

THANK YOU

**'On behalf of the prime minister
and the entire government, thank
you once again for all your work'**

Education Secretary, Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson MP

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**'The sector has shown its
characteristic tirelessness
and patience as it continues
to support staff, students
and the wider community'**

Apprenticeship & skills
minister, Gillian Keegan MP

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STANDARDS CAUSE A SLIP FOR APPRENTICESHIP PERFORMANCE

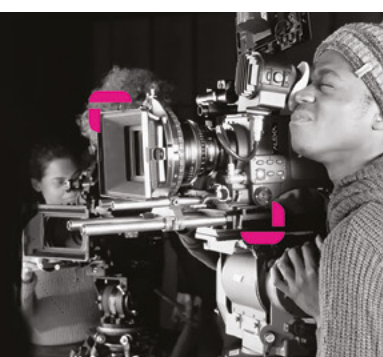
- > More than half of apprentices on standards drop-out before EPA
- > Overall achievement rate falls by 2.2 points, whilst 80% on old frameworks
- > Employers in the driving seat causing concern for large providers

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Half-year apprenticeship starts stats show continued fall

BILLY CAMDEN

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The number of apprenticeship starts in England dropped by seven per cent in the first half of 2019/20, new government data has revealed.

Provisional figures in the latest individual learner records return show there were 209,900 starts recorded between August 2019 and January 2020, compared to 225,800 in the same period for 2018/19.

For the single month of January, provisional figures show there were 28,200 starts in 2020 compared to 29,100 in the equivalent data published in 2019, a three per cent drop.

The Department for Education pointed out that the monthly apprenticeship starts figures are produced for "transparency purposes

but are generally less robust for making comparisons given different reporting patterns by providers during the year".

When comparing the first half of 2019/20 with the same period in 2018/19, starts at level 2 fell the most - from 84,200 to 68,000, a 19 per cent drop.

At the same time, starts at the higher levels jumped 16 per cent from 42,500 to 49,400.

Starts for young people were also hit hardest: 68,600 people aged 16 to 18 started an apprenticeship between August 2018 and January 2019, but this figure dropped by 12 per cent for the same period in 2019/20 to 60,600.

A DfE spokesperson said: "Apprenticeship starts have fallen but the reforms we introduced mean that apprenticeships are now longer, higher-quality and include more off-the-job training.

"We believe this is the right approach,

and we will not sacrifice quality for quantity."

They added: "We are working with employers of all sizes to make sure more people get the skills they need to get ahead.

"We want to see more people benefiting from apprenticeship opportunities in the future, and we will continue to work with employers and learning providers, particularly given the impact coronavirus will have on our economy."

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, wasn't as optimistic.

"Sadly we are now in uncharted territory with experts predicting that the country is heading for a deep recession. Fewer jobs will inevitably mean fewer apprenticeship opportunities," he said.

"Our push in the comprehensive spending review will be for a reversing



in the decline in starts for young people and ensuring that there is a strong rung at the foot of the ladder of opportunity for them in the form of more level 2 apprenticeships.

"An immediate priority is to remove apprenticeships for 16 to 18-year-olds from levy funding and put them back within mainstream DfE budgets in common with other 16 to 18 provision."

AELP not convinced with subcontracting overhaul

FRASER WHIELDON

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A major sector body has rejected nearly half the proposals in a government consultation which aims to radically overhaul subcontracting rules.

Ten recommendations were put forward by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in its 'subcontracting post-16 education and training' consultation, which closed on March 17.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers, which represents hundreds of providers and employers, did not support four of them, including the idea that subcontracting partners ought to be no more than "one hour away from the prime contractor by car".

Instead, the AELP argues, the focus should be on the whereabouts of the learner or employer, and subcontracted learners "should be in the same region as any direct delivery" - it should not be based on "the location of the subcontractor's head office".

Another of the agency's proposals, to limit the ESFA-funded post-16 learning a provider may subcontract



Mark Dawe

through a percentage cap on subcontracting which steadily reduces over time, has also run up against AELP opposition.

The setting and applying of arbitrary percentages is "not helpful," the association says, as "inappropriate" limits will "damage learners, communities and employers".

The ESFA also wants to make prime providers inform them when they intend to subcontract entire programmes from 2020/21, and will make providers seek permission from 2021/22.

This is already in place for apprenticeships, but the AELP said the agency must consider those are longer and more complex than the post-16 training programmes being discussed in this consultation.

As many adult education budget and European Social Fund programmes are "considerably shorter", it would be "impractical and inappropriate" to expect prime providers to deliver just a part of the training or assessment, the association argues.

They warn if more than one provider was involved, it could also

harm the relationship between the provider and the learner and employer.

However, the AELP wants the government to take firmer action in certain areas.

As part of a proposal for providers to publish more information about the funding it keeps from subcontractors, the agency says it "expects" the prime to retain no more than 20 per cent, as it is worried about the impact retaining more has on training quality.

Whereas the AELP believes calling that an expectation "does not go far enough to address the issue of profiteering that the ESFA say they are wanting to rule out", and the 20 per cent should be a specific policy instead.

Main providers also ought to be "open and transparent" with fees and charges, the AELP states, and should publish them on their website and also make payment terms "clearly" defined in the contract between the main and the subcontractor.

Those fees and charges, the association adds, should relate to the delivery of training - separate from other payments to enhance delivery like incentive payments for

supporting younger apprentices.

Chief executive Mark Dawe criticised the ESFA for "going down the road again of burdening the sector with more unnecessary red tape", saying if the current rules had been enforced they wouldn't be revisiting the matter.

AELP has now called for all subcontractors to be inspected directly by Ofsted, regardless of their size.

The association also repeats its proposal for the whole adult education budget, including what has been devolved to mayoral combined authorities, to be put out to tender.

Dawe summed up his association's contribution by saying instead of "a complex rewriting of the rulebook" the government should be "encouraging the procurement of as much funding as possible to substantially increase the amount of direct provision by good providers with local delivery arms".

The ESFA's consultation was launched last month after a series of subcontracting scandals, most recently at Brooklands College, which resulted in the ESFA demanding clawback in the region of £20 million.

The ESFA plans to start implementing rule changes at the start of 2020/21.

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More than half of apprentices on

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More than half of apprentices on the new style ‘standards’ that were meant to finish last year actually dropped out before reaching their end-point assessment (EPA), new government data has revealed.

A “retention rate” of 48.3 per cent was published on Thursday alongside the national achievement rate tables for 2018/19, leaving the Department for Education admitting they “recognise there is more to do” (see box-out).

“We want to see more people completing their apprenticeships”

The rate for frameworks was 21.4 percentage points higher. Both standards and frameworks had a pass rate for those that both got to the end of the course and achieved, of over 95 per cent.

Breakdown of frameworks and standards: 2018/19

Values	Frameworks	Standards
Achievement Rate	68.7%	46.6%
Retention Rate	69.7%	48.3%
Pass Rate	98.7%	96.4%
Volume of Leavers	241,670	54,590

Source: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874972/Apprenticeship_Standards_Achievement_Rates_Paper_201819.pdf

The overall achievement rate for apprenticeships only fell by 2.2 percentage points to 64.7 per cent as more than 80 per cent of the apprentices were on the frameworks currently being phased out.

Large training providers that spoke to FE Week have put disappointing rates for standards down to the “enormous” change required in moving from old-style apprenticeships, known as ‘frameworks’, to new ‘standards’, which are longer and are meant to be of higher quality.

While retention and therefore the official achievement rates are low, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers has claimed this does not mean the quality of apprenticeships has declined.

A spokesperson for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, the body responsible for developing the standards, said: “We want to see more people completing their apprenticeships.” (see box-out)

Many of the most popular standards, such as the level 3 team leader/supervisor and the level 2 customer

service practitioner, had achievement rates below 50 per cent, with some, like the adult care worker and hospitality team member at level 2, below 40 per cent.

‘Standards’ represented 54,590 (18 per cent) of all leavers in 2018/19.

Whereas ‘frameworks’, being phased out by the end of July 2020, represent 82 per cent of all leavers and saw an achievement rate of 68.7 per cent.

The government’s Minimum Level policy, for the purposes of making an intervention, has a threshold achievement rate of 62 per cent, which

has remained unchanged for several years.

According to the DfE statisticians, part of reason for the low achievement rate has been delays to apprentices completing EPAs for the new ‘standards’.

If an apprenticeship provider plans to complete the EPA by July 31, 2018, but the apprentice takes longer than planned, they are not included in the 2018/19 achievement rate figures.

But the statisticians think this would account for less than a five percentage point change, and the fact that half of

Overall 2018/19 achievement rate for standards with largest cohorts

Standard	Level	Overall Cohort	Overall Achievement Rate %	Private provider cohort and achievement rate %		General FE and Tertiary College cohort and achievement rate %	
Team Leader/Supervisor	3	6,240	41.6	5,540	40.9	500	48.8
Customer Service Practitioner	2	5,140	41.7	4,240	39.6	730	50.6
Adult Care Worker	2	4,270	39.4	3,750	39.4	450	38
Hospitality Team Member	2	3,430	36.2	3,260	36.5	170	32.3
Assistant Accountant	3	2,660	63.5	1,640	61.7	990	66.4
Lead Adult Care Worker	3	2,540	46.0	2,290	46.1	220	44.4
Retailer	2	2,280	48.3	2,170	47.9	100	57.3
Hospitality Supervisor	3	2,230	39.3	2,160	39.7	50	32
Infrastructure Technician	3	2,000	56.1	1,730	56.3	270	54.4
Retail Team Leader	3	1,380	41.6	1,310	40.4	70	64.2
Total cohort		32,170		28,090		3,550	
Provider % of cohort				87%		11%	

Source: DfE National Achievement Rate Tables March 2020
Analysis by FE Week

n new standards fail to complete



Department
for Education

'WE RECOGNISE THERE IS MORE TO DO'

"Our apprenticeship standards are not comparable to frameworks. They are more demanding as they were designed in partnership with industry, with all apprentices completing an independent assessment at the end.

"We recognise there is more to do, and we are continuing to look at how the apprenticeship programme can best

support businesses and make sure people get the skills they need."

The DfE added that it recognises that some apprentices may not complete their apprenticeship, and this can be for a range of reasons including personal circumstances, starting a new job or training opportunity, being promoted or changing apprenticeship.

apprentices are not even getting to the EPA stage highlights the major issue.

FE Week analysis shows that the biggest apprenticeship providers are struggling with the switch to standards.

"It will take a little while for new programmes to settle in"

Lifetime Training Group stands out as by far the largest apprenticeship provider, with a cohort planned to finish last year of 16,060 apprentices, more than double the British Army, the next largest provider.

They had an overall achievement rate of 55.3 per cent, a fall of 8.7 percentage points from 64 per cent the previous year.

Of the 16,060 cohort, had 7,540 apprentices were on a standard and recorded an approximate achievement rate of just 42 per cent.

The provider's chief executive, Alex Khan, said: "Clearly the transition from frameworks to standards has had an impact on overall achievement rates and it's worth noting that this change has been enormous for all involved, from new curriculum and teaching

and learning, through to the inclusion of end-point assessment.

"Ultimately we believe standards will be good for the sector and will provide apprenticeships with added levels of robustness; however, it's likely that the achievement rates will take a little while to climb to the historic national averages."

He added: "I have no doubt that with new, innovative delivery models and much improved employer engagement we will see continued year-on-year improvements, as we are already seeing this year."

The British Army, with a cohort size of 7,530, saw very little change to their achievement rate of 74 per cent, but all of their apprentices were enrolled on frameworks.

The government's data for HIT Training showed they had 1,610 apprentices complete a standard last year, with an approximate achievement rate of 43 per cent.

The provider's managing director, Jill Whittaker, said the achievement rates for last year will rise once delayed results have been included.

