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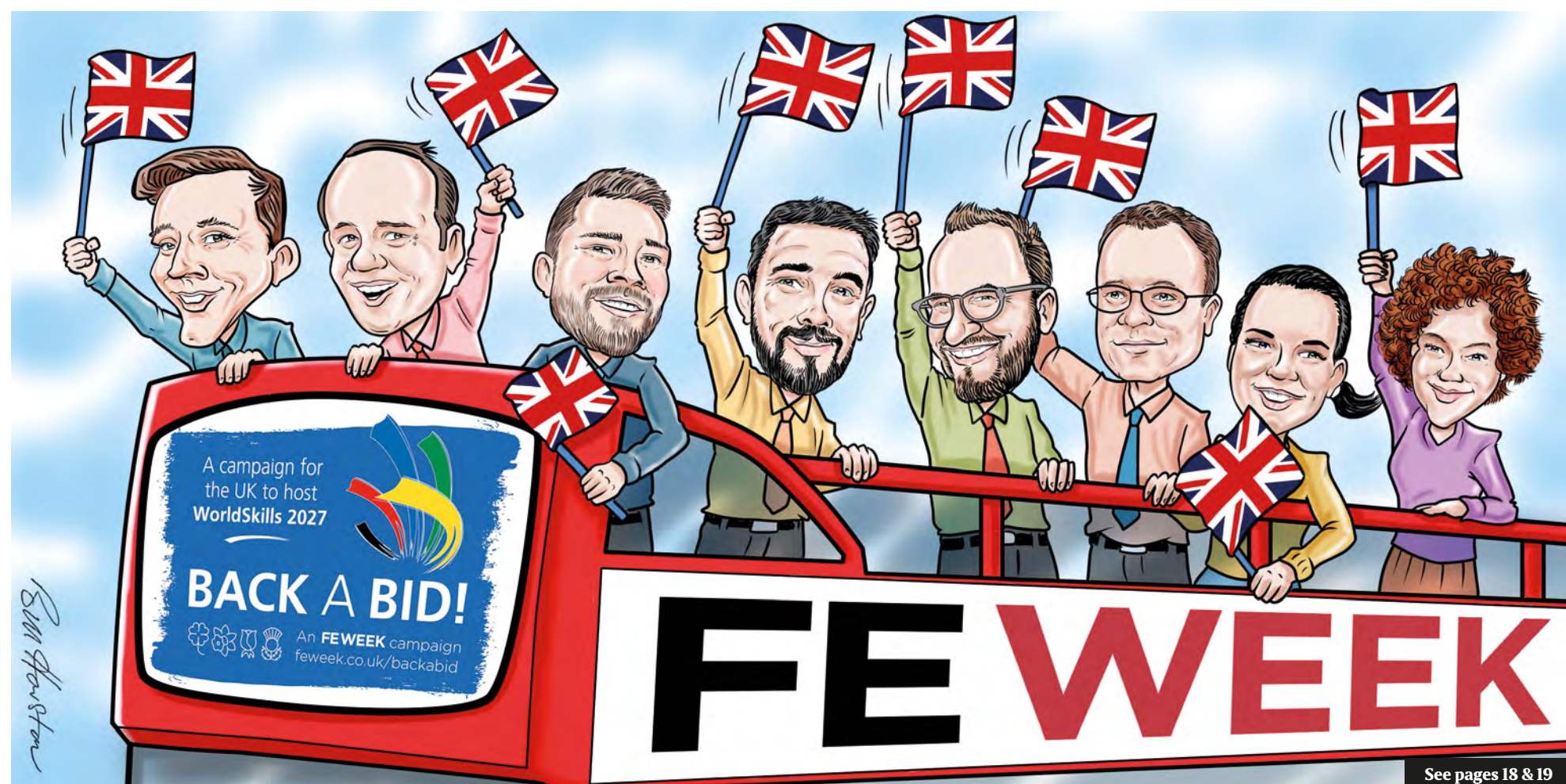
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EDITION 304

EXPOSED: FOUNDER BEHIND MAJOR DATA BREACH

'SHOCK' AS GOVERNMENT GRANTED SCREENING CHECK FIRM ACCESS TO 28M LEARNER RECORDS

EXCLUSIVE BILLY CAMDEN BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK



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HIGH COURT TO RULE ON FAILED AEB TENDER

- › Court papers reveal training provider battling for financial compensation
- › West Midlands Combined Authority allegedly admitted their scoring error
- › Judge's ruling could force retendering of dozens of contracts worth £28m

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BA hits back at ‘unfair’ Ofsted apprenticeship report

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Apprenticeships at a major airline have been heavily criticised by Ofsted. It found “disorganisation” and “inconsistency” meant too many employees “did not see the value of being an apprentice”.

British Airways, an employer provider which is drawing down government apprenticeship funding for over 500 of its own staff, was found to have made ‘insufficient progress’ in one area and ‘reasonable progress’ in two others in an early monitoring report.

Apprenticeship providers that make ‘insufficient progress’ are typically suspended from taking on and training their own new apprentices by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

A BA spokesperson said they do not believe the report was a “fair” assessment of its provision and claimed that inspectors only spoke to three per cent of apprentices.

They also pointed out that Ofsted’s inspection only looked at the

apprenticeship programme that BA delivers itself – the level 3 cabin crew standard.

The airline also has apprentices in a number of other areas, such as engineering, customer service, head office, and cargo, which were not subject to the inspection as they are delivered by other providers.

While apprentices on the level 3 cabin crew standard are “proud” to work for the employer provider, Ofsted found they are “frustrated by the disorganisation and inconsistent approach they experience in their apprenticeship”.

As a result, many of the ones inspectors spoke to “do not see the value of being an apprentice”.

Inspectors said they are not “sufficiently aware” they are even on an apprenticeship when they are recruited.

The arrangements that have been put in place with a subcontractor to ensure apprentices gain English and maths qualifications are not effective, the report reads, and too many learners failed their maths exams.

Leaders and managers do not ensure staff are giving apprentices

clear information about what to expect in their end-point assessment.

This has meant apprentices do not know enough about what the assessment will involve when they come to that point in their programme.

Trainers are also not granted sufficient time before they start their sessions to take prior knowledge into account, so they cannot alter the delivery to meet apprentices’ needs sufficiently.

And while BA was found to have made ‘reasonable progress’ in safeguarding, managers have recognised an issue around apprentices feeling “patronised” and instances of “intimidating behaviour while flying”.

Inspectors reported actions taken in response to this “have not had sufficient impact in improving the experience for a few apprentices”.

A spokesperson for the airline said they “do not believe the report offers a fair assessment” of their cabin crew scheme and Ofsted’s findings are “at odds with the positive feedback we receive from the vast majority of our apprentices”.

They added that BA “remains



committed to investing in our people” and will continue to work closely with Ofsted following the monitoring visit.

Apprentices do receive appropriate training, inspectors found, and thanks to the training they become “competent and compliant” cabin crew members who can work safely, in a short period of time.

This is because they benefit from learning in “high-quality” training facilities which reflect their on-board experience “exactly” and trainers utilise their expert knowledge to teach legislative requirements and health and safety regulations.

For example, they teach apprentices to understand the “ditching” process – where a plane has to land in water in an emergency – and practical activities are used to check learners know how to open and close doors securely.

Advertorial

Fresh start for #FullyFunctional – your pledge of support could make a difference

The start of a new year always seems like the best time to make resolutions and plans.

For NCFE, the start of 2020 sees us hit the ground running once again with our #FullyFunctional campaign, as part of our ongoing commitment to promote and advance learning for all.

Originally launched in April 2019, #FullyFunctional is our ask to the government to change the current GCSE funding legislation to help create a level playing field for English and maths qualifications.

At present, funding rules dictate that any young person who achieves a grade 3 (grade D in the old system) in their GCSE English or maths exam has to resit the same exam until they pass. Research has shown however that of those who resit, only one in every four will achieve a higher grade. For young people looking to progress in their lives and careers, this leads to a repetitive cycle of failure which is damaging to their confidence and in some cases, mental health, at what is a critical time in their professional and personal development.

Learners who achieve a grade 1 or 2 at GCSE by comparison are offered alternative routes to achieve these qualifications through programmes such as Functional Skills, offering a more skills-led, practical approach to learning which might better suit a learner’s individual learning style, as well as the needs of future employers.

NCFE has always been a firm believer that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach when it comes to education, which is why we believe that opening up these alternative options to all learners and creating a greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning will help more young people

to achieve their full potential on their chosen career paths.

As part of the campaign launch, we conducted a survey which asked the opinion of more than 2,000 members of the general public for their views on the current legislation. Nearly 70% agreed that young people should be given alternative options other than GCSEs with 71% also agreeing that students should also be allowed to learn in a style that suits them.

Additionally, over half of respondents (53%) who were studying for their GCSEs at the time the survey was conducted said that this was the most stressful time of their teenage years.

This sentiment has been echoed across the sector, with a number of FE colleges, employers, school teachers and MPs voicing their support for the campaign, which is why, in the aftermath of December’s general election and with a new cabinet in place, we feel like this is the perfect time for us to re-centre our focus in order to take #FullyFunctional to the next level.

So, how do we plan to do this? We’re looking for as many people as possible, from learners to teachers, and educational institutions to employers to get behind the campaign and make as much noise as possible about this critical issue so we can encourage a the necessary changes in resit policy which will impact so many young people for years to come.

To make this easier to do, we have created a digital pledge for people to sign, hosted on the NCFE website, which will be curated into a petition document for us to send to government on behalf of the entire sector.

Functional Skills qualifications cover the essential elements of English and maths to provide and reinforce the



relevant and usable skills that learners need in areas such as communication, problem solving, listening, time management and team working in order to enable them to engage successfully as citizens and progress to further learning or employment.

At NCFE, we believe that by working together collaboratively to address the educational needs of young people from all walks of life, we can equip the workforce of the future with the right skills to progress and achieve. People are the most important resource we have and by levelling the playing field between ‘alternative’ qualifications and GCSEs, we can successfully unlock potential and help to make a positive difference to people’s lives and the success of our economy.

For more information and to join the #FullyFunctional movement, visit www.ncfe.org.uk/fully-functional.

DfE granted screening firm access to 28m learner records

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Exclusive

The founder of a firm at the centre of a major education data breach involving betting companies was subject to a previous government investigation. Questions have now been asked as to why the firm, which offers screening checks, was allowed access to a database with the records of 28 million young people, meant only for vetted education training providers. Unions have slammed the Department for Education's due diligence processes, with one calling for an "urgent investigation looking at the criteria the DfE uses to grant access to the data".

“Parents will be rightly concerned about this data breach”

According to a DfE list, more than 12,000 organisations have successfully applied to have access to the Learning Records Service (LRS). Earlier this week, an inquiry was launched by the ESFA after the Sunday Times reported that the LRS had been accessed by data intelligence firm GB Group – whose clients include 32Red



and Betfair among other gambling companies. The data contains names, ages and addresses of young people aged 14 and over in schools and colleges across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Privacy rules state that young people's personal information should only be accessed through the LRS by organisations "specifically linked to your education and training". The DfE suspended access to the system this week in order to carry out the "necessary checks to ensure data security". It reopened on Thursday. According to the department, the "education training provider" which "wrongly provided access" to the LRS was Trustopia, a firm co-founded by Ronan Smith in August 2018. The department said the company had access to the LRS because they registered with a UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN) on the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKRLP) as an apprenticeship provider. Trustopia is not on the government's approved register of apprenticeship providers and can therefore not deliver apprenticeships in any capacity.

