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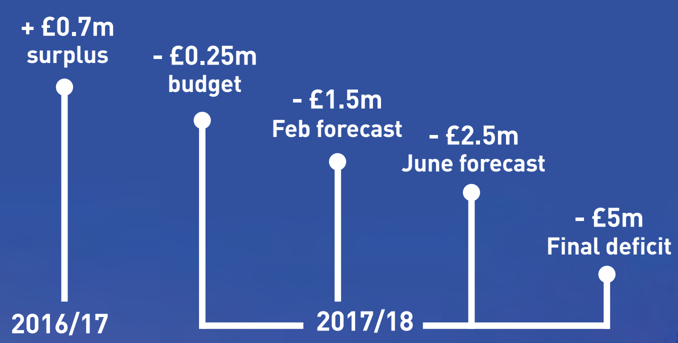
EDITION 269

NORTH HERTS COLLEGE SHOCK DEFICIT

- Forecasted 'small loss' balloons to over £5m
- Three DfE bailouts so far totaling £2.5m
- Insolvency regime a 'principal risk' to cash
- FE Commissioner report 'imminent' following ESFA 'inadequate' rating



Exclusive JUDE BURKE JUDE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

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Exclusive BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

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Approved T-level provider warns of pulling out after DfE excludes private providers from £38m capital bids

FRASER WHIELDON

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News

Cash-strapped college reveals shock £5m deficit as insolvency regime goes live

JUDE BURKE
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From front | Exclusive

A cash-strapped college's 2017/18 accounts have revealed a £5 million deficit, on the same day that the insolvency regime came into force.

The massive shortfall at North Hertfordshire College is 20 times higher than was budgeted at the beginning of the year, and twice what was predicted just two months before the end of the year.

As a result, the college received £2.5 million in bailout funding in just three months, and submitted a last-minute application for an unspecified sum from the restructuring facility.

An FE commissioner report, triggered by the college's request for exceptional financial support in September which also prompted a financial notice to improve from the Education and Skills Funding Agency, is understood to be expected imminently.

The college "generated a deficit in the year of £5.03 million" compared with a £713,000 surplus in 2016/17, while its income fell from a little over £30 million to nearly £24 million in 2017/18.

The deficit includes a £4.3 million overspend compared to income, and a £713,000 loss on the sale of a property.

The college "struggled to meet the budgeted revenue targets set, a situation caused by several factors but most notably the significant nationwide slowdown in apprenticeship starts following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy," the accounts said.

Education and Skills Funding Agency figures show North Hertfordshire had 890 starts in 2017/18, down 29 per cent on the previous year's total of 1,260, and down 66 per cent on the 2,590 starts in 2015/16.

The college received £1 million in exceptional financial support in September, and a further £500,000 in November, while "approval for a further £1 million has been granted and is due in December 2018".

Meanwhile, an application to the restructuring facility in September has been endorsed by the FE commissioner, Richard Atkins, whose team visited the college in the same month.

The college also plans to "secure a significant cash injection" by selling "surplus land", although it was unable to tell *FE Week* how much this was expected to raise, citing commercial confidentiality.

"A new approach has been taken in 2018/19 to managing our cash position ahead of the implementation of the new insolvency regime for colleges," the accounts said.

Nonetheless, the principal risk facing the college is that "we are not able to maintain our target level of cash reserves in light of the new (sector wide) insolvency regime", which came into effect on January 31 and which will allow colleges to go bust for the first time.

"We are now looking forwards," a college spokesperson told *FE Week*.

In addition to the apprenticeship slowdown, the college's recent improvements – which saw its Ofsted grade increase to 'good' in November 2017 – "required considerable investment", she said.

"We have robust recovery plan in place, we are making good progress towards implementing all the commissioner's recommendations and we are confident about our future."

Minutes from the college's board meetings show how the deficit spiralled over the course of the year.

In June 2017 "the proposal was for a budget showing a small loss" for the coming year which the senior management team "was confident could be managed".

Four months later the minutes reveal there was a "risk that this forecast deficit would increase" as part of a "full reforecast" that was "in hand" after Hart Learning and Development – the college's apprenticeship arm – "failed to hit the forecast surplus in 2016/17".

By February 2018 the forecast deficit had increased to £1.5 million.

The original deficit had been £250,000 "but it had become clear towards the end of 2017 that this was optimistic".

The June minutes show the forecast deficit had gone up yet again, to £2.5 million.

The college claims the final £5 million deficit is not comparable. The £2.5 million was "from the management accounts which covers the operational performance of the college only" while the £5 million includes "subsidiary accounts and several non-operational (and non-cash) balance sheet adjustments such as losses on disposal of assets".

The fall in apprenticeship numbers and rising deficit are among a number of challenges the college had to deal with in 2017/18.

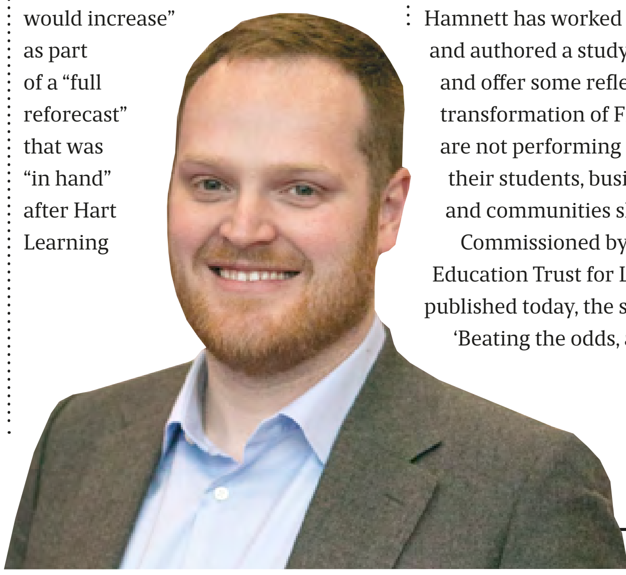
Its former principal, Matt Hamnett (pictured), left the college in November 2017, shortly after the departure of the managing director, James Sowray, of Hart Learning and Development.

Board minutes from the following month report on the outcome of a review into a whistleblowing incident involving Hart, in which they say "income had been forecast which would not now be received" and would lead to a "review of the management structure and culture in the business".

Mr Hamnett, whose £294,000 salary made him the highest paid principal in 2016/17, received £74,000 payment in lieu of notice in 2017/18 according to the accounts.

Since leaving the college Mr Hamnett has worked as a consultant and authored a study "to understand and offer some reflections on the transformation of FE colleges which are not performing to the level that their students, business customers and communities should expect."

Commissioned by the Further Education Trust for Leadership and published today, the study is called 'Beating the odds, and the system'.



Matt Hamnett

OfS board finally has FE representation

FE finally has some representation in the Office for Students.

The principal of Leicester College, Verity Hancock, has joined the organisation's board on a fixed-term appointment for five years until 31 January 2024.

She will be paid £9,180 per annum for 20 days' work – all of which will be paid to Leicester College.

Ms Hancock was previously a national director at the Skills Funding Agency.

There was controversy when the Office for Students board was announced last year without a single representative from FE, despite a large number of students taking higher education courses at FE institutions.

ESFA confirms non-levy contracts extension

The Education and Skills Funding Agency confirmed this week that it is extending non-levy apprenticeship contracts for 12 months from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

The agency will be issuing the extensions at the end of February "to provide stability while decisions about the future of the non-levy system are made".

Growth funding will, however, not be available unless "significant budget" becomes available.

Allocations will be based "on the November (R04) data submission, using providers' current delivery patterns and mix, with a forecast of their delivery from December until March".

The ESFA will confirm arrangements for April 2020 onwards by July 2019.

'Virtuous' and 'vicious' circle of adult learning

The poorest, lowest-qualified adults most in need of training are the least likely to access it, according to new Social Mobility Commission research.

'The adult skills gap: is falling investment in UK adults stalling social mobility?' reveals that those in highly paid, highly skilled professional roles were around twice as likely to have had some form of training in the past year than people in lower-skilled occupations.

The ratio is around 30 to 35 per cent to around 13 to 16 per cent.

The report has been published amid a furore over the rise in the number of management apprenticeships and a decrease in the number of level 2 apprenticeship starts.

News

Over half of 3aaa's former apprentices are still without a new training provider

BILLY CAMDEN
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More than half of the apprentices who trained with former apprenticeship giant Aspire Achieve Advance have still not been found a new provider, four months after its collapse.

The company, better known as 3aaa, went into administration on 11 October after the government pulled its skills funding contracts following a fraud investigation, which is now being looked into by the police.

A total of 4,216 apprentices were subsequently left without a place to complete their training, so the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) immediately began trying to find them alternative provision.

Skills minister Anne Milton has now revealed that only 1,892 apprentices, or 45 per cent, of those affected have moved on to new providers so far.

Responding to a parliamentary question submitted by Labour shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden, Ms Milton said the ESFA holds responsibility for moving on only those apprentices with non-levy employers, of which there were 1,832.

Of these, the ESFA has "approved 1,358 apprentice transfers to 125 high-quality alternative providers".

Alternative provision for 410 of the remaining apprentices with non-levy employers has been found, according to Ms Milton, but the agency is still in the process of "contacting the providers involved to facilitate the transfers".

But 64 of the non-levy apprentices have "notified" the ESFA that they have "successfully completed or withdrawn from their apprenticeship".

A total of 2,384 former 3aaa apprentices were with levy-paying employers. Ms Milton said the National Apprenticeship Service account managers "are supporting those employers to identify new providers".

But, to date, only 534 apprentices with levy-paying employers have transferred to new providers of their choice.

"The department should get its act together," Mr Marsden said.

"It is being slow to get the bureaucracy going to match providers with apprentices.

"There is no point in the secretary of state waxing lyrical, spending loads of money on apprenticeship campaigns if the reality is that when they get into trouble and when the government has the responsibility to deal with that they fail abysmally."

