



FE WEEK

In-depth, investigative journalism, determined to get past the bluster & explain the facts for the FE & skills sector

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FEWEEK

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FE WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



AoC calls for change to GCSE ranking plans for huge cohorts

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

Colleges are calling on Ofqual to relax plans for ranking GCSE students within each grade this summer, as doing so for hundreds across different campuses would be “impractical”.

A number that spoke to FE Week expressed fear that it would produce “inaccurate” results and put thousands of learners at a “disadvantage”.

The exams regulator is currently consulting on the proposal, which was revealed last month as part of the standardised assessment process that will replace cancelled exams due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Schools and colleges are being asked to provide both a centre grade in each subject for each student and a rank order of pupils within each grade.

Ofqual says the rank order will help determine which students move between grades during the standardisation process, which will be run by exam boards in order to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by “generous or severe” assessment.

Jeanne Rogers, vice principal for quality teaching and learning at the Luminate Education Group, told FE Week that she is not “confident in the legitimacy and accuracy of a ranking process, where hundreds of students would have to be placed in order with potentially little or no distinguishable evidence between them”.

Her group, which encompasses five colleges including Leeds City, has almost 8,900 GCSE entries from 5,520 students this summer who are taught by almost 100 teachers.

“Our main concern is that any large-scale ranking will place some students at a disadvantage,” Rogers said.

“Take our GCSE maths, for example: one campus might have 800 maths students, in 60 groups, across five departments, assessed by ten teachers. Two teachers in each department will rank their 150 students, with direct experience



of the comparable features of performance, giving them a good degree of confidence.

“They then have to join four other departments to merge the rankings and that’s where you will inevitably see some students being moved down in the rank order, as a consequence of sheer volume and the necessity to give each a unique rank.”

Rogers added that if 200 students were to share a grade in any one campus, there will be “clusters” within that grade, where there is “little in the evidence base to distinguish between them”.

While this is a challenge that Luminate will “take on, for the sake of each student”, they hope Ofqual will adjust the plan so that it allows for the ranking of students in smaller cohorts of around 150 – which would be equitable to a year 11 cohort in schools.

Birmingham Metropolitan College shares similar concerns. The group, made up of three colleges, has almost 4,000 GCSE students taught by 50 teachers.

A spokesperson said that ranking this high number will be “very challenging logistically. We would like flexibility in the ranking and have voiced this as part of the consultation,” they added.

Meanwhile, NCG has 80 GCSE teachers teaching around 4,000 students across its seven colleges. A spokesperson described ranking

hundreds of learners within the same grade band as a “key challenge”.

“For example, we know from the DfE progress measures that nationally, and at NCG, the majority of 16-to-18-year-old learners stay at the same grade, so, given that the annual distribution of learners is heavily centred around grade three, for all colleges, no matter the size, this will be hundreds of learners at different ages, from different departments having to be ranked,” she added.

“Getting this right, particularly at the proportional grade boundaries, will require some real care and attention.”

Their concerns have been echoed by their counterparts across the country, according to the Association of Colleges.

The membership organisation’s draft response to Ofqual’s consultation said colleges are “concerned” about a single-centre ranking for all candidate grades, which is not “necessary” and nor would it provide “any additional degree of accuracy”.

“Under the current circumstances, moderating student grades across a large team and across campuses is not practical.”

The AoC, like the Luminate Education Group, suggests that it should be possible to submit rankings either by teacher or in smaller groupings of around 150 instead.

Ofqual’s consultation closes on April 29.

MBA apprenticeship to live on despite attempt to axe

FRASER WHIELDON

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Exclusive

Universities are still planning to offer the MBA in the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship, despite the qualification being axed from the programme.

Earlier this month the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education launched a consultation on a revised version of the standard which scrapped all references to MBAs.

The apprenticeships quango said that requiring a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) in the level 7 senior leader standard would no longer “meet the intent of our policy on mandated qualifications”.

It followed the education secretary Gavin Williamson's request for a review of the popular programme, who said he was “unconvinced” it provides value for money.

However, the institute has this week confirmed to *FE Week* that providers would still be allowed to offer the MBA as a non-mandatory qualification, though costs for qualification registration, certification and any training not directly related to the standard would not be fundable from the levy.

An employer could choose to pay these costs out of their own pocket to enable their apprentice to acquire the qualification in addition to passing the apprenticeship via the end-point assessment.

Aston University, which has recruited almost 300 people on to the standard since its launch



in February 2018, said the removal of the MBA component “does not mean we would automatically remove the MBA from our senior leader offer”.

A spokesperson added they would determine with the apprentice employers “if the most valuable vehicle for a level 7 senior leader programme remains an MBA qualification”.

“Then we would be keen to include it”.

But they said it was too early to say with certainty whether they would charge any additional fees.

The Henley Business School, which runs the senior leader programme for the University of Reading and has had 226 starts to date, said: “The Henley MBA will always remain a key part of our programme” – hinting that option will remain open for employers.

But, as the IfATE's consultation is still live, the university's spokesperson said they were “unable to comment on what changes we will make to

our programme until the new standard and assessment plan is finalised”.

Many other universities, such as Exeter, Portsmouth, Liverpool John Moores, the Open University, and the biggest MBA provider – Cranfield University – all told *FE Week* they will wait until the standard is finalised before making any changes to their programme.

The University of Bradford launched a last-ditch recruitment drive for MBA apprentices last month as a result of the government's review into the standard.

A spokesperson from the university told *FE Week* that they are “aware that this will be removed in future”, however, the “final version is not yet approved to affect existing delivery”.

The university will “engage in a review of our level 7 apprenticeship provision when the full, confirmed details of the new standard are published”.

The government's review of the standard is planned to conclude by June 1.

The IfATE told *FE Week* that as the changes to the occupational standard and end-point assessment plan are likely to be “significant”, they expect to consider the funding band, which currently sits at £18,000.

The senior leader apprenticeship has proven extremely popular since its launch in February 2018. *FE Week* analysis shows it had 6,387 starts on the programme up to the first quarter of 2019-20.

As each of these attracted up to £18,000 of levy funding – it means as much as £115 million has been spent on this standard to date.

MoJ ploughs ahead with £2m tender for MBA apprentices

A government department is ploughing ahead with a £2 million hunt for MBA apprentices to “enhance social mobility” despite the qualification being axed from apprenticeships.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is tendering for providers to deliver the level 7 senior leader degree apprenticeship with an attached Masters of Business Administration or Masters of Science.

That's despite the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education

removing the MBA component following a review called for by education secretary Gavin Williamson.

The MoJ told *FE Week* it was aware of this, but as “no changes have been made” officially yet, they will continue to recruit MBA apprentices.

The Department for Education said that while the review is under way, it is up to providers and employers to decide how to recruit and promote apprenticeship standards.

The ministry wants to deliver the MBA

apprenticeship because, the tender document says, “senior leadership capability is a key priority for the department and there is currently no apprenticeship on offer to fill this learning gap”.

Offering the apprenticeships will “enhance the MoJ social mobility strategy by allowing employees who did not attend university to gain higher-level qualifications while in the workplace”.

Applicants for the MoJ tender have been asked to submit bids by April 30.

Stranded: how college international students are coping away from home

FRASER WHIELDON
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Exclusive

With no blueprint for this unprecedented pandemic, colleges are coming up with their own solutions to help international students who find them stuck halfway around the world from their friends and family

Colleges have earned the gratitude of international students and parents for "going the extra mile" by sheltering those stuck in England during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Students like Anatolli and Andrew Filippov, both 22 and from Dudley College, who attempted to return home to Siberia in Russia last month – only to have their flights cancelled when the Russian government closed its borders.

The twin brothers have been isolated at their accommodation at Dudley ever since, supported by the college's international team.

Despite the situation he and his brother find themselves in, Anatolli says they are not stressed as they have money for rent and food for another two to three weeks – by which time Russia is expected to have reopened its borders.



Dudley College students Anatolli Filippov (left) and Andrew Filippov



"It's a difficult situation across the world and our situation is not horrible," he said, whereas a lot of people "do not have the comfortable conditions which we have."