"As the introduction of the standards were a significant reform to apprenticeships, it will take a little while for new programmes to settle in," she said.

HIT's 2018/19 cohort of both frameworks and standards was 5,060 and their overall achievement rate was 54 per cent.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the AELP, admitted that the changeover to standards has "obviously been a challenge and it has mostly coincided

with the levy's introduction with providers no longer having 100 per cent control of the end-to-end process".

"In the vast majority of cases, the falls relate to how the official data system records changes"

But "the truth is that in the vast majority of cases, the falls relate to how the official data system records changes in employer or apprentice behaviour".

"For example, a significant number of SME employers have stopped paying the co-investment, resulting in apprenticeships being terminated, while other employers have been requiring apprentices to take functional skills tests when the apprentice wasn't ready," he added.

"Since employers were put in the driving seat, changes in employer circumstances have undoubtedly had an impact on providers' NART outcomes.

"AELP has been urging the ESFA to adjust its approach to data to reflect this in the future. In the meantime, it's back to the survival of the sector which everyone should be focusing 100 per cent of their time on."



Institute for Apprenticeships
& Technical Education :

LOW ACHIEVEMENT RATE TO BE 'EXPECTED'

"As with any reform to qualifications, you would expect to see a fall in achievement rates on the introduction of new curriculum and assessment regimes.

"Moving from continuous assessment under old frameworks to EPA under standards is what employers wanted to assure themselves of the occupational competence of apprentices.

"It has also been an important part of the reform programme's drive to improve on quality.

"Providers are having to become familiar with training to the new expectations and that apprentices can expect higher quality, more demanding training and assessment.

"Unlike GCSEs and A levels, where grade boundaries

can be manipulated, apprenticeships are about skills and apprentices will be expected to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for the occupation in their final assessment in order to pass.

"A range of options are being looked at for government, employers and providers to better support apprentices throughout their journey and increase the achievement rate.

"These include providing better upfront information to apprentices about what the programme involves so they know what to expect and can make more informed choices to start the right programme.

"We would expect to see achievement rates increasing over time."

Apprenticeships overall achievement rates				
Level	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	% point shift since 2017/18
Level 2	66.4%	66.6%	64.0%	-2.6%
Level 3	68.9%	67.9%	66.2%	-1.7%
Level 4+	61.2%	63.2%	59.7%	-3.5%
All levels	67.1%	66.9%	64.7%	-2.2%

Source: DfE National Achievement Rate Tables March 2020
Analysis by FE Week

News

Covid-19: A turbulent week for the many in FE

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FE Week reporter Fraser Whieldon takes a look at what has happened in the past week within the FE sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A flurry of announcements and guidance that aims to help FE providers during the Covid-19 outbreak was released this week, but there are still many questions left unanswered by government and there is concern about the future for some training providers.

After education secretary Gavin Williamson confirmed last week providers should close except for key workers' children and the most vulnerable learners, apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan wrote to colleges about what support they would be offered.

Her letter, sent on Friday night, confirmed the Education and Skills Funding Agency would continue to pay grant-funded providers their scheduled monthly payments for the remainder of the year, and allocations for 2020/21 would be confirmed by the end of March.

How qualifications would be graded during the outbreak was given more explanation on the same day. The government confirmed it would use teacher assessments to calculate grades in A-levels and GCSEs, after formal examinations were cancelled. Full details are still being ironed out and are expected to be published "next week"

FE Week attempted to shed some more light on what the outbreak would mean to providers with a Saturday webinar, featuring FE Commissioner Richard Atkins and Ofsted's FE lead Paul Joyce, who said the watchdog would be suspending the publication of

inspection reports until further notice.

On Monday, colleges across the country kept their doors open for their most vulnerable learners and for key workers whilst also rapidly rolling-out digital infrastructure to support home learning.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Awarding Bodies welcomed the announcement that the Department for Education would be suspending the process by which it defunds qualifications with low enrolments.

Government had planned to withdraw funding for thousands of qualifications at level 3 and below by August 2021 – but this has now been put back by a year.

The process for defunding qualifications with no enrolments will, however, go ahead as planned.

On the same day the government warned universities about switching their offers to A-level students to be 'unconditional'.

This came after a small number of them changed "a significant proportion" of their offers from 'conditional' to 'unconditional', which Office for Students chief executive Nicola Dandridge said "may undermine the

sustainability of the university system".

Michelle Donelan, the universities minister, demanded a two-week moratorium on unconditional offers, warning that changing offers at this stage "risks destabilising the entire admissions systems".

Keegan followed up her letter to colleges with one to private training providers on Monday, but it sparked major controversy.

It failed to offer them any funding support like the government had promised colleges, causing many providers to fear they will now go bust.

Guidance published alongside her letter provoked fury from Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe, after it stated DfE policy "does not allow payment for services in advance of delivery", so funding for apprenticeships cannot be made until the training has taken place.

Dawe said that as providers could not count on funding to get them through the outbreak, after several told FE Week they were already considering redundancies because of a stall in starts and recruitment, they were locked in a "battle to survive".

He branded the lack of funding a "disgrace" and demanded an urgent meeting with skills minister Gillian Keegan.

"It seems their goal is for the sector to collapse and remove any delivery to apprentices, other learners and their

hundreds of thousands of employers," Dawe concluded.

Mayoral combined authorities, such as Tees Valley, had a sunnier message for their providers on Tuesday, saying they would guarantee AEB profile payments for providers of all types for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year, regardless of recruitment.

The following day Ofqual revealed it was "urgently" working on a way to calculate grades for students studying vocational and technical qualifications this year. While teacher assessment may work for some, the "complex landscape" means there is not a "one size fits all" solution.

More details are expected next week. Ofqual is also still working out how to grade functional skills this summer.

The government came under greater pressure on Wednesday, when education select committee chair Robert Halfon revealed his committee will be probing the DfE's response to the outbreak.

To finish off the week education secretary Gavin Williamson sent a sector-wide letter to express his "deepest gratitude" to all FE providers, and Keegan sent out a video message about her optimism for the sector in face of the pandemic.

It's true, a lot can happen in a week, but this week has been exceptional in terms of announcements and the sector having to respond. Business as usual is still not even on the horizon.

Ofsted pauses publication of inspection reports

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Ofsted has paused the publication of inspection reports during the coronavirus crisis and promised that it will have "do the right thing" as its mantra going forward.

Deputy director for FE and skills Paul Joyce told an FE Week webinar on Saturday they had taken the decision because they are "well aware providers have enough to deal with".

"There are a number of providers that will be expecting a report to be published imminently," he said. "We will continue to send the report to providers but they won't be published until further notice and we'll obviously let providers know when that will be at some point in the future."

Pressed on whether this meant providers ought to ignore the watchdog, Joyce said that was "very good advice".

This decision was part of the inspectorate's mantra to "do the right thing" going forward, he added.

Ofsted said there are 50 FE and skills inspection reports being held over until the providers reopen as normal.

The watchdog announced last week that it would suspend routine inspections until further notice. It had come under fire for not halting inspections sooner.

Joyce told the webinar a visit could now only be triggered if the inspectorate

learns of safeguarding concerns or incidents which need "really urgent action". The threshold to trigger an inspection would be "really high", he stressed.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson said last week that education providers should close from today, except for those teaching the children of key workers and the most vulnerable students.

Joyce said that Ofsted is working "very closely" with the Department for Education about "potential redeployment of our staff if that is required", which might "include to support providers to deal with that situation".

It has also been decided Ofsted will pause all its work around handling complaints related to inspection reports, Joyce revealed.

The watchdog will not be contacting providers in relation to new or existing complaints and they will not be sending out complaint outcomes until further notice as well.

The inspectorate will also be working with the DfE and the Education & Skills Funding Agency, as well as sector bodies, to help independent training providers that have been suspended from new starts after a poor early monitoring visit.

"It will be focused on doing the right thing but it is a bit early to say what the right thing is. That's on my agenda," Joyce said.

Atkins offers 'confidential' support in light of Covid-19

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The FE Commissioner has offered "confidential" support to any colleges struggling financially as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Richard Atkins reassured the sector in a webinar hosted by FE Week last Saturday that formal intervention would not be triggered if colleges seek assistance during the current crisis, and urged principals not to make any "rash decisions" such as redundancies.

FE Commissioner intervention visits and "non-critical" Education & Skills Funding Agency intervention have been suspended until further notice, as confirmed by the Department for Education in guidance released this week.

Atkins said that he was "very keen to extend" consultations to any college that wants to "sound out" members of his team.

He added there had "never been a more important time for the sector to come together".

When asked how the intervention

system will adapt to recognise financial challenges colleges may face over the next six to 12 months, the commissioner said his team had been working with the DfE and ESFA to undertake "a range of modelling work".

Atkins admitted that "at the end of this difficult time, a raft of colleges will face specific difficulties", including commercial and international income, residential accommodation, real estate, mental health and wellbeing.

He urged college principals to "hold together that senior team, to communicate frequently and regularly with their staff... and not to make any rash decisions or rash judgments".

Atkins noted that a range of colleges may have been considering restructuring but warned they needed to take advice, stating that his team could help with an "early conversation" about the implications.

He said National Leaders of Governance have already been working with college chairs across the country in mentoring and support roles.

Atkins stated: "We're all going to be facing problems over the next few weeks that we've never faced in colleges,



both in terms of welfare and health but also in terms of financial stability. I'm very keen to provide whatever support we can and to make it absolutely clear that we are not carrying out any form of assessment."

He confirmed that a daily phone call has been taking place between the ESFA's local teams and colleges "as a way of checking on the stability and the issues that are facing them".

Atkins also extended support to local authority adult education services, which the team has previously worked with on quality issues, but said he was unable to do the same for independent training providers due to a lack of expertise.

The FE Commissioner called on colleges to keep subcontractors "very much in the loop, and communicate with them as frequently as they can".

The FE Commissioner's team and National Leaders of Governance can be contacted via email on FEC. OPERATIONS@education.gov.uk



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The ESFA's supposed solution to NHS business admin conundrum

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A successful alternative to the business admin level 2 apprenticeship, for NHS Trusts at least, has been found, according to the government.

A blog post published by the Education & Skills Funding Agency last week lauded the level 2 customer service programme as a viable replacement.

It has been used in Leeds Teaching Hospitals, which said the standard has proven to be “versatile, and we have used it in a range of roles within corporate services and clinical settings”, such as patient-booking services, reception areas, HR and radiology.

They have 50 apprentices currently on the programme, being delivered through Leeds City College.

Jordan Faithwaite, the education, learning and organisational

development manager at Leeds Teaching Hospitals, said in each setting the apprentices meet a “range of internal and external staff, patients and families, which provides experiences that enable the apprentices to achieve their required competencies”.

“Previously, the level 2 business administration apprenticeship would have been used in these areas, but the customer service apprenticeship has supported apprentices to undertake their administrative duties while also focusing on the level and delivery of service and customer experience,” she added.

But Rob Brookes, an NHS apprenticeship lead, hit out at the ESFA's blog and said: “What a disgrace... Are they advocating the use of a standard that’s not relevant to a job role? That really fits with apprenticeship policy doesn’t it?”

He added: “I know it can work and is working for some, but it’s papering

over the cracks a bit and it only really works for patient-facing admin staff.

“I have heard that apprentices can use colleagues as ‘internal customers’, but that’s manipulating the situation to fit the apprenticeship. Not ideal, in my opinion.”

An alternative to the popular level 2 business admin framework is needed as it will be officially switched off from July 31, and the government last month outright refused to replace the programme as a new apprenticeship standard, despite lobbying by more than over 100 employers, including the NHS.

The Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education said the proposal did not meet the required length or quality of an apprenticeship standard.

Chief executive Jennifer Coupland then told FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference that signing off on the standard would “undermine” efforts to create a “well-regarded” programme.



