

FE WEEK

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

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FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2020 | EDITION 317

**'GIVE US
FLEXIBILITY
AS TO WHO
IS ON SITE'**



**'TRUST COLLEGE
LEADERS AND
RESPOND
SWIFTLY'**



**'DON'T
INTERFERE
IN THE
DETAIL'**



OPENING FROM JUNE: COLLEGE LEADERS GIVEN FLEXIBILITIES

- Colleges freer to choose who attends for face-to-face contact
- FE Week leadership survey finds 54% support DfE expectations
- But 71% fear significant number of learners will refuse to attend

FEWEEK

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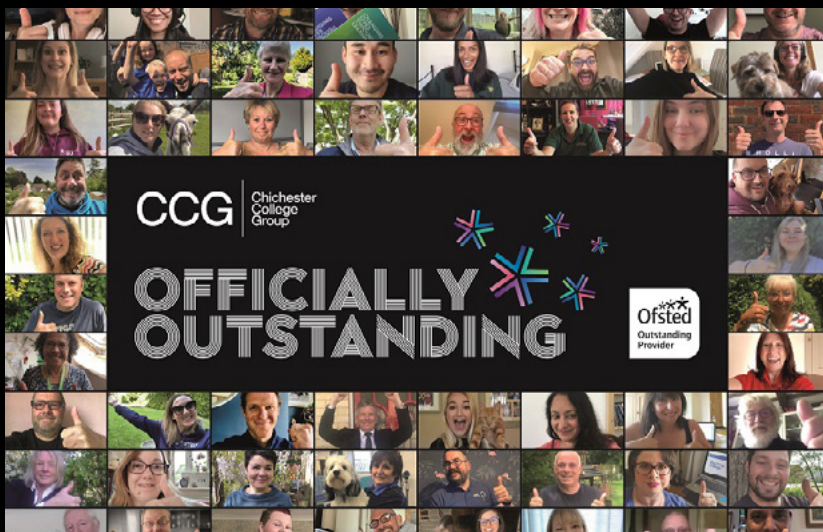
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Majority of eligible providers chose not to apply for ESFA Covid-19 supplier relief

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

Only around a quarter of eligible training providers applied for the Education and Skills Funding Agency's Covid-19 supplier relief scheme, FE Week analysis suggests.

The agency told this newspaper this week that they have received 162 applications for the extra financial support, which opened on April 24 and closed on May 3.

The figure is 22 per cent of the 734 providers with a procured adult education budget allocation and/or non-levy apprenticeship contract with the government – nearly all of which would have been entitled to bid for the scheme.

It comes as the ESFA delays releasing the outcomes of provider applications.

The agency had expected to notify providers of the outcome of their applications by Tuesday May 12, but this “unfortunately has not been possible in all cases”, they said in an update on

Wednesday.

FE Week understands that some providers have already heard back, and all applicants should now receive their outcome by the end of this week.

“We are sorry for the delay and inconvenience, but assure you that it will not affect the date that payments will be made,” the ESFA added.

The agency has come in for a lot of criticism over its handling of the relief scheme.

They took more than a month to launch the support after the Cabinet Office gave contracting authorities the green light to pay their suppliers in advance of delivery on March 20, and when it was released, it excluded the majority of apprenticeship providers.

All apprenticeships recorded on the government's digital system, mostly with levy-paying employers, have been made ineligible as the ESFA believes the contractual relationship is between the employer and the provider, rather than the government.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers is challenging this legally. James



Goudie QC, a senior silk at 11KBW as well as a deputy High Court judge and a master of the bench of the Inner Temple, has been instructed by the law firm VVW to help present the case in a letter on behalf of the membership organisation.

The letter was sent at the end of April and the government is yet to respond.

Ofqual reveals three-week window for calculated grades

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Colleges and training providers will have a three-week “window” to provide calculated grades for vocational and technical qualifications from June 1, Ofqual has revealed.

The exams regulator this week published further guidance for grading the courses this summer owing to the cancellation of exams.

It follows an announcement at the end of April that schools and colleges can either grade the qualifications by calculating results, adapting assessments or, as a last resort, delay assessments until they reopen.

Ofqual reiterated that the “majority” of learners should receive a calculated

result before revealing that colleges and training providers should “expect awarding organisations to ask you to provide centres’ assessment grades and other information about learners in a window of up to three weeks, starting 1 June”.

This will be only a week after the regulator publishes its response to the current vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) consultation, on May 22.

Ofqual intends to publish an app that will allow colleges, training providers and learners to see what qualifications are in scope for calculated grades or need-adapted assessment “when we publish the outcomes of our consultation”.

The new guidance states that in “exceptional

circumstances”, where awarding organisations need to extend the window beyond three weeks, “they will be in touch with you”.

“The window will allow them time for awarding organisations to quality assure the data, check the overall profile of outcomes and, if necessary, raise any queries with centres before results are issued,” Ofqual said.

“If you feel your awarding organisation's deadline is unachievable, you should speak to them urgently.”

Results day for level 3 VTQs will be held on August 13 alongside A-levels, while level 2 results will be given to students on August 20 alongside GCSE.

Ofqual's new guidance can be found online by visiting <https://bit.ly/2LuJzdo>

Opening from June: college leaders given flexibilities

NICK LINFORD

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From front

College leaders have been given significant flexibility over which learners they invite back onsite from as soon as June.

The Department for Education made the announcement in updated guidance on Thursday after college leaders had strongly demanded them.

It is understood senior staff from the Education and Skills Funding Agency had phoned nearly every college principal on Wednesday 13 May to quickly collate feedback on the expectation they reopen from as soon as 1 June and only for those 16 to 19-year-old learners on the first year of a two year course, equivalent to year 12 in schools.

Mirroring the findings of an FE Week survey the following day in which 54 per cent of college leaders that responded said they were supportive of the announcement, a massive 94 percent (32 out of 35) said the DfE should leave it to college leaders to decide who should come into college when they reopen.

The new DfE guidance, published on May 14, says: "We understand that there may need to be some flexibility in place due to the variety of learners and courses offered in FE setting."

Adults in the same class as 16 to 19-year-old learners could also receive face to face tuition, as can 16 to 19-year-olds due to finish this academic year "but not been able to because their assessments have been deferred".

Apprentices aged 16 to 19 should also be included on the same basis "for their off the job training where possible and appropriate, so that they can be offered some face to face contact".

The DfE added that the policy also applies to "a small number of local authority providers, specialist post-16 institutions and independent training providers".

Many colleges are already open

to vulnerable students and children of key workers, but the guidance makes it clear they do not have to open more widely from the June 1.

Monday June 1 is the earliest opportunity, but many colleges are expected to plan to open at a later date, after many leaders told the ESFA they would need more time to prepare.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said the guidance "will help colleges to make the right decisions in the best interests of their students, whilst maximising the safety of staff".

"We are advising every college to make their own decisions on their assessment of priorities, needs, the context in which they operate and individual risk assessments and we are confident that is what the government wants," he added.

The latest guidance will be welcomed by Shelagh Legrave, chief executive of Chichester College Group, as she responded to the FE Week survey to say she wanted to be given "flexibility as to who is on site" along with "more guidance on health and safety".

