



THE STAFFROOM

Skills competitions
benefit teachers
as well as learners

Page 31



In-work poverty
is a reality for
many FE staff

Page 33



PROFILE: The BTEC
student who became
deputy principal

Pages 28-30



APPRENTICESHIP ACHIEVEMENTS LATEST

- Further rise in drop-outs fuels rates fall
- 3 in 10 providers meet 'at risk' threshold
- 'Out-dated' rates need 'overhaul', say AELP

Pages 5-6

WORSE

BETTER

Cap on SME starts abolished **Page 8**

FEWEEK

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Contents

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

THE STAFF ROOM

Got views from the classroom?

Anecdotes about apprenticeships?

Insights into how the sector really works?

Get in touch with our commissioning editor J.L. Dutaut on Twitter @dutaut or e-mail J.L.Dutaut@lsect.com

Get in touch!

'Heartbreak' at sudden closure of major training provider



Page 10



Low pay driving college teachers out of the sector, IFS warns

Page 15



Lifelong Education Institute's 'coalition of the willing' stands ready to amplify workable policy ideas

Page 33



Learn and starve or earn and survive? How the cost-of-living crisis is becoming a cost-of-learning crisis

Page 35

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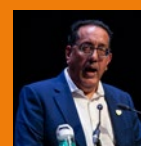
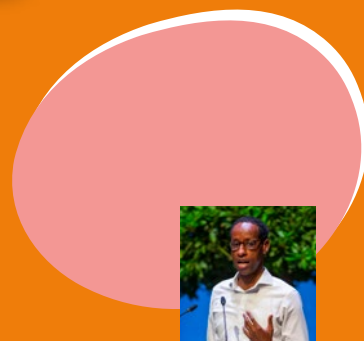
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APPRENTICESHIP ACHIEVEMENT SPECIAL

Providers demand reform as apprentice achievement rates drop

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Falling apprenticeship achievement rates have sparked renewed calls for reform as fresh data reveals that most providers fail to meet the government's accountability thresholds.

Overall apprenticeship achievement rates dropped to 53.4 per cent in 2021/22 according to national achievement rate data published yesterday by the Department for Education, a decline of 4.3 percentage points on the year before.

Achievements for standards, which made up 85 per cent of apprentice leavers last year, reduced by 0.4 per cent from the year before. The remaining apprentices, training on old-style frameworks which are being phased out, scored an achievement rate of 64.9 per cent, down 4 percentage points.

Criticism of the achievement rate model has grown since the Covid 19 pandemic. The providers representative body AELP called yesterday for an "overhaul" to reflect "outcomes, rather than outputs."

But the government has stood by its target, set in June 2022 by then skills minister Alex Burghart, for a 67 per cent achievement rate by 2025.

The Department for Education also includes achievement rates in its accountability framework for training providers as one of three "quality indicators".

Under the framework, the Department will review a provider's performance if certain thresholds around quality are not met.

For achievement rates, the framework considers providers "at risk" if their overall rate is less than 50 per cent and "needs improvement" if the measure is 50 per cent or above, but less than 60 per cent. It promises that officials will "work with you [providers] to understand which areas of your provision may be affecting your overall achievement rate".

Yesterday's figures indicate that three in ten training providers will flag as "at risk" and a further 25 per cent fall under the "needs improvement" category, 54 per cent of providers in total.

They also show that 789 training providers, 75 per cent of the total, fall short of the government's 67 per cent target.

Low levels of retention are the main driver for low achievement, and the reasons for the

high rate of apprentices dropping out has been hotly contested with suggested explanations including low wages, poor quality training, redundancy, poor access to off-the-job training and requirements to pass functional skills tests.

Retention rates for apprenticeships standards declined slightly, by 0.2 percentage points, between 2020/21 and 2021/22 but fell by 3.9 percentage points for apprentices on remaining frameworks.

Skills minister Robert Halfon wrote a letter to training bosses as yesterday's figures were published.

"I know that there is much more for us to do collectively to raise the annual apprenticeship achievement rate, currently standing at 51 per cent for apprenticeship standards.

"While not all the reasons for non-achievement are within the gift of providers or employers, I know that, like me, you want to see this figure improve" he wrote.

The letter stated a range of government initiatives aimed at improving quality, including the ETF workforce development programme and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's consultation on mandatory qualifications and end point assessments.

Bizarrely, Halfon also included the Institute's "exceptional funding band reviews for 20 priority standards to ensure that funding reflects current costs of delivery" even though, as FE Week has reported, only ten accelerated funding reviews are actually taking place.

Training body wants change

Training provider body AELP has said measuring

apprenticeship quality using achievement rates is no longer fit for purpose.

It pointed out that the reduced overall achievement rate reflects "the residual impact of the Covid 19 pandemic" on the labour market, and said the "methodology still counts learners who left years ago based on their planned end dates alongside the impact breaks-in-learning has had."

Chief executive Jane Hickie said: "The way in which apprenticeship achievement rates are calculated is out of date, and represents a regime prior to the introduction of an employer led system.

"We should be far more focused on outcomes, not outputs, including for those who don't complete their apprenticeship."

Hickie suggests "tracking learner progression and earnings following an apprenticeship" as a more effective measure of apprenticeship quality.

But Tom Richmond, founder and director of thinktank EDSK, argues that targeting low quality training should be prioritised:

"As our recent EDSK research showed, the high dropout rates are being driven in large part by poor quality programmes that lack the rigorous training and development that apprentices rightly expect.

"There is nothing to be gained by continuing to blame the pandemic for these figures, not least because many of these apprenticeships began well after the economy had reopened. In any case, if the quality of these apprenticeships was high enough then learners would be far more inclined to finish their training, even if there are other jobs available."

APPRENTICESHIP ACHIEVEMENT RATES 2018/19 - 2021/22

Source: Department for Education

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
STANDARDS				
Retention Rate	48.30%	46.60%	53.00%	52.80%
Pass Rate	96.40%	97.00%	97.80%	97.40%
Achievement Rate	46.60%	45.20%	51.80%	51.40%
Leavers	54,590	125,270	181,490	224,110
FRAMEWORKS				
Retention Rate	69.70%	69.20%	70%	66.10%
Pass Rate	98.70%	98.50%	98.50%	98.10%
Achievement Rate	68.70%	68.10%	68.90%	64.90%
Leavers	241,670	145,200	93,880	39,450
ALL APPRENTICESHIPS				
Retention Rate	65.70%	58.70%	58.80%	54.80%
Pass Rate	98.40%	97.90%	98.10%	97.50%
Achievement Rate	64.70%	57.50%	57.70%	53.40%
Leavers	296,260	270,470	275,380	263,550

APPRENTICESHIP ACHIEVEMENT SPECIAL

What the headline statistics say

DEPRIVATION

The achievement gap between apprentices from the most deprived and least deprived households has grown in the past year.

Apprentices from the most deprived postcodes averaged an achievement rate of 48.2 per cent whereas as those from the least deprived areas scored 58 per cent.

There was a 7.7 percentage point gap between the achievement rates of those groups in 2020/21, but that gap grew to 9.8 percentage points in 2021/22.

LLDD

There was a 3.3 percentage point gap between achievement rates of apprentices with a learning difficulty and/or disability and those without, with rates reported as 50.6 per cent and 53.9 per cent respectively. Though this is broadly similar to 2020/21 figures (3.5 percentage point gap), it is still larger than the 2.5 percentage point gap reported in 2019/20.

LEVELS

Level 2 apprenticeships, which scored the highest average achievement rates in 2019/20, now score the lowest. The latest figures show that level 3 apprenticeships had the highest overall achievement rate at 55.1 per cent, followed by higher level apprenticeships at 52.6 per cent and then level 2 apprenticeships with 51.4 per cent.

By comparison, level 2 apprenticeships achieved at 58.7 per cent in 2019/20, followed by level 3 (57.8 per cent) and then higher level (52.1 per cent)

SEX

Despite there being virtually no difference in the achievement rates between male and female apprentices in 2020/21, male learners achieved a 1.2 percentage point higher achievement rate than females in 2021/22. Though this is still lower than the 2.9 percentage point gap in favour of male apprentices in 2019/20.

ETHNIC MINORITIES

The gap between achievement rates of most ethnic minority groups and white apprentices grew in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21.

The largest gap has persistently been between white apprentices and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British apprentices, which was 12.8 percentage points in 2019/20, 7.1 percentage points in 2020/21 and 8.7 percentage points in 2021/22. The rate for Black/African/Caribbean/Black British apprentices was 47.4 per cent and for white apprentices was 55.7 per cent.

Achievement gaps also grew between Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups and white apprentices (from 6.3 percentage points to 6.9 percentage points) and for those in the "Other ethnic group" and white apprentices (from 6.4 percentage points to 7.8 percentage points).

The data shows the gap between Asian/Asian British apprentices narrowed very slightly from 3.9 percentage points in 2020/21 to 3.8 percentage points in 2021/22.

TOP 10 LARGEST (BY LEAVERS) PROVIDERS' ACHIEVEMENT RATES

Source: Department for Education

Provider name	2021/22		2018/19		CHANGE	
	Leavers	Achievement Rate	Leavers	Achievement rate	Leavers	Achievement rate
Lifetime Training Group	13240	45.0%	16060	55.3%	-2820	-18.6%
British Army	5990	66.1%	7530	74.1%	-1540	-10.8%
Kaplan Financial	5020	60.7%	2360	50.5%	2660	20.2%
Babcock Training	4130	56.4%	5280	63.8%	-1150	-11.6%
Babington Business College	3880	48.1%	2880	56.1%	1000	-14.3%
BPP Professional Education	3680	50.4%	510	67.6%	3170	-25.4%
HIT Training	3430	36.1%	5060	54.1%	-1630	-33.3%
Corndel	3420	60.5%	610	73.6%	2810	-17.8%
CAPITA PLC	3190	46.4%	1050	67.0%	2140	-30.7%
GP Strategies Training	2970	52.1%	2630	79.3%	340	-34.3%

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Ministers lift ban on skills bootcamps for Restart participants

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EXCLUSIVE

The government is set to drop a ban that stopped some people on Universal Credit from joining skills bootcamps, FE Week can reveal.

Currently, participants in the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Restart programme, which gives out-of-work Universal Credit claimants extra support to find employment, cannot enrol on skills bootcamps. Those enrolled on bootcamps cannot take part in the Restart scheme.

But the DWP and Department for Education have confirmed that from April 1 that restriction – which was intended as a temporary constraint – will be removed.

The DWP said the decision recognises the differences in provision between the two programmes, and will allow participants to take advantage of the different opportunities to best gain new skills and employment.

Pat Jackson, skills director at Cheshire and Warrington local enterprise partnership said it was a change that her organisation had been lobbying for.

Natasha Waller, policy manager at the LEP Network which represents all 38 LEPs, said:

"The benefit is that the participants on Restart can get the hand-holding/wraparound support to get them job-ready while skills bootcamps will give them the knowledge of a particular sector or job role and some preparation for job hunting and interview practice, but it is not as intense as what they would receive through Restart."

Jane Hickie, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said: "Currently Jobcentre Plus work coaches typically prioritise referrals to their flagship Restart programme over skills bootcamps, which has certainly impacted referrals."

"For this collaborative approach to work, we will need to give work coaches more support to understand the benefits of skills bootcamps so they can ensure potential learners take the pathway which benefits them the most."

The Restart programme, which first began referrals in July 2021, gives Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for nine months or more access to enhanced support to find work.

Around 340,000 people started on the programme between its launch and September last year, while 92,000 have achieved their first earnings since starting the scheme, although most have not yet had 12 months of support.

Government guidance said job coaches develop a package of support for participants having assessed their work history, current skills and aspirations.

That could include bespoke training, obtaining the correct certificates for specific industries or bolstered IT skills.