Health Education England told FE Week it is aware of a “handful of NHS trusts nationally” that are now using the level 2 customer service apprenticeship standard where they would have previously used the level 2 business admin framework.

However, they warned this “only works for a limited number of job

roles” and therefore might not be suitable for all types of employers.

The ESFA's blog admitted that there “may be other standards that will work better for your business if you are currently using the business administration framework at level 2”, including, for example, the level 3 business admin standard.

Troubled HS2 college spent £73K on failed Ofsted legal challenge

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

The beleaguered National College for HS2 blew £73,000 on a failed legal attempt at stopping Ofsted publishing a grade four report, a Freedom of Information request has revealed.

The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure (NCATI) provided the figure to FE Week after the college went to the High Court in the hope of suppressing the watchdog's findings.

In February, Ofsted struck a deal to pay their own legal fees in return for the college dropping their judicial review.

The education watchdog has now told FE Week it spent just £12,500 on the case.

NCATI said its decision to go to court was taken following “full and careful consideration” and after they received

advice from “leading legal counsel of a strong likelihood of success”, which was assessed “rigorously” against the costs and benefits of proceeding.

When Ofsted's report was published last month, it revealed employers had to fill in gaps in their apprentices' skills left by NCATI. It also found that management and staff did not act quickly enough to protect apprentices from harassment.

“Staff did not prioritise the welfare and safeguarding needs of the apprentice over the needs of others in the class,” the report said, while also stating the college's safeguarding arrangements are “not effective”.

The college was allowed to fund the legal challenge despite currently surviving on government bailouts and being in formal intervention, as the Department for Education has said it is an “independent organisation”.

Universities minister Michelle Donelan wrote to NCATI, in a letter published in February, confirming the



college would be placed in supervised college status “in light of the severity of the college's financial situation”.

This came after FE Commissioner Richard Atkins found that “without a commitment of 12 months of continued emergency funding, NCATI's board will not be able to sign off on their 2018-19 financial statements as a going concern”.

The costs from the legal challenge

had also been “significant”, the commissioner's report said, and given the college is receiving emergency funding, it was “clearly a very difficult and sensitive issue”.

A £4.55 million bailout was previously agreed to sign off the college's 2017-18 accounts.

NCATI, formerly known as the National College for High Speed

Rail, ran into problems with learner recruitment as delays in announcing HS2 contractors meant employers were unable to commit to the apprentice volumes they had originally anticipated.

Despite saying it would be recruiting 2,100 learners by 2022, the college only had 187 students on roll at the time of Ofsted's inspection in November 2019. Of those, 167 were apprentices.

Cash-strapped college finally set to sell campus for up to £10m

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Exclusive

A college is set to sell a campus for up to £10 million in the coming days despite local opposition, after being told by a minister to "prioritise" the sale to protect its solvency.

Developers have already been given the green light by the local council to demolish and build 108 homes at Warrington & Vale Royal College's (WVRC) Hartford campus, which closed in March 2018 with a loss of 75 jobs.

The college has been trying to finalise a deal to sell the site ever since.

While the college has remained tight-lipped on the sale and the reasons behind its delay, one of its governors and local councillor, Sam Naylor, disclosed to FE Week that WVRC is selling to developer Lane End for a sum between £5 million and £10 million by the end of March.

The college declined to comment on

whether the deal would be postponed amid the coronavirus crisis.

In February, a report published by FE Commissioner Richard Atkins warned the college's "very weak" financial position put it at "significant risk of insolvency".

A letter by then-minister for the FE market, Lord Agnew, published alongside the report, said WVRC could go broke by 2020-21 "unless appropriate steps are taken to secure the liquidity of the college", adding that the "importance of this sale to ensuring the future viability of the college cannot be overstated".

But the move has been opposed by local MP Mike Amesbury, who believes the provider ought to have made a "more concerted effort" to develop "a good FE offer to our community".

He also laid into the government for cuts to the FE sector which have been "frankly, devastating" and have left colleges like WVRC in "significant financial difficulty".

"I hear lots of talk about this government wanting to level up opportunities between the north

and the south," Amesbury said. "The college site will now be levelled down to rubble then houses, built against the wishes of local residents, put in its place."

He "firmly believes the college should not have taken this decision and left young people unable to access further education in their home town".

He has previously called for principal Nicola Newton to step down over the decision and he also launched a petition calling for the plans to be withdrawn, attracting nearly 3,000 signatures.

WVRC was formed in August 2017 from a merger of Mid Cheshire College and Warrington Collegiate, and Amesbury said that within months a "very valuable piece of real estate was closed and put up for sale".

The site had £10 million spent on it in 2012 and featured a construction skills centre, sports facilities and a performing arts building with an auditorium, according to the BBC.

WVRC refused to respond to Amesbury's opposition. Developer Lane End has also not responded to



Mike Amesbury

requests for comment.

This is not the first college to sell off land to help balance the books, and not the first such sale to run into opposition from parliamentarians: Rother Valley MP Alexander Stafford arranged to meet personally with Atkins after RNN Group announced it would be closing its Dinnington campus – something Stafford called a "huge blow".

Then-Stourbridge MP and

government minister Margot James organised a debate in parliament in October to discuss BMet's sale of her constituency's campus. The site later sold for £1.45 million less than the sum that was spent on a refurbishment in 2015.

Conservative MP Sheryll Murray called for a government inquiry into the closure of Cornwall's Saltash campus in her area, following a £30 million bailout for the group last year.

Applications open for WorldSkills Centre of Excellence

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Colleges from across the UK are now being invited to take part in the first wave of the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence programme.

Twenty slots are up for grabs for general further education colleges that have over 1,000 learners aged 16 to 18 and a "broad" curriculum offering which want to take part in the three-year pilot programme.

WorldSkills UK's head of education and skills competitions Parisa Shirazi, who is leading the programme, called this a "milestone moment" with a "unique chance for colleges to join us on the dawn of a skills revolution".

The centre, which is being sponsored with £1.5 million from awarding organisation NCFE, was first announced last month and will involve five training managers, who train the UK's competitors for the WorldSkills and EuroSkills events, employed as "high performance coaches" to work with lecturers in a professional development capacity.

In addition to face-to-face learning,



Team UK competitors in Russia for WorldSkills Kazan last year

digital masterclasses will be on offer, featuring sessions with training managers from other countries.

Shirazi said WorldSkills UK will look at "matching colleges with coaches based on both skills specialism and geographical location", and what they will be passing onto tutors is transferable between subjects.

Performance coaches will also work with NCFE to help shape and inform its assessment, qualifications and awards as part of the centre.

Meanwhile, conversations are ongoing with the Department for Education and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which are said to be "very supportive" of the centre, about how this work can influence training standards across FE.

With the programme due to be rolled out from September, and ten more providers to be picked for next year and the year after, WorldSkills UK and NCFE hope the centre will impact

more than 120 educational institutions and around 1,000 educators.

While the first wave of applications will only be open to colleges, WorldSkills UK has said it will look to include private training providers in year two of the programme.

However, the launch takes place in the shadow of the Covid-19 outbreak, which has already forced colleges to close campuses to most students and move to online learning until further notice.

Shirazi said they "fully appreciate and understand the challenges colleges are facing" with the outbreak, but decided to continue with the launch of the application process with NCFE due to the "high level" of interest received about the centre.

She said they would work with the appointed colleges to agree an appropriate time for when they can begin working with staff.

"We want to support and celebrate the sector during this difficult time," she added, and said if current circumstances prevent some colleges from engaging in the process, they can take part through the online masterclasses.

NCFE chief executive David Gallagher said he was "actively encouraging" colleges to take part in this "pioneering" project, as "the role educators play to teach, encourage and inspire their learners to be the very best they can be" is central to skills development.

Applications will close on 28 April. Anyone interested in applying should visit <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/centreofexcellence>.



EDITORIAL



The ESFA must act after more than half of all apprentices on standards withdraw

Many events and consultations have been delayed, but it seems the Covid-19 crisis was not going to get in the way of the Department for Education revealing shockingly poor apprenticeship drop-out rates.

Last year 54,590 apprentices were due to finish the new style standard and more than half of them withdrew from the programme before reaching the end-point assessment stage.

According to a DfE “explanatory paper” that accompanied the national achievement rate tables, exactly 51.7 per cent (28,223 apprentices), were on the course for 42 days or more but then withdrew.

For the minority (26,357 apprentices) that did complete the end-point assessment nearly all passed

(96.4 per cent), resulting in an overall achievement rate of 46.6 per cent.

By comparison, 30.3 per cent of apprentices on frameworks dropped out and 98.7 per cent of those that took the assessment passed, resulting in an overall achievement rate of 68.7 per cent – 22.1 percentage points higher than for standards.

Taking a closer look at the official achievement rates for standards by level, level 2 comes in lowest at just 44.3 per cent.

But the picture is not universally poor. The assistant accountant standard at level 3 with a cohort of 2,660 had an achievement rate of 63.5 per cent.

Contrast that with the hospitality supervisor level 3 that had a similar sized cohort of 2,230 but an achievement rate of just

39.3 per cent.

Or the hospitality team member at level 3, with a cohort of 3,430 and an achievement rate of an eye-wateringly low 36.2 per cent.

To put these abysmal figures into perspective, the DfE has for years set the achievement rate threshold at 62 per cent.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) says: “Where 40 per cent or more of a training provider’s cohort does not achieve the qualification achievement rate of 62 per cent that provider fails minimum standards. Minimum standards have historically been used to remove some of the poorest training provision from the market.”

And the minimum standards policy for 2018/19 is to “continue to apply Minimum Standards to apprenticeships in 2018

to 2019 as a trigger for intervention.”

For many new and existing providers, delivering predominantly apprenticeship standards, the ESFA could well be about to tell them to stop.

As for Ofsted, despite claiming their new education inspection framework pays far less attention to achievement rates, if more than half of the learners are withdrawing then surely this cannot be ignored?

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education says they “would expect to see achievement rates increasing over time”, something that would certainly result if the ESFA applied their minimum standards policy and stopped providers from delivering those standards with the lowest

achievement rates.

The DfE blandly replied that they “recognise there is more to do”.

With the Covid-19 crisis in full swing, just how much of an appetite is there at the ESFA to apply their own minimum standards intervention policy?

Forcing providers to stop delivering certain standards, such as in hospitality, would clearly not be popular with the providers even without a pandemic, but who is thinking of the apprentices?

The reasons will be varied and complex, but more than half of all apprentices dropping out last year before their end-point assessment is frankly indefensible – even in these difficult times.

Nick Linford, Editor
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The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is already being felt and if it goes on, we are going to need a complete rethink of the strategic approach to government-funded skills programmes whether it's apprenticeships, adult retraining or any other form of post-16 provision.

For the first time since the early 1980's, the FE and skills system might have to be recalibrated to face the challenges of mass unemployment in a digitised and service-driven economy. The agenda of the rescheduled AELP National Conference 2020 is probably going to look very different from that only planned a month ago.

Leading speakers have pencilled in the new dates of the Conference into their diaries. We hope that you are doing the same!



Experts

GILLIAN KEEGAN MP

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister



FE on the frontline of the biggest peacetime battle

The apprenticeships and skills minister explains her gratitude and optimism as the sector in face of the Covid-19 pandemic

This country is currently waging its biggest peacetime battle in a generation. These are unprecedented times; as we continue to combat the global coronavirus outbreak, normal life has been effectively suspended, and I know everyone is doing their individual bit to halt the spread of this disease, protect our NHS and help save lives.

FE workers have been on the frontline of this national effort. I know the past few weeks have been incredibly disruptive and difficult for everyone, with businesses, schools, colleges and other providers closing their doors and Brits collectively hunkering down in their homes to stop the virus from spreading. Throughout that time, the sector has shown its characteristic tirelessness and patience as it continues to

support staff, students and the wider community.

