

# FE Week

**OSBORNE: 14 START AGE 'HASN'T WORKED'**  
PAGE 10



**BUMPER PAY FOR BAILED-OUT COLLEGE'S PRINCIPAL**  
PAGE 3



**COLLEGE CAUGHT TACTICALLY SUBCONTRACTING**  
PAGE 4



# OVERTURNED

## Special investigation

- **More than 1,300 people who failed at level three have results reversed**
- **Good news for young learners as results change at over 270 providers**
- **But ESFA has "no plans" to amend achievement rates**

# FE Week

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feweek.co.uk



**Nick Linford**  
EDITOR  
@NICKLINFORD  
NICK.LINFORD@LSECT.COM



**Paul Offord**  
DEPUTY EDITOR  
@PAULOFFORD  
PAUL.OFFORD@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Please inform the FE Week editor of any errors or issues of concern regarding this publication.



**Cath Murray**  
FEATURES EDITOR  
@CATHMURRAY\_  
CATH.MURRAY@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Tom Mendelsohn**  
SUB EDITOR  
@TOM\_MENDELSON  
TOM.MENDELSON@LSECT.COM



**Billy Camden**  
SENIOR REPORTER  
@BILLYCAMDEN  
BILLY.CAMDEN@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Jude Burke**  
SENIOR REPORTER  
@JUDEBURKE77  
JUDE.BURKE@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Pippa Allen-Kinross**  
REPORTER  
@PIPPA\_AK  
PIPPA.ALLENKINROSS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



**Sam King**  
FEATURES AND DIGITAL REPORTER  
@KINGSAMANTHA\_  
SAMANTHA.KING@FEWEEK.CO.UK

**The team**

Head designer:	Nicky Phillips	 <p><b>Shane Mann</b> MANAGING DIRECTOR @SHANERMANN SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM</p>
Designer:	Matthew Willson	
Photographer:	Ellis O'Brien	
Financials:	Helen Neilly	
Sales Team Leader:	Bridget Stockdale	
Administration:	Georgina Heath	
PA to managing director:	Victoria Boyle	
Head of funding and assessment:	Gemma Gathercole	

# Edition 243



**People 1st back from the dead after buyout**  
Page 5



**Desperate studio schools switch to academy model**  
Page 6



**Milton hasn't met the IfA's apprentice panel in a year**  
Page 7

## Contributors



**MIKE CHERRY**  
Page 12



**ANDY STITTLE**  
Page 12



**ANDRÉE DEANE-BARRON**  
Page 13



**FEATURED CAMPUS ROUND-UP**  
Page 15

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Learning & Skills Events, Consultancy and Training Ltd  
161-165 Greenwich High Road  
London SE10 8JA  
T: 020 8123 4778  
E: [news@feweek.co.uk](mailto:news@feweek.co.uk)

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## NEWS

# College facing massive bailout debt pays principal over £265k

JUDE BURKE  
@JUDEBURKE77

A college owes the government almost £14 million in emergency bailout cash alone, but it still managed to scrape together the funds to pay its principal an eye-watering £266,000 last year.

Latest accounts show that the grade three Birmingham Metropolitan College owes more in exceptional financial support than any other college, yet Andrew Cleaves' salary makes him the second best-paid principal in the country.

A spokesperson insisted that the massive pay package is warranted, despite the issues that have developed under his watch that have left BMet owing huge sums to the government.

"The college's pay policy reflects the skills needed to run a complex multimillion-pound organisation," she said.

Details of the sums owed and Mr Cleaves' salary were included in the Education and Skills Funding Agency's 2016/17 college accounts, published last week.

They show the college owed the ESFA a whopping £13.8 million in support loans, of which £11.7 million is due to be repaid within one year.

According to BMet's own published accounts, the debt stems from a £16 million bailout loan provided by the ESFA to the college in August 2015 as part of a recovery plan.

The funding agency "reinforced its support" to the college by "providing an interest-free £16 million loan to the college in 2015/16".

Andrew Cleaves



"£1.5 million was repaid during 2015/16 and a further £0.7 million in 2016/17, leaving an outstanding amount of £13.8 million

to be paid over the next two years," the accounts said.

In addition, the college owed a further £1.7 million "in respect of historic funding irregularities".

The ESFA had "agreed to combine the repayments" of both debts into one loan, "the terms of which are currently

being renegotiated", on the condition that the college sells "certain properties" and "uses the proceeds to repay the ESFA loan".

"It is anticipated £13.8 million will be raised from the disposals of buildings, the remaining £1.7 million will be repaid from working capital."

Despite these debts Mr Cleaves, who has run BMet since 2014, was paid £266,000 on top of pension contributions of £37,000 – a figure that remained almost unchanged from the previous year.

He has the second highest remuneration of any leader of a single college in England,

behind only former North Hertfordshire College boss Matt Hamnett, who received almost £300,000 in 2016/17.

The ESFA accounts list the principal's salary at Greater Brighton Metropolitan College, formed through the merger of Northbrook College and City College Brighton and Hove in March last year, as being higher than that of Mr Cleaves.

However, the college said that this was the combined salary of the two principals that led the two colleges before they merged.

BMet, which was rated 'requires improvement' at its most recent inspection in March last year, is one of the largest colleges in the country, with an income of £61.3 million and 16,000 learners in 2016/17.

It has held a notice of concern for financial health since July 2015.

Its EFS debt is larger than that owed by any other college, according to the ESFA's accounts.

They revealed that 29 colleges owed a combined total of almost £120 million – an increase of £29 million, or almost a third compared with the previous year.

Other colleges with massive bailout debts include Central Sussex College, which owed £13 million, and City of Bristol College, which owed £9.5 million.

EFS – which can come in the form of a grant or a loan – is only available to colleges that are "encountering financial, or cashflow, difficulties that put the continuation of provision at risk", and which have "exhausted all other options".

The government has indicated that these bailouts will be phased out with the new FE insolvency regime later this year.

## Leicester city council sucked into row over 'brokerage-style' deal

PAUL OFFORD  
@PAULOFFORD

EXCLUSIVE

Leicester city council is the latest public body accused of diverting apprenticeship levy funding away from frontline learning via a brokerage-style deal with a third party.

It awarded a contract to a firm known as Salad Skills last October, to operate as a "quality-assurance partner".

This role involves identifying suitable providers to train the council's levy-funded apprentices, and monitoring how they get on.

However, one provider involved with the council has claimed that the resulting progress reports are duplication of work that training organisations should already cover.

FE Week's source is dismayed that the council is not paying Salad Skills for brokerage-style work, given that the firm is taking a cut of levy cash in exchange for vetting providers.

The cost is instead passed onto providers at the other end of the chain, which are being asked to hand Salad Skills up to 10 per cent of

their payment for delivering the training.

"Salad Skills is contracted to provide 'quality assurance', which isn't in the ESFA's list of ineligible costs, so is technically allowable," said a spokesperson for the disgruntled provider, which wants to remain anonymous.

"However, we feel that the fee they are asking to carry out these services would be diverting ESFA funding away from delivery," she said.

Salad Skills has a contract, secured through an open procurement process, to run until September 2019.

An advert on the government's Contracts Finder website indicated that the total amount of levy funding involved is £16 million, so Salad Skills could in theory earn £1.6 million.

A council spokesperson insisted the advert is misleading.

"As it stands, our annual levy contributions from October 2017 to October 2018 are predicted to be approximately £1.2 million," he explained.

If replicated over the second year of the

contract, "the maximum amount that Salad Skills could earn would be £240,000".

The situation has been likened to controversial subcontracting arrangements that are increasingly frowned upon elsewhere in the sector.

This usually sees lead providers skim off a hefty cut of up to 40 per cent of their total funding allocation in exchange for providing "management" services to subcontractors which deliver the actual training.

The case in Leicester is a little more unusual, given that Salad Skills is operating on the employer's behalf.

Other brokerage schemes have seen providers obliged to pay fees to the civil service, various NHS trusts and Nottingham city council in order to win and maintain levy-funded contracts.

Funding rules were supposed to have changed last year to prevent brokerage. They state that "funds in an employer's digital account or government-employer co-investment must not be used for specific services not related to the delivery and administration of the apprenticeship".

Both Salad Skills and the council denied that this covered their particular arrangement.

"We're neither a broker nor charge commission fees, and our quality-assurance, learner progress reviews and administration processes are in accordance with the council's

contract and ESFA guidelines which stipulate can be bought in from a third party," said the company's managing director Sarah Cripps.

"We don't select the training providers, but identify those that offer the required apprenticeship frameworks and standards and meet the council's due diligence criteria."

Its monthly progress reviews include feedback from learners on their tutors and covering how they are progressing.

"Our successes to date include the highest ever learner retention rates for the council, tracking at just over 98 per cent," she added.

The council claimed that its contract with Salad Skills covers mostly level two and three apprenticeships, including with local authority maintained schools.

"All procurement decisions regarding learning providers are made by the council, after due diligence by Salad Skills," a spokesperson said.

"Our partnership is the most cost-effective way of running our apprenticeship programme – saving the council an estimated £50,000 to £75,000 per year."

Large public sector employers have been obliged to pay the levy for the past year. Their payments flow into an account from which they are expected to draw in order to train apprentices.