Skills bootcamps are courses up to 16 weeks in length for adults to train quickly in areas of skills shortage, such as digital, construction and HGV driving. They also guarantee a job interview for learners at the end of their course.

Data published at the end of last year reported that 16,120 people started a bootcamp between April 2021 and March 2022 against a target of 16,000, although numbers of completers and outcomes were not published.



Jane Hickie

Adult learners in Liverpool to benefit from funding lift

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Colleges and training providers that deliver adult education in Liverpool City Region will receive a one-off 5 per cent funding rate uplift this year to help with rising costs and inflation.

The increase will apply to 2022/23 with leaders at the mayoral combined authority reviewing whether to increase the base rate again in the next academic year and beyond.

The move follows a meeting between mayor Steve Rotherham and colleges in the area who spoke of their battle with the cost-of-living crisis, particularly the challenges posed by rising energy prices as well as staffing pressures.

It comes weeks after the Education and Skills Funding Agency announced a 2.2 per cent uplift for the national adult education budget in both 2022/23 and 2023/24, which will also include an additional 20 per cent boost in "vital" subjects such as engineering and maths.

Other mayoral combined authorities have offered bigger in-year increases: West Midlands and West Yorkshire are both offering a 10 per cent boost to AEB funding rates, while London has offered a 3.5 per cent uplift.

Rotherham said: "Rising living costs mean that our learning providers are under more pressure than ever to continue delivering the high-quality training our residents need

to thrive. This additional funding will enable them to continue to support both current and future learners and strengthen our skills sector."

He added that this is an investment that "simply would not have been possible before devolution – we're opening up doors to our residents and building a more resilient workforce along the way".

Liverpool City Region took control of its AEB in 2019. The budget for the area totals just over £50 million annually.

The 5 per cent uplift will apply to both the 17 grant-funded colleges and local authorities that deliver AEB in the Liverpool City Region, as well as the 14 other training providers on procured contracts.

‘Delight’ as ministers ditch apprentice cap for SMEs

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A cap on apprentice numbers for small businesses that caused employers to turn away new starts has finally been scrapped.

Robert Halfon, the skills minister, confirmed in a letter to the sector on Thursday that small businesses which do not pay the apprenticeship levy will no longer be limited to a maximum of 10 apprenticeship starts from April 3, 2023.

Halfon said businesses can recruit “as many high-quality apprentices as their business needs”.

“We want to give smaller employers certainty over funding, and ensure they have access to the apprenticeships they need”

“We want to give smaller employers certainty over funding, and ensure they have access to the apprenticeships they need to meet their ambitions, fill their skills gaps, and grow their businesses,” he wrote.

The cap has been contentious because some employers have been forced to turn away new apprentice starts.

Jane Hickie, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers said she was “absolutely delighted” the cap is being abolished.

“Each year this causes big issues for smaller employers who wish to take on more apprentices and there is always a lack of transparency over whether the cap



will reset or not,” Hickie said.

“This then leads to employers being unable to plan for the future effectively. Last year it took a huge amount of lobbying from AELP and its members to ensure the minister intervened to reset the cap.”

The cap was originally introduced in January 2020 with a limit of three new apprenticeship starts, before it was lifted to ten in summer 2020.

Small businesses that do not pay the apprenticeship levy receive 95 per cent of training costs from the apprenticeship budget, funded by levy paying businesses.

The cap was intended to prevent overspend on the overall apprenticeships budget.

In April 2021 the DfE reset the cap so that non-levy paying businesses could start up to 10 new apprentices regardless of however many they already had.

Mounting pressure from the sector again last year resulted in the cap being reset once again in June 2022. The DfE at the time confirmed it would keep the cap under review.

To date, small employers who hit the cap had been forced to go down the avenue of requesting levy transfers from larger

employers which weren’t using some of their levy funds, as levy transfer funded apprentices did not count towards the cap.

Since taking on the skills, apprenticeships and further education brief for a second time in October, Halfon has made growing apprenticeship starts one of his priorities, in particular pushing for more degree apprenticeship learners.

He told this week’s Apprenticeship Ambassador Network conference that “rules will be removed where we don’t need them” to help SMEs recruit apprentices.

He told the conference that a redesigned registration process will make it “simpler and quicker” for SMEs to take on their first apprentices, with employers able to ask training providers to assist with more of the account administration.

In addition, he voiced ambitions for an easier levy transfer system and plans to double the number of starts on the pathway to accelerated apprenticeship skills bootcamps, so that SMEs could recruit directly off those bootcamps at no cost.



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‘Heartbreak’ at sudden closure of major training provider

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EXCLUSIVE

Qube Learning, one of the biggest training providers in England, suddenly ceased trading this week.

Owner Claire Whichello informed more than 200 staff of the “heart-breaking” decision to close immediately, which will affect around 3,500 learners who are mostly apprentices.

In an email to staff on Tuesday, seen by FE Week, she said that “increased competition in the apprenticeship market, challenges regarding stagnant funding bands, uncertainty around adult education budget contracts and the expected expiry of our traineeship contracts has meant there is too much uncertainty for the business to continue”.

Staff were given until midnight to park their company cars in a secure location before their insurance expired. They were given information on how to make a claim through the Redundancy Payments Service but told that claims couldn’t be made until the company was officially in liquidation, which isn’t expected until the week commencing April 17.

The shock decision came just days after the Department for Education ended the provider’s HGV skills bootcamp contract.

It is unclear how big a part this contract termination played in Qube’s decision to cease trading.

An outpouring of support for Qube staff quickly emerged on social media following the announcement on Tuesday, with several training providers offering employment opportunities on LinkedIn.

One former staff member posted: “This should serve as a wake-up call for the sector, and to the DFE, otherwise there will be many more to follow. We worked in the ‘not so sexy’ sectors, care, logistics, retail and facilities, where it’s really challenging to deliver remotely, unfortunately the funding does not reflect these challenges.”

Another said: “Working at Qube, and

the amazing people has been one of the proudest achievements within my career. I believe we all made a difference to so many people, employers, students and our colleagues alike.”

The company’s latest accounts are for the year ending December 31, 2021 and show a £10.9 million turnover but a loss of £590,000 compared to a profit of £744,000 the year before.

Qube held Education and Skills Funding Agency contracts worth £3.1 million in 2022/23 for adult education, traineeships and non-levy apprenticeships. The provider’s levy-funded contracts for this year are not yet known but in 2020/21 – the latest available data – it earned £7 million worth.

It delivered training to big-name employers like Specsavers, JD Group, Matalan, BT and Greater Anglia in sectors including care, logistics, retail and facilities.

The latest apprenticeships starts data shows that in the first two quarters of this academic year (August to January), Qube started 760 apprentices. Some 440 of those were in health, public services and care.

In the last full academic year, 2021/22, the company started 2,850 apprentices. Again, the majority, 54 per cent, were in the health, public services and care sector.

Like most training providers, apprenticeship starts dipped during the Covid years but appeared to bounce back, exceeding pre-lockdown levels.

In 2021/22 Qube entered the Traineeships market and became the third largest provider of with 540 starts.

In December 2022 Ofsted published a report that downgraded Qube from ‘good’ to ‘requires improvement’.

The provider was incorporated in 1994 and has been one of the largest independent training providers for many years.

Whichello told staff: “On behalf of all the directors, I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to every single colleague for your dedication, loyalty, professionalism and hard work. This is a heart-breaking decision to have made, but please do not lose sight of the contribution and positive impact you have made to so many students over the years.”



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Lifetime Training axes dozens of jobs

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EXCLUSIVE

England's largest apprenticeship provider is planning to cut around 60 jobs, just months after the company was taken over by its lenders, FE Week can reveal.

Lifetime Training said the move, which will reduce its workforce of around 1,000 staff by 5 per cent, follows a "strategic review of its cost base".

FE Week understands the number of learners in some sectors, such as care, is lower than the provider expected, and staffing must be adjusted.

The redundancy consultation comes amid an Education and Skills Funding Agency audit exploring possible overclaimed funding, such as for additional learner support, which could result in clawback of over £13 million.

It also follows a recent switch in ownership: at the end of last year private equity firm Silverfleet Capital sold Lifetime Training to Alcentra – one of the provider's lenders which specialises in credit management, private credit and structured credit strategies.

Lifetime Training chief executive Jon Graham told FE Week that the provider's strategic review of staffing costs is not linked to the ongoing ESFA audit, which has not yet concluded, nor does he anticipate any further redundancies going forward.

Graham said: "The review has assessed operational and support roles across the broader business to ensure we are directing our resources towards the areas of highest demand.

"The review will likely see 5 per cent of roles impacted by redundancy, and staff will be redeployed wherever possible. We remain dedicated to supporting all affected employees during this transition and ensure we provide a seamless process for our valued team members."

He added that because his provider is in a



period of collective consultation with those impacted, it would be "unfair to speculate on the exact number of jobs or the roles and sectors affected".

The company expects "minimal disruption to the experience of our learners and employer partners during this transition".

Lifetime Training, founded in 1995, has more than doubled its workforce over the past decade as it grew to being the largest provider of apprenticeships in the country, delivering to big-name employers including the NHS, KFC, McDonalds, Wetherspoons, B&Q and David Lloyd, as well as the civil service.

Covid-19 hit the company hard and forced it to make around 300 people redundant in 2020 due to falling apprenticeship starts caused by the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

Starts have been steadily recovering since then and the provider was delivering to around 20,000 apprentices when Ofsted visited in May 2022. But the resulting 'requires improvement' report criticised the firm's focus on financial performance and starts over quality, as well as a lack of off-the-

job training and poor achievement rates.

Lifetime Training has made several leadership changes over the past year, including bringing in Geoff Russell, who used to head the Skills Funding Agency, as chair and Jon Graham as chief executive.

The firm's latest accounts show that its turnover increased to £71.1 million compared to £59.9 million in 2020. But its EBITDAE (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, amortisation and exceptional items) fell from £9.391 million in year ended July 31, 2020 to £2.249 million in the 18 month period ended January 31, 2022.

The accounts also reveal the company made a loss for the financial period of £9.2 million, compared to a profit of £6.8 million in 2020.

Graham said: "Lifetime remains a financially stable with a growing learner base. We are committed to delivering high-quality training and we continue to invest in key areas. The strategic review of our cost base ensures that we are directing our resources towards the areas of highest demand unlocking further growth."

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Students 'disempowered' as ministers dig in over BTEC defunding

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Students face a "period of great uncertainty" after ministers rejected calls to withdraw applied general qualifications like BTECs from their defunding plans, or even delay the "damaging" reforms by a year.

The Department for Education will publish a list of new qualifications that will replace the current suite of applied generals in July 2024, for schools and colleges to start delivering in September 2025.

The expectation is that most level 3 alternatives to T Levels and A-levels, which must now go through a new strict approvals process, will be refused funding from this point forward.

Ministers have already made the "conscious choice" to exclude "certain" large academic qualifications, including in health and social care, applied science, and law, from this process.

The Sixth Form Colleges Association, which leads the Protect Student Choice campaign, mapped the list of qualifications that will be eligible for funding against the 134 recently reformed applied general qualifications currently available to young people and found an "astonishing" 75 will be ineligible.

In a letter to education secretary Gillian Keegan, 360 school and college leaders described the timescale as "simply not credible," and urged her to push back the plans by at least a year. They also called on her to exclude the 134 AGQs from the reforms.

Schools and colleges that signed the letter pointed out that prospectuses and marketing materials for courses starting in September 2025 will already have been finalised by July 2024, and engagement work with students will be well underway. They went on to write that "it will be very difficult to provide effective information, advice and guidance to young people if we do not know what qualifications we can deliver until the end of July 2024".

Six peers, including two former education secretaries and two ex-universities minister, sent a similar letter to the DfE at the same time warning that scrapping "popular" alternatives to A-levels and T Levels would have a damaging impact on social mobility, economic growth and public services.

