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# Unprecedented: College in 'crisis' over best-paid CEO's new role

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EXCLUSIVE

A college is facing "serious questions" over its governance following accusations of nepotism and a newly created role of president for England's highest-paid principal which has thrown the recruitment process for his successor into disarray.

Multiple attempts to fill the post at Weston College, first advertised in October, have failed and at least two job offers to successful candidates have been withdrawn. Some interviewees have questioned the board's decision to keep Sir Paul Phillips on in a remunerated role after he retires this summer.

Eyebrows have also been raised after it came to light that Phillips' son has held a senior leadership position responsible for the college's finances and has recently

**"No one is sure who is actually in charge, and the person appointed as principal has now had her career thrown into disarray"**

been promoted to chief operating officer.

Current Cornwall College deputy principal Kate Wills had resigned from her post to become Weston College principal from September 1. Cornwall College has since appointed a successor. But her new job offer was withdrawn last week in mysterious circumstances.

According to a Weston College spokesperson, the board and Wills "had asked" Phillips to support the new principal for an "unspecified period of time".



Paul Phillips

The board of governors, chaired by Andrew Leighton-Price, told staff in May in memos seen by *FE Week* that it was "absolutely key" that the role of president be created as it will support initiatives around governance, profile bids, the Centre for Excellence in SEND and various events, as well as being "responsible for mentoring the principal et al".

The president position, which *FE Week* understands will be remunerated, had allegedly rung alarm bells with candidates being interviewed for the principal post.

One offer was withdrawn as early as November during the first round of recruitment. Two more rounds followed, with the college finally appointing Wills as principal before withdrawing the offer.

Wills told *FE Week*: "Following discussions between the board of Weston College and myself, both parties have agreed not to confirm my move to the college at this time."

A Weston College spokesperson said: "We do not propose to comment about the appointment of Kate Wills as a successor to Sir Paul. An announcement will follow at the

appropriate time."

The spokesperson added that "while discussions have taken place" around the president role, Phillips "has not agreed any finalised arrangements to this end".

Union representatives said the principal situation was "very worrying".

Nick Varney, the University and College Union regional official, said: "Sir Paul's demand to be named honorary president is creating a crisis at the college. No one is sure who is actually in charge, and the person appointed as principal has now had her career thrown into disarray.

"There are now serious questions for the board of governors to answer."

### 'Sir Paul's personal fiefdom'

Phillips is the highest-paid college principal in the country, earning a total package of £362,000 in 2022, as revealed in *FE Week's* principal pay analysis this month.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## CONTINUED

Known as Dr Paul to staff and governors, Phillips was due to retire three years ago, but stayed for the pandemic period.

In his time as principal, Weston College was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, though it has not been inspected for a decade. According to its latest accounts, the group generated a surplus after tax of £218,000 in 2021/22, down from a surplus of £1.1 million the year before.

Phillips was awarded a knighthood last year and named a "national leader of further education" by the government in 2017.

In anticipation of Phillips' departure now planned for August, the corporation has arranged numerous events to celebrate his retirement – despite him taking up the presidency.

On June 29, a retirement dinner is set to take place with a celebrity host. The next day a final staff meeting and lunch is scheduled, where a recreation of a "Love Actually"-style photo montage will be shown.

Staff were also asked to attend filming slots last week where they would lip sync a tailored version of Tina Turner's *Simply the Best*, including the chorus: "You made us the best, better than all the rest, better than anyone, and we have passed the test, we're grateful for you, leading us with joy each day, it tears us apart, knowing you're retiring today." The final music video is poised to be played at the staff meeting.

In addition to a digital card for all staff and learners to sign, the finance department has set up a donation page on the college's website. Financial donations will be used to purchase holiday vouchers for Phillips and his wife to go on "a special trip to remember us all at the college".

The festivities have reportedly left a sour taste in the mouths of many staff members at Weston, especially in light of the strikes last October over pay, and the exorbitant pay package agreed by the board to Phillips.

"Our pay is appalling compared to the leadership team and other colleges around England," remarked one staff member who wished to remain anonymous. They added that some staff are discussing whether to boycott the farewell meeting.

"I do not want to shame the work that we

do at Weston College. The staff make the college not Dr Paul, and I certainly do not want to pay for him to have a holiday when I myself have not been able to afford one for three years.

"We have team members going to the food bank," they added. "We are not a cult, and he is not our leader."

A Weston College spokesperson said the events for Phillips "befit his unparalleled contribution to the college, and FE nationally, over the last 21 years of his tenure".

They added: "The costs associated with the event are limited, since it is held on college premises, with catering usually provided by learners, giving them an opportunity to showcase their achievements."

UCU's Varney said that the staff have been ignored by the college's governors.

"Weston College looks like it is being run as Sir Paul's personal fiefdom, and it shows that further education's governance model is not fit for purpose. We need a new model that works for staff and works for students," he said.

**A family business**

Multiple sources have raised concerns with *FE Week* about the board approving the appointment of Phillips' son, Joe, as a senior leader in charge of finances.

Joe Phillips has recently been promoted from his job as Weston College's vice-principal for finance and business planning to the roles of deputy principal and chief operating officer.



Weston College chair Andrew Leighton-Price

Weston College maintains that Paul Phillips had "no influence" over his son's promotion and none of his positions since joining the college in 2010 have had any conflict of interest. The college also said that his appointment was "transparent, competitive and robust" and he was unannouncedly appointed to the role.

"There is no conflict of interest in respect of his previous or new position since, as deputy principal, he reported to another leadership board member alongside the chair of audit committee, with a further officer from the Association of Colleges. This fully mitigated any potential conflict of interest and was approved by the college's external auditors," a college spokesperson said.

Governance experts told *FE Week* that colleges must publicly publish a conflict of interest policy on their website, as mandated by charities law. Weston College has only published a conflict of interest policy for governors.

"It is not just a matter of poor governance, I think it could be a breach of the law as well not to have a conflict of interest policy. If they haven't got a conflict of interest policy, they ought to have board minutes which actually deal with this particular point and issue," one expert told *FE Week*.

"That doesn't sound right to me," they added when asked about Joe Phillips' positions and promotion. "He may be the best person for the job, in which case some procedures would need to be put into place to manage the conflict of interest."

The expert also refuted the claim that conflicts of interest can be approved by external auditors. "They don't have any governance responsibilities to them," they said.

This is not the first time that questions have been presented over the college's structure. According to corporation minutes from 15 December 2021, one governor questioned the "firewall between related parties" in the new structure.

Weston did not respond to *FE Week's* requests to see its conflicts of interest policy.

The Department for Education and FE Commissioner declined to comment.

# Large provider's contracts in doubt as 'inadequate' rating looms

BILLY CAMDEN  
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EXCLUSIVE

The future of a large training provider based in the West Midlands is uncertain as Ofsted prepares to issue it with an 'inadequate' judgment, *FE Week* understands.

Inspectors are expected to downgrade BCTG Limited from the 'good' rating it achieved in 2018 to the lowest possible grade following its latest inspection which concluded last week.

The provider holds multi-million-pound contracts with different authorities to deliver training to thousands of apprentices and learners in sectors such as care, early years, accounting, construction and HGV. Its contracts include the adult education budget, advance learner loans and the government's new skills bootcamps.

**“As with all inspections, the findings and any grades awarded remain provisional and confidential”**

Ofsted's reasons for the anticipated grade four verdict are unclear, and it is not known whether BCTG is appealing against the judgment. A spokesperson for the company said bosses can only formally respond to the recent visit and grade once the report has been published.

One big change for BCTG Limited since its last inspection has been an “accelerated” shift away from subcontracting to a predominantly direct delivery model, as stated in its latest accounts. The company worked with 27 subcontractors at the time of its 2018 'good' result. This was cut to just five subcontractor partners in 2021/22, according to government data.



A statement from BCTG Limited, which is part of the BCTG Group, said: “BCTG Limited recently received a routine Inspection by Ofsted which concluded on June 16, 2023.

“As with all inspections, the findings and any grades awarded remain provisional and confidential until the report is finalised. We will respond to this, once published.

“BCTG continues to support all our learners and employers, and values the relationship with our funding partners.”

Rules set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, with which BCTG holds more than £5 million worth of skills funding contracts, state that private training providers will have their agreements terminated if they receive an 'inadequate' Ofsted result, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

The company was recently awarded an adult education budget contract with the West Midlands Combined Authority, which takes a discretionary approach on

whether to terminate contracts for providers rated 'inadequate'.

It is not clear what impact a grade four and any contract termination would have on BCTG Limited.

**“We will respond to this, once the report has been published”**

The company recorded turnover of £15.2 million and a profit of £1.1 million in 2022, according to its latest accounts which shows it employs 64 staff.

BCTG Limited's latest Ofsted inspection comes two months after Performance Through People, which is also part of the BCTG Group, received a 'good' judgment from Ofsted.