The ESFA refused to say whether Leicester City Council is breaking funding rules with its arrangement.

## NEWS

# College challenged over £100,000 tactical subcontracting

JUDE BURKE  
@JUDEBURKE77

EXCLUSIVE

A college that charged up to 57 per cent in management fees has been found to be attempting to use up £100,000 of skills funding with tactical subcontracting.

But the Education and Skills Funding Agency has refused to say whether it will take enforcement action over what appears to be a clear breach of funding rules.

According to a posting on the government's contract finder website from late April, Stephenson College is on the lookout for subcontractors to deliver part of its adult education budget for less than three months.

The contract worth £100,000 will run from May 14 to July 31. Bids from interested providers were requested by May 4.

The duration of under three months suggests it's a tactical move to use up unspent adult education budget.

Funding rules state that providers "must not subcontract to meet short-term funding objectives".

But the ESFA said it could not comment on this specific case – even though it has begun a subcontracting crackdown to ensure funding is used for "recognised costs".

The college avoided repeated opportunities for almost a week to defend itself.

It also declined to justify management fees topping 50 per cent, as detailed in its subcontracting supply-chain policy, which is supposed to be reviewed in November.

"Stephenson College retains a management fee from all subcontracted partner organisations; typically this is between 22 to 57 per cent," it said.

The policy was changed shortly after FE Week's enquiry.

After taking six days to respond, a spokesperson eventually said: "The subcontracting supply chain fees and charging policy on our website reflects our current practice."

The policy was actually updated on May 1, one day before the statement was issued.

It now says that the subcontracting charge is "typically" 20 per cent.

Mark Dawe, the head of AELP, said



this proportion should be the "absolute maximum".

If Stephenson College or any other provider is breaking funding rules on subcontracting, he insisted that the ESFA needs to "enforce them".

"We ultimately wouldn't have this problem if those that delivered got the funding directly," he stressed.

In March, AELP, the adult community education body Holes, and provider group Collab all signed up to new best-practice guidance that lead providers should charge no more than 20 per cent in management fees.

Lead providers often claim that pricey management fees are necessary to cover administrative costs, but many in the sector, including the education committee chair Robert Halfon, believe that too much money is being diverted from frontline learning.

Management fees of up to 40 per cent, as were famously charged by Learndirect, have long been a source of major controversy – but this figure pales in comparison with

Stephenson College's 57 per cent.

The college has an AEB allocation of £2,182,600 for 2017/18. It currently has a single declared subcontractor, Canal Engineering Limited, which delivers £80,000 of AEB on the college's behalf, according to the ESFA's list.

Four subcontractors delivered AEB and apprenticeships provision worth £206,730 on behalf of the college in 2016/17 – of which it retained £40,813, or a little under 20 per cent, according to the college's website.

But in 2015/16 it retained a massive 40-per cent cut on a subcontract with one provider worth £186,163.

Last month the ESFA announced it would be reviewing subcontracting fees and charges, and any changes will come into force from August.

"The ESFA rules are clear that providers must not subcontract to meet short-term funding objectives," a DfE spokesperson said. "The ESFA investigates such cases and can take action where necessary."

## London UCU members vote to strike against NCG paymasters

BILLY CAMDEN  
@BILLYCAMDEN

Staff at a London college involved in a long-distance merger with one of the country's largest college groups have voted to strike over pay.

Members of the University and College Union at Lewisham Southwark College had already been up in arms over the way they've been treated in recent years, but they claim things have got even worse since August's merger with NCG – whose headquarters is 300 miles away.

They say that over the past five years they have had their annual increments taken away, as well as their London weighting – an allowance designed to help workers with the cost of living in the capital, which is higher than that of the rest of the UK.

On top of this, UCU insists that NCG has said there will be no pay rises this year, even though the Association of College has recommended all staff get a one-per-cent increase.

The row over staff pay is thrown into sharp focus when taking into account the salary of NCG's chief executive, Joe Docherty, who enjoyed a £227,000 salary in 2016/17, along with £33,000 in pension contributions and £21,000 from benefits in kind, according to the group's most recent accounts.

A letter about the ballot, seen by FE Week, reads: "Even in colleges that have agreed to all the AoC's recommended pay increases since 2009, staff are now 24.7 per cent worse off than they were in 2009 when compared to inflation.

"However, Lewisham Southwark College is in London where costs have risen even more steeply and yet management still refuse to implement any of the AoC's recommendations."

It added that NCG was attacking "the welfare of FE staff at the core of the college with pay cuts for a decade, no increments and, unlike most London colleges, no London

weighting".

"This is against a backdrop of NCG acquiring – for no cost – over £100 million of London assets, and our CEO on a pay package of at least £278,000."

101 disgruntled union members at the college were balloted on Friday and just under 95 per cent voted in favour of strike action. Strike dates are yet to be confirmed.

To prevent it, the UCU is demanding that NCG agrees to pay rises of three per cent plus RPI with a minimum uplift of £900, the reintroduction of London weighting and the reintroduction of annual increments.

"Staff at Lewisham Southwark College

have seen their pay held down for years and they have had enough," said the UCU's head of FE Andrew Harden.

"In the recent ballot they overwhelmingly backed strike action in defence of pay and NCG needs to respond positively to that demand or risks facing disruption."

A spokesperson for NCG said it is "committed to working in collaboration with UCU, and we always try to find a resolution acceptable to all parties as outlined in our partnership agreement wherever that is possible. We of course respect the right of trade union members to participate in strike action following a ballot. Our first duty is always to our students and the college will work to minimise any impact during strike action."

Lewisham Southwark College joined forces with NCG, based in Newcastle, on August 1.

This was despite the controversial nature of the plans, due to the distance between both, which provoked the London borough of Lewisham into questioning the sense of their local college joining with a group whose headquarters is 300 miles away from the capital.

As well as Lewisham Southwark, NCG is comprised of Carlisle College, Kidderminster College, Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College, and West Lancashire College. It also runs two training providers called Rathbone Training and Intraining.



UCU members outside Lewisham Southwark College

## NEWS

# People 1st back from the brink after buyout

JUDE BURKE  
@JUDEBURKE77

People 1st will continue to provide external quality-assurance for apprenticeships, even though it's now under new ownership after it went bust.

The employment and learning consultancy, which was approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships to provide EQA for numerous standards, went into administration last week, sending shockwaves through the sector.

The Workforce Development Trust, a charity that includes Skills for Health and Skills for Justice, confirmed it had acquired the apprenticeships division of People 1st on Monday evening.

A spokesperson for the IfA said that no formal agreement for the trust to take over People 1st's EQA responsibilities had yet been made – and that recognition remained with People 1st, at least in the short-term.

"We will make a decision on the provision of EQA once discussions between People 1st and the Workforce Development Trust have concluded and the nature of the business going forward is clear," she said.

John Rogers, the trust's chief executive, told FE Week that although People 1st's

ownership had changed, "it will remain a standalone organisation capable of delivering the employer-led EQA service" for which it had been approved by the IfA "for retail, hospitality, travel and aviation end-point assessment".

"People 1st is currently discussing the new ownership arrangements with the IfA," he added.

People 1st was one of five organisations approved by the IfA to provide EQA services, and it covered 10 popular standards in the retail, hospitality and travel sectors.

FE Week revealed last week that it had gone bust, seemingly out of the blue, and had been placed in the hands of administrators.

WDT's acquisition of "key strategic

elements" would allow it to "continue as a standalone organisation" according to the announcement confirming the purchase.

Under its new ownership, it will continue to focus on "key activities including apprenticeships, EQA, accreditation services and work in the devolved nations and international markets".

Its apprenticeship services, including the EQA, had been "preserved in its entirety – and further investment will be put into this area over the summer".

The Workforce Development Trust is made up of Skills for Health, Skills for Justice, the National Skills Academy for Health and SFJ Awards, an awarding organisation.

Skills for Health was originally the sector

skills council for the health sector, while Skills for Justice was the sector skills council for the justice sector.

The two merged in 2015, and have been involved in developing apprenticeship standards for their sectors.

People 1st was itself once the employer-led sector skills council for hospitality, passenger transport, travel and tourism in the UK,

responsible for developing and managing apprenticeships in those sectors.

In addition to its EQA role, the body acted on behalf of 18 trailblazer employer groups to develop new standards, and was also the issuing authority for a number of frameworks.

Mr Rogers said he was "delighted" to welcome People 1st to the trust, according to Monday's announcement.

"We are pleased to be able to ensure that People 1st can continue to provide its highly regarded strategic services," he said.

Simon Tarr, the chief executive of People 1st, said that becoming part of the WDT Group was the "ideal solution for our clients and our people".




## Skills & Education Group

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There is still time book onto this conference which promises to provide a platform to learn, network and collaborate with senior civil servants from government departments, politicians and sector representatives through seminars and interactive workshops.

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## NEWS

## 'Unsafe' Moulton College appoints a safe pair of hands as interim principal

BILLY CAMDEN  
@BILLYCAMDEN

A troubled Northamptonshire college has appointed a familiar face as an interim leader after its principal resigned in the wake of a damning grade four Ofsted report.

