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FE WEEK

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FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2019
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REVEALED: MYSTERIOUS APPRENTICESHIP AUDITS

- Providers have been left fuming after short notice onsite audits with no explanation or feedback
- DfE tight-lipped but *FE Week* understands that after the 3aaa scandal the ESFA is on the look-out for delayed withdrawals that inflate funding and achievement rates
- For second time in 10 years the funding agency will write to FE sector about unacceptable data gaming

Exclusive BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK See pages 12 & 13

NO ACCOUNTS? NO APPRENTICESHIP EXPERIENCE? NO PROBLEM WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING ON THE ASSESSMENT REGISTER. *FE WEEK* INVESTIGATES...

Exclusive BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK See page 6

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News

UCU general secretary Sally Hunt resigns on health grounds

BILLY CAMDEN
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The general secretary of the University and College Union has resigned for health reasons, it was announced on Monday.

Sally Hunt has held the top position at the union since 2007 and has won three elections, most recently in June 2017.

The union's national executive committee said it would meet on March 1 to determine the process for the election of her successor.

In a message to UCU members and staff, Hunt said: "UCU is, and will continue to be, a great union – a reflection of its truly wonderful membership who contribute so much to the culture, politics and economy of this country.

"It is no surprise then that the union itself is vibrant, energetic and stimulating. I am grateful for the trust given to me as their general secretary and wish every UCU member and staff member well. It has been a real honour. Thank you."

UCU president Vicky Knight said the union "owes a huge debt of gratitude" to Hunt.

"She was central to the creation of the UCU [in 2006] and has led its growth and success with utter dedication to the interests of the members that we represent, and with an integrity that I know is widely acknowledged and admired throughout the movement and beyond," Knight added.

"She has been one of the leading female union leaders of her generation and has inspired many others by her example. We will all miss her greatly and I wish her the very best for the future."

Before the formation of UCU, Hunt had been general secretary of one of its constituent unions, the Association of University Teachers. Prior to that she had been an AUT regional official and a senior union official in the finance sector.

She has been a long-standing member of the executive committee and general council of the Trades Union Congress, and has been its international spokesperson. She recently served as TUC president in 2017/18.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said Sally was a "fantastic president" and "continues to be a great champion of education and lifelong learning, open to all".

"A strong woman in a tough job, Sally has been a source of inspiration and support to me and many others right across the trade union movement," she added.

"Whatever Sally chooses to do next, she will be brilliant at it."

Sally Hunt

Criminal investigation into 3aaa to begin?

A criminal investigation could soon be launched into disgraced apprenticeship provider Aspire Achieve Advance (3aaa).

This is after the Department for Education requested a meeting with Derbyshire Constabulary.

3aaa, which had over 4,200 learners and 500 staff before the ESFA pulled its funding contracts, allegedly manipulated Individualised Learner Records to artificially inflate achievement rates and misused employer-incentive grants.

The company went into administration in October and both the police and the DfE launched investigations.

The police said its meeting with the DfE is "imminent".

DfE launches T-level transition offer tender

The Department for Education is seeking an organisation to design a course for 16-year-olds who are not ready to start a T-level at level three, but will be ready before or by the time they are 19.

A 15-day procurement exercise was launched on Monday to find a supplier to help come up with the course, also known as the transition offer, which was first recommended in Lord Sainsbury's 2016 technical education report.

The winning bidder will also provide support for "providers to develop, package and deliver their local T-level transition offer" and to "encourage and facilitate participating providers to explore different approaches to implementing certain elements of the transition offer."

12th annual National Apprenticeship Week

Next week the government, colleges, providers and stakeholders will celebrate the 12th annual National Apprenticeship Week.

For the sixth year in a row, *FE Week* will be running a 16-page supplement about the event, with an interview with skills minister Anne Milton, conducted by a BBC apprentice; a feature on the new Stansted Airport College; and a special parliamentary reception celebrating the AAC Apprenticeship Awards finalists for 2019.

This year's National Apprenticeship Week will have the theme of "Blazing a Trail". A number of events are being run up and down the country, including an apprenticeship webinar called The Big Assembly.

National Apprenticeship Week a 'good time' to publish damning report, says NAO

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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Exclusive

The National Audit Office is expected to publish its long-awaited follow-up review on the state of the apprenticeships programme next Wednesday, in the middle of National Apprenticeship Week.

The independent parliamentary body was damning in its verdict on apprenticeship reform in its last report in September 2016, when it warned of a high risk of fraud and "market abuse" and revealed a lack of contingency plans.

The new report is due on March 6 and will focus on whether the reformed apprenticeships programme is delivering value for money. It is expected to be highly critical.

This latest review was launched last July. When *FE Week* asked the NAO why it had chosen the middle of National Apprenticeship Week to publish the report, a spokesperson said: "We were always going to publish this report around now and are of course aware that next week is Apprenticeship Week. Given the focus, it seems a good time to reflect on the programme."

Its report will consider whether the Department for Education has defined appropriate indicators of success for the apprenticeships programme and whether the DfE is doing enough to ensure that apprenticeships and the levy system are not being abused. It will also report on what progress has been made to implement previous NAO and public accounts committee recommendations.

The NAO is also expected to comment on why thousands of apprentices do not have a regulator responsible for inspecting the quality of their training.

This comes after *FE Week* revealed that providers who deliver apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7 that have no HE qualification (such as a degree) and are not on the Office for Students register go completely unregulated.

The new report is also expected to be damning on issues of apprenticeship oversight after repeated issues with applications to the register of apprenticeship training providers. This led to cases of "one-man bands" with no delivery experience being given access to millions of pounds of apprenticeship funding.

A new "tougher" register opened in December, which forces all providers who gained access to reapply. These applicants must have traded for at least 12 months in order to be eligible and must provide a full set of accounts if they wish to be on the register.

When the NAO launched its follow-up review it also said it would also focus on why apprenticeship starts have dropped and will additionally assess the work of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. It is also expected to examine the impact of the policy.

Earlier this month, the DfE commissioned research to examine whether apprenticeship delivery is being adjusted to account for apprentices' prior learning, signalling that the government is preparing to clamp down on funding overclaims. The NAO also told *FE Week* that this is one area of concern that it is likely to address in its new report.

In September 2016, the first NAO report on apprenticeship reforms found that a delivery team had been set up to "consider the risks of fraud and gaming" but said it was "too early to say what impact this group will have".

It urged the DfE to "do more to understand how employers, training providers and assessment bodies may respond to ongoing reforms, and develop robust ways of reacting quickly should instances of market abuse emerge".

News

Debt-ridden mega college to consult on demerging

BILLY CAMDEN
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A mega college that recently saw its principal quit before receiving its third consecutive 'requires improvement' rating from Ofsted is looking at demerging one of its divisions.

Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet), which has five main colleges plus other satellite sites, and had an income of £58.5 million and 20,000 learners in 2017/18, is one of the largest colleges in the country.

It owes the government millions of pounds in bailout cash that it received after running into severe financial difficulty and is currently subject to intervention from the FE Commissioner.

In an attempt to find savings the college is reviewing its size and is likely to part ways with Stourbridge College, which it uses to teach students across the Black Country and Kidderminster.

Cliff Hall, who took over as interim principal when Andrew Cleaves left with immediate effect in September, said: "The review is being led by the FE Commissioner's team. The plan is to make any recommendations by April.

"We are consulting all of our local stakeholders, staff and students. Any changes will only be made with the agreement of the BMet board of governors. Our over-riding priority is continuity of provision for our students.

"In the short time that I have been principal, I have come to have the highest regard for the quality of provision at Stourbridge College."

But strangely, it appears BMet's neighbouring colleges are not being consulted as part of the review.

Mike Hopkins, principal of South & City College Birmingham, said: "While I am aware of discussions taking place about Stourbridge College, we have not been consulted, formally informed or asked for our views about this."

He added that South & City would not be interested in taking on Stourbridge College as it is too far away from its other campuses.

BMet has held a government notice of concern for financial health since July 2015. Its latest set of accounts, for 2017/18, show that the college owed the Education and Skills Funding Agency £7.7 million at July 31, 2018, of which £6 million was exceptional financial support.

BMet's Stourbridge College campus

The college has also been granted an additional bailout of £4.3 million from the EFSA, which was expected to be paid in January 2019 after it "implemented an institutional review to determine the strategic future of the college", according to the financial statements.

The accounts suggest site sales will be the main way of getting BMet out of financial trouble.

They state that the college sold a building for £9.9 million in 2017/18, of which £7 million went to repaying exceptional financial support.

At the time of the accounts being published, BMet was selling two other buildings that are currently not being used, which the college is hoping will raise £5.3 million.

The college's deficit before other gains and losses was £8.5 million.

Despite its financial problems, BMet continued to make Cleaves one of the highest paid principals in the country in 2017/18, paying him a salary of £266,000.

The former senior executive at National Express resigned with immediate effect in late September. A week later, BMet's chief financial officer Simon Cosson, also departed from the college, the accounts reveal.

A month later the college was hit with a grade three Ofsted report for the third time in a row.

BMet was created in 2009 and includes Matthew Boulton College, Sutton Coldfield College, James Watt College, Stourbridge College, The Art & Design Centre in Brierley Hill, and the Academy at Kidderminster.

Ofqual sparks immediate backlash over plans to force awarding organisations to conduct no-notice audits

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Awarding organisations may soon have to conduct surprise audits of colleges and training providers as Ofqual seeks to tighten controls on the controversial "direct claims status" practice.