Skills, apprenticeships and HE minister Robert Halfon replied to the school and college leaders this week to confirm there will be no delay to the defunding timeline.

He simply said: "We understand that this is significant change, but we believe that the long-term benefits are what is needed".

Halfon goes on to rule out removing the 134 AGQs from the scope of the review but offers no explanation as to why.

He believes that young people will not be left without a pathway once the reforms are complete. He said: "Our reforms will provide high-quality opportunities for all, and I do not agree that young people will fall out of the system".

College leaders disagree

Altat Hussein, principal of Luton Sixth Form College, said: "The proposed changes to defund most BTECs are short-sighted and likely to have a massive impact on the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who go on to HE and good jobs in key sectors like the NHS."

Scott McKeown, head of New Bridge College and Future Finders Employability College, added that the removal of "these reputable qualifications" will present "further barriers for SEND students aiming to progress onto skilled employment or continue their learning journey through higher education, ultimately, disempowering them from reaching their academic potential or restricting them from entering their career of choice".

Meanwhile, Alex Pett principal of Logic Studio School, pointed out that his technical school for 14-to-19-year-olds

have "always found securing even one week work placements challenging", let alone 45-day placements that T Levels require.

He told FE Week: "If all of our students were to move to T Levels, not only would they be narrowing their breadth of study, we would simply not be able to find sufficient, meaningful work placements for all of them.

BTECs allow students to gain skills and recognition against specific and segmented assignments, more closely replicating their future experience in the workplace."

Laranya Caslin, principal of St. George's Academy in

Lincolnshire, said the T Level model "seems to be suited to large cities and simply does not translate to the countryside".

She explained that large employers across a range of industry sectors are "few and far between in our locality, and many of our students live in outlying villages with next to no public transport".

Caslin added: "Surely every 16-year-old, no matter where they live, should be able to access a level 3 qualification in an area of genuine interest to them. If the availability of AGQs is substantially reduced, that chance will be under threat for well over 50 per cent of my 'secondary modern' sixth form intake."

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the SFCA, criticised Halfon's letter.

"This response does not address any of the practical concerns raised by the 360 school and college leaders that signed the letter to the secretary of state. A one-year delay would have minimised the disruption to young people's education caused by the implementation of the government's flawed plan to scrap most BTECs," he said.

"Instead, we will now move into a period of great uncertainty for students, staff and institutions."



Robert Halfon

News

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Reprieve for at-risk level 3 courses

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Five of the 33 health and science level 3 courses set to be axed in 2024 to pave way for T Levels – including the popular BTEC health and social care diploma – have been given a temporary reprieve.

On Wednesday, the Department for Education updated the “final” list of level 3 qualifications that overlap with the first ten T Levels and face being defunded next year.

It was originally published in October but excluded courses that overlap with the health and science route amid a review of the T Level’s content, which was launched after Ofqual found last year’s exams were not fit for purpose and led to results for over 1,000 students being regraded.

The DfE’s provisional list of level 3 courses facing the chop from 2024 included 33 health and science qualifications, but Wednesday’s update has reduced this to 28.

Those that appear to be saved include City & Guilds’ diploma in adult care, NOCN’s diploma in adult care, Pearson’s BTEC national diploma in health and social care, TQUK’s diploma in healthcare support, and TQUK’s diploma in adult care.

Colleges would be particularly pleased with the continuation of Pearson’s BTEC national diploma in health and social care, which has thousands of enrolments every year and is “enormously popular and well respected by universities and employers”, according to leaders.

However, the qualifications are still expected to be defunded from 2025.

This is because in January the DfE launched the next phase of its level 3 review, which involves a new strict approvals process that all “alternative” technical and academic applied general qualifications must pass to retain their funding.

Guidance states that ministers have made the “conscious choice” to exclude “certain” academic qualifications from this process, either because the subject is “more suited to a technical qualification or because there is an associated A level”.

The only sector subject areas they will continue to fund are large alternative academic qualifications like performing arts, sport



leisure and creation, and crafts, creative arts and design. All large alternative academic qualifications in other subjects will not be eligible for funding from 2025.

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said the publication of Wednesday’s list “highlights the absurdity” of the government’s defunding process.

He told FE Week: “On the face of it, five qualifications have been saved from the scrapheap. But while DfE was busy reviewing health and science courses, ministers decided that these courses will not be eligible for reapproval. For example, the popular BTEC diploma in health and social care won a reprieve this week but will not be funded beyond 2025 in line with the DfE guidance published in January.

“This is a deeply flawed policy that is being implemented in a confused and convoluted way.”

The most popular course set to be lost from 2024 is NCFE’s CACHE technical level 3 certificate in health and social care, which had 4,010 enrolments in 2020/21.

All 28 health and science qualifications to be defunded next year had a total of 11,930

enrolments in 2020/21.

Skills, apprenticeships and HE minister Robert Halfon said: “The removal of funding from these qualifications follows rigorous assessment by independent assessors and an opportunity for awarding organisations to appeal their decisions.

“T Levels are rigorous qualifications that provide a great progression route into a range of occupations in the health and science sector. They are based on the same standards as apprenticeships and have their content set by employers.”

He added that students who take a health and science T Level are “well placed to progress into careers in the sector, including as health professionals, technicians and researchers”.

In total there are now 134 level 3 courses that will be axed from 2024 because they “overlap” with the first 10 T Levels, which between them had 39,570 enrolments in 2020/21.

More qualifications will be reviewed and defunded in future years as more T Levels roll out. A provisional list of qualifications that overlap with wave three and four T Levels will be released in spring 2023 and awarding organisations will be given the opportunity to appeal.



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Low pay driving college teachers out of the sector, IFS warns

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College teachers are leaving the profession at a faster rate than other public sector workers as they face an 18 per cent real terms pay cut, a new report has found.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, an economic think-tank, has also laid bare the growing pay gap between college and school teachers.

The research investigated how college teacher pay has changed in the last decade and looks at the sector's staff turnover rate compared to other public sectors.

Unlike school teachers, college teachers' pay is not set nationally. Instead, colleges set their own pay for teachers.

Bosses are aided by an annual recommendation on pay rises from the Association of Colleges (AoC) but are not bound by it.

The IFS compared AoC pay recommendations for college teachers with pay awards for school teachers. They found that school teacher pay has fallen between 5 and 13 per cent in real terms while recommended pay of college teachers has declined by 18 per cent in the last decade.

The median salary for a school teacher is now about £41,500 and for college teachers it is £34,500.

Adjusted to today's prices, school teachers were earning £48,000 in 2010 and college teachers £42,500. Teacher pay in the round has declined significantly and teachers in colleges have borne the brunt, with a 19 per cent fall in real earnings compared to 14 per cent for their school counterparts.

The gap between teacher pay in schools and colleges is well documented and has been one of the AoC's core arguments for increased funding for FE in recent years.

However that 18 per cent headline figure could mask a larger fall in college teacher pay. Using freedom of information data obtained by UCU, researchers found that in the three academic years between 2018/19 and 2020/21, a majority of colleges made pay awards at or below the AoC's

recommendation.

UCU general secretary, Jo Grady, said the report highlights college leaders' "refusal" to "properly uplift pay".

She said: "The sad reality is that the pay cut faced by college teachers is higher than the 18 per cent cited by the IFS, with most colleges refusing to implement pay recommendations made by the employer body. In this scenario, staff are denied binding national bargaining agreements and failed by local college employers who refuse to properly uplift pay or address shocking workloads."

Meanwhile school teaching unions have been successful in securing an offer of a £1,000 one-off payment for school teachers this year and a 4.3 per cent pay rise for most school teachers in 2023/24.

Teacher turnover

College teachers are much more likely to leave the profession than other public sector occupations, the IFS found.

According to the report, 16 per cent of college teachers leave the profession each year. That figure is 10 per cent for school teachers, between 10 and 11 per cent in most NHS occupations and 7 to 8 per cent in the civil service.

Worryingly, the report finds that it's the more experienced college teachers that are most likely to leave.

The IFS reports that around a quarter of college teachers leave after one year and almost half leave after three years. In schools, 15 per cent leave after one year and around 25 per cent leave after three years.

After ten years, less than a quarter of college teachers remain in teaching, compared with over 60 per cent of school teachers.

Anne Murdoch, senior adviser in college leadership at the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "It is simply not sustainable to have nearly half of all teachers leaving after three years. The fact that just one quarter remain in the profession after 10 years should also be a source of great concern. Colleges need to be able to retain and develop staff with a wide range of specialist and technical skills."

The 'gloomy' future

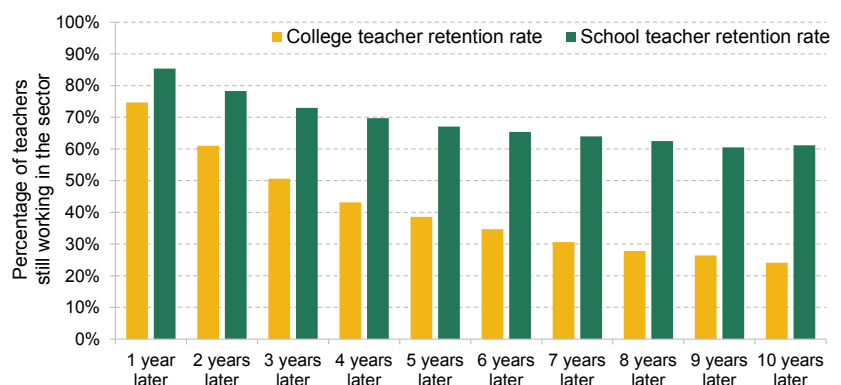
The report highlights that between 2010/11 and 2019/20, public spending per 16-19 year old fell by 14 per cent and spending on classroom-based adult education has halved.

And according to David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, the exodus of college teachers is already causing course closures.

"This staffing crisis in colleges, means that courses are having to be withdrawn or restricted. The irony of this is profound, because fewer courses means the skills shortages in the labour market will get worse, making it even more likely that college lecturers will leave their teaching roles. The impact will be fewer trained builders, health workers and technicians and a brake on the UK's economy," Hughes said.

Without extra support, "the immediate future for the college workforce appears gloomy" the report concludes.

Figure 6. Teacher retention rates for colleges and schools, 2019



Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies

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Unions demand 15% pay hike amid workload concerns

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Unions have demanded an inflation-busting 15 per cent pay rise for college staff next year.

The 2023/24 pay claim request, put forward by the National Joint Forum collective of five unions to the Association of Colleges, calls for a retail price index increase (13.4 per cent) plus 2 per cent on all pay points – 15.4 per cent in total. The unions have also demanded that colleges pay at least the national living wage (£10.42) to those aged 23 and above.

“Poor pay is now holding back colleges from offering training and skills”

The request is above the 10.4 per cent consumer price index or 13.8 per cent retail price index inflation rate reported last month and far exceeds AoC's offer of 2.5 per cent last year.

The unions call for “significant movement” towards “meaningful national agreements to address workload in colleges,” and sector-wide agreement on a new national bargaining framework for a fresh national contract for FE staff.

The unions also want a climate change commission to address sustainability, new skills, climate justice and a road map for the sector to be carbon neutral by 2030.

The University and College Union (UCU), Unison, the National Education Union (NEU), GMB and Unite, which form the collective, want the measures effective from August.

Their submission said: “In recent years staff in FE in England have seen their pay, working conditions and professionalism undermined.



The annual cycle of NJF negotiations has not resulted in meaningful and tangible outcomes that benefit staff.

“This year the joint trade unions claim seeks change. We want the outcomes of these negotiations to result in a pay rise linked to inflation and meaningful and binding agreements leading to real action to address excessive workloads and a commission to start to tackle climate change.”

The unions said workers face a 40-year high in price rises and their pay has fallen behind inflation by more than 35 per cent since 2009/10.