The apprentice transfer figures come after the ESFA warned it could withdraw funding from providers after *FE Week* revealed a few of them attempted to poach staff and apprentices from 3aaa by using underhand tactics.

An investigation by this newspaper found that some training providers were "misrepresenting their position" in an effort to recruit those affected.

Tactics included alleged false claims that the ESFA and 3aaa had asked the providers to take on hundreds of people affected.

FE Week revealed what was behind the government and police investigations into 3aaa in November.

The company, which had 500 staff before it went bust when the ESFA pulled its £16.5 million skills contract, allegedly manipulated individualised learner records to artificially inflate achievement rates by a huge amount and misused employer-incentive grants.

A previous ESFA investigation into 3aaa, carried out by auditing firm KPMG in 2016, had found dozens of success rate "overclaims".

3aaa was co-founded by Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson in 2008, but the pair stepped down in September during the midst of the ESFA's second investigation.

In December, the police told *FE Week* that it hadn't been able to decide whether or not to open a criminal investigation into 3aaa as it needed to wait for the DfE to "complete its work".

At the time of going to press the police said there was no update to this.

Starts suspended at mysterious apprenticeship provider after ESFA launches investigation

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has suspended starts at an apprenticeship firm with multimillion-pound subcontracting deals while it investigates the provider, following revelations in *FE Week* about its shady set-up.

SCL Security Ltd, a private provider based in Kent that is run by Andrew Merritt, has taken £16.5 million from Brooklands College in Surrey over the last three years to deliver hundreds of level three IT apprenticeships, for mostly 16- to 18-year-olds.

It also subcontracts for Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College, with a current deal worth £1.7 million.

But, despite the substantial contracts, SCL only employed eight people in 2017, according to its most recent company accounts, and seven the year before.

It is also not known exactly where the provider trains its apprentices, as Mr Merritt has repeatedly refused to share his delivery addresses despite numerous requests from *FE Week*.

This newspaper reported in November that the government was looking into SCL and it has now been confirmed that a formal investigation has begun.

While the investigation is being carried out, the ESFA has suspended the provider from taking on new apprentices.

Mr Merritt did not provide a comment, despite numerous requests.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "We do not comment on the details of any investigations, ongoing or otherwise."

Brooklands College said it was "unable to comment on behalf of the ESFA" and did not respond to questions about whether it still has a working relationship with SCL.

SCL secured its first direct ESFA contract this year, which totals £1 million and includes apprenticeships and adult education budget cash, bringing it in scope for Ofsted inspection.

As previously reported by *FE Week*, one area of interest to the ESFA will be SCL Security's relationship with a recruitment firm called Workforce Solutions Group Ltd, which is headed up by two brothers who were at the centre of an *FE Week* investigation in 2016.

Paul and Joe Alekna switched the ownership of a successful provider they ran from one parent company – eResponse – to another, before transferring out £6 million, liquidating it, and leaving learners and creditors on the hook for millions of pounds.

Meanwhile, the brothers continued to run another provider called Options 2 Workplace. But when *FE Week* exposed the situation, the ESFA cancelled its contract.

SCL claims on the government's Find Apprenticeship Training website to "operate training centres nationwide", but its own website makes no reference to any training venues – the only address is for a head office in Kent.

However, a Google maps search locates one of their training sites as "9 Church Rd, Redditch" – the same building that Workforce Solutions Group operates out of.

Paul Alekna previously told *FE Week* that Workforce "specialises in temporary and permanent staffing, focusing in the manufacturing, logistics and transport, food manufacturing and office appointments sectors", and insisted "that's all we do".

But he refused to deny that Workforce and SCL Security have a working relationship.

Mr Merritt offered a list of "delivery locations", which includes Hounslow, Greenwich, Ashford and Nottingham.

He said all are "under short-term rental/lease arrangements responding to demand" and the Redditch location was "one such rented room", but declined to comment on the relationship between SCL and Workforce.

He added that the "exact addresses" of the other locations "are known to all learners, staff, delivery partners and all official bodies" but refused to give them to *FE Week*.

Brooklands College also refused to release the addresses of where its apprentices were trained with SCL Security.

News

ESFA delays issuing European Social Fund contracts due to alleged breach of tender rules

BILLY CAMDEN
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From front Exclusive

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has delayed issuing European Social Fund contracts after multiple providers who lost out in a recent procurement alleged that the government broke tender rules.

Winning bidders from the exercise, which was worth £282 million in total, were supposed to be awarded their contracts on Tuesday following a 10-day standstill period, but this has now been extended to 8 February.

The providers complained that the ESFA's tender was botched mainly because the agency failed to score the "track record" section of bids, even though they were expecting to get marked for this.

Their anger was amplified when they were told they lost out to Serco, which won at least £37 million of European Social Fund cash in the tender.

The training provider made losses of £29.5 million in 2017, according to its latest accounts, and is rated "requires improvement" by Ofsted – although this is just for its apprenticeships provision.

The aggrieved providers were also shocked to find out that Learndirect's new owner secured more than £20 million worth of ESF contracts, in conjunction with his other company Dimensions Training Solutions, in the tender.

This was despite Learndirect being hit with a grade four Ofsted rating in 2017 and the ESFA terminating all of its skills contracts in July last year.

"We will take legal action if necessary as these contracts could only have been won through the successful organisation misrepresenting components of their business vehicle to the ESFA," said one chief executive of a provider that lost out to Serco and asked to remain anonymous in fear of repercussions from the agency.

A Department for Education spokesperson confirmed that the ESFA has received "a number of queries from tenders regarding the procurement process" but "no more details can be made public at this time for legal reasons".

She claimed that all European Social Fund contracts were "awarded in line with the ESFA procurement process", but also confirmed that the results of the track record section were not included in the final selection.

The spokesperson said this was made clear to all bidders but refused to say when this communication was.

The aggrieved providers said the DfE "didn't make it clear at all".

"Everyone I know is totally shocked that it was omitted," said the anonymous provider.

"The DfE has fundamentally and substantively changed the process between publishing tender documents and the marking stage, which renders the whole procurement process illegitimate."

A chief executive of another provider that lost out to Serco and also wished to remain anonymous added: "All of our challenges are based on clear breeches in the process and not on decisions.

"For example, financial standing, Ofsted Grade, misrepresentation of business structure, showing that the ESFA have not carried out clear due diligence on information contained in the winning bidders tenders."

The ESF is funding that the UK received, as a member state of the EU, to increase job opportunities and help people to improve their skill levels, particularly those who find it difficult to get work.

The current funding round is worth about €3 billion (£2.3 billion) across England over the period from 2014 to 2020.

England's fund is administered through the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Big Lottery Fund, which each provide match funding.

Documents about the ESF winners, seen by *FE Week*, shows that Serco won contracts in at least six different regions.

A DfE communication to one of the aggrieved providers stated: "I'm sure you appreciate that yours is not the only organisation to have submitted queries. Please be assured that we will not be issuing contracts in the lots where you have raised queries until we have responded to your queries."

Serco, which won 15 European Social Fund contracts valued at £31.6 million in 2017, said it could not reveal the total contracts it has won through this recent tender because the standstill period is ongoing.

But Rob Matts, Serco's head of skills training, defended the provider's track record.

"Serco has a strong track record of delivering high-quality ESF training and over the last two years we have successfully trained more than 18,000 people from over 5,500 different businesses and organisations," he said.

News

DfE guidance for new insolvency regime says colleges should recruit qualified accountants

JUDE BURKE
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Colleges should have a qualified accountant on their board, the Department for Education has said, as the insolvency regime – which will allow colleges to go bust for the first time – comes into force.

The recommendation was included in guidance for governors, published on Tuesday, outlining the new laws and governors' responsibilities.

College corporations would be "advised" to "recruit a qualified accountant on to their board", the document said.

Governors without a background in finance "are not expected to become experts", but "they should familiarise themselves with financial planning and accounting guidance", be prepared to "ask questions" about finance papers and "undertake training if required".

During an interview with *FE Week* in November last year, the FE commissioner Richard Atkins said it was "staggering" that there were still colleges that didn't have any financially qualified board members.

"You've got to have governors who are focused and who include a minimum of two financially qualified people, and they need to be challenging as well as supporting the finance director and the principal to produce the fullest set of management accounts, with robust cashflow forecasts in particular," he said.

A spokesperson for the Association of Colleges said it was "good advice" from the DfE, which would help colleges to "ensure they have people with the right skills on their governing bodies" – but that "it's up to the governing body whether they specifically need a qualified accountant".

"Many colleges have one or more accountants on their board, but sometimes legal or general business experience fill this gap," he said.

The guidance also makes clear that governors have a "statutory duty to co-operate with an administrator, education administrator or liquidator" and face the prospect of a fine or prison term if they fail to do so.

In an expert piece for *FE Week*, published on Thursday, Stephanie Mason, head of FE at auditing firm RSM, said these "potential implications" for college governors had been "less widely addressed" than other aspects of the new regime.

In the event of a college going into administration, "for the first time, the conduct of governors at FE colleges for the three years prior to making the administration order could be put under the microscope", she said.

If governors were found to have allowed a college to continue to trade knowing that insolvency was unavoidable – wrongful trading, a civil offence – a court "can impose personal liability for debts on the governors, highlighting financial and reputational risk for individual governors, and in some cases disqualification as a director", Ms Mason said.

"Ultimately, there may be scenarios where an FE provider has to continue trading to ensure continuity of service until the end of an academic year, adding further complexity and highlighting a fine line between student welfare and wrongful trading."

The DfE's guidance for college governors was published two days before the new insolvency regime for colleges came into force on 31 January.

Richard Atkins

The new laws, first proposed in March 2016, mean that for the first time colleges will be allowed to fail if they become insolvent – rather than being bailed out by the government.

A separate set of guidance, published on Thursday, said that the Education and Skills Funding Agency would be revealing details of its new intervention regime in March.