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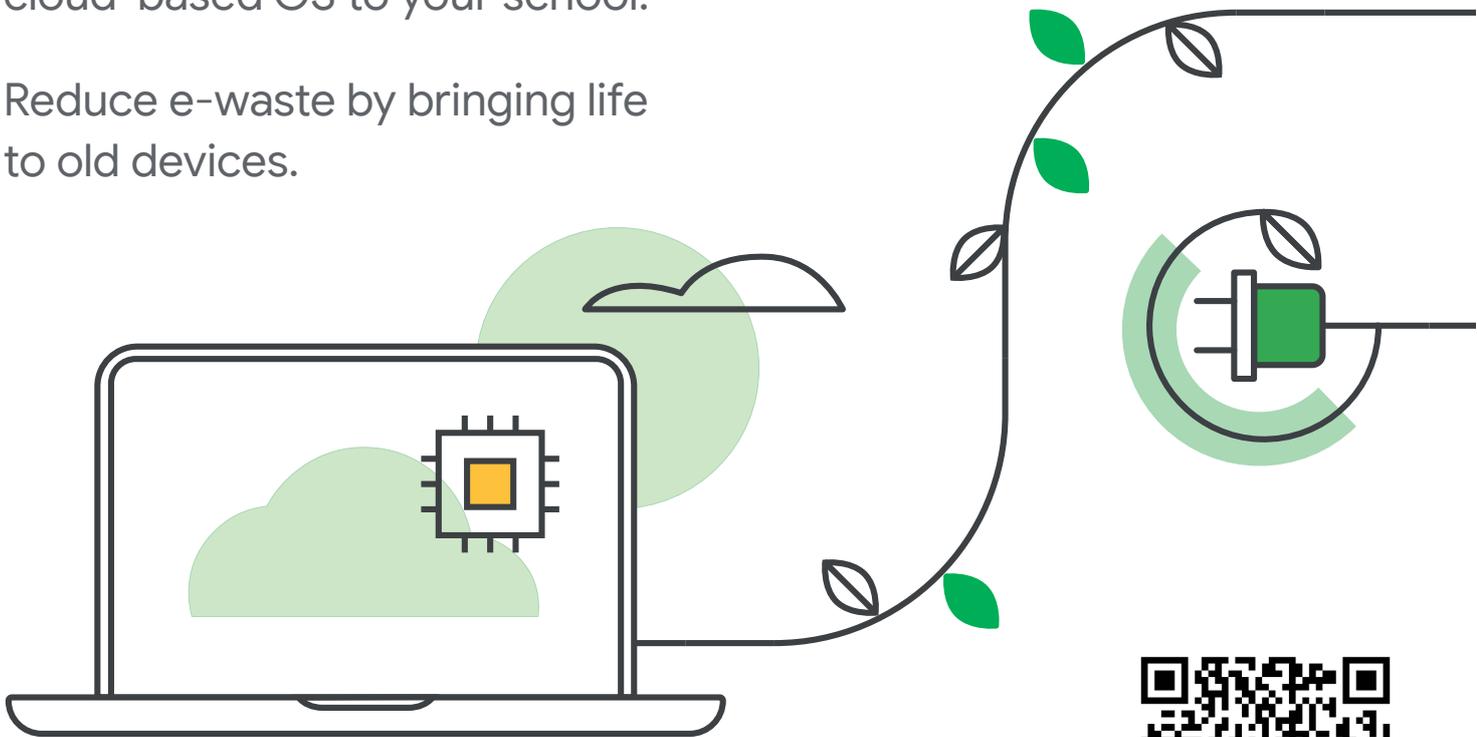


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# 'Inadequate' provider stops trading with almost £1m in unpaid bills

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**EXCLUSIVE**

An adult care training provider has left creditors with over £960,000 in unpaid bills after announcing it will wind up operations following a scathing Ofsted verdict.

Bestland Solutions Limited, which traded under the name Training Associates during its 20-year operation, was given an 'inadequate' rating by the watchdog in March. Inspectors found apprentices quickly dropped out due to being "overwhelmed" and demoralised by the lack of off-the-job training.

The provider, which offered mostly

adult care training nationwide to more than 500 apprentices at the time of the inspection, has since had its skills funding agreement with the government terminated.

Leaders of the firm held a general meeting on June 13, where it announced a special resolution to wind up voluntarily.

According to Bestland's statement of affairs published this week, the company will be unable to sell any of its assets, leaving creditors unlikely to recoup their share of a total debt of £960,343.76.

Elias Paourou and Sean Bucknall, the joint voluntary liquidators from Quantuma Advisory, identified close to

£560,000 worth of assets, including a £355,000 director's loan account. But they estimated that none of it could be used to pay off debts.

Documents show employees are likely to be left in the lurch with regards to unpaid wages. Bestland owes £116,757 in back pay, holiday pay, tax and national insurance contributions.

The company has also incurred debts of £843,434 to non-preferential creditors, namely trade creditors, banks and employees.

Bestland Solutions chief executive Jeremy Gilbert did not respond to *FE Week's* request for comment. Quantuma Advisory declined to comment.

# WCG chief executive up to lead CCCG

**SHANE CHOWEN**  
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One of the country's largest FE college groups has revealed the identity of its next chief executive. Angela Joyce will take over as leader of Capital City College Group in January 2024, the group announced this week.

She will leave WCG, formerly Warwickshire College Group, which she has led as chief since 2015, in December.

CCCG has been led by Pablo Lloyd on an interim basis since the departure of Roy O'Shaughnessy in April.

Joyce leaves one rural, multi-site college group to join an even larger urban one.

On her watch, WCG grew to six colleges across Warwickshire and Worcestershire. The group also has three subsidiary companies.

The fate of one of WCG's former colleges, Malvern Hills College, is currently before the courts as the group attempts to lift a covenant on the use of land before it is sold off. The closure of Malvern Hills has been met with controversy locally, in particular

from the area's Conservative MP Harriett Baldwin.

As well as expanding the group, Joyce oversaw WCG becoming one of the first colleges to be granted foundation degree awarding powers and, later, bachelors degree awarding powers.

"I am delighted to join one of the UK's largest college groups and lead the organisation into its next phase of development. While I will be sad to leave WCG, I take much pride in the achievements accomplished by our board, colleagues and students during my eight-year tenure as CEO," Joyce said.

CCCG is made up of three large general further education colleges spanning ten sites across central and north London, as well as a number of subsidiaries.

Joyce's new position will see her take control of a budget more than twice the size of WCG's. She will lead more than three times the number of funded learners.

According to the latest accounts data, WCG recorded 8,051 ESFA and OfS-funded learners in 2021/22 while CCCG had 26,125. On total income, WCG received just under

£49 million compared with just over £116 million for CCCG.

CCCG and WCG were both rated 'good' at their last Ofsted inspections, which took place in December 2022 and March 2018 respectively.

Alastair Da Costa, the chair of CCCG, said: "Angela stood out as the exceptional candidate during our extensive selection process. Her unparalleled track record in leadership and ambitious vision for CCCG's future make her an ideal fit for the role."

The board of WCG will begin the process of recruiting a new CEO "in the coming months".



Angela Joyce

# Level 2 apprenticeship spending down by £200m since the levy

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EXCLUSIVE

Annual spending on level 2 apprenticeships has plummeted by more than £200 million since the launch of the levy – as money paid out for higher levels rockets, *FE Week* can reveal.

New figures obtained through a Freedom of Information request also show the only age group that has experienced a fall in apprenticeship spending over that period is 16 to 19-year-old school leavers.

Experts have put the trend down to the “clunky and arduous” apprenticeship system that small and medium-sized employers (SMEs), who have traditionally taken on a disproportionate number of lower level and young apprentices, struggle to navigate.

A Department for Education spokesperson said apprenticeships were “employer-led and businesses have flexibility to spend their levy funds to invest in the skill level they need”, adding that “these figures show they are doing that”.

Falling numbers of entry-level apprentices have been well reported since the launch of the apprenticeship levy in 2017, with latest official government data showing level 2 starts have dropped by

two-fifths from 161,390 in 2017/18 to 91,520 in 2021/22.

But, because the government refuses to publish spending data for the levy, the sector is left to guess how much less funding this trend translates to.

*FE Week* can now reveal, for the first time, exactly how much funding has been spent on each level of apprenticeship in every year since the levy was introduced after obtaining the data under the FOI law.

It shows that level 2 apprenticeship participation spend dropped by a third, from £622 million in 2017/18 to £421 million in 2021/22.

All other levels experienced an increase in spending over the same period. Level 3 apprenticeship spending grew by more than quarter, before much bigger increases from level 4 onwards.

Spending on level 6 apprenticeships grew nine-fold, while level 7 apprenticeship spending was 20 times higher in 2021/22 than in 2017/18.

*FE Week* has also got hold of apprenticeship spending data by age for the first time. It shows that spending on apprenticeships for young people aged 16 to 19 fell by £60 million, or a tenth, from £686 million in 2017/18 to £626 million in 2021/22.

Meanwhile, spending on apprenticeships for 19 to 24-year-olds

grew by £312 million, or four-fifths, from £389 million to £701 million, and spending on apprenticeships for those aged 25 and older went up by £474 million to £934 million in 2021/22, which is more than double the £460 million spent on this age group in 2017/18.

Since 2017, apprenticeships in England have been funded from a levy equivalent to 0.5 per cent of payroll imposed on large employers with annual wage bills above £3 million.

Levy payers can then use their levy pot to fund their apprenticeships. The levy was designed so that large employers would not spend all their contributions, with their unspent funding going towards paying for the rest of the system, such as apprenticeships for non-levy paying SMEs.

But SMEs have since complained that the system for signing up apprentices through the government’s digital apprenticeship service is too bureaucratic, time-consuming and complex, forcing many to turn their backs on apprenticeships.

