

FEWEEK

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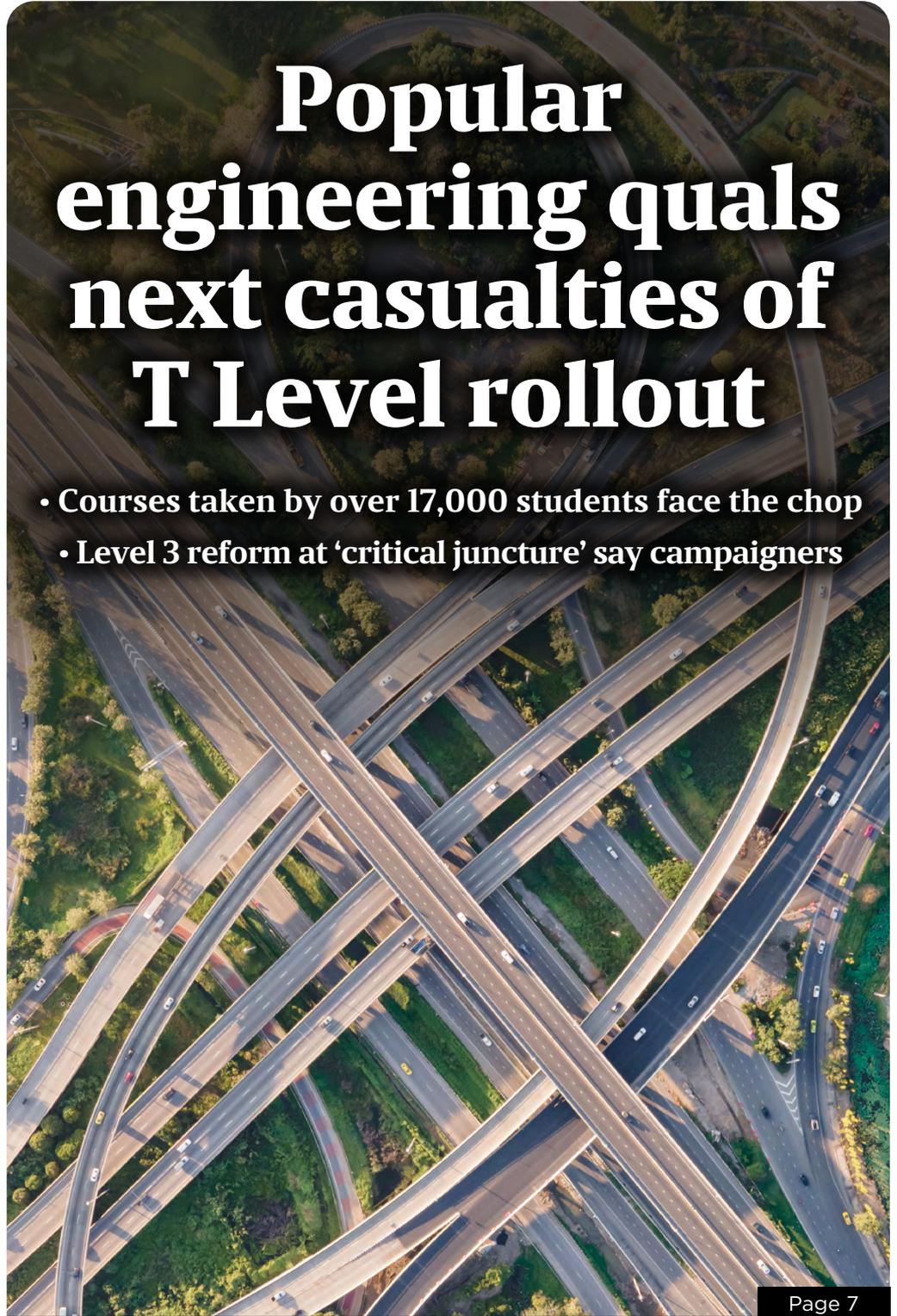
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MEET THE TEAM



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News

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AELP chief Hickie suspended pending investigation

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EXCLUSIVE

Jane Hickie, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, has been suspended pending an investigation, *FE Week* understands.

Hickie has worked at the membership body since 2016, initially as chief operating officer before taking over the top job in July 2020 when former leader Mark Dawe stepped down.

The reasons for Hickie's suspension are unclear. AELP chair Nichola Hay and vice chair Rob Foulston, who took the action, will support the organisation's senior team for an interim period.

An AELP spokesperson said: "We

understand there are rumours surrounding AELP and, for the record, we do not comment on individual employees. We also ask all our employees, members and associates not to speculate.

"We can however provide reassurance to our members that the chair and vice chair of AELP will be supporting the senior management team on the operational leadership of the organisation for an interim period while our CEO, Jane Hickie, is taking a short period of absence."

Hickie was approached for comment.

AELP represents around 800 organisations that deliver training and vocational learning. Before joining the body, Hickie was operations and corporate partnerships director for Groundwork, the national environmental charity.

She was also previously head of



Jane Hickie

regeneration at Genesis Housing Group and spent seven years at a firm called West London Leadership, recruiting corporates into a network which provided pro-bono support to hard-pressed communities.

Colleges offered slice of £165m fund to plug local skills gaps

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Colleges are being invited to bid for a slice of a £165 million fund designed for initiatives that "respond to the specific priorities" identified in each area's local skills improvement plan (LSIP).

The Department for Education launched the local skills improvement fund (LSIF) this week. It aims to help "plug local skills gaps" and "get more people into jobs closer to home".

Further education providers can use the cash to "renovate facilities with up-to-date equipment, help to upskill teachers, and deliver new courses in key subjects such as green construction, carbon capture and cyber security", according to DfE guidance.

Robert Halfon, the minister for skills, apprenticeships and higher education, claimed the funding would "revolutionise how we plug local skills gaps and provide a boost to the economy".

Successful applicants will receive funding to invest in projects that must be linked to "priorities" that have come out of the employer-led LSIP for their area.

First proposed in the FE white paper in January 2021, LSIPs aim to make colleges and training providers align the courses they offer to local employers' needs. They have been created by employer representative bodies – mostly local chambers of



commerce – in every region of the country.

Final LSIPs will not be submitted by the employer representative body for each area until May 31 and published in the summer. But DfE guidance says colleges can use the draft plan priorities, which were shared with them on March 31, to develop their LSIF application.

Independent providers can be delivery partners in LSIF-funded projects, but they can't be "lead" applicants and therefore cannot submit bids directly.

The LSIF is the successor to a previous pot of cash called the strategic development fund (SDF), which was worth £157 million for the FE sector to invest in equipment and facilities in areas such as electric and hybrid vehicle maintenance, automation and artificial intelligence.

Results of the bids to the new LSIF are expected to be announced by the DfE in October 2023.

New provider 'power' over EPAOs risks 'race to the bottom'

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EXCLUSIVE

A new rule that puts the power of choosing apprenticeship end-point assessment organisations (EPAO) into the hands of training providers will cause a “race to the bottom” on quality, officials have been warned.

The Department for Education announced this week that from August 1, the register of EPAOs will merge with the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP) and be called the “apprenticeship providers and assessment register” (APAR).

“Provider beware – don’t sacrifice long-term quality and reputation for ‘quick wins’”

Included in the move was a “bombshell” statement, as described by one EPAO, that will make training providers responsible for choosing which organisation should do the end-point assessment for their employers’ apprentices, rather than the employer itself.

Experts told *FE Week* that providers have always been the main “influencers” when it comes to EPAO selection, although officially it has always been the employers’ choice and they usually pick from a “beauty parade” of offers.

But the new rule will empower providers to “game” the system by “using their right to negotiate the prices for EPA”, according to Terry Fennel, chief executive of awarding body and EPAO, FDQ Ltd.

He said: “Fundamentally now employers are more interested in quality assured services for their apprentices over price

for EPA, therefore they are more likely to ‘shop around’ to find the best EPAO. However, providers often behave in reverse, putting ‘price’ over anything else so they will ‘barter’ with EPAOs to get the bottom price.

“If the max charged for an EPA is £2,000, but the EPAO is beaten down to £1,000 the difference is pocketed by the training provider therefore they have commercial incentive to always go with the lowest price.”

The price of an EPA is usually between 11 to 20 per cent of an apprenticeship funding band.

Helen Shinner, managing director of 1st for EPA, agreed with Fennel.

She told *FE Week*: “Many believe that this change is simply formalising what already occurs. While it’s true that many providers advise employers, we find that having the final decision does keep employers engaged in the process. Plus, they hold the power to switch EPAO if they see the need.

“The big concern is that the change may create a temptation for providers to use as few EPAOs as possible, to keep processes and systems to a minimum. While this may seem like a simplified approach, there’s a danger of taking the easiest

route, rather than the best one.”

Shinner continued: “This will hit particularly hard for providers serving niche markets, where they may find that it is the niche EPAOs that hold the assessment expertise, as well as superior customer service. The ultimate result may be a drop in quality and impact apprentice certification.

“The message is: provider beware – don’t sacrifice long term quality and reputation for ‘quick wins’”

Charlotte Bosworth, managing director of Innovate Awarding, an EPAO that is part of the Lifetime Training Group, said she didn’t see this move as “much as a concern as others”.

Her biggest concern is if EPAOs are “tiered” on the new APAR register so the assessment organisations are “deemed as a subcontractor”.

“This could lead to providers wanting to drive down the price of end-point assessment and create a system where EPAOs are competing mostly on price, which will end up impacting on quality,” she said.

The DfE said further information and guidance on both changes for employers, providers and EPAOs will be made “in the next few weeks”.



Revealed: 93 courses cleared to make way for wave 3 T Levels

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Ninety-three courses taken by over 17,000 students face the axe as the government reveals its latest hit-list of level 3 qualifications.

Popular courses for 16 to 19-year-olds in engineering and manufacturing are set to lose their funding from 2025 as officials continue to clear the way for their flagship T Level qualifications.

The qualifications sentenced to defunding this week rival wave 3 of the T Level rollout. They include Pearson's BTEC national foundation diploma in engineering, the BTEC national extended diploma in engineering and IMI's diploma in light vehicle maintenance. More than 8,200 young FE students enrolled on those qualifications in 2020/21.

Teaching of wave 3 T Levels began in September 2022, bringing in business and administration, legal, finance and accounting and engineering and manufacturing. Those students will complete in 2024. Overlap qualifications will be removed the year after, in 2025.

Skills minister Robert Halfon announced yesterday that the Department for Education had identified 93 level 3 qualifications in total that overlap with wave 3 T Levels and will therefore lose their funding.

