release, Love Simon, a rom-com telling the story of a closeted gay teenage boy in high school.

The campaigns were judged by Cameron Saunders, UK managing director for 20th Century Fox, as well as members of the studio's marketing team, and the winning campaign used the idea of "facing your fears" to fit the film's theme of coming out.

As part of the project, students were also allowed to see snippets of the film, which is officially released in April, and received an invite to a pre-screening in March.

"This has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had as a tutor," said Katy Rushton, a media tutor at the college. "I've seen students who were too shy to answer questions in class grow in confidence over the course of a week, to the point where they could pitch their ideas to 20th Century Fox professionals."

The series of workshops with the film giant were facilitated by Ideas Foundation, a charity which gets 13- to 19-year-olds hands-on experience in the creative industries.

The finer things in Liverpool



A college's on-site restaurant has become the first in Liverpool to achieve gold accreditation from People 1st, a talent management company.

The L20 hotel school and L20 restaurant at Hugh Baird College was also awarded 'centre of excellence' status for the quality of the training it delivers to aspiring chefs, as well as its links with the catering industry.

The restaurant was also placed at the "top end" of the college rosette award scheme by AA Hotel Services inspector Garry Baldwin, who presented it with a 'highly commended' award.

"To be the first college in the region to be awarded gold accreditation and named as a centre of excellence really does recognise the hard work we put in," said Stephen Otty, the curriculum coordinator at L20 hotel school.

"The school was launched to address the hospitality skills gap of the ever-growing visitor economy of the Liverpool City Region and we continue to do this in spectacular style year on year," added Yana Williams, the college's principal and CEO.

The college's L20 restaurant currently has a five-star rating on trip advisor.



The art to marching on your stomach

Catering students experienced the world of military cooking after a visit from the army's 167 Catering Support Regiment.

Under the watchful eye of the team of military chefs, the Warrington and Vale Royal College learners used basic rations to whip up nutritional dishes that could support a soldier in the field, including pasta, stews and flapjacks made with tinned and long-life produce.

Students also had the opportunity to ask the army chefs about the career options available in the forces, and heard about their

experiences in a field kitchen.

"This was a great opportunity for our students to see what it's like to work within the armed forces as a chef. It's a career option that many of them had never thought about before," said Andy Macleod, the college's curriculum manager for hospitality and catering.

"Using the ration packs to produce a meal was really interesting – we all loved it," added student Maddie Hannam.

The college hopes to take students on a visit to the 167 regiment's Lincolnshire-based barracks over the next few months.

STEM Sellers grow science in schools



Sixth-formers and university graduates will work together to educate schoolkids about STEM subjects and career options in an innovative new pilot project launched at Queen Mary’s College, reports Samantha King

The STEM Sellers initiative will partner five recent graduates on the Atomic Weapons Establishment’s (AWE) graduate programme with 20 of the Hampshire sixth-form’s students on STEM courses. They will all come up with ideas for outreach activities to take to local primary and secondary schools.

Managed by the graduates, the project will provide the college’s students with an opportunity to work closely with people who have been through university and who are taking their first steps on the STEM career ladder, as well as developing their own employability skills.

“We see this project as a win-win-win,” explained Marcus Rutland, STEM development lead at Queen Mary’s. “Our local schools get somebody else in doing something entirely free, with everything managed. It’s great for our students because they can build their skills and interact with people who can give them an eye-opener about the opportunities ahead, and it’s good for the AWE graduates who get to work on their project management and teamwork skills.”



STEM sells: Experimenting in the lab

Running every two weeks in the college’s timetabled tutor time, students and graduates have been brainstorming the activities they’ll deliver to schools, striking a balance between “fun science” activities including forensic challenges and chemical reaction experiments, with informative sessions on why youngsters should pursue STEM subjects post-16.

A body language expert from AWE will visit the group next week to run a workshop on how to deliver a good presentation, to equip the students with the skills they’ll need

to run their sessions successfully in schools.

