ESFA LOOK TO CAP PROVIDER LEVY FUNDING

Page 7

OFSTED LINKS 16-18 FLAT RATE WITH FALLING QUALITY

Page 10

EMPLOYER FEES TO BE HALVED. BUT FROM WHEN?

Page 6

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EDITION 259

SECRET REVIEW OF CORNWALL COLLEGES

- Council calls on DfE to conduct confidential review after colleges with 8,500 16 to 18-year-olds fail to collaborate
- Truro and Penwith college 'volunteer' to participate but reject several FE commissioner draft recommendations
- Cornwall college group chief executive resigns to 'expedite' government bailout ahead of 'fresh start' process

Exclusive PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS PIPPA@FEWEEK.CO.UK

See page 9

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EDITION 259

EXPERT: A bonfire of qualifications may turn out to be a damp squib
Page 13

Top-slices should be higher for 'risky' subcontractors, according to the AoC
Page 8

We face major challenges as a country so must invest in skills
Page 12

Functional skills is not a 'second rate' qualification
Page 12

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News

Providers warned their funding could be pulled following 3aaa staff and apprentice poaching

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

Multiple training providers have attempted to poach staff and apprentices from the now-defunct Aspire Achieve Advance using underhand tactics – and have been warned their own funding could be withdrawn because of it.

Apprenticeship giant 3aaa was put into compulsory liquidation last week after it ceased trading on October 11 when the government pulled its skills contracts following a second investigation into success-rate inflation.

The scandal, which has since been reported to the police, put 500 people out of work and left up to 4,500 apprentices without a training provider.

Many of the company's top former seniors have already found themselves new employment at other training providers.

However, an *FE Week* investigation has found that some of their new employers have since been "misrepresenting their position" to others affected by the 3aaa collapse, in an effort to recruit them.

Tactics include alleged false claims that the Education and Skills Funding Agency and 3aaa have asked the providers to take on hundreds of people affected.

Questions have been raised about how these providers were able to obtain private email addresses of staff, apprentices and employers – leading to concerns that general data protection regulation laws have been breached.

There is said to be £17 million of on-programme payments due for apprentices affected – a huge prize for anyone that can win transfers.

Keith Smith, the ESFA's director of apprenticeships, told the Association of Employment and Learning Providers conference this week that he is aware of questionable actions by some providers in the wake of the 3aaa collapse and warned them that there could be severe ramifications.

"We've had a few providers who've been misrepresenting their position," he said.

"Now, I have to say to those providers, when you do that, you're putting your own position at risk. And we're considering whether we stop a small number of providers from delivering because of the action they're taking in relation to this example.

"There's no place for people to come in and misrepresent to people who are feeling very vulnerable at this stage, employers and apprentices."

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the AELP, added: "One thing I want to make clear – when we hear from the ESFA that providers are telling employers they are officially appointed by the ESFA to take on 3aaa learners, when no such thing has happened – lies in other words – I couldn't agree more with Keith Smith. Those providers need the book thrown at them."

Babington is a large provider with ESFA contracts worth more than £16 million in 2017/18. It has taken on 3aaa's former operations director.

This person was part of a group of around 40 affected 3aaa staff that was kept on and paid by the ESFA until the end of October to help with the transfer of apprentices.

Babington told *FE Week* it was ready to take on a "few hundred learners" from the collapsed company, but would not comment on how many affected staff would be joining.

An email, seen by *FE Week*, from the provider to one former 3aaa employee who claims to have had no intention of joining the company, states that Babington is "delighted to be able to offer you a position".

The recipient, who did not want to be named, is concerned about how Babington got hold of their personal contact details.

Babington said it takes its obligations under GDPR "very seriously" and it was "unaware of any specific breach regarding communications to former 3aaa learners or employers".

Geason Training has meanwhile taken on 3aaa's former quality director.

It is understood that the provider, which has never been inspected by Ofsted or had its own ESFA contract, is trying to recruit 40 other former 3aaa staff.

One concerned senior FE executive, who did not want to be named, said: "We have supported over 30 non-levy employers who had apprentices with 3aaa. What has happened subsequently has been astonishing. Within days, these employers had taken calls and emails from their former 3aaa assessor stating that they will be transferring the apprentice to Geason.

"Some emails included a second email to be forwarded to the apprentice themselves and the apprentice was even named. The speed with which the plan was executed could only have happened if the provider had access to 3aaa learner-and-employer data."

Geason's director, Robert Kilpatrick, said: "Geason Training's focus has been ensuring that [3aaa] apprentices are able to continue their programmes with as little disruption as possible and that the loss of employees who are highly knowledgeable and experienced in the industry is avoided.

"Geason has been liaising with ESFA since the liquidation of 3aaa to ensure that we are doing all we can to support this."

He would not comment on how his company obtained employer and apprentice personal information.

Estio Training, a provider that received its first direct apprenticeships contract last year, which totalled £1.7 million, has taken on 3aaa's sales director.

It has offered to backdate pay for any 3aaa staff to the start of October if they join the company. Lee Meadows, the provider's commercial director, told *FE Week* they were looking to recruit around 30 staff and 300 apprentices.

One email, attempting to poach a former 3aaa apprentice, said: "3aaa have reached out to us at Estio to help out with the transfer of nearly 4,500 apprentices on to new courses and they have asked us to contact you regarding your current course.

"Estio are offering the same digital marketer course as 3aaa and we can transfer you over to us let you continue your apprenticeship where you left off with 3aaa."

Estio would not respond to repeated requests for comment about this email.

FE Week understands letters have been sent to some providers from the ESFA telling them to stop misrepresenting themselves. The agency did not deny this.

A spokesperson for the Information Commissioner's Office said: "It's a criminal offence under Section 170 of the Data Protection Act 2018 to obtain or share personal information without the consent of the controller."

NHS trusts urged to make full use of their levy funds

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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Exclusive

Health Education England has written to NHS trusts encouraging them to use or transfer their apprenticeship-levy funds after finding their annual £200 million pot is not being spent fast enough.

A joint letter from HEE's chief executive Ian Cumming and NHS Improvement's executive director of nursing Ruth May warned a "large amount of NHS apprenticeship-levy funding remains unspent" and reiterated the importance of making "full use of its levy funds" or risking losing them.

The letter, sent on October 23, asked every NHS trust to "confirm how much you expect to spend and what is likely to remain unspent".

It also reminded recipients of the opportunity to transfer 10 per cent of the unspent money to other organisations – which will increase to 25 per cent in April – and warned that "in the event that the transfer opportunity is not used, this money will be transferred out of the NHS, which would be a disappointing outcome".

The NHS has previously said it will struggle to spend the £200 million apprenticeship-levy payments it is shelling out annually within the 24-month timeframe the government has set for levy-payers.

The Royal College of Nursing previously warned the apprenticeship route is "both costly and less efficient to the healthcare system in growing local workforce" as it takes four years to complete, rather than three years at university.

The apprenticeship levy was launched for employers with a paybill of over £3 million in April last year. They have two years to spend their levy pot on apprenticeships training.

In June, *FE Week* reported the number of people starting an NHS apprenticeship had fallen by more than a third over the last two years.

The NHS is subject to a public-sector apprenticeship target, and must ensure at least 2.3 per cent of its workforce starts an apprenticeship every year.

In 2017/18 it would have needed 27,500 starts to hit this target. Instead, it saw just 12,611 starts, down 36 per cent on the 19,820 in 2015/16 and equating to one per cent of its workforce.

This was despite a pledge from former health secretary Jeremy Hunt in 2016 to create a further 100,000 starts in the sector by 2020.

The letter said it "commends NHS employer organisations for the progress achieved to date towards delivery of the NHS apprenticeship target" and recognises a "great deal of hard work has gone into developing apprenticeship-programme offers within the NHS so far".

A spokesperson for HEE said information about how close the NHS is to achieving its apprenticeship target will be published next month, but some trusts will not spend their full levy pot even if they achieve the target. She added that HEE does not determine how much levy each trust should spend.


Ian Cumming

News

Employers start to leave reviews on ESFA Find Apprenticeship Training website

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The government has launched its Trip Advisor-style review tool to let employers rate apprenticeship providers, and Ofsted intends to use the data to inform inspections.

The tool, called "what employers are saying", allows employers who have registered apprentices on the apprenticeship service to feed back on specific aspects of their programmes.

Employers rate training providers on a four-point scale, ranging from 'excellent' to 'very poor'. They can also identify the provider's strengths and weaknesses from a list, but are not able to submit any written responses.

The feedback is not moderated before it appears online, and is visible to anyone searching for a specific training provider. Apprentice feedback is also being gathered, but the Education and Skills Funding Agency says this is in a test phase and is not ready for publication yet.

A spokesperson for Ofsted confirmed it was still establishing how it will use the data. He said the inspectorate "is in discussion with the ESFA about the sharing of information".

Speaking at a fringe event at the Conservative party conference earlier this month, skills minister Anne Milton said that allowing employers and apprentices to give "smiley faces" as reviews of training providers is a better indicator of quality than "tick-box" inspections, which she said "often miss the point".