Simon Ashworth, director of policy at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said: “Although the shift towards an employer and demand-led apprenticeship service has been a

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## APPRENTICESHIP SPENDING BY LEVEL

Academic Year	Level 2 £m	Level 3 £m	Level 4 £m	Level 5 £m	Level 6 £m	Level 7 £m
2017/18	622	746	68	55	33	11
2018/19	557	838	120	100	78	57
2019/20	473	885	163	132	133	118
2020/21	378	848	192	156	203	186
2021/22	421	953	222	160	290	216
£ different between 2017 and 2022	-£201	£207	£154	£105	£257	£205
% difference between 2017 and 2022	-32%	28%	226%	191%	779%	1863%

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APPRENTICESHIP SPENDING BY AGE

Academic Year	Under 19 £m	19-24 £m	25+ £m
2017/18	686	389	460
2018/19	677	477	595
2019/20	642	546	715
2020/21	553	598	813
2021/22	626	701	934
£ difference between 2017 and 2022	-£60	£312	£474
% difference between 2017 and 2022	-9%	80%	103%

CONTINUED

generally positive move, the system is still too clunky and arduous for SMEs. SMEs traditionally have taken on a disproportionate number of young people, particularly those at level 2."

He added that the continuing lack of a level 2 business administration standard, which was a hugely popular apprenticeship under the old-style frameworks until it was switched off in 2020, has also impacted entry-level apprenticeship numbers.

Stephen Evans, chief executive at the Learning and Work Institute, calculated the real terms changes in spending for each level by adding inflation. This showed a £264 million, or two-fifths, drop in level 2 spending between

2017/18 and 2021/22.

He said the changes in spending were the "natural consequence of allowing free employer choice with few incentives to underpin investment in young people and apprenticeships at all levels".

He added: "They reflect the historic pattern of employer investment in training, with graduates three times more likely to get training than non-graduates.

"The growth in higher apprenticeships is welcome, but this should not be at the expense of training at other levels and for young people. Learning at all levels boosts productivity and we need to tackle our historic shortfalls, or we will all be the poorer for it."

# Barber's skills adviser role to be extended

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Sir Michael Barber's role as a government skill policy adviser has been extended – but a lack of transparency surrounds his work.

The public administration supremo was announced as an unpaid adviser on skills reform implementation by the chancellor in November 2022 for a six-month term.

A Treasury spokesperson said this week that "given the importance of the skills agenda and the need to maximise impact", the chancellor and education secretary had decided to extend Barber's role until December 16, 2023.

Little information has been published about Barber's advice in the skills policy arena, but he told *FE Week* this year that there would be no major "Barber Review of Skills" report.

His behind-the-scenes advice to the Treasury and Department for Education is more focused on delivery mechanisms, making what policies the sector now has work better.

This week the DfE published board

minutes from a meeting in February that said Barber was advising on five themes: "Skills delivery, a change in society's perception of skills, the use of data to enable delivery of skills, careers information in secondary and tertiary education spaces, and a whole-of-government approach to skills."

The same minutes stated that a "review of Michael Barber's work would take place at the end of March 2023".

But the Treasury told *FE Week* there was "no intention to publish further details" about this.

There are also no published terms of reference for Barber's role. The Treasury claimed there was "no requirement" to reveal these terms and "there are currently no plans to do so".

Barber has served in several roles within government, including as chief adviser to the education secretary from 1997 to 2001, head of the prime minister's delivery unit from 2001



Sir Michael Barber

to 2005 and chair of the Office for Students from 2018 to 2021. He led a review of the Number 10 delivery unit in 2021.

Outside of government, Barber has been a partner at McKinsey and head of their global education practice, and chief education adviser at Pearson.

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# PeoplePlus walks away from AEB delivery

JOSHUA STEIN  
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EXCLUSIVE

A major training provider is walking away from adult education budget delivery this summer due to the “continuing tight labour market”.

PeoplePlus Group has decided not to renew its AEB contracts, currently held across multiple mayoral combined authorities, for the 2023/24 academic year. The company will switch its focus from face-to-face direct delivery to its online digital delivery platforms.

The decision appears to have been made abruptly, considering the firm was awarded a new AEB contract in the North of Tyne area just two weeks ago.

PeoplePlus held the largest national AEB contract among all independent training providers in 2020, with an allocation of £5.6 million. At the time it was delivering courses to around 8,000 adults and training to around 3,000 apprentices.

But the scale of this provision has plummeted in recent years after the company failed to secure another national contract with the Education and Skills Funding Agency in the controversial 2021 AEB tender.

PeoplePlus also sold its “loss-making” apprenticeship business to Babington Business College in December 2020.

The company was downgraded from ‘good’ to ‘requires improvement’ by Ofsted last month when it had just 148 adult learners on its books studying level one and two courses in subjects such as security, health and safety, customer service and digital technology.

Ofsted reported that achievement rates across PeoplePlus’ students were “too variable”, and that there was not enough effort to improve learners’ English and mathematic skills.

On some courses, the “type or location of work opportunities are not always compatible with the needs of the learners”, inspectors added.

PeoplePlus said all current learners would be “unaffected” by the decision to discontinue

its AEB delivery, adding that the provider will support them to complete their qualifications.

The company would not confirm whether any jobs were at risk.

PeoplePlus currently holds AEB contracts with combined authorities in West Yorkshire and Tees Valley and a five-year contract with Liverpool City Region, worth more than £1.2 million, £755,800 and £657,000 respectively.

It also recently secured a five-year contract with Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority for an unknown amount of funding.

Last August PeoplePlus scooped a seven-year £15 million contract to offer teaching at the Werrington Young Offender Institution in Staffordshire and was delivering education programmes across 22 adult prisons at the time.

PeoplePlus is owned by Staffline Group PLC, one of the biggest recruitment firms in the UK. In its latest annual report for the year to December 31, 2022, Staffline noted that PeoplePlus was “impacted by the disruption to its skills training as a result of the tight labour market, with workers

being able to go straight into jobs without pre-job training”. That caused its revenue to slide by 6.3 per cent from £83.1 million to £77.9 million, according to Staffline’s accounts.

Staffline also devalued PeoplePlus by 12.1 per cent to £59.6 million, which it blamed on a “reduction of forecast earnings by the division”.

A spokesperson for PeoplePlus said: “In the continuing tight labour market, we want to ensure that our adult education offering in England is optimised for these new conditions and the changing requirements of learners.

“This means that, from the 2023/24 academic year, we will be revising our footprint in the sector to allow us to focus on the continued rapid growth of our digital learning platforms and our portfolio of partner services through which we support a fast-growing number of fellow provider organisations.

“Learners on our 2022/23 programmes will be unaffected by the transition to this new service model as we support them to complete their qualifications.”

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# Judge upholds 71-year-old teacher's Covid complaints

SAMANTHA BOOTH  
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EXCLUSIVE

A sixth form college in north London has lost an employment tribunal because of its "failure to take on board" the complaints of a 71-year-old teacher about working in a classroom with no windows during Covid.

Lorraine Naidoo, a part-time English as a second language teacher, took the 16 to 19 Haringey Sixth Form College, to an employment tribunal over its actions in 2020.

Naidoo's classrooms had no limit on the number of students to make sure they were social distanced and one had a window that wouldn't open, a judgment published this week said.

She repeatedly raised her concerns because of her age, as older people were at higher risk of serious illness if infected with Covid-19.

Judge Jeremy Lewis backed her claim of indirect age discrimination.

While there was a general risk assessment, the tribunal judges said there was a "serious failure" to adequately consider if additional requirements were needed.

Judge Lewis, who signed the judgment, said there was also a "wholly unreasonable failure" to comply with ACAS fairness practices.

Haringey said it was "disappointed" and is considering an appeal. A separate hearing will consider compensation for Naidoo.

Naidoo used two classrooms, one of which had a single window that was sealed shut.

The space tended to become "stuff and smelly" in the summer, she claimed, which health and safety guidance has suggested is a sign of poor ventilation.

The sixth form said there was a system to draw in fresh air, but the judges said such systems were "recognised as less than satisfactory".

Judge Lewis also said there was "no evidence" the sixth form was unable to buy carbon dioxide monitors before the government rolled them out in September 2021.

Naidoo was moved to a "smaller teaching



room without notice" on one occasion.

In a risk assessment, Naidoo asked for each pupil to have their own table to help physical distancing, and windows that could be opened.

But Judge Lewis said there was a "failure to take on board and take into account" her concerns.

Naidoo was signed off with work-related stress at the end of September and never returned.

An occupational health report indicated that her concerns on the lack of safeguards was an "obvious impediment to her health recovering", the judgment said.

It wasn't until October 9 that a "nine-point plan" was sent by the sixth form that included the suggestion to "cap your group size". It also said she could request personal protective equipment "at any time".

But Naidoo said it didn't "sound like the detailed formalised plan I requested". Judge Lewis also said in "large part" the nine points were "merely a restatement of existing practice and guidance rather than being additional measures".

In her formal grievance, Naidoo said her risk assessment was "ignored" and "made me feel that I was alone in dealing with the increased serious health risks I was being exposed to at work."

Judge Lewis said the sixth form "did not

deal with the issues raised promptly" and that there was "no adequate investigation" in response to Naidoo's grievances.

There was a "wholesale and wholly unreasonable failure" to comply with the ACAS code of practice, which sets out principles for handling disciplinary and grievance situations in workplaces.

A sixth form spokesperson said it was "very proud" of how it dealt with the "many challenges arising from the pandemic, to ensure we continued to deliver a high-quality teaching and learning experience for our students, whilst doing our very best to comply with Covid guidelines, rule, recommendations and regulations and keep all within our college community safe".