In response to the government negotiations with unions over school teacher pay, the AoC said that “college unions, staff and college leaders all stand on the sidelines looking in, with no mechanism to negotiate”.

The association added: “Pay in colleges is just as important, particularly

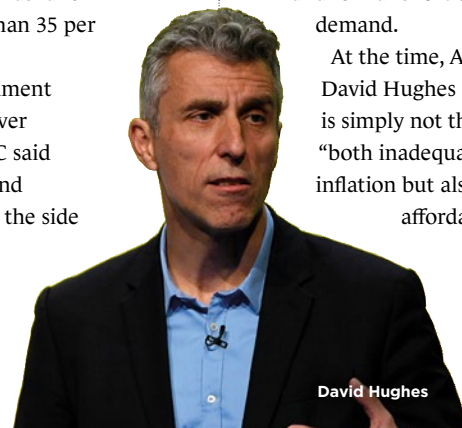
now that colleges are part of the public sector. With college lecturers paid around £8,000 to £10,000 less than their counterparts in schools, a better pay award for schools will widen what is already an unacceptable gap.

“Poor pay is now holding back colleges from offering training and skills because they cannot recruit and retain people to teach.”

The AoC last year proposed 2.25 per cent initially, upping its offer to 2.5 per cent. The UCU said the offer was “beyond insulting” and fell far short of its 10 per cent pay demand.

At the time, AoC chief executive David Hughes said that “the money is simply not there”, describing it as “both inadequate compared with inflation but also on the cusp of what is affordable for most colleges”.

The first meeting for negotiations between the unions and AoC is due to be held on April 19.



David Hughes

News

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Colleges face 'tsunami of need' for mental health support, report warns

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FE leaders have called for an urgent boost in mental health resources after a survey found nine in ten colleges had reported attempted suicide by students in the last year.

The Association of Colleges' 2023 mental health survey found that more than 80 per cent of colleges had referred a learner to A&E because of their mental health. The survey also said that 95 per cent of colleges saw an increase in mental health disclosures among 16 to 18 students.

The report found that colleges face a "tsunami of need" for wellbeing services but recent efforts to bolster mental health policies, training for staff and counselling for learners were praised.

The survey published this week gathered views from 82 general FE colleges, 13 sixth form colleges, six specialist colleges and four from academies and independent specialist colleges. It found that nine in ten colleges were aware of a learner or learners who had attempted suicide in the last 12 months.

It reported that 70 per cent of the 79 respondents to that question had seen an increase in attempts, totalling 1,357 in the last year.

The report called for an expansion of suicide first aid training, noting that just 61 per cent of colleges said it was part of their staff development programme. A third of colleges were not engaged in their local suicide prevention plan.

Some eight in ten colleges had made an A&E referral for a learner's mental health in the last year – 560 in total, or nine referrals per provider on average.

The report comes amid a backdrop of rising mental health concerns, with 95 per cent of colleges reporting a slight or significant increase in 16 to 18 learners disclosing a mental health need. The authors reported that 82 per cent of colleges said a significant number of students were experiencing mental health needs without a formal disclosure.

According to the survey, the biggest drivers of student mental health difficulties were circumstances at home (90 per cent), Covid-19 (85

per cent), social media (77 per cent) and gender identity (72 per cent).

Other reasons included exam stress, the cost of living, money worries, employment, and drugs and alcohol.

Olly Parker, head of external affairs at mental health charity YoungMinds, said: "It is concerning that so many students are struggling with their mental health and that there has been an increase in those reaching crisis. We know from speaking to young people that the last year has been one of the most challenging for this age group, emerging from the pandemic to more limited prospects for their futures, an increase in academic pressure to catch up on lost learning, and a cost of living crisis."

The organisation has called on the government to commit to a four-week waiting time to ensure young people do not get worse while waiting for help.

The AoC's report found that despite limited funding, 90 per cent of colleges had appointed senior mental health leads, three quarters had dedicated mental health policies for students and staff, 100 per cent were running wellbeing sessions for students. General mental health awareness training for staff was delivered by 86 per cent of colleges and 96 per cent had trained mental health first aiders.

The findings showed that 68 per cent of respondents were employing their own counsellors (on average two part time and one full time counsellor per provider) while a further 36 per cent used counselling support from external organisations.

Stuart Rimmer, chief executive of East Coast College and chair of the AoC's mental health and wellbeing policy group, said: "It does paint a stark picture of the position of colleges right now, and in the context of that the underfunding of the broad aspects of the public sector.

"The issues presenting to colleges are increasing in volume and the issues are becoming more acute for colleges. The reality is that this is now sucking a huge amount of resource in colleges which fundamentally we are not paid for."

Rimmer called for ringfenced funding for mental health measures and praised the

efforts of colleges.

He added: "If colleges did not do this work, there would be cause to worry gravely for the mental health outcomes of many displaced or forgotten sections of society now supported by their local college."

Concerns for staff mental health were also highlighted, with 62 per cent of colleges reporting an increase in staff accessing mental health services. Recurrence of existing mental health issues and high workloads were most often cited as the cause, alongside Covid-19, caring duties, cost of living fears and job uncertainty.

The report pointed to a lack of specialist support in colleges and the wider community and said insufficient funding was impacting the sectors' efforts around mental health.

The government announced in January that it would pump £150 million by April 2025 into 150 new urgent and emergency mental health facilities. The report's authors said that this funding will help but "does not go far enough".

The AoC's commitments in the report included dedicated research on learner mental health, regular reporting on emerging issues, helping champion and resource staff development opportunities, and developing dedicated resources and peer-networking.

That will include "a suite of resources, lesson plans, workshops and awareness campaigns aimed at learners".

The AoC called on government to ensure funding reaches further education providers and an ongoing review of the impact of factors like Covid-19 or cost of living crisis.

Colleges have been urged to conduct regular surveys of staff and learners, broaden staff development to include suicide awareness training, sign the AoC's mental health charter and engage with local health services.

The Samaritans are available 365 days a year day or night. Call them for free on 116123, email jo@samaritans.org or visit www.samaritans.org to find your nearest branch.



Stuart Rimmer

Colleges' slice of £286m fund will 'transform' buildings

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Nearly 150 colleges have secured a slice of a £286 million Department for Education funding pot for new buildings and upgrades.

Allocations were published this morning for the final stage of the FE Capital Transformation Programme – a £1.5 billion fund over six years pledged in the March 2020 budget.

Tuesday's announcement totals £286 million, awarded to 146 colleges.

The FE allocation includes 71 colleges which received more than £1 million. Among the biggest winners were NCG with £15 million, Havant and South Downs College which secured £11.5 million, and City of Bristol College with £10.4 million.

“We want every young person to have access to high-quality facilities and learning environments”

Thirty-five colleges received no allocation, while eight received less than £100,000.

Those to receive more than £1 million will have their allocation in two instalments – the first in the 2023/24 financial year and the second in financial year 2024/25.

Robert Halfon, minister for skills, apprenticeships and higher education, said: “This significant investment will transform school and college buildings across the country so that they are fit for the future and can provide the best education for students, no matter where they live.

“We want every young person to have access to high-quality facilities and learning environments, to gain the skills they need to climb the ladder of opportunity into further study and work, whilst supporting efforts to grow the economy.”

More than 180 colleges were handed a share of the £200 million first tranche in 2020. For the second phase in 2021, the DfE pledged support for 16 sites in the most desperate need. However the amount of funding for those projects, some of which are still being procured, has never been publicly disclosed.

Last year 62 winners were announced for the next £450 million phase.

Excluding the unknown amount of funding committed in phase two, the combined spend on phases one, two and four is about £936 million of the £1.5 billion pot.

The DfE said it was not yet able to say how much will be spent on projects in phase two as work is ongoing but promised that all of the £1.5 billion pot will be used to upgrade the FE college estate.

Government guidance says that the final

stage of the programme will be through a “formulaic allocation”, with first payments expected to be paid in May.

The £1.5 billion pot was designed to upgrade colleges estates over six years ending in March 2026, targeted at sites in the most need for renovation.

The DfE said the FE Capital Transformation Fund is one of a number of investments aimed at boosting post-16 education, with others including £300 million to establish a network of institutes of technology, £150 million in capital funding following reclassification of FE into the public sector, £140 million in post-16 capacity funding and the T Level capital fund to bolster delivery of the new flagship level 3 qualifications.

But Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said that while investment in schools and colleges was welcome, the announcement “comes against a background of inadequate funding”.

The full allocations can be found on the [FE Week website](#).



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T Levels: Up to £25k up for grabs in latest employer incentive

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Employers are being offered up to £25,000 towards “legitimate costs” in the Department for Education’s latest move to increase the quality and quantity of industry placements for T Levels.

The department announced in February that £12 million will be set aside for a new T Level employer support fund. More information was published on Tuesday, just days before the turn of the financial year when the fund goes live.

New guidance reveals that employers can claim up to £25,000 for costs relating to industry placements that start between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024. The cash does not depend on the number of placements offered and does not need to be paid back if one ends unexpectedly.

Colleges and other T Level providers will be responsible for payments to employers and making judgement calls about what to fund and when to make payments.

Providers have been allocated a fixed amount to distribute to employers. Allocations have been based on the number of T Levels students providers have told DfE they have signed up.

Any unspent funds will be clawed back in August 2024.

T Levels include a mandatory industry placement of 45 days or 315 hours with an employer.

Any organisation providing placements is eligible to make a claim, except for government department and arm’s-length bodies. Colleges, schools and NHS trusts are technically eligible, but organisations like the DfE, Ofsted and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education are not.

New guidance released alongside funding rules for providers outlines the “legitimate costs” employers can claim.

These include administrative costs like “setting up processes and procedures” as well as training for existing staff, equipment,



insurance and students’ transport.

Claims can’t be made for costs that could otherwise be funded via other streams, such as T Level revenue funding.

Providers are accountable for what they distribute. A six-weekly data return will include a self-declaration form signed by employers confirming what they have requested the funding for.

Employers will not have to provide evidence for the costs at the point they claim – they merely sign the self-declaration – but DfE said they will conduct random spot checks on providers and employers to check claims.

If a student drops out early, or the placement ends unexpectedly, the DfE does not expect employers to pay back money to the provider, though they can if they wish.

In November, FE Week reported that just £500,000 from a previous £7 million

employer support fund – 8 per cent – was used during its previous run from 2019-2022.

That scheme offered firms £750 to cover tangible placement costs in four regions of England, increased to £1,000 per placement in 2021/22.

An evaluation report published last year found that just 843 placements were supported against a target 32,466 with the fund.

Research from earlier in 2022 found that three quarters of employers had not heard of T Levels and only 7 per cent of employers not interested in offering T Level placements would change their mind if offered a £1,000 incentive.

Employer bodies, such as the Federation of Small Businesses, have however called for the reintroduction of employer cash bonuses for T Levels.

ChatGPT: Consider reviewing homework policies, DfE tells colleges

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Schools and colleges "may wish to review" their homework policies amid fears about the use of artificial intelligence like ChatGPT, the Department for Education has warned.

The department set out its stance on generative AI in a statement published on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, exam boards published their own guidance on "protecting the integrity of qualifications" from AI.

The DfE said that when used "appropriately" it has the potential to reduce workload across the education sector and free up teachers.

However, the DfE also said that schools and colleges "may wish to review homework policies, to consider the approach to homework and other forms of unsupervised study as necessary to account for the availability of generative AI".

The guidance follows reports of schools abandoning homework essays because of AI.

Schools and colleges should also "review and strengthen" their cyber security as AI could "increase the sophistication and credibility of attacks".

Students should be protected from harmful online content and personal, sensitive data should not be entered into AI tools, DfE said.

The department warned the quality and content of any final documents – such as administrative plans – remains the "professional responsibilities of the person who produces it and the organisation they

belong to."