When asked if employers who train apprentices directly will be able to give feedback on themselves, a spokesperson for the ESFA said users will be told not to give feedback if there is a conflict of interest, and the tool's terms of reference will be updated to clarify that.

FE Week took a look at some of the reviews given to some of the country's biggest training providers.

The largest, Bristol's Lifetime Training Group, had 15,210 apprentices in 2016/17, according to the ESFA's latest achievement-rate data, on a range of qualifications from hospitality to childcare. As of October 26, it had received 76 reviews, including 24 votes for 'excellent' (31.5 per cent), and 44 for 'good' (58 per cent).

Voters judged its strengths as including reporting on the progress of apprentices, communicating with employers and providing the right training at the right time.

The provider had an employer-satisfaction rating of 86.4 per cent in the most recent FE Choices survey, published last week, and has been rated 'good' by Ofsted since July 2012.

Slough-based IT and business specialist QA, which had 2,230 apprentices in 2016/17, had the most reviews of the large providers, having received 134 appraisals from employers as of October 26.

Of these, 14 per cent (19) rated the provider as 'excellent' and 58 per cent (78) said it was 'good'. However, 27 reviews (20 per cent) judged it as 'poor', and 10 (7 per cent) as 'very poor'. Employers listed QA's strengths, including improving the skills of apprentices and its training facilities, but said it could improve on reporting on progress and communication.

According to FE Choices, QA has an employer-satisfaction rate of 85.6 per cent, and it is currently rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

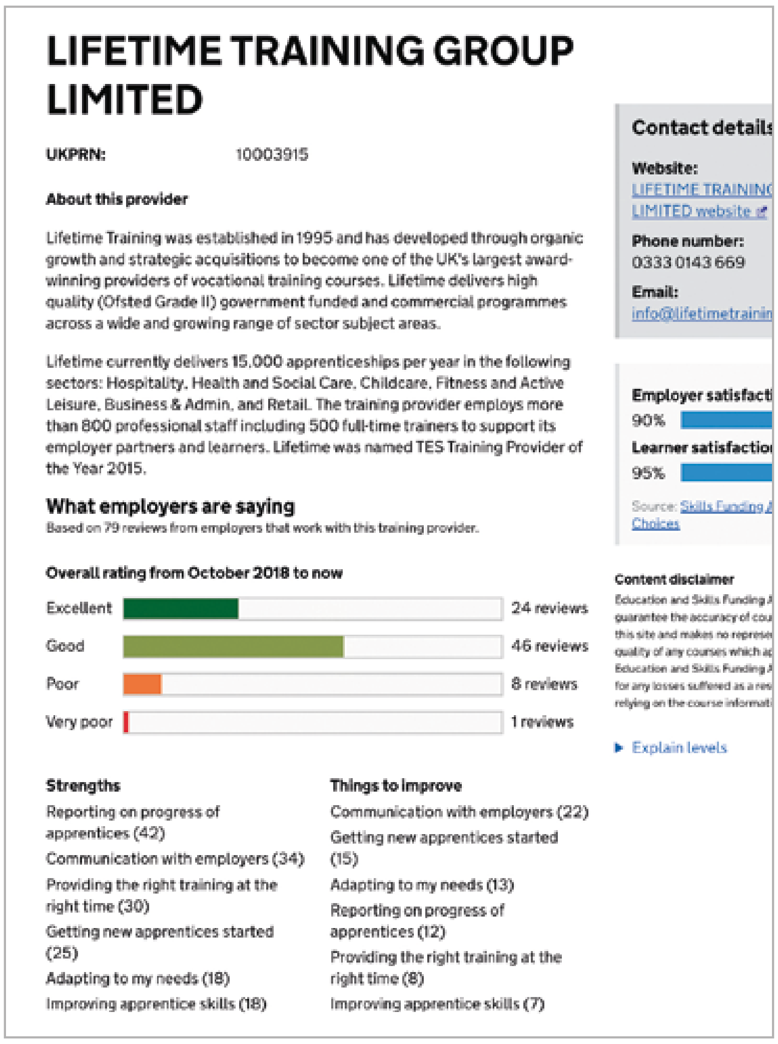
Kaplan Financial, based in Manchester with 2,530 apprentices in 2016/17 on courses including law, accounting and finance, received 119 reviews. Of these, 17 (14 per cent) were rated 'excellent' and 77 (65 per cent) were rated 'good'. It also received 16 (13 per cent) 'poor' reviews and nine (7.5 per cent) 'very poor' reviews.

Employers were most impressed by the provider's facilities and ability to get new apprentices started and to work with small numbers of apprentices, but said it could improve on communicating and adapting to the needs of employers.

In comparison, Kaplan Financial – which is rated 'requires improvement' by Ofsted – had a lower employer-satisfaction of 74.6 per cent in the FE Choices survey.

Finally, the tool has been positive for West Sussex's HIT Training, which specialises in hospitality and catering and had 8,460 apprentices in 2016/17. Of the 50 reviews the provider has received, 20 (40 per cent) rated it as 'excellent' and 28 (56 per cent) as 'good'.

HIT Training received an employer-satisfaction rating of 94.2 per cent in the FE Choices survey, and is rated 'good' by Ofsted.



Employer ratings on Find Apprenticeship Training website*

20 of the largest apprenticeship providers	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	Total	% Excellent or good
BCTG	0	4	0	0	4	100%
Hawk Management	12	15	1	0	28	96%
HIT Training	20	28	1	1	50	96%
Babcock Training	12	14	3	0	29	90%
Lifetime Training Group	24	44	7	1	76	89%
The Growth Company	11	20	4	0	35	89%
Qube Qualification and Development	7	14	2	1	24	88%
Total People	5	9	2	0	16	88%
Interserve Learning & Employment	6	12	2	2	22	82%
Paragon Education & Skills	3	5	1	1	10	80%
Remit Group	5	11	3	1	20	80%
Kaplan Financial	17	77	16	9	119	79%
Babington Businesss College	8	33	9	3	53	77%
QA	19	78	27	10	134	72%
GP Strategies Training	1	6	2	1	10	70%
North Lancs Training Group	4	2	2	1	9	67%
Marr Corporation	2	2	2	0	6	67%
Learning Curve Group	1	1	1	0	3	67%
Skillnet	2	4	3	0	9	67%
The Intraining Group	1	3	5	0	9	44%

* As at 26 October 2018

News

Budget 2018: Apprenticeship fees halved to 5% for SMEs

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The 10 per cent fee that small businesses must pay when they take on apprentices will be halved, the chancellor has announced.

Philip Hammond (pictured) revealed in his Budget speech this week that SMEs will only have to contribute 5 per cent towards the training.

The Treasury later told *FE Week* that the change would come into effect from April 2019, but backtracked a day later and said no fixed date has been decided on yet.

It comes after the skills minister Anne Milton told the Association of Employment and Learning Providers conference in June that issues with the fee have been "noted", but there would be no announcement on a policy change any time soon.

But announcing the move to 5 per cent contributions, Mr Hammond said: "As well as backing businesses to invest and grow, we will also make sure British workers are equipped with the skills they need to thrive and prosper.

"Today, in addition to the flexibilities I announced earlier this month, I can announce that for smaller firms taking on apprentices we will halve the amount they have to contribute from 10 per cent to 5 per cent.

"In total this is a £695 million package to support apprenticeships."

It is expected that the change to a 5 per cent contribution will only apply to new starters when the change comes into effect.

It is, however, not yet known if the contribution will also apply to levy-paying employers when their levy pot is empty.

The Treasury told *FE Week* these details would be decided on in early 2019.

The AELP has been heavily campaigning to remove the employer contribution rule as it believes it puts SMEs off apprenticeship, and is the reason why starts have fallen so much since the introduction of the levy.

Its chief executive, Mark Dawe, was happy with Mr Hammond's announcement.

"This is a major and positive shift which AELP has been pushing hard for since before the levy was introduced and it should enable providers to work with smaller businesses to start getting back to offering apprenticeships to young people and local communities," he said.

Shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden welcomed the change but labelled it a "minor improvement".

"This responds to the strong lobbying there has been from the sector, and in particular the AELP," he said.

"It's a minor improvement but it doesn't address some of the key issues for small businesses with back-office admin or the failure of government to incentivise small businesses by creative use and support of the apprenticeship levy."

National Union of Students vice president for FE, Emily Chapman, added: "The announcement, although the focus is welcome, will not solve the key issues that students face when taking up apprenticeships: such as low pay, expensive transport and lack of maintenance funding for their studies.

"Plans to cut the levy for small and medium employers may strengthen their role as apprenticeship providers, but reforms should instead start with the experiences of the students taking up those apprenticeships – and can only succeed when their needs are placed front and centre."

The change follows Mr Hammond's announcement at the Conservative Party Conference earlier this month that the annual apprenticeship levy transfer facility will rise from 10 to 25 per cent from April 2019.

He said he will also consult with businesses about further changes to the levy from 2020, following the slow take-up and employer criticisms.