Stephen Davies stepped down from Moulton College last month following a shocking report, which said learners, including those with high needs, were not safe.

Ann Turner has now taken the reins to try and steer the college back to safety.

She has nearly two decades of experience at a land-based college, having spent 12 years as principal at Myerscough College in Preston, and seven years prior to that as their director of finance.

She retired from Myerscough in March and is already very familiar with Moulton.

Ms Turner served as chair of Landex until November 2017, a collection of nearly 40 land-based colleges and universities across the UK, including Moulton.

"I'm thrilled to be joining Moulton College as interim principal," she said. "Having worked with the college over the last 15 years through Landex, Moulton has always been a part of me. It's not quite the retirement I was expecting, but an opportunity that I could not refuse."

Mr Davies left Moulton after seven years in the job. He started in 2011 when the specialist land-based college was rated 'outstanding', but it has since seen a gradual decline in standards to amid many financial problems, which led to an intervention from the FE commissioner.

The college has onsite accommodation and delivers programmes in "highly dangerous vocational areas" such as construction, equine studies animal management, sport, and food and drink manufacturing.

In an inspection in February Ofsted found a "number of serious breaches" to health and safety regulations, and instances where practice was "unsafe or sloppy".

The college previously said it had moved quickly ensure effective safeguards were being put in place to protect learners.

Ms Turner said the college has a "really unique offer", and she aims to "build on the foundations already

in place to make Moulton College the best destination for students exploring a career, not just in Northamptonshire, but beyond as well".



Ann Turner

## London mega-merger to create third biggest college group

JUDE BURKE  
@JUDEBURKE77

Moves are afoot to create one of the largest college groups in the country by joining four institutions from across east London and Essex.

Consultation has opened on plans, first announced a month ago, for New City College and Epping Forest College in Essex to merge from August.

The group, which currently includes Hackney Community College, Tower Hamlets College and Redbridge College, has also confirmed that it's in discussions with both Havering College and Havering Sixth Form College about a further link-up early next year.

"We strongly believe that by joining the New City College group the future prospect of the provision at Epping Forest College will be strengthened for all our stakeholders," said Saboohi Famili, Epping Forest College's principal.

The college, rated 'requires improvement' at its last inspection in December, has been in administered status for over a year, following intervention by the FE commissioner.

It was hit with a notice of concern for financial health in December, which ruled that it must agree a plan to "achieve a merger

by August 1".

In a joint introduction to the consultation, the chairs and principals of both colleges said they were "confident this proposal will strengthen provision at Epping Forest College by seeing it join a college group that is financially strong, and brings new opportunities for students, staff, employers and communities".

"We have proven through our previous mergers that being part of the New City College Group gives significant added value to our constituent colleges, not least in quality assurance and financial stability," added Gerry McDonald, New City's group principal.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the group told FE Week that there was a "commitment" from all the corporations "to explore a merger" between New City, Havering College and Havering SFC.

Paul Wakeling, principal of the grade three-rated SFC, said he had "approved in principle" a proposal to join forces with New City and Havering.

"This is at an early stage and means that we are committed to exploring and developing a three-way merger," he added.

Any decision "to merge or not would come at a later date after full consultation and due diligence".

A spokesperson for Havering College,

currently rated 'good' by Ofsted, said that "the combined expertise and experience of all three colleges aims to bring long-term benefits to students and employers and enhance the local community".

No date has been set for the merger to go ahead, although it is expected to be in early 2019.

If it all goes ahead, the resulting institution would have a combined turnover of £108 million, based on the individual colleges' 2016/17 incomes.

That would make it the third largest college group in the country, behind only NCG and the LTE Group, which includes Manchester College.

Hackney Community College and Tower Hamlets College joined forces in August 2016.

The merged college formally changed its name to New City College in February the following year, ahead of the merger with Redbridge College on April 1, 2017.

It's currently rated 'good' by Ofsted, based on an inspection of Tower Hamlets College in December 2013.

The group had an income of £57 million and 15,500 learners in 2016/17, according to the Education and Skills Funding Agency's accounts.

Meanwhile, Havering College's income was £23.9 million while the SFC had a turnover of £14 million over the year; the two had 5,800 and 2,700 learners respectively.

Epping Forest's income was £13.9 million in 2016/17, and it had 2,200 learners.

The consultation on the merger between Epping Forest and New City colleges runs until June 4.

## Desperate studio schools switch to academy model

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS  
@PIPPA\_AK

The controversial studio schools programme has announced a dramatic shift in focus after the tally of those closed or due to do so rose to 24.

Studio schools, small 14-to-19 technical institutions which are seen by many as unwelcome competition to more established general FE and sixth-form colleges, will now be incorporated into multi-academy trusts, rather than running as standalone schools usually with backing from the FE sector.

The model has been fraught with recruitment problems from the outset. Twenty of the schools have already closed, and last week, two more on the Isle of Wight and in Plymouth said they'd follow suit over the summer.

The state-of-the-art Plymouth Studio School cost £4.2 million to build and only opened in 2015. The £2.4 million Isle of Wight Studio School has been open since September 2014.

Manchester Creative Studio will also close in August, and Rye Studio School will become a sixth-form, taking the total number of closures to 24 and leaving just 30 open. Furthermore, four studio schools slated to open never went ahead, and Department for Education records show that none are currently in the pipeline.



The Studio Schools Trust – a company set up to support and promote the institutions – has also closed following funding problems caused by "uncertainty and delays". The Studio Schools Network, a new company, was set up to replace the trust last August, but has yet even to establish a working website.

The change in direction is not unexpected. Meeting records released by the DfE in June last year revealed academies minister Lord Nash met with the Studio Schools Trust in March 2017 to "review the concept of studio schools".

The Studio Schools Network told FE Week it would be "leading the movement into maturity" by moving away from working with FE colleges to focus on partnerships with multi-academy trusts.

Studio schools were introduced in 2010,

designed to provide practical workplace skills for 14- to 19-year-olds alongside academic and vocational study, but many struggled due to low pupil numbers and poor Ofsted ratings.

A spokesperson for the DfE insisted that studio schools "remain popular and are providing their pupils with a good mix of academic and vocational education, alongside the skills valued most by employers".

The government is "looking at existing studio schools and what we can learn from them", and will "not hesitate to take swift and decisive action" against underperforming schools.

Government records show more than £50 million in capital funding has so far been spent on opening studio schools, though the data only covers 27 of those currently open, so the actual figure is likely to be much more.

# Milton still hasn't met the IfA's apprenticeships panel

PAUL OFFORD  
@PAULOFFORD

The skills minister has still not met with the Institute for Apprenticeships' panel of apprentices – more than 12 months after it was established.

The panel, which first met last April, is made up of current or recent apprentices who discuss issues from the learner's perspective and raise with the main IfA board.

Shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden lodged a written parliamentary question on April 16 asking about meetings Anne Milton had held.

"I am hoping to meet with the panel of apprentices in the near future," she replied, claiming she had attended a meeting of the full IfA board "by telephone" last December.

"The panel of apprentices is particularly important to help the IfA improve the quality of apprenticeships, as it reflects the importance of apprentices' experiences across a broad range of different occupational routes."



Anne Milton

Mr Marsden was not impressed.

"It's frankly ludicrous that this reply – which finally came after DfE officials had clearly struggled with how to answer my question – admits that not only has the minister not met the apprentices' panel, but also she wasn't at the IfA's last board meeting other than 'by telephone'," he said.

"With the IfA just having taken on a daunting set of new responsibilities for technical skills, isn't it crucial that the minister does get face to face personal feedback rapidly, both from the apprentices panel and its board?"

IfA responsibilities include overseeing development and approval of new apprenticeship standards and assessment plans, advising employers on government funding for standards, and quality-assuring the delivery of apprenticeship end-point assessments. It will also oversee T-levels, the government's new technical qualifications,



Former apprenticeships and skills minister Robert Halfon meets the IfA apprentice panel in April last year

which will appear starting from 2020.

Ms Milton's predecessor as minister Robert Halfon was an advocate of the panel of apprentices' potential to allow learners to exert a positive influence on decisions affecting them.

There were initially fears that the IfA may not have any apprentice representation at all during the early stages of its development.

Mr Marsden and the NUS president Shakira Martin, who was then the union's vice-president for FE, wanted apprentices to take up places on the board itself – but the

government would not commit to the idea.

However, in December 2016, Mr Halfon confirmed that the IfA would "invite apprentices to establish an apprentice panel, which would report directly to the board".

The National Society of Apprentices expressed fears last summer that his successor Ms Milton was less interested in the panel.

"We heard Anne Milton talk about wanting to listen to as many voices as possible so we hope that she backs her words up with action," a spokesperson said at the time.

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## INVESTIGATES

# What are the repercussions of

JUDE BURKE @JUDEBURKE77  
BILLY CAMDEN @BILLYCAMDEN

EXCLUSIVE  
FROM FRONT

Thousands of young people are having their recent exam failures reversed, thanks to a change in the design of certain qualifications. FE Week looked into what's going on: who's making the change, why it has happened and how many learners are affected.

More than 1,300 learners who failed courses last year are now being told they've passed – including some who'd already dropped out of education.