While "protection for current students in the event of an insolvency being triggered by another creditor is available from 31 January", the department "will not make any changes to the intervention regime until April".

As previously reported by *FE Week*, the exceptional financial support tap will be switched off, but limited in-year support will be available.

Colleges that have "minor and short-term financial issues" can make a "business case to the ESFA for in-year budget re-profiling, on an exceptional basis", Thursday's guidance said.

Six things we learned from the DfE's new guidance

1 Early identification of financial difficulties is vital – so don't "rely solely" on ESFA ratings

College governors are being urged to "liaise with their bank and the ESFA" as "soon as signs of financial difficulty emerge".

"It will be more straightforward to identify appropriate support and intervention if colleges tell the ESFA immediately if they judge that they may be running into difficulties," the guidance said.

Governors are warned not to "rely solely" on the college's ESFA financial health rating as "such ratings do not necessarily take into account all aspects of financial management and the cashflow position can vary quickly and should be assessed monthly".

2 An independent business review could help "head off" insolvency situation

An independent business review (IBR) is the first stage in the insolvency process – and could actually "head off" a college going bust "if conducted early enough".

The IBR involves "assessing the financial and strategic future of the college" to identify a range of options for its future.

It's usually commissioned "where an undertaking is either exhibiting signs of financial distress, has breached covenants on financing facilities or where there is a material additional financing need caused by operational difficulties", but does "not automatically result in insolvency proceedings of any kind".

In the case of the college insolvency regime, it's most likely to be commissioned by the DfE, a secured creditor, or the college board.

3 Governors have a number of duties under insolvency law – and penalties if they don't comply

If the outcome of the IBR is that the college is insolvent, the DfE will appoint an education administrator to oversee the insolvency process.

Governors have a "statutory duty to co-operate with an administrator, education administrator or liquidator", according to the new guidance.

Actions that governors might be required to do include "make out and submit a statement as to the affairs of the statutory corporation, setting out the particulars of the corporation's assets, debts and liabilities" and "lay a statement of affairs before creditors".

Related to this, the FE Bodies (Insolvency) Regulations 2019 lists a number of offences that governors can be guilty of, including "material omissions from statements relating to the college's affairs", "falsification of the college's books" and "false representations".

In each case the penalty could be a fine or a prison term, or both.

4 Student governors won't be treated the same as other governors

The legislation around the FE insolvency regime "deliberately" includes "allowances" for student governors.

"Student governors must take their responsibilities as governors and duties as charity trustees seriously, and these still apply," the guidance says.

"However, it was judged that they might be likely to have less knowledge of the college's financial affairs than other governors of the college and that it would be unfair to put them in a position where they could potentially be fined for not being able to be involved in preparing and submitting statements of affairs about the college."

Student governors also don't have the power to appoint an administrator.

But in "circumstances where student members give false statements" in relation to other offences, they can be held responsible, as "these matters are within their control".

5 All governors could be guilty of wrongful trading

Wrongful trading is a civil offence that occurs – in this case – where governors have allowed a college to continue to operate when they knew that insolvency was unavoidable, and they didn't do everything they could to avoid loss to its creditors.

"Governors must act reasonably and responsibly in the time preceding insolvency to recognise the prospect of insolvency and act on it, making every effort to minimise loss to creditors," the guidance said.

If a claim of wrongful trading is successful, the court "can order a governor to make such contribution to the FE body's assets as the court thinks fit".

6 We still don't know what the ESFA's monitoring and intervention arrangements will be

The new guidance "does not provide comprehensive guidance on the financial monitoring and intervention arrangements for colleges, which are being redeveloped in the light of the introduction of the insolvency regime".

More details will be published "later in spring of 2019".

As previously reported by *FE Week*, "exceptional financial support will no longer be available from April 2019", but a "range of support will continue to be available" from both the ESFA and the FE commissioner's team, guidance said.

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News

Experts warn MPs of 'postcode lottery' for post-16 learners

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Special educational needs experts have warned of a "postcode lottery" for post-16 learners with high needs.

MPs heard evidence on the subject during an education select committee roundtable on Tuesday.

It was part of the committee's inquiry into the impact of the reforms introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014 which, among other things, extended local authorities' statutory duty towards those with SEND up until the age of 25.

Di Roberts, principal of Brockenhurst College and chair of the Association of Colleges' SEN group, said the reforms had helped "raise the profile of the FE and post-16 providers with local authorities", as previously "we were the hidden sector and we were doing brilliant work with our young people but I don't think the local authorities understood".

But Pat Brennan-Barrett, principal of Northampton College, said she was "deeply concerned" about the "postcode lottery of funding, the devolvement of the budget, the interpretation of the language of the code and how it is used".

Her views were echoed by Beatrice Barleon, policy development manager at Mencap, who told MPs that one of the challenges of the reforms was the "implementation across all the different local authorities".

Ms Roberts gave the example of East Kent College, which took its local authority to judicial review "as they didn't feel that the authority was funding them correctly, or understanding".

Through the "perseverance of the principal and the team there" they had agreed a three-year funding deal that "gives the college that certainty about being able to invest, to have the staffing necessary", she said.

That deal was "better than what we have in most places where it's literally one year to the next", she added.

Ms Roberts said official guidance from the Department for Education said that "the majority of young people with EHC [education, health and care] plans should complete their education by 19" – which she described as "totally unrealistic".

The high-needs budget is devolved to local authorities, and "has to be divided between a five-year-old and a 25-year-old" – which created pressure, according to Ms Brennan-Barrett.

After hearing the evidence, education select committee chair Robert Halfon said the picture of post-16 funding for learners with SEND "seems to be a big tangled mess".

UCU members strike over pay in 13 colleges across England

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Strikes went ahead at 13 colleges but were suspended at three others this week in an ongoing dispute over pay.

Members of the University and College Union from across England walked out for two days from Tuesday, but action was called off at Hugh Baird College in Liverpool, New College Swindon and Coventry College after management agreed to reopen staff pay talks.

"Staff have been out in force this week on picket lines across England, in freezing conditions, standing up for their jobs and fighting for fair pay," said UCU head of policy Matt Waddup.

"Colleges must stop shirking their responsibility to their staff. If they want to avoid further disruption then they need to come back to the negotiating table with serious deals.

"We hope this latest wave of action will focus the minds of those in charge at the colleges that are refusing to put their staff first."

Staff are demanding a five per cent pay increase, and are angry over the Association of Colleges' offer in July of just a one per cent rise plus a "substantial pay package" over two years, dependent on government funding.

According to the UCU, FE teachers are paid £7,000 less than their contemporaries in schools.

The fight for better pay was backed by several MPs this week, including Feltham and Heston's Seema Malhotra and Brentford and Isleworth MP Ruth Cadbury, both of whom have visited the West Thames College picket line.

"Cuts to further education funding are having a devastating impact on colleges, staff and students," said Ms Malhotra.

"I fully support the efforts of UCU members at West Thames College in their fight for fair pay."

Ms Cadbury said the government's "heartless austerity programme" was behind the fall in staff wages.

After staff at her local college voted to strike, Oxford West and Abingdon MP Layla Moran said: "It is outrageous hardworking staff at Abingdon and Witney College have been left feeling they have no option but to strike in response to pay cuts.

Harlow College picket line

"This government has decimated college funding, leaving staff pay trailing way behind their counterparts in schools."

Strike action at Hugh Baird was suspended at the last minute, after governors requested more time to ratify a "landmark" pay deal.

Their staff are asking for a salary rise of between three and six per cent over the next two years, as well as an extra five days' annual leave for 2018/19.

Governors promised to meet on 8 February to approve the deal, and if both the union and college are happy following this then the dispute will be resolved.

UCU regional official for Hugh Baird College Nick Varney said: "We are pleased that today's talks have left us in a position where we can suspend this week's strikes.

"We hope to continue the negotiations in good faith and also take scheduled action in March off the table."

Staff at Coventry College also suspended strikes after their leadership team agreed to further talks with the UCU.

Action was also called off at New College Swindon following a "breakthrough" in pay talks.

A three-day strike at the college is still planned 20 March and will take place if "sufficient progress cannot be made in resolving the outstanding issues", the UCU said.

Flagship UTC received huge DfE bailout after being stung by apprenticeship funding cuts

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Exclusive

A flagship university technical college had to be bailed out by the government with a £650,000 loan, after being stung by funding rate cuts and delays to its apprenticeship programme.

FE Week reported last week that the JCB Academy – the first UTC to open, in 2010 – was one of six 14 to 19 technical institutions to receive ESFA bailouts last year, totalling £1 million.

Jim Wade, the institution's principal, has now told this newspaper that the problems arose after it was forced to decide between running its apprenticeship programme on a third of the funding it had budgeted for – or not run a programme at all.

"We were in a difficult place, really, because the choice we had in August was do you turn around to 90 apprentices the week before they're due to start their apprenticeship and say, sorry guys, ladies, we've got no programme for you?" he said.

A subsequent £720,000 funding shortfall led to the ESFA having to step in.

According to the UTC's 2017/18 accounts, it received £650,000 from the agency, which was used to cover a £542,000 net cash outflow, part of an overall deficit of almost £1.6 million.

Its sponsor, JCB chair Lord Bamford, also agreed to up his contributions by an extra £250,000 a year for the next four years to cover the funding deficit.

The deficit "principally arose due to the costs of expanding the apprentice training programme and a lower level of apprentice funding per head than was originally forecast", the accounts said.

Mr Wade said that the UTC, which delivers training for apprentices of all ages alongside its school activities, had previously been offering the level 2 engineering technical support framework.

Because of a funding cut in April 2017, it decided to switch to the new level 2 engineering operative standard – even though the standard was still awaiting approval.

He claimed the funding for the framework was cut by 56 per cent, from £8,853 to £4,000, but *FE Week* has been unable to verify this; its current funding band is £5,000.