The apprenticeship levy is paid by employers with an annual payroll of £3 million or more, who can then spend their contributions on apprenticeship training.

Smaller employers can also access the funds generated through the levy, although they have had to pay 10 per cent towards the cost of the training ever since its introduction.

There was no mandatory charge before May last year, simply an assumed contribution for apprentices aged 19 and over.

Since last May, only 16- to 18-year-olds at employers with fewer than 50 staff are fully funded and therefore free to train.

Apprentice wage rise amongst announcements

The national minimum wage for apprentices will rise again in April, from £3.70 to £3.90 per hour.

The 20 pence extra is a 5.4 per cent rise and follows last year's increase from £3.50, after chancellor Philip Hammond accepted recommendations from the independent Low Pay Commission.

The jump to £3.90 is above inflation and larger by proportion than all other minimum-wage groups.

For 18- to 20-year-olds, the increase is from £5.90 per hour to £6.15, while 16- to 17-year-olds will see their minimum wage go up from £4.20 per hour to £4.35.

And for 21- to 24-year-olds, it is going up from £7.38 per hour to £7.70.

Mr Hammond also used his Budget to detail other past announcements for skills in England.

Up to £5 million is going to the Institute for Apprenticeships and National Apprenticeship Service in 2019-20, to "identify gaps in the training-provider market and increase the number of employer-designed apprenticeship standards available to employers".

Up to £100 million has been allocated to the first phase of the National Retraining Scheme, and £20 million's worth of new "skills pilots" for Greater Manchester were revealed.

This will include a £3 million scheme to help "employers in Greater Manchester and surrounding areas to address local digital-skills gaps through short training courses", and a £10 million pilot again to "test what forms of government support are most effective in increasing training levels for the self-employed".

Lastly, a £7 million match-funding pilot was revealed "alongside employers to provide on-the-job training to young people not currently in employment, education or training in Greater Manchester, and to move them into sustainable career paths with employers".

The government will also provide £38 million of capital funding to support implementation of the first three T-levels in 2020 across 52 providers, as announced earlier this month.

'End of austerity' will not extend to colleges

The chancellor used his Budget speech to repeatedly claim his spending plan would bring an "end to austerity" – but it doesn't appear that promise extends to colleges.

The sector was left "deeply disappointed" when Philip Hammond offered no new funding for FE – particularly as he offered schools £400 million for the "little extras", and £420 million to fix potholes on the country's roads.

His refusal to better fund the sector came despite a national Colleges Week campaign, which involved a march on parliament, and the launch of the Raise the Rate campaign. Both called for an initial funding increase for sixth-form education of £200 per student.

"The Treasury's plans do not address the big challenges of falling investment, front-loaded spending and major skills shortages," said David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges.

"We can only hope that the Department for Education and Treasury address these in the 2019 spending review."

"The chancellor has once again missed the opportunity to provide schools and colleges with the funding they need to continue delivering the high-quality, internationally competitive education our young people deserve," said James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges' Association.

"What is clear is that the government has found £420 million to fix potholes this year but no new money to increase core funding for the education of 16- to 18-year-olds."

"Spending on further and adult education has already fallen by £3.3 billion in real terms," said Gordon Marsden, shadow skills minister.

The Budget has "made it clear that the prime minister's promise to end austerity will not extend to colleges," he added.

Dr Fiona Aldridge, the interim director of policy and research at the Learning and Work Institute, said: "Greater investment in FE will need to wait until next year's spending review – we all need to make sure the government's declared 'end of austerity' applies to FE and learning."

The base rate for all 16- to 18-year-old students has been cut twice since 2010 and frozen at £4,000 per student, per year since 2013.

The Raise the Rate campaign, led by the SFCA, wants funding to increase to £4,760 per student in the spending review, which is taking place next year.

David Hughes

Plans to place limits on apprenticeship providers described as 'absurd'

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The founder of one of the largest providers in the country has hit out at plans by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to limit the amount of apprenticeships cash he and other providers can earn.

John Hyde, who also co-founded the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said it would be "absurd" to introduce funding caps while billions remained unspent.

His remarks followed the announcement earlier this week by Keith Smith, the ESFA's director of apprenticeships, that the agency intended to introduce a "financial cap in terms of how much we say you'll be able to earn in the system" – which would apply to all providers, not just new ones.

FE Week contacted a number of the biggest apprenticeship providers for their views on the proposals.

Mr Hyde, chair of HIT Training, which had an apprenticeship allocation of almost £24 million in 2017/18, said he could "understand the rationale for doing this" but "if we've spent up to our cap then employers are going to walk away and look for other providers".

The caps would have to be transparent, and made publicly available alongside information about any underspend, he said.

"It's absurd to cap people if they have, as they do at the moment, £2 billion sitting around and not being used," he said.

A spokesperson for the Learning Curve Group, which had apprenticeships allocations worth £7.6 million in 2017/18, said a cap on funding was useful "only if it is linked to quality and performance".

"Care will need to be taken when implementing any cap scheme to ensure that large employers which use their levy-funding to scale are not prevented to choosing providers best-placed to deliver the best results," he said.

Neither Lifetime Training, which had an allocation of £30 million last year, nor Babcock, which had funding worth £28.7 million, was able to respond to *FE Week* ahead of publication.

Mark Dawe, AELP chief executive, urged the ESFA to "adopt a risk-based approach" to introducing the caps.

"The final employer-driven model should allow employers of all sizes to freely choose a quality provider and not stifle the growth of innovative and responsive providers," he said.

Speaking at the AELP autumn conference in Manchester on Tuesday, Mr Smith gave no detail of how any funding limits would be set or applied, and instead said the agency would be testing the approach.

"We're going to work with you as a sector over the coming weeks to help us to identify what's the best way to do that," he said.

Their introduction is intended to ensure that "we have a process and a system to manage the way that organisations can be funded", with a particular focus on new providers.

Keith Smith

"It's not intended to stop really super-big providers from becoming super-big, but it is there to control risk to a certain extent and it is there to control quality," he said.

He insisted the plans were not "driven by any individual circumstances", including the recent collapse of mega-provider Aspire Achieve Advance, leaving 4,500 apprentices and 1,500 employers without a training provider.

However, Meg Hillier, chair of the influential Commons public accounts committee, said the plans were a sign that the agency was starting to learn the lessons from both that and previous failures – including last year's Learndirect debacle.

It also follows the collapse of First4Skills in March 2017, which held an annual £15 million apprenticeship allocation and trained as many as 6,500 apprentices a year.

"Frankly they were right in their face, thanks to some of the good work you [*FE Week*] did. Two big problems in the space of a year," she said.

These problems were "foreseeable", but "now at least they're doing something about it", she said.

"The limit itself may not be a complete panacea. It may be a start but there's a lot of risks about how it may be implemented," Ms Hillier said.

ESFA raises the bar for apprenticeship providers register

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The Education and Skills Funding Agency has revealed plans to tighten up rules for training providers wanting to get on to its apprenticeships register and kick off those who aren't delivering.

Keith Smith, the agency's director of apprenticeships, told the AELP autumn conference this week that the new beefed-up register of apprenticeship-training providers will open "within weeks, possibly sooner" and will then stay open indefinitely.

The thousands of training providers already on the register will be asked to reapply, in segments which will be "divided into groups" over the next 12 months. These groups will be focused on risk, with "high-risk" providers having to reapply first.

There is going to be a much stronger emphasis on quality.

"We want to focus the reapplication process on those providers that are potentially not delivering, and on those that we think will struggle to pass our new requirements," he said.

New questions designed to "test a provider's ability to deliver" high standards will also be introduced.

Mr Smith added that the agency is likely to introduce a rule that throws off providers who go 12 months with no delivery after joining the register, to make it a "bit more live".

"We think that will make the register feel, particularly where the employers are concerned, that they're looking at providers that are more at the delivery stage," he said.

There will also be greater scrutiny of providers getting on the RoATP. Companies must have traded for at least 12 months in order to be eligible for application and must provide a full set of accounts.

The ESFA will look "very closely" at the registered address of the training provider to fish out whether it is actually a business address.

"We know that some organisations try to register without business premises, or without a real set of infrastructure to be able to deliver. So again that's something we're going to look at and tackle," he said.

The three provider routes – main, employer and supporting – will remain in place.

Mr Smith concluded: "There is going to be a much stronger emphasis on quality, on delivery models and much stronger emphasis on the type of business we have operating the money.

"We would like your views on whether these plans go too far or not far enough."

The changes come after *FE Week* has reported extensively on the problems with the application process, and discovered, for example, one-man bands with no delivery experience being given access to millions of pounds of apprenticeships funding.

And earlier this month this newspaper discovered a loophole in RoATP after a broker advertised how companies can buy their way on to it for £50,000.

The register has been closed since the government shut it for review in October 2017, even though it was originally meant to open every quarter, leaving many would-be apprenticeships providers frustrated.

Four more providers banned from taking new recruits

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Four more apprenticeship providers have been banned from taking on new starts after facing criticism from Ofsted – bringing the total number barred up to 16.

