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FEWEEK

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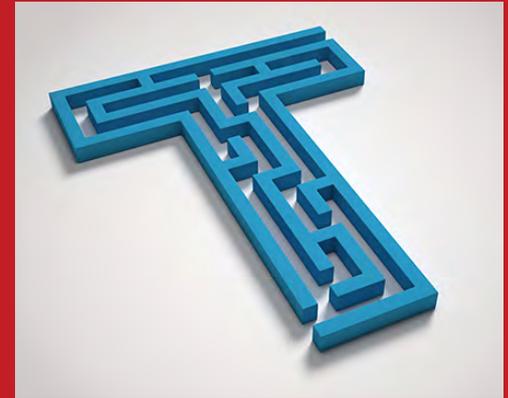
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Prison leaders slammed for ‘slow progress’ on reading education

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Prison leaders have been accused of not taking reading education seriously in a damning joint report by education and prison inspectors.

Reading education in prisons is still hampered by “weak curriculum design” and a lack of specialist staff, Ofsted’s chief inspector has warned – in a new report warning reading is “still not given sufficient priority”.

Despite warnings last year of “serious systemic challenges, as well as plenty of poor practice”, HMI Prisons chief inspector, Charlie Taylor said in this year’s follow-up report that “things have not improved at anything like the rate that Ofsted and HMIP would have expected”.

Inspectors found that staff shortages are still a major problem, that the curriculum had not been improved enough, and that the prisoners in most need of reading support were least supported to develop good skills.

While she was “pleased” to see nearly all prisons had “acknowledged the importance of reading, Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman said “there is more work to do to meet the recommendations we made last year” around teacher provision, staff training and assessment.

In total, HMIP and Ofsted assessed 24 prisons for their progress.

‘Not given sufficient priority’

Last year, the report warned many staff did not know how to teach reading, and that a lot of the work was left to voluntary organisations or enthusiastic

staff members.

In this year’s follow-up report, Spielman warned staff shortages “still limit the quality of reading education in most prisons”. At 15 of the prisons visited by Ofsted and HMIP, a shortage of qualified English teachers made it more difficult to teach reading.

“Poor teaching” and a lack of access to education means that prisoners often did not practice their reading skills. Very few of the teachers in prisons were trained to teach using systematic synthetic phonics, the report added.

That meant that some of the teachers assumed if a prisoner could answer a question on a text correctly, that they could read and understand the whole text.

“Because of continuing weaknesses in curriculum design and teaching, there has not yet been a significant improvement in prisoners’ reading skills,” the report said.

Reading, the report found, is “still not given sufficient priority”.

Difficult to navigate ‘basic aspects of life’
Inspectors found that the prisoners in most need of support were the least well supported to develop good reading skills.

Once in reading education, Ofsted and HMIP found most leaders “neither monitored the progress prisoners made nor intervened when prisoners made slow

progress”.

While “a few prisons used [...] diagnostic assessments of prisoners” to assess their ability on entry to the education steam, most of those projects were relatively new – meaning it was too early to know if they worked.

Following last year’s report, prisons were mandated to have a reading strategy. But many of those are “generic” and created by the education provider without input from prison leaders.

Inspectors said they were less confident prisoners would make progress in those prisons, in comparison to those where the governor had developed the reading programme with the provider.

Prison leaders also do not have an “agreed approach” to written communication or instructions to make prison life easier for those with learning needs. That meant that prisoners who were still learning to read “find it difficult to navigate basic aspects of prison life, such as ordering food and completing canteen sheets”.

Severe impact on prisoners

Inspectors added one new criticism in this report to those laid out last year – that prison leaders had been “slow” to meet the reading needs of prisoners

learning English as a second language.

They warned prisons “rarely” provide ESOL classes and that teachers often have “little or no expertise” in ESOL.

The lack of support from prison leaders meant that too many ESOL prisoners were forced to rely on other prisoners for support when working – because they could not understand the work instructions.



Police investigate stolen exam papers after cyber-attack

SAMANTHA BOOTH
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EXCLUSIVE

Police are investigating a cyber-attack where it is thought a hacker posed as a school to obtain exam papers before selling them online.

Cambridgeshire Police said they are in the "early stages" of investigating a "data breach" involving exam boards Pearson and OCR. The boards had exam papers "extracted from their systems and sold online", the police said.

Officers are working with the National Crime Agency and the Department for Education on the investigation.

FE Week understands the incident relates to a school's email system being hacked and then used to request papers from the exam boards – before the exam was taken. It is not known which exams this relates to.

Centres usually receive exam papers weeks in advance. However, there is also a

process to request "emergency" papers sent electronically, if there is not enough time to post the papers.

The individual exam boards refused to comment. Instead, they sent a joint statement from their membership organisation, the Joint Council of Qualifications.

A JQC spokesperson said that "every year, awarding organisations investigate potential breaches of security. When investigations are complete, sanctions, which may be severe, are taken against any individuals found to be involved".

Most summer exams series, rumours circulate online about certain papers being leaked.

But boards told the BBC earlier this year that it was extremely rare for genuine papers to be leaked. Any attempts to obtain confidential material is malpractice.

Exam boards are required to report to Ofqual when there has been an actual or potential security breach of confidential

material.

Last summer, there were 28 leaks of material, including a Pearson GCSE maths question leaked on social media before the exam.

Ofqual's annual report stated the board quickly identified the person involved and carried out "immediate inspections and extra supervision of exams" at the centre.

AQA's A-level chemistry paper last year was stolen from a delivery van. Students who had access to the paper were disqualified and the theft was reported to the police.

On the latest breach, an Ofqual spokesperson said it "requires exam boards to investigate any alleged breaches of security and to take appropriate action.

"This year, as in every year, Ofqual has received reports from exam boards about alleged breaches of security. We would not comment on any investigations being carried out by boards."

Ofqual looking at 'fully digital' GCSEs and A-levels

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The exams regulator is undertaking a feasibility study alongside the government on "what it would take" to make GCSEs and A-levels "fully digital".

Dr Jo Saxton, Ofqual's chief regulator, told the House of Lords it was important "guardrails" were set so students could benefit from technological innovation in a fair way.

Ofqual, with the DfE, is doing a feasibility study on "what it would take" for high-stakes assessments – such as GCSEs and A-levels – to be "fully digital" and delivered on screen, Saxton said.

Speaking at the education for 11 to 16-year-olds committee, Saxton added: "There are huge opportunities, but we've got to make sure that we don't throw any babies out with the bathwater."

The regulator pledged in its corporate plan last year to support exam boards to use "innovative practice and technology".

Some boards are already piloting on-screen assessment, but research by AQA last year found teachers' biggest barrier to digital exams was a lack of infrastructure.

Saxton, a former academy trust boss, said the feasibility study was looking "at things like the national infrastructure" and the "potential for digital and modern technologies to do things like provide additional quality assurance around matters like marking".

There had been "significant issues" in countries that went entirely online with their national assessments "very quickly".

Ofqual also previously promised to look into the use of adaptive testing – a computerised test that adapts to the pupil's ability – and whether it could be a possible replacement for tiering in certain



Jo Saxton

GCSEs.

Saxton said the testing was "incredibly resource intensive to develop, you need millions of questions for them to be able to be not predictable so young people aren't able to cheat".

"It's a thing personally I care a lot about but I think we're some years away from being able to deliver that."

However Sir Ian Bauckham, Ofqual chair, said artificial intelligence could help with resources. "That's an exciting potential future area."

Delayed funding band review results revealed

SHANE CHOWEN
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Two popular adult care apprenticeship standards have received a 33 per cent funding uplift this week, but training providers have warned that won't be enough to keep up with rising costs.

Skill minister Robert Halfon revealed the long-awaited outcome of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's exceptional funding band review (which has been beset with delays) at this week's Association of Employment and Learning Providers national conference in London.

Announcing funding increases for ten apprenticeships standards, Halfon said: "We know that inflation is hurting our whole economy, and I know this is putting pressure on you as you deliver high-quality training. It is affecting the costs of energy, materials, food, and tutor salaries.

"We are alive to the cost pressures you are facing to deliver high-quality apprenticeships, and I hope I've shown we will take action to support you," he said.

Twenty apprenticeships were initially in scope for funding uplifts through the exceptional review when it was finally launched in January, having been originally announced last November. IfATE then passed its own planned



Robert Halfon

end date for the review. It was supposed to have concluded in May.

AELP said lessons must be learned over the process.

Simon Ashworth, director of policy, said "The increase in adult care level 2 and level 3 by a third is most welcome. However, there are still lessons that must be taken from this process. It has simply taken far too long to get an outcome to a process that was meant to enable a speedy decision to be taken against the backdrop of unprecedented inflation rates."

In March it was revealed that 10 of the

twenty apprenticeships were opted out of the review by their employer-led trailblazer groups who instead wanted a full review including content, funding and assessment.

One of those that had opted out was the level 3 heavy vehicle service and maintenance technician apprenticeship. However, that apprenticeship, alongside the level 2 adult care worker and level 3 lead adult care worker, received one of the largest funding increases this week.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

OUTCOME OF APPRENTICESHIP EXCEPTIONAL FUNDING BAND REVIEW

Apprenticeship	Level	Starts in 21/22	Previous maximum funding	New maximum funding	Increase	% increase
Heavy vehicle service and maintenance technician	3	1130	£15,000.00	£20,000.00	£5,000.00	33%
Adult care worker	2	9800	£3,000.00	£4,000.00	£1,000.00	33%
Lead adult care worker	3	12080	£3,000.00	£4,000.00	£1,000.00	33%
Production chef	2	2420	£5,000.00	£6,000.00	£1,000.00	20%
Engineering operative	2	1460	£6,000.00	£7,000.00	£1,000.00	17%
Large goods vehicle (LGV) driver C and E	2	2830	£7,000.00	£8,000.00	£1,000.00	14%
Commis chef	2	1780	£8,000.00	£9,000.00	£1,000.00	13%
Senior production chef	3	710	£4,000.00	£4,500.00	£500.00	13%
Chef de partie	3	250	£9,000.00	£10,000.00	£1,000.00	11%
Motor vehicle and maintenance technical (light vehicle)	3	3080	£15,000.00	£16,000.00	£1,000.00	7%
Groundworker	2	580	£9,000.00			
Gas engineering operative	3	940	£22,000.00			
Painter and decorator	2	710	£9,000.00			
Advanced carpentry and joinery	3	680	£11,000.00			
Carpentry and joinery	2	4664	£11,000.00			
Maintenance and operations engineering technician	3	1510	£26,000.00			
Engineering fitter	3	830	£21,000.00			
Engineering technician	3	5660	£26,000.00			
Autocare technician	2	1370	£12,000.00			
Maritime mechanical and electrical mechanic	2	700	£12,000.00			

Now opted for a full review

Switched from exceptional review to full review

Opted out

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CONTINUED

From Monday, when the announcement was made, funding for heavy vehicle apprentices increased from £15,000 to £20,000 and the two adult care standards increased from £3,000 to £4,000.