The DfE previously announced that 134 other level 3 courses that overlap with waves 1 and 2 of T Levels also face defunding.

"We are reforming technical qualifications as the current qualifications do not consistently progress young people to related employment," Halfon said.

"Removing funding from technical qualifications which overlap with T Levels will ensure young people can feel confident that they are studying technical qualifications which will prepare them for jobs in their chosen occupation."

DfE data shows that, of the 93, 36 had no enrolments and 24 had fewer than 100 enrolments in 2020/21. Enrolment data "wasn't available" for six qualifications.

The remaining 26 qualifications recorded 16 to 19 enrolments totalling 17,120 in 2020/21.

Pearson, which offers the popular BTEC, is the most affected awarding organisation, with 12,010 enrolments in 2020/21 across 18 qualifications earmarked for defunding.

EAL and IMI are the next most affected awarding organisations, with 2,150 and

1,180 enrolments on affected enrolments respectively.

Freya Thomas Monk, Pearson's managing director for vocational qualifications and training, told *FE Week*: "Our BTEC nationals in business and enterprise are highly regarded by learners and employers and we welcome that they are not on the provisional list of qualifications that was published."

Of the 18 Pearson qualifications that have been listed, Thomas Monk said: "We will be writing to our customers shortly with what this announcement means for them and their learners."

Pearson confirmed that it will not appeal to save any of the qualifications. Other awarding bodies impacted by the wave 3 overlap list have until July 6 to appeal.

The most popular qualification on the list is Pearson's level 3 national foundation diploma in engineering, with 3,790 enrolments in 2020/21.

The qualification features as one of 75 applied general qualifications (AGQs) already deemed ineligible for consideration as an alternative to T Levels based on analysis by the Sixth Form Colleges Association.

James Kewin, SFCA deputy chief executive, said the inclusion of engineering courses on the latest list "serves as a reminder of the sort of popular and respected courses that young people will no longer be able to access in the future".

Data obtained through a freedom of information request by the Protect Student

Choice campaign, which SFCA leads, found that 68 per cent of 16 to 18-year-olds currently studying applied general qualifications are enrolled on courses that will not be funded in the future.

"Ministers have reneged on their commitment to only defund a small proportion of AGQs and taken the extraordinary step of preventing 55 per cent of these qualifications from even starting the approval process," Kewin said.

"This high-handed approach and steadfast refusal to acknowledge concerns about the direction of level 3 reform will leave many young people without a viable pathway at the age of 16."

A provisional list of qualifications that overlap with the fourth and final wave of T Levels will be published "later this year".

Kewin said: "We are now at a critical juncture in the reform process and we need ministers to start listening before irreparable damage is done to the life chances of tens of thousands of young people. A change to the defunding process is the absolute minimum we need, but delaying a bad idea does not stop it from being a bad idea – AGQs have a vital role to play alongside A levels and T Levels in the future."

DfE said the final wave 3 overlap list will be published "in the autumn" following decisions on appeals from the awarding bodies.

IMI and EAL were approached for comment but did not reply at the time of going to press.

PROVISIONAL LIST OF QUALIFICATIONS OVERLAPPING WITH WAVE 3 T LEVELS*

Qualification name	16-19 enrolments 2020/21
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Foundation Diploma in Engineering	3790
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Engineering	3370
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Engineering	1300
IMI Level 3 Diploma in Light Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Principles (VRQ)	1120
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Certificate in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	1090
City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Engineering	640
OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Diploma in Engineering	620
EAL Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma in Engineering Technologies	580
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	550
EAL Level 3 Diploma In Engineering Technologies	540
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Award in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	440
EAL Level 3 Technical Extended Diploma in Engineering Technologies	410
OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Extended Diploma in Engineering	290
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering	280
EAL Level 3 Extended Diploma in Engineering Technologies	280
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	250
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering	240
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Mechanical Engineering	180
City & Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Certificate In Engineering	180
NCFE Level 3 Diploma in Skills for Business: Sales and Marketing	150
EAL Level 3 Certificate in Engineering Technologies	150
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Manufacturing Engineering	140
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Manufacturing Engineering	140
EAL Level 3 Diploma in Engineering Technology	140
City & Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Engineering (720)	130
Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering	120

*Qualifications with over 100 enrolments - see feweek.co.uk for full list
Source: Department for Education

Construction training body takes wrecking ball to subcontracting

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One of the largest providers of construction apprenticeships has ended its troubled subcontracted provision and dropped from Ofsted 'outstanding' to 'requires improvement'.

The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) tumbled from the watchdog's top grade, which it achieved twice in the 2010s, in a report published this week.

The executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education and chaired by former Education and Skills Funding Agency chief Peter Lauener, has been among the biggest providers of subcontracted provision in further education for the past decade.



“We now focus on specialist apprenticeship delivery in niche provision”

But Ofsted's latest report revealed it has stepped away from the practice after finding ineffective oversight, with inspectors stating that leaders "focus too heavily on contract compliance and not on the quality of education".

CITB confirmed it is winding down its subcontracted delivery, which it currently undertakes with 24 partners in areas like carpentry and joinery, construction skills and bricklaying.

The organisation said the decision was

linked to government policy in 2021, which demanded providers in FE significantly reduce their subcontracted provision after scandals and cases of poor oversight were brought to light.

Ofsted's previous report on CITB from 2017 showed it had 9,000 apprentices on its books, but the report from this week showed just 629.

The company claimed this did not, however, represent a dramatic decrease in its direct provision.

A spokesperson said: "The number of learners reduced from 9,000 because we made a strategic decision to withdraw from managing subcontracting providers. In 2017 the significant majority of learners were in subcontracted provision, rather than our own CITB apprenticeships.

"We reviewed our strategy for apprenticeships delivery and took the

decision in 2021 to discontinue our subcontracted provision. We now focus on specialist apprenticeship delivery in niche provision that it would be difficult or prohibitively expensive for other providers to deliver."

The CITB spokesperson said that Ofsted's report also included "many examples of high-quality practice" at the organisation, adding that it has "committed investment to improve our training for apprentices and continue to transform provision with a focus on improving performance monitoring, supporting staff to deliver quality, specialist learning and, providing high-quality careers guidance".

Ofsted's report comes months after CITB's accounts revealed it faces a clawback of up to £10.3 million to the ESFA following an audit of historic non-compliant apprenticeships data.

News

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Care apprenticeship funding could be in line for 'levelling up'

ANVIKSHA PATEL ANVIKSHA.PATEL@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Senior officials joined FE Week editor Shane Chown on the main stage at the Skills and Education Group's annual conference this week to debate 'levelling up the sector'. Here's are the highlights:

Double cash bump for care apprenticeships?

Officials are considering boosting adult care apprenticeship funding by more than one band, FE Week understands.

The government launched an exceptional funding band review for 20 apprenticeships under the most pressure from rising costs last year. But the outcome of the process, which has since been stripped down to just 10 standards and was supposed to be wrapped up by May 1, has been beset with delays and is yet to surface.

The hold-up is down to the Treasury, FE Week understands, but sources indicate there could be good news on the horizon for the two adult care apprenticeships that are part of the review and funded at a current rate of £3,000 per apprentice.

Officials have raised the possibility of bumping them up by more than the stated maximum uplift of one funding band and, during this week's Skills and Education Group conference, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) delivery director Rob Nitsch indicated that this could happen.

Asked by FE Week editor Shane Chown whether care apprenticeships will move up by more than one funding band, he simply replied "maybe".

Nitsch added: "Some of the [challenges] are ingrained. There is the issue of pay, completion rates in that sector are woefully low. It's certainly not at the back of the queue."

He said the institute was "absolutely supportive" of the funding band review and acutely aware of challenges in the care sector, following a recent FE Week investigation which highlighted the viability of the funding model in care training.



Shelagh Legrave



Shane Chown



Rob Nitsch

When asked when IfATE would announce the review's results, Nitsch shirked responsibility for their publication. He said the institute's role was to make a recommendation on funding bands to the Department for Education, who then report to Treasury.

Colleges can't staff priority courses

Earlier in the panel session, Shelagh Legrave, the FE commissioner, was pressed on why just three intervention reports were published last year, plus one so far in 2023. Her predecessor Richard Atkins released 20 reports in 2020.

"Legally, if colleges ended up in inadequate financial health, we would have to publish an intervention report," she said. "So that does suggest that there were fewer colleges in inadequate financial health."

She added: "The danger of that is that we look as if we're OK as a sector, when in fact

financially we're not."

Legrave explained that, in her tour of the country's colleges, she is seeing the impact of years of financial pressures.

"There is a real danger that the sector will not be able to deliver the reforms that the government is looking for in further education because you can't find the staff to teach the qualifications. Every college I've been to has not been able to honour some qualifications because they can't find the expertise to teach it."

Ofsted prepares for new inspection framework

Ofsted's Paul Joyce, deputy director of FE and skills, revealed that the

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inspectorate has embarked on a review of the implementation of the education inspection framework (EIF).

"Given the EIF was introduced in 2019, we are embarking on a review in terms of how it has been implemented," he said. "Is it working in the way it was intended to work? Is there anything we need to do differently? It's the right debate."

One area under the spotlight is how Ofsted inspects "large and complex" providers in FE and skills. Joyce reassured delegates that the regulator was not looking at expanding inspection teams for large providers. "There is no more money for inspections," he said.

"If anything, I'm looking at notice periods and whether some of our larger providers need more notice to be able to get the stakeholders together that you want us to meet with," he added.

Joyce also said that Ofsted was reviewing its reports as some providers complain they are "quite short, not detailed enough and aren't unique enough to the provider".

Elsewhere at the conference, senior Ofsted inspector Julie Ashton said the organisation's internal data tool – the further education and skill intelligence tool (FESIT) – is finally set to be shared with providers in the autumn despite plans to put it into the public domain two years

ago.

"They said that two years ago, but there have been various things happening in the last two years," she quipped, adding that the regulator was having some technical issues with its release.



Paul Joyce

The Skills Network pulls out of apprenticeships

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EXCLUSIVE

A major online training provider has put a stop to its loss-making apprenticeship division and turned its full focus to skills bootcamps and adult education.

The Skills Network (TSN) this week started the process of moving its current apprentices to alternative providers to complete their training.

Chief executive Mark Dawe put the decision to pull out of the provision down to the "real challenges" with current funding levels for apprenticeships in sectors such as care, which do not cover the true cost of delivery.

TSN moved into the apprenticeships space at the time of the levy reforms in 2017. The provision is a minor part of its business, having recorded fewer than 300 starts in each of the past two years in sectors that also include early years, leadership and management and IT.