Its "nature of business", according to Companies house, is "other information technology service activities". Smith declined to comment on the breach when approached by FE Week, but did confirm Trustopia is not a training provider, nor has it ever been. It is understood that the firm has worked with education providers in the past. A previous investigation by FE Week exposed how any company can gain a UKPRN within 24 hours, simply by providing their limited company number. And a UKRLP spokesperson said at the time: "It is up to stakeholders who use the UKPRNs to ensure that they carry out the necessary due diligence appropriate to their scope when engaging with providers." Once a company has a UKPRN, it then needs to fill in a three-page application form to access the LRS. The service is designed to help training providers verify their potential student's previous educational achievements and their eligibility for additional funding. The DfE would not say why



Trustopia was given access to the LRS, or what it used the service for. A spokesperson would say only that "A full investigation is under way and we will share any further information with you in due course." Prior to co-founding Trustopia, Smith ran a private provider called Edudo, which was investigated by the ESFA in 2017. The agency subsequently terminated the firm's contracts, which were used to deliver courses funded through advanced learner loans. Smith then transferred Edudo's assets to a new company called Learning Republic and went bust. Hundreds of learners were subsequently left thousands of pounds in debt with no qualifications to show for it. An FE Week investigation last year found that some of these learners, most of whom were Polish construction workers, had claimed they never started the course with Edudo – or even realised they had signed up for one. Smith declared as bankrupt in November 2019. Juliana Mohamad Noor, the vice president for further education at the National Union of Students, said her union is "shocked that this level of personal data of students was readily available without adequate checks on who can access it". The DfE has "failed these young people by not performing the relevant due diligence assessment of Trustopia and its owner," she added. "We are calling for a full and thorough investigation of this case to ensure that no more harm is done to the students involved."

“We need rigorous checks on any organisations which are granted access”

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the NEU, said: "Parents will be rightly concerned about this data breach. "There needs to be an urgent investigation looking at the criteria the DfE uses to grant access to the data and the identities of organisations

which already have access. "Given the hugely sensitive nature of this data it is also vital that there are rigorous checks on any organisations which are granted access." According to the Sunday Times report, GB Group used the LRS for age and identity verification services for its clients. The DfE this week referred the breach to data regulators the Information Commissioner's Office. An ICO spokesperson confirmed it has "received a report" from the DfE and "will be making enquiries". A DfE spokesperson said Trustopia "broke their agreement with us" with regards to the LRS. "This was completely unacceptable and we have immediately stopped the firm's access and ended our agreement with them. We will be taking the strongest possible action," they added. A GB Group spokesperson said: "We can confirm that we use the Learning Records Service dataset via a third party. We take claims of this nature very seriously and, depending on the results of our review, we will take appropriate action." Trustopia did not respond to requests for comment.

AoC board set for shake-up to bring in outside experts

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A major reorganisation of the board at the Association of Colleges (AoC) will see many of the principals replaced by experts from outside the sector.

The membership body is also proposing to create a new members' council, as well as giving a "new focus" for their president.

Chief executive of the membership organisation, David Hughes, said the aim is to "ensure that we have good governance arrangements with the member voice at their heart".

A consultation on the plans was launched towards the end of 2019.

One of the AoC's main proposals is to create a "smaller and more focused board, with a mix of members and non-members".

There are currently 13 serving college leaders on the association's board. The AoC wants to reduce this to just four whilst appointing three external

members who have experience in operational areas such as public affairs, membership services and campaigning.

The chief executive, the AoC's finance director and chair would continue to sit on the board. It would meet quarterly and "set the strategic direction" of the organisation.

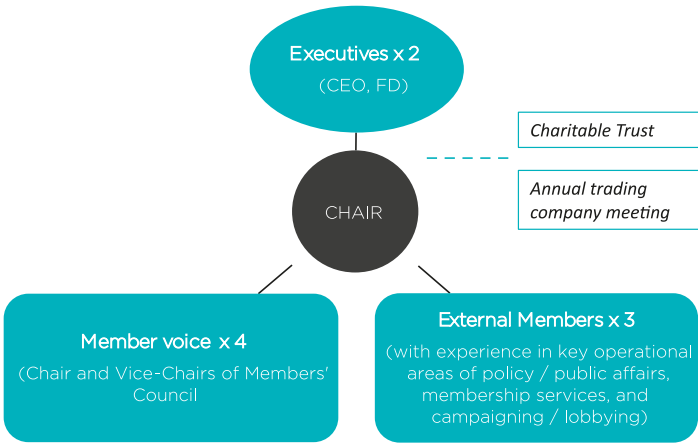
Separately, a members' council would be created and report to the board twice a year.

It would become the "overarching" governance forum for the AoC, according to the consultation, providing a "structured route for engagement with members linked to regional networks and events".

It would also "identify and establish" policy, special interest, and project-specific groups, whilst also overseeing "campaigning activities".

The council would consist of a "core group of college experts".

All college leaders would be eligible to be elected to the council, and one principal and one chair from each region would be elected through



Source: AoC's future governance arrangements consultation

member elections – taking membership to 18.

The council would meet bi-annually and be the "over-arching forum for ministers and officials to engage with sector".

AoC proposes that the president, currently Steve Frampton, would chair the members' council.

"That does raise the question of the

election process and term of office for the president," the consultation said.

"Currently, the president is elected annually for a one-year term. Only principals in post at the time of nomination, or the first-year president are eligible to stand.

"We could maintain this eligibility requirement process or propose a new process. Similarly, we could also

maintain the annual election process or propose a two or three-year term."

It added that linkages between the members' council and AoC board are "critical".

Commenting on the governance changes, Hughes said: "The AoC board spent time last year reviewing the governance arrangements for AoC and consulted members about ideas for potential changes in the autumn last year. The consultation led to really good feedback and discussions with members, as it was designed to.

"The AoC board discussed the responses and the discussions at its December meeting and agreed to go back out to members with the second stage of the process, building on the feedback and engaging members further", said Hughes. "The aim is to ensure that we have good governance arrangements with the member voice at their heart."

He added that there is "no rush for change" and that the association is "simply taking time to fully engage with members so that we can reach an agreement on next steps".

Final proposals are set to be presented in March and any changes to governance would be subject to agreement by members.

The consultation states that new arrangements are expected to take effect from August 2020.



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Ofsted annual report 2019: What

HMCI still 'not happy' with low-level arts and media courses

BILLY CAMDEN
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Ofsted's chief inspector is still "not happy" that some colleges steer too many of their students towards "superficially attractive" arts and media courses where there are limited job opportunities.

Amanda Spielman reiterated this concern, which she first raised at the 2018 Association of Colleges' conference, during her speech at the watchdog's annual report launch this week.

She said the minority of colleges simply try to "fill their rolls and attract funding", whether or not the programmes they offer "open doors for the students that take them".

"This doesn't mean that the courses the young people are taking are completely worthless. But flooding a local job market with young people with say low-level arts and media qualifications when the big growth in demand is for green energy workers, will result in too many under-employed and dissatisfied young people and wind turbines left idle," Spielman told the audience.

"So we need a clearer focus on matching skills to opportunities not just for Brexit. Many FE providers operate in places the government says it wants to level up, what better way to level up than to radically improve the quality of vocational and skills education in our towns.

"But it does also mean tackling the small minority of our colleges that have under-performed or been stuck for years."

She added that the government must think "strategically" about skills and how the FE sector is funded and "encouraged to provide the right courses of the right quality".



When Spielman first spoke out about the "mismatch" between the numbers of students taking arts and media courses and their "future employment in the industry" in November 2018, she said the qualifications give learners "false hope".

Her controversial comments made headlines in The Guardian, The Times and the Daily Mail.

Ofsted also used their annual report launch to warn that high levels of management and health apprenticeships are a "mismatch" compared to the government's industrial strategy and needs to be addressed "urgently".

Out of every 100 apprenticeships started in

2018/19, the watchdog found that 15 are health apprenticeships, 12 are business management, only six are in construction, five in ICT and five in engineering.

Business management and health accounted for almost half of all higher-level apprenticeships started last year.

"This does not appear to align well with our grand challenges as a country," Ofsted said.

After Spielman's speech, she told FE Week she was "encouraging government" to restrict funding choices for employers and colleges.

"There is always a balance in the system," she said.

"It is very important to have a level of local autonomy in decision making but the funding of post-16 education is, there is a strategic and tactical alignment to it.

"I am encouraging government to make use of the powers that it has to decide where and how to channel money to help make sure that overall we do the best job we can for young people."

Her comments sparked a backlash. Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said Whitehall "choosing winners" has a "very chequered history and at a time when business is already facing uncertainty over which way Brexit will land, the last thing employers need across different regions is being told how to spend the levy".

"Encouragement and incentivising is one thing; curtailing choice is quite another," he added.

And Matthew Percival, the Confederation of British Industry's director for people and skills policy, said: "Putting more restrictions on how firms can spend their funds risks further reducing training opportunities in lots of workplaces."

Who should decide the FE college course offer?

After the chief inspector's annual report launch speech, FE Week caught up with Paul Joyce, Ofsted's deputy director of FE and skills.

On the question of whether college leaders are to be trusted with picking which courses to run, Joyce said: "Some colleges need to look at their curriculum offer and that is exactly why principals need to be involved in that conversation with employers, the Department for Education, local enterprise partnerships and mayoral combined authorities.

"So there is that holistic look rather than an individual college principal determining what the provision is that should run at their college."

But "ultimately, at the moment, that is Ofsted's question. Are the people that are in charge and are making those decisions, are they making the right decisions and do we need to look at any leaders to enable the provision to better meet the needs of the economy?"

Joyce added: "You will have heard Amanda say in her speech that this mismatch between provision and what the economy, what local businesses, what localities need from their skills provision, so the clear message for us is for government to think about how it targets funding, how it priorities courses and how supply better means demand in FE and skills.

"The annual report specifically refers to the apprenticeship arena, where the mismatch between the number of apprentices on the say, management and business courses, just does not align with the skills priorities of the economy, of the industrial strategy. That extends to college courses as well.

"The question Amanda is posing is do we need time to look at the system as it is operating and government needs to think, does it need to have more of a role in prioritising that provision through its leavers, through funding for example, about what courses are funded, what sectors are funded and more about prioritising exactly what is needed?"



Evidence in the 2018 level two research, not inspection reports, says Ofsted

FE Week asked Ofsted for examples of inspection reports in which, as claimed by the chief inspector, "colleges steer too many of their students towards superficially attractive courses that fill their rolls and attract funding, whether or not they open doors for the students that take them".

The inspectorate pointed us to reports for North Lincolnshire Council and the Chic Beauty Academy, in which it was said the training programmes did not meet local needs.

But no inspection report examples were forthcoming for colleges.

A spokesperson for Ofsted said the issue was "not about individual examples but an overarching picture".

Rather, "Amanda was making reference to findings we have seen across the sector and were laid out within our level 2 study programmes research."

Ofsted published their report in November 2018, the findings of which were based on 15 college visits and learner surveys and found "the proportion of [level 2] students who went on to employment was small".

And the researchers found "college leaders emphasised their focus on employers, local employment need and getting students into employment"...yet..."we found little evidence of

this in-depth engagement between colleges and employers"...and..."very few colleges used the data on destinations when evaluating the quality of their study programmes".