The latest update to the register of apprenticeship-training providers, on October 26, shows the four new providers which will be facing the penalty after being deemed as making 'insufficient progress' during early monitoring visits from the education watchdog.

This means the Education and Skills Funding Agency has temporarily barred all 16 providers who have made poor headway in at least one area in reports that have been published up until October 11.

Cumbria-based NC Training has been banned after it was found to be making 'insufficient progress' in every category.

Inspectors warned that leaders and managers "are not complying with the levy-funded apprenticeship requirements" and criticised quality-improvement measures, "ineffective" governance, slow progress of apprentices and safeguarding measures which "lack rigour".

Lancashire's Ensis Solutions has also been banned after being found to be 'insufficient' in one category.

The report said leaders and managers had made "many recent improvements" to the quality of apprenticeships, but found that "too many weaknesses remain" and progress is "still not rapid enough".

Both GTG Training and Kashmir Youth Project have been also temporarily banned after receiving two 'insufficient progress' ratings each.

The banning of these four providers is the third group to be announced, after six providers were banned in September, followed by another six earlier in October.

Any provider making 'insufficient progress' faces being barred from taking on new apprentices.

These restrictions will continue until the provider has received a full inspection and been awarded at least a grade three for its apprenticeship provision. Full inspections should take place within a year of the monitoring visit.

News

DfE accused of wasting public money with new £10m ‘register of external experts’

BILLY CAMDEN
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The Department for Education will spend £10 million on 200 “external experts” to advise it on policy areas including university technical colleges, vocational education and sixth forms.

A tender document published this week reveals that the department is searching for organisations to join a “register of external experts”, made up of “individuals who have expertise and experience at a senior level in the education sector”.

In particular, the government is looking for experts in safeguarding, counter-extremism, free schools, university technical colleges, the curriculum and general education. The register will initially only include a maximum of 200 experts, but may be reopened in the future, the tender document states.

When *FE Week* enquired about the decision to have no FE-specific representation in the six categories, a DfE spokesperson claimed it would be covered in “general educational”.

He said further tender documents state that this category has a subsection for FE and sixth forms, vocational education and studio schools.

Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said the planned £10 million register was a waste of taxpayers’ money.

“If the government’s education policy was coherent and well-thought-through, they would not need to throw taxpayers’ money away on experts employed to put a spin on the problems they have caused,” he said.

“To avoid yet more mistakes and to ensure that children and young people get an education system that works, the DfE should be seeking advice from the teaching profession.”

FE Week’s sister paper Schools Week revealed last year that the DfE spent almost £100 million on advice for these projects in just three years.

The new register of external experts will encourage applications from those “with a broad range of experience and expertise” from England’s nine regions.

However, appointment to the register will not guarantee the award of any work, but will allow advisers to “bid for specific work opportunities made available by the DfE”.

Top-slices should be higher for ‘risky’ subcontractors, according to the AoC

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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Prime providers should demand a higher top-slice from “risky” subcontractors to reflect the extra work that comes with them, according to new subcontracting guidance from a leading FE body.

The Association of Colleges’ guidance, published on October 22, tells main providers that “risk is a key assessment factor when determining fees and charges” and should be assessed “in addition to all due-diligence checks”.

Other FE representative bodies have warned that providers should not be working with any subcontractor deemed to be a risk, but the AoC’s head of policy, Teresa Frith, has insisted the policy is sensible for providers who are having to spend more time and money with subcontractors with whom they have less of a relationship.

She told *FE Week*: “The amount of money you charge should reflect the level of risk, which should in turn reflect the amount of provision and support you provide to that subcontractor.

“In the whole of the apprenticeship world now, it is not in any way one-size-fits-all. It’s supposed to fit the circumstance you find yourself working with.

“If I don’t know you the risk of working with you is much higher for me. Because I am the main provider, I’m the one exposed. It’s my responsibility to spend the money wisely.”

She added: “It’s certainly not saying ‘just charge more because you can because they’re higher risk’. The service you provide has to reflect the risk.”

The guidance document said risks could include the duration or value of the contract, its geographical spread, previous track record and the qualifications and turnover of a subcontractor’s staff, and main providers need “a method of scoring risks in order to determine how the level of risk exposure is reflected within the fees and charges offered for each subcontract”.


Teresa Frith

In March, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Collab Group and HOLEX put their names to best-practice guidance on subcontractors, which included a stipulation that management fees charged by main providers should not be more than 20 per cent of the programme funding.

FE Week has discovered many examples of colleges charging much bigger top-slices in recent years.

Stephenson College, for example, charges up to 57 per cent management fees, and John Ruskin College charged 39 per cent on average in 2016/17.

Five other colleges charged top-slices of over 30 per cent in 2016/17.

AoC’s individual guidance states that if the lead provider is not directly delivering anything related to the subcontractor’s provision then “it would be highly unusual for any fee to exceed 20 per cent and generally it would be expected to be less”.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of AELP, said the association was “encouraged” by the AoC’s agreement on the 20 per cent figure, but added: “Our view is that anything above this would suggest a level of risk that the lead provider simply shouldn’t be taking on.”

Sue Pember, director of policy at HOLEX, said it was “reassuring” there was “consensus over the benefits of quality subcontracting”.

“If more than 20 per cent is kept back over management costs, there is a concern that the learner experience will be compromised and a question over why use that subcontractor if they need intensive costly support,” she added.

The guidance document was written with input from bodies including the Education and Skills Funding Agency and Ofsted, but neither would be drawn on whether they support the recommendations.

A spokesperson for the ESFA pointed *FE Week* to its existing guidance on subcontracting, including plans to publish its “final expectations” by the end of the year, but would not comment whether it supported the AoC’s approach to risky subcontractors.

An Ofsted spokesperson said the inspectorate had provided input on how it inspects subcontracted provision, but it was not in its remit to “advise or comment about the financial contracts” between providers and subcontractors.

Ofsted slams private-sector giant BPP for being unaware of apprentices’ ‘slow progress’

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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A huge private university is expected to be banned from recruiting new apprentices after Ofsted warned it was making ‘insufficient progress’, mainly because of managers being unaware of the “slow progress” learners make.

BPP University, part of the global BPP Professional Education Group, was criticised in its early monitoring visit report for making poor headway in ensuring it meets the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision.

Inspectors found that leaders “do not have access to timely, accurate or reliable data on apprentices’ progress” and as a result do not have “sufficient oversight” of apprentices’ progress.

Managers were described as being “too reliant on subjective information from assessors on the progress of their apprentices, which at times misrepresents the slow progress that apprentices make”.

Although BPP managers were said to “make clear to employers the importance of this off-the-job component”, inspectors found that “a minority of apprentices” employed by different companies said they “found it difficult to identify time to be released from work commitments”.

The university has around 15,000 students studying law, business and technology, nursing and health. BPP University turnover in 2017 was £85 million, as one of many subsidiary companies to AP VIII Queso Holdings, based in the USA.

The Ofsted visit focused specifically on apprentices on programmes from level two to level five in professional vocational areas including legal, insurance, financial services and technology.

At the time of the visit on September 26, BPP University had 350 apprentices aged 16 to 18 and 900 adults on apprenticeship programmes.

The monitoring visit criticised assessors for taking too long to intervene when an apprentice fell behind and giving “superficial” feedback on work.

Despite criticisms, inspectors conceded that assessors do well to engage apprentices and have a “broad wealth of specialist knowledge”, with apprentices speaking highly of the “value” they gain from their sessions.

A spokesperson for BPP said the company had not yet been told whether it would be banned from taking on new starts, and that it would continue to recruit until told otherwise.

She said the report “on the whole is positive” and BPP was “disappointed” with the criticisms of inspectors, which she insisted “relate largely to systems that track the progress of apprentices”.

“Unfortunately, inspectors were not able to judge our new tracking system in its entirety, which is in the process of being implemented and which has been successfully installed in our other businesses,” she said.

“We are confident that when it is fully operational it will address Ofsted’s concerns and we look forward to the full inspection in the near future.”