Anatolli came to the West Midlands college to study an English for speakers of other language (ESOL) course as he always wanted to learn about English culture and its language and wants to work for an international company, perhaps in construction, once he returns to Russia.

The brothers have already had a listening and speaking exam in February, which Anatolli passed with full marks, though, he says, Andrew did a "little bit worse".

He hopes to return home in May, but has been keeping in touch with his mother, his girlfriend and his friends via Skype.

Dudley College also has 22 learners from China studying motor vehicle programmes. They are either staying with host families or in halls of residence that they share with international students from the University of Wolverhampton.

"All are in supportive communities throughout this difficult time and are able to reassure their families back home of their safety," a college spokesperson said.

A group of fashion and photography staff and students from Dudley who took part in an international exchange in India in March of this year were able to return to the UK without issue.

"This is a particularly stressful time for individuals to be so far away from their loved ones"

But Anatolli, Andrew and the Chinese students will have to cope with being away from their families during these unprecedented and dangerous times.

They are just a few of the thousands of international students studying at an FE college in England who have been affected by the virus, who also serve as an example of how colleges, like Dudley, are having to pull out all the stops in reacting to a situation for which there is no blueprint.

Dudley's principal, Neil Thomas, said their "primary concern" for international

News

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students is to "help them stay safe and well", and they appreciate "this is a particularly stressful time for individuals to be so far away from their loved ones", so the colleges' counselling and support services have been kept active supporting them.

In some cases, the international students being supported by a college are not even theirs: over the Easter break, Chichester College Group put up students from the Falklands Islands, who had been studying at another college, in their halls of residence for free. This was after the learners could not get a flight back home and the provider they were studying at had no accommodation to offer them.

"The college went the extra mile for our son and the rest of the Falkland Island students"

After these students eventually made it home, one parent (who did not wish to be named) gave their "heartfelt" thanks to the college for "going the extra mile for our son and the rest of the Falkland Island students".

"It is a challenging time for everyone and I am sure it has been well recognised that the team put the students above all else to provide them with stability in a fast-changing situation."

Chichester's director of international Sarah Watson called it "a highly unusual time for all of us", but said the biggest challenge for the students was "the uncertainty of how or when they would be able to return home".

"Our team worked hard to provide individual support to our students to make this process as simple as possible," she continued.

"We have found that providing flexibility and extra levels of support during this time has helped to significantly reduce the anxiety of our students and of parents while their children have been overseas."

Hartpury College in Gloucestershire had found the "biggest issue" for their international students, of which it has 215 enrolled, were flight cancellations, a spokesperson said.



Hartpury College campus dog Ralph

Twenty of the college's international cohort had to stay on campus during the Easter break "due to the restrictions in place in their home countries".

They were supported by a small staff team, including residential wardens, who helped students collect prescriptions and essential supplies, as well as aiding their mental wellbeing. The wardens checked on students daily, and made themselves available for a socially distanced chat "with those who may be finding it difficult to be overseas and separated from their families at this time".

The spokesperson said the campus dog Ralph was also on hand for walks and a Facebook community page was established to give students the opportunity to "stay active, stay positive and remain part of the Hartpury community".

The Association of Colleges' international director Emma Meredith said colleges "have been doing everything they can" to support international students, and moved "incredibly quickly" to provide online learning and support measures, such as checking in with local hosts the students stay with.

"For everybody, the coronavirus pandemic is extremely worrying and we should not forget that there are young people in our colleges

who are sitting this out far away from home," she said.

Their experience, and that of their providers, has been made slightly easier by the Home Office temporarily relaxing the rules around student visas. So, for instance, the government will not take enforcement action against students who are not able to attend their studies for 60 days or more because of Covid-19; and providers will not need to report student absences.

"The team put students above all else to provide them with stability in a fast-changing situation"

Meredith said she was "grateful" for the "significant" concessions, which would provide "short-term reassurance" for students and providers.

But, she said, in the longer term there will "definitely be disruption and a financial impact to the international contracts and projects colleges had planned".

VIRTUAL OPEN DAYS

All systems go: the virtual open day has arrived

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

FE Week spoke to a handful of colleges that have cancelled their traditional summer open days and already started to advertise an online alternative.

'Tis the season for the traditional college open day, a chance for prospective students to visit campuses, chat with lecturers and ultimately choose their place of study for the next academic year.

But the unprecedented nationwide lockdown because of the Covid-19 outbreak has seen nearly all open days postponed until further notice.

Colleges have, as a result, got creative to ensure these vital events go ahead in some form or other.

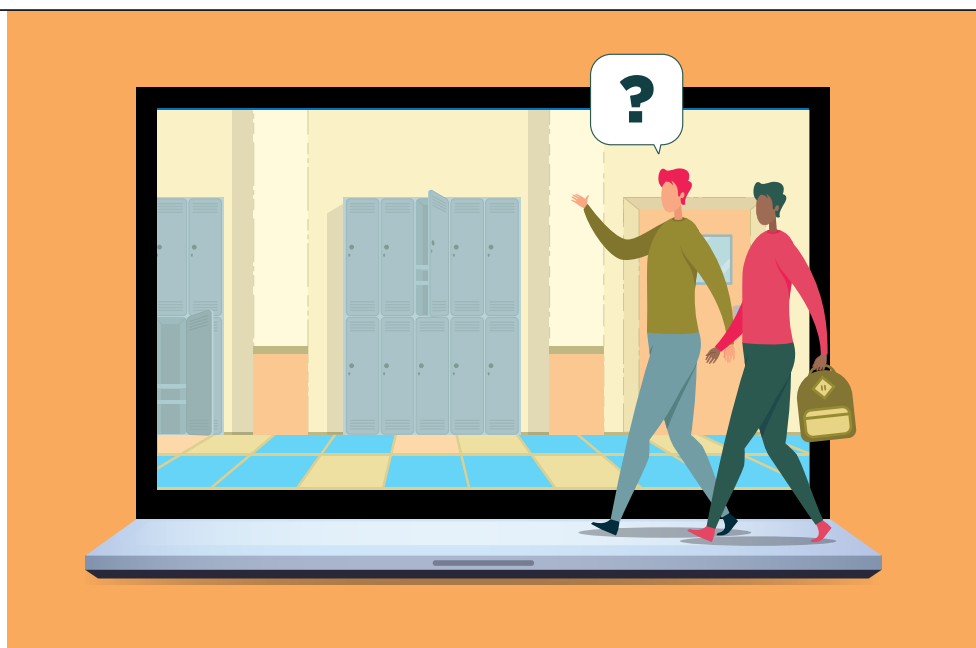
Software and social media, such as Zoom, Facebook and Microsoft Teams, are all being utilised to conduct the open days virtually.

“Visitors can take virtual tours of parts of the campus, and view 360-degree photos of the facilities”

Live video tours of campuses, one-to-one chats via messengers with lecturers, and telephone enrolments are all replacing physical visits.

City College Plymouth told *FE Week* it has opted for the Zoom video platform to host around 150 students aged 15 to 18 in real-time on April 25, from 10am to 5.15pm.

Head of marketing Louise Greenleaf said even though their campus is closed for visitors due to the lockdown, “we know that this is still a critical



time for year 11s and their parents to consider post-16 options, so it's crucial that we enable them to find out about the courses on offer and check out our facilities”.

Those who sign up will be able to choose from ten 30-minute sessions tailored for a range of courses, including apprenticeships, from hair and beauty to construction.

Once they choose a session they will be met with a two-minute intro from the session's “host” – a member of staff working in that area – who will talk through the college's key stats.

A 15-minute faculty talk will follow, which will be conducted while a member of the marketing team tours around campus to show the facilities on another livestream viewed on the same Zoom window.

Relevant employers, including representatives from engineering firms, the local police and NHS Trust, will then give a three-minute talk before finishing with a ten-minute Q&A.

Around 60 staff will be “speakers” throughout the event.