For that, I want to thank you all. We're in uncharted territory, but I feel a surge of optimism whenever I look at your collective determination to keep calm and carry on providing education, training and support to learners wherever you can.

I've seen your incredible British spirit in action across the country, with countless FE providers stepping up to make sure their students can continue their studies and help their communities. Catering students have been donating to their local food banks, college staff have delivered biscuits to NHS workers, and colleges and training providers have offered support to local schools to help look after the children of key workers. As we adjust to a radically new way of working, I've heard some great examples from our Principals Reference Group of FE colleges leading the way in offering online support.

People are pulling together – and the government is behind you every step of the way. We've taken unprecedented steps to support individuals and businesses affected by coronavirus. That includes paying up to 80 per cent of people's wages, deferring £30 billion of taxes until

“We’ve permitted distance learning, adapted EPAs and supported breaks in learning”

the end of the financial year, lending unlimited sums of money interest-free for 12 months, and setting up a new Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

While some areas of life are unfortunately on hold, we're working hard at the department to provide you all with as much tailored practical

support as possible. We want as many apprentices as possible to continue and complete their training if they can, for example. So, to support both those apprentices and their providers, we've offered certain flexibilities over the coming weeks, such as permitting distance learning wherever possible, adapting end-point assessments and supporting breaks in learning for cases where coronavirus has caused disruption.

At the same time, I've written two letters to the sector this week providing important details about the guidance we have published on maintaining further education provision. Those guidelines are available on GOV.UK, and we will be updating them regularly.

I've also been working closely with a range of sector representatives and will continue to do so to ensure that I understand the support you need.

We are continuing to monitor the situation and where further

action is needed, we will take it. I know, for instance, that we still need to provide a firm approach in place for how vocational and technical qualifications will be assessed and awarded. We are working closely with Ofqual to urgently agree an appropriate way forward as soon as possible.

We will continue to post updates on GOV.UK, so please check back in regularly for the latest information.

As the prime minister said in his historic address to the nation a week ago, we will beat this coronavirus by working together.

In my sixth week in the job, I had hoped to be out around the country seeing FE facilities, and meeting apprentices and learners. I look forward to meeting you once the country is through this time. I have no doubt that when that point comes, further education colleges and other providers will be even more essential to this country's future as we rebuild our economy.

MARK DAWE

CEO, AELP



Trust your judgement in doing what's best for your learners

Government must find sustainable solutions for learners and staff alike – and follow its own rules

Last weekend I took part in an unprecedented FE Week webinar with AELP and AoC on a Saturday, to discuss the response to the coronavirus pandemic. With Lsect managing director Shane Mann ably marshalling proceedings as the webcam calls came in from a back corridor in Heathrow's T4 and a House of Colour studio, we were also joined by Dr Sue Pember of Hoxley, FE Commissioner Richard Atkins and Paul Joyce from Ofsted, fresh from helping farming neighbours with the lambing season.

Let's start with the positives, and it is always refreshing to hear from Paul on how flexible Ofsted are being. We now know that no inspections will take place unless a serious case of alleged failure in safeguarding is flagged and confirmation came in the webinar that

no new reports will be published until the crisis is over. Richard was equally supportive in confirming that his team of commissioners will make themselves available to colleges to offer informal advice without prejudice on how they might be judged in the future.

The day before, colleges had received the welcome news from the DfE that payments for the grant-funded element of their income will be guaranteed for the remainder of 2019-20. This was encouraging when senior leadership teams are having to grapple with the challenges of the partial closing of the college estate and the cancellation of the summer exam season.

During the webinar, Sue made the point as a former senior DfE civil servant that it would have perhaps been better if the department had sent out three letters at the same time in respect of mainstream FE provision, work-based learning and adult and community learning. But then when we saw the DfE

letter on apprenticeships on Monday evening, the temptation to compare and contrast was irresistibly strong.

It's important to recognise that the absence of guaranteed funding for contracted apprenticeship providers

“Income is drying up fast for ITPs as businesses”

and assessment organisations impacts on all types of provider as well as independent training providers. As mentioned in the webinar, the AoC has a member college with 37 per cent of its income being 'commercial' and other colleges are major suppliers in the apprenticeship market too. Yet the stark fact remains that with many employers

stopping all new starts and programme completions being delayed, income is drying up fast for ITPs as businesses and so hundreds of good-quality providers face the real prospect of collapse unless ministers rethink the stance they adopted at the beginning of the week. The Chancellor's package of general support measures for businesses was helpful but it is not enough to save companies with little or no cash coming in.

Providers are now furloughing staff and having to put many on notice. Sadly, the initial indications from an AELP survey launched this week are that the numbers are going to be very high. ITPs feel understandably angry that clear Cabinet Office Covid-19 guidelines for contract payments by all government departments and public authorities are seemingly being ignored by the DfE. The short-term solution which we are both pressing for is to guarantee contracted apprenticeship provision for March and

April to all colleges and providers while we sort out a longer-term solution.

I want to emphasise that sustainable solutions also need to be found for programmes such as study programmes and traineeships while the interests of vulnerable learners are protected as well. Both AoC and AELP have their Covid-19 response checklists, including some common asks, which seek clarifications from the DfE and the various agencies on issues – interpretation of the furlough rules features strongly – and hard-working officials are doing their best to answer them as quickly as possible.

But in the midst of this crisis, AELP's topline message to leaders of colleges, training providers, EPAOs and other sector organisations is to trust your judgement in doing what's best for your learners. As Paul and Richard said in the webinar, no one is going to act as judge and jury for now. Our thoughts are also with those doing the best for their staff.

JENNIFER
COUPLANDCEO,
IfATEFacing the coronavirus
challenges to EPA together

Jennifer Coupland, chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, reflects on new guidance provided by her organisation on end-point assessment delivery

There is no getting away from the fact that these are challenging times for everyone.

Government guidance on minimising how we interact, to help curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus, is impacting on every aspect of life in this country.

Our priority is protecting the health and wellbeing of everyone involved in apprenticeships and technical education.

At the Institute, we are taking action to support the sector.

Over the past week we have taken soundings from Route Panel employers, trailblazers and other stakeholders about our business plans for the coming months. In response to that feedback we

have decided to extend our consultations on funding and on the external quality assurance of apprenticeship assessments by six weeks.

We have also postponed our ongoing route reviews. One of the key aims of these processes is to engage with employers in a meaningful way, and it's been clear that that's not going to be possible across the board right now.

The outcomes of our digital route review are now complete, so we will continue to work with Trailblazer Groups here, where we are able.

We published new guidance on end-point assessment on Monday (23 March), alongside the wider government guidance.

We have tried to strike the right balance between recognising that in some organisations apprentices can continue to be trained and assessed remotely, whilst in others there's little option but to pause training or

assessment with a view to re-starting later.

The guidance allows apprentices to take a break in learning or a pause in EPA to cover sickness or caring responsibilities related to Covid-19 of up to 12 weeks.

“The 12-week time limit will be kept under review”

I appreciate that things are moving fast and the sector's ability to deliver EPA could be further hit. I therefore want to assure you that the 12-week time limit will be kept under review and could be updated if it becomes clear that more time is needed.

Moving onto the assessment itself,

where face-to-face engagement is required, we have confirmed that this can be conducted remotely, subject to conditions on invigilation, and that arrangements must be cleared in advance by the EQA provider and the apprentice's identity verified.

A number of colleagues have asked why we did not adopt the same approach as that taken to GCSE and A levels and award grades on evidence of the apprentice's achievements to date. Some have even suggested that there is a detrimental lack of parity in treatment of apprentices, so I want to take a moment to address that head on.

The secretary of state, Gavin Williamson, has had to take one of the toughest decisions any education secretary will ever face. The decision to halt this year's exam series is affecting millions of pupils who've been preparing for years for their GCSEs and A levels. He has made the right call, but he's also

been clear that awarding grades on the basis of mocks and teacher assessment is sub-optimal. Around 4m students were due to take GCSEs and more than half a million A levels, all within a fixed window of a few weeks in May and June. He's had no choice to do otherwise.

Around 185,000 apprentices completed their apprenticeships last year and assessment is on-demand. Apprenticeships are not the same and therefore the options are different. So it's right to try to preserve apprentices' right to their EPA wherever we can. They've been training hard towards it, after all.

I would like to close by giving my personal assurance that I and the Institute will do everything in our power to support employers, awarding organisations, training providers and apprentices through this extremely testing time.

If you have questions for the Institute – please send to Enquiries.IFA@education.gov.uk.

JO
MAHERPrincipal,
Boston CollegeReflections on ‘isolation’
and support networks

Being alone successfully is a strategy that can be learned. Just a few behavioural techniques will make working home alone bearable – and even productive, writes Jo Maher

As working at home becomes the new norm, I've seen countless social media comments and blogs on how people in various professions such as the armed forces have coped with extended periods alone or away from civilisation. Strange as it may seem, my education career has also been marked by periods of isolation.

It turns out good isolation practice is also learned. From being quarantined with colleagues in Zambia during the swine flu outbreak, to having to work at home as a result of various joint surgeries, I've learned a few coping strategies worth sharing, in the hope of saving readers the steep learning curve involved.

First and foremost, structure is essential. For me, it's not about writing a timetable (though it may be for you,

especially if you have children). I am not naturally someone who likes rigid structure if I can avoid it. I find

“Managing the small things gives you a sense of psychological control”

physical cues are most helpful to help my mind switch between tasks. I wear smart/casual clothes as a cue that it is “work time”, and, as funny as it sounds, it helps my dog as well. She genuinely knows the difference between outfits. A pair of jeans means “walk time”. I suspect the same is true for any company you might keep while working from home.

One golden rule I have set up with my friends and family – another cue – is that a phone call is to discuss

serious topics and concerns, while a social media call is exactly that, a social catch-up to focus on positives. If you haven't yet downloaded the Houseparty app, or another like it, on your phone, do. It's a great way to bring people together. (Wine is preferable throughout.)

Next, managing the small things gives you a sense of psychological control and promotes mental wellbeing. I set my workstation up in the same place each day and I mirror my work times, even down to sticking to the diet that I would have at work, in order to avoid unnecessary snacking.

I've also found it helpful to add in things I would not have time to do at work, such as five-minute rehabilitation breaks every hour, to breathe, relax, stand up, move around. I avoid the living room until at least 8pm every day, because in my mind this is an evening relaxation space. Walking the dog also helps to change the scenery.

My experience of surgical recovery

has been one where my wife and family have supported me for the first week or so, but as you become more able to do things for yourself, people migrate back to their other commitments, and rightly so. The same is likely to be true in our current circumstances even if other commitments get thin on the ground. Contacting friends is hugely beneficial

“Contacting friends is hugely beneficial – don't wait for others to contact you”

for you and them alike. Don't wait for others to contact you. You get out what you put in! Adapt to others' patterns, and let them know how to adapt to

yours. It made a huge difference to me.

In the coming weeks and possibly months, many will be isolating with families and children in the house. In this case, it is vital to find ways to adapt for them as well as to them. Checking in with people in a similar position to yourself to share tips can really help too. Colleagues both close and distant can provide great support, and it's worth remembering that talking to someone who isn't as emotionally involved in your situation can provide much-needed objectivity when the going is tough.

Looking out for other people can be challenging if you are not looking after yourself. Keeping yourself physically and mentally well is essential. Access your support networks through your colleagues, family and friends and do not be afraid to ask for help, even on the small things. I have lost count of how many staff put my suit jacket on for me when I had my arm in brace!

It's together that we'll get through this. Stay safe.