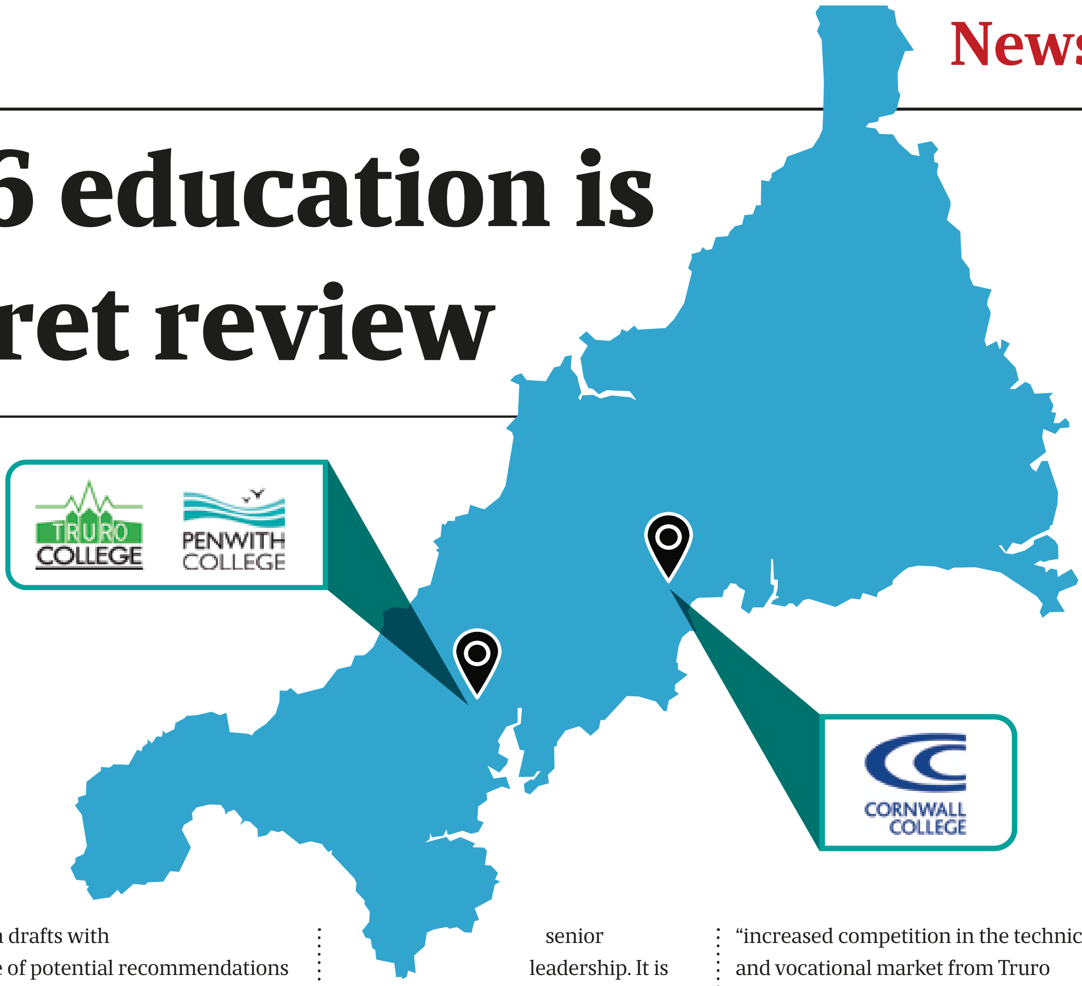
BPP appears on the register of apprenticeship-training providers four times. As well as BPP University, it has the approved providers of BPP Holdings, BPP Professional Education and BPP Actuarial Education.

So far, all 16 apprenticeship providers found to be making ‘insufficient progress’ in at least one area up until October 11 have been barred from recruiting new apprentices until their next full inspection.

BPP University is the third university to receive a monitoring visit from Ofsted, but the first to have been rated ‘insufficient’.

News

Cornwall's post-16 education is scrutinised in secret review



PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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From front | Exclusive

Mystery surrounds a "confidential" review of further education in Cornwall as pressure grows on the region's two colleges to work more closely together.

Glimpses into the workings of the secretive review have come as Cornwall College Group announced the resignation of its principal amid an ongoing struggle to secure emergency government funding.

The review, which began in June, came at the urging of Cornwall Council. *FE Week* understands the council wrote to skills minister Anne Milton to persuade the government to look into post-16 education in the county.

Truro and Penwith College has just over 5,000 16-18-year-old learners, while Cornwall College – which has previously been warned over falling learner numbers – has closer to 3,500.

The secret review comes after an area-review report covering Cornwall, as well as Somerset, Devon and the Isles of Scilly, was published in August 2017 without recommending any mergers.

However, it did recommend "collaboration" between Cornwall College and Truro and Penwith College, including the establishment of "a joint project group with an independent chair to oversee the relationship between the colleges and facilitate closer collaboration".

This closer collaboration was to include the delivery of higher education, apprenticeships and provision for students with high needs, as well as future curriculum developments at the new Callywith College.

"We are optimistic about the future as we go through the fresh start and the post-16 Cornwall review"

"By working together on areas of mutual interest the colleges will be able to reduce unhelpful competition," the report said.

However, this formal collaboration has never materialised, and the two colleges remain as rivals.

The review is a source of concern for Truro and Penwith College, which said its governors were asked by the FE commissioner to "take part voluntarily in a confidential wider post-16 review of Cornwall to assist with ongoing interventions at Cornwall College in their 'fresh start' process".

A spokesperson added: "Some interim drafts with a range of potential recommendations have been produced for discussion at the review meetings. Several of these draft recommendations do not reflect the position of governors here."

More information on the draft recommendations, the reasons behind the review or its scope have not been forthcoming. The Department for Education confirmed it was conducting the review "following a request from Cornwall Council" but would not go into any further details and Cornwall Council would only confirm it was participating. Cornwall College and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership, which is also taking part, would not comment.

Cornwall College Group, which received £4.5 million emergency funding in 2016/17 and £3.5 million in 2017/18, is still waiting to hear if it has been successful in applying for a restructuring grant, rumoured to be in the region of over £30 million.

On Wednesday, it announced that its principal and chief executive Raoul Humphreys was resigning.

In a statement, Mr Humphreys said he was "proud of the contribution that I have made in leading the college's recent financial recovery and getting close to finalising a refinancing package through the fresh start programme.

"To expedite this process, I have decided to step down with immediate effect to allow a new team to implement the next phase of the college's development."

Announcing the resignation in an email to staff (pictured), chair of governors Ian Tunbridge said the board was "optimistic about the future as we go through the fresh start and the post-16 Cornwall review".

The fresh start approach means colleges must commit to significantly changing their business or operating model, including potentially changing senior leadership. It is not clear if the fresh start approach or the resignation of Mr Humphreys – who is the seventh high-profile resignation since September 25 – is connected to the post-16 review.

An FE commissioner assessment summary of the college group, published in July 2017, said Mr Humphreys and the new leadership team were not responsible for the "loss of financial control" experienced by the college under the previous principal Amarjit Basi, who resigned in July 2016 with a £200,000 payout.

The report specifically noted "increased competition in the technical and vocational market from Truro and Penwith College" as one of the key challenges facing the college, and warned that it had a "significant problem" with small class sizes caused by "the specialist and highly technical nature of some of its courses and also the low attainment of a larger-than-average percentage of many of its students".

The spokesperson for Truro and Penwith College said the "close working" between the rival colleges would "follow the outcome of the fresh start process, which will restore stability to Cornwall College".


Raoul Humphreys

Message from the Chair

It is with regret that the Board of Governors of Cornwall College has agreed to accept the resignation of Raoul Humphreys.

Raoul took over as Principal and Chief Executive of the College in April 2017 and has led the College through a challenging time to a point where its finances are significantly improved.

We would like to thank him for his unstinting commitment to the College and for the energy and professionalism with which he has worked with the Board and the College's stakeholders; we wish him well for the future.

The Board of Governors will be seeking to appoint an interim Principal and Chief Executive as Raoul steps down from this role with immediate effect. Raoul will support the transition arrangements until they are complete.

Raoul asked for the following message to be passed on to all staff:

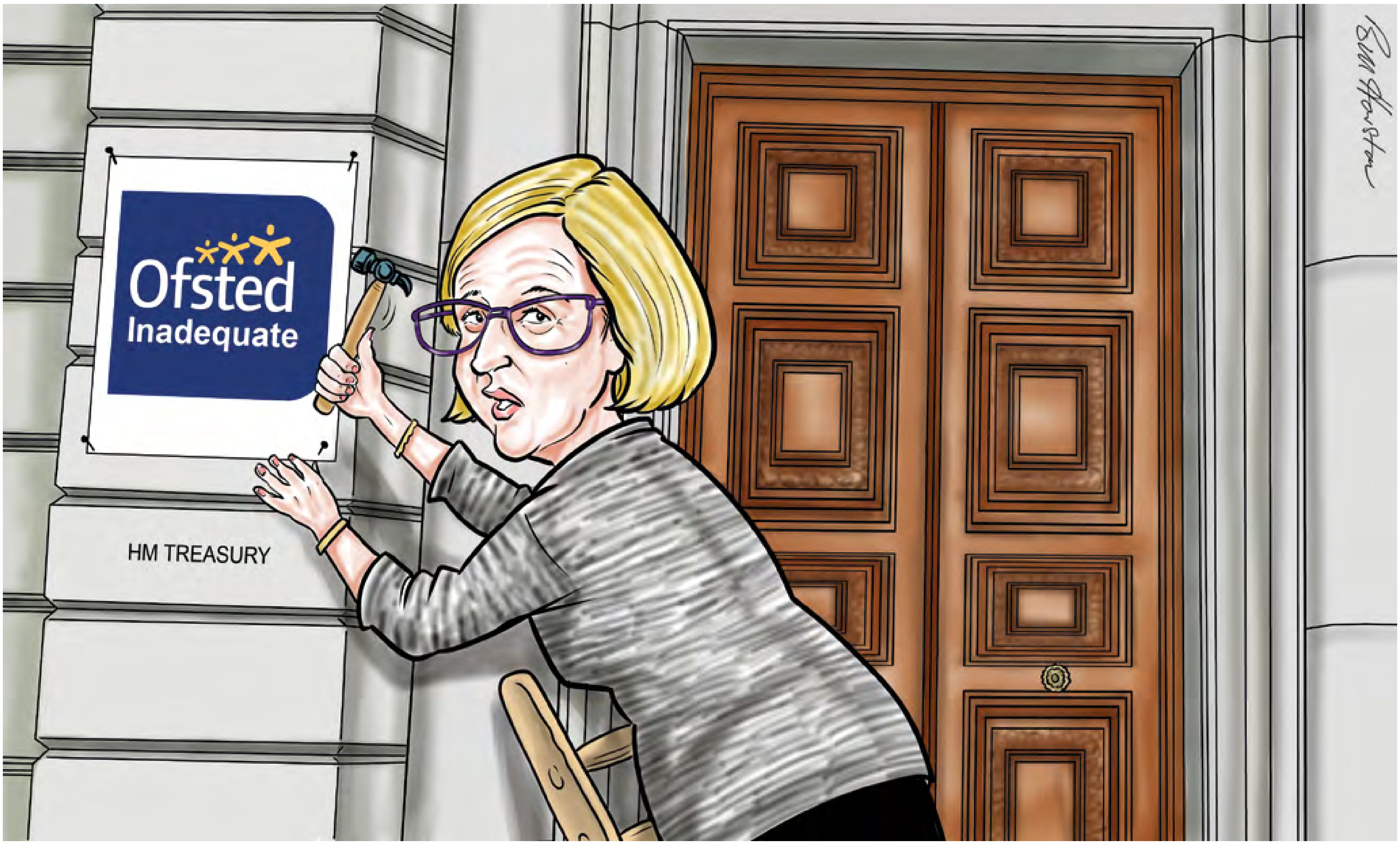
"After twenty four years at Cornwall College, most recently in the post of Principal and Chief Executive, I am proud of the contribution that I have made in leading the College's recent financial recovery and in getting close to finalising a re-financing package through the Fresh Start programme. To expedite this process, I have decided to step down, with immediate effect to allow a new team to implement the next phase of the College's development; this will ensure that the College can continue to provide high quality education and skills training to its local communities to support the development of the regional economy. It has been an immense privilege to lead the College and I have made many great friends over the years. I would like to thank all of those learners, supporters and colleagues that I have worked with, who have made such an important contribution to education in Cornwall and the South West."

The Board of Governors is highly appreciative of everyone's commitment and hard work, and we are optimistic about the future as we go through the Fresh Start and the Post 16 Cornwall review. We will keep you up-to-date with further developments in this regard.

The priority for all of us remains providing an exceptional experience for our learners by focusing on quality, recruitment and finances.

Ian Tunbridge
Chair of the Board

News



Ofsted boss backs calls for more 16-to-18 cash to combat falling standards

BILLY CAMDEN
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Ofsted's chief inspector has offered her "strong view" that 16-to-18 funding should be increased in the forthcoming spending review, after inspections found a lack of cash has directly led to falling standards in FE.

Amanda Spielman backed sector calls for more money in a letter to the Public Accounts Committee, dated October 30, which talked about what Ofsted considers to be "major risks" to the quality of education.

She said that while it "is true to say that spending per pupil in primary and secondary schools has increased significantly in real terms since the early 1990s", the same is "not true for further education and skills spending".

The chief inspector then reiterated her view that the "real-term cuts to FES funding are affecting the sustainability and quality of FES provision", but for the first time said this was now "based on our inspection evidence", and called on the government to take action.

"My strong view is that the government should use the forthcoming spending review to increase the base rate for 16-to-18 funding," she concluded.

Ms Spielman's remarks follow disappointment across the sector that this week's Budget from chancellor Phillip Hammond offered no more funding for FE (see page 6).

FE Week asked Ofsted for the evidence the chief inspector was referring to in her letter. The watchdog pointed us towards three reports – one from 2016, which rated the college as 'outstanding', and two from 2015, where both providers were rated 'good'.

All three spoke briefly about stretched resources, but none actually said quality had reduced because of funding issues.

"Individual inspection reports may not detail examples where quality has been directly affected by funding as that is not part of the framework," a spokesperson said.

"However the chief inspector's comments are based on the aggregation of our inspection evidence, our published reports and our insights."

> "Government should use the forthcoming spending review to increase the base rate for 16-to-18 funding"

She added: "Many colleges are in a fragile financial situation, as reflected by the number that are currently in financial intervention or receiving exceptional financial support.

"Over time our evidence shows that many colleges have reduced the teaching time allocated to some programmes of study, reduced the number of teaching and/or support staff employed, reduced the number of courses offered and reduced the amount of enrichment or extracurricular activity provided. These measures all have an impact on the provision offered."

Ms Spielman has previously admitted that colleges "have the biggest funding challenge" and said that Ofsted has seen "disappointing outcomes" in FE.

During her speech at the launch of the Ofsted annual report in December 2017, she said that the "sector will continue to struggle" without an increase in the base-rate funding for this age group.

The report showed that the overall ratings at general FE colleges plummeted for the third year running, and that just 69 per cent of them were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in 2017.

The sector can expect Ms Spielman to say more on the struggles that FE is facing because of a lack of funding in Ofsted's forthcoming annual report for 2018, which is due out on December 4.

A report from the Institute of Fiscal Studies last month found government funding for 16-to-18-year-olds has been cut "much more sharply" than funding for pupils in pre-school, primary, secondary or higher education.

The base rate for all 16-18-year-old students has been cut twice since 2010 and frozen at £4,000 per student, per year since 2013.

BISHOP BURTON College

protocol

Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality

Salary £75,000 plus accommodation, relocation package and benefits

Bishop Burton College is a successful specialist Further and Higher Education College. We have campuses in East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire and were graded Outstanding by Ofsted for our residential provision and Good in 2017 for our Further Education & Skills inspection. We have recently been awarded the Investors in People Gold Standard for the third time and the College has a strong culture of enterprise and commercial success. With a turnover of £25m, we offer impressive vocational facilities.

We are now seeking a Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality who will be responsible for shaping the development and future direction of the curriculum; fostering a culture of innovation and ultimately driving up standards. You will be results driven, with the leadership and management experience to influence both internal and external stakeholders and to motivate and inspire staff to fully engage with quality improvement.

This role will be both challenging and diverse, requiring the successful candidate to translate the College's vision into successful implementation. You will demonstrate a track record of delivering significant quality improvements within the education sector and will demonstrate experience of developing curriculum and programmes to meet stakeholder needs. You will be knowledgeable on funding and college finance.

This is a fantastic opportunity to work in a dynamic commercial environment and if you feel you have the expertise to make a significant contribution to our continued success, including our aspiration to be outstanding, then we would like to hear from you.

Closing date: Monday 19th November 12pm

Final selection will be held at the college on Thursday 13th and Friday 14th December 2018

For an informal discussion about the post contact Protocol's David Beynon 07970 042334 or Yvette Lloyd-Quinton 07795 256470

To apply visit the Protocol/Bishop Burton microsite at www.protocol.co.uk/bishopburton and download the assignment brief and submit your application.

EKC GROUP

Deputy Principal Further Education Broadstairs College

Salary: Fixed at £55,000 per annum
Location: Broadstairs
Hours: 37 hours per week, 52 weeks per year
Job Reference: 181000014883
Annual Leave: 38 days per year plus bank holidays

EKC Group are seeking a Deputy Principal for Broadstairs College.

Responsible for supporting the Principal in the senior leadership, management and development of Broadstairs College you will ensure the highest standards of provision, the best student experience and the maximum success for our students. In doing so you will lead and develop a range of Department Heads whilst driving forward the future strategic Vision for Broadstairs College.

We are looking for a strong leader who is happy both supporting strategic developments as well as getting into the operational elements of running vibrant further education provision.

Please note, a fully completed application is required in all cases. If you require assistance please email **nhill@eastkent.ac.uk**

We are committed to the 'safeguarding' of all our students and staff. This means everyone who works here is required to actively protect them from preventable harm. Our recruitment and selection process includes checks to ensure you will carry out safeguarding duties, and in your application you are required to demonstrate how you meet the Colleges requirements. We are also committed to complying and implementing the Prevent agenda.

To apply, please visit http://www.ekcgroup.ac.uk/content/jobs
Closing Date: 12th November 2018

The City of Liverpool College

HEAD OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

£45,732

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The role is accountable for teaching, learning and assessment across all provision types and levels of study. As a member of the leadership team in 'the college for business' you will ensure that professional development opportunities allow all college staff to respond to economic priorities and drivers for growth, supporting employers in creating a skilled workforce across the region. The post holder will have proven success in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and therefore student performance. The successful candidate will hold a recognised teaching qualification and have extensive knowledge of evidence based practice and current quality assurance policies.