Its Covid data "evidenced the extremely low infection rates" at the sixth form, "with no serious cases of Covid-related illness".

Naidoo started at the sixth form in 2008, but retired to work part-time in 2012. She had worked for less than three weeks of the September 2020 college year, which Haringey said was "unfortunate" as she was unable to see "the many measures we put in place for all in our college community, with a great deal of success".

HSE spot checks of schools in March 2021 found that 80 per cent had a good understanding of what it meant to be Covid secure.

# Collective bargaining would reduce FE pay erosion, union tells MPs

**JOSHUA STEIN**  
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“Pay erosion” in the FE sector could slow if college teachers had access to collective bargaining, according to a union.

The pay gap between teachers in colleges and schools currently stands at £8,000 – an inequality often cited as a key driver for strike action in the college sector.

Part of the reason why wages in colleges have been low for so long is the lack of collective bargaining, Jenny Sherrard, national head of equality and policy at the University and College Union, told parliament’s education select committee on Tuesday.

In the schools sector, unions and employers submit evidence to the School Teacher Pay Review Body, which then makes a recommendation on teacher pay rises to ministers. What ministers decide is then binding on schools.

There is no national framework for teacher pay in colleges. Instead, colleges are given a voluntary recommendation on pay awards annually by the Association of Colleges following discussions with unions.

This year, however, the AoC has refused to make a recommendation because “colleges simply cannot afford to make a meaningful offer” that would not be “an insult to the hard-working staff”, Sherrard said.

“Frankly most colleges ignore [the AoC’s recommendations]. That has contributed to this overall steep decline in FE pay,” she added.

The pay gap between school and college teachers means FE institutions have to compete with schools for staff, as well as better wage offers in industry.

“We have to factor in that we are also competing against another part of the education sector which is reporting its own level of challenge.”

Instigating collective bargaining must

now follow in the FE sector after it was reclassified as part of the public sector in November, Sherrard added. “Really, without a binding collective agreement on pay, we are going to continue to see pay erosion in the sector.”

David Hughes, the AoC’s chief executive, told *FE Week* his association was “happy to discuss” ideas on how a binding pay negotiation would work in England’s FE sector.

But he does not think it is the key issue, as “everyone knows that the government is simply not investing enough money in FE to allow colleges to pay what they want to pay”.

Hughes added: “It surprises me that UCU continues to spend most of its energy focusing on AoC when it really needs to help put more pressure on the government to increase funding, so that colleges can increase pay – as we all want to be able to do.”

Sherrard called for FE representatives to have a seat at school pay negotiations, as an observer, so that pay at schools and FE is seen as interlinked.

She warned that the FE sector faces a “very serious crisis” if there is no improvement in the recruitment and retainment of staff, citing UCU figures that suggest more than

95 per cent of colleges are struggling to recruit. Leaving rates are just as concerning.

Sherrard also referenced Institute for Fiscal Studies research on college teacher pay which found that around a quarter of teaching staff at FE colleges leave after just a year in work, This rises to almost half within three years. At schools, around a quarter of teachers leave within the first three years.

Three-quarters of teachers at FE colleges leave after a decade, as all the while student numbers are booming.

FE is also facing a “challenging age profile” as teachers drop out of the sector, Sherrard told MPs on the committee.

“We know that 30 per cent of the workforce are over 50 and only 8 per cent are in those lower age bands coming in.”

While she accepted that workers often come into FE “slightly later” than other sectors, she said that the ageing workforce has combined with the high drop-out rates “at the very same time as we have this bulge in students coming through the system”.

“We are rapidly heading towards a very severe crisis if we cannot address the issues with recruitment and retainment by improving pay and addressing workload,” she said.



News

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# Sector leaders and stalwarts celebrate birthday honours

**JOSHUA STEIN**  
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A longstanding college governor, a cleaning supervisor and a PE teacher are among sector figures named in the King's first birthday honours list for services to further education and skills.

More than a dozen individuals from the FE and skills sector received honours, including one CBE, three OBEs, seven MBEs and three BEMs.

Mark White, who recently retired from the Education Training Collective's governing board after 27 years, was made a CBE.

His first role in further education was as a governor at Bede Sixth Form College in Billingham, Co Durham, back in 1995, and he has also served as chair of the Stockton Strategic Education Board. Over the years White has also chaired numerous Association of College boards, including AoC sport and the AoC's governor's council.

"I am thrilled and humbled by this award. I have worked with wonderful, dedicated people and, to me, this award recognises and celebrates the value and importance of our essential further education sector," White said.

Clare Howard, chief executive of Natspec, the representative body for specialist colleges, was awarded an OBE for services to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Howard said she was "speechless and a bit stunned" on receiving the honour.

"The only way I can understand it is to see it as recognition for all those thousands of dedicated people who work in specialist colleges or with students with SEND across the FE sector," she added.

"This also wouldn't have happened without all the people at work and home that have supported me; the credit and my thanks go to my colleagues in the Natspec team, my board, students and staff of every college, and my family."

Two college leaders received OBEs for services to further education. Pat Brennan-Barratt, chief executive and principal of Northampton College, said the honour has "humbled me beyond words".

"Working in education has been a great privilege," she added. "Over time, I have worked with the

most extraordinary colleagues, whose talent and enthusiasm has been inspirational.

"In FE everybody plays a part. It's not one individual who makes a difference but the part you play in a team. I am constantly amazed by the rock-solid professionals who work in colleges – those who go the extra mile."

White is joined on the list by his former colleague Philip Cook, who left his post as CEO of the Education Training Collective last August and who has been made an OBE.

"I feel very proud, but also lucky," Cook said. "My family have been incredibly supportive throughout my career, and I have been fortunate to have worked with many talented and kind colleagues over the years."

Other skills sector figures picked up MBEs, including Gillian Eaton, the director at Sporting Futures Training in Stevenage, who said she was "immensely proud" to receive the honour.

"The value of apprenticeships is immense and, while we face challenges, we must strive to ensure that apprenticeships continue to fulfil the purpose for which they were developed," she added.

Lloyd Thomas, future workforce skills and capability lead at Co-operative Group, said his MBE was a "reflection of not only my work but the support from hundreds of colleagues I've worked with across the years."

He added: "Apprenticeships and vocational qualifications are integral to

<b>Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)</b>	
Mark White	Lately Chair, Education Training Collective
<b>For services to Further Education</b>	
<b>Officers of the British Empire (OBE)</b>	
Clare Howard	Chief Executive Officer, Natspec
<b>For services to Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities</b>	
Patricia Brennan-Barrett	Chief Executive Officer and Principal, Northampton College
<b>For services to Further Education</b>	
Philip Cook	Lately Chief Executive and Group Principal, Education Training Collective
<b>For services to Further Education</b>	
<b>Members of the British Empire (MBE)</b>	
Deborah Blackburn	Assistant Principal, Finance, Aquinas College, Stockport, Greater Manchester
<b>For services to Further Education</b>	
Gillian Eaton	Director, Sporting Futures Training
<b>For services to Further Education and Skills</b>	
Robin Lipscombe	Learning Facilitator, Marshall Skills Academy
<b>For services to Further Education and Skills</b>	
Mark McClennon	Chair, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's digital route panel
<b>For services to Further Education and Apprenticeships</b>	
Lloyd Thomas	Lead, Apprenticeships and Funded Skills, The Co-Operative Group
<b>For services to Food Retail</b>	
Asitha Panditharatna	Director of Employment Services, The Forward Trust
<b>For services to Further Education and Skills</b>	
Penelope Taylor	Head, Newark College and Air and Space Institute
<b>For services to Skills and Employment in Newark and Sherwood, Nottinghamshire</b>	
<b>British Empire Medal (BEM)</b>	
Pauline Franklin	Cleaning Supervisor, St Brendan's Sixth Form College
<b>For services to Further Education</b>	
Cheryl Bertschi	Tutor, Southend Adult Community College
<b>For services to Education</b>	
Andrew Green	Physical Education Teacher, New College Pontefract
<b>For services to Sport and to Education</b>	

ensuring our communities thrive and are opening doors every day for people from under-represented groups who otherwise wouldn't have been able to fulfil their potential."

British Empire Medals (BEMs) were awarded to three individuals including Pauline Franklin, cleaning supervisor at St Brendan's Sixth Form College in Bristol.

"I'm just absolutely blown away, I don't think it can get any better," she said.

"It has been 35 or 36 years that I have worked here, it's a very nice place to work. Being given this award, I can't thank Marian [Curran, the college principal] enough for putting me forward – what an honour."

Andrew Green, a physical education teacher at New College Pontefract in West Yorkshire, said he was "amazed" to get a BEM.

"This will be dedicated to my fantastic colleagues, parent volunteers and wonderful family, who have supported me over the years," he said.

"It has been a privilege to work with thousands of youngsters in schools, colleges and the local community. Providing opportunities for children and young people to develop their skills and achieve their potential has always been a great pleasure and honour in itself."



Pat Brennan-Barrett, Mark white and Clare Howard

News

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# Pearson's silver winners on shortlist for gold awards

**FE WEEK REPORTER**  
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Outstanding teachers, support staff and leaders from across the UK's schools and colleges have been honoured in the Pearson National Teaching Awards.

A total of 89 winners have won silver awards, with their names announced to coincide with national Thank a Teacher Day, the largest annual celebration of educators.