The qualifications watchdog this week launched a consultation on changing the way awarding bodies manage and oversee centre assessments.

Ofqual has identified a risk with so many assessments being approved by providers with "direct claim status" and no moderation taking place by the awarding organisation (AO).

The watchdog is keen to clamp down on AOs that use a verification process after certification, insisting instead that moderation should take place before certification.

The most controversial proposal in the new consultation appears to be that awarding organisations should conduct a "minimum" of two monitoring visits and an "additional unannounced visit per centre every year".

Ailin O'Cathain, head of policy at the Federation of Awarding Bodies, is not happy about the prospect of no-notice visits, which she views as "deeply impractical".

"It is a disproportionate response to how awarding organisations will choose to manage centres," she said.

"Monitoring visits are already based on risk assessments, and where awarding organisations believe a rapid response is required they will already take appropriate action."

She added that the unannounced visits have the potential to cause "significant disruption to the working of centres and raise a wide range of practical implementation issues".

The chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Mark Dawe, welcomed the "additional scrutiny because we believe accurate and consistent results are important".

However, he said, providers' "main concern will be to maintain a quick turnaround between assessment and certification".

Centre assessments are where AOs devolve some responsibility for assessment to schools, colleges and training centres. This is often known as "direct claims status", where AOs do not moderate prior to certifications being awarded.

In February 2018, Ofqual wrote to awarding bodies to say it would begin auditing the organisations' control over individual providers.

This was because of concerns that the control AOs exert over providers had lessened and that the lack of moderation for direct claim status centres was leading to inconsistencies in attainment.

In the letter, Ofqual executive director for vocational and technical qualifications Phil Beach warned: "A failure to comply with the conditions of recognition can call into question the integrity of assessments, undermine the maintenance of standards and damage public confidence in the qualifications Ofqual regulates."

Ofqual said this week that there is evidence that the "variety of approaches currently in place to manage this provide different levels of oversight".

It has also been found that the terms "moderation" and "verification" are often used interchangeably and in ways that are inconsistent with Ofqual's rules.

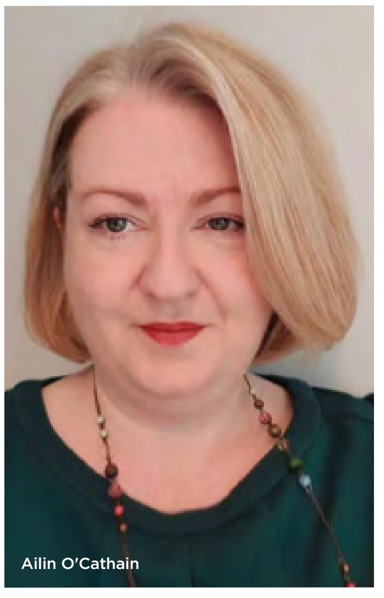
Chief regulator Sally Collier said: "We have conducted a detailed review of the use of centre assessment and believe that there are risks that can be managed better.

"The controls that awarding organisations have in place with centres must be sufficiently robust for the public to have confidence that assessment standards are being maintained between training providers and over time."

Dawe added: "While to many it sounds like a technicality, the differences between verification and moderation are critical, particularly in terms of the timely confirmation of apprentices' and students' achievements."

Awarding bodies will be given time to introduce these new requirements for existing qualifications after Ofqual gave them a deadline of January 2021.

A spokesperson for the regulator said the proposed deadline will allow AOs to


Ailin O'Cathain

make the necessary changes to meet its new requirements and roll them out to centres, following announcement of its final decisions at the end of this year.

FE Week understands that the changes could be in place in time for the new functional skills qualifications, due for introduction at the end of this year.

Ofqual's consultation will close on May 20.

News

NCG temporarily abandons search for new chief executive

BILLY CAMDEN
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Exclusive

England's largest college group has paused recruitment for a new chief executive after its initial hunt proved fruitless.

NCG was left without a permanent boss in October after Joe Docherty left. Docherty was one of eight high-profile principals to step down in a spate of resignations last term.

He was replaced by Chris Payne, the group's executive director partnerships and assurance, immediately on an interim basis and a recruitment round was then launched.

But after five months of searching NCG, which comprises seven colleges and two private training providers, has failed to find a talented enough permanent leader.

In a highly unusual move, NCG is not actively recruiting a replacement. Instead, they will focus efforts on "improving standards" as it awaits a follow-up visit from Ofsted following the grade three rating in June.

"We have experienced and committed leadership in place at NCG – dedicated to improving standards at our divisions," a spokesperson for the group said.

"We have paused recruitment for a permanent chief executive while we focus on these priorities and intend to return to the search in spring.

"Chris Payne will continue as interim chief executive in the meantime."

Rumours had been circulating that NCG was looking to demerge part of its group – a move that Birmingham Metropolitan College is consulting on (see page 4) – after experiencing a fall in training standards when it expanded rapidly in recent years. However, the group denied this when quizzed by *FE Week*.

Trouble at NCG, which is chaired by former Education and Skills Funding Agency chief executive Peter Lauener, started brewing last year.

Achievement rates across the group fell way below the national average, it had to make mass redundancies across its private training providers Intraining and Rathbone Training to make savings, and staff at its colleges in London went on strike in a row over pay.

On top of this, a free school that the group sponsored, the Discovery School, was forced to close down by the government.

All this happened before Ofsted downgraded the group from 'good' to 'requires improvement', which triggered intervention from the FE Commissioner.

The NCG spokesperson said it expects the commissioner's team to carry out a "diagnostic visit" as a result of the grade three, and while he has "not yet visited", the group expects this to happen "before the end of the academic year".

As well as FE Commissioner intervention, it is expected that NCG will be dropped from the government's final bidding round for Institutes of Technology as a result of its grade three Ofsted rating.

Following the turbulent year, Docherty decided it was time for him to resign. But because he left in October, after the start of a new academic year, he would have been paid a contractual entitlement.

These payments can be huge: in January *FE Week* reported that John Connolly, the former principal of the RNN Group who also resigned with immediate effect in October, received a £150,000 "emolument" payment, and Amarjit Basi received a £200,000 payout when he resigned as principal of the troubled Cornwall College Group in July 2016.

NCG confirmed that Docherty, who was one of the highest paid principals in the country, taking home a £227,000 salary in 2017/18, was paid a "contractual entitlement" when he left, but would not disclose the figure.

The seven other colleges that saw their top boss leave with immediate effect (in a spate of resignations after the start of the 2018/19 academic year) have all also failed to find permanent replacements.

BMet told *FE Week* this week that Cliff Hall, who replaced Andrew Cleaves as interim principal in September, still holds the post, and West Nottinghamshire College confirmed that Martin Sim is still interim principal after taking over from Dame Asha Khemka in October.

Cornwall College Group said Dr

Joe Docherty

Elaine McMahon is still heading up the college on an interim basis after the departure of Raoul Humphreys in November 2018, and the job at Havering College is still being done by interim Paul Wakeling after Maria Thompson left in September.

Penny Wycherley is still in charge of City College Plymouth on an interim basis after Garry Phillips stepped down in November, and lastly, Rachel Nicholls continues to be the acting principal at Peterborough Regional College after Terry Jones resigned in October.

Investigates

ESFA apprenticeship assessment register needs to be 'purged'

BILLY CAMDEN
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From front | Exclusive

The government has been told to "purge" its official register of end-point assessment organisations (RoEPAO) after *FE Week* found a sole trader and a new company with no trading history had successfully applied.

Sixteen companies were added to the Education and Skills Funding Agency's register last month, taking the total on there to 215.

FE Week did a background check on the newbies and found that one of the companies was only incorporated in August and that its owner has no track record in apprenticeships.

Another is not an organisation at all, it is a sole trader, who *FE Week* has attempted to contact for two weeks and who has yet to issue a response.

Two further companies got on to the register despite their accounts submission to Companies House being overdue.

The findings are ringing alarm bells with sector leaders, who have raised concerns at the lack of robustness of the approvals process and who fear a repeat of what happened with the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP), which took on many firms with little to no trading history.

"Companies are being admitted that wouldn't pass even the most basic of due diligence checks," Tom Bewick,

> "A dash for growth of the EPAO register is being made at the expense of quality"

chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said after seeing *FE Week*'s findings.

"A dash for growth of the EPAO register is being made at the expense of quality. It is time the authorities got a stronger grip, purged the register and took steps to ensure public confidence in the EPAO model is restored."

The backlash against RoATP when it was first launched led to the government closing the register for nearly a year while it came up with a new and more robust approvals process.

The ESFA finally relaunched the register in December but now, applicants must have traded for 12 months at least in order to be eligible and must provide a full set of accounts. But these rule appear to not cross over to the RoEPAO.

"This exposes a major concern and clearly demonstrates the blind panic the government must be in about the need for assessment organisations for some apprenticeship standards," Association of Employment and Learning Providers boss Mark Dawe said after being shown *FE Week*'s findings.

"Providers and employers will need to be very careful when selecting end-point assessment organisations as it seems this register is as flawed as the original register of apprenticeship training providers."

In April last year *FE Week* was first to expose the end-point assessment crisis after finding that nine would-be dental practice managers who should have completed the programme in May 2017 still could not be tested because there was no organisation to assess them.

Last month *FE Week* revealed that there are currently 17 apprenticeship standards ready for delivery with no end-point assessment organisation in place, nine of which have starts.