Apprenticeships for production chefs, senior production chefs and commis chefs were increased by one funding band. As were other popular apprenticeships, such as the level 2 engineering operative, level 3 motor vehicle and maintenance technician, and the level 2 large goods vehicle driver.

IfATE chief executive, Jennifer Coupland, said while the funding uplifts “should have a positive impact on providers and learners” she was “sorry the process has taken longer than anyone would have hoped for.”

It was also revealed that trailblazer groups for two of the remaining ten standards have opted out entirely because “they decided they didn’t need funding” according to Coupland.

Those are the level 2 maritime mechanical and electrical mechanic apprenticeship and the level 2 autocare technician, both funded at £12,000.

HGV funding row

Heavy vehicle service and maintenance was a surprise entry, considering it had been removed by its employer trailblazer group from the exceptional review in favour of a normal review.

An IfATE spokesperson told *FE Week* that this apprenticeship had completed a full standard review “at pace” alongside the other ten standards.

“This sector literally keeps our economy moving. It is right that we mitigate the significant cost increases it is facing, and recognise the critical contribution it makes to productivity,” Halfon said.

“Sorry the process has taken longer than anyone would have hoped for”

However, one training provider said it was “hugely disappointed” that the apprenticeship didn’t receive a larger increase to account for the standard being subjected to under-funding “by mistake” for the last four years.

Sue Pittock, chief executive of Remit Training, told *FE Week* that the funding band should be £26,000, similar to other advanced engineering apprenticeships, to run “a quality HGV programme safely”.

Pittock also took aim at the minister’s claim that funding for that apprenticeship was increasing by 33 per cent.

“The funding band for HGV was in fact £18,000 back in 2010, but was reduced to £15,000 in 2019, based on an error which IfATE acknowledge it made. In reality, at £20,000, we are behind where we were back in 2010 once you add EPA costs and inflation.

“Things have changed materially in the 13 years since 2010 and our costs of delivery

have increased exponentially,” Pittock said.

An IfATE spokesperson said that the organisation is “satisfied that its published processes were followed at all times and the decision to reduce the funding of HGV tech in 2019 to £15,000 was based on the evidence presented.”

However, in 2022, the spokesperson added, IfATE “became aware some of the information put forward in 2019 could have been inaccurate.”

“The most appropriate response was to re-run the funding band process using refreshed evidence, which has now been concluded,” they added.

Time to care

Inadequate funding for adult care apprenticeships has long been criticised by the health and training sectors. Several training providers that have specialised in care training have gone bust in recent times, notably Qube Learning, Quest Vocational Training, and GP Strategies Training

News of the £1000 funding increase this week was welcomed by the sector, but some have said it is still not enough.

Ian Bamford, chief operating officer at Paragon Skills and an AELP board member, told *FE Week* the adult care uplift was “really positive for the sector” but suggested a further increase to £5,000 was needed.

“We’ve had to increase staff salaries, so we’re now having to pay probably in the region of £28-£30,000 for an adult care tutor. A year to 18 months ago, that was £24-25,000, and we’ve had to swallow that cost.

“We’re also looking for a more digitally rich and innovative curriculum. On £3,000 you just can’t do that. So, this [uplift] allows us to be able to put investment in our programmes,” Bamford said.

Bamford said he believed there are discussions about a further review for a new care apprenticeship standard being pitched at a £5,000 funding band, “which is where it needs to be.”

Another large training provider in the care training sector, Lifetime Training, said the increase was “a step in the right direction.”

Matt Robinson, Lifetime’s commercial director, told *FE Week* that the “increased funding bands will greatly benefit our apprenticeships, allowing us to invest in delivering high-quality programmes despite mounting inflationary cost pressures”.



Jennifer Coupland

News

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Jane Hickie leaves Association of Employment and Learning Providers

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Jane Hickie has now officially stood down as chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

A statement confirming Hickie's departure was read to delegates at AELP's national conference in London on Monday, on behalf of the association's board by the conference chair, LSECT managing director and *FE Week* publisher Shane Mann.

The board's statement said Hickie has decided to stand down to "pursue new opportunities". It comes a month after *FE Week* revealed Hickie had been suspended pending an investigation.

Hickie's seven-year tenure at AELP, two as chief executive, has now come to an end.

The board's statement said: "We announce that after seven years of service, Jane Hickie has taken the decision to step down from her position as chief executive at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers on 30th June 2023 to pursue new

opportunities.

"We are grateful for her contribution to the success of the organisation over recent years. We thank her for all her work and wish her well in her future plans and endeavours," it added.

FE Week reported that Hickie had been suspended from her role, pending an investigation, on May 23. AELP did not comment on the suspension at the time, confirming only that Hickie was taking "a short leave of absence".

Since then, AELP chair Nichola Hay and vice chair Rob Foulston have been supporting the association's remaining senior leaders.

Hickie joined the membership body in 2016 as its chief operating officer before being promoted to managing director in July 2020 when former leader Mark Dawe stepped down. She has been chief executive since January 2021.

Plans to appoint a new chief executive have yet to be announced.

Hickie was approached for comment. At the conference, AELP board chair

Nichola Hay told delegates that she'll be "working with colleagues on the board and key stakeholders over the coming weeks on our plans for the future to make sure that AELP continues to represent our members."

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges said he was "sorry to see Jane moving on. It was great working with her and the AELP team. I wish her all the best in her next role."



Jane Hickie

Lifetime chairman Geoff Russell 'leaves the company'

JOSHUA STEIN
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EXCLUSIVE

The executive chair of one of England's largest independent training providers has left his post, *FE Week* can reveal.

Geoff Russell left Lifetime Training on Monday, after just 15 months as its chairman. He joined last March from the training provider JTL, where he was chairman for more than four years.

Shortly after joining Lifetime, the provider's then chief executive, Alex Khan, was replaced by Jon Graham, also from JTL.

Russell was the chief executive of the Learning and Skills Council and then the Skills Funding Agency, predecessors to the

Education and Skills Funding Agency, until 2012.

Jon Graham, chief executive of Lifetime Training, said Russell "has left the company as of 26 June".

"We wish to thank Geoff for the contribution he has made to the business since joining in 2022," he added, with details of his "replacement shared in due course".

Lifetime declined to provide a reason for Russell's departure.

Russell's departure comes as the provider grappled with cuts of 60 jobs as announced in March, following a "strategic review".

But it had recruited more apprentices and secured more levy funding than any other provider in England for several years – with its apprentices working at high-profile employers including the NHS, the civil service, McDonalds,

Wetherspoons, B&Q and David Lloyd.

The provider also faced an Education and Skills Funding Agency audit that explored possible overclaimed additional learner support funding, which could result in a clawback of over £13 million, according to Lifetime's latest accounts.

The company recorded a loss of £9.2 million after it posted a £6.9 million profit the year prior. Cash was also down, falling to £4.1 million in comparison to £19.8 million the year prior.

In November, the training provider was sold to Alcentra – one of the provider's lenders which specialises in credit management, private credit and structured credit strategies, in the midst of the ESFA audit.

Russell declined to comment.

AELP NATIONAL CONFERENCE MAIN STAGE ROUNDUP

'No doubt' underfunding is impacting on learners

FE WEEK REPORTERS
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Senior officials from key agencies in education and training addressed the Association of Employment and Learning Providers' national conference in London this week, and here are the highlights.

The impact on further education of under-funding and the recruitment crisis is becoming more evident, a senior Ofsted director has admitted.

Ofsted's deputy director for further education & skills, Paul Joyce, told delegates that the watchdog was aware that under-funding in the skills sector was having a negative impact on learners.

When questioned if Ofsted was concerned about the funding crisis in education and demoralised workforce, Joyce said there was "no doubt" funding is an issue in the sector and Ofsted inspectors were "seeing that impact" across the spectrum of its activities.

For example, Joyce said that the watchdog was aware of providers struggling to buy consumables, like construction materials, for use in training.

He added that the recruitment and retention crisis in FE was also filtering through to the quality of provision.

"We're also seeing issues with workforce, with recruitment ... The ability of providers to either retain their staff or to recruit new staff in areas like digital and construction," he said.

He added that inspectors are starting to examine skills bootcamps, and from the first few reports, he said it was "really pleasing to see some good provision".

Joyce repeated an earlier announcement that, from September, Ofsted will be increasing the inspection notice period it gives to the largest providers – defined as those with a £10 million plus contract value and operate in three or more government office regions – from



Paul Joyce

up to two days to six days.

That means large providers could get a notification call on a Monday for an inspection the following Tuesday, he explained.

Inspectors will also "be encouraged" to provide more detail about the provider and the provision being inspected in their reports on large providers.

Joyce also revealed during the Q&A that Ofsted is finalising its report into T Levels that "will make an interesting read". The report is due to be published in the "next few weeks".

"Inspectors conducted a number of visits primarily to wave one subjects," he said. "We looked at work placements, the way providers use their capital funding. We looked at the T Level transition programme and just took an early temperature check really on how things are."

AELP chair demands debate on IfATE 'role and remit'

The government's apprenticeships quango's role in determining apprenticeship funding needs to be revisited, the Association for Education and Learning Providers (AELP) chair has said.

Nichola Hay said there "needs to be a debate on the role and remit of IfATE [the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education] in the future skill system".

Opening the AELP's national conference for 2023 this week, Hay said IfATE has had an "ever expanding list" of responsibilities since it rebranded from being the Institute for Apprenticeships in 2019.

"Their expanded remit now encompasses T Levels, level two and level three qualifications along with higher level of technical qualifications," Hay said.

Instead, IfATE's role "should be working with employers focusing on content and curriculum", she added.

"There is nothing in IfATE's own mission about its role in funding ... is IfATE is best placed to lead on assessment and funding aspects? I think that is an important debate."