But the report also described how one "college had plans to offer a media course in 'media post-production' because there was an increasing industry demand for film-editing skills in the area".

Ofsted recommended that "all colleges should engage actively with employers. This should include greater use of employers to co-design and implement aspects of the curriculum and assess learners".

What was said about FE and skills?

Ofsted's chief inspector, Amanda Spielman, used yesterday's annual report speech to repeat her criticism first aired in 2018 that a minority of colleges simply try to "fill their rolls and attract funding", whether or not the programmes they offer "open doors for the students who take them". She added that some colleges were "flooding" local job markets "with young people with low-level arts and media qualifications". David Hughes tackles the criticism and explores whether, as suggested by the chief inspector, the government should step in

Unsurprisingly, the launch of Ofsted's annual report has sparked many conversations; it always does, because everyone becomes engrossed in debating whether Ofsted is getting it "right" or "wrong". For colleges this year, discussion has centred on whether courses offered to young people help them into jobs.

The relationship between course subject and employment outcomes is a complex one at all levels and in all types of education. It is broadly accepted that a degree in any subject is good preparation for the world of work. So singling out courses at lower levels is wrong and unfair. When employers recruit a graduate they expect a suite of skills, abilities and behaviours that allow someone to flourish in their organisation. The job-specific skills are achieved on the job, but are learned best by people with transferable skills. You don't need a degree to have those skills; colleges students achieve them on courses at every level, and in every subject.

We also know that for many students, they learn as much or perhaps even more from enrichment and extra-curricular activities. I cannot remember the last time I asked a candidate at interview about their qualifications, but I often ask about other

DAVID HUGHES

Chief executive, Association of Colleges



Where is Ofsted's evidence that colleges are being dishonest over job prospects?

activities which show the breadth of skills we are looking for.

It would also be short-sighted to suggest that every course can be matched directly to a job, not least because the labour market changes rapidly. When the best employers recruit, they are not looking to recruit people who are 100 per cent ready to do a specific job, but rather those with the potential to grow and develop, to learn and adapt. College courses develop student potential. They also build the confidence which unleashes it.

One of the accusations thrown at colleges is that they are not honest with potential students about the destinations and outcomes of a course. I've not seen evidence of that, but if it exists then I am confident that Ofsted will unearth it and report back through inspection reports. My experience,

backed up by Ofsted in its inspections under the new framework, is that colleges strive to make the best decisions for their students and the wider economy. They do set out progression pathways and offer good IAG. Results are pretty good, with the vast majority progressing on to study at higher levels or using their transferable skills in a whole range of sectors and roles.

Ofsted's new inspection framework speaks to this, with deeper dives into the intent and impact of courses. It's right to take a more developmental approach so that colleges can really focus on outcomes and positive destinations of students. But we need to understand those outcomes better and understand that most people do not have linear routes into work and through their careers. Careers are often messy, with initial qualifications counting

for little and experience and broader skills and abilities mattering far more. Over four years ago we found that the average college worked with over 600 employers. When I meet these employers, they enthusiastically talk about how their success depends on colleges supporting the development of their workforce for immediate and long-term skills needs. Investing in colleges to provide more advice to SMEs would result in more relationships like this – good for productivity as well as for student prospects.

"Ofsted singling out courses at lower levels is wrong and unfair"

I'm sceptical about anyone who believes they can determine what courses are needed to make the labour market more efficient. There are simply too many variables to make those sorts of direct links, particularly given that most of the 2030 workforce is already in school. That's not to say that colleges should not look at labour market information: they do, along with working with their local economic development team, the Local Enterprise Partnership, employer bodies and large and small employers.

Ultimately, colleges are expert at offering people the chance to succeed, no matter their circumstance or background. They do this by helping people find their passion and gain the transferable skills employers are crying out for. Employers working with colleges have high satisfaction levels, as do students; and outcomes are very good too. Any intervention must not come at the expense of this.

FE leaders delighted by Hughes' 'spot on' critique

FE Week published Association of Colleges boss David Hughes' opinion piece (above) online a day after Ofsted's annual report launch. His thoughts prompted further reaction from the FE sector.

David Russell, chief executive of the Education Training Foundation, said Hughes was "spot on with this, I think".

He went on: "I would also add that there's an age dimension here. Further education is further EDUCATION; it's not just training.

"I am 100 per cent with Amanda Spielman that we want to train people to build and fix wind turbines, and quickly; but the idea that the green energy sector's skills needs over the next 3 years are going to be met by 18 year-olds is quixotic at best.

"Up-skilling and re-skilling trained adults – usually

from contiguous trades and occupations – is the real-world solution to the rapid growth of green technologies (talk to the person fitting your new electric car charging point – he or she is a trained electrician who has specialised)".

He added: "Young people deserve to be educated broadly up to age 18, specializing gently – not severely – in subjects or fields they are broadly interested in. Those broad interests do not need to match the local labour market for media and digital arts at level 2 any more than they need to for archaeology at level 6."

Jo Maher, principal of Boston College, said she was "delighted" that Hughes has tackled this issue "head on for our sector".

"I agree fully with his points and have witnessed first-hand the fabulous work that careers teams and colleges do across the country," she added.


"Colleges are Matrix accredited for a reason: we have qualified careers staff, support Gatsby benchmarks and engage with hundreds of employers to ensure we deliver a vibrant curriculum that drives the

economy and fuels student prosperity. "If we remove student choice and subsequently their autonomy, it will impact their motivation and life chances." Deborah Davidson, who works at the Ideas Foundation, took to Twitter to say that creative vocational education at level 2 is "often a place of profound healing and growth for young people whose prior life experience has been poor". "FE is the place where they learn to re-connect with hope and aspiration. Ofsted must be careful what they wish for here," she added. Louise Doyle, the founder of Mesma (a specialist firm in quality improvement for the education sector), also questioned the whereabouts of Ofsted's evidence showing that colleges are dishonest over job prospects. "Are the new lighter reports designed to side step

this type of valid criticism?" she said. Jo Burgess, a researcher at Leeds University Business School, tweeted to say "good luck with telling young people what they want to study. "Information is good, but they might have dreams and aspirations that are not driven by their local labour market. As has been the case with teenagers since they were invented." And lecturer Lucy Supperstone took to Twitter to say it was "great to read this sensible reflection on FE. "FE is about educating the whole learner to develop skills for their future," she added. "Good curriculum development stimulates personal development that can be used in any industry, whilst using interests to motivate learning"

Jo Maher (left) and David Russell





Stuart Rimmer
@coachinception

Replying to @NickLinford @DavidRussellETF and 6 others

Fully agree with @DavidRussellETF about education not just skills . Sector has too long played the skills factory ideal to gvt plus a splendid use of the word quixotic. Top marks!

11:12 AM · Jan 23, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Stuart Rimmer, CEO of East Coast College, chips in the debate on Twitter

Coupland: outside DfE I'm looking forward to being 'an independent voice'

NICK LINFORD
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Exclusive

The new boss of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education says she's "excited to step out of the confines" of the Department for Education and have "more of an independent voice".

Civil servant veteran Jennifer Coupland made the admission during her first interview with FE Week.

She pledged to instil "collaboration" into the institute's operation, after replacing Sir Gerry Berragan at the helm of government quango in November.

She said: "In terms of my leadership style, I have a track record in apprenticeship

Sir Gerry Berragan



and technical education policy and working with the sector, colleges, the Association of Colleges, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and others in a really collaborative way.

"You need to have people on board to deliver significant change. If you don't, then that change doesn't get routed into the system. I will be looking at how we embed that more into the way the institute works in a collaborative way going forward."

Coupland made headlines this week after she called for an additional £750 million of government funding a year to prop-up small businesses' apprenticeships.

This was a big step-change to what she has been allowed to say in public in her roles at the Department for Education.

Asked if she felt liberated by the move, she said: "One of the reasons I was interested in the job was I thought it would be an exciting move for me to step out of the confines of the department and have a more independent voice in the system."

Reflecting on her predecessor's time at the institute, Coupland said Berragan "did a fantastic job in his two years here".

"We doubled in size, and he brought a degree of order and systematised the whole operation in terms of standard approvals," she added.

"Looking ahead over the next five years, my priorities are really going to be around making sure that we are operating as efficiently as we can, making sure we are as collaborative as we possibly can be, but also using the fact that we have this unique suite of employers.

"We're working with 6,000 employers on an annual basis. It gives us a degree of authority, I think, in the system, to speak on behalf of employers about the



Jennifer Coupland

things they're telling us that matter for apprenticeships and technical education going forward."

She said the IfATE has an "exciting year ahead" and revealed they will launch two consultations in the spring: one of funding and another on external quality assurance.

"Of course we are launching the new T-levels in September, so I think it is going to be a really exciting time

for the institute and I'm really looking forward to 2020," she added.

Coupland was formerly the director of professional and technical education in the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and was previously acting chief executive of the Standards Testing Agency.

Prior to that she spent three years as the deputy director of the Apprenticeships Unit.

Atkins boosts national leader numbers to 19

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The FE Commissioner has almost doubled the number of national leaders of further education (NLFs) and national leaders of governance (NLGs), after new appointments were announced this week.

Richard Atkins announced that five more college leaders will become NLFs, and that there will be four new NLGs, bringing the total number to 19.

The national network has already supported more than 60 colleges where governance and leadership needs to improve since being set up in 2018, according to the Department for Education.

Education minister Lord Agnew said: "Good governance and leadership are the backbone of any well-run college."

He claimed the programmes have made "a real difference" helping to "ensure our colleges have better leaders and governors so more people have the opportunity to access high quality education and training".

"I welcome the appointment of these experienced college leaders and

governors. They will play an important role in supporting colleges, so more people can gain the skills they need to progress," Agnew added.

NLFs are serving college leaders with "a strong track record of delivering improvement – both at their own colleges and in working with others".

They are also tasked with providing strategic mentoring and support to other colleges.

The new NLFs are: Phil Cook (Stockton Riverside College – Education Training Collective), Angela Williams (Huddersfield New College), Sam Parrett (London South East Colleges), Amanda Melton (Nelson and Colne College) and Colin Booth (Leeds City College – Luminate Education Group).

They join existing NLFs Lindsey Whiterod (Tyne Coast College), Peter McGhee (St John Rigby College), Gill Alton (Grimsby Institute of Further & Higher Education), David Gleed (North Kent College), Graham Razey (East Kent College and Canterbury Colleges) and Paul Phillips (Weston College).

Experienced college governors and clerks with "a strong record of supporting college improvement" are



Amanda Melton, Angela Williams, Phil Cook, Sam Parrett and Colin Booth

chosen to be NLGs.

Their remit is to provide strategic mentoring and support to governance boards.

For example, Andrew Baird (governor, East Surrey College) was drafted in as an interim chair at Brooklands College after the government demanded it returns a huge amount of funding following a £20 million apprenticeship scandal.

The new NLGs are: Jennifer Foote (clerk, LTE Group), Elton D'Souza (chair,

West Suffolk College), Sandra Prail (chair, Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College) and Rob Lawson (chair, Education Partnership North East) are the new NLG appointments.

The rest of the NLG team is made up of Shirley Collier (governor, York College), Heather Cross (clerk, Wiltshire College), Carole Drury (clerk, Kendal College) and Simon Perryman (governor, Barnsley College).