The award winners will now be shortlisted to win one of 16 gold awards, to be announced in November.

In a video tweeted to teachers on Wednesday, education secretary Gillian Keegan said: "You change lives on a daily basis, setting up young people for a life that

fulfils their potential.

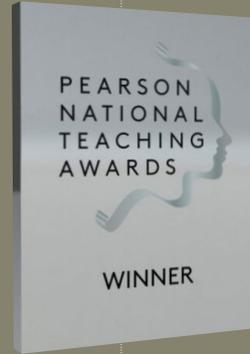
"Everyone you teach will look back one day as I did, and have a reason to thank teachers. So, thank you once again and happy Thank a Teacher Day."

Schools minister Nick Gibb added: "Thanks to your effort and your commitment and your passion, our children are now some of the best readers in the world."

**'Valuable role has inspired generations'**

Author Michael Morpurgo, president of the Teaching Awards Trust, thanked the winners for the "amazing contributions they have made to our communities".

He added: "I am inspired by the devotion



of teachers and the huge impact they have on the lives of the young people they tutor, support, encourage and motivate day in and day out.

"The valuable role they play both inside and outside the classroom has inspired generations of young people across the country to achieve their potential."

Sharon Hague, managing director of schools at Pearson UK, congratulated the silver award winners on their "incredible achievement".

She added: "We can't underestimate the huge contribution teachers make to our young people's lives."

Here is the full list of silver winners:

**DIGITAL INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR, sponsored by NORD ANGLIA**

- Lynsey Stuttgart, ACS Cobham International School
- Melanie Hall, Chase High School, Westcliff-on-Sea
- John Croxon, Lea Forest Primary Academy, Kitts Green, Birmingham
- Daren White, New Rickstones Academy, Witham Essex
- Nino Trentinella, Sutton Grammar School
- Amanda Pickard, South Ayrshire Council

**EARLY YEARS TEAM OF THE YEAR, sponsored by Department for Education**

- Essential Early Years, Birkenhead
- Arden Primary School, Sparkhill
- Egguckland Vale Primary School, Plymouth
- Little Grubs Kindergarten, Ludlow
- The Rathcoole PSNU Early Years Team, Newtownabbey, Antrim
- Little SERC South Eastern Regional College, Lisburn
- St Margaret's Primary School, Lowestoft
- The Woodland Nursery, Blackheath, London

**EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION, sponsored by Logitech**

- Victoria Butler, Asst Principal, Mark Hall Academy, Harlow
- Amy Stimpson, Meridian High School, Croydon
- Philip Potter, Oak Grove College, Worthing
- David Jones, Pembrokehire College
- Alice Morphet, Woodlands Primary School Nursery Class, Ellesmere Port

**FE LECTURER OF THE YEAR, sponsored by the Department for Education**

- India Loveland, East Norfolk Sixth Form College, Great Yarmouth
- Rachel Bown, Fairfield Farm College, Dilton Marsh
- Pamela Brown, North West Regional College, Derry
- Aine McGreeghan, SERC, Lisburn
- Lauren Robinson, Sunderland College

**FE TEAM OF THE YEAR**

- Creative Arts Department, Coleg Gwent, Caerphilly
- Everton Football College
- Performing Arts, HRUC Uxbridge College
- Entrepreneur Club SERC, Lisburn
- Trinity Sixth Form Academy Senior Leadership Group, Halifax

**HEAD TEACHER OF THE YEAR - PRIMARY SCHOOL, sponsored by Hays**

- Maria Carlton, Bewley Primary School, Billingham Co Durham
- Matthew Jessop, Crosthwaite C of E School, Kendal
- Lisa Walsh, Grove Street Primary School, Birkenhead
- Peter Hilton, Millbrook Primary School, Waltham Cross
- Dave Shaw, Spire Junior School, Chesterfield

**HEAD TEACHER OF THE YEAR - SECONDARY SCHOOL, sponsored by Hays**

- Farhan Adam, Crown Hills Community College, Leicester
- Robin Newman, Haileybury Turnford, Waltham Cross
- Jane Galbraith, Lathom High School, Wigan
- Fiona Mullen, St Andrew's and St Bride's High School

**IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP**

- The Legacy Project, Delph Side Community Primary School, Skelmersdale
- HISP Multi-Academy Trust, Chandler's Ford, Hants
- The HEARTs project, Hope School, Liverpool
- LightBulb Mental Wellness Programme for Schools, St Andrew's College, Northampton

**LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT, sponsored by the Department for Education**

- Jane Frankish, Broad Heath Primary School, Coventry
- Julie Deville, Eldon Grove Academy, Hartlepool
- Sue Thompson, Redden Court School, Romford

**John Patterson, St Vincent's School, Liverpool**

- Sue Higginson, Wirral Met College
- Sheelagh Rusby, Dumfries and Galloway Council

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE - PRIMARY SCHOOL, sponsored by PixL**

- Lansbury Lawrence Primary School, Tower Hamlets
- New City Primary School, Plaistow
- St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast
- East Plean Primary School, Stirling

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE - SECONDARY SCHOOL, sponsored by PixL**

- Crown Hills Community College, Leicester
- Kettering Buccleuch Academy
- Sharples School, Bolton
- St Michael's C of E High School, Rowley Regis
- Braes High School, Falkirk

**OUTSTANDING NEW TEACHER - PRIMARY SCHOOL, sponsored by the Department for Education**

- Alice Jones, Emmbrook Junior School, Wokingham
- Robyn Hastings, Heber Primary School, London
- Daniel Callaghan, Thorpe Primary School Bradford

**OUTSTANDING NEW TEACHER - SECONDARY SCHOOL, sponsored by the Department for Education**

- Ayla Zenkic, Bishop Challoner, Birmingham
- Zac Moxon, Chiswick School
- Russell Hill, Houlton School, Rugby
- Julie Howard, Queen Katharine Academy, Peterborough

**TEACHER OF THE YEAR - PRIMARY SCHOOL, sponsored by Randstad**

- Mia Bano, Arden Primary School, Sparkhill, Birmingham
- Mairi Miller, Coombe Hill Junior School, New Malden
- Chelsea Castell, Ernesettle Community School, Plymouth
- Kate Harrison, Fishtoft Academy, Boston
- Kateryna Konstantynova, Malmesbury Primary School, Tower Hamlets
- Claire Adshead, Thames View Primary School, Rainham, Kent
- Matthew King, Trinity St Peter's, Liverpool
- Yehoshua Radomsky, North West London Jewish Day School
- Leah Coyne, St Johns CofE Primary School, Canterbury

**TEACHER OF THE YEAR - SECONDARY SCHOOL, sponsored by Nord Anglia**

- Jo Turner, Callington Community College, Cornwall
- Patrice Gonzales, Harris Academy Orpington
- Lee McCue, Madeley High School, Crewe
- Ibraheem Talib, Nineslides Academy, Birmingham
- Jose Ros, Queen Katharine Academy, Peterborough

**TEACHING ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR - PRIMARY SCHOOL**

- Lorna Cannon, Margaretting C of E VC Primary School, Ingatestone

**TEACHING ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR - SECONDARY SCHOOL**

- Julie Barnfield, Beacon Hill Academy, Dudley
- Patrick Walker, Turnbull High School, Glasgow
- TEACHING ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR - FE
- Claire Swain, Halesowen College, W Midlands
- Liz Barber, Halesowen College

**UNSUNG HERO**

- Manjit Nahal, Bridgetown School, Stratford upon Avon
- Duncan Marshall, St Edburg's C of E VA Primary School, Bicester
- Elaine Small, The Coppice Primary School, Lapworth
- Mandy Farrar, Diamond Wood Community Academy, Ravensthorpe
- Ryan Gardiner, Howden School, Goole
- Becky Smith, New College Pontefract

## INSPECTION SECTION

# Specialist college for high-needs adults is 'outstanding' in all areas

**ANVIKSHA PATEL**  
ANVIKSHA.PATEL@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A London-based specialist college delivering vocational courses for high-needs adults has been praised for its “highly inclusive and supportive” education in an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted report.

The watchdog undertook its first full inspection of Great Oaks College in the London borough of Hounslow in April and awarded the college ‘outstanding’ across the board.

At the time of the inspection, the college had 98 learners aged 19 to 25, all of whom have high needs or education health and care plans (EHCPs), and had learners with moderate, severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), including some with autism spectrum disorder.

The relatively new college had shown positive signs from an early monitoring visit in 2021, which found it was making ‘significant progress’ after opening in 2018. The college is co-located on the same site as Oaklands School.

Inspectors said that staff and learners have “very high levels of respect for each other”, and that staff understand learners’ needs “extremely well” and have a “clear and very effective vision” for learners to live as independently as they can.

They found the majority of learners achieve their goals and continue onto positive destinations after college, such as supported living and employment.

The report said that teachers “thoroughly” prepare learners for post-college life through careers support and interview skills training for those on a vocational pathway.

It also found that staff are highly trained to identify safeguarding concerns through frequent training.

“College staff go above and beyond their statutory legal duties to help learners,” inspectors said, regarding safeguarding.

The college additionally taught students “sensitively and appropriately” about sexual identity and sexuality and how learners can keep themselves safe in college, at work and in the community with regard to online safety and consent.

Ofsted said teachers were given an extensive training and development programme, including SEND-related topics such as how to support learners who have autism, moving and handling learners and behaviour management.