IfATE has a crucial role in apprenticeship funding, as it makes an official recommendation on funding bands



Nichola Hay

to the education secretary. For that, IfATE gets funding evidence from trailblazer groups, groups of employers representing each apprenticeship which get their own evidence on funding needs from training providers.

The comments come after industry representatives have criticised IfATE for not listening to their funding recommendations.

Last month, Karen Bailey, the co-chair of the HGV, bus and coach standards trailblazer group said that "funding obstinacy" meant an HGV technician apprenticeship had received lower funding than it deserved, which meant it became loss-making and providers pulled out.

But Jennifer Coupland, chief executive of IfATE, said at the AELP conference that providing funding advice to the secretary of state was "one of the originating reasons that IfATE was created".

Previously, those recommendations were made by the minister of state at the DfE, which Coupland said the then-minister of state, Nick Boles, found "extremely challenging, and obviously he was on the hook for absolutely every detailed decision that was being made".

"So, part of the reason for IfATE was to have something independent of that process that could take the politics and take the lobbying out of it and look at it more in terms of the full facts of a case. That's a core part of our remit and I wouldn't want to give that up."

AELP NATIONAL CONFERENCE MAIN STAGE ROUNDUP

AEB procurement outcomes still being finalised

Results of the Education and Skills Funding Agency's £75 million adult education procurement are being finalised, but providers may have to wait until July – when the current contracts end – to hear about them.

The news was delivered by Kirsty Evans, the Department for Education's post 16 regions and FE provider oversight director, in a keynote session at the AELP conference this week.

"We are currently finalising the approvals which are required," Evans said, but could only commit to notifications being made "before the current contract end date" which is July 30.

Bidding opened for the next round of non-devolved adult education funding in early February, with the commitment at the time that outcomes would be communicated to providers in mid-June ahead of the contract start date of August 1.

However, a notice on the DfE's procurement portal, posted one week ago, said: "We are awaiting final approvals and now anticipate that Award Decision Notices will be issued before the end of June."

On the new contract notifications coming so close to the end of the current contract period, Evans said the Department "recognises that it's frustrating [for training providers] to be in that position. And I also know that it's



Kirsty Evans



Andrew Thomas

not the first time."

That was likely a reference to the last time a national AEB procurement took place, in 2021 when bid results were only released to providers two weeks before contracts were due to start.

Evans also said she was establishing an "independent market division" from September.

The new team will account manage the 300 largest training providers and higher education institutions that collectively deliver over 70 per cent of the apprenticeship programme.

"I want us to properly recognise your role as strategic suppliers and your criticality to the successful delivery of our priority programmes," Evans said.

Smaller providers will continue to be monitored according to risk.

Trust still lacking in the independent training sector funding

The independent training sector is "maturing", but there isn't yet enough trust to simplify the funding system, according to a senior ESFA director.

Andrew Thomas, the ESFA's director of finance and oversight, spoke about "the real challenges across the sector where a

small number of organisations can at times tarnish the reputations of fantastic organisations who are delivering and really putting learners first".

Thomas recalled that the agency hears calls from training providers for greater simplification around audit and funding compliance across a growing number of central government and devolved funding streams.

"We do want to look at where we can make things simpler. But we still need ensure that there is no tension in terms of how we make sure that public funding is used as intended," Thomas said.

Thomas compared the ITP sector to the academy sector, where he said there was a greater level of trust, thus enabling more simplification.

"The assurance we can give is greatest in school sector and most challenging in the ITP sector," he said.

Elsewhere in his speech, Thomas outlined how, in the last three years, the ITP sector's financial position has improved, with 40 per cent of providers now with 'outstanding' financial health, up from 30 per cent two years ago.

A new financial handbook for independent training providers is in the works, with a soft launch planned "towards the end of 2023".

T Levels impacted by in-person teaching reductions, says study

ANVIKSHA PATEL
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Reduced in-person teaching as a result of pandemic restrictions was the biggest barrier for a large proportion of learners undergoing the T Level Transition Programme (TLTP) and T Levels, a new survey has revealed.

While the first cohort of learners on the TLTP and T Levels 2020/21 programme reported a generally positive experience, the limit to in-person teaching was linked to lower satisfaction in learners.

The findings come from a new technical education learner survey, published this week, where 2,207 learners from the 2020/21 TLTP and T Levels programmes were surveyed for their views on the scheme.

In their first year, the two programmes were delivered by 43 providers across England in three technical routes: Education and Childcare, Construction and Digital.

One of the major findings from the survey was that 37 per cent of T Levels learners said not receiving enough in-person teaching was “the greatest barrier” to their studies. These learners received a varying blend of in-person and online teaching due to pandemic restrictions.

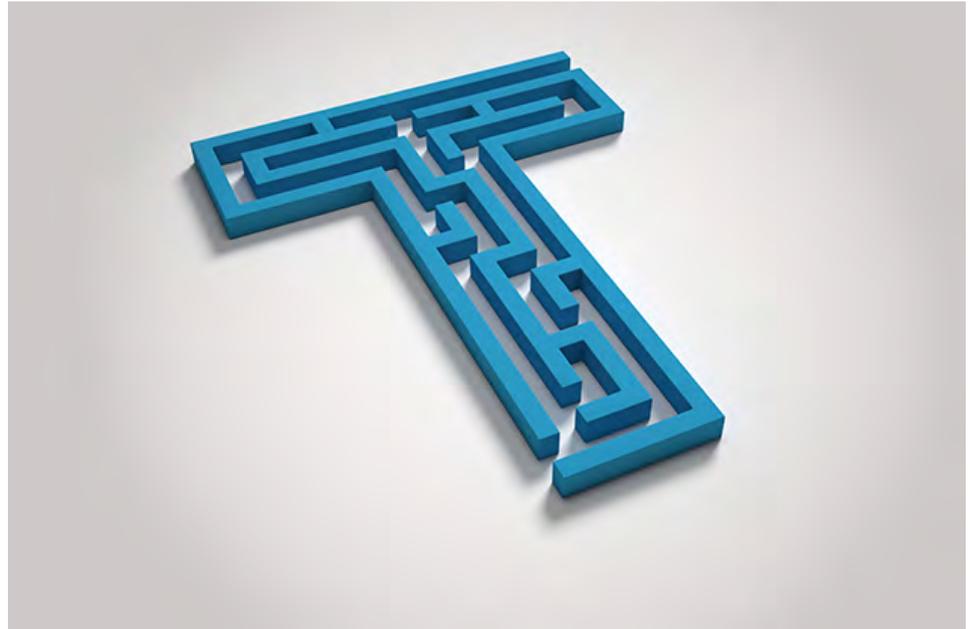
Learners on education and childcare, and construction courses found the lack of in-person teaching a bigger barrier (41 per cent and 38 per cent respectively) than those in digital courses (31 per cent).

Those doing the T Level transition programme reported similar views, with 32 per cent saying it was the biggest drawback to learning.

Over one quarter (29 per cent) of T Level learners had not experienced any barriers to learning.

Most learners who had undertaken work experience or an industry placement were satisfied with their experience, despite this cohort coming mainly from education and childcare courses, and the childcare sector being one of the first sectors to open after the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020.

“Covid restrictions were likely to have



impacted on learners’ access to industry placements – a crucial element of the technical programmes – and may partly explain some differences between subjects in perceived outcomes from courses,” the report said.

Aside from pandemic-related challenges, the report added that the difficulty of the T Levels courses had been challenging for most learners. “Those taught mainly online were more likely to find it ‘very challenging,’” it added.

However, learners with low prior academic attainment and special educational needs found it more challenging than their peers.

“The relaxing of Covid-19 restrictions is likely to lead to more learners having the opportunity to complete work experience and industrial placements and learners being taught more of their programme in-person,” concluded the report authors NatCen Social Research and National Foundation for Educational Research.

“This is likely to lead firstly to higher satisfaction with the work experience and industry placement elements of the programmes compared to the 2020 to 2021

academic year and, secondly, to fewer learners reporting remote teaching being a barrier to their learning,” they added.

Further study

The survey results found over half (53 per cent) of T Level learners intended to continue their studies following the technical programme, with nearly one-third planning to go to university. A larger proportion (40 per cent) of learners in Education and Childcare compared to learners in Digital (26 per cent) and Construction (17 per cent) identified going to university as their next step.

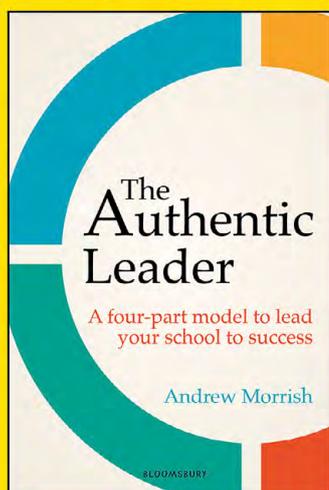
Meanwhile, over a third (37 per cent) of TLTP learners said at the start of the programme that they planned to continue to a T Level at the end of the course. By the end of the course, around a third (34 per cent) had decided not to do a T Level, leaving just under a third (29 per cent) who were not sure whether they would or not.

Digital learners were more likely to be intending to move to a T Level than other learners (48 per cent compared to 36 per cent of Construction and 29 per cent of Education and Childcare learners).