FE Week understand that fewer than 30 staff will be impacted by the closure of TSN's apprenticeships.

Dawe said: "It is a sad but well-established fact that there are real challenges with the current level of apprenticeship funding bands.

"We had already suspended starts in care, as we couldn't continue to guarantee a high quality of provision for this vital sector, with the funding government provides per learner."



Mark Dawe

TSN, rated 'good' by Ofsted, has long been one of the largest providers of subcontracted provision in further education. Government data shows the provider currently holds 36 separate subcontracting deals with colleges and councils worth over £8.5 million.

The company's accounts show it enrolled over 25,000 students onto adult education courses last year, which are all delivered online.

TSN has also moved into skills bootcamps – a flagship government scheme worth over half a billion pounds that involves free courses of up to 16 weeks in length designed to get learners quickly trained in areas of key skills shortages.

"Hundreds" of people enrol onto TSN's bootcamps every month, according to the company, in areas that include care,

digital marketing, cyber security and project management.

TSN said this period of "exciting growth" in bootcamps, the company's online resources and adult education contributed to the "strategic decision" to cease its direct apprenticeship delivery.

A statement from the provider said: "We are very proud of our achievements in the apprenticeship space in which we have helped over 700 apprentices across a variety of sectors over the past five years. But the time is right for us to focus on the increased growth of our core business, maximising the positive difference we can make to learners, businesses and communities across the UK."

TSN added that, while it will not be providing direct delivery of apprenticeships going forward, the company will "continue to support other providers of apprenticeships through our online learning resources and assessment packages through our platform EQUAL".

TSN's accounts for 2022 show turnover of £18.8 million but a loss before tax of £700,000.

The financial statements said the "negative financial impact" for the year was due to "combined cost implications of the return to normality post Covid-19, the wider economic factors and the new strategic activities" but added the company "expects these changes to bottom out and improve during 2023 and onwards".



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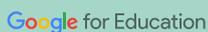


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Tributes to 'brilliant and generous' former Nottingham college principal

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The former principal of New College Nottingham, who led a city-wide merger of colleges in the late 1990s, has died after a short illness.

Dame Patricia Morgan-Webb dedicated her career to education in Nottingham. She became head of Clarendon College in 1991, then spearheaded its merger in 1998 with Basford Hall College, Arnold and Carlton College and High Pavement Sixth Form College.

What became New College Nottingham (NCN), one of the largest FE colleges in the UK, is now known as Nottingham College following its merger with Central College Nottingham in 2017.

Morgan-Webb was made a dame for services to further education in 2000, becoming the first FE college principal to receive the honour. She died on May 16, two days before her 80th birthday.

Sir Geoff Hall, who served as her vice principal at NCN, led the tributes. He remembered Morgan-Webb as a "brilliant mentor, a stimulating colleague and a great friend".

He added: "Her commitment to equal opportunities was uncompromising. Many who served under her went on to leadership roles at other colleges or in the wider sector."

Dame Sally Dicketts, the former CEO of Activate Learning, said Morgan-Webb was "very generous" when she mentored her as a young principal.

"She was astute, future-focused, gave great advice, was very generous with her time particularly for me, as a mentor," Dicketts added. "She was always available and helpful, never overbearing with her advice."

"She had stature. She was well respected." The daughter of a coal miner and a



Dame Patricia Morgan-Webb

homemaker, Morgan-Webb was raised in south Wales. She graduated with a degree in history from the University of Swansea in 1964 and entered the FE sector after getting a post-graduate diploma in education.

After taking some time away to raise her son, Morgan-Webb returned to full-time work in 1979, rising to become principal of Clarendon College in 1991.

She was principal of NCN until her retirement in 2003. While at the helm, the college achieved the Queen's Anniversary Award for Further and Higher Education in 2002.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said he got to know Morgan-Webb during the merger when he worked in the voluntary sector in Nottingham. She encouraged him to work in FE.

"She was a smart operator, passionate about learning, students, skills, fairness and worked tirelessly in Nottingham and

beyond to improve things," he said. "She got things done, got results and made a big impact."

"She inspired and encouraged me enormously to get into FE and I will forever be grateful to her for that. She will be missed, but her legacy continues in Nottingham."

Morgan-Webb also led some building renovations in Nottingham, including the regeneration of the Lace Market area of the city. "She had quite an innovative design for what she wanted for that building," said Dicketts.

After retiring from NCN, Morgan-Webb established The Morgan Webb Education Ltd, an educational consulting firm. She also chaired the AoC Beacon Awards.

The funeral service is will be held at Sutton Coldfield Crematorium, Birmingham at 11.30am June 23, 2023. Family flowers only. Donations in Pat's name to the NSPCC.

News

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Scandal-hit Brooklands College's accounts finally surface

BILLY CAMDEN
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EXCLUSIVE

Brooklands College has finally published accounts for the first time in four years.

The Surrey-based college was stung by an apprenticeship subcontracting scandal that came to light in 2019 following investigations by *FE Week*.

Left with a £25 million debt demanded by the government's Education and Skills Funding Agency, the small college, which brings in just £11 million in income annually, has spent years negotiating a repayment deal that would prevent it from going bust.

In recent months the college has unveiled plans for a £45 million re-development, which includes selling an historic building and land for homes, to pay back the debt.

Even though the college is waiting on the local council to agree to planning permission, the plan, approved by the ESFA, has moved the college's financial health up from 'inadequate' to 'good' and enabled the accounts for the past four years to be approved and published.

The accounts reveal the £25 million debt has been "discounted" to £23.1 million and can be repaid in the next three years.

"The amount due to the ESFA shown as a long-term creditor of £23m is supported by a repayment agreement and will not be called in for three years unless the development of the state enables this to be repaid sooner," its latest accounts state.

They also show the principal that



led the college at the time of the subcontracting scandal, which took place between 2014 and 2018, Gail Walker, received "compensation" of £14,175 when she after she resigned. The accounts state this was for "statutory redundancy only".

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The 16 'old and tired' college buildings getting a £600m revamp

JOSHUA STEIN
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EXCLUSIVE

Sixteen college estates across England that are "nearing the end of their life" are sharing £600 million to undergo major rebuilds, *FE Week* can reveal.

The Department of Education has set aside the money pot to revamp college buildings which have "some of the worst condition need in England", according to an answer to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

Some of the buildings identified have been empty for long periods of time due to unsustainable running costs and safety concerns, while others cannot be used for teaching owing to extremely out of date facilities.

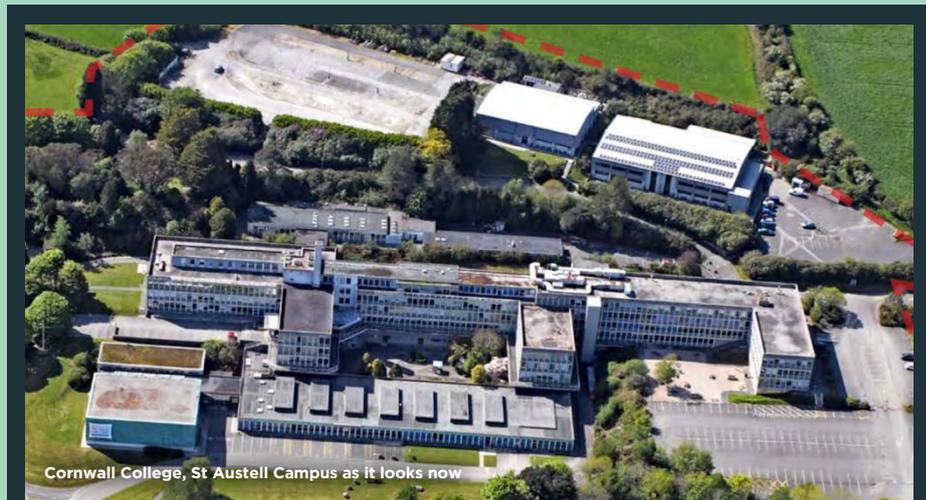
Of the hundreds of college buildings up and down the country, the Department of Education selected the 16 sites as the most in need. Assessors deemed the best way to get them up to scratch would be demolition and a full rebuild in most cases.

The fund itself forms stage two of the £1.5 billion FE capital transformation fund, which was launched by the Department of Education to refurbish and upgrade colleges in the UK.

Stages one and four of the total fund involved England's 180-odd colleges receiving individual allocations from pots of £200 million and £280 million respectively. Stage three of the total fund involves 75 colleges sharing £410 million.

But more than a year after stage two was announced, only one of the 16 colleges to get a slice of the £600 million, Newcastle & Stafford College Group, has managed to get a contract signed with a building contractor and started work, *FE Week's* FOI response shows.

Last February, the college appointed Bowmer & Kirkland to develop a three-storey skills and innovation centre at its



Cornwall College, St Austell Campus as it looks now



The planned refurbishment for Cornwall College, St Austell Campus

Stafford campus, for £23.5 million.

Work at Stafford is scheduled for completion and handover at the end of June, while the college expects the buildings to be occupied from September with its new cohorts, a spokesperson for the college said.

But work is far from starting at most of the other 15 colleges, which in the meantime are having to fork out money to maintain buildings, and in some situations, have had to leave buildings empty.

The £600 million fund is split between the different colleges depending on need. Around £40 million is going to Cornwall College,

where the vast majority of its St Austell Campus will be demolished and then rebuilt into a new and improved campus.

St Austell campus is no longer fit for purpose. Originally, the main building was the headquarters for the local clay industry, which the college "remodelled".

"It's sadly a large office block, and it's not fit for modern day teaching," John Evans, chief executive and principal of the Cornwall College Group told *FE Week*.

The main six-storey building is not in

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

News

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CONTINUED

a fit state, and the college has already moved out of the two top floors "because it leaks so badly", Evans added.

The longer that goes on for, the more money needs to be spent on maintenance – which drains money from frontline provision. That, coupled with an annual £750,000 spend on energy, means Cornwall College would have had to close the whole site for post-16 students and apprentices – leaving it with the task of trying to relocate around 1,200 students – without the injection from the FE capital transformation fund.

Cornwall's other campuses are more than an hour away and, with no sixth forms in St Austell the area would really have suffered, Evans said, and added that St Austell "deserves a high-quality post-16 facility".

BAM Construct has been contracted for the Cornwall project, which will go to planning in June with an aim to start work in September and complete by the middle of 2025.

Elsewhere, most of the Isle of Wight College's pre-1970s campus, where too much funding is sapped up on energy and maintenance, will be demolished.

