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# FEWEEK

## MEET THE TEAM



**Shane Chowen**  
**EDITOR**

@SHANECHOWEN  
SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Shane Mann**  
**MANAGING DIRECTOR**

@SHANERMANN  
SHANE@LSECT.COM



**Billy Camden**  
**DEPUTY EDITOR**

@BILLYCAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Jessica Hill**  
**INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER**

@JESSJANEHILL  
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM



**JL Dutaut**  
**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**

@DUTAUT  
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



**Jason Noble**  
**SENIOR REPORTER**

@JASON\_NOBLE89  
JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Simon Kay**  
**SENIOR DESIGNER**

SIMON@FEWEEK.CO.UK

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### THE LSECT TEAM

HEAD DESIGNER

Nicky Phillips

SALES EXECUTIVE

Tony Hudson

CLASSIFIEDS MANAGER

Clare Halliday

OPERATIONS AND FINANCE MANAGER

Victoria Boyle

EVENTS MANAGER

Frances Ogefere Dell

SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR

Evie Hayes

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

Zoe Tuffin

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Sanchez Nandi

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Learning & Skills Events,  
Consultancy and Training Ltd  
c/o Mindspace,  
9 Appold Street,  
London EC2A 2AP  
T: 020 8123 4778  
E: [news@feweek.co.uk](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk)

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## News

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# HGV hopefuls left in the dark as DfE ends bootcamp contract

BILLY CAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

## EXCLUSIVE

Much-needed HGV driver hopefuls have been left in limbo after a provider's contract to deliver their training using the government's flagship skills bootcamp model was suddenly terminated.

Qube Learning has been in discussions with the Department for Education for six months after unforeseen increases in delivery costs made the training for the 16-week course "unviable".

The DfE this week ended the contract a year after it was awarded. Qube's owner Claire Capperauld told *FE Week* that she was "surprised" by the decision and claimed her company had recently been "specifically instructed to contact learners with regards to finishing their training".

The DfE was tight-lipped about the reason for termination but promised that officials are "working to protect all learners impacted by this situation".

Both parties have refused to disclose the value of Qube's contract, or how many learners have been impacted.

Several aspiring drivers caught up in the dispute told *FE Week* that Qube had previously said that "thousands" were signed up to the course.

Many of the "gutted" and "frustrated" learners enrolled 12 months ago but never received any training. They have slammed Qube for a lack of communication and said they have been "left in the dark" while they miss out on other training and employment opportunities.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the Road Haulage Association (RHA) estimated a shortfall of 100,000 lorry drivers, caused by lockdowns, a boom in online shopping and a post-Brexit exodus of EU drivers. It prompted haulage firms to offer generous wages of up to £60,000 and four-figure sign-on bonuses.

By September 2021, the DfE had established HGV skills bootcamps to quickly train truckers and get them on the road. The programme, backed

with tens of millions of pounds, is supposed to be a 12-to-16-week course with a guaranteed job interview at the end.

Qube Learning, recently judged 'requires improvement' by Ofsted, was one of 24 providers approved by DfE to deliver the "new to HGV driving" bootcamp. It was one of only a handful that was approved to offer bootcamps in multiple locations in every region of England.

Total starts for HGV bootcamps in 2021/22 was 4,740, about 30 per cent of starts across all skills bootcamps.

Tom O'Sullivan signed up to Qube's HGV bootcamp last year after leaving a senior role in the NHS due to burn out. He viewed HGV driving as a good career for job security where he could also help an industry struggling with skills shortages.

He was accepted onto the course in February 2022 and month later took part in four webinars. He was then told to go for a medical so that he could apply for a provisional licence and sit theory tests, which he passed in July.

There was radio silence from Qube until December when he received an email to say the provider was preparing to start his training in the new year. He was shocked to receive a message this week telling him there was no way forward.

"It's super frustrating", O'Sullivan told *FE Week*. "I've made decisions to not pursue other opportunities because I was doing this. I could have been a year into paid employment by now."

Liam Millington is another HGV bootcamp

learner with Qube who has gone through a similar experience.

"It's gutting. I've been looking forward to obtaining my licence for the past year. I haven't told my family or friends yet as they were just as excited for me."

Capperauld said Qube's delivery model was different to many other HGV bootcamp providers because it outsources the practical training and testing elements to external suppliers.

She told *FE Week*: "Unforeseen increases in delivery costs since the contracts were issued in March 2022 including increased fuel, energy and staff costs meant that our model was no longer viable."

"We have been in discussions with the DfE since October 2022 regarding these challenges and were surprised that the contract was terminated after they had specifically instructed us to contact learners with regards to finishing their training."

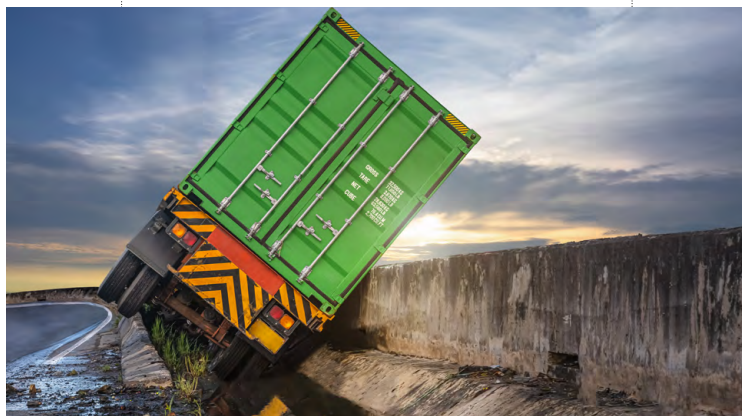
Qube isn't the first training provider to raise the alarm about the higher-than-expected cost of delivery for HGV bootcamps. Systems Group Ltd went bust in November blaming inadequate funding levels. Around 2,000 learners, mostly on bootcamps, were impacted.

Capperauld said Qube has "made it clear to the DfE that we will support with learner transition as required".

The DfE said it is "providing the opportunity for learners to enrol with another training provider so that they can complete their training".

But an email to affected learners, seen by *FE Week*, asks that "you do not contact the department and wait for further guidance and instruction – we will email you by Friday 14th April with more information".

The email added: "If you are contacted by any company regarding delivery of skills bootcamps in HGV driving, practical tests, licensing or similar, please do not take any action. The DfE is not able to reimburse any costs where a learner has elected to self-fund their training."



## News

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CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

# Flex on UKSPF skills funding 'welcome' but timing questioned

**JASON NOBLE**  
JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government has brought forward by a year the start date for a new fund for skills investment.

The timing of the announcement, made just days ahead of the revised start date, has led to concern that local leaders' hands will already be tied and providers will be unable to capitalise on the move.

The people and skills element of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is designed to help economically inactive adults into work through skills interventions.

Spending the cash had been restricted until April 2024, but the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said on Thursday that it will remove that restriction from April 2023.

DLUHC confirmed that authorities have already been allocated the cash and the start date for it has been moved forward.

However, concerns have been raised that many authorities will have already committed all of their allocation to the previous timeline, leaving them unable to take advantage of the change.

Stephen Evans, chief executive of Learning and Work Institute, said: "This flex is definitely welcome and helps to minimise gaps in support – a temporary reduction in help that never made sense in the first place.

"But the fact that it's so late in the day means that local areas already have other plans in place, that some existing programmes will already have closed and that putting in place new support will take time."

Evans said he hoped local areas will "do all they can to make good use of these flexibilities" to ensure "proper investment in people, learning and skills".

The DLUHC update said the fund is "well-aligned" to meeting the prime minister's goal of boosting skills capability, and be "the main source of funding to support

economically inactive individuals move towards employment".

It said that the removal of the restriction will "maximise the impact of the fund in this area".

The UKSPF launched in April last year, with the funding period running from April 2022 to March 2025.

It replaced the European Social Fund (ESF) which had been delivered through the European Union and was therefore no longer available to the UK post-Brexit.

Three priorities are being delivered through the fund – communities and place, supporting local business and people and skills.

The communities and place funding was able to be used from the launch last April, while the other two portions can be spent from this April (year two of the fund).

In addition, ringfenced funding is provided to authorities through the UKSPF to deliver the Multiply programme – the government scheme for adults without a grade C or above in maths to access free courses that will help them gain a maths qualification.