Meanwhile, at South Devon College during the week commencing May 4, 16 webinars will be broadcast using the Microsoft Teams platform, which students can join securely via a link and use to ask questions live.

The individual 30-minute sessions, each led by two members of curriculum staff, will include all the different subject areas available, how to apply for a course, finance, travel and learning support that is on offer.

They will all be recorded and available to watch back on the college website for students who can't tune in at the time.

Laurence Frewin, principal of South Devon College, told *FE Week* that the webinar experience will involve “course-specific information talked through by our experienced and knowledgeable tutors”.

“This will include some visual elements – images and videos – to give participants an idea of the college campus and facilities as well as what college life is like, while they are unable to visit in person,” he explained.

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VIRTUAL OPEN DAYS

“Our Helpzone Team will then cover some of the important questions asked at our open days, including what support is available for students both with their learning, their finances and their pastoral care.”

Prospective students taking part in the sessions at City College Plymouth and South Devon College will be given the option of signing up to a course on the day via phone, or given the details of their admissions teams to contact at a later date.

Bath College is set to hold its first virtual open day on May 14, and will use bespoke software currently being created by its developers on its website.

Students who sign up will be invited to click on a link that logs them on to the system, where they can listen to a choice of seven pre-recorded webinars and talks, based on topics that include welfare, apprenticeships and higher education and are each around three to four minutes long.

Students can alternatively go to live webchats with the lecturing team for a specific course to ask questions.

Jon Domaille, assistant principal for learner journey and customer relations at Bath College, described open events as “massively critical” and said it is “really vital” to keep them going in some form during lockdown.

“It is an incredibly uncertain time for students at the moment, so this is about us being able to show them that no matter what is happening, we are there for them,” he told FE Week.

“Primarily, over the past few weeks everyone has been using technology to work, speak to family and friends, so from our perspective why shouldn’t technology be used to connect and inspire prospective students?”



“They need to build up a picture as to what the subjects are about, what the environment is and who they potentially will be working with. A web or paper prospectus wouldn’t do that alone.”

While the college is embarking into “unknown territory”, if the May 14 virtual open event proves a success, it could be something that the college runs even when it goes back to work properly.

East Riding College has opted to make use of Facebook as the home of its online open events and is hosting a number this month and in June, each lasting around three hours.

Students will be able to take virtual tours of the campus, view 360-degree photos of the teaching rooms, workshops and other facilities and watch video messages from key staff. In addition, tutors will be online to answer any questions via the social network’s messenger service.

Neil Waterhouse, executive director for commercial and finance at East Riding College, explained: “Often the most useful part of their visit is getting the chance to speak to teaching staff on a one-to-one basis, and that opportunity can be

provided online instead of face to face.

“In place of campus tours, visitors can take virtual tours of parts of the campus, and view 360-degree photos of the facilities. The team are also on hand to answer queries about other support available, such as free bus travel and student finance.”

Just like at a real-life event, the marketing team will be on hand to direct “visitors” to the right member of staff.

Sunderland College, Northumberland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form, which together form the Education Partnership North East (NPNE), are offering similar virtual open days to East Riding, but they will direct prospective students to a dedicated page on their website that will offer live chats, instead of using Facebook.

They also include 360-degree video tours of campuses, while those interested in securing their place on the day will be able to do so instantly via an application fast-track service.

Staff will ring visitors if they would prefer to speak over the phone.

Ellen Thinnesen, chief executive of NPNE, said the events are aimed to “enable prospective students to engage with the college when a physical event was not possible”.

“The marketing team operate a live chat ‘switchboard’ to manage and transfer chats to key curriculum areas and specialist support staff,” she explained.

“Curriculum staff are available throughout the event to log into Live Chat and pick up transferred chats from marketing.”

Thinnesen told FE Week the first took place at Northumberland College on March 31, where almost 250 students participated, followed by one at Hartlepool Sixth Form on April 2, which generated 81 visitors.

Legal action looms as Covid-19 relief excludes 1,000 providers

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

More than 1,000 apprenticeship providers will not be eligible for Covid-19 supplier relief support from the Department for Education, *FE Week* analysis has found.

Those barred from the financial help during the pandemic include all levy-funded apprenticeships and non-levy starts through the government's digital system.

The move has already prompted legal action and been labelled as a "big mistake" by an ex-skills funding agency deputy director who suspects the Treasury is behind it.

New shadow education secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey has also said the government "needs to address this very, very quickly" (see page 19).

Apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan first revealed extra support for training providers was on its way on April 17, after weeks of the DfE failing to explain why they would not comply with Cabinet Office rules that permit publicly funded bodies to pay their suppliers in advance of delivery due to coronavirus.

In a letter to MPs on the same day, she said the measures will be targeted at "those providers that need it", but only where they "hold direct contracts with the Education & Skills Funding Agency".

"This does not apply in relation to apprenticeships funded from employer digital accounts where the contractual relationship is between the employer and the provider," Keegan wrote.

Funding streams eligible will therefore be

adult education and apprenticeships with small employers where a provider holds a direct non-levy allocation contract with the ESFA.

FE Week analysis shows there are 1,624 main and employer providers on the register of apprenticeship training providers currently, of which 593 have non-levy allocations this year amounting to £690 million.

That means there are 1,031 providers that only have access to levy funding, and are therefore not eligible for the supplier relief.

The DfE has also confirmed that non-levy apprenticeships funded via an employer transfer or that have recently transitioned on to the government's digital system will not be eligible for supplier relief.

Transfer funding, where large employers share unused funds, was launched in April 2018 and small employers began transitioning on to the digital system in January of this year.

Tony Allen, a former deputy director of the Skills Funding Agency and founder of consultancy firm Allen Apprenticeships and Skills, believes the decision to omit over 1,000 apprenticeship providers from supplier relief is "totally inadequate" and "not good enough".

He argued that levy-funded apprenticeships do in fact involve a contract between the provider and the ESFA, contrary to Keegan's claim.

"I don't buy that at all," he told *FE Week*.

"In order to become an independent training provider you have to go through a government process to get on to the register, there is then an agreement with the ESFA. You sign, as part of that process, to say that you will be bound by all the government funding rules and the rest of it.

"Getting on the register and being on the register in itself is an agreement with the ESFA. Every time you sign an individualised learner record, you are saying you are complying with the government's terms. That is a contract in anybody's book so I don't buy this. I do just think this is the department really underplaying."

Allen said that he can "see the hand of Treasury here most definitely" but criticised the DfE for "not being strong enough" to protect the country's apprenticeship programme which will be needed "more than ever" after this crisis is over.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers is also outraged and is currently seeking formal legal advice to challenge the DfE's decision.

The membership organisation's board met on Tuesday and unanimously agreed that Keegan's



Gillian Keegan

letter "ignores the fact that the levy is a tax as defined by the Finance Act 2016" and that levy-funded apprenticeships "also have a direct contract with the ESFA and so the DfE's grounds for excluding relief for them were not justified".

"Therefore the board has instructed AELP's secretariat to immediately seek formal legal advice on whether the department is still failing to comply with the Cabinet Office guidance to which the minister's letter refers," a statement from the membership organisation said.

The DfE told *FE Week* that the Cabinet Office's Procurement Policy Notice 02/20, which underpins their supplier relief scheme, applies only to circumstances where the service was procured under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and is being delivered under a contract for services.

They also said that where a provider is receiving funding under the provider relief scheme, employees who are delivering the associated ESFA funded provision cannot be furloughed. Employers can opt to unfurlough staff to receive the support.

Officials are expected to set out further detail on the measures and criteria for accessing the financial relief this week.

Keegan said, in her letter to MPs, that the support will be offered only to those providers "with proven track records for delivering quality training, and that it takes account of any wider support providers have accessed from HM Treasury or elsewhere".

AELP chief executive Mark Dawe said that in the absence of published criteria, "we are concerned that the proposed 'targeted support' will involve some form of arbitrary selection of providers that may not be fair or justifiable".