Atkins said the additions would help the office "support more colleges" and

share "best practice".

He added: "My team and I look forward to working alongside these outstanding college leaders, governors and clerks in ensuring that colleges are in a strong and sustainable position to provide an outstanding quality of education."

The aim of the programmes is to proactively help tackle issues in colleges before they become a major problem and reduce the need for formal intervention across the sector.



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Provider challenging 'flawed' AEB tender in the high court

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Exclusive

Lawyers are set to go to battle at the high court later this month, in the first ever challenge to a failed adult education budget application, *FE Week* can reveal.

East Birmingham Community Forum (EBCF) claims it was wrongly denied a fair run at securing a slice of £28 million of funding put out by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) last year.

In documents obtained by *FE Week* ahead of the January 31 court date, the independent learning provider alleges the procurement was “flawed” and that WMCA admitted in writing that they had made scoring errors. They also claim the WMCA did not abide by legislative procurement rules.

“The information provided by the defendant is unclear and inadequate”

A spokesperson for WMCA told *FE Week* they refute the claims but would be “making no further comment at this time”.
EBCF declined to comment.



If the EBCF challenge is successful, two areas of the area’s AEB provision bid could have to be retendered.

EBCF, which operates across two centres in Birmingham, applied to run a programme aimed at teaching unemployed people new skills, and an “innovative delivery” project by the March 2019 deadline of the WMCA’s tender.

But in May it was told it had failed at the first of two stages for the AEB procurement.

The first stage was split into questions about eligibility, and a general technical evaluation which asked questions about the provider’s achievement rates, learner satisfaction scores, quality assurance, capability and track record and its ability to meet local needs.

For achievement rates, EBCF had to provide its latest data for adult education, which it duly did: 96 per cent for entry-level and level one and 100 per cent for level two in 2017/18.

It sent this off with the rest of the application – only to be told later it had scored just 55 per cent when it needed 60 to progress.

A list of possible scores replicated in the court paperwork gives the only available scores being even numbers between zero and ten; but WMCA scored EBCF three for one question and seven for another question.

Following this, EBCF asked for further evaluation of its application and received a feedback report which said “no achievement rate data was received”.

When challenged by the provider, WMCA allegedly “acknowledged



the feedback report was wrong” and explained it had contained the “unmoderated” feedback of one evaluator.

EBCF claims the authority made “manifest errors” in the scoring of tenders, and believes the report is not the unmoderated comments of one evaluator, but are in fact comments made after the event.

This is because comments made in the feedback for the information EBCF provided about its achievement rates and quality assurance appear to reference emails the provider sent after submitting its application.

In June, EBCF met with WMCA’s head of skills delivery Clare Hatton to discuss its scoring and concerns, where the provider said its entire general technical evaluation should be reviewed.

A few days later, WMCA sent a letter instead. This stated that it would review only the question on achievement rates, and Hatton had performed a personal review of that question and found it deserved a score of four, not three.

“It is unclear if this review was a formal re-scoring of the claimant’s responses to question one,” the provider has said.

“On any view, the information provided by the defendant is unclear and inadequate,” adding the feedback

report and Hatton’s comments have created “a thoroughly confused picture”.

Following the letter, EBCF had their solicitors write to WMCA asking for the make-up of the evaluation panel which reviewed their application, the guidance provided to them, and any evaluation report with recommendations for the authority.

They also asked for an award notice, explaining the reasons why EBCF had not been picked and why the successful tenderer had.

EBCF claims not to have received this notice, which they say means the standstill period on the tender had not come to an end so WMCA cannot enter into contracts for the lots EBCF bid for.

This is due to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which says the contracting authority has to send an

award notice to every operator which took part in a tender.

Proceedings were initiated on June 12 when WMCA did not provide any of the information asked of them.

According to the EBCF, the lack of an award notice means that if WMCA has entered into contracts for the services the provider bid for, they are in breach of regulations and those contracts “should be declared ineffective”.

WMCA announced that nine providers were successful in their bid for the skills for the unemployed tender and 10 were for the innovative delivery tender.

If their case is successful, EBCF is also asking for their application to be “properly evaluated”, information on how the tenders were evaluated, damages and costs.



Thousands of apprentices dumped by training provider after Ofsted inspection

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More than 2,500 apprentices and adult learners have been left in the lurch after their provider immediately exited the training market following a grade four Ofsted report.

Progress to Excellence Limited (PtE), an independent learning provider established in 1997, this week dropped from 'good' to 'inadequate'.

The education watchdog reported that leaders' and governors' growth strategy to expand the curriculum "has had a negative impact on the quality of education and training that apprentices and learners receive".

Leaders "failed" to recruit enough high-quality staff to meet the increased range of vocational programmes on offer.

"Too many" apprentices and learners told inspectors that they "are having a poor experience" and have suffered "disruption to their learning because of staffing issues".

Following publication of the report

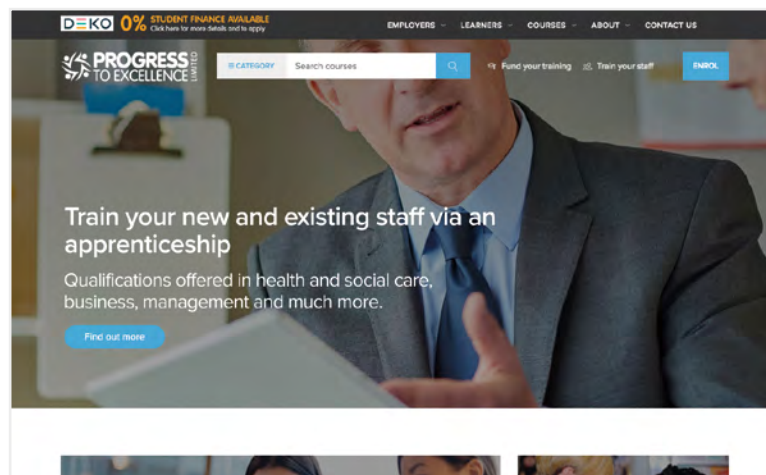
on Wednesday, Katy Lennon, acting chief executive officer of PtE, said: "Progress to Excellence Ltd will be exiting the apprenticeship market, with immediate effect. We will also stop offering funding for courses via advanced learner loans.

"All employers and learners are being notified of this situation, and where necessary, they will be supported by ourselves and the Education and Skills Funding Agency to find suitable alternative training to support their professional development."

It is not known if the ESFA terminated PtE's contracts, which is typical when a private provider is rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted.

The firm declined to comment on whether it would shut down completely or if there would be any job losses. Its financial accounts showed there were 140 employees for the year ended March 31, 2018.

At the time of inspection in December, there were 2,008 apprentices, 609 adult learners and "a very small number of learners on traineeship programmes" at the Wirral-



based provider.

PtE subcontracted out around 250 apprentices to four subcontractors.

Apprenticeship programmes included health and care, business and engineering and manufacturing at levels 2 to 5, while adult learners, who all used advanced learner loans to pay for their courses, studied hairdressing, beauty and fitness at level 3 and 4.

According to Ofsted, apprentices and learners were "frustrated" by how poorly PtE staff "keep them informed".

They also complained that they have had "many different training and assessment officers".

Students did "not benefit from a challenging and broad curriculum".

While adult learners, most of whom are non-working parents, unemployed or ex-offenders, were reported as being "proud of the improvements they make and the skills they develop", apprentices were found to be making "slow progress".

Inspectors said apprentices and

learners "are not prepared well enough for their next steps" because the advice on offer is "not impartial". Careers advice was not "aspirational enough".

Despite action being taken by the new chief executive after she identified a decline in quality, "too many apprentices" told Ofsted they were having "a poor experience" and about one fifth of current apprentices were beyond their planned end dates.

In 2017/18, over one third of apprentices did not achieve their apprenticeship.

The inspectorate said governors failed to hold previous senior leaders to account, apprentices were routinely not placed on the right apprenticeship and training and assessment officers do not ensure that all learners are on the correct programme.

The latter did offer developmental feedback to most learners but it was reported that they did "not support apprentices who have additional learning needs well enough."

However, safeguarding arrangements at the provider were praised for being effective.



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T-level cold-spots could prove

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

An *FE Week* investigation into T-level cold-spots has found six out of eight college principals in Lincolnshire appear to have turned their backs on the opportunity, with one telling *FE Week* the mandatory industry placement requirement in the region was “really, really difficult”.

We also found no colleges or training providers in London would be offering the construction T-level from September this year, something the Mayor of London said he is “concerned” about.

Lincolnshire colleges refusing to join the party

The lack of T-level industry placements in Lincolnshire appears to have been acknowledged by the Department for Education, with a series of meetings lined up so they can speak to the college principals, *FE Week* understands.

But officials declined to comment on the problem beyond repeating a previous statement concerning a “phased approach to the introduction of T-levels so they can grow in a managed way”.

It remains unclear how the lack of industry placements opportunities in the Lincolnshire area will be resolved.

Of the eight grade one and two colleges in the Greater Lincolnshire area, only Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education will be running the digital and education routes in wave one this year, and DN Colleges Group, which includes North Lindsey College and will be running all four routes in wave two from next year.

This means learners will have to put in the miles if they want to take T-levels: students at New College Stamford, for example, would have to travel out of the county to Derby College, a journey estimated to take an

hour and a half by car.

None of the remaining six colleges are part of wave one or two, nor would any of them commit to applying to run the next wave of T-levels from 2022 when asked by *FE Week*, after the Department for Education (DfE) invited expressions of interest this month.

Boston College principal Jo Maher said they are “carefully considering and reviewing” the expression of interest requirements for wave three, and will be looking at the work placement requirements and local demand to ensure any expression “set learners up to succeed with local demand”.

Franklin College is “reviewing the situation as more information comes from the pilot centres and are considering our options for the next wave at this time,” a spokesperson said.

One college which will not be going for wave three is New College Stamford after it was rejected for wave two; though its decision is also because of the demands of an ongoing merger with Peterborough Regional College.


Principal Janet Meenaghan said her college had also faced challenges around industry placements, the 315-hour work experience requirement for T-levels which partly caused education secretary Gavin Williamson’s alma mater Scarborough Sixth Form to drop out of the T-level programme in October.

Williamson said at the time that his old college took the “right decision” by pulling out and promised to convene business leaders to thrash out a solution.

New College Stamford has been part of the capacity and delivery fund piloting industry placements: they met their target of putting 74 learners on placements last year; but Meenaghan believes that while well over 100 will be placed this year, they will not meet their target of around 185.

“The challenges of making it work are really, really difficult in this location,” she said, because 98 per cent of Lincolnshire’s businesses are small or micro-businesses, and a lot are just one

GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE COLLEGES



LINCOLNSHIRE

LINCOLNSHIRE PROVIDERS RUNNING T-LEVELS

1

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (from 2020/21) (Ofsted grade 1)

2

DN Colleges Group (from 2021/22) (Has not been inspected by Ofsted)

LINCOLNSHIRE PROVIDERS NOT RUNNING T-LEVELS

3

Franklin Sixth Form College (Ofsted grade 2)

4

John Leggott Sixth Form College (Ofsted grade 2)

5

Lincoln College (Ofsted grade 2)

6

Grantham College (Ofsted grade 2)

7

Boston College (Ofsted grade 2)

8

New College Stamford (Ofsted grade 2)

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HM Government

T-LEVELS

THE NEXT LEVEL QUALIFICATION

ABOUT T LEVELS

WHY CHOOSE T LEVELS

T LEVEL SUBJECTS

FIND A T LEVEL

FIND YOUR NEAREST T LEVEL

Find a college, school or other provider offering T Levels in 2020

Map

Satellite

Map of the United Kingdom showing T-level providers marked with red pins.