The college offers a wide range of benefits, including generous holiday entitlement, pension scheme, and flexible working hours.

We are an equal opportunities employer and welcome applications from all suitably qualified persons regardless of their race, sex, gender, gender reassignment, disability, religion/belief, sexual orientation or age. We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and adhering to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The College Group actively participate in the Two Ticks – Positive about Disabled People scheme.

For more information and to apply for this role please go to: 'The College' 'College Jobs' at: **www.liv-coll.ac.uk** where you can complete your application online

Closing Date: **13th November 2018, 23.45**

New College Swindon

Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Quality
Vice Principal, Finance and Resources

Attractive remuneration package
Swindon

New College Swindon is a highly successful College based in the heart of Swindon, one of the fastest growing towns in the UK. With over 10,000 learners, a 'Good' Ofsted outcome and strong finances, we are well placed to develop our offer beyond our highly successful 16-18 year-old A-level and vocational market and grow our provision to the communities of Swindon and beyond. With a new Principal and newly formed executive leadership team, this is an ideal opportunity to join the College and help us accelerate our journey to excellence.

New College is now seeking to appoint a Deputy Principal who will be responsible for a full review of our curriculum to meet the needs of a broader range of learners, partners and stakeholders. An experienced senior leader, you'll bring a sophisticated understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Further Education colleges. You should have a proven track record as a strategic leader who can execute high quality curriculum innovation and delivery across the college.

The College is also looking to appoint a Vice Principal who will be responsible for leading corporate services as well as having responsibility for the finances of the College. An experienced senior leader, you will have a proven track record in financial strategy and leading teams through periods of development and change. You do not have to have a background in further education but will need highly developed communication skills, an understanding of complex funding structures, a commercial outlook and be committed to the values of the College.

Both positions are part of the Executive Leadership team, and will play a crucial role in formulating the strategic direction of the College.

To find out more, please visit www.newcollegeswindonappointments.com
For an informal and confidential discussion, please contact our advising consultants at GatenbySanderson: Paul Aristides on 020 7426 3987 or Victoria Wakerley on 020 7426 3977.
Closing date is Monday 5 November 2018.

GatenbySanderson

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- Develop your career in education
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illustration by Lucy Vigrass

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News

EDITORIAL

Why is the sector celebrating greater dependence on the public purse?

In the past, the government paid 50 per cent of the costs towards the training of apprentices aged 19 and over. This rose to 67 per cent during the trailblazer pilot, then it rose again to 90 per cent in May 2017 once the new system was rolled out across England. Now, to stimulate more demand from smaller employers, it is to rise to 95 per cent, in a surprise policy change announced by the Treasury this week. In practice, this means employers will be contributing just five per cent of the costs towards apprentices for all new and existing staff, at all levels from two to seven.

Mark Dawe, the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers was "ecstatic" at the decision. It certainly is a significant concession, although AELP had been campaigning for the complete scrapping of employer fees and only at level two and three.

My own view is that reducing employer fees just 18 months into the programme is a mistake for four reasons:

1. Most providers admit that the employer co-investment requirement isn't the biggest problem holding back starts. When surveyed, just 14 per cent of delegates at the AELP autumn conference this week said it was the biggest problem, compared with 37 per cent for the off-the-job training requirement. And, where fees are found to be holding back starts, what evidence is there that halving a £500 fee to £250 would change employer behaviour?

2. Tinkering with the co-investment fee damages the benefits of stability in the system, something most in the sector claim to want. It sends the message that, if employers hold out a little longer, the government will simply drop the fee all together.

3. Shifting the funding balance further away from fees in this way makes providers more dependent on public money for survival. Surely no business would want more eggs in that basket at present? It's also forcing providers to turn away income from fees to be replaced with government funds, something the National Audit Office calls "dead weight".

4. Management courses for existing staff become even cheaper for employers. For example, an £18,000 MBA employer fee will fall from £1,800 to just £900. Nobody can explain to me why the public paying the remaining £17,100 is good value for money.

If the ESFA wants to be sure a fee cut will stimulate demand, they should simply pilot it at the lower levels in sectors with a high proportion of small employers, such as hospitality and childcare. It would also be wise, as with most price cuts designed to stimulate sales, to call it a promotional offer that lasts for a limited period.

There are also critical details about the fee cut that have yet to be determined. Such as when it would apply from and whether it would include levy-paying employers without funds in their account.

Employers should be willing to pay for high-quality training and history has shown that virtually giving it away has never ended well.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply

EMAIL TWITTER FACEBOOK WEBSITE

DfE figures shoot down UTCs' 'incredible' destinations claims

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose...
Yet again, UTCs are shown to be expensive wastes of taxpayer money. Close them down now!!
ironpyrite

The story is beginning to unfold, but it is difficult to keep up with the pace.

Yesterday it was about changing the recruitment age, today it is about questioning destination data. More "smoke and mirrors"! Recruitment, retention, achievement/outcomes, quality trained staff, tutorial support, balanced programmes of study – destinations that are meaningful and sustainable will take care of themselves.
When will those responsible for this vanity project be held accountable?

When will the same level of effort, support and funding be put in to the FE system that already exists throughout the UK, and should be the sector to provide real solutions for the future?

I just hope the "interference" that has led to college mega-mergers, and recently some high-profile resignations, is not another "crazy" initiative that has not been thought through properly.

Changing the "name" is not necessarily going to be a quick fix

Gerry

A definition of incredible can be "difficult or impossible to believe" or "not credible" or "hard to believe".
Seems it was an accurate description. Perhaps the fault lies with the interpretation of what was said.

Doug

ESFA reveals plans for tougher RoATP

Funny how everyone goes on about employer-led, Keith Smith isn't going to give employers one ounce of control neither is IFA, the weight of bureaucracy is killing the new model through ongoing tinkering a lack of objectivity and a control culture

@timbucksto

Putting in additional barriers to entry will make the market function less well and will not serve quality in the long run.

@corndel_ceo

Common sense prevails – good idea.

@marches_skills

Ofsted boss backs calls for more 16-to-18 cash to combat falling standards

I certainly agree that FE needs more money, however, are the problems purely down to cash-strapped colleges or are there underlying problems?

@Eduk8Stoke

Is there no end to Ofsted's powers of perception?

@RossMidgley

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Boss of another struggling college steps down with immediate effect

I'm not sure if we're seeing an integrity-driven surge in "top" leaders feeling they can no longer carry out the job they're paid to do, to the standards required, which incidentally, haven't changed in some time, or a lot of ship-jumping when the rocks are spotted, but it's very annoying!

Noel Johnson

Experts

PROF SANDRA MCNALLY

Director of the Centre for Vocational Education Research at LSE and Professor of Economics, University of Surrey

We face major challenges as a country so must invest in skills

With per-pupil spending in post-16 education down in real terms, research shows that educational outcomes will get worse, especially for those students from disadvantaged backgrounds, warns Sandra McNally

This was certainly not a budget for FE or education generally. No additional money was given or promised (apart from a token gesture for schools). This is despite hard evidence that funding per pupil has been falling in real terms and that post-16 education has fared worse than any other area of education. The latest education spending review by the Institute for Fiscal Studies gives a comprehensive overview, focusing on FE in particular.

Falling funding has real consequences for learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have shown this in relation to schools, with a scientific design that enables us to get at causal impacts of changes in expenditure on outcomes. Depressingly, we should expect educational outcomes to get worse in the future because of this neglect.

This is something the country can ill afford to do. The OECD survey of adult skills (PIAAC) shows that England is one of the only countries where the skills of young adults are no better than those of their grandparents' generation. How is the country supposed to cope with major challenges – Brexit, the desire for lower immigration, artificial intelligence and other new technologies – if it doesn't increase investment in education and skills?

In FE, the answer can't only be T-levels and apprenticeships. The former are aimed at those ready for level 3, whereas many school leavers are not (most of whom go to FE colleges).

The latter are supposed only to be for those making the transition from school to the labour market or for those training for a completely new job. Research by Steve McIntosh and Damon Morris at the Centre for Vocational Education Research shows that apprenticeships are more beneficial (in terms of future earnings) for younger people than for those already established in the workforce.

> "The skills of young Britons are no better than those of their grandparents"

Furthermore, there are many people who need training, for whom an apprenticeship is not a suitable vehicle or who are not eligible for one. It is well established that adult training has been falling generally (see work by Francis Green and CVER).

It would be good to see more creative thinking about how to increase skills in the workforce through other policies. For example, the Treasury could create incentives for training through human-capital tax credits, as they do with tax credits for research and development. A CVER briefing note has made that case.

The Budget did have something to say about apprenticeships. Small and medium-sized enterprises will now have to contribute 5 per cent to the direct costs of apprenticeships rather than 10 per cent (with the government paying the rest). This does seem a move in the right direction. However, government support only covers the direct cost of off-the-firm training. But as Hilary Steedman points out in a CVER paper about car services, technical apprenticeships make heavy demands on small firms. Even funding the full direct costs of off-the-firm training would not be enough on its own.