The £1.58 billion fund for England over the three years has been allocated to ten mayoral combined authorities and Greater London, 50 unitary authorities, 165 district and borough councils and 23 upper tier authorities.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk district councils were among those to secure a slice of the cash – just over £1 million for Babergh and around £1.1 million for Mid Suffolk.

But allocations for year two of the fund have

already been set.

A spokesperson for the two authorities said: "All of our year two projects have already been identified and projects are in commissioning stage with all funding committed. We will not seek to change the year two funding allocations.

"The outcomes and targets for the whole UKSPF programme have been signed off via our investment plan by DLUHC, there is no current opportunity to change these targets and add additional skills projects to the existing plan.

"We are working with Suffolk County Council [the local education authority] on commissioning skills projects for delivery in year three."

Others have welcomed the move.

Graham Wood, economic development manager at the unitary authority Durham County Council, which was given £30.8 million in core UKSPF funding, said the council had shared its concern that funding people and skills from 2024 only would "create a real terms gap in provision of employment support programmes and wide-ranging upskilling opportunities".

He added that the announcement "will allow us to advance our emerging plans for employment and skills activity".

A spokesperson for the mayor of London said: "It's vital that Londoners have the right skills to get good jobs in the industries that need them, which is why the mayor has long called for the government to bring forward the people and skills element of its Shared Prosperity Fund.

"City Hall officers will now work to establish when programmes can realistically start, given the late confirmation by government."

Greater Manchester Combined Authority welcomed the move. Officials had already been working to align its recycled local growth fund cash with the skills and people element of the UKSPF that would effectively have brought forward the UKSPF cash by a year.



Michael Gove

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## Investigation

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## College group offloads MAT amid compliance review

JESSICA HILL  
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM

## EXCLUSIVE

A leading college group is parting ways with its academy trust amid a governance and compliance review by government.

Luminate Education Group is set to hand over control of its four-school academy trust, White Rose, based in Leeds, to a larger neighbouring multi academy trust (MAT), Wellspring.

*FE Week* understands the move, sanctioned by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, follows multiple internal and external investigations and a complete relationship breakdown last year between leaders of Luminate and White Rose.

The case shines a light on the challenges college groups face in operating MATs and *FE Week* can reveal that a government review of college-led MATs is underway in a drive for more effective sponsorships.

## The birth of White Rose

White Rose was created in 2014, when what was then known as Leeds City College Group became sponsor of Leeds City Academy. After the Department for Education divested another MAT, E-ACT, of ten of its schools, two of them - Leeds East and Leeds West - joined White Rose.

In 2019, all three schools were inspected by Ofsted and rated 'good', and the trust was allowed to take on another school - Mill Field, renamed Alder Tree Primary.

Following plans in 2021 for savings to be made across the colleges and MAT by sharing central services, a two-year strategy was agreed which Luminate said would have "extended and deepened" the relationship with its trust.

This involved a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which included the ongoing line management of trust chief executive Andrew Whittaker by Luminate's chief Colin Booth.

Some members of White Rose's leadership are understood to have been unhappy with the direction of travel agreed.

Whittaker then made a series of strongly denied allegations over a 15-month period against Luminate to external bodies

including Ofsted, Leeds City Council and the ESFA. They resulted in several lengthy investigations.

Luminate said the allegations were "thoroughly investigated by various organisations" and found to be "unsubstantiated".

They claimed the "long and vexatious complaints made by [Whittaker] have caused significant distress and upset".

The relationship between Luminate and White Rose was formally suspended by the ESFA in January 2022.

Whittaker was unable to respond to this article for legal reasons.

The ESFA carried out a governance and compliance review into White Rose between March and June 2022 and raised its concerns in a letter.

However, Booth said that the review did not allow Luminate as the sponsor to submit evidence, a complaint that was upheld by the DfE.

Luminate believes therefore that the review is "not complete" and that the letter issued to White Rose "cannot be relied upon at this stage".

White Rose also launched an investigation into serious concerns about Whittaker's behaviour, which led to his suspension in September.

White Rose's trustees and members are understood to be working very closely with the Department for Education, the local authority and Luminate to address issues related to the recent turmoil.

## Structural issues

When White Rose was created, the college group chief was made both a member and trustee of the MAT, in line with DfE guidelines at the time.

But in March 2022, Booth stepped down as a director of White Rose - he had been expected to continue until September 2023.

The move followed changes to the academy handbook stating the department's "strong preference" for "a majority of members to be independent of the board of trustees", and "for no other employees to serve as trustees".

Luminate is part of a government-led Pathfinder review into the structural challenges for college groups posed by ESFA rules

around MATs.

Luminate - and several other college group leaders involved in the review - take particular issue with handbook rules on transactions with individuals or organisations, including parent college groups, related to trusts.

Luminate claims the rules make close partnership between colleges and schools working "more difficult than it should be" and that the rules are not "an appropriate way to

treat two educational charities trying to work together to deliver benefits for students and better value for public money".

"We think that the rules ... have not yet caught up with the much more positive and supportive views of the minister," the college group said.

"The ESFA rules add unnecessary bureaucracy and cost to what are positive arrangements that provide real and clear benefits for students."

## The proposed takeover

An application to transfer White Rose was submitted to the DfE's regional director, who this month deferred the decision to allow more information to be gathered.

Wellspring, also a college-led MAT, has 29 schools and plans to grow to include at least four more, on top of White Rose's.

But while its sponsor, Barnsley College, appointed the original members of the MAT's board and has the right to appoint directors, the college's senior leadership team take more of a backseat role.

Luminate said: "It is DfE policy to encourage all single and small MATs to either grow or merge to form larger MATs that then have more and better resources to support their schools and students.

"Both the Luminate Education Group Board and the White Rose Academies Trust Board agree with this policy and are therefore taking action, alongside the DfE, to ensure that the [White Rose] schools are part of a larger and strong MAT for the future. The decision was made collaboratively and not based on a specific recommendation outside of DfE policy."



## News

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# Transgender guidance will include FE colleges

BILLY CAMDEN  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Official government guidance on provision for transgender students will be expanded to include further education colleges, the education secretary has said.

The Department for Education has been working on the guidance for schools over the past year amid calls for clarity on how leaders should respond to “complex and sensitive” transgender matters.

Gillian Keegan has now written to Robin Walker, chair of the education select committee, to confirm that draft guidance will be released and consulted on “later in the spring”.

**“This is such a complex and sensitive area, it is incredibly important that we take the time to get the guidance right”**

She added that the department recently expanded the scope of the guidance to include further education colleges, “as we know that colleges also need clarity and support in relation to their students who are under 18 years old”.

“I appreciate the demand for this guidance is significant, however, this is such a complex and sensitive area, I am sure you will understand that it is incredibly important that we take the time to get the guidance right,” Keegan wrote.

Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman told



Gillian Keegan



the commons education committee in November that there was an “urgent” need for government guidance to help education providers navigate a “minefield” of “deeply contested issues” given the “evolution in the interpretation” of the protected characteristics in equality law.

Keegan said in December that the DfE needs to be clear that the new transgender guidance is “based on safeguarding and evidence and not an attempt to balance contested views amongst children who are not old enough to entertain those ideas”.

College leaders have welcomed the decision to extend the guidance, with many of them unsure how best to accommodate transgender and non-binary students in areas such as sport, toilet facilities, and overnight trips.

A spokesperson for the Sixth Form Colleges Association said: “Individual institutions have had to navigate this

complex and sensitive issue without a clear steer from government, often receiving conflicting advice from legal and other sources.”

The SFCA called for the guidance to address 16 to 18s as a distinct group because they are “subject to the same safeguarding considerations as under-16s but not the same medical considerations”.

A spokesperson for the Association of Colleges said: “Colleges are often the first place that people can truly start to work out who they are, and to express themselves freely. We are proud of that and have been working with officials which we hope will result in constructive guidance.

“Colleges across England do brilliant work supporting students of all ages, and we will be pushing DfE to make sure that any new guidance allows this to continue. It is also important to remember that schools and colleges are very different and cover very different age cohort, any guidance should take that into consideration and not attempt a one-size-fits-all approach.”