Gillian Keegan MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

To all MPs in England

17th April 2020

Dear Colleague,

SUPPORT FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

I am aware of the enormous challenge faced by the Further Education sector in continuing to deliver training in the current circumstances, and of the financial uncertainty that many providers are facing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Our message to the British public is clear: stay at home, in order to protect the NHS and save lives.

It is our aim that the Further Education sector, as far as is possible, remains open for business where it is safe to do so and in adherence to the Government's guidelines. We want to ensure that learners are supported and that their training can continue, and so we have already introduced flexibilities to encourage providers to deliver training remotely and via e-learning, and end-point assessment organisations to assess remotely. I am delighted that many have already made significant efforts to respond and adapt to this challenge. We have also confirmed that furloughed apprentices can continue to train online and undergo end point



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COVID CATCH UP

Weekly coronavirus announcement catch-up

FRASER WHIELDON
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Have you felt snowed under by the sheer number of new government policies and revisions made during the Covid-19 pandemic? Here is our run-through of all the week's announcements for FE and skills providers.

Support package for training providers

On April 17, the Department for Education announced that adult education budget and apprenticeship providers that hold direct contracts with them "may be eligible" for financial supplier relief. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y7fw2jyh>)

The sector is waiting for the full details on the support measure, which is expected to arrive by the end this week.

Online portal for colleges to apply for free student laptops

On Sunday, it was revealed school and colleges will be allowed to put business cases forward via an online portal to the DfE for free laptops and tablets for students.

Eligible students include those with a social worker, care leavers, pupils in year 10, and 16-to-19s who do not already have access to the devices and whose family can't afford the costs. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ya24cu8r>)

Halt to 'all but essential' data collections

On Monday, the DfE provided a full list of data collections which have been cancelled or paused

due to Covid-19, as well as those that will continue. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ybbggkwj>)

Furlough rules published for colleges and training providers

Providers were told last Friday they should not furlough staff, teaching or non-teaching, whose salaries are paid from public income sources, including that from the Education & Skills Funding Agency. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y7fw2jyh>)

However, in certain circumstances such as where public income has been reduced or ceased, providers can furlough employees and the Treasury announced on the same day that the furlough scheme will run until the end of June. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ydgny9j>)

Student visa concessions

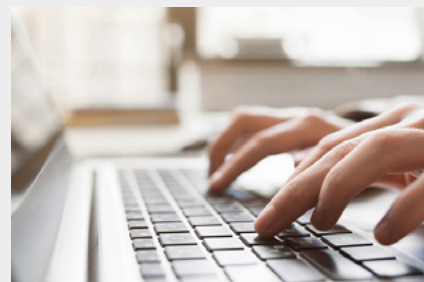
International students and their further education providers had some pressure lifted on Monday when the Home Office published a series of concessions for them due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yckzh5d8>)

Fraud warning

In their weekly update on Wednesday, the Education & Skills Funding Agency warned providers of an increased fraud risk during the pandemic.

Some learners and parents, the update read, had received a letter purportedly from the agency asking for personal bank details in relation to the 16-to-19 Bursary Fund, which was, in fact, a fraudulent letter. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yal53jmd>)

ESFA extends deadline for learner records submission

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Providers that are unable to submit their monthly data return to claim FE funding will be paid for learners already on programme, the Department for Education has said.

A list of data collections and services that have been cancelled or paused owing to the coronavirus pandemic was published this week by the department.

It said that the collection of the individualised learner record (ILR) remains "open", and providers are "asked to submit the return if they have the resources available to do so".

The Education & Skills Funding Agency said for the previous return, due April 6, that providers are working through "exceptional circumstances due to Covid-19" and this "might make it difficult to meet the deadline".

The agency told *FE Week* that for that collection period, three providers were unable to return their ILR data.

These providers will have received a payment based on their most recent return, but it would not have taken into account any new starters or achievements.

They will, however, receive funding for those starts and achievements when the data is able to be returned, the ESFA added.

The next ILR submission deadline, which is the ninth nine of the 2019-20 academic year, May 6.

Any providers that cannot meet the deadline are asked to contact the ESFA by emailing sde.servicedesk@education.gov.uk.

FEWEEK

CLICK HERE

Briefing | Further Education sector's response & requirements to Coronavirus pandemic

Monday's at 14:00, from 27th April.

A free webcast series from FE Week to provide an overview of the latest legislation and guidance from the Government regarding the response to the Coronavirus pandemic, for the FE & skills sector.

News

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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Cooking up some good news for NHS staff

FRASER WHIELDON

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A Trafford College catering lecturer has used his talents in the kitchen to make meals for local Manchester-based NHS workers and vulnerable people during lockdown.

Paul Taylor, a lecturer in catering and hospitality at the college's Aspire restaurant, is making 100 meals each week for staff at Wythenshawe Hospital, on top of 350 meals per week for the wider community.

He said he was "really proud" to be part of the initiative, which he is running with Altrincham Kersal Rugby Club.

"We are really trying to put our community first during this crisis."

The meals have been "gratefully received" by the hospital staff, said Sarah Naismith, director of Manchester Foundation Trust Charity, which supports the ten hospitals in Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, including Wythenshawe.

She called it "a great example of communities really pulling together during these challenging times," adding: "We can't thank Paul enough for his support."



Paul Taylor (far right) delivers meals to Wythenshawe Hospital with his partner in the project Mark Povey (second from right)

His meals are also being delivered to vulnerable people and those who are self-isolating, and so far, over 1,200 have been delivered.

Paul has been using the rugby club kitchen to cook the meals, while club committee members have been helping by making deliveries, writing hundreds of allergen labels, posting on social media, and taking payments for the food, which is being sold at cost price.

Trafford College principal Lesley Davies said Paul's "remarkable efforts are just one example of why I am so proud to work with our amazing staff", and she was "proud to be able to say I know Paul".

Provider gives one day a week for community volunteering

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A hospitality training provider is giving its staff one day a week off to support their community through the pandemic.

Over 100 HIT Training workers have so far signed up to deliver food and medical supplies, cook, clean and launder, walk pets and sometimes just provide a virtual friend, for people in need. Staff are qualified care specialists who train thousands of social care learners and apprentices each year.

Managing director Jill Whittaker said it feels "brilliant" to be supporting communities like this. "We believe in doing the right thing, and this feels like the right thing at the moment."

The scheme started this month and the provider is in the process of matching the volunteers with those who need support.

To start with, volunteers will be assigned to their home communities and clients, as well as HIT's larger, national client base. HIT has over 450 staff, all of whom are DBS-checked, operating from 30 offices nationwide.

Each staff member is being given one day a week, workload permitting, to volunteer, and Whittaker said: "We'd like lots of people to engage."

She added that staff have told her that, for many learners, they are often their apprentice's only contact with the outside world, due to them being furloughed or being overwhelmed with work in the care sector or the NHS. The staff "are often finding they are providing a shoulder to lean on".

MidKent College upgrades 400 laptops for frontline workers

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IT teachers and support staff from MidKent College joined forces with NHS technicians to set up laptops for frontline workers to use during the Covid-19 crisis.

Four members of staff spent three days, between 3 April 1 and 3, at Medway Maritime Hospital in Gillingham configuring around 400 laptops for hospital workers to use for tasks like virtual outpatient appointments.

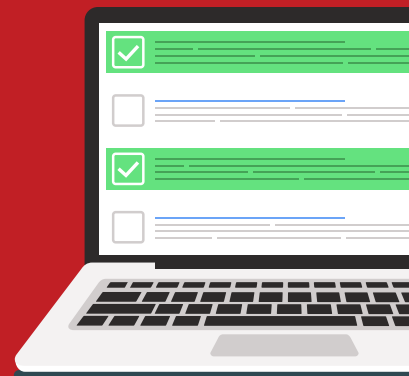
They worked alongside a team of technicians from Medway NHS Foundation Trust, which included some former students of MidKent. The college said it was "great" their former tutors were able to support them.

Their efforts have earned the public thanks of the trust, which tweeted: "Big thanks to @MidKentCollege who have rallied to support our IT team by configuring around 400 laptops to distribute to our staff."