Ofqual is responsible for their stroke of luck: the exams regulator has reinterpreted rules on reformed level three applied general and tech level qualifications, which introduced for teaching from 2016.

Most of these were designed so learners had to pass all their externally assessed exams to achieve the final qualification. That changed last month, after Ofqual wrote to awarding organisations asking them to create a "safety net" for learners who had narrowly failed one or more of their exams.

**“ We have communicated with all providers to ensure that all learners receive the qualification they deserve**

Awarding giant Pearson, whose BTECs account for the majority of the qualifications affected, has confirmed that 1,300 learners at 270 of its centres have been affected.

“Some learners who sat externally assessed units in 2017 and 2018 are now eligible to achieve a qualification when previously they weren't,” a spokesperson said.

“We have communicated with all providers about this change to ensure that all learners receive the qualification they deserve.”

Applied general qualifications and tech levels are vocational or technical alternatives to A-levels that can lead onto higher education or employment. The change is expected to have an impact on providers' achievement rates, though the ESFA seems reluctant to make official changes.

Learners on two-year courses who are due to complete their qualifications this summer are affected, as well as those who finished one-year foundation courses last summer.

The true number of learners to get the good news might be much higher; two other major awarding organisations offering similar qualifications told FE Week that they had introduced changes as a result of Ofqual's letter, though neither could say how many learners will be affected.

Ofqual itself was similarly unable to predict how many people would now qualify.

A spokesperson confirmed that its advice was issued “knowing that there was a case for retrospective regrading”, and that the regulator had “modelled the potential impact of assessment changes” with a number of awarding organisations, including Pearson.

One assessment expert who did not want to be named warned that learners could have “lost out” on a year of education or training, or found themselves unable to progress onto other education or training.

FE Week contacted a number of colleges that are among the 100s to have learners affected by the safety net change (see boxout).

Some said several learners had dropped out after failing their courses last year, though many were permitted to carry on into the second year in an effort to boost their grades.

Uxbridge College said that 10 learners on one course will have their results reversed. It is petitioning the Education and Skills Funding Agency to have these changes reflected in official achievement statistics.

This represents a 19-per-cent increase in the success rate on that course, and a 0.1-per-cent uptick in overall 16-to-18 achievement rates.

But the ESFA insisted that it had “no immediate plans” to amend achievement rates – although it would keep this under review.

The courses were reformed in 2016 to make them more rigorous, under rules set out by the Department for Education.

These rules have not changed, but a spokesperson said the DfE had “recently reiterated guidance to ensure consistency”.

According to Ofqual statistics, there were 144,855 tech level certificates issued in 2016/17, and 222,445 applied general certificates.

Pearson, has by far the largest share of both: 79,970, or 55 per cent, of the tech levels and 180,225 or 81 per cent of the applied general.

Other awarding bodies include UAL and OCR, which had a nine- and six-per-cent share respectively of applied general qualifications in 2016/17. City and Guilds is the second largest awarding body for tech levels, responsible for 31,945 or 22 per cent.

An Ofqual spokesperson said it is “pleased” that Pearson had applied the change to BTECs.

“In weighing up the need to make changes to their qualifications, we asked awarding organisations to ensure appropriate standards were achieved in these new qualifications,” they said.



## Spreading the news: How have providers been affected?

Hundreds of providers have now been given the joyous task of telling students who previously failed their courses that they have now passed.

Original failures for these learners would have had huge consequences: they might have been rejected from university, stopped from progressing onto higher courses or missed out on potential jobs.

For the training providers themselves, achievement rates would have taken a hit – meaning current government figures are not a true reflection of their training offer.

Although most are still trying to figure out the ramifications for themselves, a number of colleges with over 50 affected students between them, gave FE Week their initial reaction.

Uxbridge College has 10 learners on applied science courses affected, and some are now even being told that they actually achieved an overall ‘merit’.

However, the college said it took a “local decision at the time based on our own assessment and knowledge of the students’ standards and achievements in this qualification, before this was known, in order to not disadvantage these learners”.

All 10 were allowed to progress into their second year of the extended diploma “in an effort to improve their grades”.

“It is not considered that these learners will be unduly and adversely affected by the change and can focus their attention on improving the quality of the grades they obtain,” a spokesperson said.

However, she added that there is an impact on the college's achievement rates.

“The changes do represent a 19-per-cent

increase in the achievement rate of the applied science course and a 0.1-per-cent improvement to the overall 16-to-18 achievement rate for HCUC [the merged institution of Harrow and Uxbridge College], which at 85.5 per cent is now the highest among west London colleges and third across London colleges.”

She added that the college will make “representations” to the ESFA to ensure these results are reflected in the overall data record.

South Essex College was told by Pearson that it had 12 students affected.

“We are working with these students to support them through the process,” a spokesperson said.

“Six left the college to pursue other employment opportunities while six are continuing their studies at the college by progressing on to a different course.”

The Sheffield College had 20 students affected.

“The majority of those, 15, have re-enrolled and continued with the second year of their course,” a spokesperson explained. “We are in the process of contacting all of those affected.”

NCG, which had 3,160 students on the level three diplomas last year, knows of nine students at two of its colleges affected so far. Other colleges in the group are still waiting to hear if they have any learners affected.

A spokesperson said the group is “monitoring the impact closely and will liaise with learners at the earliest opportunity”.

Nottingham College and Exeter College informed FE Week that they only have a handful of students affected but said it was too soon to comment.

# Of mass exam failure reversal?

## The rules explained and what has changed

Level three applied general and tech level qualifications were reformed in 2016, so that they could be counted in the Department for Education's 16-to-19 performance measures.

The qualifications were designed to meet technical specifications set out by the DfE, which include a portion of external assessment.

These rules don't say that learners have to pass all of their exams to achieve their qualification, but that was how most of the courses were designed, including those offered by Pearson.

This meant, for example, that a learner who had a distinction in three out of four exams but who narrowly failed one exam would fail the overall qualification.

In its letter, Ofqual said it is "concerned that this may impact the validity of grades issued and is not fair to students who narrowly miss passing one or more units".

It asked the AOs to "provide a safety net for

students who narrowly pass on one or more externally-assessed units" on these courses, so that a learner could still pass the overall qualification without having to pass all the externally-assessed exams.

It's not clear where the original interpretation of the rules came from, or the impetus for Ofqual's letter.

The DfE is insisting that its rules haven't changed.

"We have always been clear with awarding organisations about the standard that is expected and nothing has changed. We recently reiterated the guidance to ensure consistency," a spokesperson said.

An Ofqual blog post on the topic said AOs had designed the qualifications to meet official guidelines that learners had to pass every externally assessed exam.

Awarding organisations would have had to submit their qualifications to the DfE for inclusion in the list of awards that count towards the performance measures.

## Reviewing tolerances: What are awarding organisations doing?

Pearson is by far and away the biggest provider of both applied general and tech level qualifications, though other major awarding organisations including City and Guilds and OCR also offer their own versions of these courses.

OCR offers both applied general and tech level qualifications through its level three Cambridge Technicals (2016) suite of courses.

A spokesperson said it would be "introducing a near-pass unit grade for this summer's exams" for all qualifications in the suite, and that the change would be applied retrospectively.

However, it couldn't say how many learners would have their results changed.

"We're running the data checks now and will be in touch with any affected centres as soon as

possible," they said.

Similarly, City and Guilds, which offers tech levels, will be introducing a yet-to-be-determined "tolerance" for learners that would be completing their courses this year.

It intends to "consider those results that are within a tolerance of marks below the pass mark as having achieved the component".

A spokesperson said the body is still "reviewing options" for learners that completed courses last year, and would "communicate further to centres once we have been through this process".

"At this stage we cannot give exact figures of how many learners will be impacted," she said.

AAT also offers tech levels. A spokesperson said it will be "reviewing what actions it needs

to take in light of Ofqual's letter, if any".

And VTCT will be consulting over the summer before making any changes to its applied general qualifications in sports, active health and fitness.

It is "considering assigning a minimum points threshold" that would allow learners to pass the qualification without having to pass every external assessment.

Not every awarding organisation is making changes to their courses, however.

Graham Hastings-Evans, managing director of NOCN, which offers tech levels, said it "will not need to" do so, as "no learners have been adversely affected".

Julie Hyde, the director of CACHE, said it had "determined that no safety net was required"

for either the NCFE CACHE technical or NCFE applied general qualifications, after "reviewing the assessment strategy and purpose" of the courses "alongside consultation directly with Ofqual".

The IMI is "not intending to make any changes" to its tech level qualifications", and ActiveIQ, which offers tech levels, "cannot adjust the qualifications' assessment specification".

A spokesperson for University of the Arts London, which issued the second highest number of applied general qualification certificates in 2016/17, said its courses aren't subject to the Department for Education's rules. As a result it didn't need to make any changes, and none of its students were affected.