## News

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CONTACT US [NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK)

# West Midlands plans free training for £30k earners

SHANE CHOWEN

[SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK)

Workers in the West Midlands earning up to £30,000 a year will be in line for free adult education under plans to boost access to level 3 training.

Officials at the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) released a set of proposals in a public consultation last Friday which they hope will help boost employment and earnings.

The combined authority, covering Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton, said their region has fewer residents qualified to level 3 than other parts of the country.

One proposal, to increase eligibility for subsidies currently only available to low earners to middle earners on £30,000, would be the most generous in the country.

WMCA also plans to require its grant-funded providers to ensure at least 20 per cent of their AEB provision is at level 3 and has pledged to review learner support funding in response to "additional cost-related barriers" facing local adults.

## Subsidies for middle earners

Across AEB funding bodies, low wage learners typically have access to fully funded courses at levels 2 and 3, and access to courses under the free courses for jobs scheme and other local priority level 3 courses.

The full funding of low earning learners who would otherwise be eligible for co-funding was introduced to the Education and Skills Funding Agency's AEB funding rules in 2018/19.

The agency defines "low wage" learners in this year's funding rules as earning less than £18,525, based on the national living wage.

Devolved authorities have all adopted the low wage policy but have been more generous than the ESFA in how they define "low wage" (see table).

Most now use the real living wage (£10.90 per hour) as the basis for their definition, which is higher than the national living wage (£9.50 per hour).

The West Midlands is now proposing to increase their threshold to £30,000, which would be the highest in the country, in a two-year trial beginning in August 2023, subject to the consultation.

They are following in the footsteps of Tees Valley Combined Authority, which this year raised its low wage threshold to £27,040 using local median earnings, rather than the living wage.

"We are proposing to set our low wage threshold at £30,000, just below the median pay for full-time jobs across the WMCA area (£30,634). We believe this would reflect a bold commitment to tackling low pay and supporting in-work progression across the region," WMCA's consultation document said.

The consultation states that the WMCA is aware that upping the threshold creates a "risk of deadweight", but contests that targeting specific groups of learners or sectors would "make messaging more complex and would likely reduce overall impact."

Proposals will be funded from existing AEB and free courses for jobs programme budgets, WMCA confirmed.



Fiona Adridge

## New minimum volumes

Just over £100 million of WMCA's £131 million adult education budget is allocated out to 27 providers through grants, 21 of which are colleges, with the rest split between WEA and local authorities.

As part of a push to go "further and faster", the WMCA wants the providers to ensure that at least 20 per cent of their AEB provision is at level 3.

This could prove trickier for some providers, particularly local authorities that offer very little provision at level 3 and instead specialise in non-accredited and lower level courses.

Fiona Adridge, head of insight and intelligence at the WMCA told *FE Week*: "We believe it is possible for grant providers to both excel in providing pathways up to level 2 as well as to expand delivery at level 3. As part of the consultation, we will be engaging with our local authorities to explore how we can best work together to achieve this."

## Qualifications for FE Workforce

The consultation also proposes to fully fund qualifications for FE staff to support providers to "grow their own" and develop talent in the region".

It is proposed that the WMCA will fund qualifications for teaching assistants at level 3, advice and guidance professionals at level 4, ESOL teachers at level 5 and aspiring leaders, also at level 5, to help providers with recruitment and retention challenges.

"We recognise that while colleges and training providers have access to support for their own staff development, this is limited and does not usually extend beyond level 3," the consultation states.

Interested stakeholders have until 10am April 21, 2023 to respond to the consultation which can be found on the [WMCA's website](https://www.wmca.gov.uk).

## LOW WAGE THRESHOLDS BY ADULT EDUCATION FUNDING BODIES

Sources: AEB funding rules 2022/23

Funding body	Earning threshold for access to low wage subsidies
West Midlands Combined Authority	£19,350 (based on real living wage)
Tees Valley Combined Authority	<b>Proposing £30,000 (based on median full-time earning in WMCA area)</b>
Greater London Authority	£27,040 (based on median full-time earnings in TVCA area)
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority	£21,547.50 (based on London living wage)
South Yorkshire Combined Authority	£21,225 (based on real living wage)
West of England Combined Authority	£21,255 (based on real living wage)
Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority	£21,000
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	£20,888 (based on real living wage)
West Yorkshire Combined Authority	£20,888 (based on real living wage)
North of Tyne Combined Authority	£19,305 (based on real living wage)
Education and Skills Funding Agency (non-devolved areas)	£19,305 (based on real living wage)
	£18,525 (based on national living wage)



## News

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# MPs demand 'standardised' prison education

**JASON NOBLE**  
**[JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK)**

Dozens of MPs have called for all prison education to be brought into the public sector.

In a House of Lords debate on Thursday, Labour peer Baroness Blower called for the government to use the opportunity of the launch of the prisoner education service, set for 2025, to renationalise all prison education.

She said this should include "standardised curricula and qualifications – so important when prisoners are moved – and standardised education staff contracts to assist with recruitment and retention".

Coventry South MP Zarah Sultana put forward a parliamentary motion signed by 32 MPs calling for the same move. The 32 signatures consisted of Labour, Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and Democratic Unionist Party MPs, as well as an

independent, although no Conservatives had signed the motion.

But Conservative parliamentary under-secretary in the Ministry of Justice, Lord Bellamy, said during Thursday's debate that the government isn't planning widespread changes.

He said that core education in prisons is delivered by four providers – three classified as public sector and one private sector provider, while wider prison education beyond core teaching is delivered by a range of providers, including from charitable organisations.

He added: "We are engaging with the market to encourage new providers to work with us to deliver high quality prison education. We do not currently envisage fundamental change to the prison system of outsourcing core delivery to specialist education providers."

In 2021 Ofsted launched a review of prison

education, while an education select committee report published last spring described a "clunky, chaotic, disjointed system which does not value education as the key to rehabilitation".

The Prisons Strategy White Paper published in December 2021 pledged a new prisoner education service that will "make sure offenders can improve their basic literacy and numeracy, as well as acquire further vocational qualifications, like construction and computing, to make them more employable when they leave prison."

Contracts for a new service are expected to launch in 2025.

The government finally launched apprenticeships for prisoners in October 2022, with up to 300 prisoners who are eligible for day release and nearing the end of their time in open prison expected to become apprentices by 2025.

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Richard Lambden, Business Development  
Director, Cambridge Spark



## News

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## New WorldSkills UK trustees want 'world-class skills boosts'

**SHANE CHOWEN**  
[SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK)

A communications expert, a lawyer and a university vice chancellor are among new appointments to the board of WorldSkills UK.

Included among the new trustees, announced today, is Mark Farrar, who has previously led of the Association of Accounting Technicians and the Construction Industry Training Board as chief executive. Farrar is also on the board of exams watchdog Ofqual and was a governor at Barking and Dagenham College until July 2021.

"Raising standards in training through international benchmarking will not only boost productivity and competitiveness, but also help attract the foreign investment the UK needs to create high wage jobs in growth sectors like digital, green tech, advanced

manufacturing and life sciences," he said.

The announcement comes as WorldSkills UK today closes the registration period for providers and employers to register students and apprentices for the UK national skills competitions, which kick off with qualifying rounds from next month and culminate with national finals in November.

The new board members will be joining the organisation as it prepares to improve the UK's position in the international skills competition medal tables at WorldSkills Lyon next year.

One of the first tasks for the new board members will be to appoint a successor to Neil Bentley-Gockmann, WorldSkills UK's chief executive, who is stepping down in May after seven years.

Joining Farrar is Audrey Nelson, a strategic communications specialist who has held senior communications roles in organisations such as the CBI and the Home

Office. Nelson said she "looks forward to demonstrating how investment in world-class skills boosts economic growth and is a catalyst for innovation and opportunity".

Also enlisted are new trustees Justin Rix and Sean Wellington. Rix, a partner at professional services firm Grant Thornton UK LLP, said he is "driven by a passion for getting the very best out of people and helping to empower rising stars."

"I am really pleased to have joined an organisation that thrives on providing opportunities and developing talent," he said.

And Wellington, a former engineering apprentice and now provost and deputy vice-chancellor of the Middlesex University, said: "The competition-based training programmes run by WorldSkills UK give young people a real opportunity to boost their skills and their career prospects."

