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AEB tender
winners 2023
revealed

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FEWEEK

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Fifth of AEB tender winners not inspected or ‘require improvement’

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EXCLUSIVE

More than a fifth of national adult education budget tender winners either hold a grade three Ofsted rating or have never been inspected by the watchdog, *FE Week* analysis has found.

This week, *FE Week* revealed that 54 providers successfully procured £75 million worth of contracts from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) from its delayed AEB competition.

The outcome reduces the number of providers with a procured national AEB contract by more than a third, as 88 were awarded allocations in the last ESFA tender in 2021.

Of the 2021 winners, just 20 have won contracts again this time around.

Big names missing from this year’s winners list include the likes of The Child Care Company, Skills Training UK, Babington and the Learning Curve Group.

However, the results released this week are subject to a 10-day standstill period in which unsuccessful bidders can appeal. Contracts are due to commence from August 1.

FE Week analysis of the 54 new winners shows that eight are judged as ‘requires improvement’ by Ofsted, half of whom were inspected this year. Meanwhile, four of the contractors have not yet been inspected by the watchdog at all.

This year’s tender, launched in February, is made up of £12 million for Free Courses for Jobs and £63 million for non-devolved AEB.

AEB contract values range from £203,950 to £2,496,460 and, for Free Courses for Jobs, between £17,780 and £825,506.

WINNERS OF THE ESFA'S AEB TENDER

Provider name	Ofsted grade
Academy Transformation Trust	Good
Access Training East Midlands	Good
Acorn Training	Good
Agincare Group	Good
Aspire Sporting Academy	Requires Improvement
Back 2 Work Complete Training	Good
Barnet & Southgate College	Good
Beacon Education Partnership	Good
Cecos Computing International	Early Monitoring Visit
Challenge-Trg Skills	Requires Improvement
Community Training Portal	Good
CT Skills	Good
Derby Business College	Good
Eden Training Academy	Early Monitoring Visit
E-Training	Good
Evolve Your Future	Requires Improvement
Free To Learn	Requires Improvement
Functional Skills UK	Good
Futures Advice, Skills and Employment	Good
Humber Learning Consortium Inspira Cumbria	Good
JBC Skills Training	Requires Improvement
Let Me Play	Good
Logistics Skills & Consultancy	Early Monitoring Visit
Martinx (trading as Burleigh College)	Good
North Staffordshire Engineering Group Training Association	Early Monitoring Visit
Pathway First	Requires Improvement
Pet-Xi Training	Good
PGL Training (Plumbing)	Good
Phx Training	Early Monitoring Visit
Prevista Ltd	Requires Improvement
Professional Development And Training	Good
QDOS Training	Good
Realise Learning and Employment	Good
Resources (NE)	Good
Sapphire Logistics & Consultancy	Early Monitoring Visit
SCCU	Good
SCL Education & Training	Good
Skills Max Academy	Never Been Inspected
Sutton Coldfield Training	Never Been Inspected
Technical Professionals	Good
That Nail Place	Early Monitoring Visit
The Construction Skills People	Early Monitoring Visit
The Forward Trust	Early Monitoring Visit
The Skills Centre London	Early Monitoring Visit
The Skills Network	Good
The Training Brokers	Requires Improvement
Think Employment	Good
Three Dimensional Training	Good
TLG Business Services	Never Been Inspected
Training Strategies	Good
Triage Central	Good
TRN Train	Good
Twin Training International	Early Monitoring Visit
Workpays	Good

■ Also won contract in 2021 AEB tender

Labour promises pause and review of BTEC cull

BILLY CAMDEN
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EXCLUSIVE

Labour would pause and review the government's controversial bonfire of BTECs if the party wins the next general election, Bridget Phillipson has pledged.

The shadow education secretary made the promise in a letter to the Protect Student Choice campaign, which suggests an incoming Labour government would not defund any level 3 applied general qualifications in 2025.

Her letter, seen by *FE Week*, said: "Labour believes the way in which the transition from BTECs to T Levels is being handled by the government is putting the broader success of T Levels as a new qualification at risk, and constraining opportunities for our young people.

"Labour recognises the instability that is being caused by the government's reckless treatment of our nation's vital further education sector.

"The next Labour government will ensure all students are able to complete their courses and will review the diversity of options at level 3 before making further changes."

The pledge was also included in a document setting out Labour's education "mission", which was released on Thursday following a speech from party leader Sir Keir Starmer at Mid Kent College.

It marks a big boost for the Protect Student Choice campaign, which has called for a pause and review of the process with the backing of cross-party MPs and Lords.

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association which leads the campaign, said: "In accepting the campaign's request to pause and review the level 3 defunding process, Labour has thrown a potential lifeline to tens of thousands of young people who will be left without a pathway under the current government's plan to scrap most BTECs.



Bridget Phillipson

"Knowing that a Labour government would adopt a more considered approach to qualification reform will come as welcome news to schools, colleges and universities who, until now, have had no alternative but to plan for a hasty and misguided cull of applied general qualifications."

The Department for Education is moving towards a streamlined system for students finishing their GCSEs which pushes them to study either A-levels, T Levels or an apprenticeship from 2025.

Alternative AGQs such as Pearson's popular BTECs will only get funding from August 2025 if they do not overlap with the other qualification and pass a strict approvals process.

The DfE doubled down on this timeline on Wednesday in its response to a report from the House of Commons education select committee, which called for a pause and review of the reforms.

Kewin said that, in the SFCA's conversations with the Labour team, the party has been "clear" that, if it wins the next election, no AGQ would be defunded until a review of the options at level 3 has been carried out.

"This is a potentially game-changing development in 16 to 19 education and illustrates a commitment to the sort of evidence-based policymaking that the government has chosen not to adopt at any stage of the level 3 reform process," he added.

Government ‘not walking the walk’ on T Level placements

SHANE CHOWEN
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EXCLUSIVE

The government has been accused of “not walking the walk” on T Level industry placements as an *FE Week* investigation reveals a dearth of opportunities being provided by Whitehall departments and education agencies.

Data obtained via Freedom of Information requests reveals that the majority of government departments, including the Treasury, have not offered a single placement since the launch of the flagship qualifications in 2020.

This is despite suitable T Levels now being available in subjects such as digital and management and administration.

The figures show that just four placements have been provided by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), the government body responsible for developing and promoting T Levels.

Other Department for Education agencies including the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Student Loans Company, the Office for Students and Ofsted, have all provided no T Level placements to date.

The industry placement element of T Levels is lauded by education ministers as the main reason why their new “gold standard” technical qualification stands above other level 3 rivals.

Students are required to complete a placement lasting at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days) to achieve a T Level. But college leaders regularly cite local placement opportunities and lack of employer appetite for hosting learners as a key concern as more T Levels become available across the country.

Tom Richmond, a former adviser to DfE ministers who now heads up the EDSK think tank, said: “If government departments cannot find the time and energy to offer these placements then they can hardly blame other employers for being reticent about engaging with T Levels.”



The DfE itself has performed best out of all departments. It provided six placements in 2021/22 for T Level digital production, design and development students in their teacher services, digital and capital teams.

It has 11 placements planned for this year, three further digital placements and eight for T Level management and administration students. However only one of those had been completed by the date of the FOI response, on June 26.

The DfE is a Whitehall outlier, however. The Department for Work and Pensions has offered just five placements, each of them for T Level digital students in their digital team.

The DWP did say that it had 24 placements planned for 2023/24 for management and administration T Level students within its commercial, counter fraud, customer service and digital teams.

The Cabinet Office and Department of Health have both provided just three placements each over the past two years. Two placements have been provided by the Department for Transport and one by the Home Office.

The Treasury, Foreign Office, Department for Levelling Up and Communities and Department for Culture, Media and Sport are all yet to offer a single T Level industry placement. The same is true for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Justice.

The Department for Business and Trade offered two placements this year but those

have not been taken up by students. The Ministry of Defence is the only department yet to respond to *FE Week*'s FOI request.

Ofqual told *FE Week* that it previously sought to offer placements for students but, due to “geographical limitations”, it has not “been in a position to support students studying those courses for which Ofqual would be able to offer relevant placements”.

Other DfE agencies were blunter. “Social Work England has never provided and does not plan to provide T Level industry placements,” their FOI response said.

IfATE, which has lead responsibility for developing and promoting T Levels, has only offered four placements in total. Last year it offered placements to two digital support and services T Level students in their digital services and commissioning teams. To date this year, just one placement has been taken up with a further one planned.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said the government should be leading by example. “This is an example of the government talking the talk and not walking the walk,” he said.

“If the government can't be a leading employer in offering T Level placements, why should others?”

A DfE spokesperson said: “As more young people opt to take T Levels it will be vital that employers from across the public and private sectors can offer more placements.”

The poor performance of government departments comes despite DfE officials putting on workshops and providing online guidance on providing T Level industry placements for their Whitehall colleagues.

“We are co-ordinating placements across the civil service in areas like digital, business and administration, and finance, and have strengthened the support available to government departments, offering online guidance, workshops, and hands-on assistance to ensure a pipeline of high-quality placements,” the DfE said.

NCFE transfers two T Level licences to rival

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A major awarding organisation has handed over responsibility for two of its T Levels to a competitor.

In a sector first, NCFE and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) have "jointly agreed" that the licences to develop and award both the craft and design, and the media, broadcast and production T Levels will transfer to Pearson.

Both T Levels are set to begin delivery in September 2024.

IfATE said this was to give NCFE "greater capacity to focus on its existing T Level portfolio".

The change means that Pearson takes over from NCFE as the awarding organisation in control of the most T Levels – eight and seven respectively.

The transfer to a new awarding organisation follows the decision by education secretary Gillian Keegan to

postpone the delivery date of several NCFE T Levels, including the craft and media qualification, from September 2023 to September 2024.

Keegan said at the time that there was "more work for awarding organisations to do before IfATE and Ofqual can be clear that these T Levels are capable of meeting the high-quality bar required by both organisations to enable them to be taken into delivery, and that will not be possible in time for launch this September".

The hair, beauty and aesthetics T Level, which was also delayed to 2024, is currently still with NCFE. However, this week's announcement suggested a further update on the "future delivery" of the qualification will be made in the coming months.

NCFE was subject to multiple investigations by regulators last year following an outcry from students who received lower than

expected grades in their health and science T Level.

The issues meant NCFE had to regrade students after an Ofqual review determined that the 2022 core assessment papers "do not secure a sufficiently valid or reliable measure of student performance". The Ofqual review found "question errors, inadequate mark schemes and questions covering areas not explicitly in the specification".

In an interview with *FE Week* following the investigations, NCFE chief executive David Gallagher said "lessons had been learned" and explained how the organisation itself had questions about the outline common core science content, which is designed by the IfATE's route panel, from as early as January 2020.

NCFE was unable to comment. Adding to Pearson's growing list of T Level licences is the T Level in marketing, it was also announced this week. The qualification is set to be delivered from September 2025.



David Gallagher

Catering T Level in doubt as awarding body ends development

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The future of the proposed flagship T Level in catering hangs in the balance after its designated awarding body cut ties with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE).