Dawe said the pass rate to get on the RoEPAO was "only about 20 per cent" when it first opened and "yet

> "This clearly demonstrates the blind panic the government must be in"

now in order to fill the big gaps in EPA provision, there's a danger of the agency letting foxes into the chicken coup".

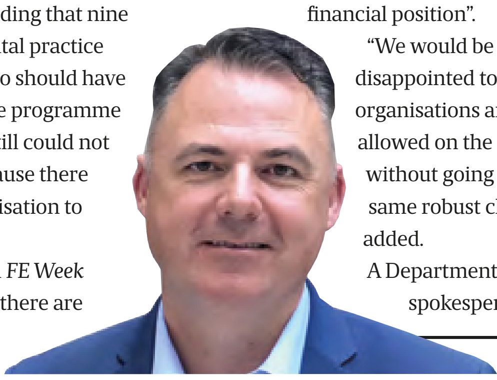
Graham Hasting-Evans, group managing director of NOCN, an end-point assessment organisation, said his company was "subject, quite rightly, to stringent checks, including those on our financial position".

"We would be extremely disappointed to find that organisations are being allowed on the register without going through the same robust checks," he added.

A Department for Education spokesperson said the application process for end-point assessment organisations "is robust" and "at the time of application all 16 organisations referred to were fully evaluated and able to meet the criteria for entry to the register".

There is no suggestion of wrongdoing by any of the EPAOs.

Graham Hasting-Evans



Tom Bewick

Organisations added to the EPAO register in February 2019
Acorn Training Ltd
Connective Care Education
Cornwall Council
Crystal Clear (Central) Ltd
ETC Awards Ltd
Highways Training UK Ltd
IMarEST
Intqual-pro
JGA Limited
Julie Maycock
Manchester Metropolitan University
Newcross Healthcare Solutions
Quantum Awards
University of Essex
University of South Wales
Xact Training

THE SOLE TRADER

The sole trader on the EPAO register is Julie Maycock, who trades as Mighty Oak Training and can assess apprentices on the level four revenues and welfare benefits practitioner standard.

Her LinkedIn page states that she is a training and policy officer at Cambridge City Council, as well as a self-employed training consultant.

Maycock is registered on the government's Find Apprenticeship Training website and describes herself as an "individual training provider specialising in working with apprentices advising customers in welfare benefits, housing, council tax, business rates and housing benefit".

"I hold a role in local government which ensures that I am fully up to date with day-to-day processes and legislative requirements," it adds.

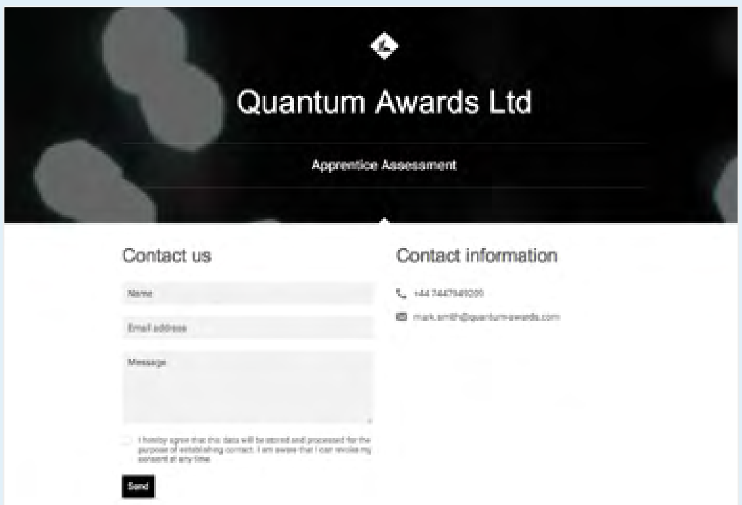
"I have worked in the public sector for over 25 years, which I feel is invaluable when working with public services apprentices."

Maycock doesn't, however, have any reviews from employers.

FE Week has been attempting to contact her (via her contact details on the Find Apprenticeship Training website) since February 12, but she has not responded at time of going to press.

The ESFA said that sole traders are allowed on to the EPAO register but that they need to demonstrate suitable expertise and resources to be able to develop and conduct the end-point assessment.

THE EPAO INCORPORATED JUST 6 MONTHS AGO



Quantum Awards Ltd got on to the RoEPAO in February despite being incorporated only six months ago. It can now do end-point assessments for apprentices on the level three improvement technician and level four improvement practitioner standards.

Quantum's website is a single page with a mobile number and email address for its majority shareholder, Mark Smith, who is currently serving his notice period at Jaguar Land Rover.

He told *FE Week* that he and his business partner, who is currently serving his notice period at another company, set up Quantum after looking for a "career change that puts something back into developing the problem-solvers of the future" after working in the automotive industry for "many years".

Smith admitted he doesn't himself have any experience in apprenticeships, but said his partner does.

He told *FE Week* Quantum expects to conduct around 150 end-point assessments every year.

News

ESFA to explore 'flexibilities' for T-level industry placement

FRASER WHIELDON
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Government officials have revealed they are actively looking at ways to make the 315-hour minimum industry placement in T-levels more flexible.

Senior leaders such as David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, have long expressed concern that young people, especially in rural areas, will be unable to pass the T-level owing to a lack of local and lengthy placement opportunities.

In a webinar put out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in February, T-level developer Sarah Knights said the government is listening to concerns and could "accommodate flexibilities" before the first T-level students start in 2020.

"It's very much something under consideration – access to industry placements, particularly in areas where opportunities are limited. There is a lot of work going on at the moment to see how we might be able to accommodate flexibilities within the delivery model," she said.

FE Week understands one area of flexibility the ESFA is looking at is allowing students to take several short industry placements at different employers, as opposed to one long one, which would add up to the minimum duration.

Jo Maher

Jo Maher, the principal of Boston College, one of the pilots of the new technical qualifications, is one person campaigning for the change to allow for multiple placements to count towards the 315-hour minimum.

She also wants a change in government rules so that simulated work within a college, at a college-run restaurant or hair salon, for example, can count towards the placement.

"I fully understand there is a view that it's an artificial environment, but having paying members of the public in the building means students can still learn," she said.

"It's the 315 hours that's the real crux point"

She believes this flexibility would be particularly helpful for students with special educational needs and mental health issues who can use it to "build confidence" before going to work at other companies.

Maher has also asked the ESFA to make 45 days the minimum requirement, instead of 315 hours.

"The spending rules say the placement can last a minimum of 45 days, but that's a misnomer. It's the 315 hours that's the real crux point," she told *FE Week*.

Maher said many of her 72 T-level pilot learners have to get up at 7am but cannot start work until 10am. This is because they have firstly to travel to college before being taken to their work by a designated minibus as they cannot afford to travel to the placement.

"Why would we then put in a measure that they have got to this for 60 days?" Maher asked.

Boston College had to buy a minibus and delegate a member of the work placement team to make an hour-long trip ferrying the learners to their placements.

"That is not what funding should be used for," Maher said.

She added that without these various flexibilities to the industry placements she does not believe T-levels will be a success.

Another area the ESFA still needs to work out is whether part-time jobs can count as part of the work placement.

When asked a question about this in the ESFA webinar, Elisabeth Baines, who works for the agency in funding and programmes development, said: "It depends. We have outlined the principles of what an industry placement should be so I do not think we can give a blanket 'yes it could'."

On the possibility of flexibilities, a DfE spokesperson would only say: "We are working closely with colleges, providers and business to get the delivery of this right and more information will be made available over the year."

However, he confirmed that there are no plans to change the 315-hour minimum requirement.

DfE urges colleges to report whether they are adopting AoC's controversial senior pay code

BILLY CAMDEN
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The Department for Education is "encouraging" colleges to be more transparent about senior staff pay when they file their accounts – and to state whether they have adopted the Association of Colleges' new code.

A "college accounts direction" for 2018/19 was published by the DfE on Wednesday and included "substantial" updates that corporations should include when submitting their upcoming financial statements.

"Corporations receive significant investment from public funds and need to demonstrate to stakeholders that decisions made on executive pay are evidence-based, proportionate and represent value for money," it said.

"This year, as a matter of policy, we have increased transparency around executive pay to support accountability, and to help maintain public confidence and trust in executive pay."

While the DfE has clamped down on chief executive pay in multi-academy trusts and vice-chancellor wages in universities, including writing to demand a justification of salaries of over £150,000, no such action has been taken against colleges, despite many principals earning over £200,000.

Addressing colleges this week, the DfE said: "We encourage corporations to make every effort to evidence their disclosures fully, and to consider what other information enhances transparency and understandability.

"For example, corporations could consider providing stakeholders with more meaningful information to help them understand pay structures and movements, such as: remuneration paid or payable in the year, alongside full-time equivalent information [and] whether they have adopted AoC's Governors' Council's Colleges Senior Staff Remuneration Code."

The voluntary guidance from the Association of Colleges was published in December.

Following its official launch, *FE Week* asked the association if the code has been well received, but it could not say as it doesn't keep tabs on the number of members that adopt it.

A spokesperson said: "We strive to continually strengthen college governance and have introduced this in order that governors can use this guidance to be more confident and clearer in the decision-making process.

"It will be for individual colleges to adopt the AoC code as they see fit but we are confident they will find this helpful."

The code encompasses "three core principles: fairness, independence and transparency".