A letter to the further education sector

GAVIN WILLIAMSON MP

Education Secretary

On Thursday, Education secretary Gavin Williamson wrote to college leaders, independent training and adult education providers to thank them for their “expertise and ingenuity” in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

Over the past week this nation has entered a truly unprecedented phase and as a government, we have had to take some exceptional steps to deal with the challenge that we are facing. As education secretary, taking the decision to close all education institutions and cancel this summer’s exams and assessments was not only enormous, it was incredibly difficult.

I am aware of the challenges that everyone in the further education sector and all those educating young people and adults over 16 years old are facing. I want to express my deepest

gratitude for the absolutely vital service that you are providing to young people, adults, and of course your local communities – for which I know colleges and further education institutions play a central role. It is thanks to your hard work on the frontline of our national effort that learners have stability and support to continue their studies and vulnerable young people continue to be cared for.

In a week of unique circumstances, one thing that hasn’t surprised me is the resilience, resourcefulness and real commitment of you all. Your sector has not only risen to the challenge, its expertise and ingenuity has shone through – using creativity and technology to keep the show on the road for the thousands of learners who rely on you. I have heard some fantastic stories of staff and leaders moving swiftly to online learning, sharing teaching resources and supporting

local schools to ensure vulnerable children and children of key workers are cared for.

I know that this will be a difficult and testing time for you all – both personally and professionally. We are in a crisis that seems to touch every aspect of our lives and I know you will be anxious about the wellbeing of your teams and learners that you support. We have published initial guidance on how best to keep staff and students safe, along with some more practical guidance on the implications of Covid-19 on the running and funding of your institutions. Working closely with the minister for apprenticeships and skills Gillian Keegan, we will continue to review this and stay alive to the challenges you are facing and how we can best respond.

On behalf of the Prime Minister and the entire government, thank you once again for all your work.

Care apprentices praised as they step up to new responsibilities

FRASER WHIELDON
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Care apprentices in the Midlands have been deployed to care homes to alleviate pressure on nurses during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Two hundred and fifty health and social care apprentices from private provider GB Training, some of whom



are fresh out of school, have been armed with face masks, more facilities for handwashing and sterilising, and updated infection control training, to take on even greater responsibilities.

At The Chimes Residential care home in Stoke-on-Trent, elderly people have been isolated to their rooms and professional visitors are not being allowed past reception, so level 3 lead adult care worker apprentices have had to carry out tasks usually fulfilled by district nurses, including taking diabetics’ blood sugar levels.

The home’s care manager, Julie Davey, said how “very proud” she was of her team, especially the apprentices as they are “stepping up to the bar and learning the necessary skills to keep giving the vital care that older people need”.

The district nurses, she said, have given the apprentices an “A” for all they have learned in these uncertain times”.

Tracey Bradley, an apprentice working at a care home in Birmingham, said it had been “very stressful”, but they have “no choice” as the learners both know the people and



care for them “deeply”.

“That we’d do all we can to help protect them goes without question,” she said, adding it was “rewarding” to be using skills and training she had learned to protect people, particularly when they are some of those most at risk from this “horrible disease”.

At Awarding Care, 92-year-old resident Stella Powell has given her thanks to level 2 apprentices “for your kindness and dedication. Not only now, but always”.

“You’ve become more than carers

– you’re friends to us too. ‘Thank you’ doesn’t seem enough.”

But it’s not just the apprentices who are helping health services during this pandemic: a tutor at GB Training, Gemma Smith, has been contacted by a hospital she worked at for several years to request she join an emergency list in case of a lockdown in the UK.

The provider said despite the challenges and the anxieties, many of the apprentices are working overtime to cover fluctuating staff shortages,

and morale remains high.

Managing director Lawrence Barton expressed his and his whole organisation’s pride in seeing the apprentices “rise to the additional challenges placed upon them”.

“Our apprentices are serving on the front line in the struggle against this pandemic and helping to save lives. In a number of cases, they find themselves caring for and protecting some of the most vulnerable in our society, many of whom are the same age as their grandparents.”

Training provider gives entire charity fund to community groups

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An independent training provider has donated more than £20,000 to an emergency coronavirus fund.

Learning Curve Group handed over the entirety of its charity foundation's balance to help front-line community groups and local charities working to ease the pressure on those worst affected by the pandemic in County Durham.

Chief executive Brenda McLeish said: "People are at the centre of everything we do, so we've made an important decision to change the pillars upon which our fund was established with the aim of supporting those who are in need of funds more than ever.

"As changes are announced daily, we are committed to supporting the local community in whatever way we can."

The County Durham Community Foundation has set up the County Durham Covid-19 Response Fund to help community groups survive during this period, and the Learning Curve



Learning Curve Group HQ

Group Charity Foundation was one of the fund's founding supporters.

The money will be spent on a range of activities. For example, £5 will go towards a hot dinner for an older person self-isolating.

In addition, £10 may be spent on purchasing items for a food bank and £20 could buy fuel to help a volunteer deliver meals on wheels.

Larger sums of £50 will support volunteers from groups based in village halls calling elderly people in self-isolation, while £100 could keep the lights on for a community group.

Chief executive of County Durham

Community Foundation, Michelle Cooper, said: "The situation is becoming more serious as each hour passes, and we cannot afford to wait around. We are devoting all of our time and energy into supporting our local grassroots groups, which in turn will bolster our communities.

"Illness, isolation, loneliness and poverty are very real in County Durham and Darlington right now, and exasperated by the spread of Covid-19: but if we work together we can provide support to the life-changing local community services that will lessen the blow."

Wellbeing coach called in to keep apprentices motivated

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An independent training provider has drafted in a mental health and wellbeing coach to keep apprentices motivated in their studies during the crisis.

Amazing Apprenticeships have launched a series of webinars for employers and providers who are trying to support their apprentices while facing their own challenges.

Director Anna Morrison said: "We have received an overwhelming response from the sector.

"We're building a real sense of community and everyone is so positive about helping and supporting each other."

The provider has partnered with Gen Healthy Minds and one of its coaches, George Anderson, to provide content for the sessions. Anderson has 20 years' experience in the fitness and wellbeing industry and his Facebook group 'On the wagon' has more than 5000 members.

He said: "Never before has there been a more important time to teach

resilience, wellbeing and mental health management techniques.

"I'm delighted to be delivering this series of online masterclasses to a group of individuals who have the potential to influence large numbers of apprentices."

Around 300 participants from across the country took part in the first webinar on Wednesday and 500 have registered for the next masterclass on Monday.

Mike Thompson, a managing partner at Gen Healthy Minds, said: "Mental health and wellbeing of apprentices must be our number one priority right now and the team at Gen Healthy Minds will help employers and providers in whatever way we can."

Many of the providers participating in the webinars have been supporting apprentices in the NHS as well as those working in food production and distribution.

The programme is free to join and is being funded by Amazing Apprenticeships. The provider has also set up a LinkedIn group to encourage sharing of best practice, ideas and support.

York College gives protective gear to local hospital staff

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
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York College has donated almost 800 pieces of personal protective equipment to its local hospital to help battle against shortages brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

A range of masks, gloves, overalls and safety glasses, which are usually in stock for use by construction, engineering and stonemasonry students, have been handed to the York Teaching Hospital Trust.

York College principal Lee Probert said: "Since we've moved to online delivery only, we decided that these should be given to front-line staff in the NHS who are saving lives."

His college's childcare students and staff have also been called upon to volunteer in some of the city's childcare centres that are stretched for staff, while other employees are being encouraged to join voluntary groups in the community if they wish to do so.

Probert added: "I've acknowledged that whilst we're working in this brave

new way not all staff will be able to work as productively at home as they could do if the college was open, and empowered people to sign up for the city's volunteering effort, if they feel able to do so."

He also said that the college is going through its food stocks to donate goods due to expire in the coming weeks and months to food banks in the area.

"These are items which we might have to write off if we're not open in the traditional sense for a significant length of time.

"We know that food bank stocks are becoming depleted and we'd rather they had it to put to good use than it be wasted."

For its own students, York College is live-streaming interactive lessons in all curriculum areas every day.

Probert praised his staff for creating "hundreds" of online lessons and resources and "working really hard to ensure students' successes".

They have also been asked to stay in touch with learners to ensure they are not isolated and are in the "best possible position to engage



with whatever system for awarding qualifications emerges".

Daily remote enrichment programmes and quizzes are also being organised for the staff.

Online cooking could prove the recipe for happy students

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
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A college in Merseyside has been using technology to stream live cooking demos, host competitions and offer pastoral support as they adapt to teaching in isolation.

Level 1 hospitality students at Hugh Baird College's L20 Hotel School have been recreating dishes made by chef lecturers at home.

On Monday, level 1 students learned how to poach eggs as part of a remote breakfast lesson.

Steve Otty, curriculum co-ordinator, told FE Week the outbreak of Covid-19 has resulted in a "rethink" of delivering methods, with the hospitality team embracing online teaching.

He said: "This has been a little challenging due to the very nature of vocational training. At college we have industry standard kitchens, a range of different ingredients and obviously we're able to work more closely with learners.

"But it has been great fun and the learners have enjoyed the experience."

L20 Hotel School's learners have also taken part in an online student competition where they were challenged to upload a picture of the "most unusual"

food item in their cupboards at home.

Nikolas Arnaudov, a 16-year-old who is studying for a level 1 VRQ Diploma in professional cooking, was victorious with Bulgarian pastries his mother had made while on lockdown.

Otty said the use of live group chats had resulted in "positive" student contributions and "improved" collaboration within groups.

He added: "It has been key that we have continued to engage and communicate with learners.

"I think that continuing with their course online has helped to lift their spirits and has kept their minds focused."

Andy Howard, one of the college's directors, also devised a way for Microsoft Teams software to offer emotional support to students during this period.

A tiered framework has been introduced to enable check-ins on learners and prompt further engagement if there are any concerns.

He said: "Planning the pastoral support is just as vital for our students as the academic delivery, if not more so."

Principal Rachael Hennigan added: "I could not be prouder of all our staff at the college.

"Their response to an unprecedented situation has been sensational."

'Virtual College' ethos accelerated to minimise social isolation

FRASER WHIELDON
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A college with over 30,000 learners has not missed a step in moving services like horticulture lessons and mental health support online during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Weston College principal Paul Phillips commended his “tremendous staff” for their work in mobilising



their digital strategy during the crisis, saying tutors have actually increased their interaction with students since the campus closed on Friday.

The college has developed a portfolio of courses, such as digital skills and mental health wellbeing, to upskill employees and members of the local community at home, and said it is continuing to get requests from employers who are looking to use the lockdown to help boost their workers' skills while they are homeworking.

The team of digital educators and developers at the college have helped build a digital learning culture at the college over the past two years, with the help of £565,000 from the Department for Education's Flexible Learning Fund, which was used to train staff in techniques like video presentations.

Phillips says it was “clear” the digital strategy was not just about creating



Emma Wilkinson, a digital marketing apprentice at Weston College

online learning, but also creating a strategy that would ensure the virtual classroom was “outstanding” and that “social isolation is minimised, that motivation is maximised, and that mental health support is embedded holistically”.

To that end, the college has also rolled out “body and mind” physical and wellbeing activities for groups

of learners, as well as sessions like watching Netflix together and sharing a break for tea.

But it is not just students getting a digital helping hand during these times: Phillips is also running regular briefings over the internet with colleagues “to keep morale high”.

He has urged other principals to do the same, saying: “Encourage staff

to digitally innovate to keep students engaged in education and use their virtual community as a mechanism to reduce self-isolation and to improve mental health, and success will come from a ground-up approach.”

The #myvirtualcollege hashtag has also been launched by Weston to capture best practice, ideas and suggestions for the future.

East Durham staff step in to keep farm ticking over

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The coronavirus has not prevented East Durham College from caring for the livestock on its farm, with staff stepping in where students left off.