A statement from the institute today said that Highfield Qualifications has ended its development of the technical qualification and more consultation is needed to determine the future of the course.

"IfATE and Highfield have worked very hard to ensure the success of the catering T Level to date," the statement said.

"It has, however, become apparent during the development stage that there is not a

shared vision of the technical qualification. As such both parties have agreed that their relationship in connection with the proposed catering T Level will now come



to an end."

Highfield was awarded a contract worth £2.6 million to develop the catering T Level in October 2021, with the intention of starting delivery this September. But education secretary Gillian Keegan announced in March that the programme would not be ready for delivery until at least 2025.

The catering T Level is now the only flagship qualification without a licensed awarding organisation.

The institute said that "a further announcement on the next steps for this T Level will be made" following "additional consultation with employer and sector bodies".

Highfield said it could not comment "for legal reasons".

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Lifetime Training CEO next in line for the chop

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EXCLUSIVE

England's largest apprenticeship provider is set to part ways with another one of its leaders – this time the chief executive – as it prepares to bring in a turnaround specialist.

Jon Graham, who has held the top job at Lifetime Training for just over a year, will leave the company next week.

The company told *FE Week* that Graham was leaving “to pursue other endeavours”.

He will be replaced by David Smith, who comes from outside the FE sector having led big-name companies such as Parcellforce, Royal Mail, City Link, Serco and most recently estates management company The Bellrock Group.

The CEO switch comes a week after Lifetime Training's executive chair Geoff Russell, who used to head up the Skills Funding Agency, suddenly left his post.

Both Graham and Russell were brought in from JTL, another large training provider, last year. Their departures come months after Lifetime Training was taken over by its lender Alcentra.

The provider has experienced a rocky year including a critical ‘requires improvement’ Ofsted report, an ongoing government audit dispute that could result in a £13 million clawback, and around 60 job losses.

Graham, who is also currently an Association of Employment and Learning Providers and Education and Training Foundation board member, took over the top job at Lifetime Training in June 2022 following the departure of Alex Khan, who had led the company for a decade.

His replacement, Smith, worked at Parcellforce Worldwide in the 2000s, where he was said to have played pivotal role in the turnaround of the company. He moved to



Geoff Russell and Jon Graham

head up the Royal Mail before leaving to lead the struggling courier firm City Link in 2011.

Smith could not save City Link from collapse, however, and was charged before being acquitted of criminal offences after allegedly failing to notify the business secretary of the company's closure in 2014.

Smith said: “Throughout my career, I have witnessed first-hand the profound impact of apprenticeships on the success of organisations. Joining Lifetime presents a tremendous opportunity for me to make a tangible difference.

“My experience at Bellrock highlighted the critical role vocational education plays in addressing the UK's skills gaps, particularly in engineering, healthcare, hospitality and retail.

“I firmly believe in the power of vocational education to drive social mobility and contribute to solving these challenges.”

The provider has also announced University of Bristol finance director Jason Smerdon as its new chief financial officer.

Lifetime Training delivers training mostly in retail and hospitality and has been

attempting to recover from the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the provider's apprenticeship start numbers hard.

The provider recorded 23,020 starts in 2018/19, before falling by more than a third to 14,980 in 2019/20. In 2020/21 Lifetime's starts further slipped to 12,910 but increased slightly in 2021/22 to 16,720.

Lifetime has however continued to be the provider with the most apprenticeship starts in England. In the first two quarters of 2022/23, the firm achieved 7,280 starts – almost two-thirds more than the second-largest provider, the British Army.

The falling start numbers contributed to large-scale redundancies in 2020 and 2023.

Accounts for the 18-month period ending January 31, 2022, show the firm's turnover increased to £71.1 million compared with £59.9 million in 2020. But its EBITDAE (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, amortisation and exceptional items) fell from £9.391 million to £2.249 million over that period.

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

Cost-of-living driving up domestic abuse and exploitation of students

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A growing number of students are falling victim to domestic abuse and criminal exploitation as welfare services struggle to keep pace with demands for cost-of-living support, MPs have warned.

The all-party parliamentary group (APPG) for students also found that, as well as leaving courses early to work, students were prioritising ones that would quickly lead to job opportunities rather than progressing to further study.

During a recent inquiry, the cross-party group of MPs heard that more college students were applying for supported housing as domestic abuse reports increased, while some colleges were reporting an increase in criminal and sexual exploitation.

"The number of at-risk learners is greater than ever," a report published this week following the inquiry warned.

But it also found that "reduced capacity in external social and public services" meant there were "limited options" when colleges looked for additional support for their students.

Some colleges reported that "extreme financial destitution" had resulted in more students becoming victims of criminal or sexual exploitation, or becoming involved with criminal gangs.

"Vulnerable students are often drawn into lawbreaking because of extreme financial destitution, which puts them at serious risk while also having a negative impact on their studies," the APPG report said.

The group based its report on evidence from nearly 80 college staff and more than 700 students gathered through a survey by the Association of Colleges (AoC).

Students wearing the same clothes every day

The report warned that "extreme financial desperation" was increasing among students and their families. Many colleges were "regularly" reporting cases of extreme student poverty.

Students were often seen wearing the same

clothes every day for long periods of time, wearing workplace protective gear outside of college, or coming to college each day to keep warm, even when they had no classes.

Student bursaries had become "essential for family budgets", the report warned. Rather than using their transport bursaries themselves, students were giving them to their families and walking for miles to college.

One of the respondents, Hartlepool College of Further Education, said there had been a 75 per cent increase in the number of 16 to 18-year-old students asking for help with food.

More than 90 per cent of the college's students had also requested bursary support from the college, in comparison to 65 per cent last year.

The APPG has called on the government to "consider the case" for extending free school meal eligibility, and for more college funding for bursaries. It also called for free or subsidised travel for those in FE aged between 16 and 19.

Short term course decisions

Financial pressures were also pushing more students to drop out of further education in the past year, with colleges warning that keeping attendance up had been "one of their main challenges".

At least 20 colleges mentioned the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on student retention and attendance, according to the APPG.

Because of rising costs, FE students were



"struggling to prioritise their studies over maintaining jobs, and working more hours to make ends meet." This led to more students dropping out.

The pressures were also affecting their decisions on what classes to take, with some students opting for shorter courses or those that would lead to job opportunities, at the expense of further learning.

'Severe' impact on mental health

Financial pressures were also having an impact on mental health, especially among 16 to 18-year-olds.

More than 90 per cent of colleges said there had been an increase in the number of students disclosing mental health difficulties.

Eight in ten colleges said they had made a referral to A&E over student mental health in the past year, while more than nine in ten said they were aware of attempted suicides by students over the same period.

Bernadette Savage, vice-president for further education at the National Union of Students, said it was "shocking" that students and apprentices were leaving education because they could not afford it.

"We continually hear how students are the future workforce, and how they will help to tackle the climate crisis and skills gap, but how can we expect this from students who are arriving to class hungry, cold and exhausted?"

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said it "recognise[d]" the impact inflation is having on families and that it is "committed to ensuring further education is financially sustainable".

"That is why we have increased the 16 to 19 bursary fund by more than 12 per cent to over £152 million this academic year, helping disadvantaged students who could not otherwise afford to participate in education with costs of books, equipment and trips where needed.

"We have also increased overall funding for the sector with an extra £1.6 billion in 2024/25, which is the biggest increase in 16 to 19 funding in a decade."

FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION 2023

Spielman: Labour safeguarding plans 'expensive and complicated'

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Ofsted's chief inspector has poured cold water on Labour plans to introduce a new annual review of safeguarding, saying it would be "much more expensive and complicated".

Addressing the Festival of Education at Wellington College in Surrey on Thursday, Amanda Spielman said the government would "have to make something four times the size" of Ofsted's current inspection operation to roll out the proposals.

She was not commenting explicitly on Labour plans but was asked if safeguarding should be removed from the Ofsted inspection framework and undertaken as a separate "indicator".

In March, Labour outlined proposals for yearly school and college safeguarding reviews at the annual conference of the Association of School and College Leaders.

Shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the safety of children and young people was "too important" to be left to infrequent inspections.

Safeguarding would remain within the remit of Ofsted and the two inspections would "complement one another".

"You'd actually make safeguarding a bigger thing, relative to everything else," Spielman added. "It would take a very big commitment of energy."

Ofsted dealt with Ruth Perry case 'humanely'

Last month, Ofsted announced changes to the inspection system following pushback in the wake of the death of headteacher Ruth Perry.

It included a commitment to reinspect schools more quickly after grading them 'inadequate' overall due to ineffective safeguarding.



Amanda Spielman

Perry's family said she took her own life after her school was rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted as a result of safeguarding failures at Caversham Primary School. An inquest into her death has yet to be held.

On Thursday, Spielman described the case as "very, very sad" and added that her sympathies "remain with Ruth's family and colleagues".

Asked if she would have responded to the situation any differently in hindsight, given criticism from the sector, the Ofsted chief appeared to suggest that she would not.

"I'm confident that my team were professional, fair, sensitive and humane," she said. "There's a very distressed family, everybody has to be very sensitive and careful around that."

Spielman 'happy' with legacy

Spielman will step down as His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) at the end of the year after seven years at the helm. It is understood her successor will be announced before the end of this month.

Reflecting on her overall tenure in the top job, Spielman said: "Broadly, I'm happy with how I've approached the job."

She added that she did "a lot of listening" to the sector before starting and would encourage the next HMCI to do the same.

As in previous interviews, she defended single-word judgments, which have been a source of controversy in recent months. "Parents do value the simplicity and clarity," she said.

Asked which single word she would use to describe her tenure, however, she retorted: "I'm not playing that game."

Big employers back call to rename 'off-the-job' training

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EXCLUSIVE

Scores of big-name apprenticeship levy payers are calling on the government to rename the controversial off-the-job training policy, warning that the "confusing" title is exacerbating high withdrawal rates.

The likes of McDonald's, B&Q, Wagamama's, Whitbread, Tesco and Bupa are backing a campaign launched by England's largest apprenticeship provider, Lifetime Training, to change the terminology.

Writing to the Department for Education in a letter signed by more than 40 large employers and seen by *FE Week*, outgoing Lifetime Training chief executive Jon Graham (see page 9) said there were many misconceptions about what constitutes off-the-job training.

"We argue that this terminology is outdated," Graham wrote. "It relates to models of training which require apprentices to spend time away from the workplace, rather than the work-based approach.

"It does not reflect the current reality of apprenticeship delivery or the learner experience. The result is a perception that this training must be carried out at home or after-hours. This is not the case."

Off-the-job training issues were a key reason why Lifetime Training was downgraded from Ofsted 'good' to 'requires improvement' last year.

Inspectors reported that the provider's 20,000-odd apprentices "too often" spend their own time completing their off-the-job training assignments at home outside of work hours.

Graham's letter to the DfE stated that misunderstanding around off-the-job requirements leads to learners failing to record off-the-job activity as they – and their managers – are unclear about what can be included.

"For managers, this creates concerns



about shift patterns, while learners may be concerned that they have to complete additional work on top of their 30 or 40-hour working week. This lack of clarity is likely to be putting managers off proposing apprenticeships, and learners off pursuing them."