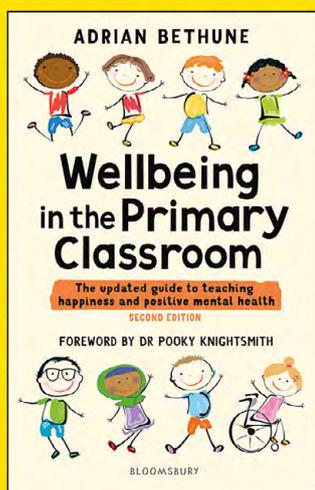
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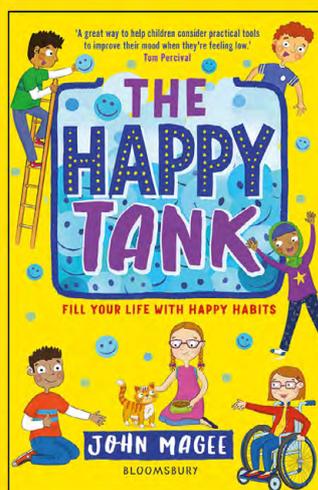
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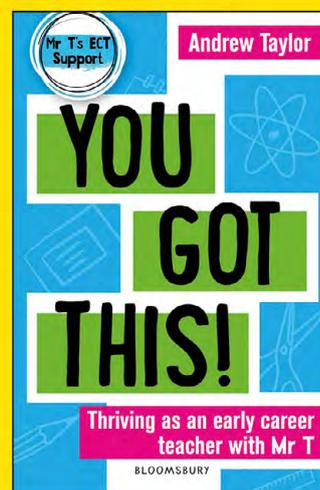
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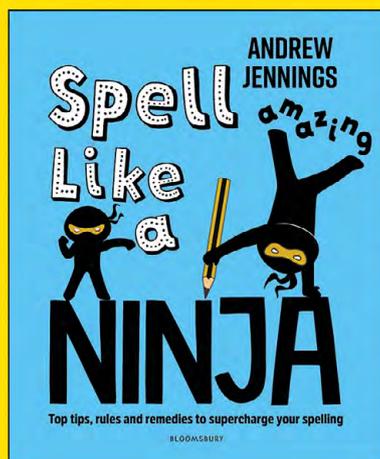
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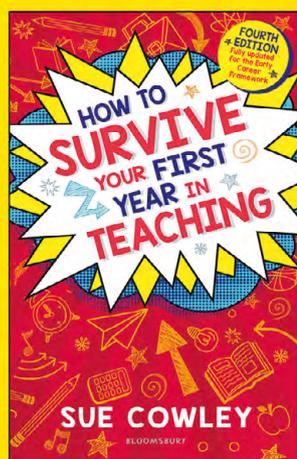
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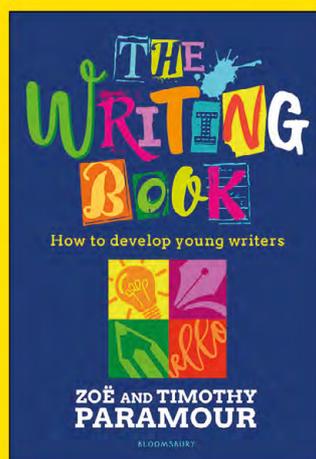
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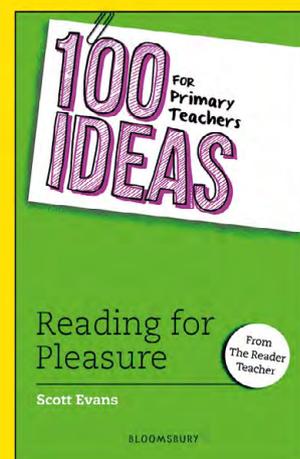
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Fariha Agha
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Dr Steven Evans
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Friday, 12:45, venue 10

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Department for Education



Emily Shuckburgh
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Another college exits 14-16 provision as its 'original mission' fades

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Another further education college has officially exited 14-16 provision this week.

Hugh Baird College will close its doors to 14-16 students this summer because growth in young student numbers has "led to the provision moving away from its original mission".

It follows a growing number of colleges which have deemed the provision is not financially viable – and have closed their direct entry 14-16 provision.

The college, which is based in Bootle, Liverpool, took the decision to suspend its 14-16 provision last year, FE Week understands. The final cohort is in the process of wrapping up their studies this year, and the college will not run any 14-16 provision from September 2023.

The college was officially removed from the Department for Education's list of colleges intending to enroll 14–16-year-olds on Tuesday. There are now 13 colleges on the list, down from 19 in 2017/19.

A spokesperson for Hugh Baird College said it had told stakeholders last year of its intention to stop its 14-16 provision.

Hugh Baird's provision for 14-16-year-old education nearly quadrupled from 2014/15 when its first, 56-strong group began studying, to 2021/22 when it had 203 students on its 14-16 programme. That then slid to 92 students in 2022/23, according to a Freedom of Information request FE Week submitted earlier this year.

Now, the college will stop the provision entirely from the next academic year following some "significant reflection and evaluation".

"The original intent of this provision was to offer an alternative to completing year 10/11 in high school for students who wanted to study vocational qualifications alongside core GCSE subjects," they said.

"Enrolment numbers have increased year-on-year, and the review identified that this growth has led to the provision moving away from its



original mission.

"Having considered a range of options on the way forward, including continuing to run the provision with reduced numbers, we concluded that we would not recruit a new year 10 cohort in September 2022."

The college declined to elaborate on why it decided to close the programme.

"The college continues to work closely with schools to provide opportunities to Year 10 and 11 pupils to experience further education through its school links programme," the spokesperson said.

The coalition government launched 14-16 provision back in 2012 as a response to the Wolf Review, with the aim of helping those for whom a vocational route into work was more appropriate.

An FE Week investigation this year

revealed that 12,860 students have been taught through direct entry, across 27 general FE and sixth form colleges.

College funding for 14-16 teaching is the same as 16-to-19-year-old-students, but the younger students get 25 taught hours a week (as at a school) compared to 16 or 17 hours usually offered on 16-plus college courses.

The need for a separate site also means that 14-16 teaching requires a lot of resources from colleges.

Alan McKenna, deputy director of SEND, an inclusive provision at Leeds City College, said earlier this year that funding is the "number one reason" why colleges have pulled out of 14-16 provision because "until you get to a certain size, I don't think you can do it at a profit, or even break even".

Perkins pledges additional spending on SME apprenticeships

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The Labour Party will commit additional spending for a ringfenced budget for apprenticeships in small businesses, the shadow skills minister has confirmed.

Toby Perkins told the Association of Employment and Learning Providers national conference in London on Tuesday that an "additional spending commitment" had been agreed with the shadow treasury team to fund apprenticeships in small and medium-sized businesses.

The official opposition announced plans to replace the apprenticeship levy with a skills and growth levy at its annual party conference last September.

Should it win the next general election, levy-paying employers will be able to spend up to 50 per cent of their contribution on non-apprenticeship courses. At least 50 per cent would need to be spent on apprenticeships.

With employers therefore likely to

spend more of their levy contributions, industry and provider leaders have been concerned that Labour's plans would leave no funding for apprenticeships in small and medium-sized businesses, which are currently funded from unused levy funds.

"There will be no reduction in the amount of funding available to fund non-levy payers' apprenticeship funding," Toby Perkins, Labour's shadow skills minister, said on Thursday.

"One of the big failures of the apprenticeship levy and the apprenticeship reforms more generally has been the reduction in apprenticeships in SMEs. Both the uncertainty of funding and the complexity of bureaucracy are barriers that prevent SMEs from taking on apprentices," Perkins said.

"So, I repeat, if we're successful in helping levy payers spend more of their levy, this will not reduce the budget set for SME apprenticeships."

Pressed from the conference floor by Crawford Knott, managing director of

Hawk Training, about safeguarding SME apprenticeship spending, Perkins said that supporting levy payers to use more of their levy will mean "an additional spending commitment" adding, "they're tough to get out of our shadow treasury team."

Elsewhere in his speech, Perkins said that funding for the flexible non-apprenticeships side of the skills and growth levy should be spent on courses that benefit "the employability of the learner in general, not just to their usefulness to their current employer."

Perkins reiterated Labour's plans to launch Skills England, a new body which would oversee the new levy and decide what non-apprenticeship courses employers could spend their levy funding on.

The shadow minister would not be drawn on whether Skills England would replace the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, but told delegates that we "are exploring what the role of these different organisations will be".

Should it form the next government, the Labour Party may become more "risk averse" in its ambition to cut red tape, according to the former skills minister, Anne Milton, who also spoke at the AELP conference this week.

"My concern when I hear Toby talking is that it's very easy to say you'll cut bureaucracy... Every party wants to cut bureaucracy. What they tend to do is increase. One of the reasons is the safeguarding of public money. Nobody wants a story in a newspaper or on social media with a headline about a bad employer or about a bad training provider.

"There will always be people, employers and training providers that try and scam the system," she warned.



Toby Perkins

News

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College principal heading for Social Mobility Commission's top job

FE WEEK REPORTER NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A college principal has been picked by the government as its preferred candidate to take over from Katharine Birbalsingh as chair of the Social Mobility Commission.

Alun Francis, outgoing principal of Oldham College, has been filling in as interim chair since January. The former deputy chair has been overseeing the State of the Nation report, which aims to cement the commission's shift from focusing solely on talented youngsters moving from the "bottom" to the "top" social mobility rungs.

"The Commission has been working hard for two years to build a solid foundation for some new thinking about the focus and priorities of policy," Francis said.

"This is a tremendous opportunity to bring this work to fruition. I especially hope to draw on my experience of working in

further education, and my knowledge and understanding of so-called 'left behind' people and places, to make a positive contribution."

Birbalsingh quit earlier this year saying her controversial opinions "put the commission in jeopardy" and it is doing "more harm than good".

Francis' appointment will be subject to a pre-appointment hearing with the House of Commons women and equalities select committee.

Equalities minister Kemi Badenoch said Francis had "demonstrated the knowledge, skills and expertise which are necessary to lead the Social Mobility Commission, maintaining the organisation's position as a champion of social mobility across the UK."

Baroness Stowell, an FE college alumna from the Midlands who has led the House of Lords, has also been appointed a



Alun Francis

commissioner on the board.

She would provide "further insight and understanding to the already diverse and accomplished SMC board", Badenoch added.

The commission is expected to publish its final State of the Nation report later this year.

Babington hires 'turnaround specialist' as CEO

SHANE CHOWEN SHANE.CHOWEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

EXCLUSIVE

One of England's largest apprenticeship training providers has appointed an "international growth and turnaround" specialist as its next chief executive.

The board of Babington has announced that Mark Basham, currently a self-employed angel investor and board adviser, will join the provider as chief executive on Monday, July 3.

The appointment follows the sudden departure of David Marsh, who left the business just over a month ago after five years as chief executive.

Basham was previously CEO of AXELOS, a company set up by the UK government and Capita, which runs certifications in best practice such as ITIL and PRINCE2.



Mark Basham

Basham's AXELOS biography described him as an "international growth and turnaround specialist."

On leaving AXELOS in April 2022, he went on to become a self-employed angel investor and co-founder of HIT Global, an IT service management training company.

The self-described "high impact CEO" said he was "excited to get started."