College Principal Nickyie Thomas told *FE Week* that everyone was “thrilled” to receive the rating and the achievement was a testament to the college’s commitment to excellence.

“The inspectors acknowledged and

praised the hard work and dedication of our staff, who provide a stimulating and engaging educational experience for our students,” she said.

She also praised staff for their “tenacious enthusiasm” and “consistently excellent” teaching.

“The teachers, therapists, medical team, and support staff work collaboratively to provide bespoke learning packages,” she added. “Their work enables students to develop their independence, communication and to ensure that they are fully prepared for their next destination, as they take their place within the community.”

Thomas said she was also “immensely proud” of the students. “They have shown they are resilient, positive and ready to challenge barriers and misconceptions,” she added.





# Secondary support schemes

Build confidence by focusing on essential concepts and tackling them in small logical steps.

When students struggle with the core maths curriculum at key stage 3, teachers need a more tailored approach to encourage progress.

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# MAYOR OF LONDON



## THIS YEAR'S MAYOR OF LONDON ADULT LEARNING AWARDS ARE NOW OPEN

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Interview

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# TRACY BRABIN

Mayor of West Yorkshire Combined Authority

‘Let us get on with what we need to deliver for our communities’



JESSICA HILL  
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM

**The mayor of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority claims to have used her control of the adult education budget to target areas where change was needed most, but is keenly eyeing more powers to make a real difference for communities**

Tracy Brabin greets me with a broad smile and bubbly manner that masks the fact she is a political force to be reckoned with.

The first mayor of West Yorkshire Combined Authority spent much of her life playing on-

screen personas in shows including Coronation Street, Eastenders and Emmerdale, which has given her a knack for wearing a big smile at opportune moments – also an advantage in her political life.

Our interview is around one of her priority areas, the skills agenda, but she has to resort to paper notes as backup when the technical details evade her. This is understandable, given the wide scope of her mayoral role; her combined authority oversees regional transport, housing, planning, finance and policing matters, as well as controlling the adult education budget.

But she is keenly eyeing more levers of power. Despite being the current chair of the M10,

a cross-party group of English metro mayors who work together on policy issues, she watched from the sidelines as fellow mayors Andy Burnham and Andy Street, of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands respectively, recently clinched even more powers in their new landmark “trailblazer” devolution deals.

Brabin pulls no punches as she warns there will be “hell on if we’re not next” for such a deal.

Brabin reveals that the M10 mayors have approached the government with an “off the shelf” trailblazer option for the other combined authorities that are “mature enough” for it. They could then have “further conversations about particular bolt-ons” which she believed the

# Interview

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Tracy Brabin

government could feasibly sign off this year.

Brabin would like to get her hands on a single funding settlement for skills, which is currently split into five different streams: skills bootcamps, AEB, Multiply, Skills Connect and the UK shared prosperity fund.

But those enhanced trailblazer deals, which act as blueprints for other areas to follow, did not extend Burnham and Street's powers that far. They did gain sway over which level three 'free courses for jobs' and skills bootcamps they can lay on in the future, rather than being dictated to by the government on such matters.

Brabin indicated she would use flexibilities to address chronic care worker shortages.

"We're told we have to run a [skills] bootcamp within certain restrictions when we know that locally, there's a real crisis in recruitment for care workers. Let us get on with what we need to deliver for our communities," she says.

Burnham and Street can also now form post-16 skills "joint governance boards", which Burnham hopes will facilitate the launch of his proposed 'MBacc Greater Manchester Baccalaureate' of technical qualifications to meet local skills gaps.

Brabin "agrees with the principle" behind Burnham's MBacc proposal but would not commit to such a move herself.

## Achievements so far

Brabin claims that having devolved power over

her region's £65 million adult education budget has provided "strategic thinking" to "ladle [funding] between communities and identify areas of deprivation for big interventions".

This approach seems to be working. In the year after the combined authority was formed in 2021, it boosted adult learner numbers by six per cent to 43,000, partly by expanding free training access to those on the real living wage rather than the minimum wage.

Adult learners in the most acutely deprived neighbourhoods rose from 37 per cent to 41 per cent.

West Yorkshire has also saved money by cutting back on subcontracting which, before devolution, took up £9 million a year of AEB funding.

Monitoring and scrutiny was ramped up, saving £1.4 million in management fees in the first year which was "woven back into delivery". But Brabin is not totally averse to subcontracting, claiming it can "help us with that community base".

## Devolution and dinners

Brabin, whose region covers Bradford Wakefield, Huddersfield, Halifax and Leeds, has "regular dinners" with local college principals.

The decision by West Yorkshire to raise its AEB funding rate for providers by 10 per cent in line with inflation "came out of our last

dinner" as Brabin was told "really vividly about the challenges facing colleges, given their underfunding for decades".

But because AEB funding from the government did not rise accordingly, money earmarked for future projects had to be used to pay for it.

When asked if the uplift has led to a lowering of overall learner numbers, Brabin responds "let's hope not".

Level two courses have seen growth this year, with demand coming through particularly strongly in employability programmes and English and maths.

## Distance dilemmas

The combined authority wants to ensure that in giving the uplift, a "quality provision" is being provided.

Now, provision which is mainly online receives the same funding as classroom courses where resource and staffing costs are much higher. The combined authority has been concerned that some providers are running courses with significantly lower guided learning hours than recommended.

Last July, Ofsted denounced some providers for retaining remote learning after the pandemic. West Yorkshire raised the issue in its discussions earlier this month with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

Brabin is concerned some providers are providing "100 per cent distance learning provision ... where a learner has no contact with a tutor", with even marking being automated.

Her combined authority is preparing a paper for its members to vote on proposals to ensure funding matches the number of guided learning hours being provided.

## Multiplying difficulties

Brabin has been "really pressing the government to be next in line for the trailblazer deal" because of her frustration at having to roll out prescriptive national schemes like the £559 million Multiply scheme to improve adult numeracy rates, which have mountains of red tape attached to them.

"We've got to have that autonomy, we can't be left behind picking up the 19-year-olds, trying to resolve problems from Multiply that come from the centre," she says.

West Yorkshire was allocated £12.4m across three financial years, with its spending plans

# Interview

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approved in June 2022 and accepted by DfE in August.

But part of a £3 million pot allocated for 'business focused activity' was held up because a tender open from December to January was unsuccessful and had to be republished, leading to an £816,000 underspend for the programme's first year.

West Yorkshire asked DfE to rollover the unspent funds to the second year, but it has not agreed to this. Other areas are understood to face the same issue. "That's a big issue beyond us. It's a national issue, and it's been frustrating," says Brabin.

"We're held to account as mayors. Yet we can't press government to be timely in delivery."

She doesn't "think the centre understands" how much work is required to get learners "ready for learning", with "so many who are so far away from even stepping into the classroom".

Just under 2,000 people engaged in Multiply in its first year in West Yorkshire, which was under target. But Brabin is "really confident" of hitting targets for years two and three.

## Women and girls

Perhaps it is because she is England's first woman to be elected as a metro mayor that Brabin has made championing the rights of women and girls a key theme of her leadership.

West Yorkshire recently helped fund a project which saw 300 women come together to build a barn as part of Leeds's first WOW (woman of the world) event, only half of whom already had construction experience, to help encourage more women to consider a career in the trade.

Construction courses run in the barn

afterwards were five times oversubscribed, and Leeds College of Building is now looking at putting on women-only construction, painting, decorating and plumbing courses after an upsurge of interest from them, according to Brabin.

Some women offered their services to teach at the college, which is currently bearing the brunt of an acute nationwide shortage of construction teachers.

Furthermore, Brabin's apprenticeship levy transfer scheme, which helps apprenticeship levy-paying employers transfer up to 25 per cent of their apprenticeship levy funds to smaller businesses and training providers, has seen Asda's unspent levy pivoted to training up police community support officers to work on buses, helping to ensure the safety of women and girls.

Brabin also claims she "persuaded" local bus companies struggling with recruitment to take on part-time drivers, to attract more women into the profession.

## Labour agenda

With forecasters hedging their bets that the next government will be a Labour one, Brabin has one eye on the shadow cabinet's plans. Brabin believes there is now a "devolution arms race" taking place, "led by Michael Gove and the Labour Party".

Labour's commission on the UK's future, led by Gordon Brown, published a landmark report last year which advocated merging centrally run adult education funding streams such as Multiply with the existing AEB budget, as well as giving mayors more powers

to decide which FE courses should be funded.

## LSIPs

Local skills improvement plans also came in for criticism from Labour's commission for "sidelining democratically elected local leadership in favour of local Chambers of Commerce". Brabin would agree.

She has a good relationship with her region's two chambers of commerce. But the combined authority "talks to businesses all the time" and the chambers are "often coming to us for the knowledge, because we store the data".

"It just feels like another lack of understanding. We could help the chambers with [LSIPs], we could work together. But it feels like it's a disconnect with what's happening on the ground."

Brabin points out with a note of sarcasm in her voice how "it wouldn't be fair for me to say" whether Conservative mayors currently get a "seat at the table" with government (Tees Valley's Ben Houchen, who often appears to hold the ear of ministers, was recently handed a peerage in Boris Johnson's resignation honours list).

But, under a Labour government, Brabin might hold similar sway with ministers.

She clearly already holds influence within Labour. She was "able to feed back" to her party how on a recent India trade mission, and she could guarantee a "talent pipeline" through her AEB budget to "co create a programme" in return for investment.