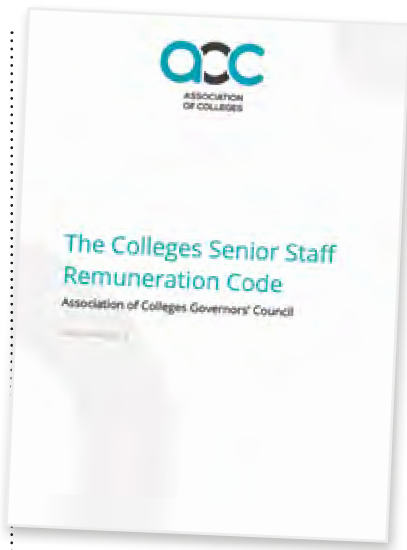
The main policies include giving seniors a pay rise only if all staff also receive one, removing top college bosses from remuneration committees, and separate publication of principal salaries.

The code was developed after tension between lecturers and their bosses intensified as college leaders enjoyed bumper wage increases while pay for lower-level staff has reportedly failed to keep up with inflation.

The University and College Union blasted principals for being "greedy and hopelessly out of touch" in April last year, after its analysis of 2016/17 accounts showed one-third enjoyed a pay rise of more than 10 per cent.

Seventeen principals earned salaries of over £200,000 that year.

This week's accounts direction from the DfE emphasises that colleges "risk" intervention from the Education and Skills Funding Agency if they do not



submit their audited accounts for 2018/19 by December 31, 2019.

It also highlighted that colleges and their auditors "need to be mindful of the new insolvency regime in preparing accounts", which came into force on January 31.

Apprenticeship starts fall for second month in a row

PIPPA ALLEN-KINROSS
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Apprenticeship starts have fallen for the second month in a row, new data from the Department for Education has revealed.

Starts seemed to be growing at the beginning of this academic year, but progress appears to have been stunted after several months of upheaval in the sector, including plans to halve the co-investment employer fee, falling level 2 starts and non-levy funding running dry.

The latest figures on apprenticeship starts show that 15,300 learners began courses in December 2018, a fall of 8.4 per cent from the December 2017 figure of 16,700.

A smaller drop took place in November, when 32,400 new starts were registered compared to 32,500 in November 2017 – a fall of 0.3 per cent.

In comparison, August, September and October saw increases on the year before of 30.9 per cent, 9.7 per cent and 13.1 per cent respectively.

Following the release of the statistics on Thursday, the DfE said it is still standing behind its manifesto commitment of hitting three million apprenticeship starts by 2020.

Analysis by *FE Week* shows that, for the government to hit this target, there will need to be an average of 82,031 starts every month over the next 16 months. Since May 2015, the average monthly starts have been 38,352.

Skills minister Anne Milton said she is "thrilled to see" the progress in apprenticeship starts, after the DfE said there had been a 9.7 per cent increase in the total starts between August and December 2018 compared to the year before.

However, the figure was 24 per cent down for the same period in 2016 – the year before the levy reforms were introduced.

Last month, *FE Week* revealed that the non-levy funding for providers to train apprentices from small businesses has run dry and some are having to turn apprentices away, but the government has no cash left in the system to ease the situation.

Chancellor Philip Hammond announced a big change to the levy system in his Budget speech in October, when he said small businesses will only have to contribute five per cent to the training of their apprentices, rather than the 10 per cent they currently pay.

However, the Treasury and DfE have still not confirmed when this reform to the levy will be brought into force, and concerns are growing that small businesses may be putting off taking on apprentices until the change is made.

And in December, *FE Week* reported that the DfE is urgently seeking to "improve understanding" of what is behind the drop in level 2 apprenticeships after starts fell to its lowest level yet.

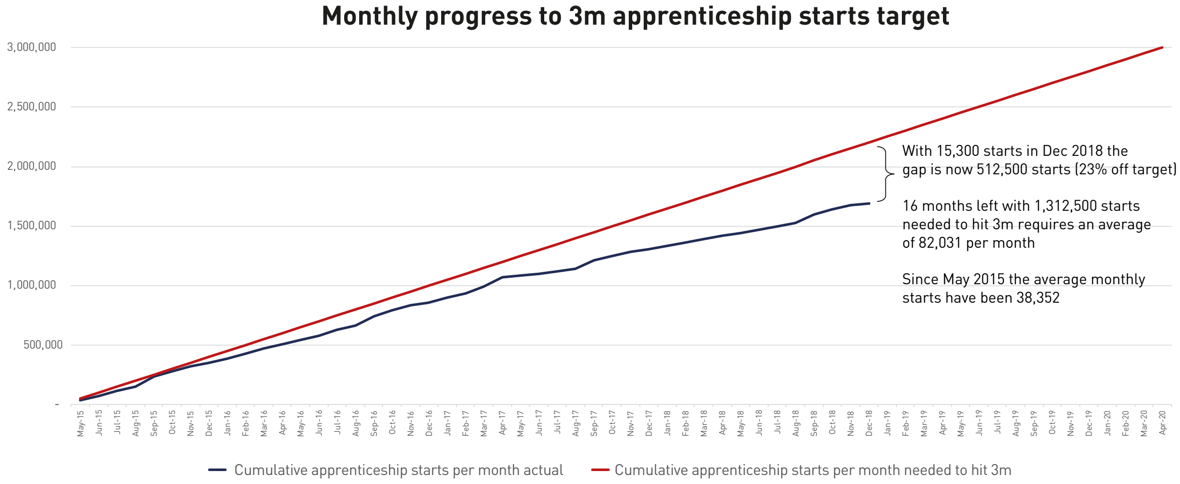
At its highest point, level 2 starts reached 65 per cent of all starts in 2013/14, but by 2017/18 it had slumped to 43 per cent.

Year	August	September	October	November
2017	22,300	64,100	39,600	32,500
2018	29,200	70,300	44,800	32,400
Shift	**30.9%**	**9.7%**	**13.1%**	**-0.3%**

Analysis by FE Week

Source: DfE Apprenticeship and levy statistics - main tables from Feb 2018 and Feb 2019

Monthly progress to 3m apprenticeship starts target



Analysis by FE Week

Investigates

Hadlow board inexperienced and in meltdown

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

Serious governance failings and financial inexperience are in the spotlight at The Hadlow Group as the board goes into meltdown.

As previously revealed by *FE Week* the Department for Education has launched several investigations into the finances of the group – consisting of a board for Hadlow College and a separate one for West Kent and Ashford College. Both principal Paul Hannan and deputy principal Mark Lumsdon-Taylor have been suspended.

FE Week has now found that the joint finance committee for the group, which reports to both college boards, currently has no chair, consists of just two board members from Hadlow College, has no representation at all from West Kent and Ashford College and for several years has had no board member that was a qualified accountant.

In recent days George Jessel, Harvey Guntrip, Chris Hearn and Paul Dubrow have all stepped down from their governor roles at the group's two colleges.

And the FE Commissioner, Richard Atkins, has loaned one of his deputies, Anna Fitch, to be the group's chief financial officer – a post that has been vacant for several years – and to pay her costs.

The lack of financial experience on the committee was troubling their own professional advisors last year.

According to June 2018 meeting minutes, 'professional advisors' told the finance committee it needed to be "strengthened" by recruiting a chartered accountant and a chief financial officer.

The college has since confirmed that the advisors were in fact Hearn's consultancy firm Edscencio and despite the obvious potential for a conflict of interest in being a paid adviser, Hearn only stepped down as a governor and as a member of the finance committee in recent weeks.

In any event, no accountant was found.

A spokesperson told *FE Week*: "We conducted a search for a chartered accountant over the summer and autumn terms, but were not impressed with the two CVs we received and did not progress them to an interview stage.

"We are in the process of conducting a further search, which is a key priority."

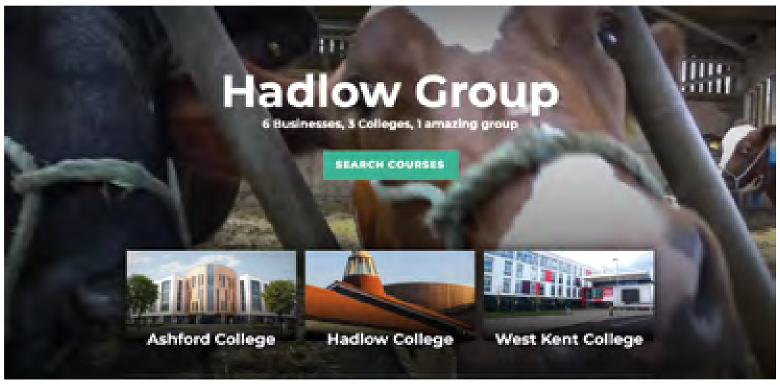
Board minutes for The Hadlow Group show it first started searching for a chartered accountant in February 2017 after its finance committee agreed it needed a qualified accountant with relevant sector experience.

In an interview with *FE Week* last November, Atkins stressed the need for colleges to have at least two financially qualified governors on their board to both challenge and support the principal and finance director – the post Lumsdon-Taylor held.

DfE guidance also states college boards require a mix of skills, knowledge and experience, "such as accountants or other qualified finance practitioners".

The FE Commissioner visit was triggered by a request for restructuring funds to the Department for Education's Transactions Unit, which raised questions about a series of land purchases by Hadlow College.

The ESFA is said to be looking to reclaim significant sums of funding from the Hadlow Group after concluding its own investigation.



It is understood the group was claiming funding they were not permitted to.

Lumsdon-Taylor said they had permission to claim the funding, as part of Hadlow's adoption of the West Kent and Ashford campuses of K College (which became West Kent and Ashford College). But the ESFA disputes whether Hadlow had this permission.