The Budget has also made provision for large firms to transfer some of the support they receive (though digital training accounts) to firms in their supply chain – increasing this from 10 per cent to 25 per cent of their allocation. It will be interesting to see how many firms actually make use of this sharing facility.

To the extent that this provides incentives for employer cooperation that goes beyond a (rather limited) transfer of government support, this might prove worthwhile. Otherwise, it seems rather inefficient and obtuse compared with a direct mechanism for which any non-levy payer might apply for additional government support from unused levy funds.

MARK DAWE

Chief executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Functional skills is not a 'second rate' qualification

It is vital that functional skills count towards the 20 per cent of time required to be learning off the job within an apprenticeship programme, according to Mark Dawe

There was no budging the secretary of state at the Conservative party conference on the issue of GCSE resits for English and maths, and you have to wonder what hold Nick Gibb has over him. In direct answer to a question from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Damian Hinds said the government had no plans to abandon the mandatory requirement for 16- to 18-year-olds to try to achieve a good grade if they stay on in sixth form or college. And try they do; we hear stories of students making as many as seven brave but hugely demoralising attempts to pass.

Ministers evidently think this is still worthwhile. This summer, with the support of some inspiring tutors, 30,000 resit students achieved a good grade in maths, which was a truly fantastic effort. But sadly, another 100,000 failed – a pattern which has largely repeated itself over the past three years.

For what? It's not like requiring a driving licence to legally drive. In the case of GCSE English and maths, we now have an alternative means of progression in the form of robust functional skills curriculum and assessment, signed off by the Department for Education itself. When we pointed this out to Mr Hinds, a youth charity bizarrely tweeted that employers would never recognise these "second rate" qualifications, but over the past three years, many businesses on the apprenticeship trailblazers, including big household names, have been perfectly happy to see them incorporated into apprenticeship standards. In fact, the many employers who understand the curriculum believe functional skills is far more relevant to the workplace than someone achieving a pass at GCSE with 20 per cent of the marks.

When AELP calls for the end of compulsory resits, it is only the compulsory element that we want gone. Students should still be given the choice to resit and with robust initial assessment, those 30,000 (and more) could still be steered towards GCSE, while the rest of the cohort would be supported to do a more relevant functional skills programme and – guess what – be motivated in maths and English as well as their main programme of learning.

> "Many employers believe functional skills is far more relevant to the workplace"

The continuing high costs and very limited impact of the resits policy has prompted AELP to make a written submission (http://bit.ly/2SmsSmk) to the skills minister on functional skills. In addition to calling for the resits policy to be adjusted, we are asking for the learning of functional skills to count towards the 20 per cent of time required to be learning off the job within an apprenticeship programme. Providers are feeding back that would-be apprentices who do not possess functional skills are less attractive to employers as the learning of them does not count towards off-the-job training. This comes on top of the challenge of actually employing someone who initially does not have the appropriate maths and English. We believe the Education & Skills Funding Agency rules should be amended as soon as possible.

For years, the funding for functional skills has been set at £471 per learner for apprenticeships, whereas the equivalent classroom teaching of English and maths attracts a rate of £724.

Our research highlights that the funding allocated to functional skills does not cover the costs of supporting a learner. With the more challenging curriculum and assessment on the horizon – due to start in September 2019 – the lower funding is even more inappropriate. It acts as a further disincentive to recruit apprentices who require maths and English, and it will continue to do so if the funding bands on apprenticeships are revised downwards by the Institute for Apprenticeships.

Doing something about functional skills and GCSE resits is another example of where fine words need to be backed up by concrete action from the corridors of power, and we look to Anne Milton, minister for skills and apprenticeships, to drive this. And one final point; let's end this utter madness that intermediate apprentices are forced to sit level 2 even if they are not prepared and then fail, when they only need level 1 to pass.

Experts

TOM BEWICK

Chief executive, Federation of Awarding Bodies

A bonfire of qualifications may turn out to be a damp squib

Take the politics out of funding vocational qualifications and trust in the technical expertise of the bodies that have been set up by parliament to regulate and fund them, urges Tom Bewick

Remember the "bonfire of the quangos"? In 2009, David Cameron pledged his future administration would put on a Guy Fawkes night to remember; as his coalition government set about reducing around 900 quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations – the definition of a quango.

Nearly a decade on, the Institute for Government estimates that 600 "arms lengths bodies" still exist, with even more public bodies performing various technical functions. Brexit is expected to add many more. In other words, like an organisational phoenix rising from the ashes, we are pretty much back to square one.

Government also talks about reducing the number of vocational qualifications. One lever for achieving this aim is changing the rules around so-called section 96 funding, which sets out what qualifications the taxpayer will support. In the firing line is applied general qualifications, such as BTECs, as they will in future have to potentially compete with a new government backed level 3 qualification – T-levels.

And there is the rub. Both the Department for Education and Education Skills Funding Agency are conflicted in their respective roles. On the one hand, these bodies are responsible for developing and funding a new suite of technical qualification called T-levels; and on the other, civil servants have the role of recommending to ministers which existing qualifications should be considered as worthy of funding in future.

This is like the R&D department of a major company being handed the role of which successful products one of its major competitors should be forced to stop selling. The temptation will always be there to knock out a competitor's products to help smooth the way for one of their own offerings. Which rather neatly brings us back to the bonfire analogy.

Cameron set three tests for the continued existence of a public body. These included whether they offered a precise regulatory or technical role (Ofqual would fall into this category); was it necessary for impartial decisions to be taken about the distribution of taxpayers' money (ESFA fulfils these criterion); and does it fulfil a need for facts to be transparently determined, free from political interference (aspects of the role of the Institute for Apprenticeships would fulfil this requirement).

> "Like an organisational phoenix rising from the ashes, we are back to square one"

To date, we've seen no published principles or tests that the government will be using to judge whether a qualification deserves future funding or not. The department has told the awarding sector nothing about how it manages to handle such an obvious conflict of interest in its role of qualifications developer, in one guise, and qualifications funder on the other.

If ministers were prepared to act in the public interest, they could learn from Cameron's three tests. They should task Ofqual, the IFA and ESFA with establishing an independent reference panel to advise them on the future of section 96 funding. This would include not only technical experts on qualifications, but the consumers of the current system – employers and learners – who could help dispassionately work out what remains of value for taxpayer support and what might cease to sit on the funding framework in future. It is worth highlighting that nearly 8,000 of the 12,751 VTQs who sit on the section 96 register were approved, after the Wolf Review, under the current government (England only).

The reason we see such a complex vocational qualifications landscape is because our country operates in a complex and highly segmented economy. Applied generals offer students career-focused education and progression onto an array of valuable routes. If they didn't, the market would not support them.

Of course, we need a world-class technical route via T-Levels. Minster Anne Milton made that clear recently. But we also need to take the politics out of funding vocational qualifications and trust in the technical expertise of the bodies set up by parliament to regulate and fund them. The reason why the "bonfire of the quangos" experiment failed was because, in the end, society had a need for their existence. The same is true of many of our tried and tested vocational qualifications.

Jan Richardson-Wilde

News

Movers & Shakers

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

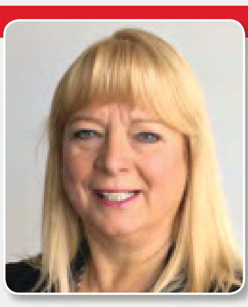
Stella McManus

Deputy principal curriculum and quality, Waltham Forest College

Start date September 2018

Previous job
Director of curriculum, North Hertfordshire College

Interesting fact
After living in Italy in her youth, Stella became fluent in Italian, and developed a profound love for prosecco and eating!



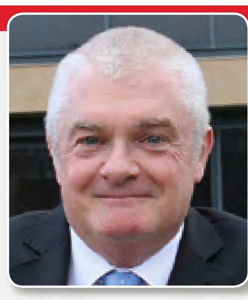
Jan Richardson-Wilde

Deputy managing director, NOCN

Start date September 10 2018

Previous job
Director of quality and curriculum, Interserve Learning and Employment

Interesting fact
Jan once climbed in the Himalayas for a week for charity, and found the experience of life in Nepal fantastic



Martin Sim

Interim principal, West Notts College

Start date October 2018

Previous Job
Interim principal and chief executive, Barnfield College (continuing to support)

Interesting fact
Martin is a life-long Bolton Wanderers F.C. fan who has been attending matches for 56 years

Kirstie Wright

Director of quality, WS Training

Start date October 8 2018

Previous job
Director of quality and curriculum, YMCA Training

Interesting fact
During an extended gap year, Kirstie spent 18 months working as a club rep in the notorious 'Hedonism' resort in Jamaica

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

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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

Solutions: See right

Spot the difference
To WIN an *FE Week* mug

Spot five differences. **First correct entry wins an *FE Week* mug.**
Email your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to: **news@feweek.co.uk.**

Last Edition's winner: Alyson Shields

Solutions

Turn the paper around to check if your answers match - but no cheating!

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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