She has also spoken to Ed Miliband and Rachel Reeves about the party's Green New Deal.

Two days before it was announced that Labour had watered down its commitment to invest £28 billion a year in green industries upon becoming elected, Brabin seemed already aware of the move, warning that it is "going to be important ... for Labour that we have a focus on the green economy".

West Yorkshire is a staunch Labour stronghold with its five Labour-controlled councils and Labour MPs, and Brabin believes they can "get a lot done" together if her party wins power nationally.

"If we had the resources that are in the South for research and development, or for infrastructure, West Yorkshire could turbocharge the national economy. We just need that investment, and that flex to deliver for our community."



Tracy Brabin

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We have appointed FE Associates to support us with this crucial appointment. Interested parties should contact [Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk](mailto:Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk) to discuss the role before the closing date.

**Closing date: 9am Monday 10 July 2023**

**Interview date: Friday 21 July 2023**



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THE STUDENT COMMISSION ON RACIAL JUSTICE

THE STUDENT COMMISSION ON RACIAL JUSTICE has published its 2023 Manifesto for Action. Over the next five weeks, its commissioners will set out its five key priorities and recommendations exclusively for FE Week

Complaints about racism must be heard – and acted upon



HARINDER RANDHAWA  
Health and social care student, Birmingham Metropolitan College

Too many students still feel calling racism out will only get them in trouble, writes Harinder Randhawa

Since becoming a commissioner on the student commission for racial justice last year, I have been working to bring about change in the way colleges address and tackle racism. One of the main ways they can either support or hinder that work is in how they manage and resolve complaints.

Accordingly, a key recommendation in our manifesto for action is for colleges to review their complaints structures and processes and to involve students to increase trust in their effectiveness.

As part of our work for the commission, our research found that students from minoritised ethnic groups are less likely than white students to report the race-related incidents they experience or witness. Some say it's because they don't feel safe, and only 58 per cent believe appropriate action would be taken.

When I spoke with students about the changes they want to see in their settings, it was clear to see the reality behind those statistics. A great number told me about the biases they experience.

This included a number of instances, for example, of security guards not letting students onto campus, which they felt could only be due to their ethnic background as they weren't causing problems

or being rude.

Sadly, I also had to witness unfair treatment first-hand when a student tried to speak out about racism. With courage, they decided to give the voiceless students in the room a voice. They put their foot down and called out someone in the room who, during an assembly, had boldly used a stereotype to slander Indian people.

“When a student speaks out, they should be listened to”

The student who spoke out was reprimanded and told they should leave the perpetrator alone. Meanwhile, the perpetrator got away with it. The student who had spoken on behalf of the South Asian community felt publicly shamed for doing so, and the perpetrator faced no consequences, let alone any

expectation that they should take responsibility for their actions.

In this context, is it any surprise students believe it's easier to ignore race-related incidents?

Speaking out about racism is just as important as asking for help when you don't understand your assignment. Every individual should be treated with dignity, respect and have the right to feel safe.

Students spoke to us about how there should be more diverse ways to raise concerns when it comes to race-related incidents. They said they would benefit from having an anonymous drop-box or an email form. They want to be able to speak about their concerns and get a response that is quick and effective.

An example of a positive response is to have a mediation session where both parties involved explain themselves and show understanding. The mediator can then see whether the perpetrator is genuinely remorseful, whether the victim

needs further support, and bring the situation to an end that satisfies everyone.

In cases where perpetrators don't take responsibility for their actions, students in our research suggested the reasonable second step of requiring the perpetrator to complete an awareness course on the impact of racism, with a threshold pass mark for returning to college.

Students should be supported to learn and understand, but safeguarding must surely require some proof that their potential victims are safe from further harm.

It speaks highly of the student body that, while some felt strongly that racism should be severely punished, most want to see a response focused on education to break cycles of behaviour.

And in the end, that willingness to learn must apply to teachers too. When a student speaks out about racially motivated unfair treatment, they should be listened to. There should be a clear process following the incident that rebuilds that student's confidence and trust.

If we really mean to deliver racial justice in education, then we must break the vicious cycle of complaints being ignored. That means all teachers must be appropriately and adequately trained to fight racism as an integral part of their important role in shaping the next generation.



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# THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

## How we're rethinking teacher development for sustainability

**Education for sustainability starts with how we train and develop our teachers, writes Charlie Simmans**

In January 2023, I took on the role of head of teacher development and quality improvement at Suffolk New College. I'm determined to think differently about the teaching landscape to empower my colleagues to be innovative for our learners. And for me, one of the key factors driving us towards a new paradigm of education is the desperate need for more sustainable lives.

**“To deliver sustainability education, we have to deliver education sustainably”**

When the ETF announced the new teacher professional standards in 2022, an amendment caught my eye. PVA2 called on teachers to 'promote and embed education for sustainable development (ESD) across learning and working practices'.

I was bemused. What does this even mean? Is this about using less paper? Recycling bins in classrooms? More digital lessons? And how could I teach this authentically to trainee teachers and my peers if I didn't know?

And with that I went on a journey.



### CHARLIE SIMMANS

Teacher training lecturer, Suffolk New College

I'm still on that journey, but at this juncture I have concluded that ESD isn't just about green skills, climate change and the environment. It's about developing, promoting, and eliciting the knowledge, skills, values and attributes we need for a different society altogether.

That sounds like a big ask, but the truth is that the solutions are mostly already here. We just need to tap into them, and that's a question of engaging everyone in the effort. Our staff don't need CPD on sustainability for their subject specialisms: they are already living and breathing their industries. They don't need external experts telling them what they already know. They need time to connect with each other to develop what they do.

To deliver sustainability education, we must deliver education sustainably – starting with teacher education. So, my team and I have been planning a whole day of CPD activity to model that.

We have a floor full of escape rooms for staff to crack, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and exploring themes such as poverty, health

and education. Staff will be able to make artistic sustainability pledges to display to students.

There's a workshop dedicated to gamification tools to use as building blocks to engage individuals in solving problems and drive sustainable behaviours. And our last workshop has a definite Mission: Impossible vibes, but the message it delivers will be most definitely not self-destruct.

This is about long-term change, and creating a culture of change. The solutions we develop now can't become a new status quo. They will need to continuously evolve and refine, and the biggest challenge to that is that humans are creatures of habit.

Sadly, this includes some educators for whom inertia is comfortable and who meet change with resistance. The measure of our success will be whether our sustainability-led approach to teacher education and CPD can bring them along on the journey.

Sustainability demands that we experience the world in a different

way, and that means teaching in a different way. In other words, teaching itself must become more sustainable, and what could make it more attractive and enjoyable than to systematically empower teachers' critical thinking skills and their problem-solving prowess.

After all, how else can we expect them to elicit these same kinds of skills in our young learners? We have a responsibility to teach in such ways that our learners have the knowledge and skills necessary to live responsibly.

Designing a curriculum for sustainability involves reviewing the content knowledge we impart, but that's only part of it. We must model what we teach to have

any hope of truly affecting their perceptions and behaviours.

I'm grateful to the teacher standards for putting me on this journey and I'm excited to be taking this next step on it to bring more of our staff along on the ride.

I hope other colleges and institutions will join us in thinking differently about shaping the next generation of students and teachers to meet the challenge of climate change.

How we go about that will vary across regions and contexts, but the core aims will be the same: creating enabling environments and fostering a culture of change. And the way I see it, that starts with teacher development.



# Colleges should be central to discussions about tuition and post-Covid recovery



**DR ALICE EARDLEY**

Chief programmes officer, Get Further

**Leaving colleges out of major reports on the impact of tuition ignores the sector's vital role for disadvantaged older learners, writes Alice Eardley**

The hashtag #andcolleges has been doing the rounds on social media for a little while now, representing the post-16 education sector's frustration in response to statements, projects and policies focused on schools (and often universities as well) that demonstrate no apparent awareness of the significance of post-16 providers in the education landscape.

When it comes to closing the attainment gap between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers, it is particularly puzzling to find colleges excluded from the discussion.

**“Colleges work with the vast majority of students who resit English and maths”**

After all, most students from disadvantaged backgrounds progress to colleges at the age of sixteen, meaning that colleges support a far higher proportion (double the percentage) when compared with school sixth forms.

More specifically, colleges work with the vast majority of the 300,000 students who need to resit their English and maths GCSEs each year, 70 per cent of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Last week, the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts published its report on Education Recovery in Schools in England. The report highlights the role played by learning lost during the pandemic in entrenching disadvantage, noting that a decade of progress in reducing the gap in attainment between learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers has been wiped out.

A significant focus of the report is on the role played by tuition, and the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) in particular, in the drive to ensure the disadvantage gap rapidly returns to pre-pandemic levels and continues to close.

There was no mention of the NTP's sister programme, the 16-19 Tuition Fund, which last year made £92 million available to post-16 providers so they could provide catch-up tuition to young people.

One of the report's five recommendations was that DfE “should monitor how much tutoring is being provided, in 2022/23 and 2023/24 when it is providing a subsidy, and in subsequent years, and intervene if

tutoring levels drop significantly.”

The focus here was on the NTP, in recognition of the impact that tutoring can have on learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in schools, but we can certainly follow this with our hashtag – #andcolleges – where tutoring can play a significant role in closing disadvantage gaps for older learners.

There is strong research evidence that small-group and 1:1 tuition can have a significant impact on educational attainment, particularly in maths and reading, and particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

At Get Further, we have recently published our annual impact report for 2021/22 which demonstrates the equally significant impact that small-group tuition can have on learners resitting GCSE English and maths in post-16 settings.