"Apprenticeships are a key element of the UK's economic strategy ensuring the availability of appropriate skills and resource. I am certain they will play an increasingly important role in the talent strategy of all businesses across the UK for decades to come. Babington is well-placed to support this trend and I am excited to get started."

Joining Basham will be Mike Kinski who will

become Babington's first chairman.

Kinski is currently a special adviser at Babington and will "provide significant additional expertise to Mark and the executive committee as they seek to build on Babington's strong reputation in the training and learning sector," according to a statement.

Babington is currently rated 'good' by Ofsted and trains thousands of apprentices and adult learners each year in areas like accountancy, administration, management and employability skills.

The provider is yet to file accounts for 2022, but its financial statements for 2021 show turnover reached £26.1 million in 2021 with a profit after tax of £3.4 million.

However, Babington's holding company, Project Sinatra Topco Ltd – now called Babington Managed Services Topco Ltd – showed a loss of £2.5 million in the same year.

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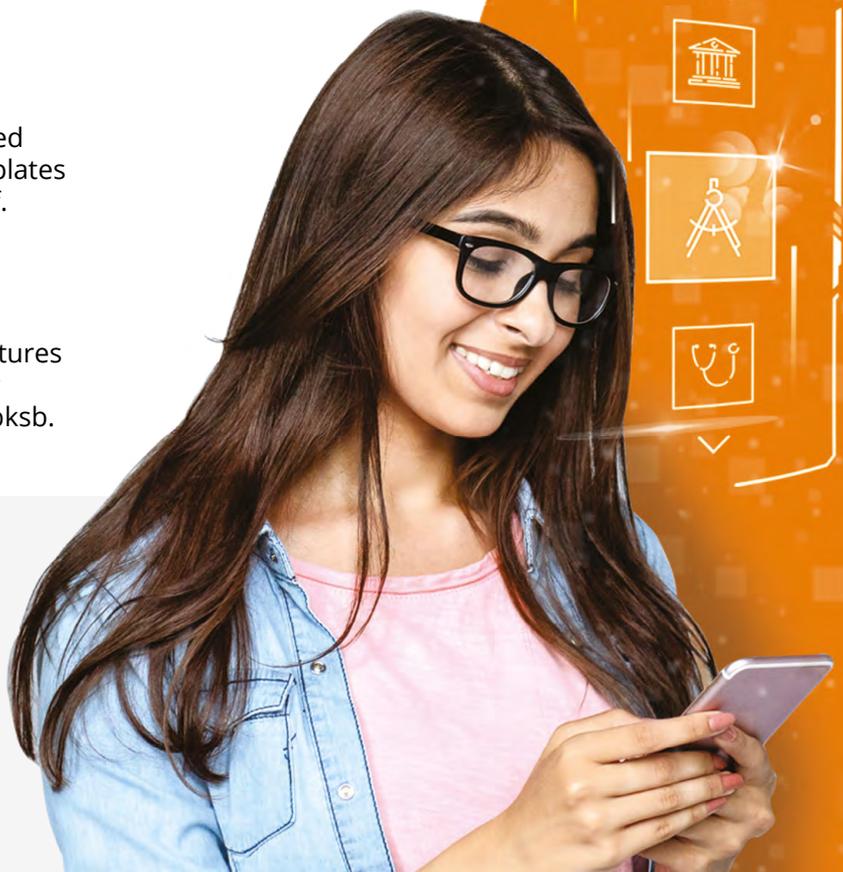
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Parliamentary committee recommends direct funding of careers advisers

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Ministers should trial the direct funding of careers advisers amid fears that asking schools and colleges to foot the bill is leading to "significant disparities" in provision, MPs have said.

Colleges should also be made to publish information on the amount of time that leaders in charge of careers provision are able to devote to their role, a report by the Parliamentary education committee recommended.

Although "many changes" to careers advice and guidance over the past decade mean the "right framework is broadly in place", the report warned of a "lack of a clear overarching strategy and stated outcomes".

While new legislation enforcing post-16 provider access to school pupils is "an important step in the right direction," the committee said it was concerned that ministers did not have a system to monitor compliance.

"Simply informing pupils of the options available is not enough to tackle the fundamental bias towards academic routes still seen in many schools," the report said.

Progress towards meeting the Gatsby Foundation's eight benchmarks for good careers advice has been "slow", with schools and colleges "only meeting just over half of them on average". This is based on self-reporting by colleges, which "means that we do not have a full picture of how many are being achieved", the committee warned.

Since 2012, schools and colleges have been required to fund their own careers provision from their own budgets.

Research by PricewaterhouseCoopers for Gatsby in 2014 estimated that the cost of meeting all eight benchmarks would range from £38,000 to £76,000 per school and sixth form.



Select committee chair Robin Walker

'Significant disparities'

The report warned the expectation on schools and colleges to pay for services out of their "already stretched budgets" was "causing significant disparities in provision", with some spending just £2 per student.

The DfE should therefore pilot a programme of funding careers advisers directly through the CEC, or Careers and Enterprise Company, the report said, rather than "requiring schools and colleges to buy in this support from their existing budgets".

The department should also make "one-off developmental funding available to schools and colleges who have the lowest record of achieving the Gatsby benchmarks".

The report also found that careers leaders – those responsible for ensuring their colleges meet the benchmarks – are "struggling to fulfil their responsibilities effectively due to lack of time amid competing pressures".

Support for careers provision should also be included in the package available to education investment areas.

Almost half have less than a day per week allocated to their role. The DfE should therefore update its statutory guidance to "suggest an appropriate proportion of time that careers leaders should be given to fulfil their role".

They should also require schools and colleges to "publish information on the time they have allocated to the role on their

website", and ensure the CEC publishes data from schools and colleges about time leaders must take to fulfil their role.

The report also makes several other recommendations, summarised as follows:

- Ensure Ofsted looks at schools' achievement of the benchmarks
- Make reporting on progress against the benchmarks compulsory for schools and colleges
- Extend coverage of careers hubs to all schools and colleges by the end of 2024
- Make the National Careers Service appropriate for under-18s or provide an alternative
- Consult on how to incorporate careers education into different levels of teacher training and development
- Provide more teachers with "experience of modern workplaces across a range of sectors"
- Consult on whether any administrative barriers to providing work experience can be removed or lightened
- Create a 'national platform' for work experience placements
- Track compliance against the Baker Clause and ensure 'appropriate action' is taken against non-compliance
- Collect and publish data on the proportion of SENCOs who have undertaken careers training and set out steps to train them all

News

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WorldSkills UK rolls out Centre of Excellence after pilot

JOSHUA STEIN JOSHUA.STEIN@FEWEEK.CO.UK



WorldSkills UK is opening its Centre of Excellence programme to all UK colleges, training providers, and higher education institutions for the first time.

This follows a three-year pilot of the programme, which WorldSkills UK developed in partnership with awarding body NCFE, which involved 46 colleges and two independent training providers.

WorldSkills UK said more than 140,000 young people and nearly 5,000 educators can now access support and development opportunities through the programme for a further three-year period.

Members of the Centre of Excellence will have access to free "world-class" teacher training, a community for thought leadership to influence policy and practice, and a hub for innovation known as the Network for Innovation. Membership is free.

WorldSkills UK interim chief executive Ben Blackledge said the programme "is already delivering results for educators and young people, inspiring learners at all abilities to achieve their own level of excellence".

"We want to build on that success and ensure we are delivering for employers too. That is why this next stage of the Centre of Excellence will have a strong focus on innovation, creating opportunities for business, and education to come together to achieve the shared ambition of a truly world-class technical education system.

"In key growth sectors covering digital, net zero and advanced manufacturing, these networks will support the development and delivery of skills specific, industry-led and internationally benchmarked training. This is providing the sector access to insights and learning from across the global WorldSkills network."

The programme was piloted to 48 organisations over the last three years. Two of those were ITPs, while the rest were FE colleges (see list below). Those 48 organisations will remain registered to the programme as it

rolls out to a wider audience.

Organisations interested in the project can register here.

NCFE chief executive David Gallagher said the two organisations are "committed to helping to create a fairer and more inclusive society through the delivery of exceptional technical education".

"If we are to achieve this, we believe that our educators need greater access to world-class teacher training, interactive networks, and international insights. That's how we can unlock their potential, so they are able to then deliver the highest quality education and

training to our workforce of the future."

Software company Autodesk and the Skills and Education Group are now also funding the Centre for Excellence alongside NCFE.

Scott Forbes, a chief operating officer at the Skills and Education Group, said: "In order to achieve a world-class skills system and to ensure our students are industry-ready – armed with the technical know-how employers need – we must invest in our teachers.

"We are therefore delighted to be championing the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence as it enters its next phase."

COLLEGES AND ITPS INVOLVED IN THE WORLDSKILLS THREE-YEAR CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE PILOT PROGRAMME

Table with 3 columns: Year 1, Year 2, Year 3. Lists various colleges and ITPs involved in the pilot programme.

INSPECTION SECTION

SEND college fails to make safeguarding progress after third Ofsted visit in four months

ANVIKSHA PATEL
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Ofsted inspectors have raised the alarm over the safety of learners at a Wakefield specialist college's following a full inspection and multiple follow-up monitoring visits.

Following Camphill Wakefield's full inspection in March 2022, Ofsted inspectors found the SEND college was inadequate overall for its SEND provision, leadership and management, and the quality of education.

Inspectors have since conducted three monitoring visits, the most recent was an unannounced monitoring visit focused on safeguarding on April 26 and 27, which found the college had made insufficient provisions to keep learners safe, particularly during trips outside of the campus.

Lead inspector Jacquie Brown said in her report that while staff complete generic risk assessments for off-site visits, they do not consider individual learners' needs of health, care and behaviour support needs.

"As a result, they cannot guarantee that learners are safe in these situations," she said.

Camphill Wakefield offers residential and day provision for learners aged between 16 and 25. The college had 66 learners enrolled as of its last inspection last March.

James Heaton-Jennings, CEO of Camphill Wakefield, told FE Week that the safety of students is its "first priority" and the college "immediately addressed" concerns as soon as inspectors identified key risks.

"This included reconfiguring our safeguarding team with additional members of the SLT. We then triangulated our actions by inviting our host local authority to review our progress, which led to a positive report," he said.

Inspectors also found that managers failed to guarantee that information about learners' allergies is correct, finding some potentially inaccurate information in documents used by staff. The report said that the college has



Camphill Wakefield

undertaken a full review to address the issue.