"It's really basic now," Ros Parker, principal and chief executive of the college said. "The buildings require an awful lot of investment to keep them going.

"Hopefully the new building will result in energy savings, and a more efficient and more effective build that will be more sympathetic to the environment."

Isle of Wight College is in a unique

position in that it provides the only further education provision on the island, so it needs to offer "the broadest range of skills possible" to prepare islanders for work, Parker added.

The college expects the new build to offer courses in electrical installation, a restaurant that will be open to the public where catering students can practice their new skills in a professional setting, and new sports and fitness facilities.

Stanmore College's project will involve demolishing five buildings and a boiler house which are "beyond their economic life [...] and cannot be retrofitted", according to Bob Pattni, the college's deputy principal for finance and planning.

He said the capital funding secured by Stanmore, the value of which could not be shared due to DfE commercial sensitivity rules, would be used to help provide "an excellent standard of educational facilities" for students.

"Any efficiencies made through being more sustainable and reducing utility bills will be reinvested into the classroom and staff," Pattni added.

For instance, it could fund additional staffing, enhance continuing professional development, or go towards high tech teaching materials such as VR goggles.

Stanmore College has submitted an outline planning application for the project, which it

THE 16 COLLEGES GIVEN PART OF A £600M CAMPUS RENOVATION FUND

Beacon Centre, Blackburn College
Lansdowne Site, Bournemouth & Poole College
Brooksby Melton College, SMB Group
Ashington Campus, Education Partnership North East (Northumberland College)
St Austell Campus, Cornwall College
Houghall Campus, East Durham College
Rochdale site, Hopwood Hall College
Isle of Wight College
Great Yarmouth Campus, East Coast College
Stafford site, Newcastle & Stafford College Group
North Lindsey College, DN College Group
Merrist Wood College, Activate Learning
Strode College
Parsons Walk, Wigan & Leigh College
Yeovil College
Stanmore College

Source: Department of Education

expects to take three years from planning approval to completion.

Part of the £600 million funding is heading Yeovil College's way, as it undergoes a major repair worth more than £43 million, according to its most recent financial statement.

"[That] is a value the college would not be able to consider on its own," the accounts added. Three existing buildings will all be demolished and replaced, while a new construction centre will also be built.

There is no doubt the new funding is "very welcome" at all the colleges. "I can't state it enough, it's a massive game changer for post-16 education in St Austell," Cornwall's John Evans said. "On completion, it will become a draw for St Austell and have a positive impact on the local economy."

A DfE spokesperson said: "We want to build a world class further education system which delivers for all learners, and a key part of this is ensuring colleges are fit for the future.

"As part of this investment, the Department is working closely with 16 colleges in the second phase of the FE capital transformation programme, an initiative that spans multiple financial years, to improve some of the worst condition sites in the college estate in the most efficient way."



Stanmore College's Oak Building is one of three permanent buildings which will be replaced, alongside a boiler house and two temporary buildings

Manchester's MBacc will redress policy's academic bias and focus on local needs and opportunities



ANDY BURNHAM

Mayor, Greater Manchester

Manchester's new MBacc will sit alongside the EBacc and be based on GCSEs and other qualifications most favoured by local employers, says Andy Burnham

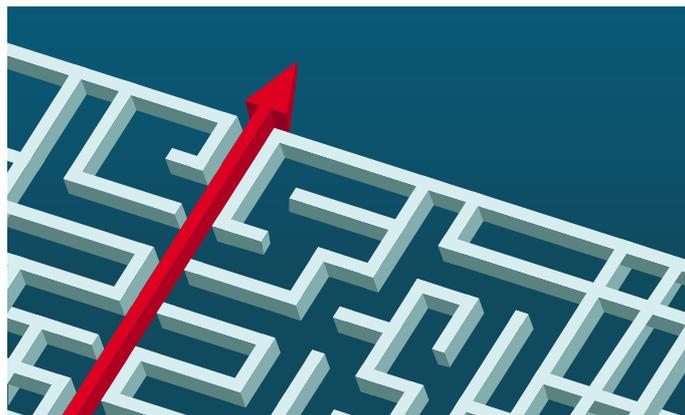
I am all in favour of helping young people who want to go to university to do so. But after decades of education policy dominated by the University route, under governments of all colours, 36 per cent of young people make that choice in Greater Manchester. Which begs the question: what about the 64 per cent who don't?

Our surveys of GM teenagers provide an answer to this question and make for difficult reading. Too many are left without a sense of direction or hope for their future, and feeling like second-class students.

We are determined to change this. Last week, seizing on the opportunities presented by the trailblazer devolution deal we recently agreed with the government, I unveiled plans for the UK's first integrated technical education system with the aim of giving young people two clear, equal paths at 14: one academic, one technical.

Young people wishing to go to university have a clear path. The English Baccalaureate - or EBacc - is based on the GCSEs most favoured by universities. From there, they progress to A Levels and use the UCAS system to find a university place.

But there is no equivalent for the young people who wish to take technical qualifications and



a more direct route to the world of work.

To create this balance, we are proposing a Greater Manchester Baccalaureate or MBacc, which would sit alongside the EBacc and be based on GCSEs and other qualifications most favoured by Greater Manchester employers. Our aim is to maximise people's chances of getting valuable qualifications and a good job in the growing success story of the Greater Manchester economy.

There will be a range of views on what should and shouldn't be included in the MBacc, so I am keen to hear from employers and educators. Following consultation, and subject to agreement with the government, our ambition is to start in September 2024.

For my part, I don't envisage two rigid, parallel routes but an approach with as much commonality as possible that will offer young people plenty of academic and technical options at 16 and the ability to switch between the two.

Here's my starter for ten to get the discussion going. I would propose that the MBacc has

three core, compulsory subjects: English, maths and - because practically every job in the GM economy is to some extent a digital job - either computer science or an alternative ICT qualification. Beyond that, students could choose from existing EBacc subjects and, critically, also subjects that are often currently excluded. That could be engineering, business studies or any of the creative subjects that have been worryingly downgraded over the past decade or so.

“Too many feel like second-class students”

The MBacc's aim is to lead people to a productive destination. To that end, we will build our integrated system around seven gateways reflecting the strongest areas of the Greater Manchester economy. These include sectors like

manufacturing and engineering, digital and technology, and health and social care. Each of the gateways will lead to a group of quality T Levels, other technical qualifications, apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships.

This approach will only work if young people have access to wider careers and life advice to make informed decisions, and enrichment opportunities to help them become 'work-ready'. It is also underpinned by 'Our Pass' - our free bus pass for 16- to 18-year-olds which opens up cultural and sporting activities, but also greater choice of education providers.

My belief is that a system of this kind, which offers a path for everyone, will help raise overall levels of attainment and school performance. If more students feel school is taking them somewhere and are constructively engaged at key stage 4, that can only be beneficial for all students.

My sense is our secondary headteachers feel the same way. James Eldon, headteacher of the Manchester Academy in Moss Side, told our launch event last week that he had invented his own version of the MBacc because he didn't feel he had enough to say to students and parents at options evenings. It made the case for change more powerfully than anything else.

We can no longer afford our historic snobbery about technical education. Devolution to the English regions finally gives us the chance to get this right - and fix another issue Westminster has long neglected.

Manchester delighted to host WorldSkills UK finals

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Colleges, training providers and universities across Greater Manchester will part-host the WorldSkills UK national finals this November.

Manchester College, Oldham College, Tameside College, Trafford College and Wigan and Leigh College have been chosen to host 40 finals between them.

“WorldSkills UK national finals shine a light on the vital importance of high-quality skills”

Mantra, a local training provider which specialises in logistics and automotive training, will host five finals, while Rochdale Training and Japanese robotics company FANUC will host each.

Two finals will take place at the



Ben Blackledge



University of Manchester, while four will be at the University of Salford. The finals begin on November 14 and culminate three days later in an awards ceremony at Bridgewater Hall.

The UK’s most skilled apprentices and students will compete in the finals across professions including automotive technology, aircraft maintenance and health and social care.

WorldSkills UK interim chief executive Ben Blackledge said: “As well as boosting young people’s personal skills and developing the skills that employers and the economy needs, events like the WorldSkills UK national finals shine a light on the vital importance of high-quality skills to the UK and the vast talent and potential we have in the next generation.”

Anna Dawe, chair of GMColleges and principal of Wigan and Leigh College, said she was “delighted” the finals are coming to Manchester. “WorldSkills UK is a showcase of the very best technical skills, so it is a cause for celebration that it is to be held in

a city-region that is creating the first integrated technical education system,” she added.

“We hope to make this a competition to remember for young people”

“Our university and independent training provider partners are also hosting finals and together we hope to make this a competition to remember for young people and apprentices.”

The national finals come at the end of a seven-month process that includes regional competition heats and intensive training.

AQA look at ‘Duolingo-style’ test for GCSE resitters

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England’s largest exam board is investigating whether a new “Duolingo-like” on-screen, on-demand test could help young people who repeatedly fail GCSE maths and English.

AQA is exploring whether a numeracy and literacy assessment would support more students who don’t get the grade 4 in both subjects needed to complete an apprenticeship or get a job.

It follows calls from the Association of Schools and College Leaders for a “passport” in the two subjects – a test taken between 15 and 19 when the learner is ready.

The recommendation was part of its “forgotten third” inquiry to “end the wasteful GCSE resit industry”.

In pre-pandemic 2019, just 30 per cent of students aged 17 or more achieved a grade 4 or above in English; 21 per cent in maths.

AQA is in the early stages of consulting school and college leaders and employers.

Ed Reza Schwitzer, the board’s head of external affairs, compared the potential assessment to the Duolingo app for learning languages, which also has an English proficiency assessment accepted by 4,000



Ed Reza Schwitzer



universities worldwide.

“Most people will accept now that Duolingo is a pretty good measure that someone can speak a language.

“We need to invest in creating programmes of learning that really engage and support pupils”

“So there’s a world in which you say – actually this young person hasn’t necessarily got a good grade on their maths GCSE, they want to do this apprenticeship, would it be enough to have a high-quality assessment from some sort of on-demand, on-screen provider?

“But it would be enough to say

actually yes I can do statistics, I can do proportions and the kind of numeracy you need me to do to do this apprenticeship.”

Tom Middlehurst, ASCL’s assessment specialist, said the union was “encouraged” by the research, but would prefer to see a new qualification.

Michelle Meadows, the former deputy Ofqual regulator, said AQA’s plan could help. “But we need to invest in creating programmes of teaching and learning that really engage and support pupils who find maths and literacy very challenging.