In terms of the college staff there were "some very enthusiastic to return tomorrow, others more reticent", according to Legrave, who added that "we will not force staff to come in if they feel unsafe".

Russell Lawrance, principal of Haringey Sixth Form College, said he encouraged the government to "set the challenge so to speak - but don't interfere in the detail" and committed to all students "having a virtual meeting or a phone conversation or meeting in college with staff as a minimum sign off".

And Bill Jones, principal of Leeds City College,



also called on the government to "trust college leaders" whilst "responding swiftly to our questions and concerns".

The government has also given college leaders the "flexibility to decide the appropriate mix of online and face to face content for each programme, reflecting what will maximise learner engagement as well as supporting more vulnerable learners, and enabling the provider as a whole to minimise transmission risk".

Despite the flexibilities on offer, 71 per cent of those responding to the FE Week survey said they thought a significant number of students will refuse to come into college in June and 46 per cent thought a significant number of staff would refuse.

And nearly all college leaders expressed concern when asked about the logistics and cost of staff and student transport.

More guidance on the safe use of transport is expected from the DfE as they "will be consulting with sector representatives"... "and this will be published along with further guidance for secondary schools and colleges and other providers in the week commencing 18 May".



Shelagh Legrave, Bill Jones and Russ Lawrance

Outstanding! College group given top Ofsted marks across the board

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Chichester College Group has become the second general further education college to be rated 'outstanding' under Ofsted's new inspection framework.

The group, which formed in 2017 following mergers between Brinsbury College, Chichester College, Crawley College and then Worthing College in 2019, received grade ones across the board in a report published on Tuesday, following a visit in early March.

Chief executive Shelagh Legrave said that to achieve the rating after such a short period following formation was a "phenomenal achievement" and a "true testament to the hard work, dedication and talent of all of our staff and students".

Ofsted's glowing report lauded leaders and managers for successfully developing a strong "collaborative culture between the campuses, particularly within teaching, training and learning".

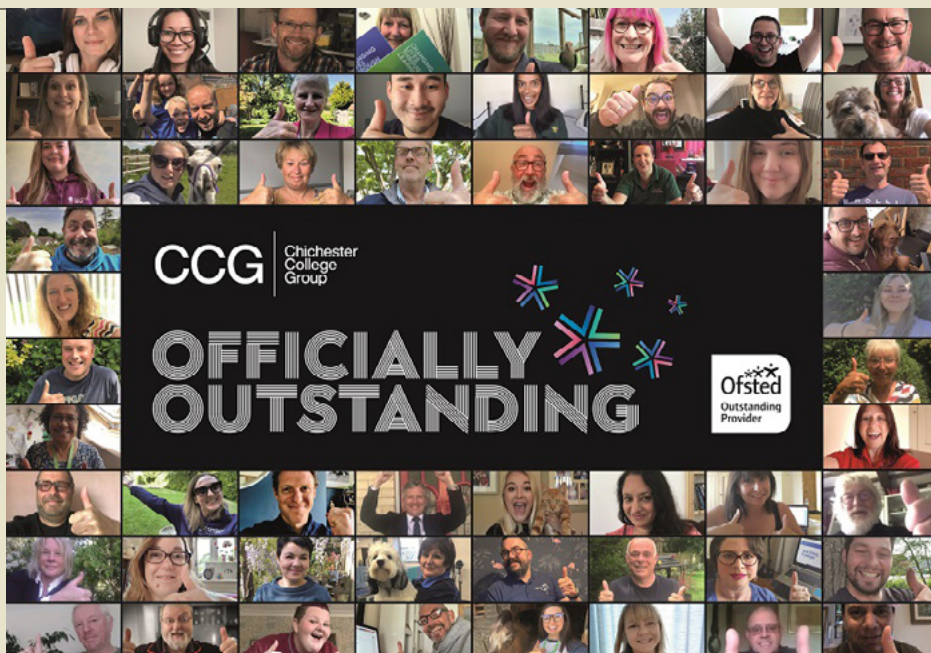
Chichester College Group has more than 12,000 students who are all "rightly very proud of their college", according to inspectors.

They found that learners and apprentices of different abilities and backgrounds work "harmoniously together and in so doing, support and inspire one another" and they are "ambitious to achieve".

The report continues: "They [students] cherish the passion and subject expertise of their teachers which inspire them to extend their learning.

"They develop new interests and pursuits, such as involving themselves in wider community, national and international interests, with enthusiasm. For example, learners work with Crawley Open House, a centre for homeless people, the Alzheimer's Society, or with overseas education charities [such as building schools in Kenya]."

Leaders and managers were praised for



working "closely" with employers and other external stakeholders to "research and design appropriate courses for learners" and ensure that these courses meet "fully the demands of their local and regional communities".

They are also "highly ambitious" for disadvantaged learners and those with additional needs, who "rapidly develop the skills needed to participate within society and gain employment".

The leadership team was commended for having "robust" measures in place to make sure that subcontracted provision to eight providers is of a "high standard".

"They hold subcontractors to account and frequently check on the progress that learners and apprentices are making in this area of provision. As a result, learners and apprentices within subcontracted provision achieve as well as their peers, and occasionally better."

Prior to the merger, Crawley College was judged as 'requires improvement' by Ofsted, while Worthing College was rated as 'good'.

Chichester College Group chair James Sarmecanic said: "This report places CCG's standing at the forefront of the further education sector, particularly among

college groups.

"I am proud of the entire team of CCG staff across all colleges. They work extremely hard and demonstrate great dedication to give our students the best opportunities possible."

In a joint statement, the group's student presidents Sophie Sargent, Ria Voice and Philip Pasby added: "We're so proud of our Ofsted result.

"Students are the heart of all of our colleges and the leadership of the group prioritises the student voice. It really is central to everything the group does.

"It's why we're so passionate about our colleges and we're really happy to see Ofsted confirm what we – as student presidents – have always felt."

The first and only other general FE college to be rated 'outstanding' under Ofsted's new inspection framework, which was rolled out in September, was Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group.

Ofsted has paused the publication of further education and skills reports during the Covid-19 pandemic, but they will release them sooner if requested by individual providers.

School slammed by Ofsted after failing Baker Clause

BILLY CAMDEN

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A school has been rapped by Ofsted for flouting the Baker Clause, as the inspectorate begins to police the controversial rule.

Leicestershire-based King Edward VII Science and Sport College was rated 'inadequate' in a report published on Wednesday following an inspection in January.

Inspectors found, among other leadership and safeguarding issues, that the school was "not currently meeting its statutory responsibility to ensure that providers of technical qualifications and apprenticeships visit the school to inform pupils about these options".

The watchdog said leaders "do not make sure that pupils receive independent careers advice", which means students "do not feel well prepared for their next steps".

Ofsted added that leaders "must" provide pupils with "information about what technical education and apprenticeship opportunities are available in accordance with the school's legal obligations under the 'Baker' clause".

FE Week understands this to be the first case of a school being pulled up by the inspectorate for

failing the Baker Clause.

The controversial rule was introduced in January 2018 and stipulates schools must ensure a range of FE providers have access to pupils from year 8 to year 13 to provide information on technical education and apprenticeships.

It became law after the government adopted an amendment to the 2017 Technical and Further Education Act, proposed by former education secretary Lord Baker, who claimed schools were "resisting" those who tried to promote more vocational courses to pupils.