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*Luke, Level 2 Hospitality  
Team Member Apprentice at  
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# MoJ to ramp up HMP Academies in prisons

**JASON NOBLE**  
JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A training programme to get prison leavers into work is to be expanded to include at least 17 more prisons in the next four years.

The government has launched a tender for contracts up to £1 million to bolster its ties with employers to deliver HMP Academies in prisons.

HMP Academies are work programmes delivered by employers to provide specialist or vocational training to prisoners with the aim of bolstering employment prospects on release.

A small number of the programmes are already running with employers such as Timpson, Halfords and Max Spielman. The Ministry of Justice has identified a further 17 provisional spaces in prisons across the country with hopes of more to follow.

The contract tender, open until the end of the month, has a planned start date of mid-June with a four-year duration.

The contract tender said it was seeking partnerships with "a diverse range of businesses from across all sectors that can offer prisoners a second chance" and "smooth the path from prison to employment".

According to the MoJ, employment leads to a fall in reoffending rates of up to 9 percentage points.

A prison service spokesperson said: "Getting offenders into work is a tried and tested way of cutting crime and protecting the public, while also boosting our economy by helping employers plug vital skills gaps."

The programme is separate to the Future Skills Programme, which supports prisoners nearing the end of their sentence with bespoke training courses, and the Prisoner Education Service.

The structure of the academies is determined by the needs of the

employers who run them and there is no requirement for formal qualifications to be included unless the firms deem it necessary.

The MoJ makes the spaces available in prison, provides some funding and pledges an interview for a vacancy for those who complete an academy for employment.

Jon Collins, chief executive of the Prisoners' Education Trust, welcomed the plans but said the MoJ must also "radically improve" prison education to provide literacy and numeracy.

Halfords started its first programme, for male prisoners at HMP Onley near Daventry, in 2014. It now runs only one, at the women's HMP Drake Hall prison near Stafford, which opened in 2017.

It has 12 women at a time in the workshop learning bicycle mechanics for a period of at least six months, working four-and-a-half days a week. When one prisoner completes the programme, another joins.

Those who complete the programme are guaranteed an interview and receive an internal cycle mechanic qualification. Drake Hall is currently assessing whether a formal qualification can be achieved through the course, Halfords said.

About 100 men completed the programme at Onley and 15 women have

so far completed a programme at Drake Hall.

Andy McBride, group head of resourcing and reward at Halfords, told *FE Week*: "The feedback is that it has been brilliant – they didn't think they would ever get a job on release, they have learned loads, they feel much more confidence in the workplace. Even if they don't end up joining us, I feel we have played our part if they then subsequently get a job somewhere else."

McBride said it can be "a costly model" to set up workshops but added: "I absolutely support other businesses getting involved."

"We could see the business benefits as well as the society benefits. We sell a lot of bikes, we repair a lot of bikes and it's a skills set that's hard to find, so it gave us an opportunity to tap into other talent pools."

Meanwhile, Timpson runs a number of academy programmes in prisons that are designed to mimic its high street stores.

The firm's website said this enables prisoners to be trained in "all the services we provide" but the "only exception to this is key cutting, for obvious reasons".



## News

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# Flexible timeframe for T Level exams will 'reduce burden'

JASON NOBLE  
JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

T Level students will be able to sit their core exams and employer-set project in two different assessment windows from September 2023, under new government plans.

Currently students must undertake their core exams, an employer-set project and an occupational specialism assessment to complete a two-year T Level. The first time students sit their core exams, they must do so in the same assessment period as their employer-set project, for instance in the summer of their first year, but retakes for those elements can be done separately.

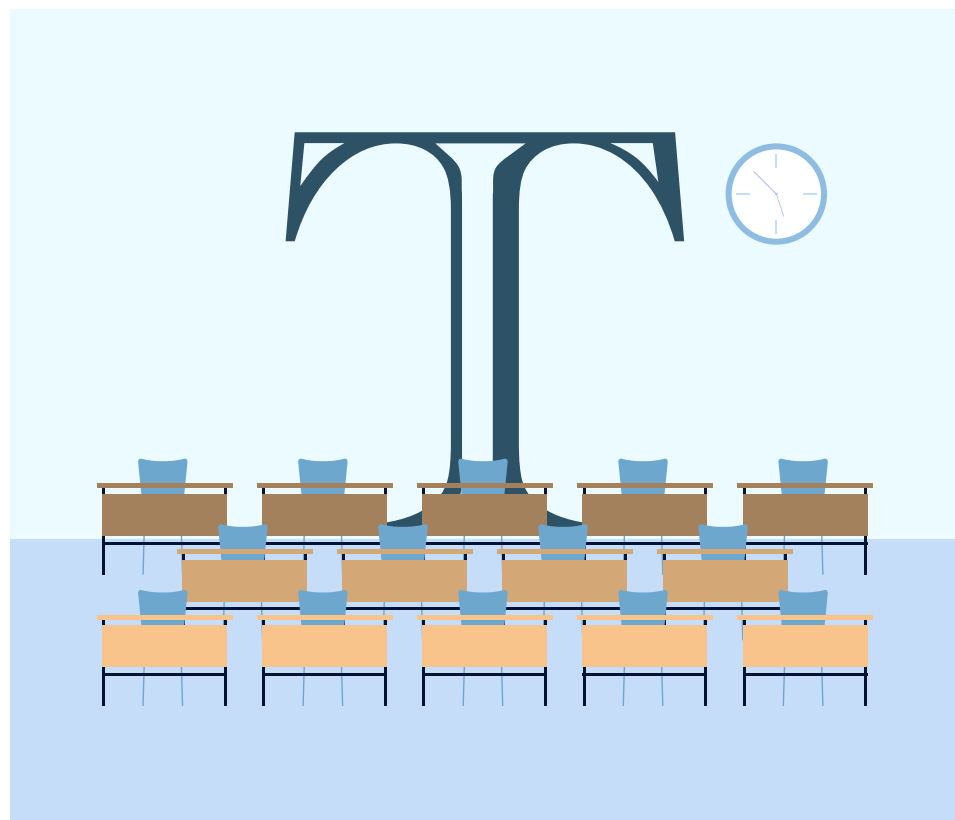
**“Providers will be able to tailor the sequencing of assessments to their course”**

An Ofqual consultation on T Level assessments proposes that awarding organisations allow students to sit core exams and employer-set projects separately. For example, students could sit one element in the summer and the other in the autumn.

The decision, taken by ministers following feedback from providers, will be introduced for new starters from September 2023.

Cath Sezen, interim director of education policy at the Association of Colleges, said the move was “sensible” and “allows greater flexibility for colleges to manage teaching and learning”.

“In practice, most colleges deliver core in the first year and occupational specialism in the second. Greater flexibility in when students can sit the core assessments makes it possible to



deliver some of the occupational specialism material alongside the core in the first year if that works better for the students and the college.

“It also allows students more time to prepare for the core assessment,” she said.

Ofqual said the move “will offer more flexibility for education and training providers and for students, as providers will be able to tailor the sequencing of assessments to their course, and reduce the assessment burden on students”.

Students would need to complete all the individual elements of a component at once, so that core exams with more than one paper to sit would be completed in the same assessment period.

Ofqual said the plans will require awarding bodies to offer core assessments twice in each academic year, which already happens because of re-sits. The changes will not affect the way

core assessments are graded.

The document said the current rules were intended by the DfE to maintain standards by ensuring core exams were not broken into smaller, separately assessed units. Ofqual believes the new proposal will not “increase any current risks” to standards.

The latest proposed change follows a decision last month by Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, to push back the start of four T Levels due to launch this September amid fears they were not ready to roll out.

Last summer, problems with the health and science T Level core exams meant students had to be regraded on their employer-set project.

And earlier this year the government changed the work placement rules for T Levels by allowing up to a fifth of hours to be delivered remotely in certain subjects.

Ofqual’s consultation is open until 11.45pm on May 15.

## News

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## INSPECTION SECTION

# Provider shuts 'some' sites after watchdog verdict

JASON NOBLE

JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A training provider in the north of England has been forced to close some of its centres in the wake of an 'inadequate' Ofsted grading.

Aspire-Igen Group Ltd, which has run six training centres across Bradford, Leeds, York, Hull and Scarborough, told *FE Week* that it had closed "some" sites and transferred provision to others where "the achievement of learners' aims can be better supported".