“Without this foundation, even the cleverest approach to assessment won’t get us very far in solving this enduring problem.”

Kate Shoemith, from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, said many people had the skill sets in literacy and numeracy for work or vocational qualifications, but struggled to sit “really pressurised” exams. “Anything that unlocks potential has to be positive.”

News

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Awards for college schemes that help with independent living

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Six specialist colleges have received awards for initiatives that help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to live independently and support their community.

Natspec, which represents specialist colleges across England and Wales, announced the winners of the Natspec Innovation Awards during a virtual ceremony yesterday.

Among the winners were Chadsgrove Educational Trust Specialist College in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, which won the student voice award for its student ambassador programme that led projects to support local organisations such as foodbanks.

Student ambassadors donated fresh produce grown in the college's garden as well as non-perishable goods to the local foodbank. Awards judge and disabled rights campaigner Alex Johnson said learners conducted "outstanding work in giving back to the community".

Hedleys College in Newcastle won the curriculum innovation award for its work with its local police force to introduce a more accessible cadet programme. Learners experienced what it was like to be a police officer, took part in a swearing-in ceremony and went behind the scenes with patrollers.

Derwen College in Shropshire was rewarded for its innovative partnership working with video production company Rocking Horse Media to produce content on the college.

Meanwhile, Hartlepool specialist college Catcote Futures won the mental health and wellbeing award for its project to immerse learners in sensory forest bathing, an initiative where students planned trails to walk among trees and in nature.



Former FE policy director at Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities and awards judge Liz Maudslay praised the project. She said it "made me realise how much we as teachers are concerned to ensure our students are continually learning and 'doing' and can sometimes forget that it is also important that they are supported in simply 'being'".

A redeveloped on-campus bungalow at Mansfield-based Portland College kitted out with accessible technology control such as Amazon's Alexa and Samsung Bixby won the innovative use of technology award. The London-based college taught learners how to use the technology for tasks such as operating heating, blinds, lights and the weekly shopping as part of its SMARTHome project, to promote and eliminate barriers that prevent their students from living independently.

Finally, the innovative routes into employment award went to The Hive College's traineeship programme. Judges said the programme, which combined English, maths

and ICT with occupational studies tuition and a work placement, "provides an ideal pathway into apprenticeships".

Natspec chief executive Clare Howard said: "During such straitened times, after the specialist post-16 sector has already faced years of underfunding, it is inspiring that our member colleges are not just making do but are brimming with new ideas and practices."

The eight-strong judging panel also included former Ofsted inspector Nigel Evans; Jeff Greenidge, director for Diversity for Association of Colleges; Rohan Slaughter, senior lecturer in Assistive Technology at the University of Dundee; Jane Hatton, founder and CEO of Evenbreak, a social enterprise run by and for disabled people; and Yolande Burgess, strategy director for London's communities at London Councils.

The winners will be presented with trophies at the Natspec National Conference on Tuesday 13 June. They also will receive a £250 CPD bursary.

NATSPEC AWARD WINNERS

Award category	Winner	Winning initiative
Curriculum innovation	Hedleys College	Police Cadet programme
Innovation in student voice (sponsored by Peridot Partners)	Chadsgrove Educational Trust Specialist College	Self-advocacy, active citizenship and community inclusion for independence in adulthood
Innovative approach to mental health and wellbeing (sponsored by AssuredPartners Hettle Andrews)	Catcote Futures	Sensory Forest Bathing
Innovative partnership working (sponsored by Innovation Broking)	Derwen College	Focus on Rocking Horse Media partnership
Innovative routes into employment	The Hive College	Traineeships At The Hive
Innovative use of technology (sponsored by teamSOS):	Portland College	Developing Independence through Maples SMARTHome

INSPECTION SECTION

Another 'outstanding' for Hawk Training

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Twickenham-based Hawk Training is celebrating another 'outstanding' Ofsted rating a decade after the provider was first awarded the grade.

The apprenticeship firm received grade ones in all areas barring personal development, which was judged 'good', in a report published this week following a visit in March.

Inspectors heaped praise on managers and staff who "ensure that the vast majority of apprentices benefit from a challenging and demanding curriculum". They said that leaders have "considered very carefully the content of programmes to ensure that apprentices build on existing and gain substantial new knowledge and skills".

The report said apprentices have an "extremely positive attitude towards their studies and are highly committed to their training". Many complete all targets they are set ahead of time, attendance is high and overall they make "very good progress, develop their confidence and achieve their qualifications".

Managing director Crawford Knott told *FE Week* the achievement was a testament to the dedication and commitment of his team despite a "really challenging time for independent training providers".

"Since the last time we were inspected, the landscape has changed hugely, obviously by the apprenticeship reforms in 2017 with the move to the levy, the switch from frameworks to standards and we've had a global pandemic."

Hawk, founded in 1988, delivers training in early years, business and administration, and team leading and management to over 1,000 apprentices and 400 employers.

Ofsted said Hawk Training apprentices receive "outstanding support" from tutors and praised their subject knowledge and

plans for on and off-the-job training activities. Inspectors found that apprentices also receive helpful careers advice and guidance.

Inspectors praised the "exceptional" behaviour of students who "rapidly develop a range of personal and professional behaviours that support them in their social and working lives".

"This result is a testament to the dedication and commitment of our team"

Leaders and managers were lauded for having a "forensic oversight of the quality of their provision, which they use to inform their clear and concise

improvement plans". They gain this oversight through activities such as sampling teaching, speaking with apprentices and employers, and reviewing the progress of apprentices.

The provider also has "highly effective" governors and non-executive directors who "have a broad skillset that they use with great effect to improve the provision". They have a "detailed understanding of further education and take a real interest in the experience that apprentices and their employers have with Hawk Training".

Knott said: "This is great for our employer partners and learners to receive the affirmation that we're delivering an outstanding service.

"We hear a lot of bad news about providers and colleges that have slipped from 'outstanding' or 'good', so for us, we are absolutely delighted."

Hawk is one of 40 independent training providers to currently hold a grade one judgment from Ofsted.

The screenshot shows the Hawk Training website. At the top is a navigation menu with links for 'About Us', 'Employer', 'Learner', 'Learning Zone', and 'Contact Us'. Below the menu is a large teal banner with the headline 'Hawk Training: Your OFSTED 'Outstanding' Training Provider'. The banner text reads: 'Here at Hawk Training we are passionate about learning. By appreciating each person is different and has different needs and aspirations, our programmes are personalised to help our learners and employers get the very best out of their experience with us.' A 'Discover' button is positioned at the bottom of the banner. To the right of the banner is a photo of two students looking at a screen. Below the banner are three smaller feature tiles: 'APPRENTICESHIPS' with a photo of a group of people, 'TRAINING COURSES & EVENTS' with a photo of a group of people, and 'LEARNING ZONE' with a graphic of a lightbulb and gears.

INSPECTION SECTION

Controversial 'inadequate' for London college

JASON NOBLE
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Croydon College has become the first general FE college to be branded 'inadequate' by Ofsted in seven years, after a "significant minority" of students reported instances of homophobic language and "taunting" behaviour.

But "extremely surprised and disappointed" leaders of the south London college have hit back and claimed the overall grade "does not fairly reflect what inspectors experienced during their visit and the evidence we provided".

Ofsted downgraded Croydon College to the lowest possible judgment from a previous 'good' grade last Friday following a visit in February.

It makes the college the first general FE college to be given the bottom overall rating under Ofsted's education inspection framework, which launched in 2019. The last general FE college to receive the judgment was Hereward College in 2016.

The mixed report included 'inadequate' grades for behaviours and attitudes and leadership and management but gave 'requires improvement' ratings for the quality of education, personal development, education programmes for young people and high needs provision. Apprenticeships and adult learning programmes were judged as 'good'.

The college confirmed that it had challenged several aspects of the report and submitted additional evidence, but said it was very disappointed the complaint was not upheld.

Inspectors said that "a significant proportion of learners who inspectors spoke with do not feel comfortable at college", particularly in social and communal spaces.

The report continued that "a significant minority of learners told inspectors they experience homophobic language and taunting and, at Coulsdon, female learners



do not feel comfortable in areas such as the student common room".

Despite the discomfort of learners, Ofsted inspectors regarded safeguarding arrangements as "effective".

Attendance for young learners was deemed too low, with leaders not setting high enough expectations of young learners' attendance and behaviour, inspectors said.

Croydon College merged with Coulsdon Sixth Form College in March 2019, but inspectors noted that there was "considerable variation" in the quality of teaching across the two colleges.

Croydon was characterised as a "positive experience", while at Coulsdon too many learners had a poor experience which resulted in a low proportion of students achieving qualifications.

Ofsted said the quality of education at Coulsdon had declined in the past three years, with tutors failing to prepare learners well enough for vocational exams there.

The report noted the challenges the college had faced, including staff recruitment problems, the aftermath of a flood and the issues from Covid-19, but said that leaders and governors had not moved quickly enough to improve the quality of provision and attendance.

A joint statement from the college's principal, Caireen Mitchell, and chair of governors, Tony Stevenson, said they were

"extremely surprised and disappointed" at the overall grading.

"While we acknowledge there are improvements to be made at both colleges, we feel strongly that the grade given does not fairly reflect what inspectors experienced during their visit and the evidence we provided," the leaders said.

"The very mixed profile of the inspection report, with two significant areas rated as 'good' and many positive comments about the quality of education and outcomes for all learners, does not align with the final grading delivered. Ofsted's concerns about the behaviours of a small number of learners are not behaviours we recognise on a day-to-day basis at our colleges. We raised our concerns directly with Ofsted and provided more evidence to address the areas highlighted."

An improvement plan was already in place and had been delivering improved attendance, the college said. It expects to demonstrate further improvements to inspectors in a monitoring visit in six months' time.

There were 2,585 young learners – around two-thirds of whom studied at Croydon with a third at Coulsdon – as well as 2,620 adult learners, 217 apprentices and 200 students with high needs at the college.

Croydon and Coulsdon had both received 'good' ratings during short inspections early in 2018.

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INTRODUCING

MUNIRA WILSON

Liberal Democrat
spokesperson for education



‘Fear not, we haven't forgotten about FE and skills’

JESSICA HILL
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As a coalition government seems increasingly likely, FE looks to the Lib Dems’ Munira Wilson to see if the party really is “the party of education” as its education spokesperson claims it to be

The central command of Munira Wilson’s party has avoided speaking on education issues lately.

The “latest news” section of the Lib Dems’ website features 97 stories and not one relates to education. The focus instead is on health, the environment and the cost of living.