LONDON PROVIDERS DELIVERING T-LEVELS FROM SEPTEMBER 2020

Region name	Name of provider	Digital sector: Digital production, design and development T Level	Construction sector: Design, Surveying and Planning T Level	Education and Childcare sector: Education T Level
London	Cranford Community College	✓	✗	✓
London	HCUC	✓	✗	✓
London	La Retraite RC Girls School	✓	✗	✓
London	Ursuline High School	✓	✗	✗

e to be a major DfE headache

or two people.

“You have to supervise and give a student something meaningful when they are there. How do you do that when you’re a tiny business? You haven’t got the capacity.”

And her learners have to travel to placements using “poor” public transport and road infrastructure, when some take more than an hour and half to reach the college as is.

The college has told the Department for Education they do not think they will be able to hit the placement target this year.

Meenaghan said she thinks the placements are a good idea and T-levels, as a whole, are “fantastic”: “I wish I had this as a young student. I would have loved it.”

After the DfE announced it would be exploring flexibilities for industry placements last year, Meenaghan put forward letting learners count paid work as part of their placement because students may have to give up work to get in the hours of the industry placement and “they’re reluctant to do that”.

London missing construction course opportunities

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has said he is “concerned” that the T-level in construction will not be offered by any providers in capital in the next academic year, or any in south London from 2021.

He believes the government “must to do more to address this gap in provision”.

Of London providers starting this year, just one is a college (Harrow and Uxbridge) and none of them are running the construction T-level, so London learners will have to travel out to providers like East Sussex College Group, Chichester College Group or Havant and South Down College.

The three London-based providers of the construction route from 2021 – Barking and Dagenham College, Newham Sixth Form College, and United Colleges Group – are all based north of the river.

There was one provider delivering the construction T-level south of the river that year, Richmond-upon-Thames College. However, they

withdrew from delivery last week, so they could focus on developing their campus.

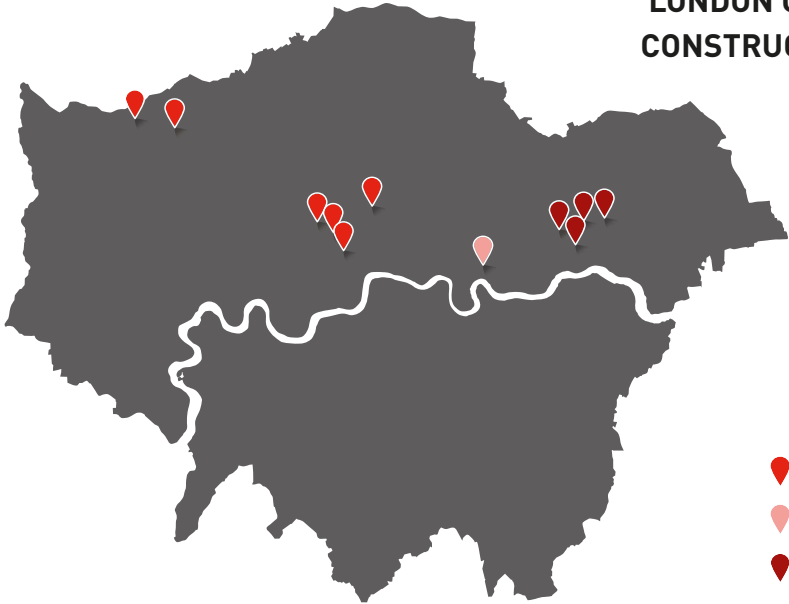
But a spokesperson left the door open to running the qualifications in the future, saying it could introduce them “at a later stage, rather than in 2021”.

They were also scheduled to deliver the digital, education and childcare, and health and science routes.

Construction skills have taken on added importance under Khan as he has led the Greater London Authority to set up a construction academy and bestow a quality mark upon providers

recognised as delivering high-quality construction skills training in the capital.

So far, 24 providers have received the quality mark, including Barking and Dagenham College and United College Group, and applications for it are due to reopen this year.



LONDON COLLEGES RUNNING CONSTRUCTION T-LEVELS FOR 2021/22

- United Colleges Group
- Newham Sixth Form College
- Barking & Dagenham College

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A fifth of colleges go more than 12 months without publishing minutes

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Exclusive

One in five colleges have not published board minutes in over a year, an FE Week investigation has found.

The news will come as a shock to FE Commissioner Richard Atkins who recently criticised Hull College for being less than transparent by not making its minutes available to staff and stakeholders for the same period of time.

The leaked report said the practice “needs to change” (see below).

And Lord Agnew, the minister responsible for college oversight, said at an event in May that good governance was “something of a personal crusade”.

Although there is no fixed rule on whether colleges must publish their board minutes online – or how frequently – “accountability” is considered a requirement by the Department for Education.

A spokesperson for the DfE said they “expect colleges – like all education institutions – to be open and transparent about their operations”, including “publishing minutes in a timely manner”.

Guidance from the Association of Colleges (AoC) states: “In the spirit of open governance and accountability, approved minutes should be published on the college website”.

FE Week’s analysis was based on an audit of more than 250 general FE and sixth form college websites.

The analysis also showed that 14 colleges appear to not have any openly accessible corporation or governing minutes on their websites.

Some, including South Devon

College and Warrington and Vale Royal College, advertise that they can be obtained on request. Others, like Portsmouth College’s website, state that permission needs to be granted to access their minutes.

“Approved minutes should be published on the college website”

Some websites, including those of New College Stamford and Fircroft College of Adult Education, stated minutes were published online, but no links could be found by FE Week, while others appeared to have no specific references at all.

The AoC’s 2015 report on ‘Creating Excellence in College Governance’ confirmed that, under the 2008 “instrument”, governing bodies must meet at least once each term.

In 2019, as part of its ‘Governors’ Council Code of Good Governance for English Colleges’, the association added: “The board should conduct its affairs as openly and transparently as possible.

“...With the continuing trend for greater transparency and ‘student/customer’ protection, we cannot stress enough the importance of being proactive in providing this assurance if we are to avoid future legislative or regulatory creep.”

College corporations can decide whether to include this requirement in their own rules, but some providers are not abiding by these either.



“The board should conduct its affairs as openly and transparently as possible”

NCG’s instrument of government states it “shall ensure that a copy of the draft or signed minutes of every meeting of the corporation... shall be placed on the institution’s website, and shall, despite any rules the corporation may make regarding the archiving of such material, remain on its website for a minimum period of 12 months”.

However, it is one of 25 colleges that have not updated their board minutes since 2018.

In addition, all of the archived minutes on NCG’s website are currently without working links.

The most recently available board minutes for four colleges were from 2017.

After being asked why

this was so in the case of Chichester College Group, a spokesperson told FE Week: “It is our policy to publish the minutes of our governing body meetings on our group website.

“Unfortunately, the minutes have not been appearing on the site. As soon as this was identified, we were able to rectify this error.”

Many of the published sets of minutes across the colleges were also incomplete.

For example, York College, which has published regular governing body minutes since March 2012 up to July 2019 was missing the minutes from its March 2018 meeting until contacted by FE Week.

A spokesperson for York College described it as an omission which has now been corrected.



Richard Atkins

Agendas and minutes of meetings are clear and well structured. There are comprehensive papers provided for governors for these meetings. There is insufficient evidence in minutes of robust challenge in all areas of business, other than some evidence of questioning to test understanding of the fresh start programme and the Harrogate dis-aggregation. Minutes have not been published on the college website for over a year. This needs to change as part of measures to make the work of the board more transparent and accessible to staff and stakeholders.

...have recognised for some time the need to strengthen the financial skills

Parents demand ‘inadequate’ Sheffield film school be reopened

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Parents are lobbying the government to restart funding for an arts and media provider that trained mostly high-needs learners.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency terminated its contracts with Sheffield Independent Film and Television (SHIFT) last year, after it was rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted.

A report by the education watchdog, published in February 2019, said inspectors found the quality of provision for 51 learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, a third of whom had special educational needs, had “declined and was now inadequate” since an earlier grade two report.

The proportion of its learners who go on to further study, apprenticeships or employment was “low” and Ofsted warned that learners make “slow progress” in achieving qualifications and developing skills.

The report came shortly after the watchdog’s chief inspector, Amanda

Spielman, spoke out about the “mismatch” between the numbers of students taking low-level arts and media courses and their “future employment in the industry”. She reiterated this concern just this week (see page 6).

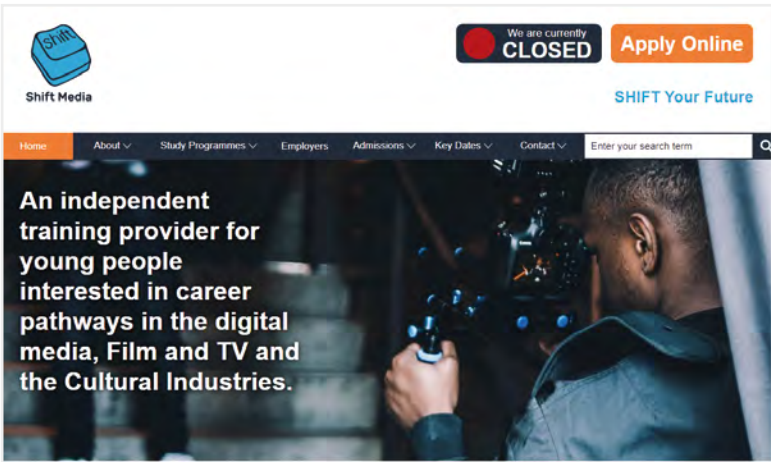
However, a parent petition says the watchdog is “ill-equipped and inadequately trained to judge specialist provision working with students who have complex needs”.

They have said the provision on offer at SHIFT was “specialist and unique”, as well as “learner-focused using gentle teaching techniques which engages the students”.

Ofsted defended itself by stating that all of its inspectors complete an extensive training programme before undertaking inspection work and inspectors with particular expertise in areas like SEND are recruited too.

“We are confident we made accurate judgements about the provision delivered by Sheffield Independent Film and Television Limited,” a spokesperson added.

SHIFT director Kathy Loizou said



parents were “absolutely distraught” that the provider had to close. They believed their children would not have gotten through education without their training.

A lot of the young people’s needs were connected with anxiety, meaning they would have found it “difficult” to go to a learning environment like an FE college, Loizou said. She added that although colleges do “great work under very extreme funding circumstances,” they are often too big

for some young people.

“We provided a safe and effective place for learners with complex needs to re-engage. We felt we were especially good at that.”

The petitioners, who are calling for the immediate reinstatement of SHIFT’s funding by the ESFA and for Sheffield City Council to take action to influence the ESFA, said there is no other provision like what SHIFT did in the area.

“Young people in north England

are put at a disadvantage in relation to their peers in the south,” they say, compared to providers in the south like Dv8 Training (Brighton).

Dv8, which also caters for high needs learners and offers arts and media courses, received a grade four in November 2018; yet has been allowed to continue its provision, albeit while subject to two monitoring visits in May and September.