Mr Wade said the UTC had 90 learners signed up for the start of 2017/18, and had budgeted £12,000 for each one, on the basis of information he'd been given by the trailblazer group developing the standard.

But when it wasn't approved in time, the school was then forced to register all the learners on the framework instead – which resulted in an £8,000 shortfall per learner.

The loss of income amounted to £720,000, which was a "problem", Mr Wade said.

"We don't aim to make a profit, so our aim with our budget is to more or less break even or create a small surplus," he said.

The UTC has since redeveloped its apprenticeship programme, which covers the costs of delivery, and now has 376 apprentices registered on a range of standards.

These include the level 3 engineering fitter, which has a £21,000 funding cap, and the level 3 engineering technician, which attracts up to £27,000.

Mr Wade said he was "confident" it would be able to repay the money, and wouldn't need any further bailouts.

The JCB Academy, currently rated "good" by Ofsted and with 575 pupils out of a capacity of 728 in 2017/18, is one of the more successful UTCs.

Many others of the 14 to 19 technical institutions – the brainchild of former education secretary Lord Kenneth Baker – have been plagued by problems since they were founded.

Eight have so far shut their doors, with a ninth earmarked for closure at the end of the year.

The majority have struggled financially after failing to recruit enough pupils, while quality is also an issue.

Around 60 per cent – or 21 out of 34 – of those that are open and have been inspected by Ofsted have been rated less than "good".


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News

Great debate on

The motion: This House believes the devolution of the £1.5bn adult education budget

FRASER WHIELDON
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More than 150 FE sector leaders came to the Houses of Parliament on Monday, January 28, for the third *FE Week*-Pearson Great Debate.

The previous two debates were on apprenticeship reforms (July) and T-levels (September).

About £600 million of the AEB will be devolved to six combined authorities and the Greater London Authority from September; the debate focused on whether the policy will be successful or not.

It was hosted by Gordon Marsden, the shadow skills minister, and facilitated by Shane Mann, managing director of *FE Week*'s publisher Lsect.

Speaking for the motion was Dr Susan Pember OBE, of the adult learning provider membership body Holex and a former lead director for FE in the Department for Education. Nick Linford, the editor of *FE Week*, argued against it.

The panel also included Cindy Rampersaud, senior vice-president for BTEC and apprenticeships at Pearson, and Mr Marsden.

Audience members asked questions and offered their experiences of the AEB and the likely effects of devolution.

At the start of the event, most believed the devolution of the AEB would not be successful.

This result did not change and the motion was voted down.

For the motion

"We have to make devolution work," Dr Pember said.

"The system we have now is not serving the nation as it should. We need to do something and we need to do it now".

One in five working adults had low literacy, there was a national skills shortage, creeping concern about automation and an over-reliance on the state - all evidence of an adult education and skills "stall".

Over the past ten years the budget for adult education had been cut by 40 per cent and only 1 per cent of the money for post-18 education was spent on community education.

She said the apprenticeship levy was working, but the activity in the sector was being diverted into degree-level courses, while level 2 apprenticeships struggled.

"Large swathes of our population are feeling left behind."

On the positive side, Dr Pember said, 86 per cent of adult community learning providers were rated grade two or one by Ofsted.

"We do know how to do it if there was more investment, or the funding that is there was provided differently.

"We have a system that is broken and is not getting to the people who need to get on in life.

"We need the new structure to encourage adults back into learning. A structure that is about local planning, local co-ordination and hearing the person's voice. We need local authority services working with providers and employers. Devolution can do that.

"I have real confidence we are seeing great progress. We are seeing the right structures being put in place and the right plans."

> "Large swathes of our population feel left behind"

The Greater London Authority was committed to free courses at level two and below for people on the living wage, as well as the minimum wage. The same offer was available in the West Midlands.

"These plans and structures will give local people a voice on where money needs to be spent and gives us a chance to see the needs of these areas."

She made reference to the upcoming spending review and her hopes that instead of Whitehall departments and large providers responding to the Treasury, combined authority mayors would say they needed extra funds.

"This policy will be the solution to many issues we have now. It will deliver local, lifelong learning strategies, real partnership and real delivery from assured providers and will work with other councils.

"It should give us clear progression routes and help learners through those routes.

"What I'm looking for is something we don't do much in this country: reward learners."

In other countries, she said, local government ran ceremonies to reward people who had done something differently.

"We will have high-level promotion and lobbying like we have never had before."

Dr Pember said it was necessary to look at what was going wrong: participation was falling and local need was not recognised by the national system.

Only a handful of providers worked across county borders.

"You have to think what this does for your area. Learners with low skills will not need to travel, local providers know what they want and combined authorities are bending over backwards to find out what is needed. That sounds good for the future.

"Having mayors champion skills as part of a bigger infrastructure seems a much better vision for the future.

"I'm open to change and change is now needed."

Mr Marsden said there were clear opportunities in new structures of devolution, but the changes had to work for the next 20 years.

There had to be more horizontal, not simply vertical, co-operation. Infrastructure projects should be tied up with local delivery, wherever possible.

Ms Rampersaud did not think it was a matter of "one-size-fits-all" and there was a place for local initiatives.

Against th

"I don't think it will be better than what we have now," Nick Linford said in response to Dr Pember.

He raised the postcode lottery – currently the learner only needed to live in England to access courses, but, once devolved, the budget could only be spent in the combined authority area, which could mean checking whether a person lived on the right end of a street.

Second, he argued devolution would actually mean more centralisation, as instead of providers deciding what courses to run, combined authorities could decide what courses were right for their area.

He raised the example of the Greater London Authority, responsible for 8 million people, which would make decisions for the whole of London.

This had been tried with local learning and skills councils, but abandoned as it could not be agreed what sectors were a priority for the capital.

"I have real issue with the idea this is localism, particularly in London, as the best decisions are made on the ground at the colleges and providers.

"To take it away from them is the opposite of being more localised."

He also raised costs: Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, could not get an administration budget, with the Department for Education instead suggesting he use the unspent AEB to hire administrators to dish out the funding.

The duplication of administration was "horrendous," Mr Linford said. The

AEB devolution

will prove to be a successful policy

ne motion

top-slice of the budget used to fund local administration in London would be more than £3 million as it was still unclear who would audit providers.

Fourth, he asked whether FE funding would be better or less protected if it sat with a combined authority.

"It won't be better than what we have now"

If more votes could be won by using the AEB for something else, as it was not known if it was ring fenced after 2020, combined authorities might decide other forms of infrastructure were more important.

"It does worry me that as the DfE budget gets smaller by devolving, initially £600 million out of £1.5 billion, the DfE will care less.

"The bigger the budget, the more weight you have in a department over how that budget is used and it will have less protection."

Conflicts of interest also needed to be considered: combined authorities, made up of local authorities, were intended to be more transparent, but there were suggestions of favouritism in certain parts of the country. Local authorities would also be bidding for training contracts.

"It can be summed up as a decision that was made at some stage (devolution is not specific to education, it is a thread of policy), but the decision did not have to be made to put the funding into the hands of the combined authorities.

"It would have been easier to give them influence over the local strategy without the responsibility for tendering, contract managing, audit, compliance, financial assurance, funding rules, data returns, data compliance – all the things we spend a couple of hundred million pounds a year on in Westminster to do on behalf of all of us in England are now going to be duplicated.

"There may be some better decisions locally. I'm quite excited by what they are doing in London to move towards outcome-based measures. Some areas will make better decisions than the decisions made in buildings in Westminster.

"But that should be for all of us, not in silos. I think the policy will be less successful than it is now as we are going to spend a lot of money creating a lot of silos, reinventing a lot of wheels and in about five years' time, when I'm proved right, we'll be saying 'why did we do that?'"

WEA says it faces core budget cut of 28 per cent next year due to devolution

WEA boss Ruth Spellman spoke at the *FE Week*-Pearson debate on Monday about the problems posed to the 105-year-old institution by devolving the adult education budget.

"I am hoping the WEA can survive this government, but we are looking at a cut of 28 per cent in our core funding next year," the chief executive of the Workers' Educational Association said.

This refers to an estimate of how much the WEA will lose when the Education and Skills Funding Agency devolves the AEB to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Greater London Authority.

"That does not make any sense because we have 2,000 locations in the most disadvantaged postal codes across the country," Ms Spellman added.

"We need a mix of both the national and local providers. If there is a national initiative to basic digital skills, how on earth are we going to do that through a plethora of different organisations?

"Entitlement needs to be a national offer through a mix of national and local providers.

"We are a national organisation that is incredibly local."

The founder of the Big Issue, Lord Bird, told parliament last April that the WEA will lose about £7 million because of devolution.

The WEA is rated "good" by Ofsted, has a £19.1 million AEB contract, and teaches around 50,000 disadvantaged learners every year.

Ms Spellman continued: "This is about funding the right solutions for the right problem and having a big enough involvement so all adults can get access to education at whatever age.

"There are some great things about devolution and I am absolutely convinced we will survive, because we are so valued and common sense, but it will be despite the structures, not because of them.

Ruth Spellman

"I put my faith in that, rather than a blind adherence to devolution.

"We do need a national education and skills strategy, and we need continuing access to learning all the way through working life and we do need to design a system that delivers that.

"I do not think we should rearrange the furniture when we do not know what system we are to trying to support."

Post-devolution audits still unresolved

One issue raised during Monday's *FE Week*-Pearson debate was the "horrendous" replication of administration that would come with devolving the adult education budget, including audits.

With just seven months to go until devolution kicks in, the issue of audits is still being battled.

The Greater London Authority, led by mayor Sadiq Khan, has been lobbying the ESFA for more cash to cover the costs for over a year.

If the extra funding isn't offered, the GLA fears it will have to top-slice even more than the £3 million from its annual £311 million budget that it has set aside for administration costs – although it cannot put a figure on this yet.

For the 2019/20 academic year, the authority said it will cover the audit costs by using part of its £1,272,282 implementation budget from the Department for Education.

