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## COLLEGE CAMPUSES UNLOCKED



- FE Week visits Lewisham College to speak to staff and young students
- Head of Estates reveals 'astronomical' cost of becoming a Covid-secure site

**Pages 12 to 14**

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### Principals sound warning on high cost of Covid safety measures



Page 9



### Minister forces all employers to drop PhD apprenticeship plans

Page 11



### Remote inspections of 'paused providers' will be challenging, but possible

Page 25



### What might a virtual industry placement project look like?

Page 26

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## News

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# Highbury College given £1.5m emergency bailout to stay afloat

BILLY CAMDEN

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A college rocked by an expenses scandal has been saved by a £1.5 million government bailout after its new leaders found it had almost run out of cash just weeks after the former principal left.

The emergency funding was granted to Highbury College this month after its bank refused to supply an additional loan.

It followed a "re-profiling" of the college's Education and Skills Funding Agency allocations, which meant £800,000 was received quicker than planned, at the beginning of the year, when its interim leaders first became aware it could soon go bust.

The bailout should enable the college to "continue to operate for at least a further year".

The details were revealed in the college's delayed 2018-19 accounts, which were published on Wednesday following a "thorough independent audit of historical finance practices".

While Highbury achieved a surplus of £1.6 million last year, this was largely because of a £5.7 million building sale that was completed in August 2018.

The college is predicting a deficit of £1.3 million by the end of 2019-20 and to remain in 'inadequate' financial health, but this could worsen as the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated its problems and has lost "significant income" from its commercial activities.

The 2018-19 accounts state that the total net impact of the pandemic to date on the college's cash flow is "estimated to be £124,000 negative", although the full effect of the virus is still unknown.

Highbury College has gone through a turbulent period in recent years. It axed its sixth form last year owing to financial pressures and made a number of staff redundant, and it is still in the midst of a long-running legal battle in Nigeria to recover funds.

The government intervened at the college in September 2019 after an FE Week investigation revealed how its long-standing principal, Stella Mbubaegbu, had



Richard Atkins



Martin Doel

spent £150,000 in expenses in four years, which included one-off lavish items such as a £434 pair of designer headphones and a lobster dinner.

The college has been in FE Commissioner intervention since November. A report on commissioner Richard Atkins' findings has been held up by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mbubaegbu, who joined in 2001 and officially retired in April 2020, actually left her position as accounting officer in December – a month before new interim principal Penny Wycherley and interim chair Martin Doel discovered Highbury was running out of cash.

The newly published accounts reveal "significant accounting failings over a number of years", which were discovered by new external auditor's from Mazars who were appointed in July 2019.

The auditors found, for example, that "no books or records were maintained" for the college's subsidiary Highbury College Nigeria Limited.

They also gave their opinion on Mbubaegbu's expenses (see page 5).

The accounts were signed off on a going concern basis but with "material uncertainty" going forward.

Doel said the college has "already made significant steps to secure the college's finances".

"Between the period of time these accounts review and now, the college has become, in many ways,



Penny Wycherley

unrecognisable," he added.

"The introduction of an experienced interim governance and leadership team has not only stabilised the finances and significantly improved staff morale but the college's success and retention rates look to remain well above national average, meaning our students are able to thrive in a supportive and productive environment.

"On top of the day-to-day challenges of the FE sector, our staff and students have also adapted fantastically to the current Covid-19 pandemic and shown true strength of spirit to think innovatively, overcome hurdles and continue to succeed."

The college hopes to move its financial health to 'requires improvement' by July 31, 2021.

A Highbury College spokesperson said the £1.5 million bailout is repayable and the details of the repayment are currently being finalised.

A spokesperson for the DfE said: "We can confirm that Highbury Portsmouth College requested Emergency Funding in May 2020 due to cash flow issues.

"In line with the arrangements set out in the College Oversight: Support and Intervention all such requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. Funding has been approved and arrangements for paying these funds are currently being finalised."

They added that the FE Commissioner's report publication has been suspended during Covid-19 and that Highbury's will be released in "due course".



## News

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## Auditors conclude former principal's expenses failed public money test

**BILLY CAMDEN**

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The controversial expenses racked up by Highbury College's former principal were "not in line" with value for money rules for managing public cash, an auditing firm has concluded.

In September 2019, and following a year-long freedom of information battle, *FE Week* revealed that Stella Mbubaegbu had spent £150,000 on the college's corporate credit card in just four years on items such as first-class flights, five star hotels, designer headphones and a boozy lobster dinner.