He added that off-the-job training is often cited as a key reason why around half of all apprentices drop out before completing their programme each year.

Off-the-job training is a legal requirement for an apprenticeship and was introduced following the levy reforms in 2017. It originally required apprentices to spend at least 20 per cent of their normal working hours on off-the-job training, but was last year replaced by a six-hour per week baseline figure.

What qualifies as off-the-job training will vary by apprenticeship and sector, but the training must focus on developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours, and sit outside the day-to-day role, but take place during normal, paid working hours.

Joanne Vincent, the colleague capability and apprenticeship manager at B&Q, told *FE Week* the terminology was a huge barrier for recruitment and retention of apprentices.

The employer has around 800 apprentices across 44 different apprenticeships and there are 350 managers across the business who "all understand off-the-job differently".

Vincent estimates that between 10 and 15 potential apprentices do not enrol each month because the "manager doesn't understand the connotations and what sits behind off-the-job – they just literally believe that they are going to be out of the office for a day a week".

She added: "If we didn't label it, and we just classed it as development or learning opportunities, then that might help get rid of some of the '50 Shades of Grey' that sits in the middle," she added.

Marie Pettitt, a level 2 customer service practitioner at B&Q, told *FE Week* that across the store she works in there "might be multiple staff members doing apprenticeships at any one time, meaning different off-the-job tasks", which inevitably creates "confusion".

"If the language was clearer, this would be one less barrier and help us manage shifts and work more effectively," she said.

The view that the phrase creates confusion is shared by many training providers across the sector.

Simon Ashworth, director of policy at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said: "The current terminology is outdated and no longer reflects how and where the broad range of training provision that exists across the apprenticeship programme can and does take place.

"This causes confusion for employers and learners alike, so updating the language we use to describe dedicated time spent developing and learning new skills would be extremely welcome and impactful."

Lifetime Training has put forward three potential alternatives to the term "off-the-job":

- Dedicated development time
- Learning and development time
- Apprenticeship professional development

A DfE spokesperson said: "Providers are free to use their own terminology when speaking to employers about apprenticeship training. We will consider the views raised in the letter and respond in due course."

West Mids to fund 'study programmes' for young adults

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Young adults in the West Midlands are in line for better training as the combined authority introduces "full study programme" funding for the first time for 19 to 23-year-olds.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) announced that funding for level 2 and level 3 qualifications for young adults will follow a model similar to that used for 16 to 18-year-olds from this September.

This comes on top of a series of measures from the combined authority which seek to increase the proportion of its residents qualified to level 3.

The combined authority has also confirmed that it will increase its low-wage threshold for access to fully subsidised level 3 courses from £19,250 to £30,000 from August 1, 2023.

WMCA proposed the change in a consultation which it launched in March to boost skills and earnings in the region. The consultation closed in April and officials revealed the outcomes this week.

The authority has also announced that it will trial fully funded level 3 courses for all residents, regardless of income in "key economic sectors". Providers and employers in the region will be consulted on what qualifications should be in scope over the next six months.

Mayor Andy Street said: "Over the past five years, we have increased our investment in higher level skills and now – following this latest consultation – we are creating our most comprehensive approach yet by offering new learners level 3 training free of charge if they are earning less than £30,000."

A new study programme funding model for 19 to 23-year-olds was not proposed in the original consultation, but is being implemented following feedback from colleges who argue that under-funding for this age group has been exacerbated by the pandemic (see page 14).

The combined authority said it had been able to increase skills funding on level 3 provision from £4.4m when it first received devolved powers in 2019 to £37 million now, "through a combination of re-prioritising the existing adult education budget" and through new funding streams such as skills bootcamps and free courses for jobs.

Qualifications for FE workers

WMCA's proposals to fully fund qualifications for the FE workforce will also be implemented following the consultation. In addition to funding level 3 and above qualifications in coaching, assessing, quality assurance and teacher training, it has now extended this offer to include level 3 certificates in employability practice and employer solutions.

More to do on learner support

Changes to the discretionary learner support funds (DLSF) scheme – a fund available to learners aged 19 and over who are facing financial difficulties – will be delayed, however, after the authority got only "limited feedback" on DLSF. Since devolution the

combined authority has not increased support funding.

It said it will now consider the "aims, focus and flexibility of the fund", and how WMCA could support level 3 learners who are earning below the average wage.

WMCA then aims to launch any changes to the DLSF by August 2024.

Cutting 'low value qualifications'

A series of funding uplifts to level 2 qualifications have also been introduced, where sectors identified a need in the consultation. So far, the combined authority has boosted funding by 10 per cent for level 2 qualifications in the health and social care sector and the construction sector.

Those include qualifications in brickwork, carpentry and joinery, and roof slating and tiling in the construction sector, and level 2 qualifications in care, common health conditions and a course to introduce caring for children and young people.

WMCA is now looking at level 2 courses in the digital and engineering and manufacturing sectors that need uplifts.

It also expects a reduction in "low-value qualifications that are delivered at scale with little progression or economic return for residents".

In its adult education budget strategy, WMCA also set out plans to make a minimum of a fifth of its grant-funded

AEB provision to be level 3 or above. But survey respondents said this should come with an aligned focus on training provision and local job opportunities, and greater collaboration between different providers in the West Midlands.

The respondents also suggested that WMCA should focus on four sectors in the next year for 20 per cent AEB provision – digital, construction, manufacturing and engineering, and health and social care.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Young adults need better funding post Covid



SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM
South and City College Birmingham

Pilot scheme with specialist staff has had a massive impact on 16-18s, but the cost is too high to expand it

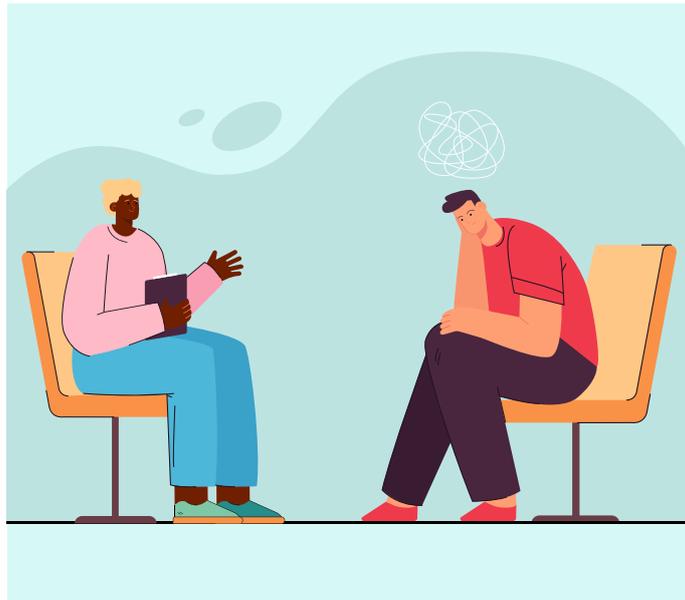
The West Midlands has a young, diverse and vibrant population. It is a great region to live, to study and to work in, but the impact of Covid has been profound – particularly on the mental health of our young people.

Before the pandemic, we were already seeing an increase in mental health issues affecting students at all levels and of all ages, but primarily among those from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds. Lockdowns, Covid restrictions and lack of adequate access to education and training only served to exacerbate this further.

“This will help us to reach more young people”

For many, this has had a serious impact on their studies.

The nature of vocational studies, coupled with the learning needs of students from many of our most disadvantaged wards, has meant that large numbers of young people have missed key elements of their education, including basic social and study skills.



For some, this has been compounded by a lack of access to technology and to family support. And it is now being exacerbated by anxiety about finances and the increased cost of living.

At South and City College in Birmingham, our key focus is to educate and train young people for their future employment. This primarily means providing teaching and learning in classrooms and workshops.

However, the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among our students – resulting in poor attendance or behaviour, physical difficulties, attention problems, and difficulties in completing work etc – is presenting serious challenges for how we can achieve this.

Over the past year, we have

sought to address this through a pilot scheme that employs a small number of specialist staff who support students with serious mental health issues. While this has had a massive impact on our students, the cost of this support is simply too high to expand it within current levels of funding – particularly for students aged 19-plus.

While the level of funding for 16-18 study programmes is becoming increasingly insufficient, it does enable us to provide a far greater level of support than is possible for equivalent learners aged 19-plus, where funding is only available for individual qualifications, rather than for wider wrap-around support and enrichment activities – a funding gap of around £1,200 per person.

This is not only unfair for learners and financially challenging for colleges, but also risks adding to our regional challenge around increasing youth unemployment and inactivity.

To help address this inequality, we made the case to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) as part of their recent level 3 consultation that they should implement a full study programme approach to funding level 2 and level 3 qualifications for young adults aged 19-23.

And we have been extremely pleased to see that this will be introduced from September 2023 – a clear demonstration of the benefits to learners and to colleges of skills devolution, through co-development of solutions that can make a difference to our learners and the local labour market.

We anticipate that this will help us to reach more young people and enable them to achieve level 2 and 3 qualifications. Longer term, this should also reduce demand on public services such as employment support and the NHS.

As a next step, we will continue to work with WMCA as they seek to implement the findings of the West Midlands Mental Health Commission by creating a new “Thrive at College” programme as part of our wider work and health offer for the region.

Collab Group CEO to retire in August

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EXCLUSIVE

The chief executive of the Collab Group will retire at the end of August, *FE Week* has learned.

Ian Pretty has led the organisation since 2015, taking the helm of what was then the 157 Group following the retirement of Lynne Sedgmore.

He leaves the organisation almost unrecognisable from the one he inherited, evolving from a body representing colleges graded 'outstanding' to a more open organisation for "like-minded, forward thinking" colleges.

Within a year of joining, Pretty had completed a strategic review of the membership body and relaunched it with a new name, the Collab Group, and a new purpose – towards policy implementation rather than just influencing.

Collab currently has 23 member colleges according to its website, a number which has fluctuated over the years.

The organisation's attention under Pretty's leadership has been focused on supporting college commercial activities and helping its members to deliver on key priority policy areas such as apprenticeships, Institutes of Technology and, more recently, higher technical skills.

But that does not mean Pretty has not been trying to lobby for his member colleges. It is that, as he puts it, his approach has not been so public.

Pretty puts his influencing tactics at odds with others in the sector, preferring behind-the-scenes conversations rather than the more visible campaigns from organisations such as the Sixth Form Colleges Association and the Association of Colleges.

"I've never been a believer in running big campaigns," he says. "My view is that you have conversations at the right levels you



Ian Pretty

need to have conversations.

"So, I've got strong links in to Number 10 and the Treasury, I've got strong links at DfE. You have those conversations."

As he reflects on his time at Collab, Pretty wants the college sector to spend less time looking inwardly at itself and concern itself more with the big issues facing the UK.

He says the sector "bases its argument in any conversation on the need to do something, as opposed to looking at the wider economic situation in the UK.

"If I look at what's happened to colleges in the last eight years, and what might happen in the next eight years, this inward perspective needs to change.

"What I mean by that is what is the sector going to do to support the issues currently facing the UK? What we are getting from both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party is that they both talk about a high-wage, high-skilled economy.