But it is still working out how it will pay for them from 2020/21 onwards.

Board minutes from a GLA meeting in January note that the authority and ESFA are "each responsible for auditing the adult education providers that they fund", but are "considering how the two organisations can work together to achieve cost efficiencies in relation to audit and reduce the administrative burden for the providers we have in common".

The minutes add that the "current offer from the ESFA" for a joint approach to audit, received in December 2018, "does not fully meet our requirements as determined by GLA auditors".

As a result, "further discussions with ESFA to finalise the approach to audit are ongoing, with an in-principle agreement expected to be in place by March 2019".

Audits are one area where the prediction of "horrendous" replication looks set to prove true, and not just in the GLA.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority told *FE Week* it will take responsibility for all audit, financial health checks and due diligence processes for its contractors under a devolved AEB, but will work with Whitehall on auditing providers getting funding from both ESFA and GMCA.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority is also collaborating with the ESFA on joint working arrangements for audit and assurance, fraud and investigations and financial health ahead of devolution.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the Tees Valley combined authorities both said they will be carrying out financial due diligence and performance monitoring, including audit, for the funding they are responsible for.

A DfE spokesperson confirmed it was working with the various combined authorities "to review options in relation to audit arrangements post devolution".

Sadiq Khan

News

T-levels timescale still 'worryingly tig

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

The Institute for Apprenticeships assumed powers for technical education on Thursday and will now lead on the development of T-levels. But will the new qualifications be ready for the fast-approaching 2020 deadline? *FE Week* sat down with the institute's boss Sir Gerry Berragan to find out

Sir Gerry added his voice to concerns that the first T-levels were being rushed out during an Ofqual conference in March 2017, and shared his view that the 2020 timeline was "worryingly tight".

One year on, does the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) chief executive have the same concern? "It is fair to say the timeline is still worryingly tight because there is no real time contingency and any project that is running without any contingency is always going to be tight," he said.

But he quickly reiterated what Jonathan Slater, DfE's permanent secretary, told the education select committee last week: everything is "on track".

"The good news is we are absolutely on schedule," Sir Gerry said. "We've taken this by the horns and managed this thing really, really closely.

"We have a detailed plan and mitigated any risks that we can to that schedule, but it still remains tight."

Assuming powers for technical education gives the IfA authority over the content of T-levels and procurement for awarding organisations.

"We'll be doing what we do for

> **"We've taken this thing by the horns and managed it really closely"**

apprenticeships but now for T-levels as well," Sir Gerry explained.

The technical education brief means the institute will also lead on the content for new technical qualifications from levels 2 to 5, once the DfE has completed its respective reviews.

However, it will still hold ultimate responsibility for the policy areas.

The institute already has its hands full with the apprenticeships brief considering the vast reforms over the last two years, so has it bolstered its team to cater for taking on technical education?

"We're clear to go," Sir Gerry said.

"We've significantly increased in size and created completely new functions in terms of procurement and contract management; we've taken on board the T-level panels from the DfE and the relationship managers that will go with them."


Sir Gerry Berragan

Over the last year the institute's staff numbers have increased significantly – going from around 86 in the summer to nearly 150 today.

This number is expected to increase to around 200 by the end of this calendar year, which will be "steady state".

The institute's funding from the DfE has doubled from £8.6 million to £15 million, and is expected to rise to around £20 million next year to cater for the extra staff.

Sir Gerry says the institute is geared up for T-levels, but he admits there are a few key challenges to making their rollout a success.

"From our perspective, it is getting the qualifications through the approvals.

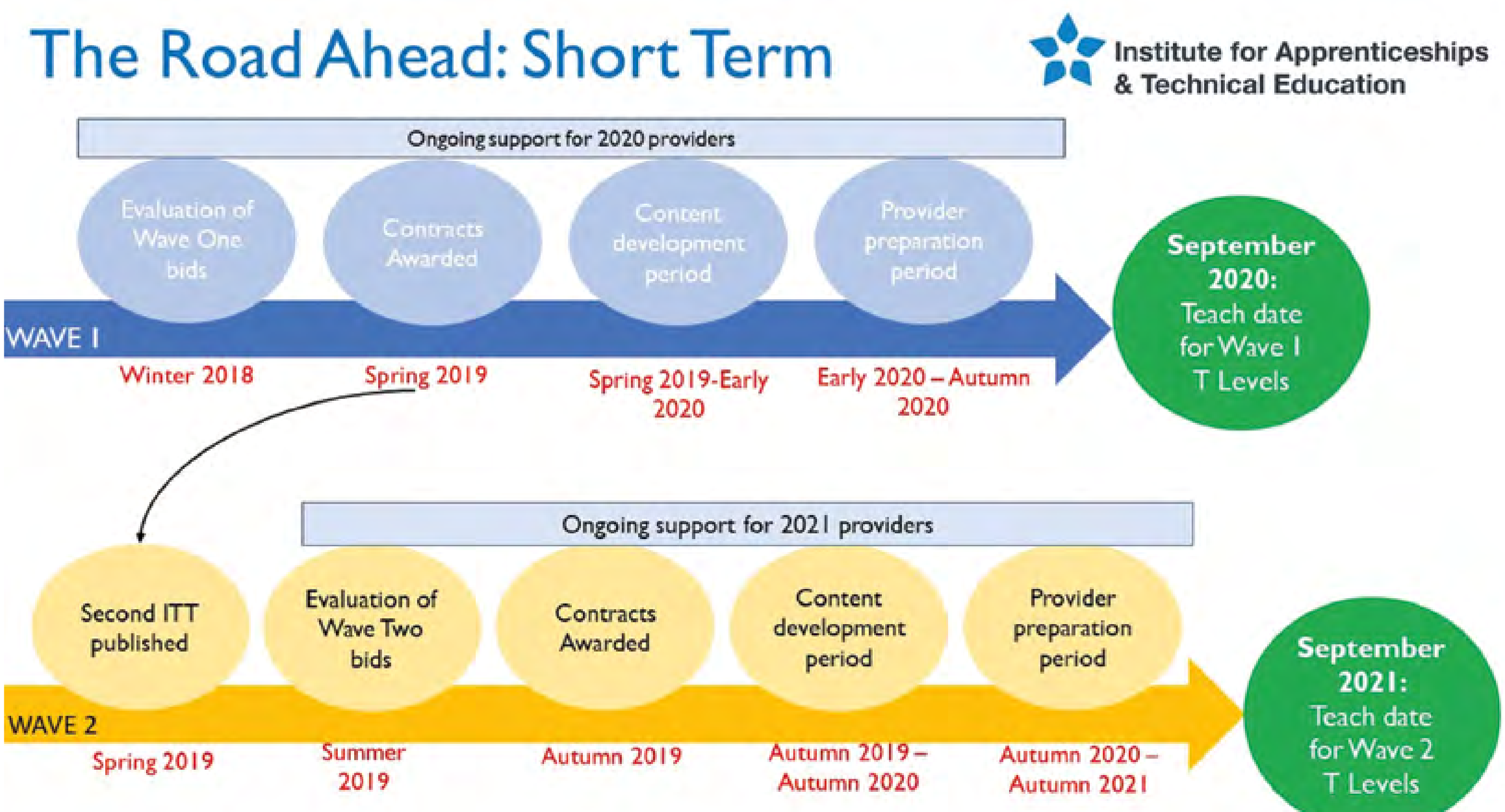
"In a broader sense the DfE needs to make sure the colleges delivering T-levels in wave one are in good shape and they have a programme and money to help them do that.

"We're sharing the content with colleges as it becomes available so that they can get ahead of the game and

> **"We'll be doing what we do for apprenticeships but now for T-levels"**

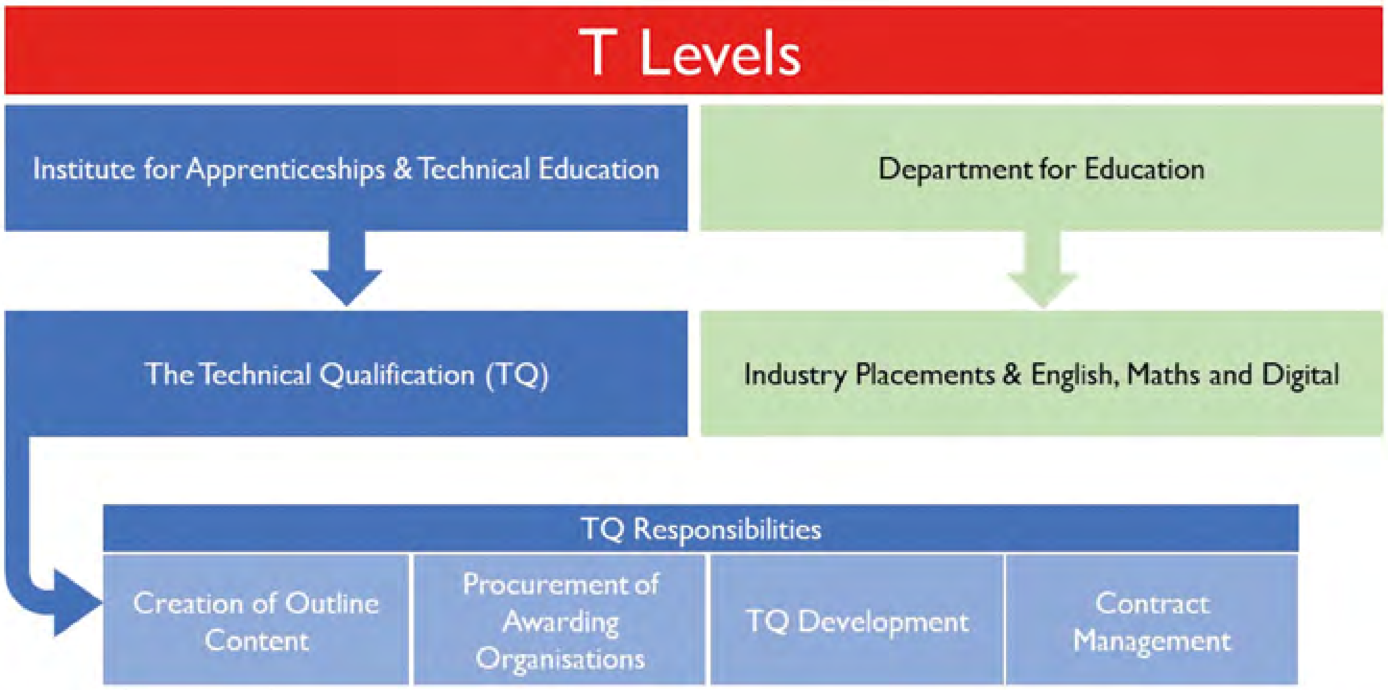
develop the content into a course."