Wilson blames this on education being a “low public priority”. In an Ipsos Mori poll last year, only 6 per cent of respondents cited “education/schools” as the most important issues facing Britain, the lowest score since 1984.

“When my team go out to journalists with education stories, there’s such little interest”

Wilson says. “It’s polling as such a low priority amongst the public. That makes me weep because...we need to see education as a future investment like infrastructure. It should be one of the biggest priorities for any government.”

Wilson is currently drawing up what she describes as a “strong education offer” in the Lib Dem manifesto.

Will Lib Dems be a voice for FE?

She highlights how FE funding has “fallen

Profile

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Munira Wilson speaking in the House of Commons



Munira Wilson visiting The People Hive in Twickenham, which provides support and activities for adults with learning disabilities

through the floor, and was totally overlooked in the autumn budget when schools were given a bit of an uplift”.

But so far, apart from at the time of the autumn statement, Wilson has rarely spoken up on FE, with her campaigns – children’s mental health, free school meal eligibility, pollution and crumbling buildings – focused around schools.

Her party “recognises the importance of lifelong learning and adult education. If we’re serious about meeting the challenges of all the new emerging technologies and growth industries, we have to invest in FE.”

But Lib Dems who fought the corner for FE historically, like Sir Vince Cable and Baroness Margaret Sharp, are no longer active in the party. Wilson took over the Twickenham seat from Sir Vince in 2019 and knows he and Baroness Sharp “well”.

She is candid that she does not know as much about the skills agenda as Sir Vince, but adds that it “doesn’t mean I think it’s any less important”.

Given the Lib Dems are champions of local devolution, I ask what she thinks of the employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans that set out what skills provisions are needed in different areas.

Wilson has not looked at the issue in detail so does not have a “new policy to offer”, but will be

“interested to see whether they’re fit for purpose and meeting the needs of local areas”.

Skills working group

She claims one reason she has not “focused” on FE and skills as much as “some other areas” is because Sir Vince, with Wilson’s education predecessor Layla Moran, had already put in place a “brilliant policy” around the skills wallet – £10,000 to be released to adults over a 30-year period to support lifelong learning. “With the grant, you could get match funding from your employer or from a local authority where there’s a skills gap in that particular area.”

“We’ll always be punished for the one thing we made a big pledge ”

While the Lib Dems “still stand by” that policy, the party has now formed a “live working group” looking at skills that “with some fresh thinking”.

“Fear not, we haven’t forgotten about FE and skills. It’s just we’re a slightly smaller party so, there’s not as much division of labour as there

used to be.”

She believes that take-up of the government’s lifelong loan entitlement due to be rolled out in 2025 will be low. “All the surveys show that if you’ve got a mortgage and kids you’re not really wanting to take on that debt to be able to study more.”

A recent pilot for higher education short courses, intended to be a step towards the lifelong loan entitlement plans, met with limited interest.

The infamous U-turn

But it is hard to listen to her talk with brevity on the need for student grants rather than loans after her party’s much-derided U-turn over increasing tuition fees when it was in coalition with the Conservatives.

She justifies it on the grounds that the Lib Dems had been trying to “put university funding on a sustainable and secure footing”, and how Sir Vince “fought very hard behind the scenes to make sure that the threshold at which you have to start paying back fees is kept at a higher level”.

She also points the finger of blame at the Tories for scrapping maintenance grants, while funding for grants and bursaries has “not kept up with inflation”.

“There’s much more that can be done around making the threshold for loans more progressive, but also boosting maintenance grants,” she says.

Wilson claims the reason she is a Liberal Democrat is because her party has “always been the party of education”, and recalls their policy

Profile

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under Paddy Ashdown of adding a penny on income tax for education.

“Our biggest spending areas have always been about education. But sadly, we will always be punished for this one thing we made a big pledge on.”

Red lines and alignments with Labour

So would Wilson have any red lines when it comes to FE policy if her party was to form a coalition with Labour this time round? Wilson claims she’s “not thinking about what happens the day after the next election”.

But the two parties share a perspective on Ofsted, with both seeking to reform rather than replace the watchdog.

This represents a shift for the Lib Dems: before the last election the party campaigned to scrap Ofsted and replace it with a new inspectorate.

The Lib Dems are also aligned with Labour on their opposition to the defunding of BTECs, which Wilson describes as “totally regressive and not thought through”. But she does not take issue with the concept of the T Levels designed to replace them.

She wants to ensure there remains an “adequate mix of vocational qualifications”. “Critically until the T Levels are bedded in, well understood both by students and employers and shown to be successful, rolling back BTECs in this way is really concerning.”

One point of difference could be the thorny

issue of VAT.

The Treasury recently confirmed that despite colleges being reclassified by the Office for National Statistics as public bodies, there are no plans to change the law and exempt them from VAT, which would cost around £200 million a year.

Labour has failed to commit to exempting colleges from VAT. But Wilson appears more forthcoming; she believes the “VAT anomaly needs to be addressed”.

Maths musings

The Lib Dems do not have a set policy or “firm settled view” on the requirement to pass maths and English GCSEs. But Wilson indicates she would like to see change.

“Until T Levels are bedded in, rolling back BTECs is really concerning”

She believes the current process is “really demoralising” for those students who fail a second time around. She wants to “look at a more supportive practical maths offer for those who just really struggle academically to be able to pass a maths GCSE, which involves trigonometry and Pythagoras and all sorts of other things that even I can’t remember what they mean – and I’ve

never used them since I passed my maths GCSE”.

Not cut out for teaching

Wilson’s passion for education runs deep as she wanted to be a teacher when she was a child. But she “quickly realised” after volunteering as a school teaching assistant that she was not “cut out” for that.

“I just realised I didn’t have the right skills to be a teacher, which requires the patience of a saint, and the ability to explain complex things in simple ways, which actually ought to be a gift for a politician. So maybe I’m not very gifted politician either!”

She was previously a lobbyist for Save the Children and the pharmaceutical company Novartis, and puts her success down to her parents’ influence. They emigrated from Zanzibar and “drummed into” her and her older sisters “from a very young age the importance of education”, prepping Wilson for north London’s Henrietta Barnett School where she was “pushed really hard in a very competitive environment”.

New department

Wilson “very deliberately” describes herself as the spokesperson for education, children and young people” rather than just “education”.

She believes children and young people’s policy is currently “fragmented across several different departments” with “no joined-up thinking” – for example, with youth services “hived off and sitting in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport” and young offender institutions coming under the Ministry of Justice.

“They’re working with some of the most disengaged young people who were probably excluded from school years ago and have all sorts of special educational needs. And they’re not even recognised as an educational establishment, which is just bonkers.”

Wilson would re-create the Department for Children, Schools and Families, ironically abolished in 2010 when the Lib Dems were in the coalition. Or “at the very least” she would create a cabinet minister for children with a “roving brief across departments”.

“We need to look at everything that sits around and outside of schools and colleges, and not just what’s going on inside them.”





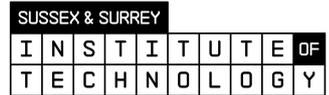
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You will be responsible for implementing the strategic business planning process and investment and change programmes for Nescot. The postholder will ensure the legal and statutory requirements placed on the college by the ESFA and other funding bodies achieve full compliance. You will also have responsibility for: Finance, ICT, Data, Estates, Risk Management and Customer Engagement – including Sales, Marketing and Commercial.

You should be a highly skilled and motivated individual with experience in a senior management team, with direct experience in managing budgets and resources within complex organisations. The successful COO will have demonstrable success in business and scenario planning. You will have a passion for education and training and proven ability to motivate and inspire others.

Closing Date: Friday, 16 June, 12 noon Interviews: Tuesday, 27 June*

*Please note, that we reserve the right to interview candidates before the application deadline.

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This is a crucial role in facilitating efficient and effective operations, leadership and management of our college. You will be responsible for developing systems and infrastructure that support cost-effective and streamlined business services.

Closing date: Sunday, 11 June, midnight

Interview date: Monday, 19 June

Head of Curriculum – Building Services and Sustainable Construction

(Plumbing & Electrical)

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You will be responsible for championing teaching, learning and assessment practices including innovative online teaching, IQA work, mentoring curriculum colleagues and English and maths engagement.

Closing date: Monday, 12 June, 5pm

Interview date: Tuesday, 20 June

Head of Curriculum – Construction Trades and Green Technology

(Motor & Electric Vehicles, Carpentry and Multi-Skills)

£45,542 to £48,959

Joining our renewed management team, you will lead our well-established Motor & EV, Carpentry, Plastering & Brickwork provision, ensuring that students and apprentices get a first-class experience and that curriculum and facilities are fit for the future.

You will be responsible for championing teaching, learning and assessment practices including innovative online teaching, IQA work, mentoring curriculum colleagues and English and maths engagement.

Closing date: Monday, 12 June, 5pm

Interview date: Tuesday, 20 June

Director of Customer Engagement

£59,734 to £63,921

The postholder will lead the development and implementation of our customer engagement strategy and promotion of our courses and services. As a dynamic, proactive and strategic leader, you will possess a creative mindset and a strong understanding of youth culture.

Your goal will be to drive the college's student recruitment, developing a network of employers, school leaders, and other influential community figures. You will develop the college's brand identity and work with the Principal to handle public affairs and raise the college's profile.

Closing Date: Sunday, 18 June, midnight

Interview Date: Monday, 26 June

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us on jobs@nescot.ac.uk



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We are now seeking to appoint an experienced, inspirational and ambitious Deputy Principal to join our Senior Leadership Team. We are looking for someone who is collaborative, who will bring ideas, innovation and energy. An individual who shares our values and passion in ensuring that our college and wider community thrives.

We have appointed FE Associates to support us with this important appointment. Interested parties are advised to contact Amanda.Hart@fea.co.uk to discuss the role before the closing date.

Closing date: 9am Tues 20 June 2023

Interview date: Mon 3 July 2023

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We have appointed FE Associates to support us with this crucial appointment. Prior to submitting an application, interested parties are advised to contact **Suzanne.Thurlow@fea.co.uk** to discuss the role.

Closing date: 9am Tues 30 May 2023

Interview dates: Weds 14 June & Thurs 15 June 2023

See more at **www.fea.co.uk/barnsley-pce/**



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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

FE can lead the way out of our permacrisis - but only if we collaborate from the ground up

The sector's leading role in the pandemic response revealed a more fundamental desire than simply sustaining a not-so-new normal, says Katie Shaw

We often think of self-defence as skills we learn individually to protect ourselves from immediate danger. It's much rarer to think of self-defence as a collective skill that we learn, practise and deploy in times of crises.