Asked to explain this discrepancy, the Department for Education said that while it is normal to terminate contracts for independent providers which receive a grade four, if there is evidence learners’ interests would be best served by maintaining the contract, they will do so under strict conditions with rigorous monitoring.

The spokesperson did say factors such as whether there are other providers in the local area to support learners are taken into account.

“Protecting the interests of learners is always our main priority, and Ofsted’s published assessments of the inadequate quality of provision is always taken seriously,” they said.

Dv8 did not respond to requests for comment about why it was allowed to keep its contract. Sheffield City Council declined to comment on the petition.

The petition had 49 signatures at the time of going to press. It can be viewed by visiting <https://bit.ly/2uqrl7p>.



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Profile

Introducing...

STUART RIMMER

CEO, East Coast College

JESS STAUFENBERG
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Hanging above Stuart Rimmer's head is a portrait of an austere woman with a wide-brimmed hat and lace collar. She's looking sideways, face half in shadow, into the office of the East Coast College principal. The Suffolk institution is her old stomping ground, explains Rimmer. The inscription below reads "Miss Grace Musson, Principal, 1923-1946".

"I've read lots of her old letters. Do you know what's mad? She's talking about exactly the same thing we are today. She's talking about raising the participation age, setting up courses to teach navigation for sailors, and literacy for adults. Fast forward, and we're still wrestling with participation, we've just set up a maritime centre and we're trying to improve numeracy and literacy. Her wisdom continues through."

Two things are striking about Rimmer. Firstly, you get a sense he deeply values the influential people he has encountered during his career.

Secondly, he swings sharply between political despair and personal love for the FE sector. Is it a bad thing that not much has changed? I ask, nodding to Miss Musson.

"Can you imagine a principal lasting 20 years now?"

"In my dark moments about the FE landscape, I think we're staring into the abyss. In my lighter moments, I see students in corridors who are ambitious and authoring their world and I find that fascinating. The institutions we work in have been around for 100 years, so it says something that society needs them and it will be ever thus."

It's a typically philosophical answer from an FE leader who has long warned policymakers to end an obsession with grades and instead focus on staff and student wellbeing. In a TEDx talk

online, you can watch him read his "love letter to education" in which he says "our relationship hasn't been going well lately, and it's because you've changed".

Putting his money where his mouth is, Rimmer sits on the Department for Education's advisory panel on teacher wellbeing and has helped compile a mental health charter for the Association of Colleges, now signed up to by 150 colleges.

His frustration stems from FE being treated as a place "where we solve industrial shortages by pumping people full of skills...Education is much more sophisticated than that. The intent of curricula should also be to help people with their social and emotional development." The problems in the system are causing staff burnout, Rimmer adds.

He looks up at Grace Musson and laughs drily. "Can you believe she was in her job for 20 years? Can you imagine a principal lasting that long now?"

Despite serious doubts about the "hero leadership" model of improving FE ("it's too egotistical") Rimmer clearly holds deep respect for inspirational people he has met along the way. He admires the work ethic of his parents, who lived in the basement of a block of flats in Lancashire which, over time,



The portrait of Miss Grace Musson, principal of Lowestoft Technical College, 1923 - 1946, which hangs in Rimmer's office

they bought and rented out. Most of the tenants were power station workers, so Rimmer says he was "always surrounded by people who worked. I learnt you had to put in effort to do OK."

Authority was a problem for him at school, being what he describes as "slightly over-aggressive and reasonably bright", and he left at 16 for a factory job. "For some people, that was where ambition went to die. But for me, it was working with an entrepreneur who clocked that I taught some of the men how to read." This factory owner, called Ron Nisbitt, was a "patriarchal tough guy" who said "don't bring me problems, bring me solutions". Once Rimmer thought it made business sense to order 250,000 baseball caps from China to sell on in Liverpool. "We had to rent out space to house them and we lost money on it! He let me make mistakes."

After a few years, Rimmer decided to study three A-levels during night classes at Lancaster & Morecambe College. He never turned up for his sociology exam because he was at a factory meeting, but two A-levels got him into Teesside University, nevertheless. First he studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics, displaying an academic interest in the way society runs, then a more practical masters in enterprise management.

But big bucks soon bored him: "My first job in insurance in Manchester was soulless." He did a PGCE in Sunderland, yet found "the linearity of school didn't connect with me, it was too prescribed. FE felt a bit edgier and more interesting."

That was when he landed a job as a business lecturer for then-principal Jackie Fisher at Newcastle College, which Rimmer describes as "like signing for Man United but not realising. Jackie had this huge reputation, and people say she was



Oil rig-like structures are being set up for students to practise on



fierce and aggressive and she was, but she was hugely values-based. She's produced more principals than anyone else and she did that through clear and strategic thinking."

After a couple of years he moved back to Lancaster & Morecambe College, where, under principal David Wood, it was "less of a Darwinian existence" and he learned "more compassion and not to rush – there's more than one way of getting to 'good'". By 39, he was principal at Great Yarmouth College. He spearheaded the merger with Lowestoft College in 2017 and again with Lowestoft Sixth Form College last year, to form East Coast College.

Now all three sites stand in a quad that's still got work going on, such as the new £11.7 million Energy Centre specialising in offshore energy vocations. Rimmer's entrepreneurial streak is evident in having secured most of the cash from the local enterprise partnership, and I'm shown

around a jaw-dropping studio which simulates navigating a ship out of port from its cabin bridge, packed with exciting-looking bleeping controls, as well as towering rig-like structures.

"School didn't connect with me. FE felt a bit edgier"

As we walk, Rimmer drops another strong entrepreneurial idea. "I would encourage FE to get a closer relationship with clinical commissioning groups (CCG), like we have, because they have money." The college's counselling service has been partly funded by Norfolk and Waveney CCG. It seems obvious once he's said it.

But having been inspired by so many leaders along the way, one gets the

sense Rimmer is now at a point where, like many others in FE, he is looking up the chain of command and seeing little that inspires him. I push him tentatively on East Coast College being graded 'requires improvement' in May 2018. "What I'm probably more interested in is our corporation going through a proper ten-year planning cycle, regardless of Ofsted grades, which will come and go. As long as our purpose is clear and our mission is noble, and if we can look at ourselves honestly in the mirror and say we did a good job."

I query that the 2018 report said "too much teaching is undemanding". "I always think we can do better for our students. Yes, I'd like to see more students pass every year." For Rimmer, the major obstacle to better quality is the working conditions of his staff – "the high pressure, stress and

workload".

What can be done? I ask, expecting the usual answer about smarter marking strategies. But Rimmer aims straight for the heart.

"I think some of the representative bodies have become lapdogs of the Westminster bubble, and as such we just do the bidding of Whitehall. There's an urgency for the FE sector to become more political, as opposed to just talking about cuts – to become more radical and politically alive."

How? "The only way FE will find its voice long-term again is if it rediscovers its socialist ideals, in that it's there to

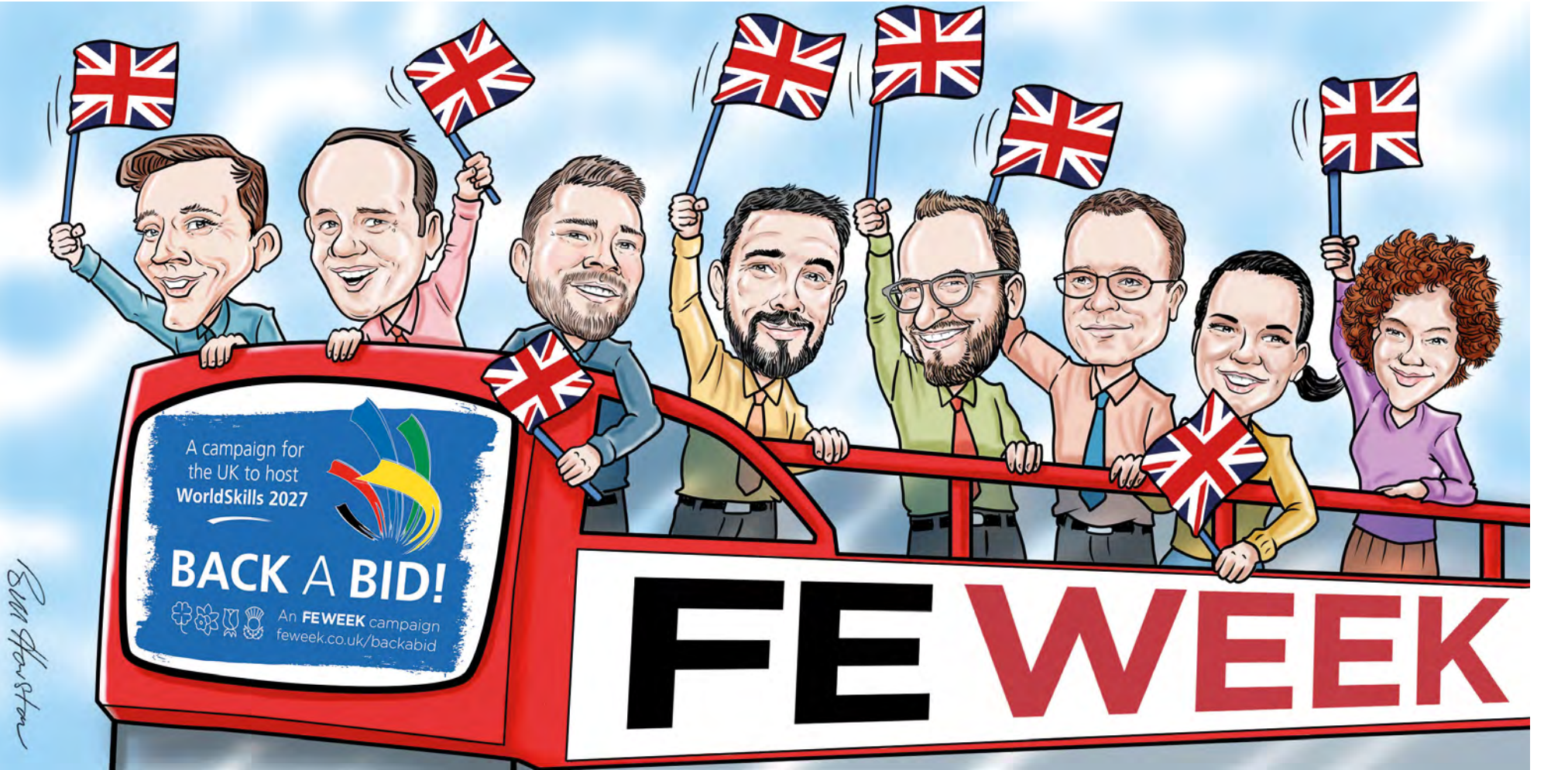
support its communities and to make their lives better. This idea that people around here don't have high aspirations really hacks me off. They do, they just don't know how to navigate a system not designed for them."

In the absence of inspiring policymaking, I suggest to Rimmer he should go for it himself. "At some point I might consider a more national job," he muses. "But there's a job to be done here. I believe in staying somewhere to live with your mistakes."

One gets the feeling Miss Musson, with her steely look, approves.



Rimmer at the helm in the college's new ship bridge simulator



Education secretary calls on sector to support a UK WorldSkills bid

FRASER WHIELDON
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Education secretary Gavin Williamson has applauded the UK's ambition to host an upcoming WorldSkills competition – and is encouraging the sector to back a bid.