Education sector has 'lagged in tech adoption'

The DfE will convene experts to work with the education sector and "share and identify best practice and opportunities to improve education and reduce workload using generative AI".

Students will need to be "knowledgeable and develop their intellectual capability" to "harness the potential" of AI, the government said.

"The education system should support students, particularly young pupils, to identify and use appropriate resources to support their ongoing education.

"This includes encouraging effective use of age-appropriate resources (which in some instances may include generative AI) and preventing over-reliance on a limited number of tools or resources," the guidance says.

Speaking at Bett Show ed tech conference, education secretary Gillian Keegan said the education sector has "often lagged in tech adoption".

She also said that tech that doesn't work is an "expensive and potentially dangerous

mistake" and one that education providers "cannot afford to make".

Keegan believes teachers' work could be "transformed" by AI but it's not yet at the standard needed.

Sector 'moving too slow' on AI

Education experts were quizzed on the use of AI by MPs on the science and technology committee on Wednesday.

Rose Luckin, professor of learned centred design at University College London, warned that the education sector doesn't have "the in-depth knowledge about AI to be able to do a really good job.

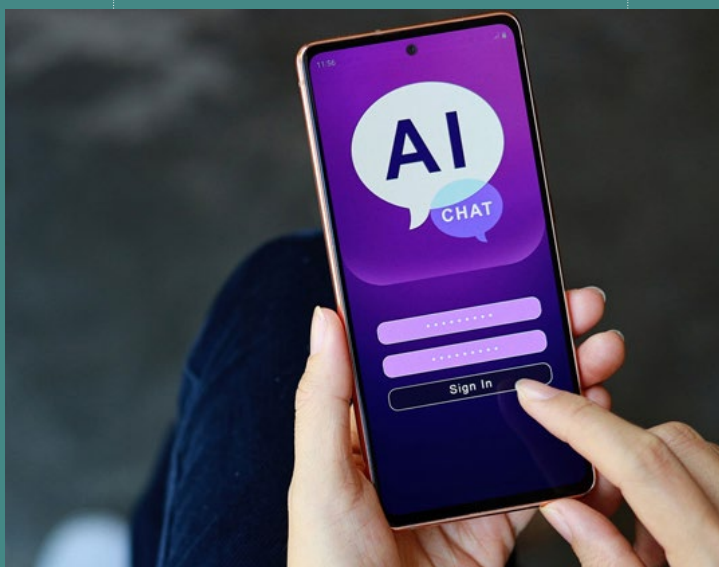
"The technology's moving at pace, it's increasingly complex. Even the people developing it don't always understand the implications of what it does."

Daisy Christodoulou, director of education at No More Marking, said "speed matters" when responding to AI changes and that too many organisations are "moving very, very slowly".

"I think we need to have a good, hard look at how we assess. I do think ChatGPT has huge implications for continuous assessment and coursework," she said.

"I've heard a few suggestions about different things you could do...but some of the people making those suggestions don't realise quite how powerful a tool like ChatGPT is.

It is capable of producing, original, very hard to detect, relatively high-quality responses to any kind of question. We have to be looking at assessments that are in more controlled environments."



News

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£14m mentoring boost for FE teachers

JASON NOBLE
JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced £14 million over the next two years for mentoring of new FE teachers and a support programme for leaders and governors.

The DfE has signed a two-year deal with Cognition Education to deliver a teacher mentoring programme for the FE sector, which will run until the end of March 2025.

The contract is worth up to £4.2 million – £1.2 million for the contract itself and £3 million of grant funding for eligible FE providers to boost sector engagement with the mentor training programme and fund extra mentoring hours.

“We will provide effective support to new teachers moving into the sector by continuing to enable access to mentoring”

The programme had previously been run by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) from 2020 to 2023, but in spring last year the charity announced that the DfE had slashed some of its grant funding, estimated to be about 15 per cent.

There were expectations that some of its programmes may be re-tendered, but the second contract the DfE has announced this week has been awarded to ETF for continuous professional development supporting leadership and governance in the sector.

It is a programme the ETF has already delivered with other sector bodies.

Robert Halfon, minister for skills, apprenticeships and higher education, said: “With more and more fantastic technical training offers being rolled out, including apprenticeships, T Levels and skills bootcamps, it is vital that we support FE teachers to deliver top class education and training.”

The mentoring will focus on FE teachers in



the early stages of their careers.

The measure comes off the back of the Skills Bill, with the Skills for Jobs white paper in January 2021 explaining that “to deliver high-quality teaching, professional development must continue throughout an individual’s career”.

In the white paper, the government pledged to “take a more active role to support the sector”, and added: “We will provide effective support to new teachers moving into the sector by continuing to enable access to mentoring.”

According to the DfE, around 2,000 FE workers had undertaken training or professional development under the programme when it was run by ETF. About 6,000 people have benefitted from access to a skilled mentor.

Training and development of a minimum of 600 mentors has been targeted for the new two-year contract for Cognition Education, which will benefit about 1,800 early career teachers.

Cognition Education, a global education consultancy organisation founded in New Zealand, has been operating since 1989.

Tracey Newman, UK managing director at Cognition Education, said the consultancy was “proud to be able to assist in the delivery of the programme to the FE sector”.

The leadership and governance programme secured by ETF aims to strengthen FE

leadership teams, support the growth of leadership pipelines and bolster improvement in the sector.

The DfE said it anticipates that more than 5,500 people in leadership and governance roles will benefit from the £9.55 million two-year programme.

The ETF is jointly owned by the Association of Colleges, HOLEX and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

AELP walked away from the organisation in 2018, claiming that it was “no longer an organisation run by the FE sector for the sector”, but re-joined in the last year.

Dr Katerina Kolyva joined as chief executive in February, and recently told FE Week of her ambitions to diversify income, bolster global opportunities and address issues such as sector recruitment and retention, austerity, sustainability and green skills.

On this week’s announcement, Kolyva said the organisation was “delighted to continue the growth of professionalism across the FE sector”.

Kolyva added: “Effective leadership and governance are crucial to enable the sector to thrive and we welcome the opportunity to work closely with our sector partners to deliver this ambitious programme of support to existing and aspiring leaders and governors across the sector.”



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INSPECTION SECTION

Top marks for Catholic college as watchdog praises 'mindset'

JASON NOBLE

JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A Catholic sixth form college has been rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted 14 years after its last inspection.

Cardinal Newman College, in Lancashire, was handed top marks across the board in a report published on Wednesday following a visit in February.

The college teaches more than 4,200 young people on a mix of level 3 A-level and vocational programmes.

Inspectors found students who were "overwhelmingly positive about the education that they receive and the care and support that staff give them during their time at college", adding that students "thrive in the supportive and nurturing environment that leaders and staff have created".

Teachers were praised for promoting and advocating the "Newman mindset", which includes "high expectations and aspirations for future life beyond college".

Teachers also plan students' learning "meticulously so that they gain a deep knowledge of the content but also develop high levels of transferable skills such as critical-thinking, problem-solving and data analysis".

Leaders were lauded for providing "an ambitious, focused and high-quality curriculum", as well as a "broad variety of A-level and vocational programmes to provide progression to university, apprenticeships or employment".

Inspectors also found that leaders "provide a highly effective foundation learning programme for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) that helps them to achieve in line with their peers and prepares them for their next steps in independence, further training or employment".

This was Cardinal Newman College's first inspection since 2009, when the college was also judged 'outstanding'.

Since the last visit Ofsted has introduced an enhanced inspection framework, meaning inspections place less emphasis on exam

results and more on the quality of teaching and curriculum, as well as the skills inspection element which assesses how well it is meeting the needs in the area.

Principal Nick Burnham said: "Cardinal Newman College is proud to have been rated as outstanding by Ofsted once again.

"The outcome of the report is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our wonderful staff, students and the wider Newman community, who always go above and beyond."



Cardinal Newman College

Provider 'surprised' by Ofsted downgrade

JASON NOBLE

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An independent training provider in Nottingham has expressed surprise after Ofsted published an 'inadequate' report while it was still challenging the findings.

Voluntary and Community Sector Learning and Skills Consortium, which trades as Enable, said it had challenged the grade four rating it received from the education watchdog in a report published on Wednesday, following a visit in January.

It had previously been rated 'good'.

At the time of the inspection Enable had 330 learners and apprentices, the majority of whom were on employability, English and maths courses for adults.

Teresa Cullen, chair of the board, said the

organisation was "taken by surprise when it was published".

"We were expecting to hear something further from them. It's been a very difficult process really," Cullen said.

"We didn't expect to be inadequate, we haven't been inadequate before. We feel very strongly that Ofsted haven't taken into account the unique challenges of an organisation like ours."

Cullen acknowledged there was "a lot at stake" given Education and Skills Funding Agency guidance dictates that 'inadequate' providers will have their ESFA funding withdrawn.

Inspectors reported that too many learners didn't attend lessons often enough, while the "vast majority" of learners didn't benefit from activities beyond their vocational training.

Ofsted said that leaders, managers and trustees "do not have an accurate oversight or understand the quality of the teaching they provide, including that of subcontractors".

The organisation works with 11 subcontractors, whom Ofsted found received "no guidance or support to develop and improve the quality of the courses they provide, beyond checks of their compliance documentation."

Inspectors said that safeguarding measures were not effective, as leaders and managers didn't ensure staff are suitable to work with learners and apprentices and did not carry out due diligence checks on tutors.

The organisation confirmed that it is currently in negotiations with the ESFA.

News

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Do we need LEPs after all?

JASON NOBLE
JASON.NOBLE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

With government funding for skills advisory panels ending and the future of local enterprise partnerships hanging in the balance, the landscape for regional skills oversight is shifting. Jason Noble assesses the impact if both are lost for good.

For the last decade, local enterprise partnerships have been at the forefront of local and regional economic development across England.

Launched in the early 2010s to replace regional development agencies, LEPs were designed to take responsibility for local growth and play a role between central government and local businesses.

But with devolution deals promised for every region in England that wants one by 2030, and the government in the spring budget indicating that it was "minded to withdraw central government support for LEPs from April 2024", is it already over for LEPs?

It would appear the writing has been on the wall for some time. LEPs were frozen out of bidding to become employer representative bodies for the new local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) being developed across England, although it



should be noted that mayoral combined authorities were also curbed from taking control of those too.

And this month, the Department for Education published the final funding allocations for skills advisory panels – groups bringing together employers, providers and other key stakeholders, many of which are led by LEPs, to gather local data and evidence to inform local skills policies.

The DfE has confirmed there will be no further funding of SAPs, with the 2022/23 cash set at £55,000 for each of the 34 areas – £20,000 less than the £75,000 the year prior.

The DfE said the reduced allocation reflected the smaller ask of SAPs from previous years.

A spokesperson said: "We want to ensure that we are putting employers at the heart of local skills systems to help people to develop the skills they need to get good jobs and increase prospects.

"That's why we are rolling out the employer-led local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) across the country, which the skills advisory panels supported in development by sharing analysis and data of the local skills system."

The SAPs could still exist within the new employer representative bodies forming

the LSIPs, but that will be down to the individual areas and will not attract any more central government funding, the DfE said.

The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities department told FE Week: "Our intention is for the functions of local enterprise partnerships to be delivered by democratically elected local leaders, where this is appropriate and is not already delivered by combined authorities."

A consultation on the future of LEPs is currently underway – the 38 LEPs are in a four-week window to complete a questionnaire that evidences where they add value, with next steps likely to be unveiled in the summer.

But what will the potential loss of LEPs and SAPs mean for local skills functions?

Mark Livesey, chief executive of the LEP Network which champions the 38 LEPs across the country, is unequivocal.

"You won't miss the benefits until they're gone because LEPs play such an integral role in local skills provision – they've worked hard to build local partnerships between local business and



Mark Livesey

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

News

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CONTINUED

providers," he said.