## Awarding organisations that offer the affected qualifications

Awarding body	Applied general?	2016/17 certificates	Tech level?	2016/17 certificates	Changes?	Learners affected	Centres affected
Pearson	Yes	180,225	Yes	79,970	Introducing a near-pass grade	1,300	270
OCR	Yes	13,585	Yes	3,370	Introducing a near-pass grade	?	?
City and Guilds	No		Yes	31,945	Introducing a tolerance for learners taking exams this summer, and reviewing options for learners who took exams last year	?	?
VTCT	Yes	160	Yes	3,800	Consulting over the summer to decide if they are going to make any changes	?	?
AAT	No		Yes	4,510	Still reviewing what actions it needs to take following Ofqual's letter	?	?
NOCN	No		Yes	2,005	No	-	-
NCFE/CACHE	Yes	50	Yes	4,665	No	-	-
Institute of the Motor Industry	No		Yes	3,980	No	-	-
ActiveIQ	No		Yes	5,560	No	-	-
University of the Arts London	Yes	20,715	No		No	-	-

NB: Certification figures taken from Ofqual's Annual Qualifications Market Report 2016/17 Data Tables. Certifications in this period may contain a mixture of legacy and reformed qualifications.

## EDITORIAL

## ESFA misses the chance to toughen up



The ESFA must enforce rules that are supposed to be putting a stop to wasteful short-term subcontracting.

The example uncovered this week showed Stephenson College seeking to find subcontractors to use up £100,000 of funding by the end of July.

That's less than three months from the start of the contract to the end, proving that it's a tactical move with the short-term aim of simply hitting its adult education budget allocation.

The funding rule they are clearly breaking states that providers "must not subcontract to meet short-term funding objectives".

So what is the ESFA going to do about it?

It sadly wouldn't tell us, and passed up a perfect opportunity to show that it's getting tough.

Incidentally, 57-per-cent management fees are way too high, so it's good that the same college changed its policy after we confronted them.

AELP, Holesx and Collab were right to stipulate that lead providers should charge no more than 20 per cent.

The system must not be abused. Unscrupulous lead providers will have to find other ways of supplementing their income.

**Paul Offord, Deputy Editor**  
news@feweek.co.uk

**QUALS PASS CHANGE TWEETS:**

**Michael Steel** @theMichaelSteel

Wow. If this was A-levels there would be resignations...

**Amanda Kelly** @Functionalise

Those 1,000 learners (that is just for Pearson's BTECs - many more were taking courses with other awarding organisations!) are now either 80% of their way through a repeat year or have had to change their plans!

**Patrick Craven** @Padcraven

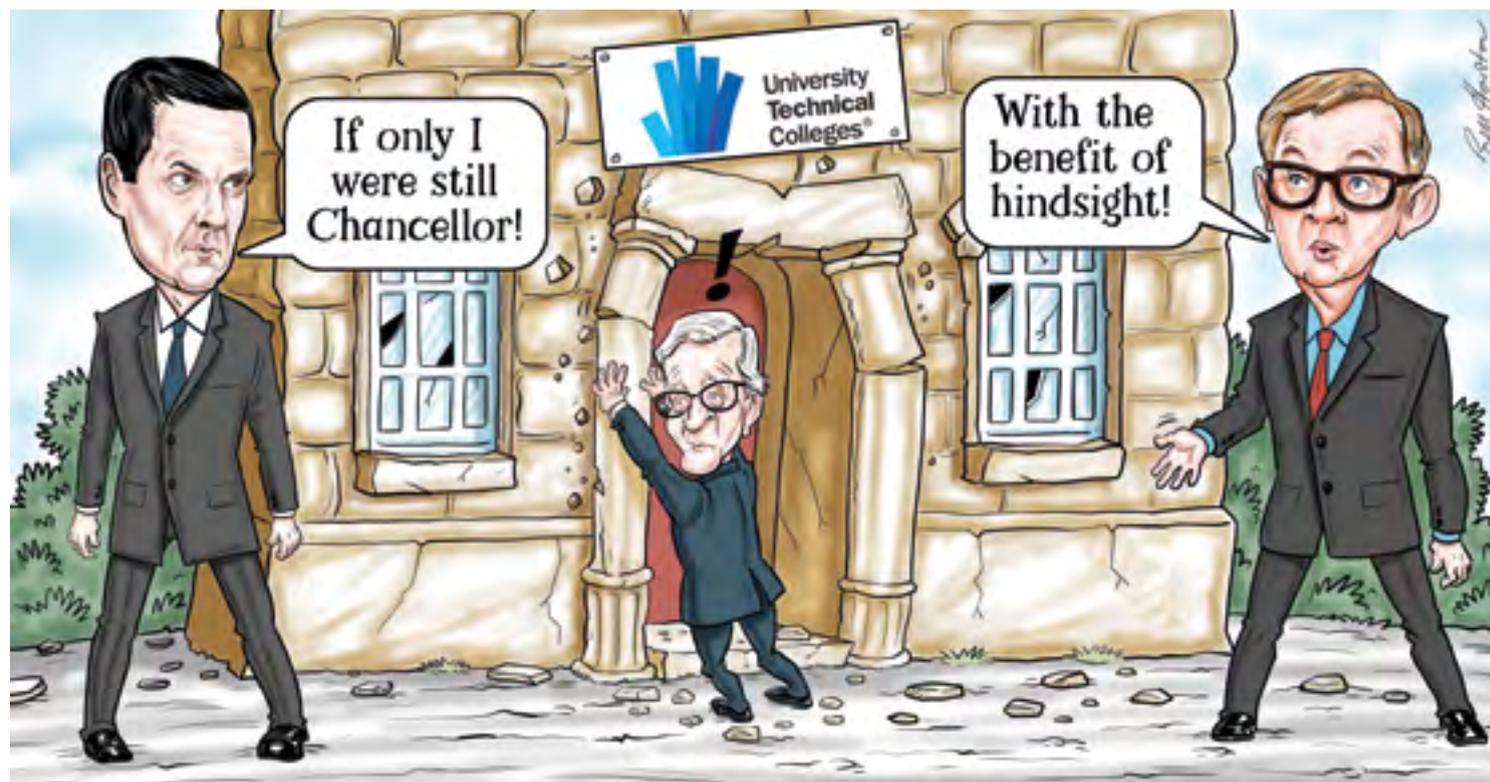
This is what happens when you let any assessment or qualification design become too Silo'd. The level and type of intervention was not quite right either but had become necessary for applied generals I think #lessonlearned?

**Mike Tyler** @MikeTylerSport

This is major news. No longer will Level 3 #BTEC students have to achieve a Pass grade in all of their external assessments to pass their course. They can also pass the course if they get a Near Miss (N grade).

**Hilary Read** @HilaryReadOn

Good grief...



## UTC architect George Osborne says 14 start age 'hasn't worked'

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
@BILLYCAMDEN

**G**eorge Osborne, who as chancellor was one of the driving forces behind university technical colleges, would seriously consider scrapping the starting age of 14 if he were still in charge at the Treasury.

The former MP told the Commons education committee that he had been examining early issues with the project just before he left office in 2016, and had come to the conclusion that they are in need of radical reform.

He was in Parliament in his capacity as chair of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, attending a hearing on improving skills and training in the north.

His 'Educating the north' report, released in February, discussed the need for more workplace-based learning options for 14-year-olds in the region.

However, he has now admitted that UTCs have perhaps not been the best option.

The idea of the 14-to-19 technical institutions was born at the end of the Gordon Brown's Labour government with the backing of former Tory education secretary Lord Kenneth Baker, though the subsequent coalition government expanded on it.

"There was a question mark at starting it at 14," he told MPs. "There is an argument that I was digging into before I left office that moving school at 14 is not always the easiest thing and people are reluctant."

He said the model "clearly hasn't worked" in some cases and "if I was back at the

Treasury I would be looking at that".

UTCs are seen by many as unwelcome competition to more established general FE and sixth-form colleges, which consistently return a much higher proportion of higher Ofsted grades.

Eight have so far closed, largely due to recruitment issues, and one fifth of the UTCs inspected by the education watchdog so far are rated 'inadequate'.

A number have already been forced to switch recruitment age to 13 in order to harmonise with ordinary comprehensive schools. They say changing at 14 is too disruptive to GCSE learning.

Mr Osborne is the latest senior figure involved in the inception of the specialist technical education providers to admit that the model, as it stands, is in serious trouble.

Michael Gove, who launched UTCs in his stint as education secretary, acknowledged in February last year that "the evidence has accumulated and the verdict is clear" that UTCs were in trouble.

Three months ago it emerged that Mr Gove had been "forced" to create UTCs by Mr Osborne and David Cameron.

FE Week approached Lord Baker and the Baker Dearing Trust but neither were available for comment at the time we went to press.

Mr Osborne was present at this week's hearing with Lord Jim O'Neill and Henri Murison, the vice-chair and director of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership respectively.

The trio spoke heavily on the need for

further devolution of the adult skills budget, which was one of the main recommendations in their report.

"Skills is going to take years to fix," said Mr Murison. "In skills what the north needs is to get on with showing what works in devolving funding. I believe the adult education budget is the start because what we really need is influence over the entire spend from 0 to 25 in an area and a place.

"I believe the local areas should have absolute influence in the skills system to make it for employers. Devolution is the solution."

Mr Osborne even suggested the government might want to look at reintroducing the controversial individualised learning accounts.