Then Department for Education minister Lord Agnew, who said he was "deeply concerned" by the spending, intervened immediately by sending in the FE Commissioner Richard Atkins to investigate.

At the time, the college insisted the expenses were "approved and authorised and were then subject to independent audit, as is usual practice". Mbubaegbu, who became principal of Highbury College in 2001, was then suspended in November and officially retired in April.

While the FE Commissioner's report findings are

held up by the coronavirus pandemic, Highbury College's new external auditing firm, Mazars LLP, have given their opinion on the expenses after conducting their own investigation.

In the college's delayed accounts for 2018-19, which were published this week following a "thorough independent audit of historical finance practices", the auditors said: "During the year, as part of a whistleblowing incident, some instances of potentially inappropriate use of college funds were identified."

"This related to expenditure by a member of the senior management team, some of which arose during the period August 1, 2018 to July 31, 2019."

"In our opinion, the expenditure was not in line with the principles set forth by parliament of achieving economy, efficiency and effectiveness."

Asked if the auditors' opinion would lead to any further action, a spokesperson for

Highbury College said: "Matters raised within the report have been reviewed via the appropriate channels. We are unable to comment further."

And a spokesperson for the DfE said: "We decline to comment. It is a matter for the college, which has conducted its own investigation into the matter."

Mbubaegbu was replaced by Penny Wycherley as interim principal in December and Martin Doel was later announced as interim chair.

Doel said that the introduction of an "experienced interim governance and leadership team has not only stabilised the finances and significantly improved staff morale but the college's success and retention rates look to remain well above national average, meaning our students are able to thrive in a supportive and productive environment".

But since Mbubaegbu's departure, Highbury has had to secure a government bailout after the new leadership team discovered the college was set to run out of cash (full story page 4).



Stella Mbubaegbu

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# FE snubbed in 'corrected'

## DfE £1bn catch-up plans

BILLY CAMDEN

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The government is facing fierce criticism for snubbing colleges from its £1 billion Covid-19 "catch-up" package after appearing to include them and other 16 to 19 providers in their initial plans.

Prime minister Boris Johnson and education secretary Gavin Williamson have today launched the funding in a bid to help school pupils catch-up on the teaching time they have lost because of the coronavirus pandemic.

But it has been announced under a cloud of confusion and frustration.

Last night the Department for Education initially won praise from the likes of the Association of Colleges after telling the press that £700 million of the funding would be "shared across early years, schools and 16 to 19 providers over the 2020/21 academic" to "lift educational outcomes".

But two hours later the DfE sent out a correction which removed the inclusion of early years and 16 to 19 providers and reduced this part of the fund down to £650 million.

The other part of the package is a £350 million national tutoring scheme "specifically for the most disadvantaged" – which was originally set at £300 million.

David Hughes, chief executive of the AoC, said the government is "right to take action to help school pupils catch up for lost time" but it is "indefensible to overlook the needs of the 700,000 in colleges".

"I expect their exclusion from this announcement to be followed rapidly by clarification on the funding and support for college students," he added.

Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said the last-minute exclusion of FE providers was "unjustifiable".

"Our understanding was that 16 to 19 providers would be able to access at least some of the proposed Covid catch up support.

"However, today's announcement specifically excludes 16 to 19 providers so we await further clarification on what elements of the package



Boris Johnson and Gavin Williamson

and related funding our members will be able to access."

He added: "Young people of all ages have shown great resilience in response to the Covid crisis; it would be entirely unjustifiable to exclude sixth form students from the package announced today."

Toby Perkins, Labour's shadow apprenticeships and lifelong learning minister, told FE Week the "very fact" that FE was included and has now been excluded is "very revealing about the governments entire attitude towards post-16 vocational education".

"If this means that there is a plan for schools but not for FE then that would be an unforgivable disgrace," he added.

"But if in fact what it shows us is that colleges are simply an afterthought and whilst having time for a plan for schools they have not got around to one for the FE sector then that would expose exactly the extent to which FE is not a priority under this government."

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, welcomed the package of support for schools but said that he was "also concerned to see that there is now apparently no funding for early years or 16 to 19 provision, when these sectors are absolutely vital to the future of children and young people".

He added: "It remains frustrating that we haven't had the opportunity to discuss any of this with the government ahead of this announcement and that we once again find ourselves having to piece together the detail."

Pressure has been mounting on the government in recent weeks to produce a proper plan for helping students catch up with the teaching time they have lost after 12 weeks of lockdown.

Meg Hillier, chair of the influential public accounts committee of MPs, accused Williamson of being "asleep on the job" while Johnson has faced repeated questions on the issue during his coronavirus briefings.