"Local authorities simply don't have that scale of business contact and the deep understanding of local labour markets which LEPs have built up over the last decade."

He described it as a "retrograde step at a critical point," pointing out that as apolitical bodies, LEPs did not have the same political wrangling which elected authorities faced.

"Local authorities simply don't have the scale of business contact"

Nationwide, LEPs have secured more than 3,500 business professionals in volunteering as enterprise advisors in schools to deliver careers sessions for the Careers and Enterprise Company.

Many help facilitate apprenticeship levy transfers from larger to smaller employers, and have a key seat on SAPs which have generated some of the evidence that has informed LSIPs.

Furthermore, many are involved in key government programmes such as Kickstart, Restart and skills bootcamps, and have been involved in dishing out investment funds locally.

Indeed, bootcamps is one area where the LEPs say they could add more value.

Chris Starkie, chief executive of the New Anglia LEP covering Norfolk and Suffolk, said the LEP significantly exceeded its wave 3 bootcamps target of 240 by achieving 310 learners, and could deliver twice as many learners this year had it been given the funding to do so.

It bid for £2.7 million for wave 4 bootcamps, but was given just £1.4 million.

He pointed out that some mayoral combined authorities struggled to hit their targets but received much larger allocations – at a time when

the chancellor said he wants to drive up bootcamp starts with ambitions of another 8,000 bootcamp places in 2024/25 announced in the budget.

"We are just disappointed that while some parts of the country are struggling to get learners and struggling to get providers, we have just completed a procurement process where we will have to turn away providers and turn away learners because our settlement is much lower than MCA areas," Starkie said.

Starkie says that LEPs have given further education providers "a real stake in local economic development – with an influential role in the work of LEPs, including seats on LEP boards".

For Clare Hayward, chief executive of the Cheshire and Warrington LEP, the convening powers of LEPs are among the most important – and will be key to skills provision in the future, not just for the present.

Hayward said: "There isn't really anybody else that plays that collaborative, catalytic role in bringing all of those voices together when it comes to skills."

"You might be able to understand what our current landscape is by using data and evidence, but also because we have those relationships with our businesses and business representative organisations, we can say what are the future skills."

A push for business involvement in post-16 education has been clear for some time: Ofsted now measures colleges for their contribution to skills needs, and the watchdog often comments on how much apprenticeship providers work with firms to design their curriculum.

LSIPs add to this by bringing employers into wider local and regional planning and

not just individual courses.

Ewart Keep, emeritus professor at Oxford University's department of education, said that the new LSIPs will need to develop further still.

"The model seems to be employers sit down with chambers of commerce and write a letter to Santa saying 'these are the skills I need from local colleges and providers,'" he said.

"If this model is going to have any long-term impact employers need to go on to a second stage – 'this is what we the employers can contribute to the development of those skills'. You move from a wish list to co-production and employers accepting a greater responsibility."

LEPs are understandably keen to shout about their work but local authorities will feel they can perform just as well.

A spokesperson from the Local Government Association said that the chancellor's plans to transfer responsibilities from LEPs to local authorities by April 2024 "provides a helpful timeline for councils and combined authorities".

"The writing has been on the wall for a little while now"

But it warned that "this needs to be supported by a commitment from government that transfers of responsibility are matched by sufficient funding and a commitment to work with the sector to identify any capacity issues some areas may face".

Hayward concluded: "There is a realism that structures are changing, the writing has been on the wall for a little while now. What's really important is that we don't lose some of the business voice, the independent voice, the strategic voice in the shift and the restructure. It may not be called a LEP but actually what is required is the capabilities and the skills of a LEP to be able to deliver."



Clare Hayward

Vice Principal Competitive salary

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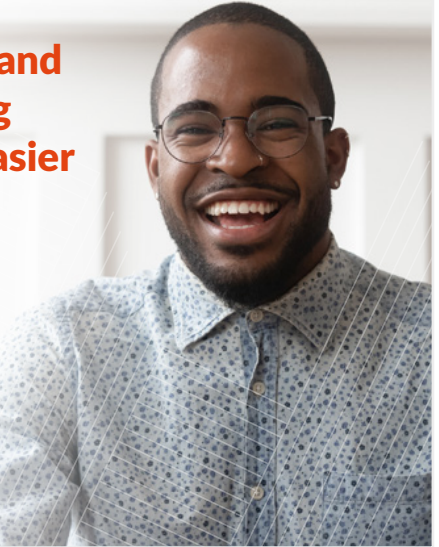
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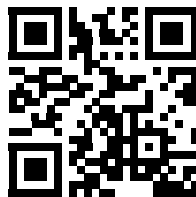
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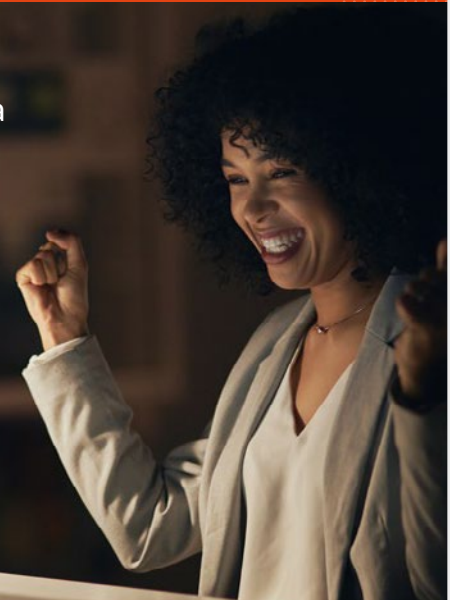
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INTRODUCING

CLAIRE
HEYWOODDeputy principal, Heart of
Worcestershire College**‘The beating up of
colleges that goes
on is really tough’**JESSICA HILL
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM

Claire Heywood, deputy principal at the Heart of Worcestershire College, never thought she would be a leader and has seen some ‘dark times’. But colleagues were always there for her, she tells Jessica Hill

Those who work in FE often hold a special place in their heart for the sector. None more so than Claire Heywood, who has spent her entire 30-year learning and professional career at the Heart of

Worcestershire College (HoW). For her, it is far more than just a workplace.

The deputy principal believes the FE sector saved her life when she was experiencing “dark, dark times” and is gravely concerned that funding cuts and qualification reforms threaten her college’s ability to provide for the more vulnerable in society.

When she was just 19 and working in the college’s SEND department, Heywood’s father died suddenly and she took on caring responsibilities for her mother, who would also pass away five years later.

She survived because a “family of colleagues” rallied around her.

“I got adopted by quite a few people,” Heywood says. The “debt of gratitude” she feels toward the college and “the sector beyond it” explains her long commitment.

She compares the worsening pay conditions for FE staff to a bad relationship.

“You probably know in your head you should leave, but your heart can’t quite come to terms with that idea.

“You just think ‘I need to hang in here because I do still love you. But you’re making it really hard

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out naughty students and to “blame me if this goes wrong”. She could still see the good in students when others had given up.

“While some see bad behaviour, I see creativity and entrepreneurialism and I think there's something you can do with that because its energy. It's on us to turn that into something positive that doesn't get them into trouble with society.”

She “very much pushed” her college bosses to develop NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) provision, and took on a succession of roles building that up.

for me to keep loving you,” she says

Resisting introvert leanings

I meet Heywood at an education conference after she delivered a presentation on how colleges work with employers, apparently with an easy confidence.

But she was “painfully shy” child and in class she was the one “who knew the answer but never put my hand up”. She admits that teaching “doesn't sit any better in my stomach now than when I was at school”.

The youngest of four children, Heywood grew up on a Worcester council estate. She explains with a smile that her father was “a milkman – not ‘the milkman’, and recalls “suddenly feeling very posh” when her family were able to afford central heating.

At 16, Heywood’s “typically crap” school careers advisor pointed her in the direction of a job at a new Tesco store. Instead she became the first person in her family to carry on with education post-schooling, “following friends”. She enrolled on a BTEC national diploma in health and social care at Worcester College of Technology, which merged with North East Worcestershire College in 2014 to become HoW. The course had a wider public service focus, and Heywood “had a vague idea” about joining the military or police.

She recalls “feeling low” after the first week, and her parents reassuring her of their support if she wanted to drop out – “the opposite” of what she

advises parents to say now.

But Heywood “instinctively knew” she needed to stick at it, and soon discovered she “had this brain” she wanted to use.

One course work placement was with the college’s SEND students, which Heywood was nervous about because it involved “out there” stuff in drama classes”. It took her as far from her comfort zone as possible.

“Some of my school friends ended up in prison or on heroin”

Drawn to naughty boys

After the course, Heywood worked in a factory and became “quite depressed”, so she readily accepted an off from the college to work in the SEND department. She quickly moved up the ranks to lecturer, while completing a degree and later a master’s in education leadership.

She was “drawn to the naughty kids who talk back, boys in particular” because “it's where I came from”.

She describes her older siblings as “very roguish” and some school friends “ended up in prison or on heroin”.

Heywood recalls persuading her boss not to kick

This work brought her into contact with some “particularly high profile” young offenders “put in the area to hide away”.

She admits that occasionally she encountered students with “something dark there”. “That’s just one or two exceptions where the good was perhaps a bit manipulated,” she adds.

When teaching at a homeless hostel during a three-year project she led for the college to encourage education reengagement, Heywood recalls one lad who was “really going down a dark path” with crime and drugs.

Now he has his own family and carpentry business, and recently reached out to show Heywood how far he had come.

“He said - quite often they do – ‘I was really naughty wasn't I? And asked me why I put up with him. I said, ‘because your behaviour isn't who you are, it's just your behaviour. So who am I to judge?’”

Defending college to employers

Heywood believes that college dropout statistics mask how many students “make their way back a year or two down the line, because there's a bit of growing up that happens”.

She finds herself looking to the college’s data to defend it and its young people when she is working with employers on meeting their needs.

“The regulation and some of the beating up of colleges that goes on is really tough,” she says. “You can have an employer saying, ‘the colleges

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aren't doing enough on this topic, and I've got vacancies to fill!"

But Heywood reminds them HoW is "not a job centre - it's not my job to fill your vacancies. And here's some data that suggests if you pay a little bit more, you might fill [them]."

"While some see bad behaviour, I see creativity"

Heywood hits back at employers who criticise the young. When they complained at a recent LSIP (Local Skills Improvement Plan) event about young people lacking soft skills and "not showing initiative", Heywood put the ball back in their court: "Well, did you when you walked into your first job? To be fair, they acknowledged they didn't. It's about reminding people that it is too quick and easy to demonise young people."

Heywood was "shocked" to discover that last year, 78 per cent of all local vacancies did not require a minimum level of education. She is concerned colleges are being tasked with providing skills, while "the employer in the driving seat isn't asking for any". This presents "a challenge" for education and training providers.

Heywood believes colleges are not without

blame though. They can be "slow to turn things around and make a decision", and she agrees with former skills minister Nick Boles when he warned colleges that "training providers will nick our lunch if we don't get on things quick".

SEND losers in qualification reform

HoW has been providing supported internships for its SEND students since they were first piloted in 2013, and has so far placed 100 into sustained employment.

Heywood says it's a "fantastic programme", but "requires some additional support to businesses because there's a lot of fear and hesitancy about whether they can cope with someone with additional needs. But actually, the support you have to provide is much less than you anticipated," she adds.

Heywood is particularly concerned about the impact of the rise of T Levels and defunding of other courses on SEND students, who already face limited opportunities as it is.

"There are some good kids practically who even the [apprenticeship] standards are too much for. It just feels like we're cutting them off too soon."

Heywood is also worried about the impact of the sector's financial stability on students. Her college has "pulled in the FE commissioner", who advised streamlining its current portfolio of 16 buildings across four campuses. This would save costs but Heywood is concerned "the disadvantage



gap is being wedged even further".