MidKent responded to say they were "glad to help", and principal Simon Cook told *FE Week* the provider was "proud" to play a small part in helping the NHS, saying the health service's workers "are doing fantastic work in very testing circumstances".

Before the crisis, the college and the trust already had a strong arising from the NHS's involvement in health and social care training.

Cook said: "We value our relationship with key community partners, and are all passionate about working together to support the communities we serve, be that through healthcare, education, or any other facet of community life."



Feature

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In conversation with...

KIRSTIE DONNELLY

CEO, City & Guilds



'The things we're talking about
in a COVID context are the things
we have had to tackle anyway'

JL DUTAUT
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In her first interview as CEO of City & Guilds, Kirstie Donnelly speaks to *FE Week* about leadership in crisis and her vision for the future amid transformative technological shift

Anyone can lead when the plan is working. The test of a leader is what they do when the

plan falls apart.

For Kirstie Donnelly, who stepped up to the role of CEO of City & Guilds in January after 8 years as managing director of its biggest arm, the test has come early and it has come hard. As if a new government with a new focus on further education and a Brexit bill putting national pressure on the skills agenda weren't enough, the coronavirus is rewriting all the rules of what is possible across society.

"And a new shadow government too," she

reminds me. "That's another nuance."

Perhaps working from home particularly suits Donnelly, or perhaps she's already acing the test. Throughout our interview her demeanor is calm and assured and her leadership vision is untroubled.

"A lot of the things I'm now having to rethink, I would have probably wanted to start to turn my attention to. The difference is speed. And focus."

In fact, what for many is an existential crisis,

Feature

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Kirstie speaking in a group panel alongside Keith Coats and Kirsty Wark at AAC 2018

to Donnelly is an “existential opportunity”. She was awarded an MBE in 2011 – the same year she joined City & Guilds from a defunct LearnDirect – for services to e-learning. If anything, the rapid move to digitalise education in response to lockdown closures is long overdue as far as she’s concerned.

Which isn’t to say it’s been plain sailing. “It’s definitely diverted me for a short period while we had to deal with what I would call the crisis of the crisis. How do you furlough? How do you mobilise remotely your 12 to 13 hundred staff worldwide safely? But in the past week, I’ve started then to think much more about our rendezvous with the future. I believe all the things we’re talking about in a COVID context are all the things as a sector, and as an organisation in that sector, we would have had to tackle anyway. We’re just having to do it with more pace and more commitment. So it’s not about moving fast and getting it wrong. It’s more commitment to the agenda.”

But the agenda, for Donnelly, is about much more than updating tools and practices. It’s about resetting the very ethos and structures of the sector. “If you think about the sorts of businesses that are likely to come out of post

COVID, there are likely to be all sorts of models that will impact on education and skills and how it’s delivered. If we don’t seize on these opportunities to adapt the sorts of organisations we are, someone completely new will come into the space, because they will be unshackled by the dominant logics we all have.”

“We all want to be successful, and to find new models you have to go to a blank sheet”

And the organisation Donnelly is now leading from the front is no exception. City & Guilds is 142 years old, the world’s largest vocational awarding body, and a prime example of an organisation with a ‘dominant logic’. A deeply embedded one too. “It can’t not because of where it’s come from. Introducing digital credentials may not sound dramatically different, but ultimately I think digital credentials could overtake the requirement for

having a traditional qualification. Well, actually saying that is quite radical because that’s treading on the toes of that dominant logic about what awarding and assessment actually means and needs to look like. But I think we all want to be successful, and to find those new models you have to go to a blank sheet.”

Donnelly has been steeped in e-learning and digital education for a couple of decades now, and her success in becoming City & Guilds’ first female chief executive owes as much to her vision as it does to her perseverance. No techno-evangelist, she has clearly processed the decades of edtech promises and false starts into an optimism tempered with a healthy dose of realism. To realise technology’s potential, a number of other factors have to fall into place – factors the current crisis is bringing to the fore.

“It’s a fairly simple value chain cycle. We recruit, we diagnose, we train, we assess, we certify. Whether they are an apprentice or a full-time learner, ultimately, that’s what we’re trying to do. If you work out what role you want to play in that value chain, and how you can digitally enable and blend some of that, and how that fits in the broader ecosystem, that’s your

Feature

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blank sheet.”

But the blank sheet approach carries risk, not least of which is the threat of forgetting where you’ve come from, and your purpose. For Donnelly, it’s a question of imagining “that you are an organisation that doesn’t exist today but wants to exist tomorrow. What is it you would create? Then somehow you’ve got to retrofit in the good things about the fact you’ve got DNA, and you’ve got a history and you’ve got capabilities and skills, but not let that overtake the new thinking that you’re going to want to enable.”

Another risk is the possible disruption of the sector by new players, “unshackled” not only from dominant organisational logics but perhaps also from its dominant ethical ones too.

“A piece of work carried out in 2015/16 came up with a quote that the largest internet business in the world by 2030 will be education. I’ve been coming back to that quote in my head recently, because I think post-COVID that is actually even more likely to happen. It’s not likely to be one single player, although it could be if you think of the Googles of this world and the dominance they have. We all need to be very cognizant of that.”

It’s clear from our conversation that

Donnelly’s leadership will be characterised by much more than gaining a competitive edge over rivals. To beat back the risks associated with the necessary aspects of digital disruption and to safeguard its “DNA”, her view is that the sector’s response to this critical period must be defined by collaboration.

“I’d like to shift the pendulum and say online assessment becomes our hundred percent goal”

“I’d like to shift the pendulum and say [online assessment and proctoring] ultimately becomes our hundred percent goal. Not in a year, but I want to push very, very hard on that. But I want to try and share some of that with the market as well. It’s about wanting to put back into the ecosystem.”

The word ecosystem is one she returns to time and again, and it’s a view that also shapes her wider policy agenda. What the government

should be focusing on is healing the divides of a fractured system, and rebalancing the equilibrium between local and national decision making.

“I think it’s particularly acute in FE. The government pick us off, because they see it as sort of a gap to drive through the middle something they want to happen that isn’t necessarily in the interest of the sector.”

She’s far from the first to suggest it, but Donnelly thinks the sector needs less of the political pendulum swings and more stability. For her, that comes through longer-term spending commitments, but also through reimagining central government’s role, not at the top of the ecosystem, but as another player in it.

“There’s a schizophrenia at the moment. They seem to be saying – and Boris himself as PM and given this backdrop as mayor has always had that sense – that more should be happening at the devolved, regional and local levels. But the reality is that policies still aren’t there to enable that to happen. We need central government to become much more of a supporting enabler, to identify the really good practice that we need to bring up to a national level or to make sure it gets flushed back out to other regions.”

Of all the shocks rattling FE and skills, our conversation hasn’t even touched on the climate crisis. In a sense though, Donnelly isn’t a leader in a technological or industrial revolution, but an ecological one. Sustainability pervades her thinking.

“You could never take on becoming a CEO in the skills sector without having a high degree of wanting to create a better place, and a better sense of the purpose that you hold. Here we are. 142 years old, in our fourth industrial revolution and probably marching to our fifth. For me, it’s about creating the legacy of the CEO who enabled the change to happen so that someone asking about this crisis in another hundred years’ time can say ‘Good. They made that change at that moment.’”

It’s perhaps cliché, but no less true for it, that we are living history. With leaders like this, the future of the sector seems brighter, and the darkness of the moment less oppressive.





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Hundreds of Sheffield College support staff win payrise

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Support staff at Sheffield College will see a salary increase as high as 18 per cent from May as leaders agree to pay all workers the real living wage “for the first time”.

Trade union Unison has negotiated a deal that will see the college now pay a minimum rate of £9.30 an hour, which is above the £8.72 national living wage for workers aged 25 and above.

The real living wage was devised by charity the Living Wage Foundation, and a total of 133 non-teaching workers at Sheffield College, including cleaners, cleaning supervisors and estate staff, are set to benefit.

Around 400 of the college's support staff, some of whom work at subsidiary companies, will also see their consolidated pay increase by at least 2.75 per cent.