Another out-of-the-ordinary practice at The Hadlow Group is the one finance committee for two, unmerged colleges.

Although West Kent and Ashford College and Hadlow College belong to the same group and share a principal, they have not been merged. A planned merger is currently on hold.

Other colleges which share a principal, as Kingston and Carshalton colleges did before they merged, had two separate finance committees.

This has all taken place in the shadow of the new insolvency regime: if the college has to give funding back to the government, it may need a short-term bailout and to quickly dispose of property to avoid going into administration.

Insolvency guidance for college governors, published on January 29, states that colleges would be "advised" to "recruit a qualified accountant on to their board".

Hadlow Group finance committee board members*

ASHFORD COLLEGE

WEST KENT COLLEGE

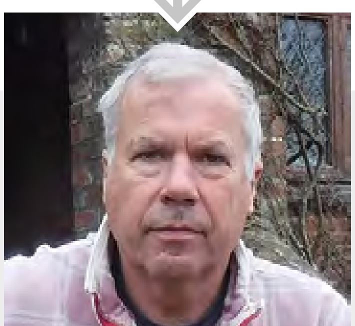
HADLOW COLLEGE

Paul Dubrow (Chair)

Dubrow was the only member of the finance committee who served as a governor at West Kent and Ashford College. The former chair of WKAC's governing board, before stepping down in February, he attached a laurel to the final beam when builders finished constructing a WKAC centre in Ashford in 2016. He is a director for Global Driving Ranges Ltd.

Chris Hearn (also paid advisor)

Hearn was the UK head of the education sectors for Barclays Corporate Bank between 2009 and 2015. Since then, he has co-run a consultancy that provides financial advice to colleges, such as East Berkshire and Strode and Havering College of Further and Higher Education; as well as advising organisations that want to do business with colleges.



John Dinnis

Dinnis runs his family's farm, Filston Farm, in Shoreham in Kent, which houses a number of businesses and has arable farming, livestock, competition horses and sweat lodges. He is a director of The Shambles Property Holding, an estate management company based in Sevenoaks. Dinnis also served as a governor of Shoreham School for three terms.

Mike Weed

Professor Weed is pro-vice chancellor for research and enterprise at Canterbury Christ Church University, which has a partnership with Hadlow Group to run courses at its colleges. He is also the head of the university's human and life sciences school and has worked for various banks, government departments and local authorities on public health initiatives.

* As at February 28, 2019

News

Mystery no-notice ESFA au

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

From front

Exclusive

Providers are fuming at the Education and Skills Funding Agency after officials started conducting short-notice mystery audits in the wake of the 3aaa scandal, *FE Week* can reveal.

In what appears to be the second major investigation into achievement rate data at FE providers in the past ten years, the agency began carrying out a significant number of data reliability checks at providers in February.

"They would not say what they were looking for and haven't been in touch since"

They're understood to have been prompted by ESFA's concern at the unpublished results of the qualification achievement rates for 2017/18, as well as its investigation into disgraced apprenticeship firm Aspire Achieve Advance (3aaa). The company went bust in October after the government pulled its skills funding contracts following allegations of fraud.

It is understood the agency will soon write to the whole FE sector expressing concern over data gaming, just as Geoff Russell, then-chief executive of the Learning and Skills Council, infamously did in 2010.

FE Week has spoken with numerous providers who have experienced the new audits, which have all followed the exact same format.

They were given two days' notice to hand over up to 100 apprentice files – dating back to 2015/16. Staff from ESFA'S provider risk and assurance team and its counter-fraud team then turned up onsite to go through the files.

After two days of working through the files they left, without taking away any of the material. Providers were not told what they had been looking for, nor anything about what the officials found.

One provider, who was angered by one of these audit visits, and who did not wish to be named, told *FE Week*: "The ESFA staff refused to say why they needed to audit a huge number of apprentice files. This was also the experience of other providers we have spoken to.

"They would not say what they were looking for and haven't been in touch since they spent two days reviewing the files. Gathering so much paperwork for them with just two days' notice took a significant amount of resource, and to not tell us why really makes me angry."

FE Week understands that since the demise of 3aaa the ESFA has found that significant sums of funding was paid for learners at the provider that should have been withdrawn. This inflated not only the company's funding, but also their achievement rates – something that almost resulted in a second 'outstanding' rating from Ofsted last May.

FE Week understands the ESFA is now urgently looking into whether other providers have inappropriately taken funding and boosted achievement rates for apprentices, misusing reporting of withdrawals as well as the way they recorded breaks in learning and transfers.

The agency has now closed a loophole relating to the coding of transfers.

When asked about the mystery audits, including their scope and purpose, an ESFA spokesperson would only say that the agency's "priority" is to "protect learners and ensure public money is being used effectively by training providers and these checks are a key part of our assurance process".

He added: "As recent cases have demonstrated, if we find evidence of any wrongdoing we will not hesitate to take appropriate action."

The audits took place in February as this is the window between providers giving feedback on provisional 2017/18 qualification achievement rate data and the date on which it becomes final.

It is understood that providers with what is considered to be suspicions or unreliable data will be excluded from the official figures when they are released later this year.

Writing in his weekly update on Thursday, Association of Employment and Learning Providers boss Mark Dawe warned his members that the ESFA is "looking at the data far more closely, running various reports to check integrity and also coming to the provider for clear evidence".

He added there will be "less tolerance for 'mistakes' and no tolerance for potential manipulation".

This all comes at a time when Ofsted is turning its focus to providers' "integrity" during inspections.

FE Week edition 261 revealing what was behind 3aaa investigations

THE SHAKY HISTORY OF ACHIEVEMENT RATE DATA

Achievement rate data has been an increasing cause for concern among ESFA officials in recent years.

In early 2017 the agency admitted to a "loophole" relating to breaks in learning in its calculation for 2014/15, which, until it was closed "artificially", boosted the rate for around 10 per cent of providers.

Later in 2017 the ESFA attempted to hide the botched data by publishing revised national achievement rate tables for 2015/16 for individual providers but without comparable figures for previous years, which are needed to give any kind of indication of providers' progress.

But following a call for an investigation into the agency's failure to be forthcoming with the necessary data, the ESFA U-turned and eventually released the comparable figures.

And in the 2015/16 achievement rate data some providers, notably the biggest college group in the country, NCG, were absent from the tables owing to what they claimed were "data glitches".

After being omitted, Ofsted delayed its inspection into NCG as the inspectorate couldn't analyse the group's achievement rates. When Ofsted eventually went knocking in 2018 it downgraded NCG from 'good' to 'requires improvement'.

And during the course of its enquiries into the now-defunct 3aaa, Ofsted admitted to *FE Week* that the inspectorate didn't visit providers with big falls in achievement rates because they had "limited resources".

The ESFA's audits appear to be a re-run of what happened 10 years ago, which led to Ofsted doing their own data checks ahead of inspection, but which stopped only a few years later.

In 2009 the Learning and Skills Council – the predecessor organisation to the Skills Funding Agency – along with Ofsted, the Data Service and the Information Authority looked into "suggestions that data manipulation goes beyond routine data cleansing to improve the accuracy of the data".

They concluded: "Some of the practices identified at the fact-finding visits have led to an artificial increase in success rates."

Geoff Russell then wrote to the sector (see page 13) to "ensure this practice ceases with immediate effect".

FE Week asked Ofsted why it had stopped carrying out the data checks that it had introduced following the Russell letter, to which a spokesperson replied: "Activities in 2010 were a response to circumstances at the time. ESFA are responsible for the quality and reliability of provider data and they have been taking forward this role ever since."

Asked if Ofsted plans to change its approach, such as returning to checking data, under the new Education Inspection Framework set to be released this year, the spokesperson said: "Ofsted inspectors pursue relevant lines of enquiry during inspection, and will continue to do so under the new framework."

He would not say whether the education watchdog currently has full confidence in the credibility of official achievement rate data.

udits spark provider anger

Geoff Russell's infamous letter to the sector in 2010

>lsc

Leading learning and skills

Dear [college principal – by first name]

Individualised Learner Record Data Management

Last year Ofsted reported concerns raised by some colleges about data management practices employed by some colleges to maximise their success rates. This prompted a joint review by the LSC and Ofsted, to analyse Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data. This included seven fact finding visits to understand the extent to which college data management varies between institutions.

The review highlighted that colleges adopt various approaches to the completion of the ILR and interpret the ILR guidance differently, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes inappropriate reporting.

Issues identified include:

- different practices relating to the recording of 'unfunded' learners
- the failure to record all learning aims being undertaken by learners
- changes to planned end dates
- late changes to a learner's programme of learning
- inappropriate use of the transfer code.

This work has shown that we need to tighten up the ILR guidance, and be clearer about its status to remove any ambiguity.

The information authority has begun the process of clarifying and strengthening the guidance. This will take time, but progress has already been made. Meanwhile, in the Annex to this letter you will find some guiding principles and explanations of a number of key points, which make clear our expectations for consistent and fair data management.

There are four detailed points that I would like to emphasise at this stage:

- There must be a learner record in the ILR for every learner and not just those that are LSC funded. Those learners who are not LSC funded should be clearly identified.
- Once a learner is recorded as LSC funded, this must not be changed in any circumstance unless the LSC, at a national level, explicitly states that this is permitted through further guidance.
- The learning planned end date field, (A28), must remain constant once completed. This is stated explicitly in the ILR specification
- Where a learning aim has a completion status of 'transferred to a new learning aim' there must be a corresponding data set in the ILR for the learning aim to which the learner has transferred. This is a mandatory requirement.