It "boils" her "blood" that "FE is right the way down the [government's] priority list". "If your intent is to wipe out this sector, this is how to go about it. You can't even begin to finance the replacement for what that would lose," she says

Nurturing others into leadership

Heywood, who became vice principal in 2018 and deputy in 2021, never imagined herself as a leader. She now spends much of her time delivering on aspirational leadership programmes and encourages other introverts like her to believe in their own potential. "While there are a lot of it exuberant extrovert leaders around...you actually don't have to fit that particular mould to make it as a leader," she says.

Heywood is also "passionate" about "taking the right person" for the job and then "giving them the skills". When it comes to NEET teaching, "it doesn't really matter" if an applicant has never taught. "What we want to know is what they're motivated by. If that's all the right things, we take them on and train them. I'm proud of people in the college now, and who've moved on to other colleges, who we took with no teaching background and turned into great teachers. They then go pay it forward."

Heywood believes working in FE is "endlessly fascinating" and is clearly in no hurry to end her relationship with it just yet.

"Yes, the relationship might not all be rosy, but you can't help but love it," she admits.



Heywood (right) in her early days as a support assistant on a residential for SEN learners

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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

Everyone gains from taking part in a skills competition – from learners to teachers (and it's not hard work)

Skills contests develop the professional and technical skills of learners – and the professional development of their teachers, says Daniel Thomas

We are no strangers to sporting competitions in Manchester. After all, we have two of the most successful football clubs in the UK. What is less known is that we also have a strong track record in winning medals in skills competitions.

Alongside eight other colleges in the region, Trafford College Group takes part every year in the Greater Manchester Skills Competitions. Run by a dedicated group of “champions” from each college, these competitions also serve as a feeder for WorldSkills UK. In 2021, the Greater Manchester Colleges Group dominated the leader board at the WorldSkills UK national finals in skill areas ranging from graphic design to mechanical engineering CAD, with Trafford College Group winning a silver medal for IT support technician and a bronze in confectionery and patisserie.

Participation at a national level with WorldSkills UK has helped to develop the professional and technical skills of our learners and has had a positive effect on their ambition and aspirations for



DANIEL THOMAS

Programme Lead,
Creative Industries, The
Trafford College Group

their future careers. In addition, I have found that working with WorldSkills UK also delivers tangible benefits to teaching staff in three key areas, and I would encourage everyone to get involved.

Enhancing curriculum

There is sometimes a misconception that putting learners forward to take part in skills competitions will result in a lot of extra work. In truth, while there is some additional preparation in the initial set-up of the assignment or activity, this allows greater scope for creativity in teaching and learning.

For example, my department has introduced projects that involve cross-departmental working. The art department has been using clay to create 3D model characters and the games design department has been using photogrammetry to capture 360 images that they can load into games engine software to animate. What better way to prepare learners better for the commercial settings that

await them? And for me, the variety in teaching is a great motivator.

An ear to the ground

The Greater Manchester and the WorldSkills UK competition programmes are designed by industry professionals. As a result, you receive exposure to the latest trends in industry. This provides excellent CPD for our teachers, ensuring we are providing our learners with up-to-date information and skills that will help them to gain employment.

We have also built stronger relationships with industry partners, creating more opportunities for our learners. This level of commitment shows our learners that these competitions aren't simply a nice thing to be involved in, but are a crucial part of them finding employment. Indeed, many employers who judge the competitions use the process to talent-spot.

A global outlook

As part of the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence programme run in partnership with NCFE, we are working with coaches

who have captured valuable lessons from their involvement in the international WorldSkills competition. We are learning to embed these global best practices in our classrooms, helping our students and apprentices perform to higher standards of excellence.

But the focus isn't just on technical skills; mindset training is also a key part of this CPD programme. I've learned new techniques to support my learners develop positive mental and behavioural skills, including teamwork, communication, time management and working under pressure. This is not only helping them excel, but me too. The reflective practice element of the training offered by WorldSkills UK is crucial in that.

Ofsted recognises the role of skills competitions in stretching learners, but I think the best way to understand how competition activity can drive forward a college is from the learners themselves. One of our students, Daisy Wheeler recently told me she feels being involved in skills competitions is preparing her for industry, “where I will compete for jobs and contracts”. She also particularly valued “having industry professionals as teachers and guest lecturers”.

It's sometimes hard when you're watching your football club to remember that it's not always the winning or losing that matters most. But with skills competitions, it really is about the taking part – and everyone gains from that.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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Lifelong Education Institute's 'coalition of the willing' stands ready to amplify workable policy ideas



ANN LIMB

Chair, Lifelong Education Institute



MARIUS S OSTROWSKI

Senior public policy researcher, ResPublica

There have been quite enough talking shops, writes Ann Limb and Marius Ostrowski. The Lifelong Education Institute will be about advocacy and action

There have been a lot of talking shops and ideas swapping sessions about skills over the past four years. My friend and sister “grande dame of FE”, Ruth Silver, refers to them as a “constellation of commissions”. But where’s the action? Where is the sector’s rightful and angry cry? Who is listening? Who is doing something about it?

The nation’s skills crisis is as critical as the climate emergency. This is no grandiose fantasy. I was a climate change campaigner in the 70s. That’s also when I began my career in FE. If my 70-year-old elderly knees weren’t beginning to creaks, I’d do a Greta Thunberg – sit down in silent solo vigil outside parliament with my placard bearing my slogan: **SAVE OUR SKILLS NOW**

Instead I’ve taken to the podium by becoming inaugural independent chair of the Lifelong Education Institute (LEI), the sector-wide, apolitical body set up by Res Publica to take forward the work of its lifelong education commission, chaired by the former universities minister, Chris Skidmore.

The institute’s vision is to use its influence to turn ideas and insights into



implementation. It is a powerful “coalition of the willing” to amplify workable policy ideas on which there is common accord.

We need momentum to make sure that what we know works (as all the commissions have shown) is made to work. With a shared vision of where the country and the sector need to be in ten years’ time, with policy co-created with the “teachers and the taught”, and with a properly funded and championed sector, we can **SAVE OUR SKILLS NOW**.

The current skills crisis is one whose causes are a long time in the making, and for which the solutions have to take an equally patient and far-sighted view. What we are really dealing with is an interlocking trio of crises: social fragmentation as large tranches of our population fall victim to marginalisation and inequality, decline

in our prosperity as our productivity puzzle continues to go unsolved, and neglect of our cardinal virtues as opportunities to flourish and develop are closed to many.

“The skills crisis is as critical as the climate emergency”

Lifelong education can help to address these. It can strengthen the bonds of inclusion by supporting those who have fallen behind. It can overturn a decade of stagnation and restore the UK to growth. And it can give everyone the chance to find new avenues of discovery and meaning.

We find ourselves on the cusp of a new era of

remarkable transformation in further and higher education. The centre of gravity is shifting towards helping learners move seamlessly between education and work, and towards upskilling and retraining as required by a new world of work with more flexible demands.

This raises new expectations on colleges and universities, businesses, and government to work together to provide the funding and frameworks for a new generation of training approaches and qualifications.

To meet these expectations, we have to craft new forms of radical thinking around skills and education. That is the mission of the LEI, providing a forum to bridge the barriers and boundaries that have shaped the skills and learning landscape up to now.

The LEI will place the needs and experiences of lifelong learners at the heart of the policy agenda and leverage our sectors’ collective potential to put all forms of learning from technical training to academic study within the reach of all. We will help bring together all those with a stake in upskilling the British workforce in a new portfolio of education partnerships and we want to channel the best insights from home and abroad to build the world-leading education system the UK deserves. Through advocacy and action, the LEI stands ready to **SAVE OUR SKILLS NOW**.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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In-work poverty is a reality for many FE staff. That's why there are huge staffing shortages in colleges


MAXINE LOOBY

Vice president, UCU

Ignoring recommendations for pay awards every year just won't wash anymore, writes Maxine Looby

Staffing in further education has reached crisis point and now workers are fighting back.

Employers' own data shows 96 per cent of colleges have difficulty recruiting, with an average of 25 posts per college unfilled at the start of the academic year.

Staff know why there is a crisis: pay is too low, workloads are too high and far too often college employers fail to treat them as the skilled and experienced professionals that they are.

The University and College Union (UCU) estimates that the salaries of college teachers have fallen behind inflation by 35 per cent since 2009, while the pay gap between school and college teachers stands at £9,000. The Association of Colleges (AoC) also admits 98 per cent of English colleges use "flexible employment contracts" – code for precarious employment practices such as term-time only, hourly-paid or even zero-hours contracts.

Employers can choose to ignore the outcome when the UCU negotiates nationally with the AoC over things such as pay, conditions and workloads. For example, the AoC makes pay recommendations every year, yet in the main, colleges do not award any increase at all.

Low pay is having a devastating impact on the lives of our members. Last summer, we surveyed more than 2,700 workers from more than 200 colleges across England. We found that most college staff in England are financially insecure. Eight in ten said their financial situation is harming their mental health, and a shocking number reported skipping meals and restricting their use of hot water. Seven in 10 said they will leave FE unless pay and working conditions improve.

Workloads are also through the roof. On average, college staff do two extra days of work unpaid per week and more than nine in ten (93 per cent) say their workload has increased over the past three years.

A situation like this doesn't harm staff, but students too. A college workforce that is exhausted, precariously employed, struggling on

low pay and crushed under brutal workloads cannot be expected to deliver the best for students. We can do better, and we must.

"We know the money is there to pay staff fairly"

Last November, FE was reclassified as part of the public sector. The UCU welcomes this step but it should not be seen as an end itself. It's now time to negotiate a new settlement that respects our professionalism, rewards staff in line with other teachers and strategically invests in the future.

We know the money is there to pay staff fairly. National funding for 16 to 19-year-olds has increased by 8.4 per cent

this year, and UCU members are refusing to sit by and let the situation deteriorate.

More than 4,000 members across England have downed tools this academic year – the biggest strike wave ever to hit FE. Together, they won improved pay deals at more than 20 colleges. And just last week, in an indicative ballot, 87 per cent of voting members said they are prepared to strike to secure an above-inflation pay rise, binding national bargaining structures and fair workloads. This could pave the way for coordinated strike action across more than 200 colleges in England.

Our special sector conference is meeting imminently to decide the union's next steps, but it is clear that employers are risking unprecedented industrial unrest unless they address pay and workloads, and agree to enter into binding national bargaining agreements.

It won't do for college leaders to keep saying their hands are tied when what increases in funding there have been have not been shared with staff. The recruitment and retention crisis will not be solved by looking the other way to in-work poverty across the sector and hoping for an ever-willing supply of new lecturers to fill the gaps.

We know why this crisis is happening, and it's time to fix it.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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'Growing our own' through quality teacher education can help to plug gaps in recruitment



SARAH MARQUEZ

Dean of Higher Education, University Centre Leeds, a member of Luminate Education Group

Homegrown talent isn't the answer to all our recruitment problems but, with quality ITE, it offers some distinct advantages, explains Sarah Marquez

The challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers is becoming increasingly acute, exacerbated in FE by substantially lower pay scales. That is the troubling backdrop for the country's colleges as they strive to return to pre-Covid staffing levels, and it is no surprise that the services that were worse affected by the pandemic are now struggling.

FE providers are feeling the bite harder than most since they face an extra, double challenge: namely, the lower levels of pay they can offer and the fact that many of the technical and vocational lecturers they need can earn more within their chosen industry.

A report published by The Lifelong Education Commission and Chartered Institution for Further Education in February showed that average FE teacher wages were up to £10,000 lower than those of school teachers – and even further behind universities.

The same document suggested that staffing in FE may have fallen by one-third in the past 10 years, and that the vacancy rate at colleges averaged about 8 or 9 per cent, double the pre-pandemic level.