It is not clear which centres have closed and whether any jobs have been lost.

Ofsted downgraded the provider to the bottom rating following a visit in December and a report published this week, raising issues such as poor attendance, behaviour and teaching. It had previously been rated 'requires improvement' in February last year.

The provider said nearly half of its learners had no prior qualifications and multiple barriers to learning. Aspire-Igen Group said "it should come as a surprise to no one that some have struggled to re-engage with formal, face-to-face

education".

The group has struggled to recruit staff over the past year and at times relied on employment agencies to continue in-person learning.

A spokesperson said leaders had requested an internal review of the report.

"Although we do not agree with some of Ofsted's comments, we have taken them on board and reshaped our provision, closing some of our centres and transferring provision to one of our other centres where the achievement of learners' aims can be better supported," the spokesperson said.

"In future, we aim to focus our delivery in West Yorkshire around our well-equipped Bradford centres, alongside smaller centres in North and East Yorkshire."

According to inspectors, Aspire-Igen provides education for young people – many of whom have no prior qualifications or who have high needs, with 575 learners on its books at the time of the visit.

Just under half of those were on health and social care and child development programmes, largely at levels 2 and 3.

Others are on entry level, level 1 and level 2 programmes in areas such as construction, motor vehicle, public services,

business administration, hair and beauty, learning support, IT, and hospitality and catering.

Inspectors found that "too many learners do not attend their classes frequently enough," which resulted in gaps in learning or were "not well-enough prepared" for employment or further training or education.

Inspectors reported poor behaviour, attitudes and disrupted lessons.

Learners on health and social care and child development courses benefitted from work placements and useful careers guidance but too many learners in other programmes did not get the same, the report found.

Leaders were "too slow to act" on poor teaching, the report said, adding that efforts to improve quality are "not effective enough".

Assessments were not used by teachers to identify gaps in students' knowledge, which resulted in learners not having a good enough understanding of how to improve or falling behind.

The report continued that "teachers do not adequately support learners to improve their English skills," and added that "while most learners with high needs make progress towards their individual learning goals, too often this is not rapid enough".

Ofsted said that workshop space at the firm's Leeds site was not suitable for the construction programmes, as bays were too cramped, and some online teaching resources on the childcare courses were not appropriate for the age of the learners.

It added that while directors had supported leaders' work to improve attendance, they "do not do enough to tackle the poor quality of education".





## News

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## INSPECTION SECTION

## ‘Major staffing issues’ blamed for Ofsted downgrade

JASON NOBLE

JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Safeguarding and subcontractor oversight issues have dragged a Manchester-based engineering and manufacturing training provider's Ofsted rating down to 'inadequate'.

Salford and Trafford Engineering Group Training Association (STEGTA) was dealt the lowest grade in a report published this week after an inspection in late January. It was previously rated 'good' overall.

Quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, and apprenticeships were all found to be 'good' in the latest inspection. However, the watchdog found that personal development 'requires improvement' and leadership and management were 'inadequate', largely because of safeguarding concerns and poor oversight of subcontractors.

STEGTA has accepted the findings and will not appeal.

Chief executive John Whitby told *FE Week*: "We had major staffing issues which impacted our administration and leadership and management in the run up to the inspection.

"We are now back to full capacity within our leadership and management team and have restructured and strengthened our safeguarding

team and systems, and have full confidence in our action plan going forward."

Education and Skills Funding Agency [ESFA] rules state that any provider receiving an 'inadequate' rating in a full inspection will be removed from the register of apprenticeship training providers.

Whitby said his firm expects to enter discussions with the ESFA over an intervention, but would not be drawn on what contract termination would mean for the future of his company.

STEGTA delivers level 2 to 4 apprenticeships in engineering, manufacturing and construction, and had 318 learners at the time of the visit. It works with 16 subcontractors across its programmes.

The report praised apprentices' positive attitudes to their learning and the additional learning they received beyond their apprenticeship.

Trainers and instructors also helped learners to develop their character and confidence, inspectors said.

The report found a "clear rationale" for the curriculum, and it was taught effectively by "well qualified and experienced" training officers in the construction and engineering sectors.

Inspectors said that safeguarding arrangements were "weak", although learners said they felt safe.

The report found that training for staff in how to identify and report concerns was "not sufficiently comprehensive", adding that "when staff have identified specific potential safeguarding concerns, they do not routinely follow these up with decisive actions to ensure the safety of apprentices".

Board members felt they did not get sufficient training on safeguarding duties and leaders did not regularly review the policies.

Leaders' oversight of education quality was "too reactive" with "disjointed and vague" processes in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of provision, inspectors said.

Ofsted also took aim at STEGTA's oversight of its 16 subcontractors, most of which are colleges. They found that apprentices follow different programmes of learning provided by subcontractors which "do not always relate to their job role".

The report said: "Leaders are overly reliant on subcontractors' own processes in evaluating the quality of training that apprentices receive. Leaders do not plan and influence sufficiently the curriculum content that subcontractors teach.

"Too many subcontractors choose the curriculum content without input from employers and the provider."

## Overwhelmed learners drop out at 'inadequate' provider

JASON NOBLE

JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Apprentices with an East Sussex provider were so "overwhelmed" and demotivated by a lack of off-the-job training that they quickly dropped out, an Ofsted report has found.

Bestland Solutions Ltd, which has 20 years' experience and trades as Training Associates, largely delivers adult care apprenticeships and had more than 552 learners on its books at the time of the inspection in mid-December.

Inspectors rated the provider 'inadequate' in all areas, finding that too many apprentices were "significantly behind" in their work and teaching was not consistently well-planned or structured.

Ofsted reported that leaders did not ensure apprentices received their off-the-job training entitlement, adding: "As a result, too many apprentices feel overwhelmed, lack motivation and quickly drop out of their apprenticeship."

Too few apprentices benefitted from developing their wider skills or guidance on possible carer pathways, Ofsted said.

It continued that "too many apprentices lack engagement and do not attend training or reviews well," while not enough completed the required English and maths standards needed to qualify. It said that in some instances it was a result of pressures in the care sector.

Elsewhere, the report said that quality assurance mechanisms were not used effectively, while leaders didn't ensure employers were routinely involved in

curriculum planning.

Tutors didn't benefit enough from upskilling or research opportunities and leaders didn't ensure apprenticeship content was structured appropriately, according to the report.

Inspectors found that most apprentices didn't benefit from "useful, purposeful target setting" to help them improve, and feedback from tutors didn't always help apprentices improve their work.

Education and Skills Funding Agency guidelines say that 'inadequate' providers will be struck off the register of apprenticeship training providers, putting funding and provision under threat.

Bestland did not respond to requests for comment at the time of going to press.



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INTRODUCING

# KATERINA KOLYVA

CEO, ETF

'I'd like us to  
be a lot more  
outward-facing'

JESSICA HILL  
[JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM](mailto:JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM)

**Katerina Kolyva is a Europhile who speaks five languages and has lived in six European countries. The new chief executive of the Education and Training Foundation (who's backing Sweden in this year's Eurovision) tells Jessica Hill how she plans to secure the charity's survival**

The Education and Training Foundation's new chief executive Katerina Kolyva has taken the

helm at a "pivotal moment", guiding it to the future from turbulent times of late.

Kolyva, who joined the charity last month, knows it can no longer rely on clinching automatic government contracts. Her mission is not an easy one; she has to ensure it returns to the same "sector-first" roots it had when it was created in 2013, but also needs to seize on new commercial opportunities to secure its survival. And those might be overseas.

The ETF was initially funded by the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills but "owned" by the Association of Colleges,

the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) and the adult education provider network HOLEX.

AELP ditched its "ownership" in 2018, claiming it was "no longer an organisation run by the FE sector for the sector", but has recently re-joined on the understanding that it returns to its original sector-first purpose.

"I think we're clear now – I am clear, at least - that we are moving to a new era of working in partnership with the sector to deliver," Kolyva says.

The recalibration comes partly from necessity.



# Profile

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The ETF delivered a large surplus on its 2019-22 T Level professional development programme because Covid meant it was mostly delivered online (and therefore cost less), but then faced pressure from DfE officials to pay back up to £7.5 million. Kolyva admits it was a “very difficult discussion.” The contract requirements had already been delivered and the ETF sought legal advice, eventually agreeing to repay £6.2 million.