If the data management in your college varies from this practice, please ensure that this practice ceases with immediate effect. This applies in respect of all remaining ILR returns relating to 2008/09 and for 2009/10 onwards. We will include a more thorough analysis of ILR completion as part of the college funding audits which will be carried out later this year. If those audits reveal that a college has not been recording data in line with the guiding principles outlined in the Annex, this may trigger appropriate sanctions.

In view of the issues that this exercise has identified, I believe it is now timely to work with the sector to look at issues around data capture and success rates, and to agree a shared view as to the right and appropriate level of regulation and audit.

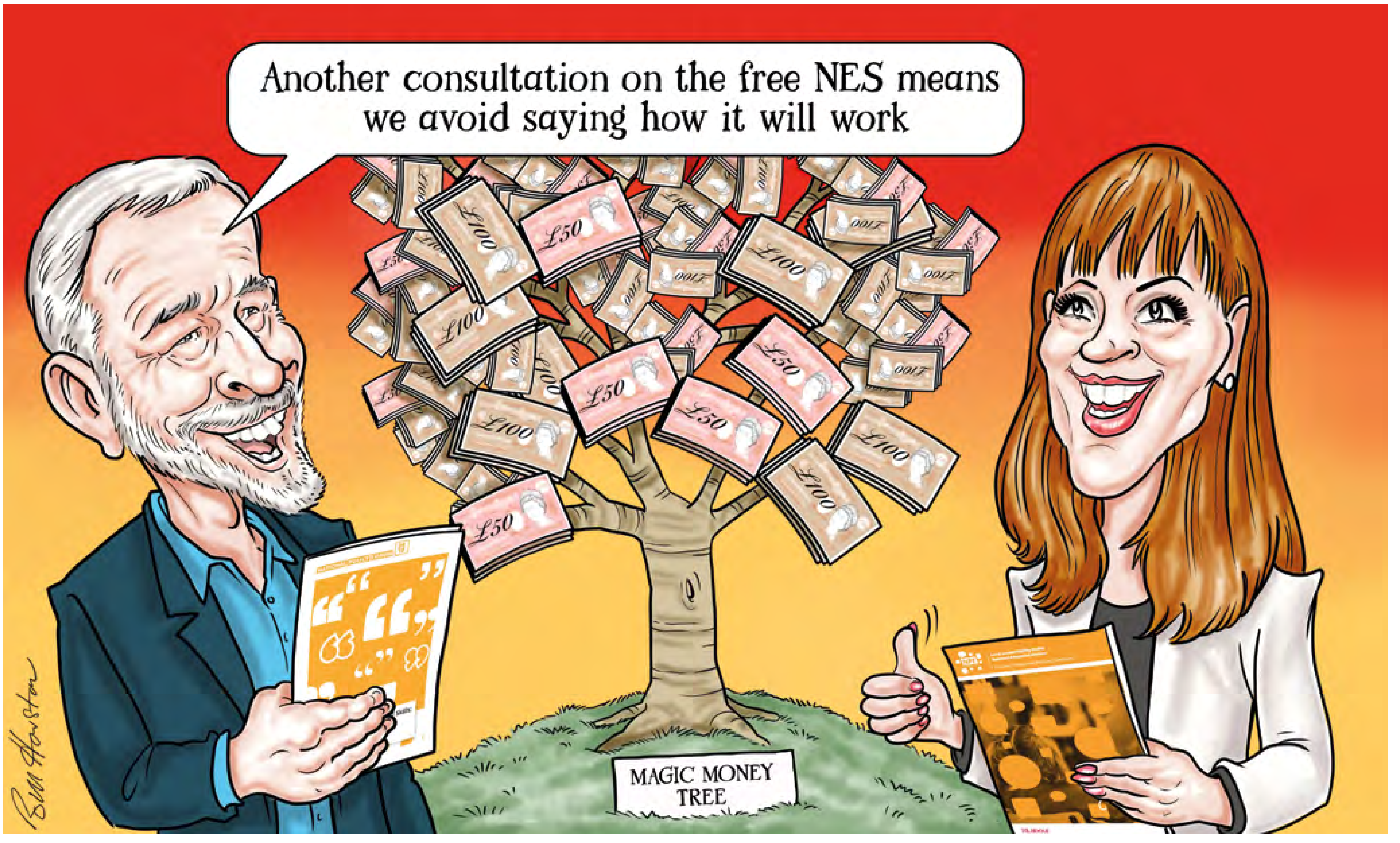
To that end I have written to Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC), proposing the establishment of two project groups, one focussed on colleges. This group will include representation from colleges, the AOC, the data service, the information authority, Ofsted (as observers) and the LSC. We will ensure that the group represents the interests of all parts of the sector. The information authority, as custodians of the ILR, has been asked to chair the group.

If you have any questions about this issue please contact your Partnership Team.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Russell
Chief Executive
(Agreed by and electronically signed in his absence)

News



Labour launches second National Education Service consultation in the space of a year

BILLY CAMDEN
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The Labour Party has launched its second consultation on its plans for a National Education Service, which will explore how to move to a system "empowered" by "local accountability".

It will be of particular interest to colleges, in light of the fact that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has previously told *FE Week* that his plans for free lifelong learning could mean that they lose their status as independent corporations and be brought back under local authority control.

In a consultation document entitled "Local Accountability in the National Education Service", the party's early years, education and skills policy commission warns that "in our haste to rectify the damage the Conservatives are doing to our education system, it could be tempting to simply return to what has been done in the past.

"But this would be a wasted opportunity," the document states.

Labour wants to "empower" local communities "to influence change where it is needed and guarantee that the education system meets their needs".

> "By reinstating local democratic accountability trust can be built"

The party's first consultation on the NES, which ran for 12 weeks last year, was light on detail and didn't include any costings for how these policies would be implemented.

This new consultation, which runs until June 30, equally gives away little about the party's vision for a National Education Service, beyond its promise to "empower" local communities "to influence change where it is needed and guarantee that the education system meets their needs".

"By reinstating local democratic accountability, and involving local stakeholders in the creation of shared education aims, trust can be built," it states.

The six questions posed are deliberately broad and open-ended.

Labour members and supporters are asked whether they believe there should be a "single democratically accountable structure" for the National Education Service, that would "deal with each part of the system and its institutions at local and national level".

Respondents are also asked how they would "ensure education institutions retain appropriate levels of autonomy and independence", and to say what role they think local authorities, combined authorities, metro mayors and local enterprise partnerships should play.

In November 2017 Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said that his party felt "there's a danger with the independent model of college education that they get too far away from local communities and local education authorities" and that what "we're looking to is a model that will bring them closer to that, but not removing the important connection with local industry".

> "There's a danger with the independent model of college education"

Then, in September 2018, the shadow skills minister Gordon Marsden refused to rule out bringing colleges back under local authority control.

The National Education Service is a flagship policy of Jeremy Corbyn's, and seeks to emulate the popularity and support enjoyed by the NHS.

At last year's party conference, Labour voted to recreate a "coherent, planned and appropriately funded national public system which is accountable to its various stakeholders and communities". It has also set out 10 guiding "principles" which will be followed during policy development.

To help shape the NES, Labour has launched a lifelong learning commission.

Earlier this month a team of 16 education experts joined the advisory board, including former education secretary Estelle Morris, former Association of Colleges chair Carole Stott, managing director of City & Guilds Kirstie Donnelly, and *FE Week* contributor professor Ewart Keep.

One of its tasks will be to carry out work on funding models that would "ensure that education is free at the point of use for all those who need it".

Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust

Chief Executive Officer

Salary £160,000

Are you an innovator and a visionary who can change the lives of young people with SEND?

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Orchard Hill College, based across seven college centres, and **Orchard Hill College Academy Trust**, comprising 14 academy schools, together form **Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust** (OHC&AT), a family of specialist education providers for pupils and students from nursery to further education across London, Surrey and Sussex.

The uniqueness of OHC&AT is that it is fully representative of all designations of special education needs and disabilities. Pupils and students within the OHC&AT family have a wide range of learning abilities and additional needs including complex autism; speech, language and communication difficulties; social, emotional and mental health; and physical disabilities including multi-sensory impairment and complex health needs.

The CEO needs to shape the future of the organisation and empower our staff teams so that our pupils and students continue to achieve their full potential.

Please visit **www.ohcat.org** for details of the role and further information about our organisation.

If you would like to discuss this opportunity at Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust please call Beverley Davidson on **020 8397 7001** or email **bdavidson@orchardhill.ac.uk**

Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Closing date for applications is Monday 11th March at 5pm

Interviews to be held on Thursday 21st and Friday 22nd March.

Assistant Principal - Ealing Green College

Are you passionate about improving students' lives?

West London College is looking for an accomplished Assistant Principal to join the College and lead an exciting directorate, predominantly based at Ealing Green College.

The curriculum specialisms within the directorate include IT, Digital and Creative, Business and Professional, English, Maths, Science and an International Language School.

We are seeking to recruit a talented and capable individual who would be joining us at a key time, with the College ready to maximise the opportunities that our vibrant local economy provides. Can you lead, manage and continuously improve an education and training offer that meets the local and regional needs, contributes to growth and ensures high standards are exceeded?

The right applicant will demonstrate effective leadership skills, extensive experience of strategic and operational curriculum planning and offer a history of stakeholder engagement, resulting in demand-driven provision.