The college has a 24-horse yard, 200 sheep and an animal care unit which houses ‘Wrinkles’ the giant tortoise as well as wallabies.

Its Houghall Campus is set in around 500 acres of arable, grazing and woodland.

Lindsay Haggis, director of land-based studies, told FE Week: “The farm is ticking away absolutely brilliantly.

“I guess the disappointing thing is the learners would have been here to see it all and that is the opportunities that they are missing at the moment.”

She said the equine lecturing team had “pulled out all the stops” the week before the college closed to ensure that learners had completed the practical assessments required to achieve their qualifications.

Staff have been using Facebook

and Microsoft Teams to keep learners updated with what their favourite horses are up to as well as providing information on how Covid-19 is impacting the industry.

Yard manger Kate Lee and her team of four have been following a rota to take care of the horses and ensure they will be ready for when the students return.

Most agriculture, animal management and foundation learners had the opportunity to get involved with the lambing season before closure but the college’s suckler herd of native cattle have just started calving, with three born so far and another 27 on the way.

Haggis said: “Luckily the farm staff always take the time to take a snap or two so we can share these events with the learners.”

Similarly, level 3 agriculture students had managed to complete their ploughing assessments before classes ended.

Haggis added: “While it’s a shame the learners didn’t get to follow this



Wrinkles, the giant sulcata tortoise

up with drilling, they will see the fruits of their labours when they return for year two and get on with harvest.”

The director also stressed it is “very much business as usual” in the animal care unit, with senior animal care technician Imogen Wright training giant sulcata tortoise Wrinkles as well as looking after the rest of the animals, which include wallabies and raccoons.

College leader zooms in on fitness for colleagues

FRASER WHIELDON
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A college senior leader by day and dance instructor by night is running free online classes to keep her colleagues active during Covid-19.

Tracy Round-Turner, assistant principal for young people at West London College, has been a dance instructor for eight years, having previously danced professionally with the likes of Mr Motivator and on Blue Peter, and now teaches disciplines like Zumba and her own dance fitness hybrid.

Once her regular community class in Wimbledon had to stop due to the government restrictions, she moved the classes online through the video conferencing platform Zoom.

On top of her regular attendees, many of whom are NHS workers, she decided to advertise it to staff from her college to “help keep them active and build a sense of online community”.

Round-Turner said: “I think isolation can be scary, and it is important to reach out to each other

and feel connected.

“I’m hoping the staff of the college will get involved and join me to shake their cares away and take some time to feel good about themselves.”

She taught her first online class on Monday – ‘Monday Motivation’, featuring Zumba and another discipline called ViBeatz, from 8pm to 9pm. And last night, she ran a class called ‘Burn It Up’, which involved high-intensity interval training, and helped core strength and balance.

On top of that, Round-Turner is also offering a 20 to 30 minute yoga stretch session each day around lunchtime to “help those that have been sat in front of their screens all morning to remember the importance of resting their eyes and re-aligning their bodies and minds and re-energise them for the afternoon ahead”.

She sees this as an opportunity for people to get even fitter than they were before the lockdown, saying: “I think we should learn from this and think more about employee wellbeing – which we’ve been quite slow to do in this country.”



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Feature

Free meals: are vouchers what colleges

JL DUTAUT
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In the absence of the government’s promised universal voucher system, colleges and ITPs are taking matters into their own hands, finds JL Dutaut

Campaigning from school leaders last week resulted in DfE announcements promising a relaxation of rules for the disbursement of free meals funds and the creation of a universal voucher system. However, it is unclear whether any college benefits from the former or has any appetite for the latter.

“We started calling all our eligible students – around 700 families”

This week, my conversations with leaders for the five case studies below revealed a settled situation in terms of free meals, as well as potential pitfalls ahead. Chief among those is the roll-out of the universal voucher system itself, and second, the system’s capacity to do much more than sustain its current load.

The coastal colleges

East Coast College principal Stuart Rimmer and his team seem to have stolen a march on the government and most other colleges by signing up all of their free-meal-eligible students to Edenred’s “Ticket Restaurant Plus”



card. Each student is issued with a contactless card redeemable in a number of food outlets and all major supermarkets.

The college is pre-loading the cards with enough money to last until the end of the Easter break, topping up the allowance to cover the holiday period and sending out advice on how best to spend the money.

“If we’d had 24 hours’ notice, we weren’t going to be in a position to

hand out meal vouchers,” says deputy principal Nikki Lane, “and we’d have been putting more people at risk through contact.”

The college contacted eligible students before signing them up to the GDPR-compliant scheme. “We’ve got all the management behind it, so we can see who is using it and how, so we can prioritise where we need to be for support.”

The sign-up process has allowed the college to audit their contact details for all of these students, bolstering their ability to deal with safeguarding concerns. Uptake is high, but over 15 per cent of the college’s 16-to-18 roll are eligible for free meals. Plans are in place for the safeguarding team to reach out to those who don’t respond, and the college could end up with two concurrent systems to meet needs.

Just two weeks ago, I met MidKent College principal Simon Cook in a Gillingham campus atrium buzzing with a careers fair. This week, Cook is sitting in that atrium, one



of a handful of staff caring for only 27 of the college’s most vulnerable students.

From last Thursday, Cook’s team has worked to identify all their vulnerable students. MidKent operates a system of discretionary bursaries for those whose household income is below £28,000, topped up for those also eligible for free meals. In normal times, money is added to their student

ID cards, which can be swiped on college premises to pay for food.

“We started calling all our eligible students on Thursday and Friday – around 700 families. Where we were able to get bank details, we paid money straight into their accounts. By Friday, we’d processed payments for about 550.”

Unlike East Coast College, MidKent is not paying through the Easter and



Face of the universal free meal voucher?

Colleges need to cater for the vulnerable?



May breaks, but will top up according to need. In some instances, students don't have bank accounts and money has had to be paid to parents or carers. Cook acknowledges this carries the risk of money not being used for its intended purpose. MidKent's safeguarding team is following up to "do what we can to ensure parents don't keep that money from students."

"To be honest, safety is more important than finance"

For Cook, the voucher scheme would have pre-empted some of those concerns. MidKent processes payments on a weekly or monthly basis according to need, and Cook is looking at transferring to monthly during the closure. "We try not to spook or scare, but we know we're more than likely to be paying that through to the end of the academic year."

The rural college

"To be honest, safety is the most important factor," says Boston College principal, Jo Maher. The cost to the college of providing free meals is less than £1,000 a week, "so in terms of all the decisions management make, this is one of the lower-risk ones."

How to disperse the funds is another matter and Boston, like MidKent, have opted for direct payments to students or their parents or carers. In part, that decision was driven by the reality of access to food retailers in what is a dispersed, rural catchment. In part, it was a question of timing.

"We looked at every single option. We looked to get a voucher scheme out quickly, but the companies said their risk plans were challenging, should we go into lockdown."

Boston College contacted the same company that is providing East Coast College with the contactless cards, but the firm couldn't guarantee the service would be put in place in the event of a sudden lockdown. It was the difference between 48 hours and 72 hours. In the end, it wasn't a risk worth taking for Maher and her team. "What I can't be doing is mobilising non-essential administration staff next week when my finance department can be managing that from home."

Maher is also concerned about the roll-out of the proposed universal voucher scheme in the middle of a lockdown. "If it can be done remotely and electronically, brilliant. If it requires an admin burden and can't, then I don't want to risk my staff."

The urban college

Trafford College has opted for a mixed-methods approach.

"On top of our normal bursary, we've given eligible students a monthly top-up of £50," says vice principal James Scott. "That's already set up for April, May and June. For students for whom that isn't enough, we've set up an online system where they can apply for further assistance, and that would be in the form of vouchers."

At this early stage, there hasn't yet been any uptake on vouchers. The extra payments are designed to see students through their holiday periods, so Trafford's options are still open. Under consideration is buying vouchers for a specific supermarket (something that's possible in well-served south

Manchester) but the college is open to a more universal system, should one become available.

Trafford's concerns are longer-term and broader. "Hardship is only going to get more challenging," says Scott, but the solution as he sees it is to make the most of the college's place in the community through initiatives like food banks.

With regards to the universal voucher system, other than the concern he shares with Maher of an additional admin burden, Scott is also worried about "driving a coach and horses through what colleges have already spent a lot of hard work setting up".

"Hardship is only going to get more challenging"

The ITP

For Mark Pike, CEO of Develop, which works mainly with highly vulnerable students, free meals are fundamentally not a concern. All students are set up to receive payments already, and Develop will simply continue to make these. To mitigate the risk of mis-spending the allowance, Develop has a random audit process in place. Students are expected to keep hold of receipts to prove their expenditures.

Technically, disengagement from learning for three weeks could lead to disallowance of the free-meals money. In such cases, Develop's safeguarding team always intervene before action is taken that could harm



students financially. Pike expects those safeguarding interventions to increase.

While audits and processes may appear unnecessary at this time, the independent training provider is chiefly concerned with keeping as much of a sense of normality as possible for his students, who often suffer high anxiety levels and for whom the current crisis only heightens those vulnerabilities. An expectation that students will continue to engage in learning through regular online tutor sessions means that Develop's students have the consistency they need, and a continuity to their education few providers can boast of in the current circumstances.

When it comes to universal vouchers, and somewhat counter to at least some colleges, Pike is concerned that a government offer that bypasses Develop to deliver straight to students would heighten risks for his learners by severing the vital relationships they have built up in order to steady these

young people's lives.

As James Scott says, "I don't envy the government." And the situation won't get any easier for them or anyone else. Pike's students could soon be everyone's.

"We've already started taking applications from families who are now workless due to the virus," says East Coast's Nikki Lane, who is expecting a rise in demand from families with self-employed parents and those whose ability to work will be impaired by factors such as mental health and loss of childcare.

All the colleges I spoke to were keen to tell me about the work they're doing, not just for their vulnerable students but for their vulnerable communities at large. That's a subject for a further feature. By the time it is written, FE may have a universal voucher system few colleges need, but will they have the clarity they want about equipping them to deal with that increasing vulnerability?





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Due to the impending retirement of the current Chief Executive, we wish to recruit for 1st August 2020 or as soon as possible thereafter.

This position provides an outstanding opportunity for a person with extensive experience of the further and/or higher education sectors to lead a dynamic organisation at a time when technical education and skills are enjoying an enhanced profile and recognition of their importance to the nation, the environment, food production, and the economy.

The work involves substantial activity across the country and at member Colleges and Universities. The Board is seeking to recruit the right individual for this important role and is therefore taking a flexible approach to this appointment. Remuneration package negotiable in the region of £100K/annum for a full-time position.

Further details are available from: www.landex.org.uk
Potential applicants are welcome to discuss the position informally with Chris Moody, the current Chief Executive.
Tel: **01604 550109** E-mail: chrismoody@landex.org.uk

Closing date for applications: Friday 27th March 2020

FE Week guides for the

The 11 key things colleges need to know

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
YASEMIN@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Education secretary Gavin Williamson last week called on colleges to be at the forefront of the country's response to the coronavirus crisis, insisting they will be "directly saving people's lives".

Guidance has since been published to inform them of various changes during the pandemic.

They include:

- A letter from apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan: <https://bit.ly/2xjQmTf>.
- Maintaining education and skills training provision for FE providers: <https://bit.ly/33JoVIn>.
- List of key workers and vulnerable children: <https://bit.ly/2UjvAfm>.
- Guidance for apprenticeships: <https://bit.ly/2Uley0J>.

FE Week has pulled out 11 key points of what colleges need to know:

1 FE providers have had to stop classroom delivery from March 23 for most students

Until further notice, colleges have been told to stay open only for vulnerable students up to age 25, and those children of key workers up to and including 17-year-olds.

Vulnerable children include those "supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child-in-need plans, on child-protection plans, looked-after children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care plans".