Brown added that the college was aware that the residential care staff were not recording safeguarding concerns on online systems consistently, which meant education staff would not always have information on safeguarding concerns that occur in the residential settings.

Camphill Wakefield has recently hired a new head of care, who is currently revising the culture and reporting procedures in residential accommodation.

"However, it is too soon to see the full impact of their actions," the report added.

Two subcontractors work on the 56-acre campus: Stride Theatre Group and Riding for the Disabled, who deliver programmes on the college site. The college also has a working farm and gardens with greenhouses.

The report said that college leaders "work well" with external health and safety specialists and staff in the farm areas, and horse-riding school supervise learners in these areas closely.

Camphill also reviewed their care plans for learners with epilepsy and staff have recently undergone epilepsy training.

The report found most staff have completed mandatory training in safeguarding and the Prevent duty and several members have been identified as

needing additional safeguarding training, such as the administration of medication.

Heaton-Jennings confirmed that 86 per cent of staff have completed the additional level 3 qualification in principles of safeguarding children, young people and adults.

"Like many colleges, we have experienced disruption and uncertainty over the past few years, but we are very proud of the way in which the staff team have stepped up to rebuild a fantastic resource for our young people," he concluded.

The two previous monitoring visits found reasonable progress was being made to the quality of teaching given to learners. However, the first visit found learners were not receiving good enough feedback to improve on, and the second visit said that parents and carers were not receiving "appropriate updates" on the progress of learners.

"Too often, these staff are occupied with other tasks and are not able to make the calls as often as they should," the report said.

In 2020, the college won a Natspec award for pathways to employment, where judges praised the college for having an "aspirational" pathway into employment embedded into the curriculum.



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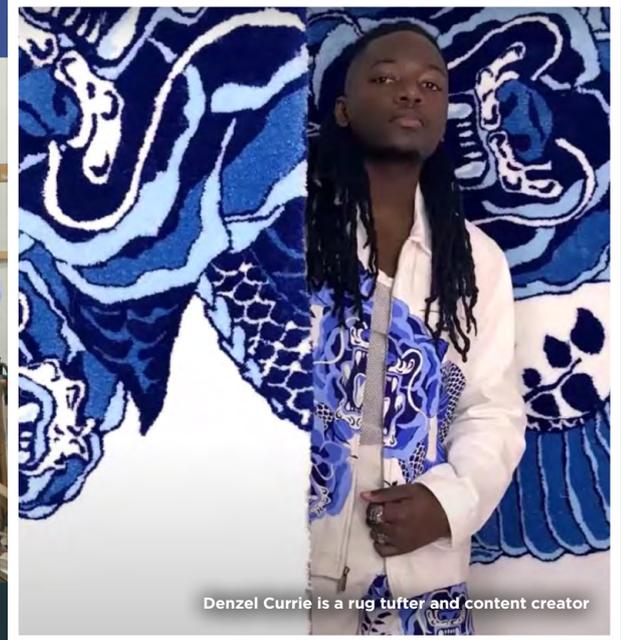
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Apprentice organ builder Adam Davison



Denzel Currie is a rug tufter and content creator

A break with tradition: the crafts fighting for survival

JESSICA HILL
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM

The biggest losers in the government’s mission to boost apprenticeships are traditional crafts for whom the term “apprenticeship” was initially intended. Jessica Hill investigates how longstanding training going back to the Middle Ages is now under threat.

Crafts passed on since England’s original national apprenticeship scheme was introduced in 1563 are now considered too small in scale and specialist to conform to our standardised apprenticeships system. Only a quarter of the UK’s 259 heritage crafts have approved apprenticeship standards – and far fewer are being delivered.

But all is not lost. The popularity of TV shows such as BBC One’s *The Repair Shop*, “how to” crafting videos and heritage-themed films and festivals are breathing a new lease of life into some traditional skills.

Apprenticeships non-starters

Organ-building and watchmaking – skills

passed down since the 1500s and now deemed “critically endangered” – have been available as apprenticeship standards for five years but have yet to enrol any recruits.

Stained glass-making, traced back to the 7th century, has recently been declared “endangered” by the charity Heritage Craft, which publishes an annual “red list”.

Its apprenticeship failed to attract any interest, a year after jumping the many hoops involved in getting approval from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education’s (IfATE).

Heritage Craft partly blames its demise on that of another craft, mouth-blown flat glass-making, deemed “extinct” after the only company making it, English Antique Glass, was forced to leave its Birmingham home because of redevelopment. This had a “knock-on effect” on stained glass restoration.

Other apprenticeships designed to keep traditional skills alive but which have failed to attract any apprentices include clockmaker, assistant puppetmaker, bookbinder and blacksmith, all because of a lack of ability to procure a training provider, an end-point



Papyrus painter Nicola Hibbard

assessor or, in the case of bookbinder, both.

The process of trying to get an apprenticeship off the ground has been particularly challenging for The Institute of British Organ Building (IBO).

It first got an apprenticeship standard over the line in 2017 (after eight years of trying), but it then took until 2021 to find a training provider, the Building Crafts College. In the meantime IfATE said the standard required a review – despite never being taught.

Its accrediting body NOCN does not employ organ-building assessors, so three people within IBO’s ranks were tasked with

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assessing its scheme under the NOCN umbrella. IBO's Carol Leevey describes this as "quite ludicrous".

Last year the standard was approved with maximum funding (£27,000), but the Building Crafts College can no longer commit to running the three-year course.

The college's building manager, Joe Mercer, says it had concerns over organ-building being "viable over a long period of time". "There is pent-up demand, but it is a very disparate industry. We want to know there would be subsequent cohorts."

Meanwhile, organ-builders are continuing to retire. "The worry is firms close without a successor, because they couldn't properly train anyone," says Leevey.

Heritage Craft's executive director, Daniel Carpenter, blames the lack of apprenticeship starts on training providers requiring "bums on seats". "It's just not economically viable for them to have such small cohorts. Increasingly, they're pulling out from this provision."

Leevey urges the government to recognise their apprenticeships model "doesn't suit crafts with five new people a year", and to "compensate providers to offset losses they incur in teaching smaller groups...to demonstrate the national heritage value these crafts have".



Metalsmith Gordon Coe with his mandalorian helmet and Viking pendants

IfATE's chief executive, Jennifer Coupland, acknowledges the "particular challenges" heritage industries face.

"How small a number of apprentices do you need to make a cohort viable? That doesn't mean those skills aren't needed. It's a balancing act."

This year, IfATE is instead prioritising reviewing apprenticeships with "large numbers of apprentices, new and emerging technology or new regulatory requirements".

Meanwhile, the government seems unaware of the problem. Skills minister Robert Halfon says he is "not quite clear why [heritage crafts] wouldn't be suitable to apprenticeship standards".

"If there are problems, of course I would look at it because I want to support these traditional paths wherever I possibly can."

Alternative solutions

Any government help may come too late as some heritage businesses have turned their backs on the apprenticeships system and found other means to train learners.

Adam Davison, from Durham, 22, sees himself as being on a three-year "apprenticeship" (but not an official one), with his employer, the organ builder Harrison & Harrison, dictating what he needs to learn.

After studying chemistry, maths and physics A Levels with the intention of going to university, he decided to be more "hands-on". "I love being able to see the finished product."

"Having to explain to people what I do is the hardest thing – most people are surprised to hear the [organ-building] industry exists."

Saddlery guilds have existed in England since the 12th century, but for Patrick Burns, the founder of the Walsall Leather Skills Centre, it was not financially viable to "jump through all the hoops" involved in offering saddlery apprenticeships.

Instead, his saddlers can undertake traditional-style, informal apprenticeships through saddlery companies. The cost of



Daniel Carpenter, executive director of Heritage Crafts

paying for courses "doesn't put people off" – he gets about five enquiries a week. "My problem is finding tutors at a reasonable price that keeps courses affordable."

Crafting themselves

Carpenter believes heritage crafts are "riding the wave" of a revived public interest, prompted by people "re-evaluating their lives after Covid" and "wanting to do something productive, where they can see the outputs of their labour".

Creators sometimes teach themselves the traditional skills, with online help. Gordon Coe, a Suffolk college-trained fabricator and welder, specialises in handmade armour and pendants inspired by his love of *Star Wars* as well as history.

While a medieval blacksmith forging iron spent seven years "indentured" to a master craftsman, Coe works independently through his company Mendo Metalsmith. He forges steel and perfects his craft by "playing and experimenting" and watching blacksmiths' TikTok videos.

These only provide "snippets of information". "They never give you the full 'how to' – there's always an element missing. That's the fun of it, because you then go practise."

Carpenter highlights how 98 per cent of heritage crafts are micro businesses of

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CONTINUED

10 or fewer employees, making it harder for craftsmen to "afford to step away from production to train somebody".

That's the case for Coe, who would not consider taking on an apprentice. "Trying to teach someone would be difficult when I need to be getting on with work to meet my deadlines."

Carpenter believes some older makers do not pass their skills on because they believe young people are not interested in heritage crafts. "There's a breakdown of communication between generations, they don't know how to talk to each other about it."

Reimagining old crafts

Both Coe and Nicola Hibbard, a historian who specialises in painting using plant-dye paint on papyrus paper, showcase their talents at historic fairs and festivals, which are gaining popularity, partly inspired by TV shows and films such *Game of Thrones*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Last Kingdom*.

Hibbard, who paints in the same way as people did in Egyptian, Roman and medieval times, says her skill is "as much about chemistry as art" because of the time it takes to source her paints.

But although her historical research gives her some ideas, she's learnt more through experimentation because of "deliberate

inaccuracies" in the historic documents of the time.

"The trouble with teaching yourself these skills is that in the 14th century, the guilds wanted to maintain their market monopoly. Half the paint recipes are fakes... because they were concerned talented amateurs were cutting in on their business."

The future

Heritage crafts in England employed 210,000 people and contributed £4.4 billion a year to the economy, according to research commissioned by the government in 2012. But Carpenter laments the lack of "political will" to explore whether that is still the case.

The UK is one of only 12 countries in the world not to have ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. "The rest of the world understands the importance of those skills, but sadly we don't."

But Carpenter is hopeful there is a solution that could solve some of the challenges holding craft apprenticeships back. An organisation with private sector backing is currently seeking to set up a residential heritage crafts training centre in the south of England to provide the classroom element of



Maise Matilda Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* piece

apprenticeship training.