The Role

The successful candidate will be an active member of the Senior Leadership Team, influencing College-wide strategy, providing inspirational leadership to staff, encouraging innovation and excellence and ensuring the learner experience is of the highest quality.

Key aspects of the role will be developing and maintaining high quality learner experiences and outcomes as well as embedding the College's core values of Excellence, Ambition, Focus, Accountability, Inclusion and Integrity.

The post holder will be responsible for securing growth as well as continuous improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The successful candidate will play a crucial role in developing the Ealing Green College, ensuring an effective, contemporary provision.

If you are driven, enthusiastic and committed to ensuring an outstanding experience for the learners we serve and to provide opportunities for our communities, we would love to hear from you.

To Apply

For more information and to apply please visit our website and send a CV with supporting statement to **hrresourcing@wlc.ac.uk**

Tenure: Permanent
Salary: Up to £80k per annum
Closing Date: Monday 18 March 2019

For the full description of the job requirements and criteria please view and address the Job Description and Person Specification.

West London College
wlc.ac.uk

Hammersmith & Fulham College
Gliddon Road, Barons Court, London W14 9BL

Ealing Green College
The Green, Ealing, London W5 5EW

Southall Community College
Beaconsfield Road, Southall, Middlesex UB1 1DP

Park Royal College
Unit 1, Nucleus Park, Central Way, Park Royal, London NW10 7XT

West London Construction Academy
Southall Waterside, 170 Brent Road, Southall UB2 5LE

Landex
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DIRECTOR OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

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Landex is unique as a membership organisation in having as a primary goal, the continuous improvement of all its members through annual peer review, CPD, and the development of outstanding teaching and learning supported by interactive learning materials. In addition, it seeks to represent its members within a wide range of external agencies and funding bodies, as well as securing and delivering funded projects of benefit to its members.

Due to the current postholder securing a position as a College Deputy Principal, we wish to recruit for 1st September 2019

A full job description and recruitment pack for the vacancy can be downloaded from **www.landex.org.uk**

Potential applicants are welcome to discuss the position informally with the Chief Executive. **Tel. 01604 893550**

Closing date: Friday 29th March 2019

PETROC™
COLLEGE OF FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION

If you would like an informal chat about these roles please contact Jane Hanson on **01271 852522**

For further information and to download an application pack, please visit our website **www.petroc.ac.uk/jobs**. Please note it is not College policy to accept CV's.

It's a thrilling time to join Petroc... Rated as the best college in the country 2018*, Petroc is committed to driving forward educational success in further and higher education. We are extremely passionate about raising the aspirations, knowledge, innovation and skills of individuals, communities and businesses in Devon and beyond.

*Ranked no 1 in NICDEX league table, published by FE Week

From stunning scenery to cutting edge technology, Devon, has so much to give.

Year after year our students produce exceptional, record-breaking results and progress onto the country's leading universities, further training or employment.

We have three campuses in North Devon and Mid Devon, and are proud to offer an exceptional range of curriculum with provision ranging through further education to higher education including A-levels, apprenticeships, vocational training, degrees and professional programmes both full and part time, and including a wide range of recreational and short courses. We are committed to serving our whole community and live by our values of: Professional, Trusted, Ambitious and Inclusive.

Petroc is seeking to recruit the below:-

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead
Full Time and Permanent

Job Location: North Devon Campus (Barnstaple)
Salary: Competitive
Hours: 37 hours x 52 weeks
Closing Date: Noon on 11th March 2019
Assessment Day: 18th March 2019

Successful candidates will be an experienced practitioner in Safeguarding, Student Support and Welfare, and Prevent, managing and delivering an outstanding service, including recording and managing MASH, LADO and Prevent referrals. To act as the subject specialist and trainer on Safeguarding and Prevent. To work and manage the service across the college sites, supervise team members and present structured reports to the strategic Safeguarding Committee. Be a key link with external service providers such as Devon County Council Early Help, and with Government agencies.

Tutorial, Enrichment, and Progression Manager
Full Time and Permanent

Job Location: North Devon Campus (Barnstaple)
Salary: Competitive
Hours: 37 hours x 52 weeks
Closing Date: Noon on 11th March 2019
Assessment Day: 18th March 2019

This new role provides an exciting career opportunity for you to shape and develop an outstanding tutorial provision across the college. Successful candidates will have excellent interpersonal skills and management experience in a good or outstanding curriculum area, be an experienced teacher, managing staff, learners, and resources. Working with the College Ofsted Nominee you will act as the College lead for the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework for Personal Development and Behaviours and Attitudes, and lead on the development of promoting an inspiring and successful UCAS provision.

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News

EDITORIAL

So much about the ESFA's register of end-point assessment organisations makes no sense

In October 2016 the then-chief executive of the ESFA boasted about how hard it was for organisations to get onto their apprenticeship register of end-point assessment organisations.

As we reported at the time, Peter Lauener told the education select committee that just 21 applications out of 161 had been successful, explaining: "The quality of the end-point assessment is absolutely critical to the quality of the apprenticeship."

So it should come as a surprise to find that since Lauener's retirement, the ESFA appear to have dramatically changed their approach.

In what appears to be a deliberate attempt to expand the pool of assessors in the wake of concern there are not enough, the most recent round of successful applicants takes the list to over 200 and includes a council employee that applied as a sole trader as well as two guys that incorporated a limited company last August and have yet to trade or even leave their day jobs.

Our findings, ahead of the National Audit Office report on apprenticeship oversight due out next week, should raise serious questions, including:

1. Why is a funding agency responsible for determining the suitability of assessment organisations? It makes no sense.

2. Why is it acceptable that someone can join the register without any trading history given the ESFA no longer allows for this on their provider register? It makes no sense.

3. Why is it called a register of organisations when they let on sole traders? It makes no sense.

4. Why do end-point assessment organisations answer to dozens of different external quality assurance bodies approved not by the ESFA or Ofqual, but by the Institute for Apprenticeships. It makes no sense.

5. Why is Institute for Apprenticeships, not Ofqual, the regulatory body for end-point-assessment? It makes no sense.

6. Why is the Institute for Apprenticeships the regulator and for many standards also responsible for external quality assurance of assessment organisations? Regulating yourself makes no sense.

It will be interesting to see how many of these assessment related issues get picked apart next week in the NAO report.

Either way, with the pipeline of end-point assessments now starting to swell, if this does not start making more sense there is a real risk that the whole system could be undermined and come crashing down.

Nick Linford, Editor
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply

EMAIL TWITTER FACEBOOK WEBSITE

ESFA warns it could trigger college insolvencies with adult education budget claw-back

A strange situation. Sub-contract training providers such as ours have no problem finding suitable candidates to train, support and complete, but are told that there's no AEB to be had, while many of those with prime AEB contracts appear unable to spend theirs.

Nick Vause

DfE publishes indicators for potential fraud in education providers

Publishing a list of indicators is likely to be as effective as having a voluntary pay code for senior staff.

Geoff

Ofqual sparks immediate backlash over plans to force awarding organisations to conduct no-notice audits

We struggle to get more than one visit a year from City & Guilds. If we want more, we have to pay for them, so who foots the bill for this? That being said, I wholeheartedly agree with this, might get rid of "telephone diplomas" – not provided by us, but I have met learners who only had contact from their assessor over the phone!

Mary Holmes

Tributes paid to former FE Commissioner Sir David Collins

Very sad news indeed today. Sir David Collins was a true champion of FE colleges and an inspirational sector leader. He will be greatly missed. I won't forget the inspiring leadership development days he led at both colleges where I was principal.

@RichardAtkins2

Is a criminal investigation into 3aaa about to begin?

It's disgusting that apprentices haven't been reassigned!

Claire Parker-Doyle

Scrap GCSEs and A-levels in favour of 'holistic baccalaureate', says education committee chair

The lack of any strategy or plan seems staggering. Mr Halfon now throws another hand grenade into the education pathway that seems to be dysfunctional for those aged 5-22.

Gerry

The ESFA needs to talk about sex

Completely agree with you, Steve, this could be painful for these individuals. Also, this can lead to an incomplete picture of demographics and will not allow us to accurately monitor impact. As you have said, we've gone to great pains to expand and refine ethnicity categories, this shouldn't be a big deal.

Hira Malik Tabasum

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Providers turning apprentices away as non-levy cash dries up

"Fire It Up!" "Turn them Away!!" Reminds me of New Deal when TV and other adverts told employers there were unemployed people with support attached ready to fill their vacancies.

The November push drove employers by the hundreds to ask for these new employees. Problem was, there were no contracts in place, no training providers ready and employers walked away and didn't come back. "Joined up thinking" strikes again...

David Armory

Experts

MINISTERIAL MUSINGS

Anne Milton, Minister for skills and apprenticeships

A stronger set of tools to hasten FE improvements

Government interventions can be tough, but they're necessary if we want to create successful and sustainable colleges, says Anne Milton

I wanted to use this month's column to share with you the work that the FE Commissioner, Richard Atkins, and his team of deputies are doing to champion and support the sector.

Almost eight out of ten colleges are now graded good or outstanding by Ofsted, which is a fantastic achievement. This couldn't be achieved without the hard work and dedication of the many talented teachers, leaders and governors, for which I am extremely grateful.

A college is a multi-million-pound business and leading a college is a big and important challenge.

We set up the FE Commissioner's office in 2013 because we wanted to make sure learners that are getting the high-quality education and training they deserve, and that colleges have the support they need.

The commissioner and his team are doing vital work with colleges right across the country, helping to strengthen leadership and governance, which is vital for a resilient FE sector.