"It all sounds fantastic, we all nod along. But the rhetoric from both parties doesn't fit the reality of what they are going to have to invest in to achieve that change."

One of the major shifts that Pretty has witnessed in his time in FE is the move to devolve more skills powers and funding

to mayoral combined authorities. He draws a parallel with Wales where, he says, colleges have "a direct line to the minister where decisions are made".

This "fundamental shift in the power base" makes it "an interesting time" for the sector he says. "You've got to think very differently about who you're having conversations with. And who the representative bodies are having conversations with."

As he prepares to leave the sector, Pretty reflects on his work on area reviews, Institutes of Technology and the work he is doing at the moment supporting colleges with "a massive amount of issues" related to reclassification back to the public sector.

Pretty's retirement means there are three chief executive vacancies among FE's national representative bodies. Jane Hickie officially left her post at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers last Friday and Tom Bewick will leave the top job at the Federation of Awarding Bodies at the end of September.

FE Week contacted the Collab Group chair, LTE Group chief executive John Thornhill, but he declined to comment.

AoC calls for 'one system' to fund and regulate FE and HE

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The next government should regulate and fund colleges, universities and training providers through a new "one tertiary system", the Association of Colleges (AoC) has said.

The membership body made the call in a new report called Opportunity England, which makes more than 20 other policy recommendations to create a "national post-16 education and skills strategy" following the next general election.

Among the proposals was a demand for apprenticeships to only be taken by new job starters, and increased funding rates so FE providers can match the new starting salary of £30,000 a year for schoolteachers.

These are the key recommendations:

'One tertiary system'

Colleges, universities and other learning organisations "need to be regulated and funded together as one tertiary system", the report said.

According to the AoC, separate regulation, funding, data and success measures make it "hard for people and employers to understand and navigate the learning and skills they need and want".

Learning organisations are in turn "forced to compete for scarce resources, resulting in a reduced breadth of offer, efficiency and quality of provision".

The AoC's report did not go into detail about how this system would work in practice, or which regulator should run it.

Rather, it stated that the new system would need to be developed "in partnership with learning organisations and across a range of other institutions including local government, employer groups, unions and community organisations".

Labour released a document outlining its education "mission" this week (see page 5), which agreed that the regulatory landscape that covers higher and further education is "complex, burdensome and bureaucratic".

The document said that a Labour government "will undertake a period of review, with the aim of streamlining regulation and ensuring that regulators are supporting cooperation and collaboration between colleges and universities".

It added: "We will learn from proactive approaches to supporting 'articulation agreements', which ensure that students are



able to have learning recognised and can move seamlessly between institutions, overcoming barriers to make accessing learning easier."

Only allow apprenticeships for new job starters

The AoC said the overall apprenticeship programme "is not working" because of the government's refusal to set any priorities for how the levy should be used by employers.

This "failure" has led to "unwanted and major shifts, with higher-level apprenticeships for existing employees in big companies growing at the expense of opportunities for young people and new labour market entrants where numbers have reduced".

Apprenticeships need to be focused on new job starters – which would be a return to the recommendations of the 2012 Richard review, the AoC said.

The programmes should be "clearly targeted at and promoted to" those who are new to a job or role that requires sustained or substantial training.

Training and accreditation of existing workers should be "delivered separately", as should provision aimed primarily at entry-level jobs, the AoC's report said.

The association also called for a review of the levy, to look at where the money is currently being spent, what forecasts suggest about future spending, whether there are options to pool employer contributions and whether it will be necessary to increase the levy rate from 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent.

Lifelong loan entitlement should include grants

Since 2004, the AoC said that participation numbers in government-funded learning have

almost halved, with now only one in three adults self-reporting any participation in learning – the lowest level in 22 years.

To address this, the current government is introducing the lifelong loan entitlement in 2025. This will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime.

The AoC said that, as well as loans, this entitlement should make grants available to "ensure wider access" to the scheme.

In addition, the association said a "universal entitlement" to a first full level 3 qualification, building on the "lifetime skills guarantee" introduced in 2020, should be implemented, but with a wider range of courses on offer and with maintenance support.

Poor staff pay must be addressed

There is a crisis in college workforce recruitment and retention, driven largely by poor pay, the AoC said.

The average pay for teaching staff in colleges sits around £8,000 a year below that of their colleagues in schools.

According to the AoC, funding rates need to be increased for colleges to at least be able to match the new starting salary of £30,000 a year for teaching staff in schools.

There is also a big pay gap between college lecturers and the industries they train people for.

The AoC wants the next government to invest in a "cadre of sector experts" to be employed by colleges in priority sectors and paid closer to industry levels, to "stimulate demand, engage with employers and to help ensure curriculum, delivery, quality, CPD and work placements are all adequate to meet labour market needs".



Awards celebrate stories of triumph over tragedy

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Learners who have had to deal with family tragedy, severe brain damage and homelessness are among this year's Festival of Learning award winners.

Ten students, tutors, colleges, providers and employers were recognised for their inspiring stories as part of a celebration of lifelong learning at a ceremony run by the Learning and Work Institute (LWI) and supported by Phoenix Insights.

"This year's Festival of Learning award winners are truly inspiring," said Stephen Evans, chief executive at the LWI.

"Their stories demonstrate the many ways adult learning holds the key to improving people's job and career prospects, increasing health and wellbeing, widening participation in society, and much more besides."

The award sponsors were NOCN, the ETF, City Lit and the Skills and Education Group.

Illness didn't hold back award winners

Jackie Butterworth was diagnosed with the bowel disease ulcerative colitis in 2013 and had a stoma fitted the following year.

The LWI awarded her the learning for health award after she took part in support groups and courses. She has now set up her own group to support others going through similar challenges.

The new directions award went to Jason Richards, who was recovering from severe brain damage and years of homelessness when he found training opportunities through Newground Together.

Following his learning, he not only found work opportunities, but also got the chance to reconnect with his family.

Paul Eeles, chief executive of the Skills and Education Group, said the award highlighted one of the best things about lifelong learning, allowing people to make a fresh start and follow a new path.

"Life can lead you in unexpected directions and continuous learning is vital to taking the opportunities that come your way," he said.

Learners overcame unimaginable struggles
Fakhra Irfan was awarded the

English language learning award.

When she moved to the UK, she did not speak any English and lacked the confidence to explore beyond her home environment.

She pursued adult learning and gained newfound independence when her husband died shortly after she gave birth to her third child.

Meanwhile the return to learning award was won by Tyrese Williams.

She found school extremely challenging and left without any GCSEs. But her life changed when she was referred to a course at Buckinghamshire Adult Learning, which is aimed at young parents developing English, maths and digital skills.

"People coming back to learning at any point in their lives is something to applaud," said Mark Malcomson, CEO at City Lit. "The knowledge, skills, joy and fulfilment they gain is something that changes and improves lives immeasurably."

Margaret Porta was the winner of the patron's award, chosen by LWI patron Princess Anne. She won after gaining new IT skills through tutoring with the Open Age DigitALL Project and successfully put together a digital campaign to promote her first art show.

Tutors make 'transformational' impact

The tutor award went to Emma Iliffe for her dedication and passion for deaf culture and the deaf community. She is a teacher of British Sign Language (BSL) at City Lit.

"The transformational impact tutors, trainers and educators have is not limited to learners," said Katerina Kolyva, chief executive at

FESTIVAL OF LEARNING AWARD WINNERS

Award	Winner
Patron's Award	Margaret Porta
President's Award	St Giles Trust
Tutor Award	Emma Iliffe
English Language Learning Award	Fakhra Irfan
Learning Provision Award	Fircroft College
Learning for Work Award	Geoff Carter
Learning for Health Award	Jackie Butterworth
New Directions Award	Jason Richards
Employer Award	Nuneaton Signs
Return to Learning Award	Tyrese Williams

Education and Training Foundation.

"It extends beyond the learners to their families and communities. In a world where we are all contending with diverse and rapidly-evolving challenges—ranging from the accelerating impact of technology on work to a cost-of-living crisis—this has never been more important."

The winner of the learning for work award, sponsored by NOCN Group, went to Geoff Carter.

He secured employment on the HS2 project after an extended period of unemployment followed by a family tragedy. The judges said his construction training not only brought him skills and qualifications, but also empowered him to show his children what a good working life looks like.

Employers were also celebrated at the ceremony. One such award went to the charity St Giles Trust, which won the president's award for its London Peer Hub. The programme trains and supports learners to "turn a past into a future" and achieve a level 3 NVQ in advice and guidance – usually the first qualification that they have ever attained.

Nuneaton Signs won the employer award, sponsored by NOCN Group. Since 2021, the company has supported internships for young people with special educational needs and disabilities in partnership with

North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWSLC).

Meanwhile, Fircroft College was selected as winner of the learning provision award. One of only two adult residential colleges in England, the judges said it provided a safe and welcoming environment for learners with multiple and complex needs.



Festival of Learning Award winners

Make sex ed compulsory for over-16s, say MPs

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Sex and relationships education should be made compulsory in colleges to help young people avoid “potentially harmful and dangerous situations”, MPs have said.

Relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) is currently mandatory in secondary schools up to the age of 16. But the gap between 16 and 18 without RSHE means young people are left “under-supported” and “less equipped” with important knowledge about RSHE, according to a report by the women and equalities select committee.

The report follows an inquiry by the committee into sexual harassment in schools and colleges, launched amid the emergence of the MeToo movement and the findings of Everyone’s Invited, an online platform set up to document stories of harassment which went viral.

Ofsted also published a review in 2021 covering sexual abuse in schools and colleges – which the MPs welcomed but said needed to go further. For instance, the select committee warned female staff were “not immune” from abuse and called on Ofsted to investigate their abuse by other staff, pupils and parents as part of its inspections.

One of the report’s key recommendations is that RSHE be made compulsory up to the age of 18.

“[A lack of compulsory RSHE after 16] leaves young people making their first steps in the adult world under-supported and less equipped to navigate potentially harmful and dangerous situations and keep themselves safe and healthy in relationships,” the report said.

“RSHE should be extended to young people in post-16 educational settings.”

The committee suggested it would like



all young people between the ages of 16 and 18 to receive RSHE but that it would be “up to the government how that can be implemented”.

The committee did not hear evidence on how this could apply to independent training providers, and so has not made any recommendations for ITPs.

Though there is agreement that RSHE is needed in colleges, some sector leaders have urged the government to support colleges with funding and resources so that they can offer that provision.

Geoff Barton, general secretary at the Association of School and College Leaders, said sexual harassment and violence was “treated as an extremely serious matter in schools and colleges”.

But he warned that colleges had received “very little” in the way of support or training for teachers to provide RSHE.

“Schools and colleges are striving to uphold good values, but they cannot fight this battle alone,” Barton said. “They need to be

supported in terms of funding, resources and an online regulatory framework that protects young people.”

He also warned that the Online Safety Bill, which was partly developed to tackle misogyny and abuse online, is still “plodding its way through parliament”.

The bill entered parliament in March 2022 but is still in report stage in the House of Lords.

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said sixth-form colleges “almost invariably” already offer RSHE, as “they understand how important it is”.

But he said there was “unlikely to be any significant advantage in making [RSHE] compulsory”.