"Critical" workers have been defined as those working in the following sectors: health and social care, education and childcare, key public services, local and national government, food and other necessary goods, public safety and national security, transport, utilities, communication and financial services.

2 ID 'critical worker' parents

The DfE has recommended that colleges ask for "simple evidence" that the parent in question is a key worker, such as



their "work ID badge or pay slip".

It would be "overly burdensome on key sectors at this critical time to ask employers to write a letter on behalf of their employees".

3 Colleges will continue to be financially supported

The government has confirmed it will continue to pay grant-funded providers their scheduled monthly profiled payments for the remainder of the 2019-20 funding year.

Education & Skills Funding Agency allocations for 2020-21 will be confirmed by the end of March and payments will be made as scheduled.

Existing support arrangements will also remain in place for colleges in significant financial difficulties, including short-term solvency support through emergency funding.

The Student Loans Company will continue to make scheduled fee payment to providers for advanced learner loans.

4 GCSE and A-level exams will not be taking place this summer

Exam boards will be asking teachers who know their students "well" to submit a set of evidence, including performance in mock results and their judgment about the grade that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead.

Full details are still being ironed out with

exams regulator Ofqual.

With regards to vocational and technical qualifications, the Department for Education is working with Ofqual to "see what flexibility and pragmatism can be applied to ensure students are not disadvantaged", but teacher assessment is "not possible" for all of them.

5 Grading for functional skills and VTQs still to be decided

With regards to vocational and technical qualifications, the Department for Education said it is working with Ofqual to "see what flexibility and pragmatism can be applied to ensure students are not disadvantaged", but teacher assessment is "not possible" for all of them.

At the time of going to press, Ofqual said they hoped to develop and publish a "clear approach for the different categories of VTQs in the coming days".

Decisions on how to grade functional skills qualifications have also not yet been made.

6 Apprentices can go on extended breaks in learning – but payment will stop

Funding rules currently state that a break in learning must be initiated by the apprentice.

The government will now allow employers and training providers, temporarily, to also

report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption is greater than four weeks.

Colleges and training providers will not receive payments for apprentices who are on breaks in learning.

7 Face-to-face end-point assessments can be rescheduled or 'modified' for apprentices

Apprentices who are deemed ready for assessment, and cannot be assessed due to Covid-19-related issues, will be able to have their end-point assessment rescheduled.

A simulated remote assessment will also be allowed during this time.

8 Train staff in distance learning

Where possible, colleges have been urged to prepare staff on distance learning and to make use of tools already available at the college, including physical and digital resources and Cloud storage systems.

Accessible guides on distance learning should also be given to students, and colleges should consider "lesson capture" to allow students to "dip in and out of lessons at their own pace".

9 Ofsted inspections suspended

Ofsted inspections have been suspended until further notice.

The publication of inspection reports has also been paused. There are currently 50 FE and skills completed reports being held over until the providers reopen as normal.

10 FE Commissioner team at your service – but not for intervention

Scheduled FE Commissioner intervention visits have also been suspended until further notice.

But Richard Atkins has confirmed "confidential" assistance will be provided to any college that wants to discuss issues being faced in the wake of the pandemic.

National Leaders of Governance are also ready to offer any support they can.

Phone calls to both groups can be arranged by emailing FEC.OPERATIONS@education.gov.uk.

11 Colleges could be working under these arrangements until the start the 2020-21 academic year.

Prime minister Boris Johnson said last week that "we can turn the tide within the next 12 weeks".

But when asked what "turn the tide" actually meant, Johnson said: "I cannot stand here and tell you that by the end of June we will be on a downward slope."

coronavirus pandemic

Government announces new measures to help training providers – but is it enough?

BILLY CAMDEN

BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government has released a package of measures that it hopes will help training providers during the coronavirus pandemic. Important documents include:

- A letter from apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan: <https://bit.ly/2UQQq5d>
- Support for businesses: <https://bit.ly/3bwS963>
- Apprenticeship programme response: <https://bit.ly/3dvL87o>
- Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education response to COVID-19: <https://bit.ly/33NNFPs>.

Here are the key points you need to know:

1 Private providers also told to stop classroom delivery from March 23
Until further notice, independent training providers should close their doors like schools and colleges.

2 No funding support
The government appears to offer no funding support for training providers during the crisis.

While it has confirmed it will honour all payments to grant-funded providers (i.e. colleges) for the remainder of 2019/20, no such promise has been made for procured contracts.

Private providers will only continue to be paid “retrospectively for the training they have delivered and can evidence”.

Government policy “does not allow payment for services in advance of delivery,” it claimed.

The ESFA added that it “reserves the right to recover funding which was claimed for and paid to the training provider, but for which the training provider was found not to be eligible”.

3 Face-to-face apprentice end-point assessments can be rescheduled or ‘modified’

End-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance providers are encouraged to engage and agree where

remote assessment can replace face-to-face assessment, or where a simulated environment can be used.

Apprentices who are deemed ready for assessment, and cannot be assessed due to Covid-19 related issues, will be able to have their EPA rescheduled. Where there is a “specified time limit for EPA post gateway”, a further pause of 12 weeks is allowable.

Apprentices whose gateway is being delayed are allowed a break in learning, with an extension to the assessment timeframe.

4 Grading for functional skills and VTQs still to be decided

This year’s summer exam series has been cancelled. With regard to vocational and technical qualifications, the Department for Education said it is working with Ofqual to “see what flexibility and pragmatism can be applied to ensure students are not disadvantaged”, but teacher assessment is “not possible” for all of them.

At the time of going to press, Ofqual said they hoped to develop and publish a “clear approach for the different categories of VTQs in the coming days”.

Decisions on how to grade functional skills qualifications have also not yet been made.

5 Apprentices breaks in learning rule softened – but providers still won’t be paid

Funding rules currently state that a break in learning must be initiated by the apprentice.

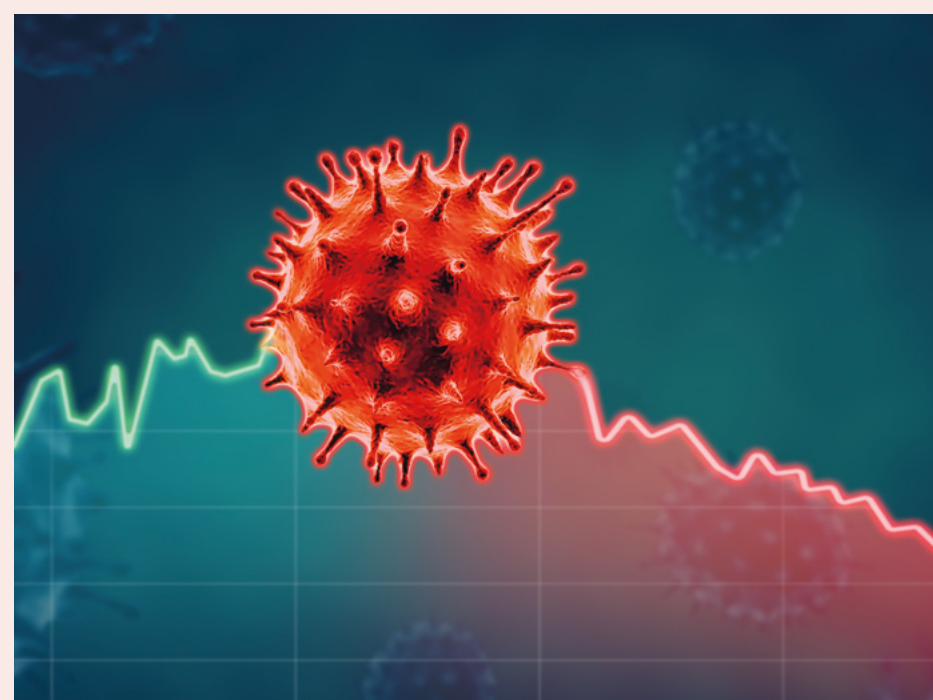
The government will now allow employers and training providers, temporarily, to also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption is greater than four weeks.

Training providers will not receive payments for learners who are on breaks in learning.

6 Go to Treasury if you’re struggling financially

Where the Covid-19 outbreak results in loss of income due to ceased or reduced delivery of training, training providers “should consider their eligibility and apply for the wide range of financial support that HM Treasury has already announced for businesses”.

The government has said it will cover 80 per cent of salaries for employees that would otherwise have been laid off during the crisis. However, staff who are “furloughed” will not be allowed to work at all during this period.



7 Apprentices made redundant to find a new employer within 12 weeks

Where apprentices are furloughed (granted a leave of absence) or placed on unpaid leave, employers and training providers have been urged to consider whether a break in learning would be appropriate.

Where apprentices are made redundant, it is the DfE’s ambition that they will be supported to find alternative employment, and continue their apprenticeship within 12 weeks.

The training provider “must support the apprentice to find another employer” where redundancies take place.

8 ‘Distance learning’ encouraged

The government is “encouraging and supporting employers, and training and assessment providers, to make use of distance-learning tools wherever possible and practicable to do so” for learners and apprentices.

9 Claiming apprenticeship payment for training in March

Where training has been delivered this month, but a break in learning has begun, to ensure payment for these apprentices training providers have been told to include these learners in their March

ILR submission as on programme, record, retain and submit evidence in the usual way, and record a break in learning in their April ILR submission.

They should also ensure that these learners are not recorded as permanently withdrawn from their apprenticeship, by entering the ‘Completion status’ field of the ILR as ‘6’, denoting that the learner has temporarily withdrawn from learning due to an agreed break in learning.

During March, levy-paying employers “should not use the apprenticeship service to ‘pause’ or ‘stop’ payments to the training provider, where some training has been delivered in March”, the DfE says.

Doing so will result in the training provider not receiving any payment for these apprentices.

10 Apprentice arrangements for April and beyond

For a break in learning greater than four weeks that begins on or after April 1, the apprenticeship should be ‘paused’ by the employer through the apprenticeship service at the point the break in learning begins.

The employer should “not ‘stop’ the apprenticeship through the apprenticeship service as this will prevent it resuming subsequently”.

Chancellor announces financial aid schemes for businesses and the self-employed

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The chancellor of the exchequer, Rishi Sunak, has unveiled a number of schemes, including grants and loans, as well as tax reliefs and deferrals in an attempt to protect the economy during the coronavirus pandemic.

He has called these “unprecedented measures for unprecedented times” and claimed the steps taken so far were “already making a difference”.

Guidance has been published to inform businesses of the range of measures on offer due to the crisis:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-if-your-company-cannot-file-accounts-with-companies-house-on-time>

FE Week has compiled 14 key points employers and the self-employed need to know:

1 The government will refund two weeks of Statutory Sick Pay per employee for SMEs

Employers should maintain records of staff absences and payments of SSP but employees will not need to provide a GP ‘fit note’. SSP will also apply from day one of the sickness period, instead of the current four. It also covers those who have been asked to self-isolate as a precautionary measure.

The rebate scheme is currently being developed and the eligible period commenced on March 13.

The size of an employer will be determined by the number of people they employed as of February 28, 2020 and must be fewer than 250 employees.

The government said it will work with employers over the coming months to set up the repayment mechanism as soon as possible.

2 80% of salaries for employees who would otherwise have been laid off during the crisis will be reimbursed

All UK businesses with a PAYE scheme will be able to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme by designating affected employees as ‘furloughed workers’, notifying them of this change of status and submitting information to HMRC about these employees through a new online portal.

There will be a cap of £2,500 per month

for employees who have been asked to stop working, with wages to be backdated to March 1 for an initial three-month period. It is at the employer’s discretion if they wish to pay the additional 20 per cent of the employee’s salary.

The chancellor has said that he will extend the scheme if required.