Unison's Yorkshire and Humber area organiser Jordan Stapleton said many of the lowest paid employees will see their pay increase by up to £2,805, or 18.6 per cent, “after years of bearing the brunt of austerity policies designed to

slash costs”.

This two-year deal, over 2018-19 and 2019-20, comes after the union had organised a strike at Sheffield College in November over changes to administrative staff contracts.

Unison had not balloted for fresh strike action but was in a formal dispute with Sheffield College over performance-related pay. Unions have to formally register a dispute to take industrial action.

It has been agreed that performance pay will be removed for lower pay grades, and a commitment has been made to discuss the future of performance pay, including phasing it out for all staff.

The union has argued that performance pay can have a negative effect on staff, by making them focus on competing for pay awards, rather than supporting teamwork and better service delivery.

Several of the college's pay grades have also been adjusted, with staff at each level seeing their pay increase.

At a minimum, consolidated pay has increased by 2.75 per cent for 2018-19 and 2019-20 and staff will receive a non-consolidated pay-off of one per cent.

The college already awarded staff a one per cent pay rise last November, and this further raise will be paid in May 2020.

Owing to it being a two-year deal, parts of the increase will be backdated to February 2019 and parts will be backdated to February 2020.

Sheffield College generated a £1.3 million operating deficit in 2019, but its financial health is rated as ‘good’ by the Education & Skills Funding Agency.

Paul Simpson, the college's executive director of human resources and organisation development, said they are “confident” the pay award is sustainable, owing to the college having budgeted for it and because of its financial health.

He added that “investing in our staff is the right thing to do” and is “vital to achieving our strategic ambition of being an employer of choice in our region”.

The raise will also affect workers at the college's other businesses: Sparks Managed Services Ltd, where 128 employees will benefit, and Sparks Services Ltd, where 18 employees working in areas such as marketing and learner recruitment will receive the uplift.

Talks under way to extend apprenticeship frameworks cut-off date

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The cut-off date for starts on old-style apprenticeships, known as frameworks, could be extended, the chief operating officer of the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education has said.

In a webinar hosted by the Association of Colleges on Thursday, Rob Nitsch revealed that work on prolonging the switch beyond July 31 is already under way.

“Yes, in a nutshell,” he said when asked whether it would “make sense” to extend the date.

“We have done a bit of work on this. It is interesting across different sectors – some are very well set up, they have left frameworks behind, but there are a couple of other sectors where that conversion hasn't fully happened.

“There is a discussion to be had, and I know there is consideration of what is the best thing to do in that space.

“That is where it sits at the moment. Voices are being heard and it is currently being weighed as an issue.”

Nitsch added that the government is “absolutely committed” to the turn-off of frameworks as their employer-designed replacement, known as standards, are “widely acknowledged as the better product – they are where the future is”.

The process of closing old-style apprenticeship frameworks to new starts began in March 2016, and the original intention was to switch them all off by August 2017.

But this cut-off was dropped at the end of 2015 and replaced with a “migration from apprenticeship frameworks to standards over the course of the parliament”.

The government's current plan is for all apprenticeship starts to be on standards from August 1, 2020.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief policy officer, Simon Ashworth, said a postponement on this is a “no-brainer”.

“The IfATE position makes a great deal of sense to us, and in our view, we should be seeking a delay in the switch-off until March next year,” he told *FE Week*.

“When the pandemic is over, employers and providers are going to have more than enough on their plate to support a recovery than to be worrying about this.”

FE Week has asked the IfATE for comment, including when the new cut-off date for frameworks might be.

It is understood that the decision of whether or not to extend it would ultimately lie with the Department for Education.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

New shadow ed sec admits NES plan didn't reach voters

Exclusive

Freddie Whittaker meets Rebecca Long-Bailey, Labour's new shadow education secretary

The lack of an "overarching message" from Labour on its flagship national education service (NES) was one of the reasons it lost the last general election, says the new shadow education secretary.

But Rebecca Long-Bailey says the "fantastic" policy will survive and be developed by Labour under Sir Keir Starmer's leadership. She has pledged to "flesh out the detail" in the "next few years".

A flagship policy of Jeremy Corbyn, the party's former leader, the service was an umbrella term for a free "cradle-to-grave" education that had no tuition fees. It also pledged to replace Ofsted.

But although elements of the policy were extensively covered in the media and seemed to reach voters, many felt the overall vision did not hit home.

"There are a number of reasons as to why we lost, we know that,

but one of the reasons is that we didn't have that overarching message that explained to people what the national education service was for and what a Labour government was for," said Long-Bailey in an exclusive interview with FE Week's sister paper Schools Week.

But the former party leadership candidate believes the NES was key policy "for a reason", adding that that the coronavirus crisis has highlighted the "huge role" schools, colleges and training providers play in society.

"If we're going to make sure that we don't just see social mobility, the odd few climbing the ladder and doing very well for themselves, but everybody rising up and realising their potential, then we've got to have a cradle-to-grave national education service that means education is a right for all."

Long-Bailey's first task before she can flesh out Labour's education policies is to hold the government to account for its coronavirus response.

She believes "clearer" communication is needed about plans to reopen schools and colleges, and warns of "a lot of concern"

among staff about a rushed return.

And in terms of training providers, she says the DfE's response to support them financially has not been adequate – especially their latest announcement, that levy-funded apprenticeships will not be eligible for supplier relief (see page 10).

"The Association of Employment & Learning Providers has raised the alarm about this and I understand that they're seeking legal advice on the government's action, because they believe that the grounds to exclude those providers isn't justified.

"By being a levy provider, you would have a direct contract [with the ESFA] in any event through that system.

"So I think the government does need to address this very, very quickly because there are a number of training providers who now really are worried about not just what's going to happen over the next few months, but they're worried about whether they're actually viable over the next week."

Long-Bailey says training providers are going to be "essential in our economic recovery", so it's an "incredibly worrying" time for them.



Rebecca Long-Bailey

Editorial

Now more than ever, the role of an independent and capable media is essential for democracy and society



These are testing times for all of our organisations. I'm sure many of you have spent a sleepless night, or two, running through business continuity plans and survival strategies.

Over the past few weeks, I have spent time looking towards the future and how we can continue; as an independent news service, and also as a financially sustainable product.

Since the newspaper's launch in September 2011, we've always been brave with our approach to providing you, our loyal readers, with high-quality, independent, investigative and balanced education journalism for the Further Education and skills sector.

Along the way, we've come in for plenty of criticism. But I am proud that we've always reported factual news in a raw and honest format. Not

all truth is readily accepted. But we've always been open to hearing frank and honest feedback.

As publisher, I am clear that we remain committed to ensuring that FE Week continues in that same vein. But, to ensure that we do need to adapt.

Over the coming weeks, we will be making some changes to the way we deliver our news.

Earlier this week, I confirmed plans to end the print edition of FE Week, with immediate effect. This decision wasn't easy, but inevitable with the unstoppable trend towards digital publishing, coupled with the current situation.

In recent years we have seen a continual rise in the popularity of our digital offer for subscribers. And our website has received an enormous

traffic increase – over double the monthly average in March alone with over one million web page views.

We are continuing to invest in FE Week. Over the coming weeks, there will be some more updates, including a new jobs board and our webcast briefing service.

FE Week is no longer in print. But, FE Week will continue to be the sector's leading newspaper. Providing you with in-depth, investigative journalism, determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts – always and forever for the FE and skills sector.

#LoveFE

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

Abingdon & Witney College

Senior Management Team positions

We are a highly successful, inclusive and ambitious general college of further education and proud winners of multiple national and local awards for our work. Following the appointment of the current Deputy to Principal, applications are sought for the following opportunities within our Senior Management Team:

Vice Principal (Funding, Planning and Systems Improvement)
£73,980 per annum

A new role, and a very exciting opportunity for the right candidate to transform the college-wide data and information agenda in the interests of students, staff well-being and business performance.