Whether it's allowing groups to use college kitchens to cook and distribute community meals during Covid-19 or opening a warm bank as energy prices soar, the need for spontaneous and localised responses as self-defence against economic and social disasters feels like a skill we need to master, together.

“Mutual aid isn't about limping from disaster to disaster”

Community self-defence isn't new. The building of solidarity across communities as a means of survival through reciprocal exchange of services, support, supplies and skills has always been practised. Whether it's coastal communities coordinating the first volunteer lifeboat services or a network disseminating supplies in the



KATIE SHAW

Social movement trainer and facilitator

wake of Hurricane Sandy, community-led disaster responses are often far more effective than waiting for the bureaucracy of government or top-down actions of charities. During Covid-19, you probably heard of this self-defence referred to as “mutual aid”, where the community takes the lead in protecting itself.

As part of a research project in 2020, I spoke with workers across further education about their experiences of mutual aid in their day-to-day work. Participants talked about how competition between providers led to some of them feeling isolated and how it was easier to connect to other FE workers further afield. Communities such as #UKFEChat (a weekly online discussion group set up by the indomitable Sarah Simons) provided a space to develop themselves and to share with others, building a horizontal community out of necessity and creating a space for survival against the “hostile attempts to paint the profession in a poor light”.

The research discussions also explored mutual aid within communities during the

pandemic, and the parallels and possibilities it held for FE. One participant noted that they hoped the community-building they had experienced during the pandemic would help to “demonstrate the agency that people have in their communities”. Others discussed developing adult community learning in ways that drew on what was happening within local mutual aid groups, where people were learning a range of skills and knowledge from gardening to navigating the welfare system.

As lockdown hit, some colleges and training providers were quick to respond to community needs, offering their catering teaching facilities, making PPE and providing free short courses. This pivot provided a space for FE to facilitate learning that met people's much broader needs as opposed to the narrower focus on skills and employability.

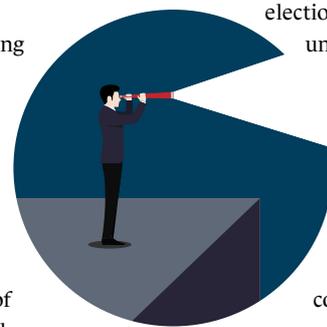
But practising mutual aid isn't about establishing a new

normal as quickly as possible and limping on from disaster to disaster. Instead, it's a way of wedging open those cracks within our current system and building practical solidarity across our communities to remake our world. It's the way communities have always defended themselves, but it's often so buried under bureaucracy that it seems radical.

So often we see the most straightforward route of change-making is to make immediate demands of the people who can be responsible for the mess we're in. With another general election on the horizon, understandably the sector is starting to strategise and lobby.

But whatever shade of politician and policy change comes our way, we need to protect ourselves from big social, economic and environmental disasters. We're not going to do this with a blueprint or a strategic plan, but by finding ways to strengthen our interdependence locally and develop ways of responding to community needs.

There's no better place than in FE to learn the skills and tools to build the world we want to see – from the bottom up, without permission from anyone but each other.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The government’s muddled messaging over skills is not showcasing FE to its fullest



ANNE MILTON

Former apprenticeships and skills minister and current advisor to PLMR

Efforts to promote the skills sector will continue to fall flat until Downing Street develops a sustained narrative about its value, writes Anne Milton

In November 2017, I told the Association of College’s annual conference that “further education is central to the challenge of delivering a prosperous future for this country after Brexit”. Much has changed. We’ve had to grapple with the impact of the pandemic, not to mention the near constant political changes in Downing Street and the Department for Education. Yet what I said remains true. The importance of FE to the country’s future has never been clearer.

“We need vocal champions right at the top”

Fortunately, the list of Conservatives throwing their rhetorical weight behind skills and FE has grown considerably. Rishi Sunak, Jeremy Hunt, Boris Johnson, Gillian Keegan and more see increased skills levels as a means of driving growth, supercharging productivity, tackling regional inequality and improving life chances.

Technical and vocational

education and training is certainly the key that can unlock the country’s economic potential. But in setting out its pro-skills agenda, the government’s communications approach is not showcasing the sector to its fullest. They are treating skills as amorphous and theoretical when they are in fact firmly rooted in local education and training organisations.

On average, colleges work with more than 500 local businesses and are often a leading employer in their own right. Independent training providers are equally pivotal in supporting learners and driving economic growth, locally and regionally. Yet this importance is not reflected by the government, or indeed the national media. It is on government to more clearly set the tone and state how they will make skills growth a reality.

During my time as apprenticeships and skills

minister, it became clear to me that it was incumbent on the government to recognise and champion skills from the grassroots level up. Without this constant advocacy and adequate finance, the gap between academic and vocational education will not be bridged.

Every August, thousands of learners receive results for vocational and technical qualifications, but they are never given the spotlight those studying GCSEs and A Levels get. Skills ministers make valiant attempts to gain more press coverage, but this needs to be replicated across government.

What’s more, initiatives to put technical education in the shop window can either fall flat or be shortlived. Why, for example, do occasions such as National Apprenticeship Week and National Careers Week come and go with so little attention?

A sea change in

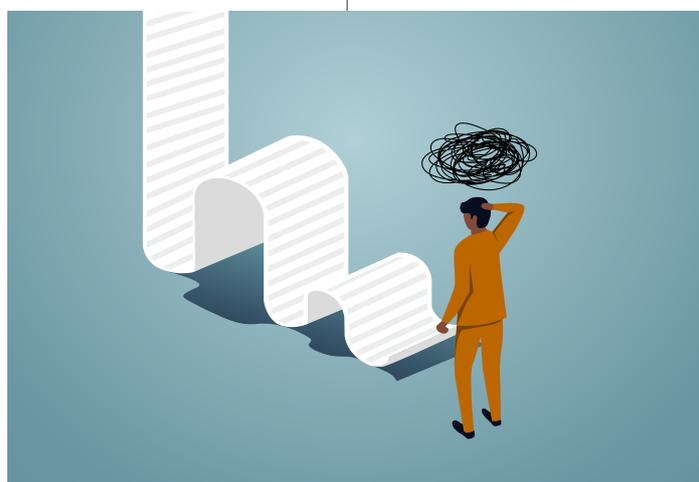
communications is needed. The government, and particularly the incumbents of Numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street, must make a more robust effort to champion these courses with new audiences.

We have long talked about tackling the stigma associated with technical education, but a positive, accessible story is still not being told.

The narrative power of technical education is evident: it delivers brilliant individual stories and a wider economic narrative. Finding a way to connect these dots is a challenge the government must finally rise to if it is serious about changing perceptions around skills, and turbocharging its economic and educational ambitions – irrespective of political parties.

The challenge is often picked up by colleges and independent training providers, most of whom do a brilliant job of marketing themselves. But more can always be done, whether that’s through social media, working with local radio and media outlets, or enlisting the support of those with the skills to help get the message across. Schools could arguably do more too.

I am optimistic about the future of vocational and technical education and training. But to make the most of the sector’s potential, we need vocal champions right at the top of government to start telling a more powerful story.



Opinion

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FE is bucking the trend on the attainment gap - and it's doing it on a shoestring



SARAH WAITE

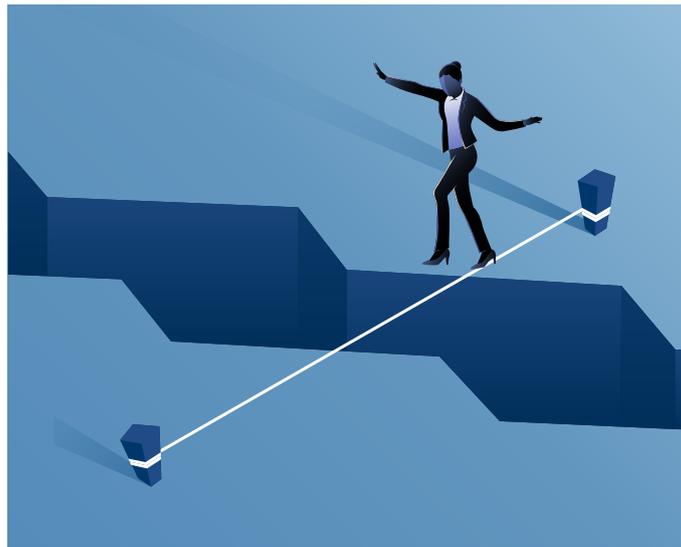
Founder and chief executive, Get Further

The DfE's latest figures show FE is delivering progress and closing gaps, writes Sarah Waite, so perhaps it's time for funding to match results

The Department for Education last month released new analysis of attainment and progress to the age of 25. Hidden in this statistical release was a good news story: the proportion of young people who achieve a good standard of English and maths by the age of 19 is at 74.9 per cent.

Progress in these subjects between the ages of 16 and 19 is now the highest on record – an achievement driven by the country's post-16 sector. Two decades ago, fewer than 6 per cent of young people who had not passed GCSE English and maths at 16 went on to achieve them by the age of 19. Today, that figure is almost six times higher.

Progress in English and maths in post-16 education has been on an upward trajectory since 2014 when the condition of funding was introduced. Notably, the analysis also shows that more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are passing GCSE English and maths in 16 to 19 education than their peers. This bucks the longstanding trend for the country's attainment gap, which emerges early and typically widens as children progress through education. Instead, the 16 to 19 sector is having



some success in narrowing the gap. This is a huge testament to FE, the part of our education system that serves a significant proportion of 16 to 19-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds and 90 per cent of young people retaking GCSE English and maths. And it is the part that gets on with the job with little fanfare and funding.

Real-term cuts across FE stand at 8 per cent. Teachers in colleges get paid on average £7,000 a year less than their peers in schools. There was no additional funding for FE in the autumn statement, and notably there has never been pupil premium funding for 16 to 19-year-olds. Across every metric, funding to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds nosedives at 16.

This makes the increase in attainment and progress in basic English and maths

skills and the subsequent narrowing of the attainment gap all the more impressive. By any measure, these improvements have been achieved on nothing more than a shoestring.

“Imagine what could be achieved if FE was properly funded”

Of course, there is still more progress to be made. Despite these improvements, two in three young people who miss out at school still have not achieved a level 2 qualification in English and maths by the age of 19. Moreover, the narrowing of the gap is only slight at three percentage

points. It could and should be closed further.

But policymakers should take note. Imagine what could be achieved in FE if the sector was properly funded. What might we expect the sector to deliver if FE teacher pay matched that of schoolteacher pay and colleges could compete for qualified staff? And how much more might we close attainment gaps if funding for disadvantaged 16 to 19-year-olds matched that of school-aged young people?