I'm very pleased to see the number of colleges needing formal intervention has fallen and problems are being tackled far earlier. However, where a college is experiencing severe challenges it is only right that the commissioner intervenes. Thankfully, this is now only in a small number of cases.

When there are issues, though, they must take account of a wide range of views, including those of college staff and learners, before deciding what action to take to bring about rapid and sustainable improvements.

At the start of the last academic year, the FE Commissioner's role was expanded with the introduction of "diagnostic assessments", allowing the team to focus on early diagnosis and prevention rather than waiting until more serious problems have emerged.

They now have a stronger set of tools to speed up improvements. This includes our Strategic College Improvement Fund, which is driving up standards across the sector, and

> "From April, a stronger college intervention regime will be in place"

our National Leaders of Further Education and National Leaders of Governance programmes, which draw on the expertise and experience of some of the best FE leaders, governors and clerks to help other colleges to improve.

We are also seeing further progress in strengthening the long-term position of colleges through structural change, with several college mergers going ahead and more in the pipeline. This work has been supported by funding from the restructuring facility, with £470m of this funding approved at the end of January 2019.

I recognise mergers and interventions can be tough for all involved, but these changes are necessary if we want to create successful and sustainable colleges where staff want to work and students receive high quality education.

While the vast majority of colleges are run well, there will still be some colleges having difficulties. There will be a strengthened college intervention regime in place for FE and sixth-form colleges in April, which will make sure we can respond effectively to early signals of poor financial health and quality.

The commissioner and his team will continue to help with early diagnostic assessments, which enable them to broker support for colleges that are at risk from a quality and/or financial perspective. If a college is facing difficulty, please do talk to your ESFA territorial team contact as soon as possible to ensure that a robust assessment of the college's position is made.

We understand there has been a lot of change and more is on the horizon. Colleges will need to keep adapting, but it is also an exciting time and a great opportunity for colleges to be part of this technical education transformation.

Since I became Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills I have been continually struck by the significant role colleges play. They are an engine of social mobility and change lives. They give people hope and the chance of a rewarding job, career and life ahead often when there was no hope before. Thank you for all you do.

MARK FARRAR

Chief Executive, Association of Accounting Technicians

There's life outside of the levy in a post-Brexit landscape

The apprenticeship levy needs to be rebadged as a skills levy and utilised for a broader range of training, says Mark Farrar

The news that some training providers are having to turn away individuals interested in taking apprenticeships (as reported in *FE Week*, 8 February 2019) is, to put it mildly, awkward for the Education and Skills Funding Agency. If the number of apprenticeship starts is to have any hope of returning to where it was prior to the levy's introduction, let alone of showing significant growth, the funding system speedily needs fixing to ensure that it doesn't result in non-levy-paying firms being left out in the cold.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up over 99% of all businesses and are, as such, the engine room of the British economy – a fact that won't change whatever the outcome of the current Brexit negotiations. Indeed, in a post-Brexit world it's vitally important they are not adversely impacted by shifts in funding, given they'll have plenty of other issues to deal with.

The government appeared to recognise this when they cut small employers' co-investment rates for apprenticeship training to 5% as part of the most recent Budget. However, this has yet to be implemented and will achieve little if such businesses find themselves being turned away when they do seek help for the training of their prospective apprentices.

Within the accountancy sector there has been a steady increase in the number of training providers offering AAT qualifications over the past few years, in response to ongoing demand from employers.

It has also been great to see a year-on-year rise in accounting apprenticeship starts, which were up 12% during 2017/18 – one of the few sectors to show any increase. However, looking at wider data we can see that the increase in new student numbers across the whole sector is more muted, suggesting, perhaps

> "The SME community really needs to be brought centre stage"

not unsurprisingly, a trend to badge existing levels of training under the apprenticeship banner as employers seek to recoup value from their levy payments.

If we then look to the SME sector, there are worrying signs that numbers there may be starting to dip. I sincerely hope that after several years of significant change across new standards, end-point assessments, quality control and several funding mechanisms, the result isn't a decline in the overall numbers of those being trained.

For sectors such as accountancy, where significant amounts (or even too much!) of training have always been undertaken, we need to be on our guard and act quickly.

The provision of current apprenticeship funding is, of course, to be welcomed. However, we have a cautionary message for policymakers and the ESFA. While they may wish to place their eggs in the levy-paying basket, the SME community really does need to be brought centre stage.

And it's not all just about apprenticeships. In terms of up-skilling or re-skilling people as economic changes or new technology take hold over the next decade, we have to recognise that most of the workforce that will be impacted is already gainfully employed and has been for some time.

At AAT we have been calling for some time for the levy to be rebadged as a skills levy and utilised for such broader training. It is good to see the first signs of the government enabling some flexibility in this regime but there also needs to be real focus on the SME community covering both adult education and apprenticeship needs.

Accountants tend to talk numbers and finance. There is real power and success to be found in getting such matters right. There are also some pretty hefty negative impacts to be endured if the wrong call is made. Right now some careful thinking is required on skills funding, as the upcoming fiscal year for the business community both large and small seems likely to be a very changed landscape.

STEPHEN EVANS

Chief executive, Learning and Work Institute

The demise of Working Links is a learning opportunity

The failure of the provider should prompt us to reflect seriously on the role of the marketplace in learning and skills, says Stephen Evans

Working Links' fall into administration is bad news for the people they support and their employees. Its case is different to that of learndirect and other providers. But together, they should give pause for thought about the nature of markets in learning and skills and their limits.

Firstly, commissioners need to be realistic. A large part of Working Links' problems came from its struggling probation contracts. Its management and staff bear responsibility for bad practice, such as assessing probation users as lower risk to avoid putting sufficient resources into helping them. But the government should have heeded the warnings at the time of procurement that you couldn't cut huge amounts of money out of the system without affecting the service. Added to a focus on price, rather than value, this leads to a vicious circle where providers either put in unrealistic bids or face going out of business.

Ultimately, good public services cost money. We should always strive for greater efficiency, but procurement isn't a sort of inverse magic money tree – sometimes you get what you pay for.

Secondly, this looks like the end of what was meant to be a new type of provider. Working Links started as a large, national partnership between the private, public and voluntary sectors in the New Labour years, intended to be the best of all worlds. It was sold off in 2016 to a private equity firm. Inevitably this leads to a push for higher profits at the risk of its social mission. The same can be said of learndirect, whose worst excesses (such as spending taxpayers' money sponsoring a Formula One team) were rightly exposed by *FE Week*.

Perhaps the future is more local? We're already seeing that shift in the employment sector, where a greater proportion of opportunities are now locally commissioned. Does the contraction of the large outsourcers

> "Does the contraction of the large outsourcers mean the rise of local specialists?"

mean the rise of the local specialists? The devolution of the Adult Education Budget in parts of England could hasten this.

Thirdly, markets need managing and have their limits. Contracts and targets drive behaviour, whether set out through a procurement or managing an in-house public service. That's why we need effective monitoring of quality, including through Ofsted, and service standards. But you can't write everything in a contract and you can't monitor everything. The same is true of a service delivered in-house by the public sector of course.

Empowering employers and individuals can help in this. What are the minimum levels of service standards people can expect and what do they do if these aren't met? The Apprenticeship Levy has the potential to shift the dial for employers – putting them in greater control through their levy accounts. Learning and Work Institute has argued that Personal Learning Accounts could empower individuals, and I'm pleased that the Welsh government has committed to trialling them. Bottom-up accountability to customers can complement top-down regulation.

The NHS ten-year plan for England argued that regulations requiring services to be tendered were holding back the integration of services that patients, often with complex conditions and needs, required. I wonder if we should start to make the same argument for learning and skills?

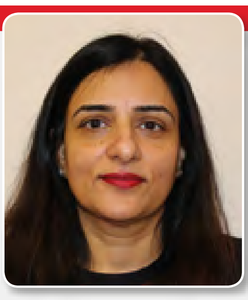
The lack of an overall vision and principles guiding decisions doesn't help. Nor does seeing each service or contract in isolation. Learning and Work Institute will shortly be launching a project exploring how we balance a focus on integrated services with ensuring that we don't lock out people with fresh ideas.

The decline and fall of Working Links and other providers is sad for all involved. It also raises big questions about how to build learning and skills systems that work for people and employers. We need a diverse range of high-quality providers. But we also need to recognise that markets have limits.

Bulletin

Movers & Shakers

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



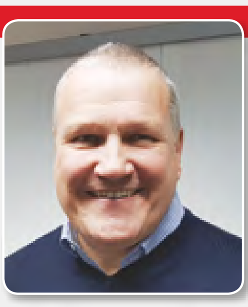
Asfa Sohail

Principal, Lewisham College

Start date February 2019

Previous job
Vice Principal, Havering College of FE.

Interesting fact
She does a lot of charity work in her own time.



Viv Russell

Board member, Mineral Products Qualifications Council

Start date December 2018

Previous job
Lime & Powders Director, Tarmac

Interesting fact
Viv shared a flat with Ricky Gervais at university.

Mike Thompson

Strategic advisor, People Plus

Start date February 2019

Previous job
Director, Early Careers, Barclays.

Interesting fact
He is a marathon runner and triathlete, and he completed his tenth major race in New York this year.

Stephanie Horn

Board member, Mineral Products Qualifications Council

Start date February 2019

Previous job
HR business partner, CEMEX.

Interesting fact
She started a book club which last year reached its 100th book.

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

FE Week Sudoku challenge

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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

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: Henry Griffith

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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