Assistant Principal (Apprenticeships and Employer Engagement)
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We are also looking for two exceptional candidates to join us as Heads of Faculty:

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Head of Technology
£51,144 - £56,442 per annum

To lead our Technology Faculty, incorporating FE and HE provision in Engineering, Motor Vehicle, IT and Science.

Our wider mission is to change the lives of our students and our community. If you would like to be a part of that, we'd love to hear from you. If you are interested in applying for any of these opportunities, please email humanresources@abingdon-witney.ac.uk for full details in order to apply.



EXPRESSION OF INTEREST TRAINERS/MENTORS/CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS

Teaching Matters is the teacher's professional development division of FE Associates, the FE and Skills sector's leading providers of expert insight and specialist support.

We specialise in teacher training in the Further Education and Skills sector. Following our successful application to join the register of apprenticeship training providers, we are launching the new Level 5 apprenticeship standard in teaching in further education and skills.

We are looking to build a team of freelance sector professionals familiar with apprenticeship standards and want to hear from individuals with a background in teacher training to join us as trainers, mentors and curriculum developers. We will contract with you to deliver elements of the apprenticeship programme, to support and mentor teachers, deliver content and prepare them for end-point assessment.

If you wish to express an interest in joining our team, please forward your CV to donna.clifford@fea.co.uk. If you would like to discuss the opportunity informally, please contact Dave Sykes on 07736 148682.

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A degree or professional qualification and a recognised teaching qualification at level 5 are essential.

For further details about this vacancy, please visit our website www.waes.ac.uk/vacancies

EDU WEEK **JOBS**

Coronavirus Cover Roles

Education organisations are seeking to fill the following emergency cover roles:

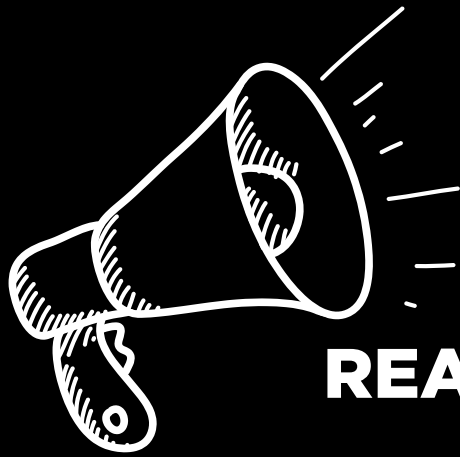


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READER'S REPLY

DfE to launch online portal for colleges to apply for free student laptops

Yet again apprentices excluded from this scheme. They can afford to buy their own apparently. Clearly out of touch with what most of them earn.

Paula Rowland, Twitter

Unlimited data mobile broadband (with reasonable limitations) for every student also seems a very good idea. Philanthropic industry or a handsomely large, but very, very well-priced government contract would, for either sector, cost next to nothing. And then there are the social and economic benefits of universal access to digital tools and resources.

Jed Keenan, website

A good idea but I also know of quite a few college teachers who need a decent laptop, otherwise online lessons are not going to happen

Ann Cowie, Facebook

Teachers to estimate functional skills results this summer

Off the top of my head I would have thought a mid-way solution could have worked. Teachers assess the learners as a 'pass' or 'fail' and an interim 'provisional' grade is given and certificated. The awarding bodies could issue certificates stating the grade is provisional, and when some semblance of normality resumes, learners could re-sit exams to get the 'official' pass. Keeps all parties involved. A bonus spin-off is that data could be analysed at a later date to see how teacher-assessed grades differ from the official exam condition grades (say, at regional or institution level), which might also act as a brake on sharp practice.

Anonymous, website

Teachers estimating grades 'could sound the death knell for public confidence in Ofqual'

Best decision we've had so far during this pandemic. Well

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REPLY OF THE WEEK

Minister tells MPs over 1,000 apprenticeship providers will not be given any supplier relief



How ridiculous. The funds used for levy are still under the jurisdiction of the ESFA and their funding rules and assurance team.

Darren Vidler

done Ofqual and Gavin Williamson – ensures learners are not disadvantaged during this difficult period.

Amy Ealing, website



I don't agree with this. It could sound the death knell for Ofqual, and also it feels like a bit of a politically loaded message aimed at the secretary of state. Far from the death knell of Ofqual, I would argue they, working with awarding bodies, will be critical to installing public confidence.

James Stockdale, Twitter

AELP turns to lawyers after minister claims apprenticeship providers ineligible for supplier relief



This is the right thing to do as it is the apprentices who are being treated differently, not just the contract holders.

Umbrella Training, Twitter



This decision will kill off many great training providers. The agenda continues to cut away at ITPs. Totally unacceptable.

Matt Ward, Twitter

Vast majority of apprentices still receiving training, according to AELP survey



April's figures will show a brutal downturn of employers pausing apprenticeship provision, redundancies, breaks-in-learning...

Alex Ford, Twitter

PROFESSOR EWART KEEP

Director, SKOPE (the Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance)



The Covid-19 recession: what can FE and skills providers do?

Unemployment is liable to jump sharply in the coming months. How should FE respond to the needs of young people and adults?

Young people tend to suffer worst when there is a recession and the labour market slackens. They find themselves competing with displaced adult workers, who can demonstrate relevant work experience to prospective employers. Research shows that employers are using experience as an increasingly important filter in the recruitment process, and are also ever keener to use various forms of work trials (agency work, internships, gig work) to assess the suitability of applicants for their workplace.

Transitions from learning to earning have lengthened, and become more precarious and uncertain. In other words, a major recession runs the danger of worsening pre-existing problems with the youth labour market. For young people not going into HE, there is the added danger that under-employed graduates will cascade further down the occupational hierarchy, taking openings that might otherwise have gone to non-graduates.

What can FE and vocational skills providers do? First, be modest in what they promise. The past, not least the recession of the early 1980s, tells us that policy debates about youth



unemployment often come to blame a "lack of skills", despite the fact that the underlying cause is a lack of job openings for new entrants to the labour market, and adult workers losing their jobs as demand for the goods and services that their organisations deliver collapses.

"Most Covid-19 unemployment will not primarily be due to lack of skills"

The education system runs the danger of setting itself up to fail if it promises too much by way of its ability to ameliorate the employment impacts of Covid-19. If underlying demand for labour falls and policy fails to counteract this, most of what education can do is move individuals up and down a job queue for what limited openings

are available. The majority of the unemployment created by Covid-19 will not primarily be due to individuals' lack of skills.

What can be done presents itself as a fairly predictable list. Revitalise our mechanisms for tracking young people's labour market outcomes and those at risk of becoming NEET.

Re-think the support we can give them in terms not just of careers advice and guidance, but also wider scaffolding for transitions, and ask some hard questions about DWP and Jobcentre Plus's ability to deliver this.

Expand traineeship provision for those most at risk of becoming NEET, and look to government (national and local) to work with employers to create pathways into work experience and then work. Wage subsidies for young employees may be needed.

For adults, when it becomes clearer in which sectors and occupations employment growth

potential resides, re-training and re/upskilling schemes (often probably delivered in bite-sized chunks, rather than full qualifications) will be needed.

Two key resource constraints loom. The first is the public funding. Public finances will be under huge strain in the wake of the pandemic. Tax revenues will be sharply down, spending to shore up the economy sharply up. Universities have already constructed their initial pitch to the UK government for support to tide them over the looming collapse in the overseas student market, which has cross-subsidised large amounts of activity in HE.

The second is employers' willingness to cooperate. Before Covid-19 struck, we had ambitious targets to expand apprenticeships, expand work experience for undergraduates and many other groups of students in FE and schools, as well as find the new T-level work placements. Employers in many sectors are disorganised and lack the means to work together on skills issues; and the levels of employer-provided workforce training have been falling steadily since the late 1990s.

New collective mechanisms to engage with employers will be needed, and a new consensus about the rights, roles and responsibilities of employers will have to be constructed.