“Evidence shows that sixth-form students are only funded for 15 hours a week of tuition, so were this to become an additional requirement on the timetable, the delivery costs would need to be fully funded by government”.

The Department for Education and Ofsted both declined to comment.



Bill Watkin

INSPECTION SECTION

City Lit back to top Ofsted marks

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One of England's largest adult education providers has returned to Ofsted's top rating.

The inspectorate heaped praise on the City Literary Institute's highly qualified and passionate tutors and "exceptionally well-motivated" students in an 'outstanding' report published this week.

The last time the London-based adult education charity was fully inspected was in 2016. It received a 'good' rating, a downgrade on the 'outstanding' judgment it received in 2011.

In its latest report that takes the provider back to top marks, inspectors said leaders had created a "very well-considered curriculum" to meet varying needs of students and who go on to achieve "exceptionally good" results.

City Lit is one of the oldest colleges in England, established in 1919, and offers part-time courses and adult learning to around 24,000 adult students in London and beyond. The college offers online courses in modern foreign languages, humanities and creative writing, specialist programmes in speech therapy and programmes for students who have learning disabilities.

During its 2020 monitoring visit examining its Covid-19 teaching procedures, City Lit students reported positive experiences of online learning and inspectors found the college made safety a high priority.

The 'outstanding' rating comes after a tough year for the charity. Early last year, the FE commissioner stepped in to give financial notice to improve over City Lit's "inadequate" finances.

Then, in December, online lessons and enrolment were halted due to a ransomware attack that caused a month-long IT outage.

During its latest full inspection, which



took place in May, Ofsted found City Lit managers maintained a high quality of teaching through frequent classroom visits, effective feedback and a variety of training.

"As a result, tutors are highly effective in their practice and teach courses that students enjoy and by which they are inspired," the report said.

City Lit principal Mark Malcomson told *FE Week* that the college was "absolutely delighted" with the Ofsted report, which "acknowledges the hard work and dedication of our entire community".

He added: "This recognition by Ofsted is a testament to the unwavering commitment of the staff and the leadership of City Lit in delivering excellence in education. We also make sure our students are learning in a supportive environment, ensuring a comprehensive and holistic learning experience for our students."

Ofsted also praised the college's engagement with industry professions and employers.

"Consequently, students acquire skills that are industry-relevant and result in gaining commissions, working with agents or securing permanent employment," the inspectors said.

They added that the college's governors

"support and challenge" leaders, provide effective scrutiny and guide the development of the college.

"Governors are well informed about the college's strengths and weaknesses. They provide effective scrutiny of the provision and challenge to the senior leadership team that ensures that students benefit from high-quality provision, whatever they study."

As a result, City Lit students are "inspired to learn" from their tutors. Inspectors said students excel in their studies, prospering in the "highly supportive and respectful environment". They become motivated to participate in their communities and wider public life as a result of taking City Lit courses.

"Students flourish because of the new knowledge and skills they learn, the social networks they develop and the positive impact that attending college has on their wellbeing," the report said.

Malcomson added: "We are immensely proud of our staff, students, governors, partners and the wider community for their continued support and collaboration. It is an honour that we have been recognised as an exceptional institution."

INSPECTION SECTION

SEND college to close after second 'inadequate' rating

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EXCLUSIVE

A specialist college for young people with autism is to close after being given an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating for the second time in a year.

Farleigh Further Education College in Frome, Somerset, owned by Aspris Children's Services, told *FE Week* that it will shut the college at the end of the summer term due to "ongoing shortcomings" in provision.

The college said it has "no viable option" but to close. "We are sorry for the disruption this will cause," a spokesperson added.

As of May, the college had 24 learners aged 16 to 25 with autism. All are in receipt of high needs funding.

During its inspection in early May, inspectors

found that staff did not take "a small minority" of cases seriously enough when learners reported bullying or harassment.

The report also found learners' attendance was too low and staff did not help learners to catch up after an absence.

Inspectors questioned staff teaching methods and a failure to plan curriculum content well enough so it accounts for what learners already know and can do.

While arrangements for safeguarding were effective, inspectors criticised the college's "minimal" careers guidance and advice to learners and said there was little oversight of skills that learners gained on work placements, leading to "too slow" progress from learners developing work-appropriate skills.

At its last full inspection in February 2022, when the college was given its first 'inadequate' rating which prompted the

headteacher to step down, inspectors made the same critique over Farleigh's slow action to address learner reports of bullying and discrimination.

Since then, the college has undergone two monitoring visits, the latest of which was in March this year. Inspectors said the college was making reasonable process to implement improvements.

A spokesperson for the college said: "We set ourselves high minimum standards for the quality of education and support to be delivered, and it has become clear that the college will not be able to meet the required level within what we consider to be an acceptable timeframe.

"As a responsible provider, we have therefore found ourselves with no viable option but to close the service, as we are not prepared to deliver a standard of education, we consider unacceptable in the medium- to long-term."

ITP keeps contract despite bottom judgment

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EXCLUSIVE

An engineering and manufacturing specialist training provider has kept its apprenticeship contract despite being given an 'inadequate' rating from Ofsted.

Salford and Trafford Engineering Group Training Association (STEGTA) was downgraded from 'good' to the lowest possible judgment in March largely because of safeguarding concerns and poor oversight of subcontractors.

Education and Skills Funding Agency policy rules that a provider will usually lose its apprenticeship funding agreement if it receives an 'inadequate' verdict from the watchdog, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

STEGTA's report showed 'good' ratings in three of the five fields inspected, including

quality of education and apprenticeships. Leadership and management was the only area judged 'inadequate', which pulled the overall grade down to the bottom rating.

The provider was only suspended from new starts following the grade four report. It has since been revisited by Ofsted, which conducted a monitoring visit last month and published a report this week which said the provider was making 'reasonable progress' in all areas.

John Whitby, STEGTA's chief executive, told *FE Week* that the ESFA chose not to terminate contracts and the provider had been "supported through the new ESFA intervention strategy" under its accountability framework.

Under that policy, the ESFA identified the training provider as being "at risk" and placed it under intervention before a monitoring visit inspection.

STEGTA remains on the register of apprenticeship training providers and its temporary ban from recruiting new

apprentices has now been lifted, Whitby said.

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

Ofsted's monitoring report said the company had carried out a "wholesale review of safeguarding", which included appointing two additional safeguarding officers.

The watchdog previously said that staff training on safeguarding was "not sufficiently comprehensive", but since the 'inadequate' rating the team is now "appropriately trained and qualified" for their roles.

It also said the provider addressed the lack of staff awareness around the Prevent strategy, and had started to teach students to understand the risks around radicalisation and extremism.

On top of that, STEGTA had taken "decisive action" to address Ofsted's concerns that the provider did not assess the quality of the subcontractor provision well enough.

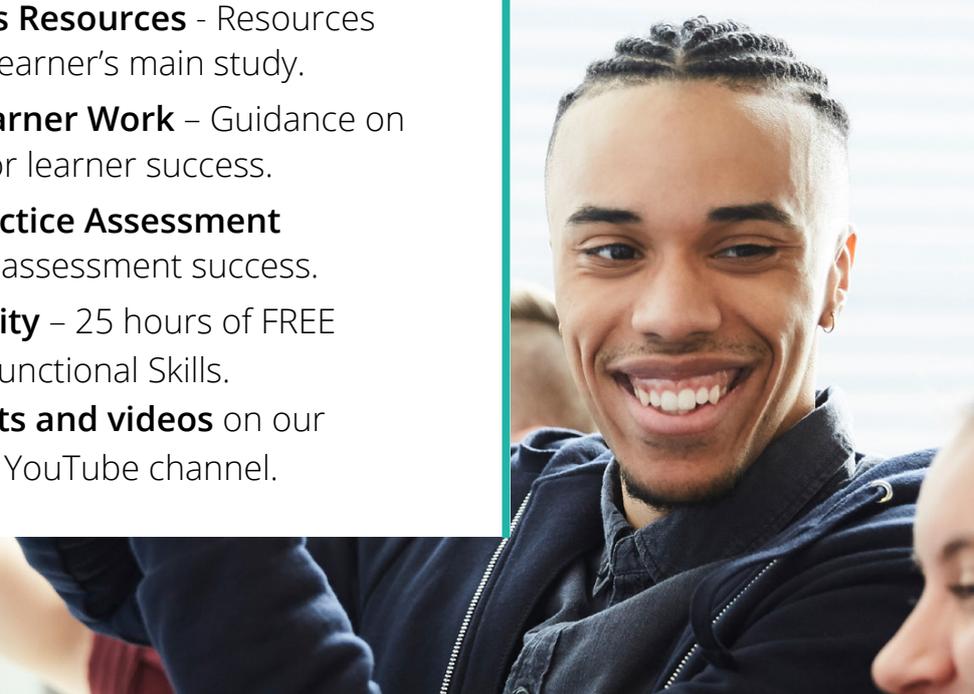
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INTRODUCING

COLIN BOOTH

Chief executive, Luminate Education Group



‘The fallout has been depressing – and very stressful’

JESSICA HILL
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM

Colin Booth has had a tough time of it in the past few months. The chief executive of Luminate Education Group tells Jessica Hill about a career in FE that started with him living in his car

Colin Booth's 40-year career has taken him from teaching anything anybody would pay him for

to becoming chief executive of one of the largest college groups and a national leader of further education.

But recent months have been the toughest of all with his Luminate Education Group facing investigation following multiple complaints from the same person – complaints that Booth fiercely denies as “vexatious”.

Following internal and external investigations and a complete relationship breakdown last year between the leaders of Luminate and White

Rose, its four-school academy trust, Luminate relinquished its direct management of the trust. It will sever its ties completely when White Rose joins another MAT.

Recent investigations by external bodies that include Ofsted, Leeds City Council and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) have taken their toll.

He is immensely proud of the college group's 14 to 16 provision, and how it nurtures pupils who he feels were failed by the school system.

Profile

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An unannounced Ofsted inspection in May, following another safeguarding complaint, was also full of praise for the Leeds facility.

But Booth describes the ongoing fallout from previous investigations as “depressing, and very stressful”.

He also blames himself in part for the relationship breakdown with White Rose’s chief executive Andrew Whittaker. “I have to mark that down as a big failure in my management of that person.”

Living in his car

Booth’s interest in teaching teenagers followed his graduation from the University of East Anglia, when he worked with young people on environmental issues at Capel Manor College in North London.

He spent the next two years getting part-time teaching jobs in London, paid by the hour.

While nowadays colleges are “desperate to get half a dozen people applying” for lecturer positions, it was “quite difficult” to get a job then,

with 200-300 applicants for each position.

Booth was “a bit short of money to say the least” and spent that first year living in his Ford Cortina and “sleeping on people’s floors and sofas”.

“I have to mark that down as a big failure”

He was technically homeless during that period, and reveals he even spent a night in police cells “because, as far as I could tell, they just didn’t like the fact I was sleeping in my car.”

Red box teaching

Booth tells me his dream job would have been as a rugby union player. But failing that I’m sure he would love to be in control of the chancellor’s red box, so he could allocate colleges a massive injection of cash.