There are challenges on the horizon too as technology is making items easy for anyone to mass produce. Coe is concerned about the future of metalcraft because 3D printers can now print wood and metal filaments. "One person can create a template file [online] and anyone can now go click and 3D print it."

Carpenter believes heritage crafts can thrive alongside the digital world, pointing to heritage crafters who have gained sizeable online followings.

They include Denzel Currie, a former graphic designer whose rug tufting videos went viral over lockdown and who has since worked with big brands Jaguar and Nike, and Maisie Matilda Jackson, an art historian who practises fore-edge painting on books, a technique from the 13th century.

A video of her painting the edges of a copy of *The Lord of the Rings* has been viewed more than 7.4 million times.

Carpenter warns those practising endangered crafts sometimes feel "pressure" upon "realising that the buck stops with them". "If they don't make it a go of it, the craft will die out. We're hoping that doesn't weigh too heavily on them."

Jackson is well aware that her craft, now critically endangered, is "really unique to English artistic culture. It's really important for me to keep it alive," she says.



Maise Matilda Jackson is a fore-edge painter and content creator



The College is situated on the edge of the beautiful Lake District National Park it's known for its glacial ribbon lakes, rugged fell mountains and historic literary associations. Market towns such as Kendal, Ambleside and Keswick on scenic Derwentwater are bases for exploring the area and home to traditional inns, galleries of local art and outdoor equipment shops.

The provision of high quality education for all students, and the forging and strengthening of partnerships with employers are key strategies for the future.



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

Interview date: **Friday 21 July 2023**



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Closing date: 9am Tuesday 18 July 2023

Interview date: Thursday 27 July 2023

Visit: www.fea.co.uk/bmet-fd/



Opinion

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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

If you want to support your students, start with understanding who we are and what we need



AREEBA IFTAKHAR

Student, Milton Keynes College

Poor communication and lack of understanding are hampering colleges' support of students from minority ethnic groups, says Areeba Iftakhar

I am 21 and studying health and social care. Safety and wellbeing are at the heart of what I am learning, and I'm pleased that they are also at the heart of the work of the Student Commission on Racial Justice.

Among the commission's five priorities, we focused part of our peer research on exploring racial justice in relation to support, safety and wellbeing. Colleges have a reputation for doing a great job when it comes to student services, including mental health provision and learning support. However, our findings suggest that support may not be as accessible to all students as once thought.

Many told us they felt well supported, but students from minoritised ethnic groups felt less confident that they would receive adequate mental health support if they sought it. Equally, while most students felt safe in their colleges, students from minoritised ethnic groups report being targeted by security staff.

Some students spoke positively about their college's multi-faith facility, yet many said that theirs was not well advertised and did not offer adequate space. Moreover, many said staff weren't supportive of their use

of the facility – and a significant number did not even know it existed.

This is not acceptable. Students and teachers are learning and working in a public setting. Everyone must understand that each of us is unique, and that with different people come different needs. Not having enough knowledge is not necessarily a problem, but it is certainly not an excuse. No one should be judging anyone else based on their appearance or behaviour, and this applies as much to racist stereotyping from security staff as it does to support staff who may not provide the same support to minority students, assuming they don't need it.

Students told us a lot about being questioned by teachers during Ramadan when they needed to pray, being asked to "just do it later" or told to "do that on your own time". This is when lack of knowledge does

become a problem. If staff don't understand the needs of their students, how can they possibly offer the best support? We are encouraged to ask questions when we don't understand. The same applies to adults. Most people love to be asked questions about their cultures and religions, particularly if it is friendly, respectful and genuine.

"Lack of knowledge is not an excuse"

Students appreciate the support they receive from their education institutions, particularly when they take steps to accommodate their religious and cultural practices. A well-advertised, suitable and accessible multi-faith space, reasonable adjustments for Ramadan, and seizing opportunities to grow community

understanding go a long way towards that.

As a commission, we think that colleges need to work more closely with their student body to understand individual needs when it comes to support. We also think colleges need to ensure that their staff get to know and understand their students – who they are as individuals, and why they need what they need, whether that is Halal food or time and space for prayer. Christmas is a given. Ramadan, Eid, Diwali, Lunar New Year matter equally to many students.

To build on the quality of support colleges offer, we recommend creating and training a cohort of student ambassadors who can represent the student body in an authentic way. They can advise you of the needs of their peers. They can help to design and deliver unconscious bias training to ensure that no student is treated unfairly, targeted, or dismissed.

We also recommend that colleges improve their communication so that students clearly understand what support is available and know how to raise concerns or suggestions if they do not feel their needs are being met or are experiencing unfair treatment.

After all, supporting us to succeed starts with understanding who we are, what we need, and celebrating what makes us unique.



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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

It's been a challenge. But staff were very open to developing literacy in their subjects

Many FE students have poor literacy skills. But her appointment as her college's first literacy lead has resulted in it being embedded more naturally into lessons, says Danielle Long



DANIELLE LONG

Literacy lead and English teacher, Oldham College

Literacy is woven throughout every part of our educational experience, whether that's writing assignments, reading case studies or expressing strong communication and presentational skills. Even when we leave the safety of education and step into the world of work, literacy is always a constant.

Yet, according to the National Literacy Trust, one in six (7.1 million) adults in England have poor literacy skills. This can lead to low self-esteem, misunderstanding of concepts, poor behaviour and, ultimately, hinder learners wanting to gain higher-level technical qualifications and employment.

“It's a struggle to find literacy resources targeted at FE”

Oldham College recognised the importance of developing these skills for all students and appointed a literacy lead (as well as a numeracy lead). In this role, my purpose is to give staff the tools, resources and, above all, the confidence to make literacy

explicit to all their learners.

The search for ideas and support was challenging to start, and I continue to struggle to find literacy resources targeted at FE learners.

Learning does not stop when a child reaches 16. English doesn't suddenly become relevant only to A Level students. Adult learners, in addition to our 16-18 vocational learners, also need support to develop their literacy. There is certainly a gap for educational publishers to fill when it comes to the professional knowledge and resources available to FE. After all, universities and employers require a high level of literacy of their students and employees.

Having said that, there is plenty of potential within the sector itself to fill these gaps. Happily, this is what I have been able to uncover and facilitate at Oldham, and I am certain the same is achievable in every FE setting – whether on its own or by working together.

My journey began with meeting each faculty area to gather as much information about the specific literacy skills required from each subject. Standing nervously in front of business and sports teachers about to

deliver a presentation about the importance of literacy, I kept asking myself: would vocational staff want to have conversations about literacy? Would they want to listen to an English teacher talk about English? I needn't have worried; what I found was that staff were very open to developing their own awareness of literacy in their subjects and keen to hear how I could support them.

After those initial meetings, I focused on two areas of need: supporting staff to identify spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPG) errors in students' work, and better embedding subject-specific, technical vocabulary.

This led to the creation of “faculty bookmarks”, posters of the top 10 technical terms in each area, and a focused CPD session on identifying SPG errors. We have also launched literacy knowledge organisers, where vocational staff give an overview of literacy skills in their subject and we explore ideas and

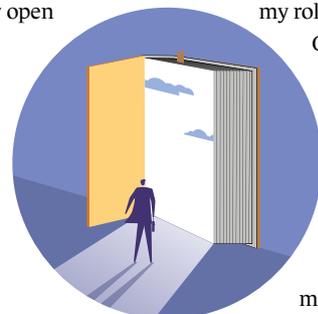
strategies for embedding these in the curriculum. These knowledge organisers don't just benefit students in their various subjects; the English team uses them to support contextualisation to help learners to make valuable and meaningful connections across curriculum areas.

Having been part of the English team for six years, it was quite a daunting prospect to leave that bubble and branch out across college. As I reflect on the start we've all made, I am deeply encouraged by the collective reception the staff have given to my role.

On a professional level, it has given me rich insight into almost every course taught at the college, and I have connected with colleagues I might never have met.

It is evident that literacy is being embedded more naturally into lessons. Staff as well as learners have greater awareness of the impact literacy has on achievement, progression and employability.

So, I would encourage every college to have a literacy lead (and a numeracy one too). Imagine what we could achieve for the sector with a national network, developing the profession's knowledge base, creating resources for every subject and, most importantly, bringing people together in common effort.



We're all struggling to fill vacancies. But we must collaborate to make retention a sector-wide priority



**SAM
PARRETT**

CEO, London and
South East Colleges

Colleges can't compete on pay with industry or schools, writes Sam Parrett. We need to work together to retain staff without undermining each other

I have worked in FE for 30 years – an I have never seen recruitment challenges on the scale we are now experiencing.

We are not alone. Private and public sector employers in almost every industry are struggling to fill vacancies. The Office for National Statistics reported in November 2022 that more than 13 per cent of employers had gaps they couldn't fill and that, overall, there were as many vacancies as there were unemployed people (1.19 million).

“Our sector is essential to future prosperity”

But the great irony for colleges is that we have been deemed as the silver bullet to solving the country's skills shortages – via the upskilling, reskilling and training opportunities we offer – when we ourselves are facing a recruitment crisis.

Sustaining high-quality provision is already a huge challenge. But when you throw in the cost-of-living crisis, the post-pandemic “great resignation”, long-term



underfunding and a stark lack of parity with schools, the situation is as unsurprising as it is relentless.

FE relies on the expertise and knowledge of skilled tradespeople and industry experts. Yet these professionals are deciding to move within their industries for more pay, rather than going into teaching.

This impossible situation will only be solved by fairer funding. The fact that colleges are not exempt from VAT is a good example of the inequity within education; an unfair anomaly costing colleges about £200 million every year.

Along with colleagues, staff and the AoC, we will continue to call on the government for better deals to support our sector, which is quite clearly essential to the country's future prosperity.

It is this disparity between schools and FE that is adding to FE staff's feeling of being undervalued. A report from

the Institute for Fiscal Studies highlights that while teachers' pay in schools has declined by between 5 and 13 per cent in real terms (which is bad enough and needs to be addressed), pay levels for FE lecturers have fallen by 18 per cent.

The same report also reveals that school teachers earn 21 per cent more than college lecturers, a gap that is increasing over time.

As chief executive of an academy trust as well as a college, it's clear to me that all teachers and support staff need to be more fairly rewarded in salary terms.

However, such disparity within FE specifically is unfair and wholly unreflective of the unique dual professionalism needed in FE – where our lecturers are vocational specialists as well as skilled teachers.