One key milestone that the IfATE has managed to meet is the controversial £17.5 million procurement process for assigning awarding organisations to each of the first three T-levels, which will cover digital, childcare and



T-level roll-out timeline

ht' as IfA takes on technical education



IfATE overview slide of T-level responsibilities

education, and construction.

The Federation of Awarding Bodies threatened legal action against the government last year because of its tight implementation plans including the procurement, which would almost certainly have delayed the rollout of the new post-16 technical qualifications.

But the body dropped this challenge in August after the DfE offered to "reset the relationship" with awarding organisations (AO).

Sir Gerry said the IfATE will notify the successful AO bidders over the next week, which will be followed by a 10-day standstill period before an official announcement in February.

The awarding organisations will then have close to a year to develop the content before it is passed on to providers to develop them into courses and market the T-levels to students.

Sir Gerry concluded by saying T-levels will be "revolutionary rather than evolutionary" as they'll be the "first big major qualification of its sort for some time" and his organisation is ready to step up and make them a "success".

Secrecy around funding band formulas protects against 'misuse', says IfATE chief exec

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Exclusive

The government's apprenticeships agency is not willing to share the formula it uses to calculate funding bands for apprenticeship standards as it fears employer groups will "misuse" it to "inflate their costs".

Sir Gerry Berragan, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's chief executive, acknowledged that it is a "common refrain that we are very secretive about how we do funding band calculations" during an interview with *FE Week* this week.

He said he wanted to tackle this by becoming more transparent about how the costs are arrived at by the institute as they often differ hugely to what trailblazer groups suggest.

"What trailblazer groups sometimes say is that they do not understand why the IfATE made that funding decision and I think we need to be much better at explaining why decisions were made in the way they were and that might include interaction with the route panels," Sir Gerry said.

But the "calculus" is "where we will probably be less willing to be open".

"That is an area where the more open we are, the more danger there is that people will misuse that information to try to inflate their costs," Sir Gerry said.

"We have to strike a balance between being straightforward and balanced, which we want to be, and not being so open that, frankly, it opens us up the system to being gamed."

The IfATE's lack of transparency around funding band decisions has been an issue for many in the FE sector ever since the institute launched, and has led to various appeals and subsequent delays to standards getting up and running.

FE Week reported in August that the institute refused to publicly reveal the recommendations from its controversial first funding band review of 31 apprenticeship standards – although it did share them with the employer groups involved.

The review was launched in May and led to numerous standards being hit with rate cuts of up to £5,000.

The trailblazer group behind three popular management apprenticeship standards in the review was backed by more than 150 employers – including retail giant Tesco – in its fight to overturn plans to slash their funding bands.

The chartered manager, operational manager and team leader standards all faced cuts of between £500 and £5,000, and the employer group appealed on the grounds that the process behind the decisions wasn't "fair and transparent".

The group ultimately lost the appeal.

Meanwhile, the trailblazer group creating three FE teaching standards, which have been in development since 2015, accused IfATE of exceeding its powers last year after claiming their

proposed funding bands were just half what they would cost to deliver.

The group claimed that the recommended funding bands were not "based on evidence and on a formal, transparent process".

The group successfully appealed the decision and two of the funding bands were increased, but it severely delayed the rollout of the standards, which will finally be ready for delivery from next week.

As revealed by *FE Week* last week, the number of appeals against the IfA skyrocketed by 425 per cent last year as a result of the funding band review.

According to minutes from a November meeting of the IfA's approval and funding committee, there were just eight appeals from trailblazer groups in 2017 and 42 in January 2018.

Out of all of the 2018 appeals: 21 were rejected, 13 were upheld, 13 were considered not in scope and three are pending a decision.

The institute is likely to be hit with more appeals this year after launching the second wave of its funding band reviews – of which 30 apprenticeship standards are involved.

News

Provider could pull-out of T-levels after DfE excludes ITPs from capital funding

FRASER WHIELDON
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From front | Exclusive

An independent training provider due to deliver the first T-levels from next year has warned it might have to pull out of the programme after being frozen out of infrastructure funding.

The "ridiculous" decision by the Department for Education to exclude all ITPs was revealed on Wednesday when it launched a £38 million capital fund that the 52 providers in wave one of the new post-16 technical qualifications can access.

The fund is split into two parts – a specialist equipment allocation (SEA) and a competitive buildings and facilities improvement grant (BFIG) – to help build new classrooms, refurbish buildings and upgrade equipment.

But the BFIG is only available to schools and colleges, not independent providers.

Mark Pike, the chief executive of Develop, one of only two ITPs set to deliver the first three T-levels from 2020, said the rule "puts a big question mark" over its ability to offer the qualifications.

"It's just ridiculous," he said of the DfE's decision. "There has been no indication we would not be able to access the fund."

Mr Pike was at a meeting on Monday with DfE officials where funding for T-levels was laid out, but he said no mention was made of ITPs being cut out of the BGIF.

Develop, which applied to become a T-level provider under the name Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership and is set to offer the digital route, had been looking at opening another centre and hiring more staff to provide T-levels, but is now faced with having to instead consider displacing other students to accommodate learners for the new qualifications.

"We knew it will be slightly different for independent training providers, but it was at least an opportunity for us to have more of the opportunities FE colleges get," Mr Pike told *FE Week*.

"But it's an unfair and unjust system now."

The other ITP in line to deliver T-levels from 2020/21, Access to Music,

> **"There has been no indication we would not be able to access the fund"**

has said it is "disappointing" ITPs had been excluded and it is "urgently" seeking clarification from the Education and Skills Funding Agency about capital funding for T-levels.

The chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Mark Dawe, hit out at the "bias towards colleges", which has been "implicit for a long time and now the DfE has made it explicit".

"It's just more money being thrown to colleges when it's the ITPs that are delivering what employers want," he said.

"There have been multiple offers from ITPs to engage their business networks, especially to meet the major challenge of finding appropriate industry placements, but the DfE has been ignoring or rejecting the offers.

"We wish them luck with T-levels, because we think the DfE are taking the same old path ignoring those that can make a difference, and it will be added to the list of failed technical policies."

Providers can receive up to £1.4 million from the BFIG if they are teaching the construction route, a maximum of £650,000 for the digital route and a maximum of half a million for the childcare route.

When asked why it decided to exclude ITPs from the buildings and facilities improvement grant, a DfE spokesperson would only say that all providers for 2020/21 will receive the SEA, but the department has sought to prioritise investment in buildings for the long-term.

On hearing the DfE's rationale, Mr Dawe said: "What a ridiculous response. The Office for National Statistics should investigate because they class colleges as independent of government, meaning there is no reason for singling them out for special treatment."

Skills minster Anne Milton said: "T-levels are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform technical education in this country.

"It will be vital that they have access to the latest, high-quality equipment and state-of the art facilities during their studies.

"The T-level capital fund will help those further education providers at the forefront of delivering these important reforms to be ready to teach T-levels from September 2020."

The first T-level courses will cover in education, construction and digital.

West London College

wlc.ac.uk

DIRECTOR OF QUALITY

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You will lead, manage and develop a team of quality professionals, embedding the College's core values of Excellence, Ambitious, Focus, Accountability, Inclusion and Integrity. Providing strategic oversight for quality across the College, you will have overall responsibility for the management and development of exemplar QI and QA, with a particular focus on excellence in teaching and learning. You will be a completer-finisher and have relentless drive and focus on ensuring that an outstanding quality profile will be realised across the organisation.

THE PERSON

The successful candidate will be a proven leader and manager with extensive experience in the delivery of organisation-wide quality processes and systems. You should be able to demonstrate a passion for teaching and learning and an understanding of how to develop quality processes that support staff to excel in delivering the best possible education experience for every student. You will be able to demonstrate a track record of success and outline the value that you will bring to the College.

With comprehensive experience in business and quality improvement techniques and strategies to raise achievement and the ability to motivate and inspire a group of professional staff you will come to this role with a clear and transparent vision, and be able to deliver the quality interventions that will underpin the College's behaviours and core values. In addition you will be:

- Able to use data and statistics to enable improvements across the whole College.
- Skilled in developing positive working relationships and promoting the College.
- Financially astute, with an understanding of the impact on costs and funding relating to quality improvement.
- Experienced in delivering change along with working in a large multi-site environment.

Our aim is to recruit the best staff possible and to deliver first class teaching to our learners. We are committed to equality and diversity and expect our staff to share this commitment.

The safety and welfare of our staff and learners is extremely important to us and is why we pride ourselves on our Safeguarding procedures.