When he started out, he commanded a very

different red box – one that still sits in the corner of his office. He used to go into colleges and stick that day’s timetable on the box, with all the gaps marked. Managers added their sticky notes on to it with a time and class for anything they wanted covering.

The box contained standard lessons that Booth adapted for “almost anything”, something that he believes made him a better teacher, by forcing him to reflect on the techniques of the craft.

He admits it was “extremely poor management practice” and “sincerely hopes” a teacher would not be able to do that today.

Sex education

Booth started noticing “patterns” emerging in his classes. He was most often asked to cover sex education and says it’s “not that surprising” that teachers tended to be off on those days.

He recalls awkward groups of young mechanics, bricklayers and nursery workers, the “most difficult” being twenty-something roofers.

He doubts whether students’ knowledge of such matters now is “that great” – the government’s women and equalities committee this week called for sex ed to be made compulsory in post-16 education settings for that reason. But in the mid-Eighties, “it was awful”.

Championing the underdog

The thread running through Booth’s career is his championing of marginalised groups. At the moment, that’s vulnerable 14 to 16-year-olds, but in his early career it was students with learning difficulties.

His first full-time role, at Carshalton College in Surrey involved teaching, then establishing, courses for these learners.

At the time, the college was “desperate” for more enrolments as it was enrolling “fewer and fewer” GCSE and A-level students. Booth was told to recruit as many learners as he could, so ventured into schools.

The Warnock Report in 1981 introduced FE’s first SEND system and Booth recalls being warmly welcomed by schools that had never been approached by college lecturers to recruit pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

He “caused mayhem” with his own success. He

Profile

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got 30 learners lined up, but his senior lecturer “went mad”, because she didn’t have enough teachers.

College independence

In the early days of Booth’s career, colleges were reliant on local authorities for funding. But there was “a lot more” of it than now.

He recalls how the college’s French teacher had just two A Level and one GCSE student a week.

The fact that there were so few French students was “a problem”, but “not the end of the world. The thinking was, ‘we’ll only stop teaching it when the local authority don’t give us the money to.’”

Booth became a senior lecturer at South Thames College when colleges were made independent – a status they recently lost with reclassification.

At the time the college was moving its staff data from paper to computer hard drives and Booth was tasked with “making sense” of it.

What that revealed was “fascinating”. For three years, a head of department had been “Tipp-Exing off” his staff rota a member of faculty he didn’t like and sending him home.

“Nobody noticed...it wasn’t until we sat with all the electronic data and said ‘who’s that? And why are they getting paid that money? Let’s find a timetable for them.’”

Inspector Booth

Booth spent nine years at South Thames before becoming vice-principal at Newcastle College and a part-time Ofsted inspector, at first focused on adult learning.

At the same time, he stopped teaching – which

he says was unfortunate as he learnt from the role “how to teach better than ever before”.

“The number of people I saw doing things in classrooms and I thought ‘I would’ve copied that if I’d seen it 10 years ago. The opposite too.’”

“If staff enjoy being here, they’ll do a better job”

Booth is broadly supportive of inspection, despite the pressure it piles on. He recalls how before the introduction of the common inspection framework in 1992, “all teachers in a staffroom knew who the best and worst ones were. We also knew nobody ever did anything about it...which was terrible, really.”

In the early days, Ofsted’s role was providing advice rather than public judgments. But “quite frequently people didn’t follow it”. Booth was one of the first cohorts to get training in making clear judgments, which he found “incredibly difficult” at first.

But those changes mean teaching is “a lot better now”.

Booth moved on to Barnsley College for seven years (steering it to outstanding) before joining Leeds City College group in 2015, rebranding it to Luminate three years later.

Free schools opposition

One of the threats Luminate is facing is the prospect of seven new colleges and sixth forms in

West Yorkshire.

Leeds City College is one of five colleges that have written to the DfE to oppose the proposals.

Some of the money to build them will come from the levelling-up fund, but Booth believes it represents “the opposite of levelling-up”. It is intended, he says, for “relatively elitist level 3 provision”.

“We’ve got the government providing a fund to set up more competition for the thing that’s already there, while underfunding everything else. It’s dysfunctional.”

With more NEETS in Leeds than ever, the area needs “loads more level 1 and vocational” courses. “The only thing we don’t need more of is A Level provision.

“If you cream off everything that’s easy to do, what you get left with is the most vulnerable and difficult students – the people who need colleges most. You can’t possibly run it.”

Booth laments that politically, there is a “complete vacuum” when it comes to educational structures. There’s also a mismatch between the needs of the local economy for more level 2 and 3 digital skills provision, and Luminate’s waiting lists for basic skills courses.

But Luminate is set to become one of the biggest T Level providers in the country in September, and Booth is a great believer in the qualification – for some learners. “The idea they can completely replace everything that isn’t A Levels is utter nonsense”.

FE leadership programme

Booth works with the FE Commissioner, with nine other leaders, on its national leaders programme, providing advice to other colleges.

He’s been supporting Kirklees College around senior management restructuring, while Stoke College was having “real difficulties with their apprenticeships”, so Booth brought them in to talk to one of Luminate’s apprenticeship managers.

And how about his own leadership style?

The priority for him is ensuring staff are excited to work for Luminate. “I spend all my time worrying about how to create the right values and culture. Because if staff enjoy being here, they’ll do a better job.”





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Closing date: 5pm on 19/07/23

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The RNN Group are recruiting for a number of key roles



RNN Group's main goal is to be an 'outstanding' education and training provider and this is at the heart of everything that we do. To help us achieve this we are looking to recruit highly motivated, innovative and dynamic individuals to join our existing teams. To be a part of the team at RNN Group we will expect you to be committed to our values too;

- We are Inclusive,
- We have Integrity,
- We Deliver,
- We are One Team

Lecturer in Teacher Education (30hrs a week)

The role of the lecturer will be to deliver on a range of programmes, equipping our students with the skills required for future development, through outstanding education and training and inspiring our students to achieve their potential. The Teacher Education curriculum area delivers predominantly Higher Education programmes, including a Foundation degree in Learning Support, BA in Education and Professional Development, the Certificate in Education/ Professional Graduate Certificate in Education/Post Graduate Certificate of Education and an MA in Education & Professional Development.

You will be part of a supportive team, working closely with your Curriculum Team Leader, to deliver a high-quality Teacher Education provision. You will need to have a flexible approach, as you will be expected to carry out teaching observations off-site, as well as working evenings and Saturdays and possibly working outside term time.

You will be required to support the development of new qualifications, such as a Master's degree in Education and Professional Development and other qualifications which are relevant to the current education sector.

Teaching, Learning and Development Manager (Full time)

We are looking for an inspirational and innovative Teaching, Learning and Development Manager to manage the Group's Quality Team to design, plan and co-ordinate high quality, pedagogically informed continuous professional development programmes which meet the needs of curriculum and support teams.

Using your excellent management, communication and teaching skills and your knowledge of the education sector, you will build highly effective working relationships with curriculum teams to bring about constant improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

You will lead the Group's "deep dive" approach to evaluating the quality of education and learning experience and you will ensure quality policies and procedures are compliant with relevant external bodies.

In this role you will collaborate with curriculum teams to develop effective processes to track and monitor learner progress and implement training, support and robust continuous professional development programmes that facilitate the sharing of good practice and innovation.

As Teaching, Learning and Development Manager you will support the Director of Quality & Academic Standards to prepare for and contribute to the Further Education self-assessment process, the Higher Education self-evaluative process, Ofsted inspection process and Teaching Excellence Framework validation.

You will be required to ensure high levels of visibility and attendance at stakeholder events and activities external to the Group particularly in the SYMCA, SCR and D2N2 regions as part of your role.

We are OFSTED 'Good' (November 2022)

We celebrate diversity and are proud to have been recognised as Investors in Diversity for our work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This means that you'd be working in a supportive environment that encourages, recognises and celebrates effort, achievement and cooperative attitudes. We welcome applications from everyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, faith or disability. We are also proud to be part of the Disability Confidence Scheme.

We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, vulnerable adults and young people. All new employees will be required undertake a DBS check.

If you require further information about this vacancy please contact the HR department on **01709 722750** or recruitment@rnn.ac.uk. To apply for either, or any other roles we have at present please visit our website – www.rnn.ac.uk.

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Location: Bridgwater Campus

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Interview date: Wednesday 26 July 2023

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Our quality of education is strong, as evidenced in the most recent Good Ofsted grade and the college is financially sound and delivering a surplus. Our modern, inspirational campus is world-class and we have made significant investments over the last few years in developing a range of superb facilities, including a new Construction Skills Centre and Civil Engineering Training Centre. We deliver innovative programmes through our National College for Nuclear, working with our key partners and nuclear supply chain across the country.

The Vice Principal will strategically lead on the whole college curriculum, maintaining ongoing high quality in our teaching learning and assessment and ensuring that our offer continues to meet the needs of our local stakeholders. Key ambitions will be to harness the strengths and passion of our staff, and to champion a culture of empowerment and high expectations throughout the college.

Our successful candidate will bring a strong track record of effective leadership of a relevant, substantial curriculum area, with a breadth of experience in college curriculum design and delivery in order to oversee our dynamic, responsive offer aligned to regional needs in Cumbria. We are looking for a committed professional who can operate as part of a team, who leads by example and who has a passion for vocational education and training. First-hand experience of leading effective change in positive learner outcomes is also desirable.

Closing date for applications is:
Wednesday 12 July 2023
at 12pm midday.



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Capel Manor College



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Full-time, permanent

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Closing date: 11 July 2023

Interview date: 19 July 2023

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- Apprenticeship Admissions and Employer Engagement Co-ordinator ~ £27,396 - £32,411 Per Annum

The deadline for all applications will be 12:00 Noon on Monday 17th July 2023.

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Also recruiting **Part-time Lecturer/Tutor in Plastering & DIY (AS1373)**, with variable hours, pay up to £20.50 per hour, plus appropriate holiday pay.

Further information and how to apply is detailed on the College's website: <https://www.lmc.ac.uk/jobs>

Closing date for application: **Tuesday, 11th July 2023**

▶ Click here to find out more

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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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

Remove the barriers and show us all the things we can be, not what the past tells us we should be



AHMADULLAH ORYAKHIL

Student, Milton Keynes College

There is work to be done to remove barriers to aspirations in colleges, writes Ahmadullah Oryakhil

I'm 18 and an ESOL student at Milton Keynes College. I moved to the UK from Afghanistan just over a year ago and joined the Student Commission on Racial Justice because I like to help people and I wanted to better understand the opportunities open to me here.

A key aspect of our commission's research has been the world of work and aspiration. This explores topics such as access to higher education, support from staff and further opportunities to build skills and develop ourselves. I made this my area of focus because, as an ESOL student, I have seen the best of teacher support but also faced a number of difficulties.

To begin with, I observed that my classmates and I were not getting as many opportunities as those studying in other departments. I am not alone. One student told us: "Due to me being a foreigner, they wouldn't let me participate in activities and people thought I was dumb, just because I was an immigrant. This made me feel terrible and really heartbroken". My experience is that staff and students from other departments treat us differently too; they don't seem

to care about ESOL learners as much.