The scheme was scrapped in 2001 after abuse by unscrupulous providers led to a reported £67 million fraud. He suggested that enough time had passed since the scandal and that they could be used again in the future.

"I don't know whether you could design them to be fraud-proof because in the human world you can't create that, but you need to police it and punish those who offend," he said.

"The problem with ILAs was the industrial scale abuse so whether you could revisit that policy and find a way I don't know. It has been a long time and maybe revisiting that so the money can follow the individual and the individual can be more empowered, employers can ensure FE courses are relevant to them, I would be in the devolution space and I would introduce that."

## COMMENTS

### More than 1,000 16- to 18-year-olds who failed courses last year to be told they passed

What are the chances of the QAR being republished with these additional achievements taken into account?

What on earth does "impact the validity of grades" mean? I had an impacted wisdom tooth once which had to be extracted, but I'm struggling to understand what impacted validity might look like.

On the substance of the proposal, which as I understand it is to allow compensation between unit results, the problem as outlined by Ofqual is a classic criticism of unitised qualifications. I wonder why they were unitised in the first place?

Andrew Tan

Mike Farmer

### Fresh round of redundancies at Learndirect as funding dries up

Unfortunate use of the phrase "outstanding delivery" from LD!

Spectacularly bad leadership caused this in my view. Seems to be a distinct lack of sympathy towards learners and staff from leaders in this whole sorry affair.

Lurch



# Deputy Principal

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**Closing date:** Monday 14th May

**Interviews:** Monday 21st May



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[recruitment@eastleigh.ac.uk](mailto:recruitment@eastleigh.ac.uk)

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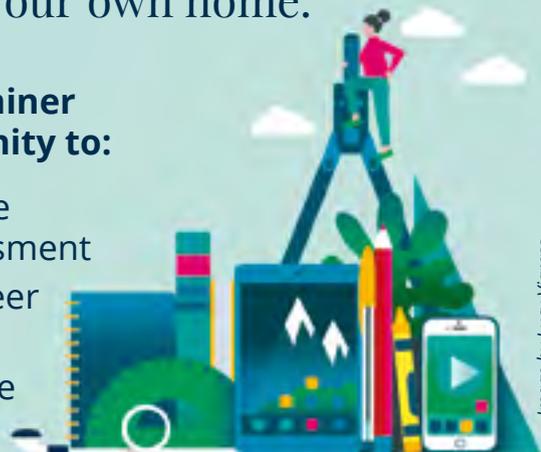


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Byddwch yn gyfrifol am sicrhau bod ansawdd y dysgu a'r addysgu ar draws y coleg yn hynod effeithiol, yn ogystal ag arwain ar weithrediad ein strategaeth Addysg Uwch a Sgiliau uchelgeisiol.

## YNGHYLCH COLEG CAMBRIA

Mae Coleg Cambria wedi sefydlu ei hun fel darparwr addysg blaenllaw yn y DU. Dyfarnwyd graddau uchaf y sector i'r coleg gan Estyn yn y cylch arolygu, gyda'n perfformiad a'n rhagolygon presennol ar gyfer gwelliant yn 'rhagorol'.

Wedi'i leoli ar ffin Gogledd Ddwyrain Cymru, mae gan y coleg gysylltiadau trafniadaeth ardderchog nid yn unig o Ogledd Cymru ond gyda mynediad hawdd i draffyrdd cenedlaethol a chyda rhwydwaith rheilffyrdd gwych a chysylltiadau cyflym i Lerpwl, Manceinion, Caerdydd a Llundain.

Yn ôl Lonely Planet, Gogledd Cymru oedd un o'r 10 lle gorau i ymweld â nhw ar draws y byd yn 2017. Mae'r gornel brydferth hon o Gymru yn llawn hanes, a gan olygfeydd ac arfordiroedd ysblennydd.

I gael rhagor o wybodaeth ac i wneud cais ewch i <http://cymraeg.cambria-jobs.co.uk/vacancy>

Dyddiad cau ar gyfer ceisiadau yw **Dydd Llun 14 Mai 2018 am 12yp** Cynhelir y cyfweiliadau ar 23 a 24 Mai 2018.

Os oes gennych chi brofiad o reoli a gwybodaeth helaeth a dealltwriaeth o'r sector addysg, yna byddem wrth ein bodd yn clywed gennych chi!

Mae'r gallu i siarad Cymraeg yn ddymunol.

# Deputy Principal, Finance and Resources

**Salary:** £80,350 - £85,850 (depending on experience)  
**Benefits:** Local Government Pension Scheme, generous leave allowance, relocation package, inclusive access to personal development programmes

Furness College is a vibrant, innovative and fast-paced college based in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria. Judged to be good with outstanding features by Ofsted in March 2015 and with outstanding financial health, the College is ambitious about its future. Following a merger with Barrow Sixth Form College in August 2016, we are the largest FE provider in Cumbria. The College is based on two campuses: the £42 million Channelside campus which opened in 2013 and the Rating Lane campus which provides the largest choice of A' levels in Cumbria. We have a first-class reputation for our work with local employers, including BAE, and we have an exceptionally strong STEM curriculum.

With its long history of ship building and the presence of a large number of international employers, Barrow-in-Furness is a vibrant place to work and live. Only 12 miles from the Lake District National Park and 30 miles from the motorway network, the quality of life is second to none, with a relatively low cost of living. There are good schools, superb leisure opportunities and ready-made holidays on the doorstep.

The Corporation is looking to appoint an ambitious and forward-thinking individual to this senior post. The Deputy Principal, Finance and Resources, is a crucial member of the Executive Leadership Team, contributing significantly to the future success and development of the College. She/he will provide strategic leadership and direction across the finance, estates, human resources, IT and other associated support areas, ensuring that the College meets the challenges faced by the FE sector. The post holder will provide long-term financial stability and effective resource management, enabling



the College to take advantage of future opportunities and work effectively with employers and other stakeholders.

The successful candidate will be a qualified accountant with a strong, successful track record of strategic financial leadership and financial planning/control at an executive level. She/he will be a talented leader and will demonstrate strong management skills, motivating and inspiring the wider college team whilst understanding the complexities of delivering education and skills training in an FE environment. Knowledge of the FE sector and funding methodologies would be beneficial; however, applications are welcome from high-calibre individuals from a diverse range of sectors.

If you would like to discuss the role in more detail with Andrew Wren, Principal and Chief Executive, please contact **Karen Johnson**, Clerk to the Corporation, on **01229 844805**, or email [karen.johnson@furness.ac.uk](mailto:karen.johnson@furness.ac.uk).

**Timeline:** advertised Friday 27 April  
**Closing date:** Monday 14 May 5pm  
**Shortlisting:** Tuesday 15 May  
**Interviews:** w/c 4 June





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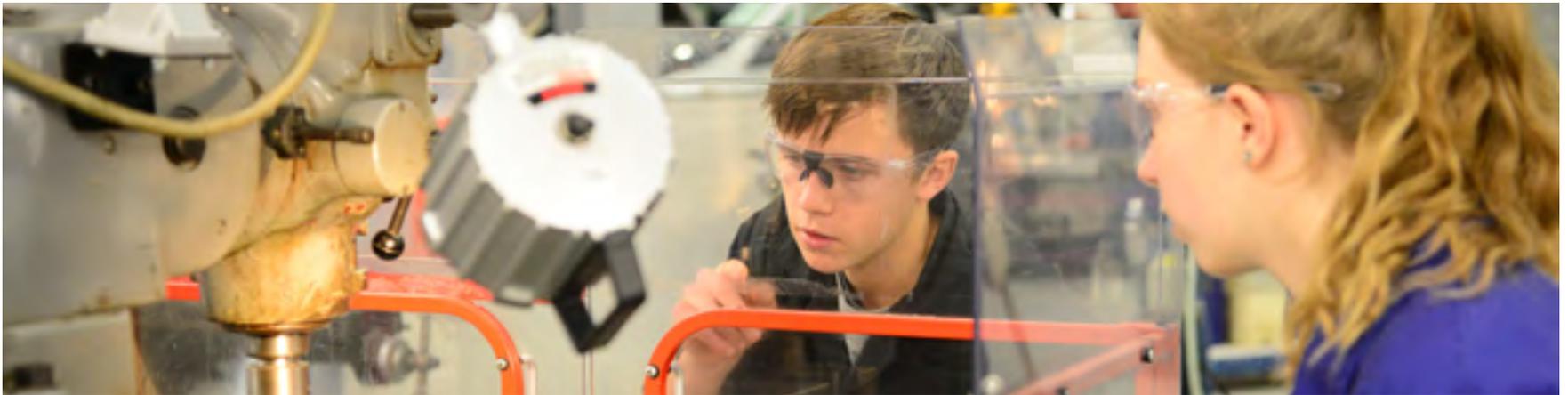
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Jonathan Poxon,  
Head of Projects

**T** 07805 568 448

**E** jonathanp@emfec.co.uk

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## EXPERTS: FOCUS ON T-LEVEL WORK PLACEMENTS



# MIKE CHERRY

Chair, Federation of Small  
Businesses

## The best way for colleges and SMEs to work together

**Employer buy-in is only going to get more important as T-levels arrive, and Mike Cherry has some advice for colleges that want to engage more small businesses to help out on skills**

Investing in our young people and supporting them to move into work is a topic that I care very much about, both in my capacity as national chairman of FSB and personally as a small business owner. I am passionate about helping small businesses flourish, and nurturing the skills of the next generation. This is why Young Enterprise has been FSB's chosen charity for over five years and why we are supporting the government's opportunity areas initiative.