The government has become increasingly concerned at non-compliance with the rule but has yet to take any meaningful action.

While it has sent out numerous letters to schools and multi-academy trusts reminding them of the duty, no action was taken in the first year of its existence, even though a study by the Institute for Public Policy Research found that around two-thirds had broken the law.

It led to the clause being labelled a "law without teeth" by Charles Parker, the then executive director of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, which helps to run University Technical Colleges.

Former Department for Education minister Lord Agnew sent out the most recent batch of warning letters in February 2020 – but MPs, such as

education select committee chair Robert Halfon, believe the government is still "not doing enough".

The lack of action has led to calls for Ofsted to assess compliance with the rule as part of a wider judgment on a schools' careers guidance.

King Edward VII Science and Sport College is an academy that teaches around 750 students aged 14 to 18.

Since Ofsted's visit in January, it has joined the Apollo Partnership Trust and appointed a new governing body.

Jennifer Byrne was the school's principal at the time of the inspection, but a press release on its website states that vice principal Emma Booth has since become acting principal.

Julia Patrick, chief executive of the Apollo Partnership Trust, said that although King Edward VII College was not part of the academy chain at the time of the inspection, they have taken Ofsted's report "very seriously and are actively reviewing it with a view to early implementation of any recommended changes".

She would not comment on Byrne's position at the school.

Ofsted has paused the publication of inspection reports during the Covid-19 pandemic, but has said it will release them sooner if requested, as was the case with King Edward's.

ESFA delays action on achievement rates

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Exclusive

Two weeks after the Education and Skills Funding Agency announced they would intervene at apprenticeship providers that failed to meet the minimum standards in 2018-19 they have pushed back the plans by more than four months.

Officials originally said on April 29 they would send out letters to those in scope, understood to be several hundred training firms, stating how they would be challenged "next week".

However, FE Week understands that only a handful were sent out and only to those where it was decided there was no need for action.

The remaining and vast majority of letters were finally sent this week, but they state that any challenge has been delayed because of Covid-19.

In letters seen by FE Week, the ESFA said: "We have decided not to issue you with additional contractual obligations, which we use to manage the quality and quantity of the delivery of your apprenticeship provision, at this point, due to the

ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

"We are aware of the continuing challenges surrounding the delivery of apprenticeships under the present circumstances and will monitor the situation closely.

"We will make a final decision on the need for intervention, as a result of failure of minimum standards, later in the year. We expect this to happen as soon as it is possible, but no later than October 2020, when we will write to you again on this subject."

A spokesperson for the ESFA confirmed that all providers will receive the same message "where we are deferring our decision on intervention action".

They could not say how many providers could require challenge as the agency has not yet completed the process of contacting all those in scope.

The spokesperson added that the approach on minimum standards, including the deferral of final decisions on intervention, was agreed "prior" to the notice being published on April 29, and they have "taken account of the impact of Covid-19 on the provider base (e.g. their need to prioritise work to manage through the immediate challenges) in our decision making".

Providers have to have more than 40 per cent of their cohort on frameworks and standards above a 62 per cent achievement rate to achieve the minimum standard.

As previously reported, overall achievement rates for apprenticeships dropped 2.2 per cent points last year to just 64.7 per cent.

The achievement rate for the new apprenticeship standards was particularly low, averaging just 46.6 per cent, compared to 68.7 per cent for frameworks.

The DfE cited apprentice drop-out as the problem, with overall retention rate being 65.7 per cent, meaning more than one-third of funded apprentices were leaving before the course had finished.

The agency's minimum standards policy document reminds providers that "poor or declining education performance data can lead to escalating intervention action and we will act early in the best interests of students, apprentices and the public purse".

And action for failing to meet the minimum standard can be as severe as contract termination, according to the agency's "oversight of independent training providers" operational guidance.

FE Week Webcasts

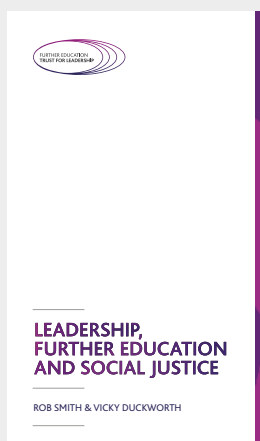
A free webcast update series from FE Week, in partnership with FETL, to provide an overview of the latest legislation and guidance from the Government regarding the response to the Coronavirus pandemic, for the FE & skills sector.

Mon, May 18, 2020
With Denise Brown

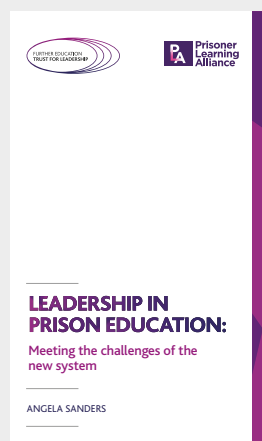
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With Sandy Henderson

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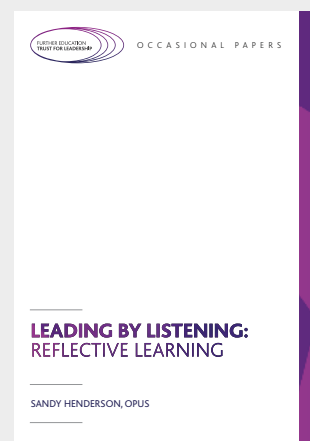
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Coronavirus delays troubled college's merger until autumn

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Exclusive

A cash-strapped college's merger plans have been delayed owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College, which was told by FE Commissioner Richard Atkins last year that it could not survive as a standalone due to its "terminal" finances, had scheduled to join the Trafford College Group by August.

A consultation on the move was run at the end of March and while both parties are still committed to it, they have pushed back the date for completion to October 30.

In a joint statement the colleges said: "In light of the ongoing Covid-19 situation and the impact this will have on the due diligence process, the merger transition board, along with the Education and Skills Funding Agency considered the July 31, 2020 merger date and agreed that it was sensible to reschedule the merger date for October 30, 2020.

"This not only allows more time to ensure



Lesley Davies



the merger process is completed but also allows both colleges to recruit and enrol at the start of the academic year as well as get students inducted and on to their study programmes as the main priority."

The merger is reliant on additional funding being fronted up by the ESFA.

Minutes from a Trafford College board meeting in January stated that principal Lesley Davies "reminded members of the red risk and that the group would not proceed with the merger if funding was not made available".

"The ESFA representative commented that it was important that the ESFA were clear on what the funding requirement was and its justification."

The college told FE Week it is still working with the ESFA on funding models and options, which cannot be assessed until all due diligence has been completed. They would not provide a figure of how much funding has been requested.

A number of other college mergers are planned for August 2020 and remain on track despite the disruption caused by Covid-19. These include Peterborough Regional College joining up with New College Stamford, and Swindon College merging with New College Swindon.

The Grimsby Institute and East Riding College are also currently scheduled to merge in August, but a spokesperson said they could not comment on whether this was still the case.

Atkins' report on Cheadle and Marple revealed how the college had generated "substantial" deficits since 2013-14, and said it was "unlikely" the college could continue alone.

Merging Trafford College Group and Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College would create a single college group working across the existing college sites.

Trafford College already merged with Stockport College in April 2018, a move that required a £30 million bailout from the Department for Education.