I have worked in FE for

several decades and have never seen teacher recruitment problems as bad as this. Part of the difficulty for institutions like ours, which provides higher education (HE) provision for Luminate Education Group's FE colleges, is that we're the "poor relation" in terms of our pay scales.

"ITE can provide a crucial pipeline of high-calibre new teachers"

But colleges are finding innovative ways around this problem, including by adopting a "grow-your-own" approach through their initial teacher education (ITE) provision. Introduced in 2018, ITE offers a non-traditional, apprenticeship-based route into the profession.

Here, ITE has provided a way

for us to home-grow our FE teachers for our campuses in Leeds, Harrogate and Keighley. We are basically talent-spotting as we train, and have had success stories in a number of fields, including computer games and business.

For those aiming to teach in FE in skill shortage areas such as maths and STEM, we also offer ITE bursaries to make the option more financially viable. And, as a widening participation (WP) institution, our teacher training is designed to fit around students' commitments. That means we attract many people from industry who want to retrain and whose experience is so valuable.

Of course the "home-grown" route can only do so much, and it is only a valid choice when your ITE provision is of a high enough quality.

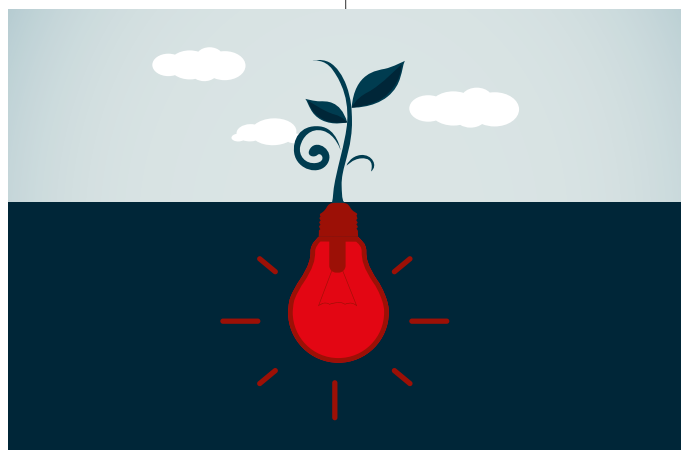
University Centre Leeds has just been given a 'good' Ofsted rating; the first provider in the north east, Yorkshire and Humber to achieve this under

the new inspection framework. Most of our trainees undertake their placements with Luminate Education Group and go on to gain employment at one of the group's colleges, which is a sure sign we're doing something right.

The Ofsted report highlighted how our trainees are fully embedded as members of staff within their teams; they're not "visitors" but valued colleagues. The inspectors also commented on the strength of our mentoring, and we make sure that the support network is there for trainees to link what's happening in the education classroom with practice in the workplace.

Much more has to be done if we're to successfully tackle this national recruitment and retention crisis. Targeted government funding is definitely needed to close the pay gap between FE (and its HE providers) and schools and universities. An awareness-raising campaign is also needed to educate people about how much we need people with real-world industry experience to enter teaching.

Both of those matters, sadly, are out of our control. What we and our fellow post-16 education providers can do, for now, is ensure that we continue delivering a quality ITE provision to provide a crucial pipeline of high-calibre new teachers to help us weather this storm.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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Learn and starve or earn and survive? How the cost-of-living crisis is becoming a cost-of-learning crisis


JOSH SPEARS

 English lecturer,
Darlington College

Learners are increasingly forced to make horrible choices between cash or the classroom, says Josh Spears

Education underwent a transformation during the Industrial Revolution. A series of reforms in 1870, collectively called *The Elementary Education Acts*, enabled children to obtain an education. Before the reforms, many were sent to work in the most dangerous parts of factories, where injury was common, all for paltry wages that their families needed to survive. Thanks to these acts and other social reforms that continued into the 20th century, children could access schooling free and, armed with an education, go on to careers that lifted them and their families out of poverty.

Now, as the effects of the cost-of-living crisis truly manifest, we are beginning to see regression. Our learners are having to make choices under a pressure they should never be subjected to in their teenage years: Do they learn and starve, or earn and survive?

In any other decade, such a claim would have been dismissed as hyperbole. If it wasn't for seeing it first-hand and talking to those involved in FE and the local community, I would hardly believe it myself.

I noticed the change last year. Learners who had been



attentive and bright at the start of the first term missed classes or turned up late. When they did attend, their excuse was always the same: they had been offered an extra shift.

Companies could be accused of being complicit, but from their side an increase in overheads means that employing 16-year-olds can be nearly £5 cheaper than employing someone in their 20s.

Things are now worse. Despite my college pulling as much funding into its bursary and free meal schemes as it can, more learners are asking, often at enrolment: "Can I skip classes to take a shift if I promise to catch up?"

Carole Todd, our vice-principal, agrees that it is a growing concern that learners are forced to make this choice between learning and earning. Few would disagree that a

strong vocational education opens doors to well-paying, non-exploitative careers, while entry-level jobs often start and end on the minimum wage

"They are lured away by promises of quick cash-in-hand work"

and zero-hours contracts.

But the reality is that last year in the construction department alone, a few dozen learners across the trades left the college half-way through the course, lured by promises of quick cash-in-hand work. It is the families that often make this choice for them. Financial hardship and cultural poverty mean they need their children to be

earning and lack the guidance to advise their children to seek out training courses that would allow them to learn and earn at the same time.

In the community, there is evidence of this change as well. Speaking to my local councillor, Sajna Ali, I discovered that teenagers are recruiting other teenagers to jobs with poor hours and pay for a little kickback of their own. "Often," Sajna told me, "these poor kids are being offered cash-in-hand work in restaurants owned by friends of the family miles away from the town. They are picked up mid-afternoon and returned after midnight, and for what? £25? How can they learn when they are so tired from such shifts?"

This decade will be defined by the situation we've called the "cost-of-living crisis", but if we fail to act on behalf of our learners it will soon become a "cost-of-learning crisis" that will damage the workforce for years to come.

FE has become a last line of defence between a life of skilled success and one of below-the-breadline suffering.

We need to be more vocal about the horrible choices our learners are forced to make. And we need a plan to mitigate the cultural poverty that inhibits families from seeking the right sorts of help, as well as plans to feed and support these learners economically.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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Employer projects and a work-ready culture: if it works for our UTC, it can work for you too


JEREMY GALPIN

 Former chair,
London Design and
Engineering UTC

London Design and Engineering UTC's employer engagement provides a model for opening the doors to apprenticeships for all, writes Jeremy Galpin

Skills and apprenticeships minister Robert Halfon grabbed our attention during his speech to the annual apprenticeship conference when he said: "To every young person I meet, my message is that no matter who you are, or where you're from, or whatever career you want to do, an apprenticeship will open doors for you."

With 42 per cent of London Design and Engineering (LDE) UTC's learners eligible for pupil premium and 55 per cent speaking English as a second language, we understand the importance of helping young people from a range of backgrounds seize the opportunities that are out there for them.

My impact report on the school's careers strategy reveals several interesting findings about the UTC's employer engagement and offers some insights into how other practitioners can open the doors to apprenticeships, further education and employment to all their learners.

Quality and quantity

The report, carried out with the support of LDE's leaders and its employer partners, found that our 569 students received an average of 19 encounters with employers during 2020-21. The target under the Gatsby benchmarks is just one.

The tremendous work of staff to achieve this has rightly been recognised. Employer engagement

manager Janice Tricks' work bringing employers and students together was cited three times during an education select committee hearing last November.

But more than quantity, it's the breadth and depth of that engagement that is the real key to success. Skanska ran mental health and wellbeing sessions for years 12 and 13. National Grid embedded power engineering sessions in year 9 science. With CVB, the Costain Vinci Construction Grands Projects and Bachy Soletanche JV, Tideway, which is building the "super sewer" under London, offered advice and support about job roles where A Level students could apply their maths skills.

More than two-thirds (68 per cent) of learners agreed or strongly agreed that they had met a whole range of employers at the school.

A culture of engagement

The essential ingredients of a UTC also produce results. Associate principal James Culley told the report students are "part of a professional working

environment", allowing them to "slowly develop confidence" and their employability skills on a day-to-day basis.

This is achieved through work experience, but also by the UTC keeping office hours rather than traditional school hours and by students learning on industry-standard equipment with expert teachers.

"Our students received an average of 19 encounters with employers"

Ninety-four per cent of learners agreed that they were given information on apprenticeship vacancies. The same proportion of our leavers said that they had been given good advice on how to apply for apprenticeships and other opportunities.

One of LDE's alumni, who now works as an apprentice site engineer, gave us a brilliant

illustration of the importance of believing in our learners and presenting them with opportunities beyond the curriculum. In the report, he was glowing about having had the chance to meet ministers and take part in radio and TV interviews as one of our student ambassadors.

Getting started

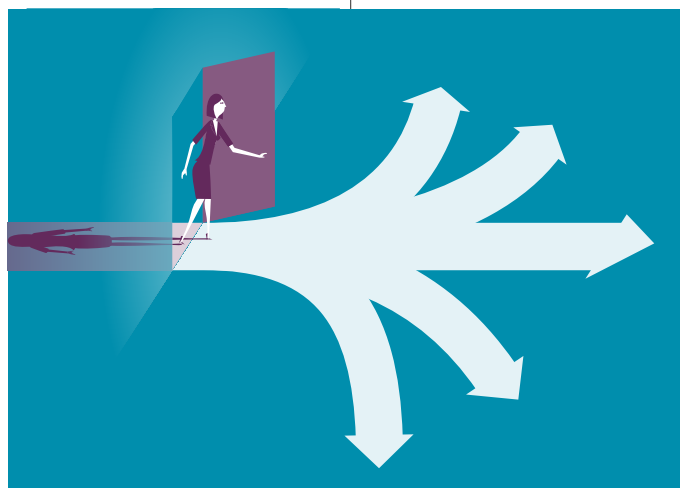
Our research has led us to several recommendations for how employers, learners, and providers can create a more effective engagement programme.

For employers, governorship roles can provide valuable insights into a provider's potential and how their projects can fit with the provider's curriculum. Bringing employers on in this way can also help to create a sense of mutual endeavour.

For learners and families, tracking employer engagements is a powerful measure of how much they are creating opportunities for themselves. It's also an important addition to their CV. Work experience opportunities are out there, and directing them to sites such as LinkedIn is a great place to start.

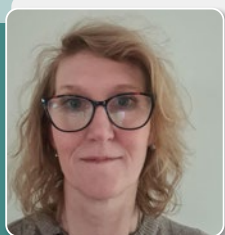
For colleges and training providers, maintaining long-term employer relationships is key. To make the most of those relationships, leaders should support employers to develop projects for students and support staff to use employer engagement across the curriculum.

Perhaps the best piece of advice is from our apprentice site engineer: "You've got to want to do things".



Bulletin

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**Rachel Quinn**

Director, East Midlands Institute of Technology

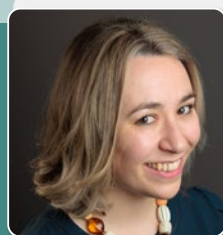
Start date: March 2023

Previous Job: Head of People and Skills, D2N2 LEP

Interesting fact: Rachel is also a ceremony officer – essentially a celebrant registrar – which means she spends her weekends conducting weddings, civil partnerships, citizenship and civil baby naming ceremonies.

Movers & Shakers

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

**Charlotte Bonner**

CEO, EAUC - The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education

Start date: February 2023

Previous Job: National Head of Education for Sustainable Development, Education and Training Foundation

Interesting fact: Charlotte is a self-professed train geek and enjoys long distance overland travel. The furthest she's got without flying (so far) is Tokyo, Japan.

If you want to let us know of any new faces at the top of your college, training provider or awarding organisation please let us know by emailing news@feweek.co.uk

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