The last few years have seen many changes to education and training in England. One of the most fundamental shifts has been the movement toward a skills system that is increasingly employer-driven in an attempt to better meet the needs of business. Whether you're an advocate or sceptic of this approach, it has placed greater emphasis on the role of business in educating and preparing young people to make decisions about their pathway into work.

But beyond this, fostering better links between business and education is crucial if we are to address troubling skills shortages that many small businesses are facing. Our own research has found that a third of business owners who have attempted to recruit in the last 12 months have been unable to find the individuals they're looking for. This is particularly the case in skilled trades, which is worrying given that our members tell us that technical skills are the most important skillset for growth.

I am proud of the fact that many small businesses are already actively involved with schools, colleges and universities. They are participating in careers and apprenticeship fairs, workshops and providing opportunities for students to experience and understand the world of work. In Kent, over 400 students and small businesses have taken part in Skills 3030 workshops – a two-hour event involving facilitated “speed networking”, employment-related workshops and inspiring stories from entrepreneurs.

However, by their very nature, small business owners are time and resource poor – factors that can inhibit this engagement. Although 82 per cent of small firms agree they should be involved in careers education activities, over half of business owners have never engaged with a school or college.

Of course, the introduction of T-levels and apprenticeships, for example, will pave the way for more students to experience the workplace first-hand – many in local small firms – but we need to keep looking for ways to achieve a greater impact for all young people, in all routes.

Small firms want to help, but educators need to take the lead and follow a few golden rules to successful engagement. Firstly, SMEs provide clear information about participation in careers activities. Over a third said better guidance on how to get involved would get them more involved. Secondly, try to ensure that the business has a consistent point of contact in the college.

“ **Small firms want to help, but educators need to take the lead**

Thirdly, once a relationship is established with a business, prioritise maintaining and nurturing it. Many small firms we've spoken to have been involved in a careers fair, never to be approached by the college again. Finally, don't forget to approach small business owners to educate young people about self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Our small businesses are lynchpins of their communities, recognisable faces on our high streets, and employers of local people. They understand the value of giving back, providing opportunities and inspiring young people in education. However, I've found that the benefits work both ways – over half of small firms believe that improving their involvement with their local college would have a positive effect on their perception of the skills and aspirations of young people, which can only be a good thing.

There are clear gains to be had on both sides, but my opinion is that the success of business and education engagement depends on strong leadership, clear communication and effective resourcing by the education sector. This can only be achieved with sustained support from government. The careers strategy was a step in the right direction, but time will tell as to how effective it proves to be.



# ANDY STITTLE

Director of teaching and learning,  
Truro and Penwith College

## Colleges need help with these long T-level work placements

**The 45-day placement requirement in the new T-levels is a laudable goal, but colleges need differentiated support, writes Andy Stittle**

**W**ork placements are a valuable undertaking: they set theory in context and develop sector-specific employability skills.

Like most colleges, Truro and Penwith welcomed the T-levels work placements pilot, which gave us the opportunity to identify a few problems that need to be addressed before final roll-out. Lessons from the pilot are crucial if we are to ensure that T-levels do not follow earlier failed attempts at reform to vocational and technical qualifications.

Engagement with employers, given the small scale of the pilot, was not an issue – it simply involved building on our existing employer relationships. However, we did come up against numerous challenges.

Typical of rural areas, our students travel significant distances to study and work, many for over three hours every day. Rural bus services are limited and costly. With a flat-rate payment allocated to a work placement travel and no rural uplift, this is a major problem. Securing high-quality placements that are “affordable” in time and cost to students is a challenge. Cornwall is characterised by rurality and low productivity. Access to some sectors is difficult and the reason why substantial numbers of our students eventually leave the county.

The 45-day minimum requirement is highly problematic for a large tertiary college in an area with predominantly micro, small and medium enterprises. Significant block release or timetabling college attendance over three days a week in one year, for example, would mean that many staff teaching across comprehensive provision (technical/vocational and academic) would be unavailable. Even in the pilot phase, a minority project can dominate timetabling structures at the cost of other provision.

Quality placements are potentially as demanding on employers as apprenticeships. When the initiative is rolled out across all curriculum areas, we suspect from conversations with employers that saturation point could be reached. The period also rules out the “one-day-a-week” placement model often favoured by employers. Furthermore, many smaller employers typically secure orders three to four months in advance and cannot commit to placements further ahead than that. The opportunity of a longer-term

placement is valued by many employers however; it develops the student as an effective team member, though it can result in an offer of employment and leaving the college course.

In many sectors, we have set up sector employer representation groups. These have proved particularly useful in keeping employers abreast of the new developments and in addressing potential hurdles. Some of these solutions, such as sharing the work experience between two employers, need to be addressed in final roll-out. They are particularly keen on the model of a qualification which progresses to a higher-level apprenticeship, as this is where their skills gap resides.

However employers are keen that the college retains its own commercial town-centre operations, such as a hair and beauty salon or restaurant, as an eligible placement. These provide a range of vocationally specific yet rounded employment skills by rotating job roles. Employers are very complimentary about the range of work-ready skills students acquire in these venues, something difficult to facilitate in a busy small enterprise.

The enhanced placements align particularly well to occupational courses with clear progression to employment or apprenticeships. Students on the pilot enjoy and value their placement. It builds aspiration, informs career choice, signals future options and can enhance work ethic in college.

“ **Quality placements are potentially as demanding on employers as apprenticeships**

However, additional funding simply to meet additional delivery hours will not be sufficient. Only financially healthy colleges will truly be able to meet the new technical reforms, and with half the sector in deficit, this needs to be addressed through wider review, including: increased flexibility or changes to address student demand, the time limitations of a busy small business, the diversity of courses and regional complications.

## EXPERTS

**Cruelties in the way much-needed welfare is handed out to NEET families is preventing their children from social mobility, writes Andrée Deane-Barron**

**W**hy would the government establish policy that so defiantly restricts the progress of another? I am referring to the welfare benefits system and its adverse effect on the take-up of apprenticeships, especially among those who are in most need of training and employment. This barrier to improved life choices and opportunities is a restriction on social mobility and social justice – and the current situation doesn't help the government's target of three million apprenticeship starts by 2020.

When a young person starts an apprenticeship they earn a wage that's not often much higher than the £3.70-an-hour legal minimum. Nevertheless, their parents will generally lose their entitlement to housing benefit, child tax credit and child benefit. No consideration is made for the lower wage apprentices earn, nor the fact that many of these young people remain dependent on their parents.

According to the latest DWP statistics, housing benefit averages approximately £95 per week, the child tax credit is worth nearly £60 per week, while weekly child benefit is £20.70. In some circumstances losing these benefits can end as a reduction of several thousand pounds a year, a loss which would be significant for nearly any family, let alone one already is struggling to manage.

Understandably, parents often discourage



## ANDRÉE DEANE-BARRON

Education and skills director,  
Central YMCA Group

### Flaws in the benefits system are holding apprentices back

their dependants from taking on an apprenticeship and, catastrophically, are forced to accept that they remain not in education employment or training (NEET). According to a 2010 study, those who have spent time out of work and education are far more likely to be unemployed later in life. The average individual life-time cost to the Treasury of somebody being NEET is £56,300, but more important is the cost to an individual's self-esteem and self-worth.

It makes absolutely no sense that our welfare system doesn't address these consequences: the human cost of this waste of public money is appalling. Apprenticeships have the capacity to transform lives and give young people the tools they need to succeed, regardless of where they've come from, and the benefits system shouldn't be holding young people back.

In our latest 'Transforming education'

manifesto, Central YMCA called on the government to remove barriers for learners, but again and again our cries have remained unanswered.

It is understandable that enthusiasm for welfare reform is low given the colossal task of rolling out universal credit, and perhaps changes to schemes that are soon to become legacy benefits, such as housing benefit and child tax credit, are unlikely. Child benefit however is not included in universal credit, and alone amounts to over £1,000 per year for families. Ensuring that parents can keep this benefit when a young person in their household becomes an apprentice surely isn't a mammoth task, and it's one that should have cross-party support given the apparent bipartisan consensus on the need to promote apprenticeships and encourage social mobility.

When I gave evidence to the education select

committee a couple of weeks ago, this consensus certainly seemed evident, and many members agreed with me that the government really shouldn't be passing up such a relatively easy hit. I'm hopeful therefore that the committee will join Central YMCA in pushing for reform, but we know that changes to the welfare system alone won't solve everything. There are other barriers for learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have learning difficulties and disabilities.

I wholeheartedly agree with the social

“ **The human cost of this waste of public money is appalling**

mobility commission's proposal to adopt a more ambitious and unifying approach in order to maximise everyone's life chances and enable them to achieve their aspirations.