Although she believes the foundation is now on “very good terms” with the DfE, she acknowledges that while the ETF used to get a government grant every year, it now has to shift to competing for contracts as “one of many players”.

## “We have to compete as one of many players”

Kolyva is new to the UK’s FE sector having spent much of her career working for the EU, mainly in education and research strategy. But what she lacks in FE know-how she makes up for in leadership expertise, having most recently spent six years as chief executive of the Council of Deans of Health, a UK-based membership organisation representing healthcare education

and research.

She is currently in “listening mode” as she develops the ETF’s new strategy – and that means talking first and foremost to other organisations representing FE.

“It would be remissive of me to say I shouldn’t be talking to these organisations representing the sector [too]. Quite the opposite, I should be talking to them first.”

So far, she has been told the ETF’s leadership programmes are “very highly regarded”, but when it comes to some “processes” – Kolyva does not elaborate – the feedback is “you could do it better”.

Kolyva wants to use “all the mechanisms we have in our hands” to “understand what the needs of the sector are”. “Once we understand that, we deliver that. And if we need to influence government to prioritise what the sector needs, then we have that duty to the sector. That’s the narrative from now on...”

But there is also now a need for “income diversification”.

Quite aptly, the new chief executive – who is very much a citizen of the world – has her sights set on giving a new global outlook to an organisation that has been England-focused.

Kolyva is from Greece, speaks five languages, has lived in six EU countries and worked in more than 25 of them. And she writes travel blogs.

She believes the ETF “hasn’t even touched

the surface of [global opportunities] yet . I’d like us to be a lot more outward-facing in terms of what’s happening globally, not just on our doorstep.”

## “We must understand the needs of the sector”

On the doorstep, Kolyva perceives issues in England with “recruitment, retention, austerity – horrible things”. Globally, she sees “metaverse, sustainability and green skills”. She refers to a recent report stating how an individual might have 15 different careers, reflecting how the FE trainers of tomorrow will have to build up a more “agile” workforce.

Kolyva, 50, has had a fair few careers herself, including as a teacher, translator, researcher, evaluator, lecturer and academic, as well as chief executive.

After doing lots of travelling with her family as a child and attending a French private school, she studied languages in Greece but has not lived in her homeland since she was 24. She returns regularly to the “very beautiful” island of Paros where her parents live, and there are also regular holidays to Belgium, her husband’s home country.

Her multicultural experience and insights means she brings a “big focus on inclusion” to

# Profile

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the ETF table.

But she is also quite upfront about her privileged background. While Kolyva often hears people identifying with a particular issue because of their working-class roots, she admits she has “never felt or lived in a state of poverty”, and believes conversely that is why she is “so passionately committed to social mobility in this sector”.

## “I appreciate the privilege that I have had”

“I don't have pain, so I suppose I appreciate the privilege that I have had. I almost look to others that I've come across in my education journey or my work. I've almost always worked in places that were non-elite perhaps because of that.”

Kolyva's “big dream” as a young student was always to work for the EU, and after studying politics and international relations at the University of Kent she got her big break in Luxembourg, then Brussels. But she hated it.

She loved the “idea” of the EU – “the multicultural side, the vision and how countries

together can do so much” – but it was “too bureaucratic” and she felt “part of a machine”. So she returned to Kent, and wrote a PhD about the “anthropology of bureaucrats”.

But her red-tape angst did not put her off from returning to the continent, first to Denmark then Belgium and Lithuania, partly to work on various EU education programmes.

And despite her disdain for EU red tape, she remains an ardent Europhile and hopes for “better collaboration” between the UK and the EU post Brexit, “particularly with education”. She's also a huge fan of Eurovision (she's betting on Sweden winning this year, but hurriedly adds that the British entry is “very good”).

Kolyva tells me of her love of France, Italy, Spain and especially Denmark, and when she describes returning to live in the UK in 2007, I can't help but wonder why she chose our drizzly shores. She says she likes the way the UK does business – its “focus on delivery outcomes” and “not just faffing around”.

“I have been at European meetings where you've got people talking forever, going through a lot of context and background and I'm thinking, ‘Oh no, just get to the point!’”

Her first job back here was for the Nursing



EU network of nursing regulators in EU Parliament Brussels (Katerina on the far left)

and Midwifery Council where she quickly moved up to director level.

Her proudest achievement during her nine years there was helping to introduce revalidation, the process of renewal of professional development in nursing.

Whereas previously nurses were able to stay on their professional register indefinitely without requiring any checks on their expertise, Kolyva and her team introduced new rules requiring them to regularly prove they could still meet standards.

“It was about being proud of your professional development, so it was not a punitive thing, [although] the regulator at the time was seen very much as punitive,” she says. “It was all about sick pay policies, and disciplinary procedures whereas I was coming in from another angle – the improvement side. I'm proud of how we turned around some of the narrative of what the regulator was.”

As chief executive of the Council of the Deans of Health, she gained insights into how FE and FE interact in healthcare.

“I saw it from the other side, now [at ETF] I'm seeing it from this side which is fascinating,” she says.

The ETF has expanded from 75 staff in 2019-20 to 141 in 2020-21, and now to about 200, mainly due to the T Level programme but also to a “move to bring in high-level in-house expertise”.

But in light of changing market circumstances, Kolyva is “not complacent” about its growth.

“We are a charity in a very competitive market, we are in a sector that is depleted of funding. We have to behave smartly.”



Speaking at the Education Select Committee



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## THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

# How teachers can stay ahead of the curve on technology to help students' learning

**The key to upskilling teachers to keep pace with classroom and technological changes? Share and share alike, says Amy Hollier**

My career has been largely unplanned and hugely fulfilling – and has brought opportunities I could never have imagined. I'm a dual professional who entered further education as a hospitality lecturer 16 years ago and who remains a passionate advocate for continuous lifelong learning through CPD.

From a food and wine pairing app in 2012 (one of the first smartphone apps to be produced in education with more than 30,000 downloads) to student analytic dashboards, and from the Listening Project student voice conference to a teaching and learning strategy underpinned by digital development, my focus has always been on supporting quality improvement in technical teaching and training.

**“Technology often advances faster than curriculum”**

I now manage the national blended learning consortium of 164 colleges, co-creating contextualised digital learning resources with teachers, trainers and employers to support



## AMY HOLLIER

Director of blended and online learning, Heart of Worcestershire College

flexible modes of delivery. I led the DfE edtech demonstrator programme on behalf of my college during the pandemic, and, though I am now a leader, a member of the BETT UK advisory board and the DfE digital technology and standards working group for the FE sector, I am still very much a teacher.

So it was a huge honour to have recently been awarded an ETF and Royal Commission technical teaching fellowship for my work in technical teaching. My aim is to keep that focus by supporting teachers and trainers to raise their awareness of new and emerging technologies that are shaping industry practices, give them confidence to use these technologies and help them to consider how they can be used in their settings.

### Challenges ahead

Vocational teachers often do not have remission to research how technology shapes working practices: this fellowship will enable me to research specific sectors to identify these new technologies, such as wearable tech in health or thermal imaging drones in construction,

and how to deploy them in education.

Technological changes also often advance more rapidly than curriculum development. It is therefore vital that teachers be upskilled and use the most advanced practices in their industry sector to lead curricular development.

The use of virtual reality in subjects such as science, health and social care and public services is already allowing learners to experience real-life scenarios they wouldn't normally be exposed to. Such scenario-based learning develops wider skills and improves knowledge retention. More than that, it prepares students for a rapidly evolving workplace.

### Getting started

My project will include gathering information and consolidating it into material that can be shared across FE. Its dissemination will support the inclusion of the most current

and emerging technologies, professional standards and practices.

The key to its success will be to get educators excited about how their industry is evolving and ensure that they are well placed to share that excitement with an emerging technical workforce.

But there's no need to wait. There are great educators already sharing best practice and innovation in using digital tools online. These range from simple ideas such as asking learners who struggle with writing to take pictures of what inspires them to more complex solutions such as

Dan Fitzpatrick's PREP approach to using AI tools to lessen a teacher's workload.

Professional social media networks can also be helpful. We got involved in a

Bodyswaps pilot that has provided us with Meta Quest VR headsets and a licence to trial scenario-based learning software that builds interview and public speaking skills. Our learners love it.