FE staff have long known about its potential to be transformational for social mobility. Research too is catching up, with the latest studies in cognitive neuroscience suggesting there is a “window of opportunity” for learning in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Anne Milton, the former minister for apprenticeships and skills, this week writes of the need for the highest levels of government to back the sector.

This latest analysis from the department should be the catalyst for the new narrative she rightly calls for. There can be no stronger evidence to justify better funding than this narrowing of the attainment gap in English and maths – proof positive of the vital role colleges play for young people, the economy and society.

See page 29 for Anne Milton's op-ed.

Opinion

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Education must adapt to deliver the key employment skills of a changing workplace



LUKE BOCOCK

Research director, NFER

A new NFER report suggests it's time to revisit the national curriculum to embed six employment skills that will power the future economy, explains Luke Bocock

Artificial intelligence is weaving its way into our everyday life. Technological breakthroughs have begun to disrupt our workplaces and will change the jobs of the future and the skills needed to do them. The impact of technology, particularly AI and automation, is also likely to be compounded by social, environmental and economic changes, including those brought on by Brexit.

Changes to the labour market threaten to exacerbate existing skills shortages. There are more than one million job vacancies in this country, with some recent employer surveys suggesting unprecedented levels of skills shortages. According to Manpower Group's most recent talent shortage survey, 77 per cent of employers report difficulties in filling roles, a 17-year high.

Severe skills shortages threaten England's prospects for economic growth. In 2019, the Open University calculated the cost of skills gaps to the UK economy at £4.4 billion a year, for example in recruitment fees and temporary staffing. More recently, a 2022 report by Skills Builder Partnership put the cost of low essential skills

at £22.2 billion. And skills shortages don't just impact the economy; they have damaging consequences for individuals who cannot access satisfying, well-paid work and they threaten to widen social inequalities.

“Severe skills shortages threaten economic growth”

Before we can get to grips with this challenge, we need a detailed, data-driven understanding of future “skills demand” – the skills that will be required in the labour market of the future – and of “skills supply” – the skills that can be expected to be available. Our findings so far suggest that skills shortages could worsen, implying we

need to take urgent action to prevent knock-on effects to our economy and society.

Specialist skills and knowledge are vital in most occupations, but our research suggests it is transferable “essential employment skills” that will be in greatest demand in 2035. Almost 90 per cent of the 2.2 million new jobs that are anticipated to be created in England between 2020 and 2035 will be professional and associate professional occupations, which require higher levels of these skills. Employers are already reporting difficulties recruiting people with these skills, and these shortages may worsen between now and 2035 unless action is taken.

Working with researchers at the University of Sheffield, we identified the six most vital “essential employment skills” for future employment as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, organising,

planning and prioritising work, creative thinking and “information literacy” (skills related to gathering, processing, and using information).

These six were identified by projecting the skills that will be required in each occupation in 2035 and combining them with future employment projections. To meet future demands, we need to support more workers to develop these vital skills and to ensure young people have higher levels of them than previous generations when they first enter the workforce.

Our findings also highlight the need for a greater understanding of the supply of “essential employment skills” and the role our education and training systems can play in developing them. Unlike many other countries, the English national curriculum does not define and integrate a set of transferable essential employment skills. It is time to revisit this and adopt the six we have identified as the basis of this list.

In the next stage of the Skills Imperative 2035, we will estimate what the future supply of these essential skills is likely to look like in 2035 and predict where gaps are likely to arise – including identifying which groups are most at risk of lacking those needed. We will then investigate how the education system can best support the development of these skills.



Opinion

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Promised transgender guidance won't amount to much unless it leads to a culture of inclusion



JAKE GRAF

Presenter, speaker and patron, Mermaids



HANNAH GRAF

Presenter, speaker and patron, Mermaids

Sector guidance on transgender learners must be the impetus to get beyond toxic discourse and antiquated practices to create genuine inclusion, write Hannah and Jake Graf

To read or listen to the UK media, you'd think the world was overrun with trans people. We're everywhere. A threat. An "issue" that needs to be resolved and a "debate" that needs to be had. Yes, we exist. We've existed forever. But for years we've been talked about and not to, doubted not trusted, and often ostracised by systems that should be enabling us to reach our potential. As FE awaits government guidance on how best to support trans people, we want to stress the need for openness and inclusion.

We know how it feels to grow up trans. Growing up in a body that feels alien to you, knowing that who you are is perceived as freakish and wrong. Most of us try to overcome and accept those feelings by effectively hiding our real identity. But we also know the difference that support and understanding from friends, family, teachers and peers can make.

That's why it's vital that the forthcoming guidance is implemented with inclusion at its core. Trans people who are supported through their transition have the best outcomes.



The end goal should be to stop it being an issue at all; for a young person's gender identity to be irrelevant so that they can just get on with being a young person. In an era of equity, diversity and inclusion, trans people need to be afforded the same opportunities and chances as their non-trans peers.

Inclusivity needs to begin at the top and filter down through every staff meeting and into every classroom. Trans students should feel safe, respected and supported.

Through our work as patrons of the charity Mermaids, we hear about an education system that falls way short of the support it should be offering and the example it should be setting – educators refusing to correctly gender a young person or refusing to call them by their correct name, and young people being endlessly and cruelly

questioned about who they really are.

Unsurprisingly, these youngsters quickly reach a point where they no longer want to go to college, opting for home education instead.

“Education falls way short of the support it should be offering”

They are being ostracised, sacrificing all the social inclusion and development that college should bring.

Meanwhile, the education sector is still working with antiquated systems. The Individualised Learner Record (ILR), for example, only recognises male or female.

These systems need to be truly reflective and representative.

When someone comes out as transgender, those around them are likely to be shocked or surprised and, quite often, might struggle with how best to deal with it. That's not unreasonable. The guidance should warn against a situation where the fear of saying the wrong thing leads to nothing being said at all, which only results in the trans person becoming cut off or distanced from those around them. We should be willing to go on that journey with that young person. It's a circular process – the more open the young person feels they can be, the quicker those around them will learn and the more support they can then offer.

Let's not treat the trans community the same way we treated the gay community in the 80s. Let's not confuse the need for discussions around best practice with fear-mongering, and let's not pretend this is about bathrooms when it's actually bigotry.

Instead, let's reach a place where society is learning and growing alongside the trans community, until eventually it isn't a thing and people can just be people.

You can hear more from Jake and Hannah Graf on the *Let's Go Further* podcast produced by the Skills and Education Group

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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London shows delivering green skills depends on FE to lead local partnerships



MARK JENKINSON

MD, Crystal Associates

Mark Jenkinson explains how his consultancy is working with colleges to better meet the needs of green industry employers

Further education colleges are fundamental to the flow of skills into industry and the exponential growth of green jobs is creating huge opportunities for them and their learners – if they can seize them. In the London region alone, there is a projected rise of between 61,000 and 91,000 green jobs over the next seven years.

From electric vehicle charging and heat pumps to retrofitting and smart infrastructure, the scope for new job opportunities is immense. But developing new training programmes and finding the right people to deliver these can be challenging. There is also a widespread need for capital investment to fund new facilities.

As a green consultancy, we have been working with Local London Green Skills and Jobs Partnerships to find out how colleges can better meet the needs of green industry employers. Comprising 13 FE colleges across the region, with local authorities and employers, the partnership (funded by the DfE’s Strategic Development Fund) is working to ensure that people are provided with the skills and tools they need to access the many green jobs of the future.

We looked at and considered each college’s facilities as well as staff training, curriculum and

industry engagement. These are all vital elements of a college’s ability to effectively deliver green skills training.

Each of the colleges we visited

“Identifying two or three key areas of excellence is beneficial”

has clearly made great strides. Most have received capital equipment funding and have installed equipment to support the new green skills-focused curricula. Yet challenges remain around lack of space, resources and recruitment of teaching staff.

Many staff are keen to upskill, yet 74 per cent of teachers felt they needed more support to build the wider knowledge needed for the new qualifications. Confidence around new technologies needs to be built and staff supported with high-quality CPD from

industry experts .

Our engagement with more than 100 employers and other stakeholders shows that most want to get involved and play their part.

This is a good start, but more needs to be done.

To keep building on this foundation, we have developed three key recommendations for ensuring colleges are well placed to play their part.

Collaboration and partnerships

While engagement with employers in FE is widespread and positive, smaller colleges often lack the dedicated resource to drive employer engagement. Partnerships between colleges can provide so much benefit here, supporting institutions of all sizes with more structured access to employers and ensuring equity of opportunity for students.

Accessing new sources of funding can also be better achieved in a partnership, with specific joint initiatives offering much greater impact. This is also

the case for careers information, advice and guidance, and for communications and marketing campaigns, which all benefit from combined expertise, funding and support.

Partnerships also offer strengthened CPD and cross-college training. Delivery of curriculum pathways can be also be coordinated across colleges and aligned to learner needs, facilities and staff expertise.

A dedicated plan of action

The example of the Local London region suggests that identifying two or three key areas of excellence, such as retrofit and EV charging, is beneficial. This focus creates the opportunity to become a centre of excellence for a specific growth area, which in turn supports increased industry and expert engagement.

Adaptability built in

The green skills sector is moving at great pace. To keep up, a frequent and structured review of new technologies and employers’ current and future needs are as fundamental as keeping abreast of ever-changing FE policy and qualification reform.

FE’s work to support green skills is encouraging, but we must build more momentum to ensure the workforce of the future is equipped to meet the needs of a net zero economy.

And to do that, we must leverage the power of collective working.



Movers & Shakers

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



Nicola Cove

Principal & CEO,
Furness College

Start date: September 2023

Previous Job: Deputy Principal,
Furness College

Interesting fact: Nicola is an ardent Plymouth Argyle fan and likes to follow the mighty Green Army to away matches when they are playing in the North West



Haroon Bashir

Deputy Director,
Learner Services,
Halesowen College

Start date: May 2023

Previous Job: Head of Equality and Diversity and Deputy DSL, Halesowen College

Interesting fact: Haroon shares a birthday with David Beckham and shares the same wedding anniversary with him and Victoria Beckham



Ian Browne

Interim Vice
Principal: Curriculum,
Telford College

Start date: May 2023

Previous Job: Vice Principal - Student Success, City of Wolverhampton College

Interesting fact: As a leaving present from Wiltshire College, Ian fulfilled one of his life goals which was to skydive. He jokes that maybe his PA arranged it because she didn't like him

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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