The merger will have to be finalised without Trafford principal Lesley Davies, who is stepping down from the role on July 31 after leading the college for four years.

"I am immensely proud to have led The Trafford College Group and its amazing staff for the past four years and it has truly been a highlight in my career," she told FE Week.

"It has been incredibly rewarding to work with so many fantastic colleagues, supporters, stakeholders and our communities in Trafford and Stockport."

Davies added that while she is leaving her full-time job, she will be continuing with a number of non-executive board roles.

She started her career in education and training 30 years ago as a college lecturer and has since held senior roles in the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Learning and Skills Council, the Association of Colleges and Pearson.

James Scott, the vice principal of curriculum and campus principal of Stockport College, has been appointed as acting principal and chief executive of the group while it recruits a permanent replacement.

COLLEGE INNOVATION SHOWCASE

Highlights from the 'regional skills concordat' college showcase

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Twelve months ago a "regional skills concordat" was set up so that 11 colleges would work with industry to identify current and future skills gaps.

Robert Halfon, the MP for Harlow and chair of the education select committee, launched the collaboration in April 2019 claiming the "vital and exciting development will provide a ladder of opportunity for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and improve the prestige of skills development".

The UK Innovation Corridor – a network of science and technology companies, academics, start-ups, finance and law firms from London to Cambridge – set up the project and helped produce a "showcase" of FE college-led employer engagement and skills activity along the region.

Former college principal and chair of the UK Innovation Corridor, Ann Limb, praised the collective efforts as "phenomenal".

The final showcase was due to be presented in parliament but had to move online owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

FE Week joined the webcasted event on Wednesday, during which ten of the participating colleges answered one of three questions about the benefits of developing partnerships with

businesses and potential future changes to engagement with employers.

Here is how the showcase went...

Q1: How has your employer engagement most benefited the college, your learners, employer partners and the wider community?

Hertford Regional College

Katrina Dougherty, vice principal of enterprise and innovation, said the college operates a destination curriculum model, which "supports learners to see their current studies as a passport to their future careers and not just the achievement of a qualification in its own right". She focused on the provider's 15-year relationship with Winchmore Brickwork – its team visits at least once a month to actively engage in programme delivery and typically uses the partnership to recruit their apprentices each year. "Working with Winchmore has enabled us to provide learners with access to real-time, hands-on experience," she added.

Peterborough Regional College

Marie Peene, operations director of apprenticeships, provided the example of the development of the level 3 food and drink engineering maintenance apprenticeship standard. Prior to delivery, the college engaged with employers and the National Skills Academy



Ann Limb

for Food and Drink to shape the curriculum. Forums, meetings and feedback informed the contextualisation of the programme as well as the layout and equipment that should be used in the centre. Further engagement allows staff at the college to ensure they have up-to-date expertise.

Q2: Which employers has your college engaged with?

Capital City College Group

Barry Connolly, strategic advisor for engineering development at Conel (part of CCCG), discussed the gratitude of Transport for London rail and of global real estate firm CBRE for the development of apprentices' engineering skills and benefits to their businesses. He added the college's facilities put it in a "strong position to bring out further growth" and that increased employer partnerships would create new apprenticeship opportunities to help "young people within the local community and the UK Innovation Corridor become the next generation of qualified engineers".

Waltham Forest College

Senior business adviser Nelson Dean spoke about the development of the college's partnership with One Housing Group. It started with a request to help recruit one apprentice and

Capital City College Group

Engineering Employer Examples

- T F L (Rail) and CBRE (Building Services)
- Development process
- Collaboration
- Flexibility and responsiveness
- Successful proven delivery
- Growth and long term commitment



barryconnolly

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COLLEGE INNOVATION SHOWCASE

has now grown into a bigger programme with opportunities for industry work placements. Dean said Waltham Forest College also has wider discussions with the housing association's supply chain and host networking events to explore the challenges of the industry and how the college can support the upskilling of staff or provision of candidates for jobs.

Ada, the National College for Digital Skills

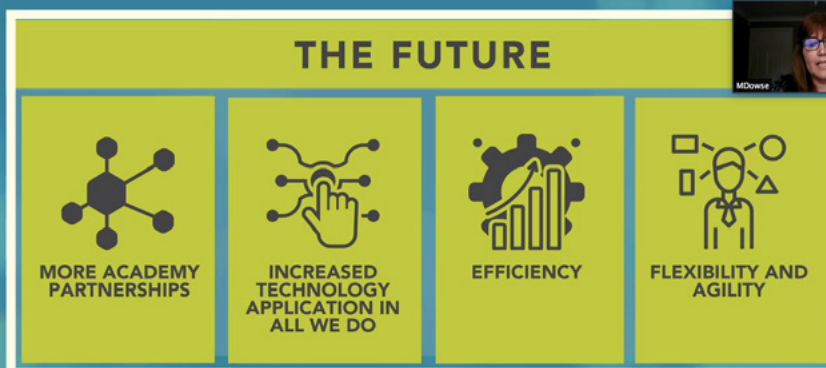
Principal Stuart Noss elaborated on Ada's partnership with software company Salesforce. It provides "significant" numbers of mentors every year and sponsors events such as a week-long take-over of the college to co-deliver a client brief training project, giving students "the opportunity to experience what the real world will be like". The firm has also helped design the curriculum, is part of the induction programme and provides grants to invest in welfare. Noss concluded the partnership is "hugely beneficial for both parties".

Stansted Airport College, part of Harlow College

Deputy principal Will Allanson explained that the partnership came about due to the college's location, the fact Stansted Airport was the largest single employment site in the East of England and that there had been no access to vocational education within the district. He said the curriculum had been designed to prepare people to go into employment at the airport. "We join the dots up with young people between where they are and where they need to get to," Allanson continued, citing employers coming in to work alongside learners and tutors at the college as well as opportunities for work placements.

Deputy principal of Cambridge Regional College Michelle Dowse's highlighting employers' future expectations for engagement

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L100/2020

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT SHOWCASE - GLOBAL SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

42

Q3: How do you see your employer engagement changing in the coming one to five years? What is driving this change?

Cambridge Regional College

In the most popular quote of the seminar, deputy principal Michelle Dowse passed on the perspective that "resilient companies don't bounce back, they bounce forward". She said that many employers in the Innovation Corridor have told her they will embrace the technological changes that many of them have accelerated during lockdown and "they'll require even more support from us to help them make those changes". She predicts this may take the form of more webinars, virtual career support and interviews, as well as greater flexibility in delivery models.

Capel Manor College

Key issues for principal Malcolm Goodwin

included climate change and food security, which he said had been highlighted with the pressures on the supply chain during Covid-19. For the specialist environmental and land-based college the most effective way to develop multi-employer collaboration has been hosting large fairs. "Looking at the three- to five-year picture, I think I can see the alumni playing a much more significant role," he concluded.

New City College

Steve Lee, the deputy group director for apprenticeships and business development, said the college has been maintaining engagement with employers and stakeholders during the pandemic and "keeping that momentum going where we can". It is currently in the process of opening a new campus and modernising the others with hopes to "meet the needs of employers and to future-proof education where we can". Input received so far on equipment and technology has been utilised to shape what the campus should look like.