Individual ministers have taken some action over the years to improve social mobility, and I wouldn't want to deny anybody's personal commitment, but often it seems cross-departmental issues like these fall through the cracks. It is only when the government takes an overarching approach to social mobility will issues such as the unintended negative impact of the benefits system be avoided.

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## CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King*



Camilla Jameson, left, with Sarah Capewell from Arch

## More (girl) power to you

A sixth-form college has teamed up with a local charity to deliver lessons on self-esteem.

City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth-Form College partnered with the domestic abuse and social inclusion charity Arch to run its 'Girl Power' programme, which covered topics such as consent, life goals, self-confidence and relationships, for female students aged 16 to 19.

Seven students took part in the programme, identified by the college as those who would most benefit from the weekly two-hour sessions.

Following the programme's success, the

charity has received funding to run another round of sessions with the college, and will look to expand the programme across the city over time.

"We were aware that the age of our students makes them statistically more likely to experience abusive relationships. To maximise the college's support network we reached out to Arch whose work in the area is highly regarded," said Camilla Jameson, learning support assistant at the college.

"The young women who participated have drastically improved their self-confidence and resilience, which is great to see."



(L-R): Q&A host Sean Jarvis, Siobhan Greene and Dean Hoyle

## Huddersfield heroes return home

Two high-powered alumni of Kirklees College have returned to their former stomping grounds in Huddersfield to talk about their careers journeys.

The co-creator of *The X Factor*, Siobhan Greene, and Dean Hoyle, who founded the greeting cards chain Card Factory, both paid a recent visit to their former college.

The pair returned as guest speakers at the Huddersfield Town Enterprise Academy meeting, fielding questions from delegates about what made them.

The event was run in partnership between the college and Huddersfield Town AFC as a

way of introducing local business people, and encouraging them to work together.

Hosted at the college's Landings 72 restaurant, guests were also presented with a breakfast prepared by catering staff and students.

"As someone who is Huddersfield born and bred, I'm immensely proud of our town and the accomplishments of its residents," said Lydia Butterworth, head of sales and marketing at the college. "It was fascinating to hear from our alumni Dean and Siobhan, who were informative and entertaining in equal measures."

## Addressing a prickly issue



Looking sharp: A hedgehog

Inside the Hedgehog symposium



Experts in Hedgehog care gathered at Hartpury College for an event promoting the animals' welfare.

The Hedgehog Rehabilitation Symposium event attracted over 90 delegates from more than 35 different organisations, including wildlife hospitals and the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, who shared their tips on how to care for wild hedgehogs.

Sessions included presentations on the status of Britain's hedgehog population, a talk from Nigel Reeve, the author of *Hedgehogs*, as well as a session with veterinary pathologist Alex Barlow, who dissected hedgehogs that had died in care to examine their cause of death.

"Hedgehog rehabilitation is largely funded by volunteers, giving up their time and money to care for sick and injured hedgehogs across the country," said Lucy Learman-Brown, a senior lecturer at Hartpury, and lead organiser of the event.

"To draw 90 delegates from so many organisations together was a fantastic opportunity to debate controversial issues, and explore ways we can work together to support best practice."

## Wheels in motion for homeless project



In the driving seat: Luca Buratti

A public services student is leading a new project to help Birmingham's homeless population.

Nineteen-year-old Luca Buratti, a student at Stratford-upon-Avon College, has taken on the role of project leader in a scheme to turn a double-decker bus into a mobile shelter for rough sleepers.

The project is being run by the Rotary Club of Birmingham Breakfast, and Luca has been awarded membership of the group for his commitment to community projects and frequent charity work, including organising fundraisers for the Alzheimer's Society, Blood

Bikes and Warwickshire Hearts.

So far in his role as project leader, he has been responsible for securing the bus and liaising with the local council for permission to run the scheme.

"This is a fantastic project that will really reduce the problem of homelessness in Birmingham," he said.

"Luca certainly personifies all the best qualities we hope to encourage in our students. We are tremendously proud of him for what he has achieved and for his public-spirited attitude in general," added Aimee Clayden, the college's public service lecturer.

CAMPUS ROUND-UP *with Samantha King***Pixar co-founder beamed into classroom**FEATURED  
CAMPUS  
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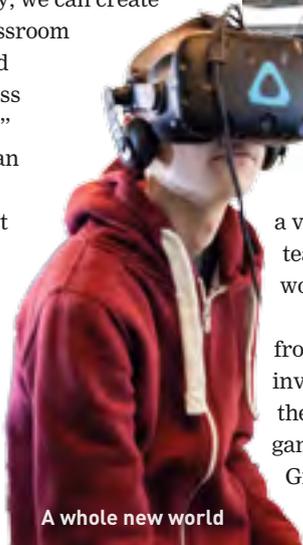
Gaming and IT students came face-to-face with the co-founder of Pixar during a lesson with a difference, reports Samantha King.

The group of students from Langley College, part of the Windsor Forest Colleges Group, wore virtual reality headsets and were transported into a virtual classroom, where they met the Oscar-winning animator Loren Carpenter, beaming in live from the United States.

He talked to learners about his experiences working at Lucasfilm and Pixar, as well as upcoming projects he has in the pipeline.

“Through virtual reality, we can create a fabulous distributed classroom where anyone in the world with the internet can access a classroom and teaching,” he explained. “Students can experience what it is like at the top of Everest, or get inside a locomotive to see how it works up close.”

The exchange was facilitated using ENGAGE, a free platform that allows schools, colleges, universities and businesses to create



A whole new world



A student prepares to enter the virtual classroom

a virtual classroom and bring together teachers and learners anywhere in the world.

Observing the session were educators from local schools and colleges, who were invited to see the technology in action by the event's organiser, Christian Long, a gaming tutor at the Windsor Forest College Group.

“Like a drill in a carpentry workshop

VR should be there being used every single day, rather than just showing it off as a nice little toy you might get out for Ofsted because it'll look good,” Mr Long said.

“It is said we only retain 30 per cent of what we hear, but 90 per cent of what we experience. It's why we can often remember our childhood holidays vividly, but not many of our school lessons. VR is an incredibly powerful tool for engaging students and



Loren leads a session in the VR classroom

helping them experience what they learn, so the lesson is never lost.”

**Do you want to be in Campus Round-up?**

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**Wes Johnson**

Chair, The Lancashire Colleges (TLC)

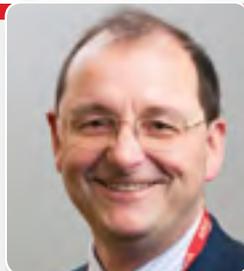
Start date March 2018

**Previous job**

Principal, Lancaster & Morecambe College (ongoing)

**Interesting fact**

Wes is a passionate Nottingham Forest fan and regularly makes the 300-mile round trip to support his team.

**Fred Carter**

Principal, Lewes & Eastbourne Sixth-Form College

Start date April 2018

**Previous job**

Vice-principal, North East Surrey College of Technology (NESCOLT)

**Interesting fact**

Fred is a keen snooker player. His other loves include watching Leeds United, travelling, politics, and cricket.

**Clive Cooke**

CEO, East Sussex College Group

Start date March 2018

**Previous job**

Principal, Sussex Coast College Hastings

**Interesting fact**

Clive used to deliver keep-fit training and aerobics sessions on a radio station in Birmingham.

**Paul Simpson**

Executive director for human resources and development, The Sheffield College

Start date May 2018

**Previous job**

Senior HR manager, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

**Interesting fact**

Paul is a keen windsurfer and can't wait to get back on the water this year to master the heli-tack technique.

**Biram Desai**

Chief finance officer, East Sussex College Group

Start date March 2018

**Previous job**

Vice-principal, Sussex Coast College Hastings

**Interesting fact**

Biram qualified as a skydiver in Florida in 2004, despite his main parachute not opening during his first ever experience of the sport. He now gets his adrenaline fixes closer to the ground.

**Movers & Shakers**

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- Paul A. Kirschner -
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### FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

			2		4			
8		7		4			5	
			3	5		7	1	
	5		2				6	4
			4		3			
4	7				5		2	
	6	5		9	2			
	1			3		2		7
		2		7				

Difficulty: EASY

	3					2	8	
7	8			2		4		
4			6				3	
		8	5	6				
5			8		2			3
				9	7	8		
	1				9			6
		3		7			9	4
4	7						2	

Difficulty: MEDIUM

Solutions: Next edition

### Last Week's solutions

8	5	6	1	3	7	9	2	4
2	9	3	8	5	4	1	6	7
7	4	1	2	6	9	5	3	8
5	2	8	3	7	1	6	4	9
9	1	7	4	2	6	3	8	5
3	6	4	5	9	8	2	7	1
4	8	2	6	1	5	7	9	3
6	7	5	9	4	3	8	1	2
1	3	9	7	8	2	4	5	6

Difficulty: EASY

7	8	6	1	5	9	2	3	4
9	3	1	4	2	6	7	5	8
4	2	5	3	8	7	1	6	9
3	7	8	5	9	4	6	1	2
2	5	9	6	3	1	4	8	7
6	1	4	8	7	2	5	9	3
8	4	2	9	6	5	3	7	1
5	9	7	2	1	3	8	4	6
1	6	3	7	4	8	9	2	5

Difficulty: MEDIUM

### Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug



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