His remarks come as FE Week launches its 'Back A Bid' campaign to prove there is sufficient interest in hosting the competition, affectionately known as the 'Skills Olympics', in 2027.

It follows on from WorldSkills UK "exploring" whether to bid to host the competition, as outlined by the organisation's chief executive Neil Bentley-Gockmann in an interview with FE Week earlier this month.

Williamson said the competition "is a fantastic way



Gavin Williamson

to showcase the very best young talent from across the country," and he "applauds WorldSkills UK's ambition to host a future WorldSkills competition here in the UK".

"I look forward to hearing the extent of support for this from the sector."

FE Week kicked off its campaign with a call by Shane Mann, managing director of FE Week's publisher Lsect, for the sector to "unite behind reinvesting in WorldSkills UK and a bold vision for their next decade" (see page 19).

Mann said holding the international skills tournament here would "be an amazing opportunity for our sector and the UK to play host to the global skills community".

Shadow FE minister Emma Hardy

has offered her full support, as she says the WorldSkills competition "is a wonderful opportunity for young people to highlight their skills and talents on the world stage".

"I've seen the transformation in young people's confidence and employability after developing skills and being chosen to represent their country."

The chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education Jennifer Coupland said her government quango also "backs the bid".

She would find it "incredibly exciting" to host WorldSkills 2027, because of the chance to "showcase the fantastic skills we have in this country" and "really energise young people and training providers to hit the highest standards".

The possibility of hosting has already attracted support from sector organisations like the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, with chief executive Mark Dawe saying "now" is the right time to bring the competition back to the country,



after it previously came to London in 2011.

But Dawe, who also sits on the WorldSkills UK board, said this time "it would be great if we could mount a bid for a city other than London".

"Fantastic" was how Association of Colleges president Steve Frampton described bringing WorldSkills back to the UK "as part of a very strong signal we are serious as a nation about being a world leader".

"If the UK is to be a world leader in skills at all levels, this is exactly the sort of thing, alongside wider plans, that will be key to tackling the employment challenges of the future".

It is not just sector organisations which can back the bid: FE Week readers are being encouraged to show their support at FEWeek.co.uk/BackABid and on social media using #BackABid.



Deputy Principal

Ref 200148 (2 posts) Salary: Up to £85,000 p.a.

Runshaw is a highly successful and comprehensive tertiary college with a national reputation for excellence and an annual turnover of £27 million. The college has been rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted for well over 20 years.

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Closing date for this post is **12 noon, Tuesday 11th February 2020.**

Interviews will take place on **Thursday 27th and Friday 28th February 2020.**

For further information and to apply, please visit <https://www.runshaw.ac.uk/the-college/jobs/our-vacancies/>. Alternatively, please email HR@runshaw.ac.uk or call **01772 642004**, quoting the vacancy reference number.

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PRINCIPAL

TRURO & PENWITH COLLEGE



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Due to the retirement of our current Principal, David Walrond, after 17 years outstanding service including 10 years as Principal, we are seeking an exceptional candidate with significant senior management experience to lead Truro and Penwith College.

Our new Principal will lead a committed group of staff in ensuring we maintain our Outstanding status and ensures the College continues to provide the best environment for students to achieve their potential. If you have vision, energy, determination and commitment to achieve excellence at one of the most successful College's in the country we would like to hear from you.

Closing date: 12 noon Friday, 31 January 2020

Interviews: Week commencing Monday, 10 February 2020.

Previous applicants will be carried forward.

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We offer a generous package with benefits including 37 days annual leave plus bank holidays and College closure days, teacher pension scheme, relocation package, free on-site parking and a variety of on-site benefits and discounts.

Truro and Penwith College is committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people, and applicants will be subject to full employment checks including enhanced DBS disclosure.



Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality

Location: West London College **Salary:** Up to £110k **Reporting to:** CEO / Principal

We are seeking an exceptional Deputy Principal to join our strengthened senior leadership team at a very exciting time in our journey. We have made significant improvements in our financial position, and we are now focused on realising the huge potential that West London College has in fully meeting the needs of our students, staff, employers and communities. We are looking for a suitably skilled and experienced person who shares our vision and ambition to be the leading college in west London for technical and vocational education and skills training. The successful candidate will be highly effective in their pursuit of continuous improvement of standards, student outcomes, organisational effectiveness and curriculum efficiency. This role will provide a capable and ambitious leader with significant career prospects and the opportunity to make a major contribution to the educational, economic and employment landscape of the nation's capital city.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION:

West London College is committed to meeting the needs of its students and stakeholders, through collaboration and innovation across its curriculum and student services. Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College – known as West London College - is a large general and further education college with five main campuses at Hammersmith, Ealing, Southall, Park Royal and the west London Construction Academy. The College covers 12 miles across west London and enjoys a positive relationship with both of its respective local authorities; Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham.

In 2017 the College was graded 'Good' by Ofsted and the latest self-assessment aligns the judgements to the new EIF, with a significant focus on the quality of education and the actions being taken to continuously improve teaching, learning and assessment. Courses are offered in most subject areas, with the significant majority being those up to, and including, level two. Around three quarters of all enrolments are for adult learners, mostly studying part-time with the College. The College has a small cohort of apprentices and is looking to grow this provision aligned to the skills needs of west London. The College also has a small cohort of higher education students, which it is intending to grow. Commercial programmes are large and important part of the offer, and the College is seeing success in growing this income strand further.

The College intends to build on its emerging specialisms, particularly around construction and the built environment – a unique partnership between Berkeley and the West London Construction Academy has been awarded the Mayors' Construction Academy kite-mark for the quality of provision. Through the positive relationships with the two major London boroughs, increased 14-16 and high needs student numbers are highly likely due to exceptional student experience provided at the College.

ABOUT THE ROLE:

As Deputy Principal you'll take the strategic lead on curriculum, quality, student services and MIS across all five campuses. With your team of Assistant Principals, your skills and experience of FE leadership will enable you to effectively contribute towards moving things forward, whilst working closely with the CEO & Principal and a collaborative Executive Team to implement the new vision, mission and strategic objectives of the College.

WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR:

It is expected you will be people-focused strategic leader with experience of leading improvements of a similar scale and complexity to those required at West London College. You will have significant experience of operating strategically across curriculum and quality functions.

Through adopting an holistic approach to developing the College's specialisms of the future, through corporate partnerships and stakeholder engagement, your focus on providing an outstanding student experience will be at the forefront of your planning and everything you do.

For further information about the role, or to arrange a confidential chat, please contact our executive search advisers at Peridot Partners:

Drew Richardson-Walsh
drew@peridotpartners.co.uk
07739 364 033

Sarah Szulczewski
sarahs@peridotpartners.co.uk
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Closing date: 12pm Monday 3rd February 2020

<http://bit.ly/36r68rL>





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Location: Waterlooville, Hampshire

Salary: £80k



This is an exciting time to join HSDC. A dynamic FE College that has been created following two mergers and now comprises three campuses at Alton, South Downs (Waterlooville) and Havant. We are a forward-thinking tertiary provider meeting the needs of over 9,000 full and part-time students and 500 employers in South and East Hampshire through the commitment and passion of some 900 staff.

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

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- Financial acumen;
- The ability to respond in a rapidly changing environment;
- The ability to respond to sector opportunities;
- Advanced communication skills;
- Open management style and most importantly a sense of humour!

More information on the position can be found here - hsdc.ac.uk/vp

Benefits

- 37 Days Annual Leave;
- Option for Pension scheme;
- Free on-site gym;
- Staff development opportunities;
- Staff recognition scheme, Employee Recommendation Incentive and access to many more benefits.

Closing Date: Monday 10th February 2020
Interview Dates: 18th and 19th March 2020

This position is full time, however, HSDC is proud to support flexible working opportunities and therefore applications for flexible working will be considered.

Safeguarding

The College is committed to safeguarding and promotes the welfare of all learners. It expects all staff to share this commitment. All successful applicants will be required to undertake an enhanced DBS check and to provide proof of their eligibility to work in the UK.

We will not accept applications from agencies for this position.



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EDITORIAL

Back our bid to host WorldSkills 2027

This is the decade when we can ignite a passion for skills in the UK. But it will require a bold ambition and all corners of the UK to come together.

Last summer we crashed out of the top 10 medal table at WorldSkills in Russia, behind France, Germany and Austria. Team UK in previous years have sat comfortably in the top 10. We are the 6th largest economy on the globe, but just managed to hit position 12 at WorldSkills 2019. It was rather disappointing. Whilst we had some world class performances from the team, it wasn't enough.

WorldSkills UK have had a tough decade, like many, with continuous uncertainty around funding

and subsequent budget cuts.

As a sector we should unite behind reinvesting in WorldSkills UK and a bold vision for their next decade. The government, in recent years, have banged the drum for their support of upskilling the nation and reinvesting in the skills system. What we need now is a common ambition that we can all unite around.

FE Week is today launching our 'Back A Bid' campaign for the UK to host WorldSkills in 2027.

The chief executive of WordSkills UK used this paper earlier in January to suggest that their organisation was starting to look at whether we could host a future competition.

It would be an amazing

opportunity for our sector and the UK to play host to the global skills community.

A bid is an opportunity for our sector to truly think big and demonstrate a bold ambition. We can exploit the process of bidding, and hopefully hosting, as a catalyst for change. Adopting an ambition to implement international benchmarking across the sector and thus creating a stronger economic future for more young people.

Winning the bid would also see the UK host ministers and, business and education leaders from across the globe as part of an international skills summit. A platform from which we can demonstrate we are developing the skills needed to

attract investment and subsequently jobs for our highly-skilled learners.

The cost of hosting the competition would be around £100 million. Funding could be sourced from three areas, one third coming from government, one third from sponsorship and the remainder coming from delegate packages and competition fees. Not an eye watering sum of money when you consider the short and longer term impact hosting could have.

The next step for government is to announce their support of a feasibility study, which of course will require public money and time. The Secretary of State appears to be supportive, in principle, but he will need some

encouragement. That's where the sector and your stakeholders come in!

The UK last hosted the competition in 2011, a major legacy from 2011 was the annual WorldSkills UK Live at Birmingham's NEC.

It's early doors, but now is your opportunity to help shape what 2027's legacy could be. The sector needs to demonstrate there is a healthy appetite working together on a bid and leaping back up the international medal table.

Show your support for the bid at FEWeek.co.uk/BackABid and on social media using #BackABid.

Shane Mann,
Publisher - FE Week
news@feweek.co.uk

Readers' reply



Ex-SFA deputy director slams funding management ahead of Ney review

Fully agree with Tony. Real contract management with two-way information flows improved service delivery. The remote approach is at best frustrating, at worst... negligent.

Simon

London will be first to launch regional AEB learner survey

Would be good to see how they will stretch their budget for this survey. It is quite expensive for providers currently collecting destination data through contractors. Look forward to the results being cascaded, as it could help to cover for internal course evaluation, Ofsted etc. as well.

Tracy Adams

FE is 'ticking time bomb', says college chief

The closure of Saltash College should not happen. Many of the students will find it difficult to adjust to other colleges which from Saltash are not easy to travel too. They will probably just drop out of education, thereby depriving the country of skills they could have obtained. The college also plays an important part in the community for older people to learn and stay part of the community. This government promised to invest more in education, another broken promise!!

Mrs JM Blake

Shouldn't the question be around the utilisation of the campus? The investment was already there when colleges open these campuses. As a small

not-for-profit provider, we have invested £2 million of charitable funds to support strategic growth by understanding the local needs.