North Hertfordshire College

Adam Barnes, head of employer engagement, outlined how the college's separate brand for apprenticeship provision, Hart Learning & Development, was set up to look at how it could "expand on a more national basis". By cutting the number of courses on offer, it was able to create "a much more tailored programme". He sees the provision of pre-apprenticeship training to help clients with recruitment as an area for future growth. According to Barnes, this means the provider "can design things that are expressly related to the job roles that people go into".

Senior business adviser at
Waltham Forest College,
Nelson Dean, speaking
about their partnership
with One Housing Group

News

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Volunteers flock to Kent's 'Sewing For Carers' Zoom workshops

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU

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A local council's adult education department has launched a range of free virtual sewing workshops to make medical scrubs for key workers.

The initiative by Kent County Council aims to alleviate the shortage of protective clothing being experienced by hospitals and care workers in the area.

Specialist tutors are running online courses

to provide their expertise and assistance to members of the public sewing the much-needed garments for NHS staff and carers.

It has had more than 100 enrolments in the scheme so far, with Sewing For Carers workshops running three to four times a week.

Alison Cutts, curriculum leader and sewing tutor for Kent Adult Education, told FE Week: "The response we have had to the classes has been brilliant, they have filled up very quickly and the students are all pleased to be able to do something to help and feel that what they are producing is made to a good standard.

"Some students have been sewing to fulfil orders placed through the Kent Scrubbers Facebook groups and others are making PPE for family, friends and neighbours who are key workers."

Supplies made by those following the real-time online step-by-step demos on Zoom include scrub tops, trousers and gowns.

Kent County Council has also bought and distributed 300 metres of fabric for local groups, which can make around 85 sets of scrubs.

Specific help, with, for instance, the neck-

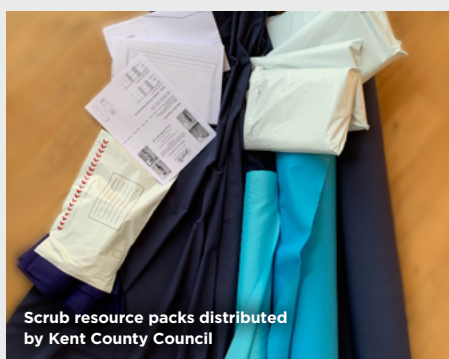


Alison Cutts, Curriculum Leader and sewing tutor for Kent Adult Education

facing, inserting pockets and attaching sleeves, is available.

The council's adult education division has sent out over 40 free resource packs of fabric, thread, patterns and instructions, and are also supplying fabric to relevant Facebook groups to distribute to their members as orders come in from each hospital.

This week it is fulfilling an order for the Darent Valley Hospital Core Midwife team, who need 20 sets of scrubs with their team name on to identify them.



Scrub resource packs distributed by Kent County Council

Cumbrian campus welcomes some new four-legged students

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Lakes College in West Cumbria has opened its doors to some canine students, though currently closed to most of the human variety.

The college has allowed Cumbria Police dogs Jovi, Dot and Lola to undergo specialist training on their campus after the dogs' usual training venues became unavailable during lockdown.

College estates manager Andrew Sisson said there was "no hesitation" in their decision to help out. "The police, and their dogs, play a vital role in keeping us all safe, and it's great that we're able to support them, especially through these challenging times," he said.

Sergeant Aidan Bew of the Cumbria Police dog section said: "We've been using this location to perform essential training with our three new dogs, as well as follow-up training with our other specialist roles.



(From left) Andrew Sisson, estates manager at Lakes College, police dog Junior; Sergeant Aidan Bew, police dog Lola and Kate Pearson, cross college administrator at Lakes College

"It has proved to be an ideal setting to put the dogs through their paces, and extremely valuable with the current restrictions." He thanked the staff for being "extremely accommodating.

Police dogs have to be trained in a variety of environments to prepare them for the conditions they will be placed in during live jobs.

Lakes College principal Chris Nattress said he was "delighted to help" the police force. "It was a perfect opportunity for the dogs and trainers to use our estate to sharpen their skills and help

keep us all safe. Always happy to help here at Lakes."

Copeland Mayor Mike Starkie also praised the partnership. He said: "It's great to see Lakes College stepping up to offer the site for Cumbria Police to use during the lockdown.

"The college is an important part of the West Cumbrian community, and the willingness of staff to help out in this difficult time is an excellent example of the area's resilience when faced with challenges."

Profile

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Introducing...

CHRIS HUMPHRIES

Acting president and chair,
WorldSkills International



**'I'm doing my very best
to make sure that I live up
to everyone's expectations'**

JL DUTAUT
JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK

FE Week meets the new WorldSkills International president trying to live up to a legacy while negotiating the headwinds of multiple global challenges.

Chris Humphries didn't expect to be in this position. Taking over the presidency of WorldSkills

International after the untimely passing away, aged just 56, of its deeply respected and newly elected president, Jos De Goeij in February this year was, he says, "not on my plan".

Humphries had been brought in as the organisation's chair of the board. "It was all I was expecting to do. Jos was the head of WorldSkills Netherlands for decades and was everyone's choice to be the next president. We were delighted when he was approved unopposed by the members, and we expected him to serve his full,

maximum eight-year term."

For someone who has spent his entire career in the skills sector, with a somewhat intimidating CV of professional and volunteering positions, including leadership in education and industry and driving national strategies, Humphries is self-effacing about his own vision. "I'm doing my very best to make sure that I live up to everyone's expectations based on what Jos was going to try and bring to WorldSkills."

That agenda, Humphries explains, "is to exert

Profile

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more positive and beneficial influence on the content and structure, the curricula and the assessment of VET [vocational education and training] systems around the world.” That already sounds like a vast remit, but as if picking up from such a legacy, and after such a trauma, isn’t hard enough, Humphries has been given the reins at a time of extreme headwinds for a global organisation that aims to foster partnership and to champion young people in industry.

Even before the Covid pandemic, the global political scene was defined by Brexit and by American retrenchment. Unequal development still threatens geopolitical stability. Environmentalism, especially among the young, was becoming more global and more radical, and we are undergoing a technological revolution (accelerated by the response to coronavirus) that is transforming precisely the kinds of jobs WorldSkills is built to champion.

It’s quite a cocktail, but Humphries has a knack for disaggregating its ingredients and putting them back together in less threatening admixtures. Perhaps that comes from having been instrumental in the ten-year strategy to take WorldSkills to 2025. He is steeped both in the organisation and the sector, and has had time to gaze into a crystal ball with some of the sector’s leading lights, not just here but around the world.

Did that document get everything right? No. “Of course, the long-term impact of Brexit on Europe wasn’t a feature, but to be honest, that’s been a relatively easy one to track. The UK’s position in WorldSkills Europe has been strongly



Chris giving a speech at his election to the WorldSkills Board last August

protected through all of this. And of course, we have no foresight or expectation of the impact of coronavirus.”

Nevertheless, he says, “we were on target with some of the challenges, in particular sustainability and environmental impact. We were particularly keen to ensure that our competitions are as environmentally sound as possible, and that includes everything from looking at the materials we use to the projects we set.”

As surprised as he genuinely is to find himself in the presidency of WorldSkills International, it was never a given that Humphries would be involved with skills at all. Yet his study of philosophy at bachelor’s level at the University of New South Wales (a degree he took seven years to complete) clearly still informs his incisive analysis of today’s situation.