With so many developments, we must grow our profession's confidence to experiment with digital tools to enhance teaching and learning. The key to staying ahead of the curve on edtech is to share our challenges as well as our solutions.



## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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# Technical education cannot be delivered on the cheap, we must start playing hardball on staffing


**IAN  
PRYCE**

 Chief executive,  
Bedford  
College Group

**The sector can't sell itself cheap if it wants to fill its staffing vacancies with high-quality talent and overcome its underdog status, says Ian Pryce**

Staff vacancies are at a record level in colleges up and down the country. This isn't because of an explosion in student numbers; it just reflects a growing inability to attract skilled people who have many other options. When it comes to competing for talent, further education is the underdog. And while we might love an underdog, we should remember the term is defined as a competitor with little chance of winning, or someone with little status in society.

The problem will only get worse if we show our desperation. We must resist employing unsuitable people simply because students would otherwise have no teacher. If we play that game, things won't improve.

We now have a smorgasbord of initiatives aimed at bringing in new blood. No one is against such campaigns, but we must avoid undermining our profession and services. At times it feels like we communicate that anyone from industry or commerce can waltz in and save us.

We need high-quality people with strong and successful technical backgrounds. Just as there is a minority of poor teachers, there are poor plumbers, engineers, care

workers, chefs and accountants. We don't want to be the refuge of the dual-unprofessional. We don't want to become a sector with the strapline "We buy any carpenter".

The reason for our underdog status is obvious: pay. Research shows that the most people leave their jobs to earn more. Every study shows this is true for between 50 and 70 per cent of movers. There is a reason Manchester City attracts an abundance of world-class talent and Rochdale doesn't.

Research on reasons to stay is consistent too. Number one is inertia. We are fortunate that our staff feel such a sense of mission that they stay with us, even when they could earn more elsewhere – in industry, schools or universities. But this commitment is stretched to its limits. Labour markets reach an equilibrium and, once inertia and loyalty are exhausted, you get what you pay for. We must heed this

warning.

The latest data from HMRC shows the typical school teacher earns £39,000 – at the upper quartile for income, as you would expect for a graduate professional. In contrast, the equivalent college teacher is paid just above the median. Loyalty extracts a high price in terms of our people's general standard of living.

**"We must not become the refuge of the dual-unprofessional"**

Here are five suggestions for how we might respond to the challenges.

First, make it a specific objective to improve pay in real terms. Too often, we use cuts in real-terms funding

rates as a "computer says no" starting point on pay negotiations. Our college has set itself this objective and made pay awards every year since incorporation.

Second, recruit newly technically qualified, non-experienced people. While students should enjoy learning from dual-professionals, a fair amount can be taught by those who simply know their subject. We should mirror the Teach First model.

Third, reclaim the title lecturer. FE is not a graduate teaching profession, so we compare badly with schools if we describe ourselves as teachers. Lecturer denotes specialist experience and expertise, and is where staff derive their economic value.

Fourth, exploit the funding methodology that requires planned learning activity, not taught hours. It could help us afford to pay more if more learning was done without teacher contact.

Finally, look to bolshie sectors that stop doing things when funding isn't fair. Farmers leave crops in the ground. Local governments close libraries. Health services let waiting lists rise. Rail operators cancel trains. We soldier on. If employers and government want us to meet need but won't pay the price, then let's stop providing the service until they do. World-class technical education cannot be delivered on the cheap.



## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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# Norfolk's example shows the solutions to apprenticeship problems can be found locally


**KATY DORMAN**

 Apprenticeships  
strategy manager,  
Norfolk County Council

**Targeted financial support and bespoke practical help and advice have driven Norfolk's level 2 and youth apprenticeship starts well above national rates, says Katy Dorman**

Norfolk is bucking the trend as the figures for apprenticeship starts, especially at level 2, become ever more gloomy. Last year, starts across the county increased by 18 per cent. Despite a slight decline in the overall number in the first three months of 2022-23, three interesting stats remain: the increase in our starts for those aged 16 to 18 continued, as did the increase in those starting level 2 apprenticeships – and we've seen the best figures in three years on newly recruited apprentices (those employed less than three months).

## Promoting the benefits

This is the result of a lot of hard work. Six local providers hold the "top spots" for the numbers of apprentices they've started so far this year. And while the most recent Q1 numbers had just 13 fewer starts than the same period in the previous year, Norfolk SMEs started almost 80 more apprenticeships than they did in the pre-pandemic Q1 of 2019-20.

Many businesses benefited from the post-pandemic national incentives available last year. However, primary and secondary research conducted by Apprenticeships Norfolk – a hub run by Norfolk County Council

providing impartial guidance for businesses and individuals – highlighted the practical and financial support needed to help more SMEs and apprentices access programmes.

## "Early indications suggest a retention rate of 83 per cent"

After securing almost £2 million of external funding, the hub has delivered a range of initiatives, including a #MadeInNorfolk TV campaign that has raised awareness with unscripted messages from real, local SMEs that had taken on an apprentice about the benefits it had brought them. A dedicated website explains the grants, bursaries and support on offer.

The combination of promotional activity and carefully planned interventions (additional financial and practical support) may be

the catalyst for the growth in Norfolk, which exceeds national figures. Indeed, evaluations indicate that the financial support made a significant difference with local business owners.

## Kickstarting the provision

Meanwhile, a pilot scheme to progress Kickstarters on to apprenticeships provided a combination of upfront financial incentives – a six-month wage contribution (based on NMW at 37 hours a week), up to five hours of individualised practical support (including an employer "induction" session) and a £300 training budget for the employers/apprentices.

Employers developed their mentoring skills and apprentices accessed added-value training to help them to engage in the apprenticeship more effectively.

Feedback indicated that the 42 participating businesses would have been unable to offer a full-time apprenticeship without the scheme, and that the apprenticeships may not have led

to so many job offers.

Seven apprentices had withdrawn by the end of the pilot, three of them citing family moving out of county as the reason. Early indications suggest a retention rate of 83 per cent, far exceeding national figures.

## Learning the lessons

Success is a collective partnership. It requires input and commitment from all stakeholders, including providers, employers and individuals with supplementary brokerage of financial and practical support.

Next, it's crucial to keep raising awareness of apprenticeships so that SMEs really understand the benefits and the impact an apprentice can have on their business. Many simply do not.

But success hinges on a balance of financial and practical support. The evaluation of our pilot verified this. Its key findings indicate that financial stimulus was critical for the business to support starting the apprenticeship and that individualised, wraparound support was equally important to see it through to completion.

SMEs also benefit from learning how to mentor apprentices and better manage their programmes. This supports retention and offers a higher return on investment for the apprentice, the business and the economy.

The problems with apprenticeships are national but, as Norfolk is showing, some of the most effective solutions can be found locally.





## Opinion

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# Ministers' determination to go back to the old ways of learning risks throttling online learning at birth


**MARK  
DAWE**

CEO, The Skills Network

The DfE's expectation of 85 per cent face-to-face teaching shows a bias towards traditional methods that can only hold the sector back, writes Mark Dawe

Recently, ChatGPT and I wrote in these pages about the incredible benefits of online learning in driving up efficiency, quality and success in education. We were finally on the cusp of understanding how technology can enhance learning and skills!

My optimism crashed a week later when the DfE increased the requirement for face-to-face teaching to 85 per cent of learning.