To apply, please visit www.wlc.ac.uk/your-college/jobs

Closing Date: 10th February 2019

Principal & Chief Executive

Fareham College

Location: Fareham, Hampshire **Salary:** £110,000 - £120,000 **Closing Date:** Monday 11th February 2019

Our Successes:

- "Outstanding" Ofsted November 2017
- "TES FE Awards for FE College of the Year" February 2018
- "Nominated for TES Apprenticeship Programme of the Year November" 2018
- Setting the agenda for improving teaching and learning for post-16 Maths with investment from the Department for Education to develop a regional "Centre of Excellence in Basic Maths" – awarded October 2018
- Fareham College wins Apprenticeship Initiative Award at Constructing Excellence SECBE Awards 2018 in July
- "Awarded T-Level Pilot" – June 2018. Fareham College is one of only 9 colleges in the south-east to be offered the opportunity to deliver the first 3 T-level subjects in 2020.
- Fareham College scoops Teaching Excellence Framework Award in June 2018

Fareham College offers state of the art facilities comprising workshops, teaching classrooms, learning resource centres, restaurants, a theatre, a hair & beauty salon and associated facilities. We operate over a number of sites which are either purpose built or significantly updated and refurbished following an investment of £34m.

In November 2017, the College received an 'Outstanding' judgement in its latest Ofsted inspection, one of only a handful of colleges to have converted to the highest grade in more than two years.

Our success is supported by a team of over 300 academic and business support staff. We work closely with employers to provide the very best technical and professional training to set our students on the path to exciting and rewarding careers.

We are looking for a Principal with proven experience/skills in the following areas:

- Advanced leadership skills - adapting and managing change projects, making difficult decisions whilst still maintaining a motivated team
- Financial acumen to understand key drivers and respond with clear timely and measurable recommendations
- Advanced communication skills and the ability to adapt to different groups, students, employers, politicians, educationalists and Governors
- Student engagement to deliver high quality outcomes and tracking students into employment
- Employer engagement and responding to sector opportunities, including partnering individual organisations and groups of businesses within sectors
- Exploit the reputational opportunities arising from an "outstanding" organisation and deliver growth in student numbers and continually improve quality
- Able to respond effectively in a rapidly changing environment
- Open management style and most importantly a sense of humour - making the experience fun

Interview Dates: 20th & 21st March 2019

Follow us on LinkedIn and view our latest college updates.

For any application queries, please contact Sarah Allen, HR Adviser on 01329 815 394. More information on the position can be found here: www.fareham.ac.uk/college-overview/fareham-college-principal-recruitment/

We are not using agencies to recruit to this position.

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CITY of BRISTOL COLLEGE

Principal and Chief Executive

Competitive Salary

The city of Bristol is a hugely creative, vibrant and innovative city. With large numbers of multi-national employers across a range of industries and a significant creative cluster, our College has made real progress in securing the support of employers and key stakeholders in the city.

We are seeking a leader who has the capability to balance the internal and external leadership demands of this post whilst building a culture where all colleagues contribute to improvement and student success. Above all, our new Principal and Chief Executive must subscribe to our values of integrity, respect, ambition and pride, making those central to their work both within the College and across the city.

We have retained the services of FE Associates to support us with this crucial appointment and interested parties are advised to have an initial conversation with our lead advisor, Matt Atkinson. This can be arranged via Samantha Bunn on 01454 617707 or samantha.bunn@fea.co.uk.

For more information visit the FE Associates website: https://fea.co.uk/jobs

Closing date: **Noon on Wednesday 13th February 2019**
Interview dates: **Monday 25th and Tuesday 26th February 2019**

FEA FE ASSOCIATES

ESP Education & Skills Partnership

ESP is recruiting.

This is an exciting time to be joining a dynamic and innovative training provider. These new roles provide unique opportunities for ESP to become a world class institution and create and grow our apprenticeship offer.

We are currently recruiting a Programme Delivery Project Officer, looking for a solution focused individual who has experience of designing, developing and shaping the delivery of our apprenticeship programmes.

We are seeking two committed and qualified trainers and learning and skills coaches of Leadership and Management to drive forward our portfolio of Leadership and Management and Human Resource qualifications, including higher apprenticeships to meet the demand for skills development and the expectations of our employers.

With the learner at the heart of all we do, ESP are currently looking for an enthusiastic and driven Compliance and Quality Lead to take a lead role in the development and maintenance of robust controls and procedures with the purpose of ensuring compliance with audit requirements to meet funding and external stake-holder requirements, and contribute to improving the quality of, and compliance with the completion of learner files and accurate data recording.

An excellent opportunity has arisen within ESP for a highly motivated, learner focused, inspirational Work Based Learning and Skills Coach to join our team to deliver outstanding provision to our learners and employers delivering apprenticeship programmes including Customer Service, Team Leading, Business Management and Leadership and Management programmes.

To apply for any of the above positions, please email your CV and covering letter stating how you meet the person specification and why you would be suitable for the role to **karen@esp-ac.uk**

For more information on each vacancy, please visit **https://bit.ly/2zKXruk**


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Business Manager
Finance Officer

News

Give employers more time to spend apprenticeship levy cash, CBI urges

JUDE BURKE
JUDE@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Employers should be allowed to appeal for more time to spend their apprenticeship levy funds if the standards they want to use are still in development, the Confederation of British Industry has said.


John Cope

Its new report, 'Getting apprenticeships right: next steps', calls on the government to introduce a process for such employers to appeal to the Institute for Apprenticeships on a "case-by-case" basis for the "sunsetting period" to be extended.

It's one of a number of recommendations put forward by the business organisation to ensure apprenticeships meet employers' needs into the future, as the government seeks to evolve the system almost two years after the introduction of the levy.

The government should "introduce an appeals system for extending the sunsetting period for those employers with standards that are still in development", the report said.

Under such a system, employers would have the right to request an extension on the 24-month limit for spending their levy funds "as long as the business commits the funds" in their accounts.

John Cope, the CBI's head of education and skills, said its "motive behind such an appeal system is that we want to get apprenticeship starts up, and we don't think that employers should be penalised for something they don't control".

The appeals system would come into play where a standard is still in development, and is predicted to take longer to get approved than the time left on an employer's levy funds.

It "would in essence be the employer saying, it's not my fault, can I get my levy funds held – and so commit them – until the standard is in place? At which point then the apprentice can start," Mr Cope explained.

"It is an issue that does come up quite often, and I suspect that it will come up more and more as we get closer to April," he said – April is when unspent levy funds will begin to be lost.

The CBI report also urged the government to allow IfATE to "set its own success criteria for the technical education system – including progression, wage data and the closing of skills gaps – with a legal reporting responsibility for its findings to ministers" and to "set out how in future traineeships will interact and link to both apprenticeship standards and T-levels".

Recommendations for the institute include carrying out a review of "existing standards, to ensure that there is no duplication or narrow programmes" and to "raise its profile with employers".

It should also "ensure it has enough frontline capacity" so that it can make the standards process more efficient, and to "provide full transparency over funding decisions, including the financial models used".

Readers' reply

EMAIL TWITTER FACEBOOK WEBSITE

Learners starting FE loans funded courses falls for third consecutive year

FE students differ greatly many are re-entering education after a significant time spent working. They are generally from a less affluent demographic more acutely aware of the problems loans can bring, unlike an 18-year-old HE student that just sees another source of free money

Mel

More than half of 3aaa's former apprentices are still without a new provider

So are the now-defunct vocational college learners. Closed in April and still yet to be accepted by a prime.

@swood8012

MPs from all sides call for an end to six years of real-term FE funding rate cuts

It's time for FE to review their #usp and provide narrow and deep #richlearning - it's the only way to survive by being an expert in specified subjects and #industry then a centre of #excellent can be created; #learners and #clients will find you. Chasing numbers does not work.

FTA London

Social Mobility Commission report warns of 'virtuous' and 'vicious' cycle of adult learning

Not really a surprise! Time to do something about it...?

Mark Hill

Providers that plan for less than 20% off-the-job training will have 'all funding recovered'

Two points:
1. The current way the field to record OTJ is set up is a farce, updating a single field every month when the ILR doesn't include details of precisely how many contracted hours an apprentice has, means it can't show if they're meeting OTJ anyway, and overwriting a number every month is a nonsense, no other fields in the ILR work in this way.
2. According to recent reports, it's only STATUTORY leave, i.e. 28 days, which can be excluded from the calculation, so if you have learners with 30 or more days annual leave, it's still just 28 days...

Steve Hewitt

It's time FE learnt to embrace the embarrassing

Ruth, you make a great point in this piece: given the appropriate culture, making mistakes can be the best impetus for learning. Given the irony of our central mission as educators, if only those overseeing the system would refer to the research of John Hattie, which asserts that a climate of fear is not conducive to great learning.

Amarjit Basi

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Providers that plan for less than 20% off-the-job training will have 'all funding recovered'

I think that in theory the off the job rule is a good idea. But it does not always translate in to practice and it does not allow for diverse circumstances.

For example, a high level mature adult apprentice who is in a responsible and demanding position that requires operational and strategic management responsibility is more often than not working well over and above their contracted hours – it is expected of them, and their pay scale generally reflects this level of responsibility.

It puts them at a disadvantage and impacts negatively on their choice to develop. It would make sense to allow for an opt-out process for the learner if the 20% rule was impacting adversely.

Jennifer Clough

Experts

MINISTERIAL MUSINGS

Anne Milton, Minister for skills and apprenticeships

We must encourage schools to promote apprenticeships

Too many providers are still being blocked from going into schools to talk about apprenticeships, despite enthusiasm from both employers and young people about the rewards they reap, says Anne Milton. We need to work together to tackle negative perceptions among teachers and parents

Top of the list of priorities for any minister for apprenticeships and skills must be making sure people know about, and can get access to, great further education and training — that's the way to get a good job, go on to further training or progress your career.

At the start of the year, lots of people - particularly young people - will be starting to think about their futures. And as further education and training providers, you are all playing a vital role in this.

I have visited lots of businesses across the country and met and spoken to many fantastic and talented apprentices. What's clear is that more and more people are recognising the life-changing benefits apprenticeships can bring. I have seen the enthusiasm among employers grow as they reap the rewards that apprentices are bringing to their workplaces.

> "Young people need to see the different routes available to them"

But there are still too many people, parents and teachers who are sceptical about technical education and apprenticeships. So it is our job to work together to help change their minds and make sure they know about all that's on offer.