If the degree took him so long, it is in great part because of his politically active youth, which saw him serve as the deputy editor of the university newspaper and as student union president. It was the end of the 1960s and Humphries was, to all intents and purposes, a bit of a campus radical. He later found out that the man

his father had named as his godfather was a member of Australia’s intelligence services, and had “a rather large file on him”.

“I couldn’t get into America for a number of years because I’d been too active in the anti-Vietnam War movement,” he adds, with what sounds like some relish. He also confesses another reason for his lengthy studies: “I was probably enjoying myself a little too much.”

“The Chinese are determined to open their doors, but will the rest of the world come?”

From Sydney, Humphries came to England to take up a master’s degree at the LSE under Karl Popper, but quickly realised he was done with academia. “I needed a break, and I met someone who was doing this job working in a school around media and working with teachers and children to actually try and change education. I just thought it sounded interesting.” It led to his first job in the UK,



Chris along with his family receiving his CBE award at Buckingham Palace, 1998

Profile

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in 1974, as a media resources officer at the Inner London Education Authority, helping to effectively apply technology to improve learning.

He started as technician, on the shop floor, and Humphries hasn't looked back. He has committed his entire career to the overlap in the Venn diagram where education meets technology, with stints at the National Council for Education Technology, Acorn Computers, Training and Enterprise Councils, City & Guilds and others, and contributed to the evolution of technical education since before Thatcher's technical and vocational education initiative.

It's an illustrious career for a man who came from a broken home, and whose childhood was put back on track by his stepmother. His biological mother "disappeared" when Humphries was four, and until the age of 12 he was "fostered out to relatives". His father had no formal education, but "taught himself and eventually became a state manager for one of the big insurance companies in Sydney". His stepmother first ran a baby store, then became a bookkeeper of such skill that she was recruited as the treasurer and company secretary for Japanese-run global stationery manufacturer (and whiteboard pen inventor), Pentel in Australia. "Within three years, she was the first female and first non-Japanese director of a Pentel subsidiary in the world."

His father was no less inspirational. Having

worked his way up to a position of some status, he watched his wife overtake him and, at a time when this was still socially awkward, embraced his new role as the "directors' partner". "He threw himself into it with great gusto and he became a sort of little celebrity in this group of partners, all of whom were Japanese women. They had to adapt all of the partner visits and trips to make sure they could somehow cope with this stray Australian man."

"We are looking to establish a potential project on creating a model for hybrid assessment"

Good humour and optimism characterise my conversation with Humphries, and he will need them in spades in the first months of his unexpected role. The next WorldSkills global competition is set for Shanghai next year, and the Chinese authorities are determined to open their doors, "but will the rest of the world come?"

With 20 per cent of national competitions cancelled this year, and a further two-thirds postponed indefinitely, the challenge is a steep

one. But Humphries sees a bigger picture and a bigger role for the WorldSkills network. Seventy per cent of its member countries and regions have closed their colleges and training providers, "so we're doing a lot of active work around the world to explore how many countries have taken their training online".

It's work that could bring forward the agenda to develop remote assessment of skills in leaps and bounds. "The problem with VET is that it is in the application that the skill is properly reflected. So we are looking to establish a potential project on creating a model for hybrid assessment that would allow not just us but colleges, apprenticeship employers and training providers to conduct validated assessments at a distance."

Additionally, developing countries are particularly struggling, and increasing the quality of VET there is difficult even in the best of times, so Humphries and WorldSkills International are leveraging member-to-member support to lay the groundwork for leaps forward. "Member cooperation has been driving us for the last two months, and over the next four months we've scheduled a whole series of workshops, seminars, coaching sessions, material exchanges, and the sharing of projects and materials to protect those nations and help them get ahead of the game."

In passing, he praises WorldSkills UK and its CEO, Neil Bentley-Gockmann, for being "a leading light in much of what's happening here". But tackling inequality seems to permeate the whole organisation, and none more so than its inadvertent president.

His other role is as pro chancellor of the University of West London – a university set up to serve disadvantaged students and which bills itself as "the career university". (They considered "the vocational university" as an alternative.) Until Humphries joined as part of a shake-up, it was set to fail. It is now among the top 50 in the UK.

"Targeting young people for whom education and higher education is not on their radar and creating opportunities for them is a fantastic agenda."

It's an agenda Humphries has been pursuing his whole life, and there's no doubt this lapsed philosopher and radical will leave a legacy at WorldSkills in his own right.



Chris' first trip for City & Guilds to Shanghai, 2002



Create mentally healthy learning environments

CACHE is once again supporting Mental Health Awareness Week, which runs 18th-24th May.

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Closing date for applications: **1st June 2020**



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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.

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Vice Principal - James Watt College £80,000

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Closing Date: Monday 18th May 1pm

EDU WEEK

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Advertise



READER'S REPLY

Government to take ownership of colleges

Bob Harrison, website:

"I know this is way out left field but could the problem be that the government has systematically and deliberately underfunded further and adult education for several years, leading to a degradation of infrastructure and a depleted and demoralised workforce?"

John, website:

"Does this mean the college teaching staff salaries will be brought in line with school teaching salaries? Great!"

What does an inspectorate do when it can't inspect?

Richard Moore, website:

"I'm afraid there isn't very much Ofsted inspectors could usefully tell practitioners about high-quality online learning. That isn't meant to be a criticism, rather that inspectors have rarely looked at online learning properly in the past, even in colleges with significant amounts of it. I suspect that it is the practitioners who could train inspectors up on what separates good and outstanding online learning from the rest, rather than the other way around."

DfE clarifies which college students 'should' receive face-to-face delivery from June 1

Jo Brodrick, Twitter:

"Surely it would be more beneficial to focus on students who need specialised spaces or equipment to develop their vocational skills. I'm thinking construction, motor vehicle etc, where practical assessments are mandatory."

Taking up the ventilator challenge

Jo Kitchen, Facebook:

"I've always said that one missed opportunity with 18-25 apprentices is not being able to count voluntary work as part of

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REPLY OF THE WEEK

Government to take ownership of colleges

"What a pity that mismanagement/poor governance in a relatively small number of colleges should lead to such an outcome being contemplated. As former chair I would certainly resign and ask the rest of the corporation to consider its position, thus enabling, under a governmental regime, the appointment of properly remunerated board at full NED rates. The entire governance playing field having changed, a national move in that respect might cause a measure of governmental reflection and their greater appreciation of the majority of well-run, well-governed colleges."

Graham Ripley, website

their 20 per cent off-the-job hours – all the additional skills this brings to enhance a CV."

DfE announces first-year sixth-form students return to college as soon as June 1

Tim Paver, website:

"This is lunacy. The government expects social distancing to continue for months and yet you want to bring young people back to unsuitable environments. Even at half-capacity you will be looking at hundreds of students in most establishments. It's far too early. Waiting until at least July 4 makes far more sense, and then only if R is still below 1 and reported new cases have dropped below 100 a day. Health and safety of staff and students must come first."