But my main problem is that although I have high grades from my studies in Afghanistan, I am limited in progressing on my ESOL course. Government funding does not allow us to complete multiple ESOL exams in a year, even if we are more than capable. I have high aspirations, and I would like to move on to the course I want to study to help me progress with my life, but I am stuck.

I am lucky: my teachers and support staff do all they can. Our equality, diversity and inclusion manager, Arv Kaushal is dedicated to uncovering barriers to progression, and the team actively seeks to mitigate against these or to remove them altogether. "Building fairer futures is a journey, not a destination," he says, "and we will continue to deliver a values-driven approach to learning."

But our peer research found that students from minoritised ethnic groups, including foreign national students, face more barriers to success than their white peers. These include stereotyping and prejudice which, with a lack of positive role models in the teaching body and among external speakers, threatens to narrow or lower their career aspirations.

"I have high aspirations, but I am stuck"

Our data tells us that 41 per cent of students from minoritised ethnic groups believe that the types of jobs and industries that are open to them are affected by their ethnicity or race. Fellow commissioners have

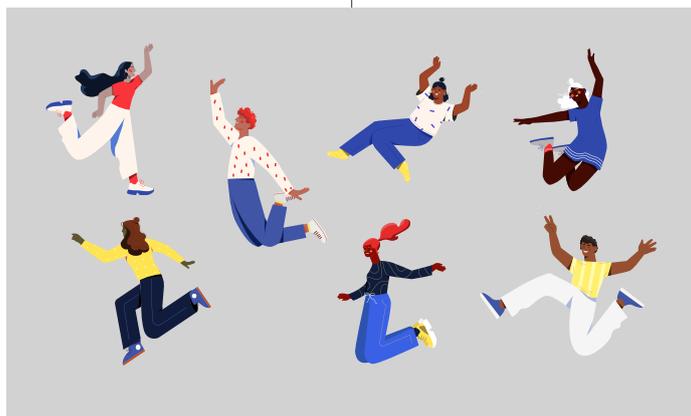
experienced this first-hand, one of whom said they had experienced rejection from universities where their white friends – with the same grades but traditionally white surnames – had succeeded.

Many of these issues can be overcome. Our recommendations are to schedule talks from external speakers, particularly from minoritised ethnic groups, to inspire students to consider a wide range of careers. Many of the students we spoke have to battle assumptions that their race or ethnicity makes them suitable for certain types of jobs. Meanwhile, ESOL learners say they don't hear from many successful people who were once foreign nationals in the UK education system.

Alumni from minoritised ethnic groups should share their success stories, so that students will see that their career aspirations are achievable.

Finally, we recommend enhanced support, such as skill- and confidence-building tutorials. This will help students from minoritised ethnic groups to overcome prejudice as they navigate their next steps in their education or career.

Be ambitious for all of your students, no matter who they are, and show them how to succeed and be the future of this country.



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THE STAFF ROOM

Dispatches from the frontline of FE

How we're helping refugees to learn, grow, and integrate into their new society

Refugee students bring untapped value to our colleges and our workforce; we just have to invest in demonstrating their talents, writes Shivan Merza

The escalating refugee crisis was brought into focus last month when a fishing boat carrying up to 750 refugees sank off the coast of Greece. While many are affected deeply by this news, for those of us who have made similar journeys, with a different outcome, it is uniquely painful.

I find some comfort in the role education plays in telling a different story. Reflecting on my own experience and the opportunities we're providing across NCG, amid undeniable darkness there are beacons of hope and support.

As project coordinator for NCG's Our Community is Your Community programme, I have seen and contributed to the transformative power of education for refugees like me.

“The hardships they have endured don't define them”

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of November last year, the UK is sanctuary for about 231,597 individuals. The growing refugee population, catalysed by the crisis in Ukraine, brings



SHIVAN MERZA

Project Coordinator,
My Community is Your Community at NCG

challenges and opportunities.

As education institutions, it is our duty to extend our support to the vulnerable, and Our Community is Your Community is NCG's commitment to do just that, as both a lifeline for those seeking refuge and a tool for their empowerment.

Every refugee has their own story, but the hardships they have endured don't define them. They may have been doctors, engineers, teachers, musicians or have other skills that require translation. Or they may just be brimming with potential.

We aim to create a safe haven where they can learn, grow, and integrate into their new society. It's not merely about education, but about creating a sense of belonging and agency over their futures. For this reason, we provide spaces for connection, such as monthly coffee mornings. This has been extremely popular at Carlisle College, particularly with women. We also build relationships through activities such as cooking classes, sports events and charitable activities.

We also help our students to understand and navigate the complexities of the education

system, from application processes to accessing ESOL courses and pathways to employment or university. We help them access housing and benefits, or with contacting utility suppliers.

This support extends beyond ensuring they can use the skills they've brought with them to also finding ways of assimilating to a new culture – one that varies from college to college and community to community.

For example, in Newcastle College we ensure our ESOL courses discuss the unique dialect of the north east, something the students appreciate.

And the help we offer doesn't end at Newcastle, Kidderminster and Carlisle Colleges. The project is currently in action at these colleges, but all seven of NCG's colleges share in the commitment to assist refugees. Together, we form a network of support, redefining what is possible for these storied and sometimes traumatised individuals.

Collaboration and shared

learning are essential to our success. We observe and learn from other institutions' efforts to support refugees, whether that's in education or beyond. For instance, Scotland has become a source of inspiration.

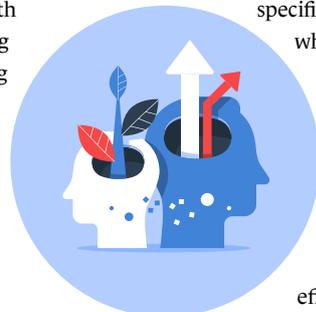
Our endeavours extend beyond our campuses and beyond those who have arrived in our communities. As part of the “Good for Me, Good for FE” campaign, we've set up donation collection points across our colleges. These benefit local charities, including foodbanks, but they also collect donations

specifically to support those who remain in Ukraine, and recently those affected by the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. It reflects our wider commitment to humanitarian efforts and shows

just why colleges are community assets – here to support everyone.

We are a team that may have different stories, but our origins are the same. We each wanted a chance to have a better, safer life; recognising that in each other builds a deep understanding of one another.

We aim to intertwine education with empathy and community solidarity, making a tangible difference in refugees' lives. And in that, we hope to be a source of inspiration and precedent for others.



Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Without urgent action, we risk losing another generation of vocational learners



DAVID GALLAGHER

Chief executive, NCFE

Funding is needed to ensure all learners can access the same opportunities regardless of their background, says David Gallagher

Many people reading this piece will know first-hand that the financial scars of the 2008 financial crash, and subsequent austerity measures, continue to undermine further education.

Our latest report, *Austerity 2.0: A Lost Generation*, details the depth and breadth of these scars in sobering detail, and explores how the comparable shocks of Covid-19, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis will undermine a new generation of FE learners without urgent action from the government.

“The fragile nature of the sector means the longer-term picture is bleak”

From a helicopter view, we can see the devastating impact of the 2008 crash and austerity on the sector. As the report states, from a high of £7,750 per student in 2010, spending for students in 16-19 educational settings is yet to recover to pre-financial crash levels.

Projections suggest that this will only rise to around £6,600 per student in the coming years – a 15 per cent decline which fails to account for the economic shocks seen in recent years and will undermine students’



prospects. Moreover, spending on adult further education and apprenticeships will still be 25 per cent lower in 2024/25 compared with 2010/11.

By no coincidence, total apprenticeship starts fell roughly 37 per cent from 2015/20, with Covid then going on to hamper starts in the past few years. The drivers behind starts and engagement with further education are of course complex, but the fragile nature of the sector means the longer-term picture is bleak.

The number of adults projected to be in funded FE, for example, is expected to decrease from 786,053 in 2022/23 down to 614,252 in 2025/26 – a fall of more than 21 per cent – at a time when our economy and labour market is in desperate need of the skills, talents and economic activity of as many people as possible.

This deeply troubling landscape has a significant impact on communities. Among the most deprived quintile of adults,

participation in FE fell more than 29 per cent between 2016 and 2020.

Moreover, the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance, and similar support levers, has disadvantaged the poorest students seeking to enter FE. Without proper support for further education, the push for true social mobility will always fail.

The government’s rhetoric on support for skills suggests we have begun to turn a corner – for example, through the funding uplift for 16 to 19-year-olds and the latest adult education budget rise. Yet we need to build on this momentum if we are to ensure funding levels go far beyond those seen before the 2008 crash.

Providing the required funding would ensure all learners can access the same opportunities regardless of their background, and power economic growth regionally and nationally.

In support of this, we need central government to turbocharge a comprehensive

communications campaign which highlights the essential importance of high-quality FE to students, parents, employers and the wider country. This is true for schools, also, whose role in providing careers advice must be overhauled to clearly outline the exciting opportunities available to students who wish to pursue technical and vocational courses.

There is a wider economic imperative, too. Reduced investment in FE means fewer students are entering courses that will enable them to gain the skills and knowledge they need to access high-skilled employment.

Moreover, it means our businesses and employers cannot depend on the workforce they need to remain competitive internationally. This is particularly significant for key sectors such as digital, tech, health, and social care.

Quite apart from the long-term ramifications of the 2008 crash and austerity, the economic shock of Covid-19 and the unfurling cost-of-living crisis, combined with rapid policy and regulatory change, has left the sector in a fundamentally fragile state.

The sector needs comprehensive support and transformational new measures to thrive, alongside a recognition that FE is seen as part of the solution to the problems we face as a society. There is, rightly, bold rhetoric about a “world-class skills system”, but this simply cannot be achieved without the funding to match.

Opinion

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Getting LSIPs right. Why adjusting the current model could reap rewards for skills provision in England



EWART KEEP

ReWAGE expert and Emeritus Chair in education, training and skills at the Department of Education, University of Oxford

Local skills and development plans are sorely needed but unlikely to be fully address our skills problems without important changes, writes Ewart Keep

Employers, providers and stakeholders in England have been working to develop local skills development plans (LSIPs) for their region, designed to improve skills provision to meet local needs and support local economies.

And it's clear that they are needed – there is an urgent requirement to improve the skills of the UK's workforce. Statistics show that there has been a steady decline in skills investment over the past two decades with employer-funded training dropping dramatically. Overall, UK employers invest just half of the EU average in training – a trend that is damaging the UK's productivity and ability to keep pace with international competitors.

Investment in skills could change this. However, it is not clear that LSIPs will be equipped to tackle the existing problems.

The work and employment expert group, ReWAGE, has published Getting LSIPs Right, which advocates for LSIPs but argues that their existing remit is unlikely to fully address the UK's skills problems, suggesting three key ways in which it could be adjusted.

Employers as stakeholders, not customers

First, employers need to take a

more active role. They do feature largely in the LSIPs system, but as customers setting out their requirements.

In many regions, great efforts have been made to gather employers' requirements, but only limited responses have been received. Many employers, especially SMEs, don't have the skills or resources to set out their future staffing needs in any detail.