To help with this, we have launched an apprenticeships campaign and website. Our real-life apprentice stars are of all ages and backgrounds. There's Sarah, who is retraining as a nursing assistant in her 50s, and then there is 20-year-old Megan who is training to be a building design engineer at construction firm, Troup Bywaters + Anders. Their stories and journeys are truly inspirational, but they would not be where they are now without high-quality training and that's down to all of you. Please do keep up the fantastic work you are doing and help us make sure more people can follow in their footsteps.

Something that is still of concern is that a year on from the Baker clause coming into effect, there are still too many of you having difficulties or being blocked from going into schools to speak to pupils about apprenticeships and technical education options. As the Prime Minister said in PMQs recently, it is important that young people are able to see the different routes available to them, different routes into the workplace.

If you are having difficulties, please let us know. I want to hear about it and I will intervene if there are clear cases of schools not complying. I have recently written to some of the largest school trusts that have not yet published arrangements for provider access on their school websites to ask them to tell me how they are complying. I will also be writing to all local authorities to remind them that their schools must make sure providers are able to talk to pupils.

> "Unless you get out there, we can't change the culture"

Do make sure you make the most of the opportunity offered by the Baker clause, and by events you attend, to talk directly to pupils about what you do and the wide range of options on offer. We need to change the culture - we know it will take time, but if you don't get out there it won't happen.

Hopefully, you can all work together on ideas that will encourage schools to respond more positively to approaches from providers. For example, you could create a joint presentation on all of the apprenticeship and technical education options available locally. You could put on an event with local schools, colleges and employers to showcase further education, and invite parents too. I'm really keen to hear from any provider about the different approaches you are taking in your local areas and the impact they are having so that we can help share ideas and best practice.

TOM BEWICK

Chief executive, Federation of Awarding Bodies

Government must mitigate the risks of rollout of T-levels

The technical education reforms under way have the potential to transform England's skills and productivity record – it is vital that they are anchored in formal legal partnerships

The Department for Education will shortly announce which awarding organisations will be delivering the first four T-levels – a new technical-based qualification being introduced between 2020 and 2022 in England – following a controversial procurement exercise.

Concerns continue about the extent to which a single point of provision in T-levels might ultimately lead to a single point of failure. We all know what happens when monopolistic services fail their customers: just ask rail passengers on the Northern and Southern franchises.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. Government has the power to mitigate the risks when implementing massive change projects. The technical education reforms under way have the potential to transform England's skills and productivity record from one of being a laggard in the G7 to being the envy of the world. We are told things will be different this time because policymakers recognise that, unlike the tinkering of old, whole systems change is what is now required. If T-Levels are launched into the market as just another post-GCSE qualification, as opposed to a comprehensive study-program dependent on massive industry involvement, then they will most likely fail. After all, we've been here before with the 14-19 Diplomas.

With a more systemic approach, T-levels could become anchored in new independent and incorporated bodies called Technical Education Partnerships (TEPs). Awarding bodies, perhaps some working in consortia, would play their role as experts in the qualifications design and assessment aspect of these partnerships. But, crucially, these new legal entities – working under licence from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IATE) – would sweep in the current employer trailblazer groups that have been responsible thus far for developing standards and assessment plans.

> "Employer-led TEPs could help provide a more focused level of leadership and scrutiny"

Similarly, T-level route panels would find a welcome home in the TEPs.

The main problem with the apprenticeship and technical education reforms to date is that employers are neither visible or really accountable in the new system. Stakeholders lack a coherent voice with which to dock their expertise and operational concerns.

Employer-led TEPs could help provide a more focused level of leadership and scrutiny because the buck would stop with them for the operational success of both the apprenticeship standards and wider technical education reforms. For example, if the skills minister Anne Milton is unhappy with the performance of a particular occupational route in future, she could bend the ear of the industry-appointed chairperson in charge of the TEP.

IATE would then be freed up to do more of the strategic legwork – something their counterparts in Switzerland (SFIVET), for example, already do. Sitting on the boards of TEPs would be senior principals of colleges involved in delivery, including those with a specialist interest in careers advice.

As coverage in *FE Week* has shown, it is far from clear who the buck stops with at the moment when it comes to the coherent regulation of quality assurance and performance in work-related learning.

The monopolistic one-size-fits-all approach of T-levels has to co-exist alongside the "let a thousand flowers bloom" approach of EQA – the current quality assurance model of apprenticeships. For those at the chalkface, the skills system feels like it is being simultaneously designed and run by Karl Marx (the father of communism and central planning) and Milton Friedman (the high priest of free market ideology).

Surely, with contradictory forces like this at work, something has to give? By grounding the reforms in new TEPs (a mix of markets and smart operational planning) we might get closer to delivering on the sheer scale of ambition that is required. Muddling through, as is presently the case, is unlikely to work.

LORD KENNETH BAKER

Former education secretary and chair, Baker Dearing Educational Trust

We take a fairer approach to UTC destination data

Lord Baker on why the Baker Dearing Educational Trust's own data on university technical colleges is more comprehensive than the DfE's 'official' measures

What is the point of collecting data? Without data we just have subjective opinions, but with it we have objective information, which in turn provides useful insight. Indeed, the Baker Dearing Educational Trust's desire for an early insight into the success of the university technical colleges (UTC) programme led us to capture our own destinations data.

Let's start with "official" measures of destinations for 18-year-olds in England. The latest statistics available, produced by the DfE and released in October 2018, are only for students who left in the summer of 2016. However, their journey into this data capture began in 2014, when they completed KS4. Back then, of the 550k pupils who completed this stage, about 500k progressed into 16-18 state education.

Those 500k students completed their KS5 education in the summer of 2016, but how many are included in the DfE's headline destination data? Just 372,255, or 75 per cent of those who started this phase of education back in 2014. What happened to the rest? Some dropped out along the way, but the vast majority are simply excluded from the "official" statistics because they were entered for a Level 3 qualification that was not "approved", or a Level 2 qualification, or lower. In short, the DfE's statistics exclude the lower echelons. This is referenced in their small print but their figures don't tell the full story. Of the 80k Level 2 leavers at 18, who are excluded from the headlines, 19 per cent of students did not progress to a "sustained destination" compared with eight per cent of those included in the official statistics.

Our motivation for collecting destinations data is to gain a timely insight into the success of the relatively young UTC programme. If we were to rely solely on DfE data, we would always be two years out of date. With the majority of UTCs opening in 2013, or later, the DfE's figures only include the destinations of young people who completed their KS4 studies at UTCs in 2014, or earlier. This includes those from just two UTCs. Since 40 per cent of students stay on at their UTC after KS4 (about the same as the national average), nearly all of the currently available KS5 UTC leaver data is based on students who only joined at 16. UTCs provide a four-year programme for a reason.

> "It gives us detailed insight into the relatively young UTC programme"

However, it's not just the timeliness of the data that matters, it's also the granularity. UTCs are employer-led and supported by universities. These organisations provide much to ensure the programme is a success, and many are beneficiaries of UTC leavers. Rightly, they want to know about the companies UTC leavers are joining, apprenticeship levels etc. DfE data doesn't provide this detail. Such information is also of interest to all UTCs and forms a key part of their promotional material to encourage students to join.

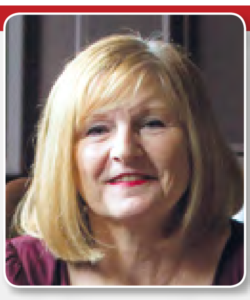
To achieve our aim of collecting independent destination data we have engaged a company called UTC Hub. In 2018, they captured 98 per cent of all UTC leavers; no student is excluded due to their level or programme of study. By contrast, the DfE's approach only includes Level 3 leavers, omitting all 18-year-olds who entered other courses. Unlike the DfE, which measures "sustained destinations" over six months, UTC Hub captures destination "starts". There are practical and good reasons for this: first, the significant amount of data crunching required to collect six subsequent months' worth of information is beyond our small charity's budget; second, "starts" data is a perfectly valid measure, used, for example, in university and apprenticeship statistics.

In 2018, 27 per cent of our 18-year-old leavers started an apprenticeship, with more than half at a higher or degree level, and 47 per cent started at university, with four-fifths choosing a STEM course, almost twice the national average. For a relatively new programme, these insights give us great confidence in its future.

Bulletin

Movers & Shakers

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



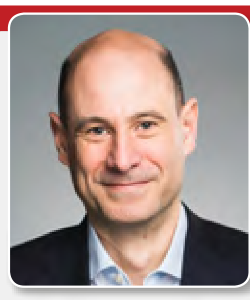
Carole Carson

Chair, SCL Education Group

Start date December 2018

Previous job
CEO, Babington

Interesting fact
Carole implemented the very first BT broadband help desk



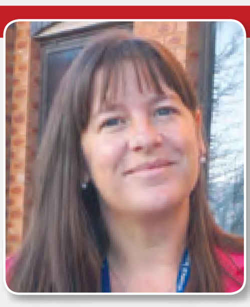
Anthony Tattersall

Head of enterprise, EMEA

Start date January 2019

Previous job
Area vice president UK, Cornerstone OnDemand

Interesting fact
Anthony has a keen interest in film-making and writing, and has had a short film shown at the Cannes Film Festival



Kelly Perkins

Chief executive, Alliance Learning

Start date November 2018

Previous job
Operations and quality improvement executive, Alliance Learning

Interesting fact
Kelly once did a skydive – not to raise money for charity, but just because she'd always wanted to do one

Rachel Ellis-Jones

Deputy principal, Bishop Burton College

Start date January 2019

Previous job
Vice principal, Cheshire College South and West

Interesting fact
As a university student, Rachel dreamed of becoming a rock journalist and once interviewed Duran Duran

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

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Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted

SIR GERRY BERRAGAN
Chief executive
Institute for Apprenticeships

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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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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

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: Ian Taylor

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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