Kenny Stoddart

Investigation: Highest principals' pay plummets

Based on the fact these posts have been filled the justification always given for high salaries being needed to attract the right candidate seems flawed.

Stefan

PhD-level apprenticeship plans move a step closer

I genuinely wonder if PhD level apprenticeships would have been developed if we didn't have the levy but the old funding system

Verity Davidge

REPLY OF THE WEEK

Ex-SFA deputy director slams funding management ahead of Ney review

Gone are the days when providers had quarterly reviews with their contract manager. We haven't seen or heard from ours (apart from phone/email at our instigation) in two years and are apparently on our third one since January 2018.

Sue Bishop

Experts

Shortly after the scandal at Hadlow College Group was exposed, the government commissioned an independent review of college financial oversight. Dame Mary Ney's report is due for publication imminently and *FE Week* has already reported that the Education and Skills Funding Agency is to be heavily criticised. Chris Todd, a chartered accountant and college principal, considers the problems and how to fix them

Having worked in further education for around 15 years, I've noticed that not much has really changed when it comes to financial regulation and oversight in the sector. It really is no different now to what is was 15 years ago. Colleges are still getting into financial trouble; there continue to be cases where the management override of controls is evident; and our regulator (the ESFA) remains fixated on financial data returns.

I'm a big fan of *Game of Thrones* and a particular quotation by Daenerys Targaryen springs to mind: "We need to break the wheel." Clearly, what we are doing isn't working. It never has and it never will, until we start to think differently.

As someone who has quite an unusual range of experience in further education finance I feel well placed to comment on these issues. I've been an external and internal auditor at KPMG; I've worked at the Learning and Skills Council in provider financial management; and I've been a finance director in three educational institutions (two of them FE colleges).

Not wanting to steal Dame Mary's thunder, although I'm not sure her report will reach the same conclusions that I have, I thought it would be useful to share my three-point plan for improving financial regulation and oversight in the FE sector.

1. Use information that already exists to monitor the finances of colleges

The current approach employed by the ESFA to capture financial data is, in my opinion, not working. Even with the introduction of the new Integrated Financial Model for colleges (IFMC)

CHRIS TODD

Principal and chief executive, Derwentside College



A new approach to financial regulation and oversight in the sector

return, the focus remains on data harvesting, as opposed to interpretation and human-based interaction. I may be wrong, but I'm not convinced the agency will make best use of this return when set against the significant workload that it creates.

Here's an idea: all colleges produce management accounts on a frequent and timely basis across the year – why not use these to review college financial performance and to exercise oversight?

Yes, the quality of management accounts will vary between colleges. However, poor-quality accounts are often an early warning sign that financial issues lie ahead. This in itself could be an early trigger for intervention. Additionally, reviewing the management accounts on a regular basis, could highlight areas where colleges are exhibiting early signs of distress (ie, unexpected cash-flow decline).

It strikes me as a fairly obvious solution and would provide more frequent and timely information to support the early identification of issues. It would also reduce the significant amount of time our finance colleagues spend each year

completing these data returns, which provide little benefit or use to our own organisations.

2. Employ the right people

I read with interest Dominic Cummings' recent blog post encouraging "weirdos and misfits with odd skills" to apply for jobs within No 10. Whether you agree with this or not, my experience of the ESFA, and Civil Service more generally, is that they lack diversity in thinking. Many of the people I have come across in the Civil Service have worked there for the majority of their career, with limited exposure to the commercial world.

If the ESFA is going to move to a model that is less reliant on data harvesting and rules-based transactional funding, to a model focused on intelligence, interpretation and relationship management, it will need to make sure it employs the right people.

Challenging a finance director or principal of an FE College on financial performance requires a specific range of skills. Too often, discussions around financial performance take place with non-

financial staff, who do not have the experience or expertise to challenge effectively.

Fewer high-quality staff, paid at a level commensurate with the skills set and experience required, would add much greater value. Additionally, if their employment results in fewer colleges becoming financially distressed, then the public purse would benefit greatly. We may even be able to generate a favourable return on investment!

“Unfortunately the ESFA has become a shadow of its former self”

3. Focus on people and relationship management

There are lots of great people working in the ESFA, and in the North-East in particular, we enjoy a positive relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Unfortunately, however, the ESFA has become a shadow of its former self, with a huge decline in staffing numbers evident since 2011. To me, this is not sustainable and we need a fit-for-purpose funding agency that is properly funded going forward.

This is not to say that things were perfect back in the days of the Learning and Skills Council, but what did exist back then was an approach to financial regulation and oversight based on relationship management. We need this again but better, with high-calibre, qualified staff who can rival the best of us working in colleges across the country. Only this, will deliver the high-quality financial regulation and oversight colleges need.

To conclude, financial regulation and oversight will never remove financial failure altogether. There is always scope for human error and the management override of controls, but we must reach a position where the avoidable failures are identified at a much earlier stage. In my view, this is entirely possible if we take a fresh approach.

SFA lost 1,000 staff in just six years

NICK LINFORD
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The Skills Funding Agency shed over 1,000 staff when responsible for apprenticeship providers and college financial oversight, before being brought into the Department for Education (DfE), new analysis by *FE Week* shows.

But the 60 per cent reduction in staffing resource was not matched by similar cuts to the number of providers, contracts managed, nor overall funding being allocated (see table).

On a per employee basis, the amount of funding to oversee grew from £2.5 million in 2011 to more than £6 million by 2017.

This figure is likely to have risen further in recent years, with further

growth to the apprenticeship budget along with many more providers given access to the funds.

The level of staffing resources at the agency could form an important feature in the delayed Dame Ney report.

Ney was commissioned by ministers in August last year "to carry out an independent review of how the government monitors colleges' finances and financial management".

At the time, the DfE said the terms of reference "in light of the financial difficulties at Hadlow and West Kent & Ashford Colleges" was to "review the way Government monitored and exercised its oversight of those colleges' finances and financial management, and their effectiveness in practice, including the work of the ESFA and the FE Commissioner's team; and to recommend changes

Skills Funding Agency	Payroll staff numbers	Providers with allocations	Total allocations	Av allocation per staff	Av allocation per provider
Year ending 2011	1,658	1,552	£4,190,698,148	£2,527,562	£2,700,192
Year ending 2012*	1,343	1,112	£4,019,863,695	£2,993,197	£3,614,985
Year ending 2013	1,241	1,062	£3,974,414,706	£3,202,590	£3,742,387
Year ending 2014	1,248	990	£3,359,962,332	£2,692,278	£3,393,901
Year ending 2015	941	1,029	£3,718,415,686	£3,951,558	£3,613,621
Year ending 2016	868	1,037	£3,749,414,199	£4,319,602	£3,615,636
Year ending 2017	635	1,074	£3,998,420,772	£6,296,726	£3,722,924

* Significant drop as SFA phased in a £500k minimum contract level policy to help with falling SFA staff numbers (which then drove up subcontracting). But since 2015 provider numbers have risen whilst SFA numbers continued to fall. So by end of 2017 SFA staff had fallen 62% but provider numbers only down 31% (and big rise again in last two years with appren levy)

that would reduce the risk of such problems recurring, taking account of colleges' independence and the need to minimise regulatory burden".

When shown the SFA staffing

analysis, the DfE was unwilling to provide a statement, but did say it is very difficult to compare these two (SFA and ESFA) systems as there has been considerable change in the

organisation in the last ten years. They pointed to a move to do more things digitally, which, they said, has made staff ratios versus monetary value more difficult to analyse.

The mayoral combined authorities are developing impact and performance measures to assess whether the Adult Education Budget is having a positive impact in their area. Setting the right targets and outcome measures, in a fair, simple and cost-effective way, is critical, warns Harminder Matharu

The end of January marks the end of the first six months of devolved delivery of the adult education budget (AEB) and the returns from colleges and providers may indicate whether the new arrangements are resulting in less underspend than has been the case nationally over the past few years.

Of course, it's not just about how much funding has been spent; having fought so hard to get it devolved, the mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) will want to assure themselves and stakeholders that local delivery has made a tangible difference to their local communities.

The whole point of devolution is that each of the combined authorities will eventually define for themselves their AEB priorities. Increasingly there is talk of assessing the impact on these, rather than looking solely at outputs and outcomes, although the latter will obviously help measure impact.

Work is already under way, with the GLA commissioning the Learning and Work Institute to support the development of their impact-assessment proposal with a view to running a pilot.

The Liverpool City Region is piloting outcome-based delivery through their sector-based work academies, while the West Midlands combined authority is testing wider than traditional

HARMINDER MATHARU

Devolution director, Association of Employment and Learning Providers



Measuring impact and performance fairly in the devolved areas

approaches.

All are also very conscious of finding the best way to measure the impact of AEB on social value, where the learning may not be centred around qualification and outputs.

AELP welcomes this work, and if stakeholders are supportive, we would like to see it used as a template for developments in other areas.

We hope that the devolved areas as a collective group will also keep a wider national picture in mind because providers deliver across multiple areas. Measuring impact is a complex challenge when faced with variances in local labour markets, and AELP has suggested to the nine devolved areas a set of principles to consider.

These start with setting the right targets and outcome measures from the outset, as this is critical for ensuring that adult education reaches the right individuals. The combined authorities should consider and compare approaches in neighbouring areas, along with any national approaches, to identify common aspects to align where there is value in doing so.

Outcome measures should take into account the learner's starting point to accurately assess distance travelled, impact on social mobility and real added value. This should be backed up by the measurement of planned progression outcomes to allow for longer term impact assessments.

We should recognise that cohorts of learners may require differentiated outcomes supported

by clear criteria and rationale for assessing impact. This involves acknowledging the varying socio-economic factors affecting them.

It will undoubtedly help if there are clear definitions for all performance measures related to assessing the impact of delivery. At the same time, we should minimise the administrative burden and financial costs of data collection.

Finally, the combined authorities should ensure fairness across all provider groups through a system that allows providers to invest and plan delivery which maintains value for money throughout.

As well as deciding what progression outcomes should be measured, it's important also to agree on when to measure progression, because a learner may not benefit from it in the short term.

Existing data collection systems should be reviewed before new systems are created, which means engaging with other stakeholders and partners that already collect measurement and destination data. For example, we recommend a look at the DWP's new Data Lab and exploring whether this allows tracking of individuals over a longer period.

“Outcome measures should take into account the learner’s starting point”

Despite the size of the challenge, we must work to keep the processes as simple as possible with cost considerations at the forefront of the emerging proposals.

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Clare Russell

Principal,
Runshaw College

Start date August 2020

Previous job
Deputy principal, Runshaw College

Interesting fact
She bought her first house aged 19, with savings from her £1.50 an hour job in a chip shop



Matthew Percival

Director of people and skills
policy, Confederation of
British Industry

Start date October 2019

Previous job
Head of employment policy, Confederation of British Industry

Interesting fact
He chairs Chislehurst & West Kent Cricket Club, the only club whose ground is protected for cricket by an Act of Parliament



Michelle Brabner

Principal,
Southport College

Start date April 2020

Previous job
Deputy principal, Runshaw College

Interesting fact
As part of her Master's degree, she bred thousands of lobsters to release into the wild

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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

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

Difficulty:
Easy

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

Difficulty:
Medium

Solutions: See right

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Last Edition's winner: Alyson Shields

Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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