“A far better model has employers as co-producers”

LSIPs also aim to link local education and training suppliers more closely to employers.

In theory, this encompasses all aspects of academic and vocational education but in practice most of this activity is linked to FE colleges. Although many colleges have positive links to employers, few have dedicated time or resources allocated to these relationships. While LSIPs will provide colleges

with resources, if this is another temporary “pot” of funds then it is unlikely to result in long-term impact.

A far better model has employers as co-producers, fully involved in skills delivery and implementation, with appropriate checks (training hours, number of apprenticeships) on activity and quality. Activities could further be strengthened, following the German system, by including worker representatives, trade unions and local authorities as co-producers.

Retraining our focus

Second, there needs to be a greater focus on enhancing the skills of established workers as well as those of new entrants to the labour market.

New entrants are a small fraction of the labour market as a whole and limiting training activity to new entrants means that existing skills shortages are not addressed. Also, it is common in the UK for young people to try various occupations and sectors once in work, so targeting training primarily at young

people in the hope that they will stay in the area in which they have been trained is a far from perfect solution to skills shortages.

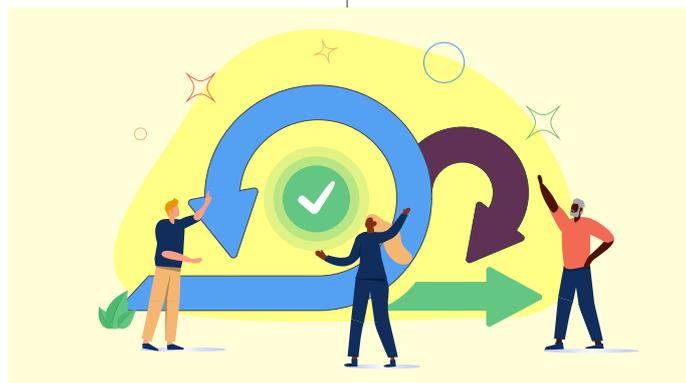
Training efforts focused on this group will be helpful but they do not make major inroads into overall levels of workforce skills. For that we need to look to employers to provide training for people already in work.

Better guidance for all

Third, good careers guidance needs to be introduced. A previous ReWAGE paper explains the benefits of making effective careers guidance available to everyone of working age. In essence a well-connected and established skills system with career guidance at its heart will support the labour market in meeting future employer demands.

Any investment in England's skills infrastructure will need to be supported by improvements in other areas, including job design and organisational strategy. And the wider complexities of the UK's job market also need to be considered; in some sectors, such as social care, it is unattractive pay, terms and conditions that discourage workers and that result in high turnover.

Expecting training and recruitment to solve this problem is a little like pouring more water in to a leaky bucket. It could result (at least temporarily) in more water in the bucket, but it would be far more effective to fix the leak.



Opinion

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Getting together is key to ensuring teaching and learning narrow the regional and national skills gaps


**ROSA
WELLS**

Executive dean of engineering, digital and sustainable construction, University College Birmingham

Birmingham's Institute of Technology shows that genuine partnerships can rise to the challenge of our skills shortages, says Rosa Wells

It can be difficult to find the time to take a look at what is happening outside of your classroom, lab, or workshop. However, collaboration, when well planned, can make a huge difference in how we teach.

I moved into FE teaching following a career in aerospace manufacturing and knew immediately that I'd found the right job. It gave me the opportunity to share my passion for engineering with a diverse group of learners, and support them into exciting careers. It was – and still is – hugely rewarding.

“Specialist subjects have fewer opportunities to collaborate”

I have experienced diverse teaching across the country at all levels and in different roles. I began at Fareham College in Hampshire and went on from there to Warwickshire College and then to north-east Scotland, before moving to Birmingham, where I have been for ten years – first at Solihull College & University Centre, and now at University College Birmingham.

I have taught core skills maths, worked within a quality team and then as a curriculum



manager. More recently, I've managed employer engagement and partnerships, working closely with our apprenticeship team. In this role, I've had the opportunity to explore ways in which collaboration can support teachers' professional development.

One of the challenges with teaching in FE is the lack of “off-the-shelf” resources to support teaching. We are all busy creating our own resources, which can mean less time to think about innovative delivery. This is particularly challenging for very specialist subjects, which also have fewer opportunities to collaborate internally.

In 2017, I joined a consortium of three colleges, four universities and several engineering employers to develop a proposal for one of England's first institutes of technology. We were awarded a licence to operate as an Institute of Technology (IoT) in 2019, with the objective of increasing level 4 and 5 provision to support the advanced

manufacturing and engineering sector in Greater Birmingham and Solihull. I was appointed to lead the new company and the collaborative work between educational institutions and employers.

It was a key priority for me to ensure that the collaboration was effective at all levels so that our lecturers, teachers, and technicians would benefit from working more closely with neighbouring colleges, universities and employers.

With DfE funding, we invested in a “learning factory” in Birmingham city centre, available to engineering students across the consortium. We've been able to invest in industry-standard software and CPD, and our academic teams benefit from collaborative training sessions.

All partners can access a digital twin of the learning factory too, meaning that engineering and digital students can simulate the factory environment at their own campus before travelling to test their designs.

Recruiting teachers familiar with these specialist industry requirements can be difficult, but we invest centrally in experts who can train and update our college teams, ensuring we meet employer requirements. Our teachers value this new academic network and our learners benefit.

The IoT was also seeking ways in which collaboration could enhance outreach activities to encourage more female engineering students and learners from diverse backgrounds with different experiences and non-traditional qualifications. I was honoured to be awarded an ETF-Royal Commission technical teaching fellowship to support this research, and that award has allowed me to evaluate what works well and share my experiences.

As a result, the IoT was able to attract additional funding to launch a new regional digital platform – The Hub – showcasing engineering careers in education.

As well as supporting regional partnerships in responding to employer requirements, my position at an IoT has provided me with broader influence, as vice-chair of the National Network of Institutes of Technology.

The launch of new engineering and construction departments at University College Birmingham is also a direct response to the regional and national skills gaps that collaborative activity has identified. The effect of all this is that our learners are developing the skills and behaviours identified by industry.

How to manage risks and maximise the opportunities of artificial intelligence for apprenticeships



JONATHAN BOURNE

Managing director,
Damar Training

There's little focus on how AI will affect apprenticeships, writes Jonathan Bourne, and yet it's the education sector that's ripest for disruption

Barely a day goes by without a prediction of how advances in artificial intelligence are going to (take your pick) destroy humanity, put us out of work, help us lead more fulfilling, productive lives or solve climate change.

A group of school leaders recently formed a body to advise and protect schools from the risks of AI, but in the world of apprenticeships there has mostly been silence. The DfE's policy paper in March, Generative artificial intelligence in education, mentions research into the skills needed for future workforce training, but has not a word on apprenticeships.

There is now a DfE call for evidence, which closes on August 23, but in the wider economy things are moving much more quickly. AI is already used for tasks previously done by entry-level staff. In legal services, AI tools can draft and summarise documents. Automated code generation, code analysis and debugging are encroaching on the work of software writers. Customer service roles are being replaced by AI-powered "bots."

The jobs, apprenticeships, and T Levels where change is most likely are at levels 2 to 5. Those involving physical labour or where tasks are performed outdoors are at lower risk. All of which makes for an uncertain future, but there are things providers can do now

to prepare.

Experimentation as standard

All apprentices should use AI at least once. It doesn't matter if it's to prepare a first draft of research, to improve a document or email or to write some code, as long as it's relevant to their job.

This will allow them to safely explore the benefits and risks. AI is great at producing first drafts or suggesting amendments, but it gets things wrong. Have the apprentice check their work using authoritative sources. This leads to wider ethical conversations – about identifying fake news, plagiarism, how to spot AI "hallucinations" or problematic outputs.

In short, it's an excellent primer on AI's capabilities and on why we need to exercise caution and responsibility to use it productively.

Focus on what AI can't do

Apprenticeships should complement strong foundational knowledge development with an increased focus on skills and behaviours where AI is poor, such

as teamwork and higher-order thinking skills such as critical analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creativity (as opposed to memorisation, repetition, and imitation).

"All apprentices should use AI at least once"

Over two years ago, Damar partnered with O Shaped to embed its competency framework within the paralegal apprenticeship. The framework focuses on areas such as emotional intelligence and trust, problem-solving and identifying opportunities. These are human-centric skills and behaviours where AI is unlikely to compete any time soon.

Use AI to widen access

Through Damar's technology partnership with BARBRI on solicitor apprenticeships, AI is adjusting the pace of learning to

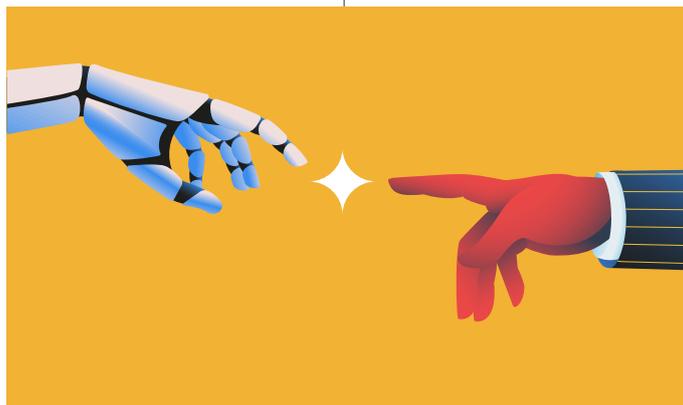
reflect individual strengths and weaknesses and help widen access to the legal profession.

This is just the start. AI can already create lesson plans for students at different levels and make sensible suggestions on syllabus sequencing. This gives us the chance to personalise learning, whether through recognition of prior learning, adjustments for SEND or other individual characteristics. We aren't quite at the point of AI developing full, individually tailored training plans, but AI-assisted elements can already sit within a standard delivery model.

We can also use AI to improve marking and student feedback and help teaching staff manage their workloads. By asking students to use AI to evaluate their essays for ideas, content, sentence structure and organisation, we free up time for more detailed and valuable feedback and can spend longer on the highest impact teaching and coaching.

While some assessment methods will have to change, apprenticeships are well-placed to cope with concerns about "cheating". Most end-point assessments feature a professional discussion where the assessor probes the apprentice's understanding, so the apprentice cannot hide behind a nicely scripted AI presentation.

So, while we should be cautious, educators have less reason to be fearful than some may think. AI is here to stay, and apprenticeship providers who rise to the challenge will quickly see the benefits.



Bulletin

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Sarah Marquez

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

Start date: July 2023

Previous Job: Interim Dean of Higher Education, Luminate Education Group

Interesting fact: Sarah is an avid traveller and when she's not busy overseeing the university centre, she can be found exploring the Greek islands. She's particularly fond of the people, culture, food, beautiful scenery and the climate

Movers & Shakers

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



Billy Smith

Chief Executive, Association for Learning Technology

Start date: September 2023

Previous Job: Freelance consultant

Interesting fact: Billy was a child actor and filmed alongside well-known actors such as Keira Knightley, Ross Kemp and Martin Clunes in television, film and adverts. His favourite part was performing in a reconstruction as a war time child who was the recipient of a Pride of Britain award

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

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