Scarlett, website:

"I totally agree with this. As a student, I don't feel safe. Many of my friends won't be able to get to school and their parents are key workers and school buses will not be running. Furthermore, the size of my classroom, it would be very difficult to be 2m away from everyone, even if it's half the class. Working from home has not been hard for me as I keep to a timetable and I would be happy doing this until early July or even September if it has to be. Sending children back is wrong at this time as there is still no vaccine found. Even though children aren't affected as badly, we can still carry and pass on this virus."

TOM
RICHMONDFounder and
director, EDSK

Former adviser to skills minister calls for temporary ban on new adult apprentices

The response to the pandemic recession must centre on supporting those who are finishing their education and those who are struggling to find work, says Tom Richmond

Given the controversy surrounding the apprenticeship levy before the outbreak of Covid-19, it is unsurprising to see calls for the levy to be reformed as part of the government's response to the economic crisis. In our EDSK report at the beginning of this year, we found that the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 had already contributed to a steady fall in the proportion of apprenticeships being provided to young people compared to older learners.

If the objective is to prevent young people suffering financial hardship in the coming months, a major package of direct and temporary measures will be required to overcome the challenges posed by Covid-19. Minor policy tweaks and good intentions will prove entirely insufficient. There are three tools that the government has at its disposal – all of which could be implemented relatively swiftly.

First, the government should introduce a temporary ban on new apprenticeships being offered to learners aged 25 and over until, say, the end of 2020. It is often forgotten that “adult apprenticeships” did not exist until 2007, yet they have subsequently swamped the



apprenticeship system. In a time of crisis, this cannot be allowed to continue. To cushion the impact of this change on older workers, the government could bring forward some of the funding earmarked for the upcoming National Skills Fund to support those who need to retrain or upskill during this period.

“Minor policy tweaks and good intentions will prove entirely insufficient”

Second, the government should ban apprenticeships for learners who are not new recruits to their employer. The latest Department for Education survey of apprentices showed that 61 per cent of “apprentices” were already employed by the employer with whom they started their apprenticeship, and 42 per cent were working for their employer for at least 12 months beforehand – thus illustrating the amount of funding that could be

freed up.

The same survey found that 84 per cent of apprentices aged 25+ were already employed before their apprenticeship began compared to 47 per cent of apprentices aged 19-24 and just 28 per cent of those aged 16 to 18. This means that any restrictions on the use of apprenticeships for existing employees will disproportionately benefit the youngest learners.

Third, the government should rekindle the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE). In 2012, when over a million young people were unemployed, this grant of £1,500 was given to employers who took on up to three apprentices aged 16 to 24. Eighty per cent of the grants went to businesses that employed up to 25 people, and 85 per cent went to employers that had never had an apprentice before.

The government should reintroduce a more generous version of AGE as part of their Covid-19 response. Small and medium-sized employers would receive £5,000 for every newly recruited apprentice aged 16 to 18 and £2,500 for new apprentices

aged 19 to 24. Additional grants of £5,000 would also be given to any employer that has never recruited an apprentice before or has not done so in the past 12 months. There is nothing to be gained by timid action on this front, particularly when employers' training capacity in terms of staffing and resources is likely to have been seriously curtailed by recent events.

Although such spending might feel like a luxury, England is in fact remarkably stingy when it comes to encouraging employers to take on apprentices (even in the good times). In Austria, companies have received government grants for each apprentice since 2008 equivalent to as much as three times an apprentice's gross wages. In France, organisations employing apprentices for at least one month can benefit from a tax credit of €1,600 per apprentice per year. In the Netherlands, a subsidy for employers was introduced in 2014 of up to €2,700 per apprentice per year.

While there is no perfect policy waiting to be plucked off the shelf, the response to Covid-19 must revolve around supporting young people who are finishing their education throughout the rest of this year as well as those who are struggling to find work. There is nothing wrong in principle with upskilling the existing workforce, but it would take a brave politician to argue in the current climate that people who already have jobs are more important than those who do not.

JULIE
MIZONAccess manager,
Quality Assurance
Agency

Necessity breeds invention, and grade assessment has had to adapt quickly

This crisis has shown how well we can make transitions in order to protect students' interests, says Julie Mizon

According to Dutch historian Rutger Bregman, crises bring out the best in us. And while it will take some time before we can assess the success of the rapid changes we've seen across the sector, there's no doubt that, despite the physical distancing, the resolve for sector stakeholders to work together to protect students' interests has surged, allowing us to make significant transitions in a short space of time.

QAA's Access to HE Diploma has had to change fast too. We've moved swiftly to an estimated grade model. Getting there required collaboration with Ofqual, the Department for Education, and Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), and we consulted extensively with Access students. And now that we've developed an Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) ('extraordinary' is the regulatory term – we're not trumpet blowing) to make sure the principles for assessment are consistently applied, we're talking to Access providers and students to make sure everyone knows what we've done and what's going to happen.

Consulting providers and students through webinars has been a great way to get a direct sense of what the key concerns are. Above all, course tutors want to make sure the grades they award are fair and that their

students are as prepared for their transition to higher education as possible.

The basic roadmap is clear. Students who plan to complete their Access to HE Diploma by July 31, 2020 will now receive estimated grades for all remaining assessments with submission dates after March 20, 2020. AVAs will ask course tutors to generate those estimated grades based on their professional judgment. Those really are cornerstones of the model: professional judgment and evidence. The evidence will include the student's prior attainment, formative assessments and any other records of student performance. The course tutor will review all the grade indicators that have been given for a unit and will then determine the final grade for the unit using the existing method of establishing the midpoint of grades in the unit grade profile.

“Grades will reach UCAS by July 27, 2020, and should reach students around the same time”

This is the fairest solution, as ultimately tutors are best placed to judge the likely performance of their students. QAA and AVAs will do everything they can to make sure grades awarded this year are as fair as possible. Grades will

be subject to quality assurance processes, including internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation.

We have to make sure that student awards and results have been quality assured and approved. They must also be ready around the same time as in previous years, to allow timely transfer to UCAS and higher education providers. That means grades will reach UCAS by July 27, 2020, and should reach students around the same time.

Occasionally, students may feel their grade doesn't accurately reflect their performance. That's a risk of any estimated model. In such cases, students will have the opportunity to appeal, or may choose to sit their assessments at the earliest reasonable opportunity. The latter may, however, impact their ability to progress to higher education in September – and it's down to us and to course providers to make those choices clear. We've hosted webinars for students too – and there are more coming up this month.

Last week we published further detail for students continuing their studies after July 31, 2020. There are three key considerations for providers after the summer. Firstly, the challenge for tutors and students in a full or partial move to digital delivery. Secondly, we have to be alive to the possibility that there may be changes to the way work is assessed. And finally, the possibility that, depending on provider and AVA arrangements,



assessments won't happen as or when originally planned.

We're encouraging continued learning, where possible, because it's critical for students to be as prepared as possible for their transition to higher education. And we have to be open to other options too. The ERF provides a structure and rules around who is eligible for estimated grades, which is particularly helpful for students on flexible learning pathways. We are working with AVAs and providers to provide information about other options for students, for example, breaks in learning. AVAs are also working with providers where students are due to complete close to, but after, 31 July 31.

Ultimately, we have to be open to the possibility of continuing change too. Through collaboration and solidarity, we've got to a place where we can offer the best possible outcome for students. If the pandemic context changes, collaboration will be important again.