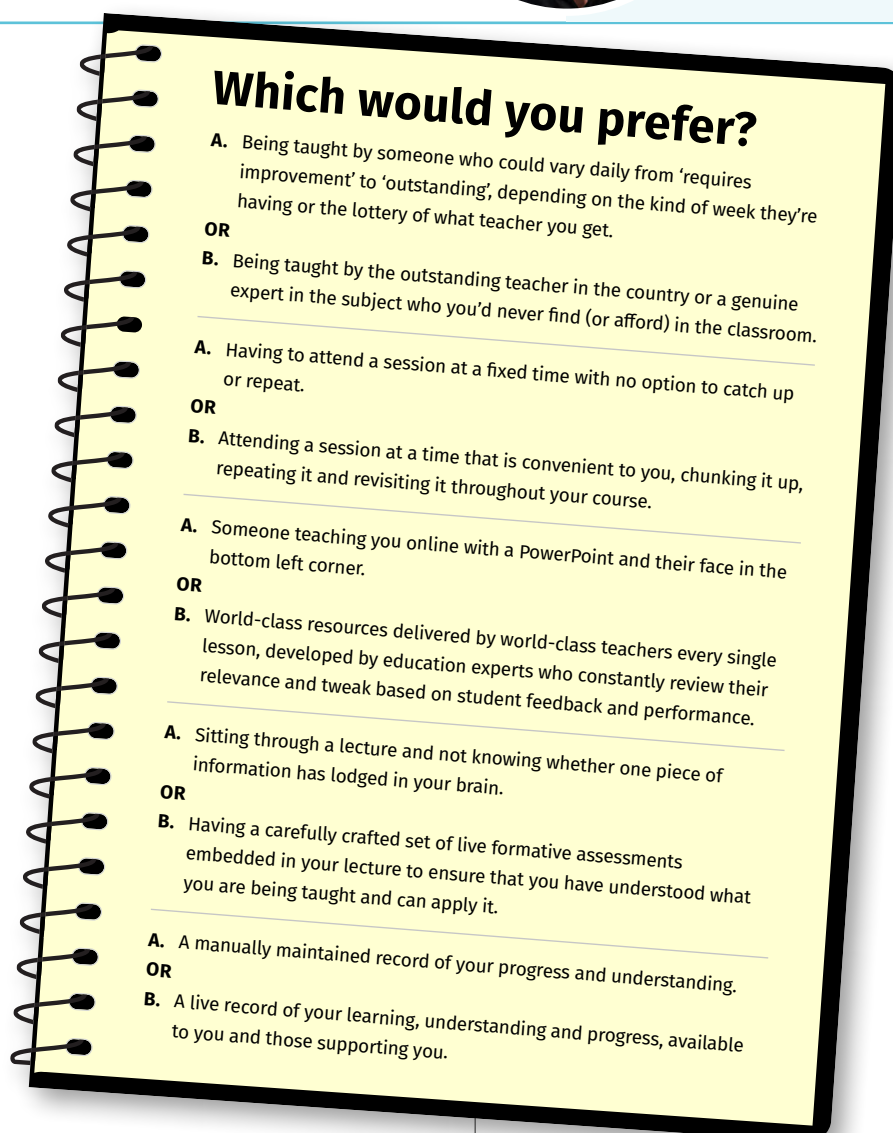
Online learning helps transform lives, something I have seen over and over again. It is therefore deeply worrying that in the face of a general upturn in embracing technology, the DfE and its regulators seem to be set on returning to old ways of working, limiting opportunities for many of our communities.

**“Learning at a set time every week excludes millions”**

It sometimes feels like those making the decisions are doing everything they can to stifle innovation in the delivery of education and skills. If we are not careful the government will inadvertently create a learning agenda where online learning is throttled at birth – making us less competitive in the long run.

When I was at the University of Cambridge three decades ago, we had 85 per cent face-to-face learning time: 15 hours of lectures each week with 200-plus students and virtually no interaction. Genuine live interactive learning took place in our tutorials the other 15 per cent of the time. We can do much better than this through a sensible blend of resources and live interaction.

So let's get interactive with a little quiz.



It's B all the way, of course. Sure, there are difficulties to overcome such as the real challenge of digital exclusion. But sitting in a classroom or on-screen at a set time every week also excludes millions from learning new skills.

The DfE must accept that online delivery is as good, if not better, than much face-to-face delivery. It should be encouraging development of online resource development, not reducing it.

More importantly, the whole FE regulatory system needs to get round a table and set out

what good looks like in the online world, so it can have confidence in commissioning online delivery.

The DfE claims to care about outcomes, but obsesses about inputs. Ofsted cares about intent, implement and impact, so let's allow it to focus on that and nothing else. The Treasury wants more skills and more efficiency, so allow us to offer solutions.

The potential is there, and we can't afford for ministers to keep chickening out of the big calls to make education more effective and inclusive.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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# Everyone gains from a supported apprenticeship – not just students who have special needs



**JOSHUA  
EARNSHAW  
-POTTS**

Apprentice and winner, nasen Award for Young Person aged 17-25

**Joshua Earnshaw-Potts is pleased others see his success as an inspiration, but many more are capable of what he has achieved...**

My first day doing work experience at Wat Tyler Country Park in Essex was in September 2019. I instantly felt freer; I hated being stuck indoors and I loved working within a group, getting tasks done.

Even as a small child I loved playing with bugs and dirt. I remember getting told off for diving into puddles, but no scolding ever made me feel less happy about being covered in mud.

**“It doesn’t feel as if my learning needs are important”**

So I was hugely grateful when Wat Tyler gave me the opportunity to work for them. A traditional classroom isn’t for everyone, and I have learned over time that I struggle to work in enclosed areas. I love the fresh air, the space. Being indoors is suffocating.

Working in the education area at the park gave me the chance to be part of a team that made an area safe and user-friendly for local schools. I had the opportunity to cut



down the reeds in the ponds, cut back all the overhanging trees and discover creatures every day, knowing I was doing something for the environment, that I was making a difference.

With my apprenticeship, I can learn while doing something I feel passionate about – looking after our planet and being a guardian of the environment. Every week, after working with different volunteer groups, I can look back on our completed work and see tangible progress. I have also been able to plant new trees, and I think about this a lot; it’s crazy to know that through my work, tall trees will be here in years to come. It is a very satisfying feeling.

I knew a “traditional” education pathway wasn’t for me so I was so happy and excited to get an apprenticeship where I could learn on the job. I

work with so many great people, experience the woods, meadows and community spaces and maintain these spaces for everyone to enjoy. I even get to talk to the public and educate them on what we are doing.

I feel like I’m part of the team, I blend in and it doesn’t feel as if my learning needs are important. I like being different and unique, but I feel normal because I can just be myself and that is enough.

I am more mature too. The apprenticeship gave me the chance to drive the all-terrain vehicle off-road and now I want to learn to drive, which I didn’t think I would do. This apprenticeship hasn’t just given me an education; it has developed me as a person.

My employers say I am an inspiration, which is a crazy feeling because all my friends could have done what I have achieved. They just weren’t as lucky as I have been.

That’s why I want more employers to look at supported apprenticeships. Young people with SEND can work hard, we can achieve and we do have bright futures. We might just need some extra help. I tell my work friends the things I find difficult and they help me. I get the job done, and it means I can have the life I always wanted.

**“I was so happy to get an apprenticeship where I could learn on the job”**

I have been able to achieve things that I didn’t think I ever would. Winning the nasen award for young person aged 16-25 being one of them. Writing this article for you to read is another.

I have learned so much through my apprenticeship that I hope I can become a fully employed and permanent part of the team one day. I tell the Castledon School students who come here now that I didn’t always want to do work placements, but now I love it. My school, and Basildon Council through my land management apprenticeship, gave me a route into work. I want to see more schools and employers doing the same.

## Bulletin

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**Audrey Nelson**

Trustee,  
WorldSkills UK

**Start date:** March 2023

**Concurrent Job:** Strategic  
Communications Specialist

**Interesting fact:** Audrey's true passion is music, having started out performing in Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. Her favourite treat now is a visit to the Royal Opera House



**Justin Rix**

Trustee,  
WorldSkills UK

**Start date:** March 2023

**Concurrent Job:** Partner - people advisory  
practice, Grant Thornton LLP

**Interesting fact:** Justin is a never more happy than by or indeed on the sea, a keen sailor with a very ancient sailing boat which takes nearly as much time and effort in keeping seaworthy as it does to sail

## Movers & Shakers

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



**Sean Wellington**

Trustee,  
WorldSkills UK

**Start date:** March 2023

**Concurrent Job:** Provost & Deputy Vice-  
Chancellor, Middlesex University

**Interesting fact:** Sean is a music fan and loves reading reviews of home audio gear that he will never own



**Mark Farrar**

Trustee,  
WorldSkills UK

**Start date:** March 2023

**Previous Job:** Former CEO of the  
Association of Accounting Technicians  
and previously CEO of the Construction  
Industry Training Board

**Interesting fact:** As well as sailing and racing offshore, Mark once took a yacht through Amsterdam's central canals early one morning

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