“If you’re speaking to a crowd of educationalists, this project has the benefit of being something that is high impact without requiring any one person at the college to be cooking up every detail from scratch, which would be really time-consuming. Having AWE as a partner and the graduates there is fantastic,” Mr Rutland added.

“It’s something I can see could be repeated elsewhere. I’m sure lots of STEM employers have lots of graduate-intake programmes where they want the graduates to take a lead



The launch of STEM Sellers



Marcus Rutland

on something.”

Funding for the project, including minibus hire and any purchases required for the workshops, will be covered by a fund accessible to the AWE graduates.

Do you want to be in Campus Round-up?

If you have a story you’d like to see featured in campus round-up, get in touch by emailing samantha.king@feweek.co.uk



Michael Finn

Joint headteacher, Sir Simon Milton Westminster UTC

Start date February 2018

Previous job

Vice-principal, Sir Simon Milton Westminster UTC

Interesting fact

Michael is a keen singer, and in his youth performed in choirs at both the Albert and Festival Halls.



Andy Cole

Principal, Kensington and Chelsea College

Start date February 2018

Previous job

Principal, College of North West London

Interesting fact

Andy used to curate art exhibitions and, in the 1980s and 1990s, ran a gallery around the corner from Kensington and Chelsea College’s Chelsea Centre.



Nazir Afzal OBE

Chairman of the corporation board, Hopwood Hall College

Start date September 2018

Previous job

Pro-chancellor, University of West London

Interesting fact

Nazir is known in greater Manchester for his role in prosecuting the “Rochdale grooming gangs”, as chief crown prosecutor of the Crown Prosecution Service for north-west England.



Aaron Jeffries

Apprenticeship levy lead, Covéa Insurance

Start date January 2018

Previous job

Learning and development partner, Covéa Insurance

Interesting fact

Aaron’s a keen artist and has painted a number of canvasses for friends and family.



Colin Peaks

Principal, Wilberforce College

Start date September 2018

Previous job

Vice-principal, Wilberforce College

Interesting fact

Colin was a pupil himself at Wilberforce College between 1991 and 1993.

Movers & Shakers

...

Your weekly guide to who’s new and who’s leaving



AELP Technology Conferences 2018

Technology in Education and Training continues to advance and there are many new opportunities for the Further Education sector to embrace and harness with a real opportunity to have a coherent end to end technology solution for the delivery of high quality education and training.

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www.aelptechnologyconferences2018.org.uk

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FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

		5		9	3	2		
	9				8	7		6
8		3						5
			7		9		2	
3								9
	8		4		2			
1						3		7
2		4	8				9	
		9	3	5		8		

Difficulty:
EASY

9			5	3			7	
				2	6			9
						6	5	
		6		8				3
2	7	3				8	6	4
8				6		7		
	8	5						
7			6	1				
	1			5	2			6

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Solutions:
Next edition

Last Week's solutions

9	5	2	1	3	4	8	6	7
3	1	7	5	6	8	2	9	4
4	6	8	7	9	2	5	3	1
2	8	5	6	7	1	9	4	3
1	3	4	8	5	9	7	2	6
7	9	6	2	4	3	1	8	5
6	2	1	4	8	5	3	7	9
5	4	9	3	2	7	6	1	8
8	7	3	9	1	6	4	5	2

Difficulty:
EASY

9	6	8	5	3	1	4	7	2
5	4	7	8	2	6	1	3	9
3	2	1	9	7	4	6	5	8
1	9	6	4	8	7	5	2	3
2	7	3	1	9	5	8	6	4
8	5	4	2	6	3	7	9	1
6	8	5	3	4	9	2	1	7
7	3	2	6	1	8	9	4	5
4	1	9	7	5	2	3	8	6

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug



Spot five differences. **First correct entry wins an FE Week mug.**
Email your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to: news@feweek.co.uk.
Last Edition's winner: Harry Jerome