STUART
RIMMERPrincipal, East
Coast College

The can has been shaken, so we must proceed with caution

Re-opening campus is a high-risk, high-stress, physical and emotional challenge, says Stuart Rimmer. Here are some guiding principles to keep in mind

At my school there was a boy called Dave. He was well off and (mostly) good hearted, so used to buy cans of Tango at break time for fellow students who were less well off (me). This was usually well received, except that around one in three times Dave would secretly, violently shake the can before handing it over, resulting in the poor student (still me) getting an explosion that normally led to arguments and a massive uncontrollable mess.

This crisis has been punctuated by daily changing, uninformed and contradictory but mostly benign DfE guidance notes. Generated by 23-year-old Cambridge graduate policy geeks, who have been turfed out of Sanctuary Buildings and are now located in their childhood bedrooms in the Surrey commuter belt, with their PCs set to rapid-fire, like Custer's cavalry trying to repel the natives, the latest campus re-opening guidance being handed over is a bit like Dave's can.

This view can be juxtaposed with the ESFA response, which I have experienced as more sensible, steady, measured and interested in identifying risks and recognising the sovereignty of individual corporations to make

decisions in the context of health and safety law and colleges doing our very best.

I have reminded my governors that guidance is simply that. It does not mandate, but suggests. It points to what we should or could do, but not what we must. This is an important distinction, especially where the weight of culpability rests. While this remains the case, our paramount concern must be the safety of staff and students. This will require a re-opening approach based on pragmatism, phasing and principle-led decisions.

I wish also to delineate two distinct issues – that of opening in September against issues of closing off this academic year. The former is still to be fully explored, while the latter is managing amid crisis, with action born out of necessity, not detailed planning. The approaches may be governed by similar H&S rules but the emphasis must be different.

I propose that to close off this year the focus needs to be based

on three principles.

1. The safety of staff and students is the primary concern. Safe systems of working should be defined locally and will require detailed risk assessments at college, building, course and individual level. Risks cannot be eliminated but can be better understood and mitigated. Staff morale and commitment through the crisis has been high in many colleges and this must be protected at this crucial juncture.

2. Priority groups must be identified at a local level. Colleges need to have the flexibility to choose these for themselves. These groups should be selected by what is necessary, not what is desirable.

3. Face-to-face interventions in June should only be focused on ensuring that progression can be secured for all students, so they are not disadvantaged, or

risk wasting a year.

Colleges have a very busy few weeks ahead, with a range of complexity to navigate, including risk assessments, training for staff, meaningful consultation with staff and unions, re-engagement of facilities, including new cleaning protocols, communications to students, re-supply of PPE, identification and planning priority groups (based on baskets of quals yet to be revealed by Ofqual), taking legal advice and finally, corporation approvals. Each of these items is in itself a detailed work stream.

“Our paramount concern must be the safety of staff and students”

The educational, social and even psychological case for re-opening can be easily made with obvious benefits. However, we have to deal with the situation as it is, not how we would wish it to be, and policy makers need to be mindful of this. Re-opening campus is a high-risk, high-stress, physical and emotional challenge that should be treated respectfully.

We now need to learn to work out how to open the fizzy can, but with flexibility, caution and only when necessary.



JOHN
COPEDeputy director,
Public First

It's hard to argue that further college rationalisation isn't needed

Rationalisation needs to reconcile three very different types of college – and the grey areas in between, says John Cope

It is almost impossible to identify when this was said: “Commissioners cannot repeat too often that they have been impressed with [the] technical knowledge of the masters and managers of industrial establishments on the Continent”, unfavourably comparing us with Germany. Was it the Roberts Review in 2002? Tomlinson in 2004? Wolf? Sainsbury? Ney? Augar? Nope. It's from an 1884 Royal Commission on technical instruction. Predating even the appointment of Nick Gibb as schools minister.

In an echo of history, Gavin Williamson announced last year, “Today, I am setting a new ambition. To super-charge further education over the next decade with an aim to overtake Germany”. Colleges have been braced for a skills “white paper” ever since, and as revealed by *FE Week*, it is now imminent and potentially explosive.

Most dramatically of all, it looks like the government is set to bring colleges back into the public sector. This could be interpreted in many ways. At the tinkering end, it could change the ability of colleges to borrow, some DfE intervention powers, and the role of the FE Commissioner. At the revolutionary end, we



could be about to see what lay behind the overlooked Augar recommendation for the “rationalisation of the [college] network” to “establish a genuinely national system”. This isn't entirely new territory, the government's area review has led to more than 60 mergers since 2015, with more in the pipeline. But pushed to its maximum, it is radical.

“There must be support for college leaders to oversee huge institutions”

It's hard to argue rationalisation isn't needed, but it can't be narrow and top down. It needs to cover more fundamental questions on what a college actually is, where do sixth forms fit in, should universities keep creeping into apprenticeships, and does the academisation of schools into large groups offer lessons for a similar process with colleges.

The huge scope of an increasing

number of college groups couldn't be clearer to me as a new non-exec director of the Activate Learning group, which includes colleges, higher education, apprenticeships, UTCs, academies and sixth forms. This is the first of three types of college – massive in scale and educational offer. With nearly 20,000 learners, it's a similar enrolment to the Universities of York or even Imperial. It's groups like this I think the department has in mind as a “new normal”.

A second type of colleges are the converse – small and hyperlocal. They tend to be in struggling communities and towns, scraping by financially, and are outcompeted by sixth forms and universities on funding and prestige. I vividly remember a college principal despairing that having attracted enough students for courses to break even, a massive new sixth form was approved just down the road.

The third type are more specialist institutions. Not necessarily large or with thousands of students, but with a unique specialism, usually related

to the local economy or a sector in which the UK is a world leader, allowing it to leverage private investment and prestige.

“Rationalisation” therefore needs to reconcile these three very different groups and the grey areas in between, such as independent training providers. In doing so, the government must learn the lessons of academisation. Setting out in 2010 to rationalise secondary schools into 20 or 30 super school groups with 100-plus schools each, the system has ended up more fragmented, with LA schools, single academies, tiny and huge trusts all existing a decade later. They have also struggled to grow the pool of effective leaders and the strength of governance needed to sustain groups that could feasibly oversee £1 billion of public money.

So if Williamson is serious in his ambition on colleges, there can be no half measures: rationalisation of the whole system needs huge cash incentives for mergers and support for college leaders to oversee huge institutions. And when the inevitable pushback comes, the department has a compelling case to the sector, parents, and learners (backed by a long-term funding settlement and cross-party support) so the reforms don't become a toxic distraction or top-down reorganisation, but a stable settlement that will last for decades.

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Jennifer Bramley

Chief Operating Officer, Babington

Start date May 2020

Previous job

Executive Director Customer Engagement, Babington

Interesting fact

Actively hosts and participates in various fundraising events, ranging from 20 mile riverside walk to five-a-side football in support of local charities



Peter Mucklow

Official Delegate, WorldSkills UK

Start date May 2020

Concurrent job

Director of Apprenticeships, ESFA

Interesting fact

Peter has supported Aston Villa for 50 years



Craig Wade

Sector Manager Health and Science, NCFE

Start date February 2020

Previous job

Curriculum Manager for Health and Social Care at New College Durham

Interesting fact

Craig has 10 years' military experience having served in the Royal Navy as a registered nurse

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