With extra support provided by tutors, we have found that young people can achieve grade 4 in English or maths at rates considerably higher than the national average. We also know that achieving English and maths

GCSEs can lead to economic benefits for learners, with an increase in lifetime earnings of over £45,000.

Not only does the investment in tuition considerably improve the life chances of the individual young people who benefit from it directly, there are also significant benefits for the wider economy.

Post-16 education has a crucial role to play both in closing the disadvantage gaps that opened up during the pandemic and ensuring that the pre-Covid progress made in closing gaps is resumed. It is overwhelmingly colleges that are helping those young people to catch up who, due to disrupted education, missed out on a grade 4 in their English and maths GCSEs.

They should not be left out of conversations about education recovery, not least because the financial and staffing pressures confronting schools are compounded in a sector that has historically been significantly underfunded.

In this context, and in light of the compelling evidence of the impact tuition can have the educational and life chances of all young people, including those over the age of 16, we are calling on the government to ensure that colleges are more than an afterthought in the decisions taken about educational recovery.

The government needs to extend and scale up national tutoring policies to ensure that high-quality, fully-funded tuition is available beyond August 2024 to all young people who need that extra bit of support to truly achieve their potential.

Opinion

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# Apprenticeships in pharma are on the up. Here's how to keep it that way



**ANDREW CROYDON**

Director, education and examination policy and partnerships, The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry

**Apprenticeships have the potential to meet the pharmaceutical industry's skills gaps, says Andrew Croydon, but only if we ramp up the system**

Apprenticeships are a powerful tool for bridging the skills gap in the pharmaceutical sector – essential if we are to keep one of the UK's most innovative industries globally competitive.

With constant advancements in technology and medical research, the skills required within the industry are always changing and evolving.

The demand for skilled workers has never been greater, and apprenticeships provide a win-win solution.

They allow employers to access a skills development pipeline across a wide range of roles, including those where priority skills gaps have been identified. At the same time, apprentices get an opportunity to 'earn while they learn' and further their journey in a fulfilling career.

Traditionally, apprenticeships have been associated with skilled blue-collar or artisanal jobs. However, in recent years, the apprenticeship model has been gaining traction in many professional services roles and in the science and technology sectors, including pharmaceuticals.

Through a combination of on-the-job training and classroom learning, they provide a unique and flexible opportunity for people to develop relevant skills while directly contributing to the workforce.

Research by the ABPI has shown

that the number of apprentices hosted by the biopharmaceutical industry in 2022 had increased year on year since 2015 (287.5 per cent) over that period. And encouragingly, apprenticeships are being delivered from level 2 to level 7 across a range of disciplines, and with increasing flexibility on duration.

This highlights increasing sector employer confidence in using apprenticeships, although to develop a skilled workforce for the future it is crucial we align skills supply with employer demand to ensure we have a talent pipeline suitable for the industry. To do this, we need closer collaboration between industry, educational institutions, and policymakers.

**More pharmaceutical standards**

First, there must be consultation to identify the specific skills and competencies that the pharmaceutical industry needs, and where the skills gaps exist. The ABPI's latest skills gap report analyses the skills gaps and trends within the UK pharmaceutical industry based on survey data from over 30 different employers.

The report includes past examples of using the

apprenticeship route to act on identified skills gaps, including the development of the Level 7 Bioinformatics standard, and of the Level 7 Clinical Pharmacology Scientist standard which launched in September last year.

**“We need to reach those who tend not to see the sector as accessible to them”**

So, we know that actively involving employers in the design and delivery of apprenticeship programmes is our best bet to achieve the outcomes we need. It ensures that teaching plans align with industry needs and that apprentices are actively prepared for the roles and challenges they will face in their careers.

What we need now is to replicate that work for more of the sub-sectors within the pharmaceutical industry, and to target efforts where there are the greatest shortages first. We also need clearer pathways to those Level 7 apprenticeships, so that younger

people can understand more about their route into the industry earlier.

**More flexibility**

Next, the skills sector must be agile and responsive to the evolving demands of the industry. That means that any new and existing apprenticeship frameworks and qualifications must be flexible enough to quickly incorporate emerging technologies and research breakthroughs.

Employers would also like to see the government do more to increase flexibility on how the apprenticeship levy can be used to ensure that businesses of all sizes can benefit.

And if apprenticeships are going to deliver on their promise, they also need to recognise the greater flexibility of today's workforce. We need a clearer and more coherent careers guidance system, and its focus can't be only on young people as has traditionally been the case. Adults increasingly need careers guidance, and we need to reach those sections of the population who tend not to see the sector as accessible to them.

Addressing the skills gap in biopharmaceuticals is vital for the UK's continuing place as a sector leader and for our continued economic prosperity.

We welcome the Department for Education and the Office for Life Sciences' support for employers to tailor apprenticeship delivery to meet the needs of employers and their apprentices'.

However, there is a lot more work to be done to ensure our system competes with the best.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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# Why colleges are well placed to lead education towards greater neuro-inclusion



**PAUL EELES**  
Chief executive,  
Skills and  
Education Group

**The FE sector's accessible curriculum is an excellent launchpad to showcase how neuroinclusive education can be, says Paul Eeles**

I recently underwent a neurodiversity assessment. Finally, at the age of 56, I have a formal diagnosis of neurodiversity and dyslexia. Finally, I fully understand the challenges I've always had. I no longer feel like I'm rubbish at certain things; instead, I employ strategies to counteract the challenges I face, and I know what support to ask for from friends, family, and colleagues.

Those challenges are simple but disruptive. Because my short-term working memory is poor, I often forget to do things colleagues have asked me to do – unless I write them down.

My spelling is not what it should be. And I sometimes find myself stumbling through answers while desperately trying to remember what the question was. In short, my brain functions in an atypical way.

Yours might too. Across the nine domains they measure, Cognassist (who assessed me) estimate that less than 10 per cent of people sit in the 'average' cognitive profile range. This suggests that places of work and learning that aren't assessing for neurodiversity are potentially letting many people down and missing out on many talents.

I loved school and I thrived in many ways – but none of them academic. I had detentions on

a weekly basis for my spelling, and I left without an O level to my name. In reality, I was being punished for something I never stood a chance of excelling at. I just got used to people thinking I wouldn't amount to much.

Of course, neurodiversity and its associated conditions such as dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and dyspraxia weren't really recognised back then. We've come a long way since. Some brilliant work is happening across education, but there's still so much more we could do.

When I left school at 16, I went to college. It was transformative. Finally, I was given the chance to learn in a different way – a heavily practical way that really suited me. I started to thrive and people started to believe in me.

A pivotal moment came for me a few years later, when one of my tutors suggested I should teach. It was the first time that I'd felt I had something to offer an education setting. Another year later, I became

the youngest lecturer ever to have worked at Walsall College. My career since has spanned 35 years in further education, and I have taken my own education to master's level.

**“Think of all the talented, neurodiverse learners that would bubble to the surface”**

I was lucky. I found my way. But the fact remains that I was needlessly pushed to the bottom of the academic pile for years. I always had the ability to learn; I just needed the freedom to do it in a different way. How many talented people have fallen by the wayside because they never found their niche in education?

As chief executive of the Skills and Education Group, I am on a mission to ensure education policies and assessment practice

become neuroinclusive. Any policy or practice that is solely built around the assumption that we all learn in the same way is simply outdated.

We need to much better educate our teachers about neurodiverse conditions. Learners can't thrive on empathy alone; they need teachers who understand what their diagnosis means, the hidden challenges they present, and the initiatives they can deploy to help them. We need to identify these conditions earlier, and we must be ready to support learners with them with every step of their journey.

And we need government policy that supports neurodiversity in delivery and assessment as a mainstream issue. Further education has traditionally provided a much more accessible curriculum for many by default. We can't put this at risk through qualification reform when we should be codifying that inclusiveness and driving it to greater heights.

Colleges are precisely the kind of inclusive environments our whole education system should be learning from, but the sector can't stop pushing forward. The collaborative networks of neurotypical and neurodiverse students they create are surely leading to a more understanding and accepting society.

Think of all the talented, neurodiverse learners that would bubble to the surface if that was the educational norm.



# Movers & Shakers

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



## Debbie Gardiner

Managing Director,  
Learn Plus Us

**Start date:** May 2023

**Previous Job:** Chief Commercial Officer,  
Learn Plus Us

**Interesting fact:** Debbie ran her first fundraiser when she was just 10 years of age; a jumble sale in her garage. It was a massive success, raising a whopping £20 (a lot of money in 1970) and it set the scene for her future voluntary and fundraising work



## Ken Merry

Deputy Principal  
and Deputy  
Chief Executive,  
York College &  
University Centre

**Start date:** June 2023

**Previous Job:** Vice Principal - Quality,  
Barnsley College

**Interesting fact:** Ken once travelled to Iceland with the sole purpose of seeing the Northern Lights. Despite perfect conditions, he did not see them but, while in Iceland, the lights were visible each night in York



## David Akeroyd

Principal &  
Chief Executive,  
Barnsley College

**Start date:** August 2023

**Previous Job:** Deputy Principal, Barnsley College

**Interesting fact:** David spends his weekends looking after his Miniature Shetland Ponies - Dinky and Calypso - in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales

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@fewweek.co.uk](mailto:news@fewweek.co.uk)

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