HMRC is working to set up a system for reimbursement. This is expected to be launched in late April with grants paid to employers in May. HMRC envisage that employers will use the deferred VAT payments to cover staffing costs of furloughed workers until grants are paid.

3 There will be a business rates holiday for all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England for the 2020-21 tax year

It will apply to properties that are mainly or wholly used as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas, live music venues, hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation and for assembly and leisure.

No action needs to be taken as it will apply to your next council tax bill in April 2020.

Businesses that received the retail discount in the 2019-2020 tax year will be rebilled by their local authority as soon as possible.

4 Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors will receive a cash grant of up to £25K

Businesses with a rateable value of under £15,000 will receive a grant of £10,000 while those with a rateable value of between £15,001 and less than £51,000 will receive a grant of £25,000.

Businesses which do not pay business rates are not included in this scheme.

Local authorities will write to businesses eligible for these grants under the Retail and Hospitality Grant Scheme.

5 A one-off grant of £10K will also be given to support certain small businesses

Businesses that occupy a property and are eligible for small business rate relief, rural rate relief and tapered relief will receive this grant.

It is part of the Small Business Grant Scheme funding for local authorities, which will write to businesses eligible for these grants.

6 Valued Added Tax (VAT) will be deferred for three months

It will apply to all businesses for payments due between March 20, 2020 and June 30, 2020.

No applications are required.

Businesses will be given until the end of

March 31, 2021 to pay any liabilities that have accumulated during the deferral period.

Customers who normally pay by direct debit should cancel their direct debit as soon as possible. HMRC will not charge interest or penalties on any amount deferred and businesses can opt to continue paying as normal. Visit: british-business-bank.co.uk

7 SMEs will have access to working capital

The government will provide lenders with a partial guarantee of 80 per cent on each loan (subject to a per-lender cap on claims of up to £5 million in value and for up to six years).

Overdrafts, invoice finance and asset finance will also be available.

The government will pay to cover the first 12 months of interest payments and any lender-levied fees. Some banks are also pausing any capital repayments on the loans for 12 months.

UK businesses with turnover of no more than £45 million per year have to meet extra conditions as stipulated by the British Business Bank to apply for the new temporary Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme Visit: british-business-bank.co.uk.

8 The Bank of England will buy short-term debt from larger companies

Under the new Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility, the Bank of England will support your company if it has been affected by a short-term funding squeeze. The Covid Corporate Financing Facility will purchase short-term corporate debt – known as commercial paper. The scheme is now open for applications. Visit: bankofengland.co.uk/news/2020/march/the-covid-corporate-financing-facility

9 All businesses in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, may be eligible to receive support with their tax affairs

Arrangements are agreed on a case-by-case basis and are tailored to individual circumstances and liabilities through HMRC’s Time To Pay service.

If you have missed a tax payment or you might miss your next payment due to Covid-19, call HMRC’s dedicated helpline: 0800 0159 559.

10 Companies may make an application to extend the period allowed for filing to Companies House

It should be submitted before the filing deadline.

11 Businesses that have cover for government-ordered closure and pandemics or unspecified notifiable disease should be covered by insurance

The government said insurers have confirmed that asking venues to remain closed from March 21 is sufficient to make a claim if other terms and conditions are met.

Businesses with event cancellation policies that include unspecified notifiable disease extensions should also be able to make a claim for necessary and unavoidable cancellation, abandonment or postponement.

12 Protection from eviction for commercial tenants

All commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent because of Covid-19 will be protected from automatically forfeiting their lease and being forced out of their premises if they miss a payment up until June 30..

All commercial tenants will still be liable for the rent.

No action is required.

13 The self-employed will be given a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years

Anyone with trading profits of up to £50,000, makes the majority of their income through self-employment and submitted a self-assessment tax return for 2019 will be eligible to apply.

The support will be capped at £2,500 per month and will initially last three months.

HMRC will contact those eligible directly, but the system may not be up and running for two months, with taxable grants expected to be paid directly to the claimant in June.

The chancellor has awarded an additional four-week period for individuals to file their 18/19 tax returns and said the self-employed can access the business interruption loans scheme or apply for Universal Credit in the interim, if applicable. Self-employed individuals may also qualify for Universal Credit and other welfare support.

14 Income Tax self-assessment payments may be deferred

You are eligible if you are due to pay your second self-assessment payment on account on July 31.

If you take up this option, it will be due on January 31, 2021.

No applications are required.

'Sharing the art and soul of excellence in technical teaching and learning' – NCFE and WorldSkills UK partner up on new 'Centre of Excellence'



David Gallagher,
Chief Executive, NCFE

Education and skills charity, NCFE recently announced a new strategic partnership with WorldSkills UK. Over the next three years, the two organisations will be working closely together on a pioneering project to create a 'Centre of Excellence' for technical teaching which will directly impact more than 40,000 young people across the country. David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE, shares his thoughts about the project and what it means for the technical and vocational education market.

NCFE has always championed alternative routes to education and appreciates that there is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to teaching and learning styles. Through our range of qualifications and educational services, we are committed to promoting and advancing learning for people of all ages and aim to provide platforms at all levels to help our learners to get on in their lives and careers.

Over the last six months, we've been looking at what else we could do to help our learners on their educational journeys, to ensure that they have the best possible learning experiences and get the most from their time in further education. As a result of this, one of the key areas that we have decided to focus on is the work that we do to support educators themselves.

Having sat at the forefront of technical education for over 170 years, we understand the critical role that positive, driven, knowledgeable and inspiring educators play in a learner's success story.

Through the delivery of high-quality learning experiences which help to build confidence,

self-esteem and understanding, educators can positively influence learner outcomes to help them reach their full potential and there is no better example of this than the training managers operating on behalf of WorldSkills.

WorldSkills UK is a partnership organisation which combines the worlds of business, education and government to accelerate the development of young people's skills from national to world-class standards through the organisation of a range of 'Olympics-style' skills competitions.

Shaped by over 65 years of global benchmarking, year after year, WorldSkills UK's highly experienced training managers produce competition-winning students and apprentices across multiple fields of technical and vocational education, which not only showcases the calibre of students in the UK's education sector, but also helps to inspire future generations of technical and vocational learners.

Through the new WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence in partnership with NCFE, we are aiming to harness the experience and expertise of the WorldSkills UK training managers to create an innovative training programme which will focus on bottling, digitising and sharing the art and soul of excellence in technical teaching and learning, with a view to mainstreaming the skills needed to become a truly world-class technical educator across the sector.

The Centre of Excellence will see us develop new methodologies, new content, new resources and new approaches, based on taking the best of what's already out there in the sector, and lifting it up to help educators right across the UK's technical and vocational education system to deliver truly world class training experiences.

Throughout the project's three-year pilot phase, which commences in September 2020, NCFE will provide strategic advice,

resources and funding to the project, which is something we're very excited about. It's anticipated that the initial phase of the project will directly impact more than 40,000 young people, nearly 1,000 educators and more than 120 educational institutions, with the intention that this will be the foundation to roll-out to hundreds more in the years to come.

With the imminent introduction of T Levels and a rise in the number of apprenticeships being offered to young learners, as well as ongoing conversations around the need to 'level-up' the workforce in order to futureproof the economy, technical education is very much under the spotlight at present.

Through our partnership with WorldSkills UK, we want to take advantage of that spotlight to emphasise some of the incredible career opportunities available at the end of a period of technical or vocational study to inspire and empower learners to make the best possible decisions about their own education to help them achieve their personal goals.

As two organisations with a common purpose for the promotion and advancement of learning and a shared vision for a world-class skills system, the partnership with WorldSkills UK is a perfect fit for us.

The Centre of Excellence has the potential to create a legacy which will not only change the shape of technical and vocational teaching, but will also make a difference to the lives of young people for years to come. We're incredibly excited to see where the project leads us and are thoroughly looking forward to working with WorldSkills UK.

To find out more about the Centre of Excellence, visit <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/worldskills-uk-centre-of-excellence-in-partnership-with-ncfe>.

Bulletin

Movers & Shakers

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



Rebecca Conroy

Acting chief executive,
East Sussex College Group

Start date March 2020

Concurrent job

Principal, East Sussex College Eastbourne

Interesting fact

She is a trained harpist



Mark Byerley

Director of career pathways in
technology, Activate Learning

Start date May 2020

Previous job

Head of faculty for technology, Abingdon and Witney College

Interesting fact

He previously served for 23 years' in the British Army



Donna-Marie Janson

Principal,
Varndean College

Start date September 2020

Previous job

Vice principal, Varndean College

Interesting fact

While she was teaching in Australia, she taught some of the cast of Neighbours and climbed the Sydney Harbour Bridge

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

FEWEEK

Got a story?

Get in touch.

Contact: news@feweek.co.uk
or call 020 81234 778



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This BTEC Level 2 is designed to be used flexibly as:

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- a roll-on, roll-off programme for an Apprenticeship or employment.

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quals.pearson.com/BTEC-PA-industry-skills

100% internally assessed

Student will explore

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Unit 2: Professional Development

Unit 3: Creative Interpretation

Unit 4: Audition and Portfolio Process

Unit 5: Preparing for a Performing Arts Production

Unit 6: Performing Arts Production

Unit 7: Responding to a Progression Opportunity

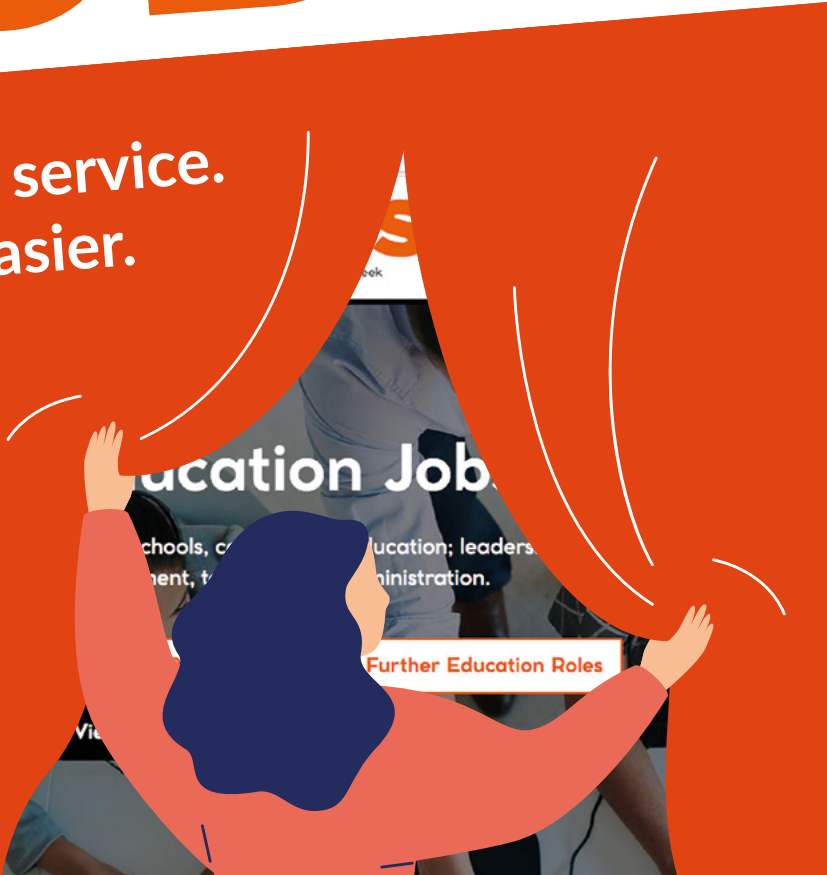
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FE Week Sudoku challenge

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

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

Difficulty:
Easy

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

Difficulty:
Medium

Solutions: See right

Spot the difference To WIN an FE Week mug



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



Solutions

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

Difficulty: Easy

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

Difficulty: Medium

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