So, we find ourselves simply unable to compete with many of the offers made to our staff

by schools and universities, both in terms of salaries and esteem.

Further education is a rewarding and incredibly impactful sector to work in. It offers a stable career, with lots of progression opportunities and generous leave. But this is no longer enough, particularly in a world where people are rightly demanding fairer salaries that enable them to fully provide for themselves and their families.

A few years ago, I posed the question as to whether FE should have a “transfer window”, similar to the football model. It would mean an open culture in which staff could change jobs more easily, with colleges having greater flexibility to recognise and reward talent. I'm sure this would improve retention and outcomes – so is it perhaps something we should consider as a sector? I'd be keen to hear from colleges willing to give this a go.

We need to work together, valuing all our lecturers and support staff equally and sharing expertise fairly in a way that benefits learners, rather than damaging their prospects.

If we are to create a strong pipeline of dedicated teaching professionals and leaders in our schools, colleges and universities, we need politicians to listen, hear and recognise our unsustainable position – and work with us to address it.

The German system cannot be lifted and shifted to England. But there are lessons we can learn



GRAHAM HASTING-EVANS

Chief executive,
NOCN

The looming general election gives the sector a chance to take the lead in shaping the next stage of skills policy, writes Graham Hasting-Evans

With our focus on the shortage of many skilled occupations, and the ongoing debate over recruiting from overseas, NOCN has looked at what makes the German apprenticeship system successful. From this, we have been able to draw out key lessons for educational policy here.

The reform of the English apprenticeship system began in autumn 2013 with the first wave of Trailblazers, followed by the new apprenticeship levy and the creation of IfATE in 2017.

Ten years on, while higher and degree apprenticeship starts have increased, total apprenticeship starts have declined by one third, with level 2 starts declining by two thirds and level 3 starts by one quarter.

On the positive side, we now have better occupational standards. There are 673 live as of May this year, covering all sectors of the economy. However, only 360 are at the traditional levels 2 and 3.

In Germany, by contrast, starts have held up well despite Covid. Germany has about 330 state-recognised craft and technical standards, or occupations. In that, the two countries are similar.

However, 50 per cent of German school-leavers (15-18)

move on to vocational training, with one third contracting to do apprenticeships, compared with only 6 per cent of English school-leavers (16-18).

Germany's involvement of SMEs in the system is better too, 98 per cent against 41 per cent here. And although Germany measures completions slightly differently, its rate is about 87 per cent compared with our 54 per cent. Finally, Germany's proportion of apprenticeship starts relative to population is 0.6 per cent. Ours is 0.4 per cent at levels 2 and 3.

What we do have more of is organisations. Our apprenticeships system is fragmented, with skills policy controlled by the DfE through ESFA, IfATE and Ofqual, and trade and professional bodies dealing with IfATE. In Germany, there is a single organisation, with 630 staff. Independent of ministers, it is driven by industry requirements through collaboration with regional and national chambers of industry, commerce and crafts.

The German government funds formal training, while

employers cover costs of the apprentices. There is no complex, inflexible apprenticeship levy, which seems to result in greater employer engagement at all levels.

“Half of German school-leavers move to vocational training”

And finally, while FE is still seen by many as secondary to the “preferred” academic route, German technical occupations are the only route for employees to find work and for employers to find skilled workers. The importance of occupational training is embedded in the systems from age 11, giving credibility and encouraging engagement.

The German system cannot be lifted and shifted to England. Its very structured approach makes it too rigid for

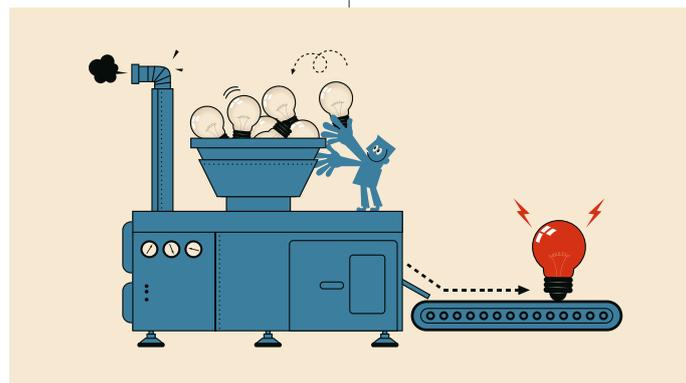
that, and in any case hampers its ability to adapt to the agile requirements needed for net-zero and digitisation.

Realistically, with a general election due, it is unlikely that we will see fundamental change soon. But this creates an opportunity for the sector to take the lead in shaping the next stage of evolution for our skills.

It needs to be streamlined, easy to use and embrace localities and trade bodies as well as the needs of the economy. It must meet the needs of existing workers as well as those moving into employment for the first time. It should be based on a national skills strategy to deliver a green and digitised future. And parity of esteem with the academic route is the least value that should be ascribed to it.

In this regard, IfATE's *Simpler Skills System* report is welcomed. Our next steps should be to develop a national skills strategy, to research how to increase apprenticeship starts and achievement rates, to benchmark apprenticeship funding systems and improve the levy, and to better connect our national and regional policy-making levels.

Greater political recognition of our sector's value must continue. But rather than waiting on political leadership, we are better finding out what we can learn from Germany and start to develop a clear plan for what happens in a new parliament.



The apprenticeship levy cannot sit in isolation of place-based need. A clear strategy is needed...now



DAVID PHOENIX

Vice chancellor,
London South
Bank University

Amid clamour for levy reform, we mustn't lose sight of other employer incentives and the importance of strategic and local leadership, writes David Phoenix

A Policy Exchange report published in May called for widescale changes to the skills funding system; and an open letter sent by several major employer representative bodies back in February described the apprenticeship levy as a "£3.5 billion mistake". The Labour Party has recently announced that it would transform it into a "growth and skills levy".

While we do need to reflect on how we address weaknesses in the current approach to work-based education, we should also pause to celebrate the fact that since the apprenticeship levy came into effect in 2017 it has generated funding from business to support more than 1.75 million apprenticeship starts. This includes more than 400,000 higher and degree apprenticeships. The DfE claims that, in England, 99.6 per cent of its ring-fenced apprenticeship budget (£2.455 billion) was spent on training last year, with less than 0.5 per cent of funding returned to the Treasury.

With this in mind, I recently hosted a roundtable on the future of the apprenticeship levy with representatives from think tanks, professional bodies, representative bodies and Lord Blunkett, who produced the

Labour Party's recent Council of Skills Advisers' Report. Although there was much nuance to the discussion, and a usual focus on transparency and bureaucracy with respect to the levy's allocation, a key theme was around the importance of positioning the levy within a wider, place-based skills framework.

The apprenticeship levy was introduced to help address the under-investment in training by UK employers (currently less than half the EU average). However, it has arguably had limited impact, given that only 23 per cent of employers were offering apprenticeships in 2021 and 39 per cent have provided no skills development for their workforce during the past year.

There is a risk that our skills funding is creating a "welfare state mentality" for employers. With that in mind, the government perhaps needs to consider using tax incentives or other funding levers to complement the levy in ways that encourage more employers to take ownership

of this agenda, assessing their own future skills needs and investing in training, be that through apprenticeships or otherwise.

"There little strategic oversight of how the levy is spent"

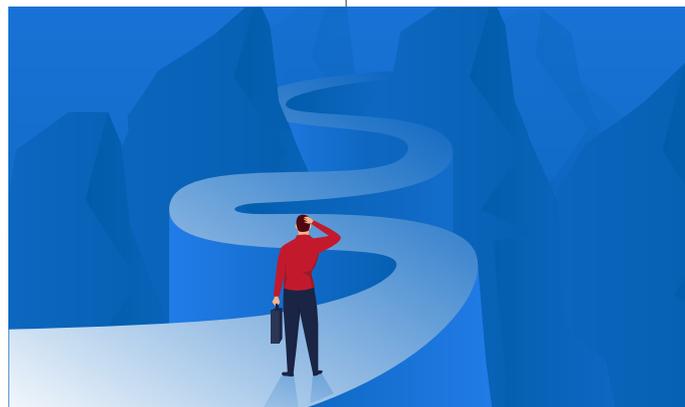
If skills development is to expand in a sustainable way, then as well as funding levers, we will need a clear skills strategy at government level to identify areas of skills deficit and focus on core growth opportunities such as green skills, digital, engineering, biology and healthcare. The current lack of strategic oversight of how the levy is spent means it is currently subject to the individual decisions of 17,000 separate employers. While these employers will make the best decisions for their businesses, their choices will not necessarily align with

wider government and societal priorities.

The identification of national priorities would help improve investment in infrastructure at a local level. That could be facilitated through the shared prosperity fund, for example, but linked to investment in local skills needs by local business beneficiaries. Without a clear strategy it is difficult to ensure work is joined up across different government departments and to understand not only where we should focus but what investment is needed for success.

If the government provided a clear strategy, it could assess the funding needed to tackle shortfalls in level 2 and 3 skills. These are unlikely to be addressed by business, but must be dealt with if we are not to fail 50 per cent of our young people. A dedicated fund to promote opportunities aligned to apprenticeships and training for learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds could help to transform the skills pipeline as we develop our aspiration to be a knowledge-led economy.

This must be part of a clear skills strategy that helps support appropriately funded adult education through developed funding for core level 2 and 3. This plan must also incentivise employers to engage in skills development and align government departments to enable place-based focus within a national framework.



Movers & Shakers

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



Louise Ranford

Operations Manager
- English, Maths & ESOL, Learn Plus Us

Start date: May 2023

Previous Job: Head of Skills, PILOT IMS

Interesting fact: Louise is an adrenaline junkie and did a wing walk for her 40th birthday, raising money for Acorns Hospice. Whilst it was the most uncomfortable thing she's done, she is planning to do another one, with a loop the loop!



Joe Turner

Managing Director, Novo Training Group

Start date: June 2023

Previous Job: Managing Director, BCE Group

Interesting fact: When travelling the world Joe spent time living with a tribe in Thailand



Tony Holloway

Operations and Quality Director, Learn Plus Us

Start date: June 2023

Previous Job: Interim Operations Director, Learn Plus Us

Interesting fact: Tony once walked from London to Birmingham (144 Miles) along the grand union canal and then the circumference of the Isle of Wight to raise over £10,000 for a children's hospice

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