ANNA
AMBROSE

Director, the
London Progression
Collaboration (LPC)
at think-tank IPPR



The 'forgotten third' simply cannot shift to online learning

Financially vulnerable people without household internet access are unable to access remote learning during the Covid-19 crisis, writes Anna Ambrose

The move to remote learning in response to the Covid-19 crisis has been a moment of profound evolution for the adult skills sector. The extent to which online platforms were being used to deliver learning varied between providers before the start of March, rendering the level of readiness for such unexpected events hugely variable.

The sector has responded with a move en masse to digital delivery in an impressive effort to sustain training provision. As is the case in many a crisis, we may well look back and reflect that this moment accelerated a trend that was already in train.

In apprenticeships, an increase in remote learning could be particularly attractive to employers looking for more flexible ways to incorporate the required 20 per cent off-the-job training. This is a positive development, because retaining apprentices and offering new apprenticeships will be of key importance for businesses and individuals once the recovery from this crisis is under way. The London Progression Collaboration (LPC), the initiative I lead, supports London employers to offer and sustain apprenticeships in the

badly hit retail, hospitality and construction sectors. Their need for the right people with the right skills will be paramount.

However, the think-tank IPPR, which hosts the LPC, last week highlighted the extent to which the delivery of remote teaching to the nation's school-age children risks widening the persistent gaps in achievement between disadvantaged young people and their better-off peers. So too, this move in adult learning risks leaving behind those already experiencing in-work poverty and other disadvantages.

stats are weighted towards older people, in fact more than one-third of 16-24-year-olds live in mobile-only households. Due to the ongoing lockdown restrictions, places such as libraries, colleges and cafes – where those without internet access can get online – are closed. That means that those who we most want to reach with apprenticeship levy funds and other skills investment will have real difficulties accessing online learning.

So, while it's great news that many apprentices are able to continue their off-the-job learning



content remotely. While colleges and other training providers offer support to learners to increase accessibility and inclusivity of courses in myriad ways, their resources are already stretched.

To avoid perpetuating the progression gap, funded support to access online provision is needed both during this crisis and beyond. The government must work with service providers to ensure sufficient free home internet access for learners on low incomes.

A digital access fund should be established to ensure all adult learners can benefit from remote learning with suitable connections and digital devices. Once the Covid-19 crisis eases and the economy begins to reboot, businesses will look to these key individuals and their skills to bolster the recovery. Action now will determine if they are equipped to do so.

“Without action, a move to greater online vocational learning risks expanding barriers to training”

Whilst the ONS found that 99 per cent of UK adults were recent internet users in 2019, this disguises the fact that a proportion of this internet use takes place outside the home. Around one in ten adults does not have internet access of any form at home on any device, rising to almost one-third of those categorised in the lowest two social grades.

Three in ten of the group classed by Ofcom as “most financially vulnerable” live in households without any internet access, while eight per cent have access only via a mobile phone.

While it's easy to assume these

while furloughed, without further support those with the most need and most to gain will simply be unable to do so. Without action, a move to greater online vocational learning risks expanding the barriers to training and in-work progression.

The impact on other groups also needs serious consideration, in both the short and longer term. For those with some physical disabilities, remote learning could improve accessibility and indeed has been requested for some time; but for those with some learning difficulties there could be additional challenges in accessing

DR PAUL PHILLIPS CBE

Principal and chief executive, Weston College Group



There's a new breed of college in town, as we learn to adapt

The pandemic is forcing us to adopt new ways of working, and if we remain flexible, we have much to learn from the emergency procedures we have had to put in place, writes Paul Phillips

A great tidal wave of change is leaving no part of our sector untouched, and those who are found to be too unyielding will snap. Like so many reeds in its path, the key to success is flexibility. For example, I always thought I was an accessible principal, but my newly acquired skills in digital communication have opened up new avenues. Meanwhile, my staff have gone above and beyond looking for new openings every time a door closes. Life's entrepreneurs are emerging from all areas of the college, and the best testament to that is that learners from local academies want to join our online provision.

Weston College is relatively unique in its composition, so we spin a lot of plates. Frankly, it makes life difficult from a training offer perspective, but it is a good insurance if one plate breaks, which is sadly inevitable. Our planning uses a multi-factorial set of indices, including an almost pick-and-mix approach for learners and employers. That's why, on top of transforming and sustaining our provision, we are also able to deliver vital training and resources to help the NHS,



and why many of our staff and learners (many of them young apprentices) are able to be on the frontline delivering desperately needed health and social care support.

The question on everyone's minds is what we're going to do when we reopen. We are already on to that, and we have gone back to grassroots to plan. There is inevitable change ahead, and while the current period is no walk in the park, the near future will not be a time for the faint-hearted.

Before my career in colleges, I ran hotels, NHS research and businesses, and I have learned that planning strategically is always about starting with a blank sheet of paper, analysing the benchmark issues and making your desired destination explicit. For now, planning through the impacts of Covid-19 is more reminiscent of those cookery programmes where you

are given a couple of ingredients and asked to concoct something special in record time. But the stakes are high, and we shouldn't underestimate the mental health impacts, both of our immediate situation and as we return and readapt to a new era for FE.

“The near future will not be a time for the faint-hearted”

As a sector, we are more than used to managing crises, delivering against all odds and taking calculated risks. That's why I am sure we will survive this. But Covid-19 is not an excuse for finding ourselves in a difficult situation: it is the catalyst for change. Of course, there will be a tendency to blame the pandemic

for not achieving some targets. For example, I don't think we will hit target on 16-to-19 this year, simply because our NEET and traineeship provision has been hit.

But equally, our adult provision is doing very well out of the expansion of distance learning, and we've already noticed healthy green shoots of success in our digital mindshift. Moreover, recognition of the potential of a new digital college is impacting other key issues: minimising bureaucracy, producing succinct remote solutions for teaching and learning, and a more in-depth questioning of work-life balance. Could this lateral thinking also engender change with funding and quality regimes?

When I first came to the college, self-belief was at a low ebb. A few years later, one of my team commented that I had instituted change by “dragging them into a new era”. This time, all together, we are riding a tsunami of change. Of course there is trepidation and excitement in response, but if you take the time to notice it, a lot of creativity too.

When the wave rolls back, we will find there's a whole new breed of digital college in town – more flexible and more robust, more community-centred and more self-assured. Because nothing, least of all a virus, should threaten our responsibility to deliver outstanding teaching and learning.



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



Sanna Jordansson

Board member,
Capital City
College Group

Start date March 2020

Concurrent job

Global director of people strategy,
Broadway Malyan

Interesting fact

She has a keen interest in astrophysics



Sharon Saxton

Board member,
Capital City
College Group

Start date March 2020

Concurrent job

Director, Sharon Saxton Consulting

Interesting fact

She was involved in a business start-up
in 'Wellbeing at Work'



Anthony Impey

Board member,
Capital City
College Group

Start date March 2020

Concurrent job

Chair, Big Ideas Group, Federation
of Small Businesses

Interesting fact

He was awarded an MBE in the Queen's
2018 New Year's Honours for services to
apprenticeships and small business

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the

2.6

challenge

Save the UK's Charities

On Sunday 26 April, the Virgin Money London Marathon would have taken place on the streets of London. The world's greatest marathon turns the capital into a colourful carnival of inspiring runners and fancy-dress-wearing fundraisers, all supported enthusiastically by the best crowds on the planet.

The race isn't just a lot of fun, it's also the world's biggest one-day fundraising event, generating **£66.4 million** for thousands of charities in 2019. This year, the London Marathon, like so many other mass participation sports events, has been postponed, leaving charities facing a £4 billion shortfall. But you can help...

How to get involved

From Sunday 26 April, join The 2.6 Challenge by completing any activity you like – from running 2.6 miles to flipping a pancake 26 times.

1. Choose your #TwoPointSixChallenge
2. Choose your charity
3. Donate or fundraise via twopointsixchallenge.co.uk with Virgin Money Giving or JustGiving
4. Complete your challenge

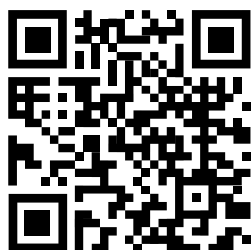
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Use the QR code to donate or start fundraising now!

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