Johnson said today that the £1 billion package will help "headteachers to provide extra support to children who have fallen behind while out of school", adding that he is "determined to do everything I can to get all children back in school from September".

Williamson claimed the package will "make sure that every young person, no matter their age or where they live, gets the education, opportunities and outcomes they deserve, by spending it on measures proven to be effective, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged".

The DfE said further guidance will be published "shortly".



# Colleges announce free summer food scheme for vulnerable 16-18s

**YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU**  
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Two colleges have announced they will offer free meals over the summer holidays to their most vulnerable 16-to-18-year-old students.

Cornwall College Group and Yeovil College both made the commitment in the same week the government U-turned on its decision not to provide free lunch vouchers to school pupils during August. The change of mind followed mounting pressure led by footballer Marcus Rashford.

Boris Johnson's official spokesperson announced the creation of a £120 million "Covid summer food fund" on Tuesday, but the scheme is expected to benefit only students up to the age of 16.

Principal of Cornwall College Group John Evans said: "With the impact coronavirus has had, the pressure on many households has never been greater... Feeding our most vulnerable learners throughout the summer is a vital way we can serve the communities in which we operate."

He added that the college had "certainly been inspired" by Rashford's campaign to run its own free meals scheme, which normally ends at the end of the academic year, during the summer.

The Manchester United striker penned an open letter on Monday to MPs about his experience of relying on free school meals, and the Labour party had called an opposition day debate on the



Marcus Rashford HEVROL



issue in parliament on Tuesday, before Downing Street reversed its decision and approved the extension.

Evans said his college was "ensuring the same applies for 16-to-18-year-old learners".

Cornwall College Group, which has seven sites across the south-west, said it has 192 eligible students. This includes those staying at the group next year as well as those who are finishing their studies this academic year.

It expects the scheme to cost around £26,000, which will be funded from the existing discretionary budget it receives from the Department for Education for offering free meals.

Students will either receive the free meals through payments into an approved personal or guardian's bank account, or through vouchers for a supermarket they have access to.

Cornwall College Group's summer food scheme will run from July 6 until September 4.

Yeovil College's free meals will continue for all eligible current and progressing students aged 16 to 18 who "remain actively engaged in their college learning" during the summer period.

The Somerset-based college said it has ring-fenced money within its own college budget to ensure it is not dependent upon additional government funding to make this commitment.

Principal Mark Bolton said: "I feel strongly that all students are entitled to nutritious food, which

encourages and supports positive mental health as a basis for positive academic learning.

"It is key that students feel both empowered and capable of continuing their education during the holiday period, enabling them to maintain strong learning habits and to catch up with practical assessment where necessary to move forwards with their learning."

FE Week has asked Yeovil College how many students will be eligible for their summer food scheme as well as how the meals will be provided, but they did not respond at the time of going to press.

The government extended its national school food voucher scheme, which has replaced school lunches for many disadvantaged children during partial closures, to colleges that were having "practical difficulties" delivering free meals to students during the coronavirus pandemic in term-time at the end of April.

However, colleges had to exhaust their 2018-19 and 2019-20 free meals in FE and 16-to-19 discretionary bursary allocations and submit a business case to the Education and Skills Funding Agency for access to it.

At the time of going to press the DfE could not confirm the age range that the government's summer food fund would apply to. A spokesperson would only say that full details will be announced in "due course".

## News

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# Principals sound warning on high cost of Covid safety measures

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College leaders have warned of spiralling Covid-19 safety costs as their membership body calls for a £70 million fund to ease budget pressures.

Multiple principals who spoke to FE Week said they are having to fork out hundreds of thousands of pounds on personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitiser, signage, shields and temperature guns.

The Department for Education guidance for the wider reopening of colleges, a process which got under way on June 15 after 12 weeks of lockdown, states that any costs associated with implementing social distancing and safety measures must be funded from "existing college budgets".

Yesterday, the Association of Colleges asked for a one-off £70 million grant fund for social distancing adaptations for their members as part of a £3.6 billion post-pandemic skills package.

FE Week spoke to four college leaders about their unforeseen expenditure on safety equipment required to create a Covid-secure campus.

Mike Hopkins, principal of South and City College Birmingham, said he has already spent between £120,000 and £150,000 in additional costs to date and estimates spending between £250,000 and £300,000 next year.

He said: "So we're trying to assess everything, but there is not only the lack of guidance, but trying to crystal-ball gaze a month ahead of the moment is high on impossible."

Hopkins added his college had donated all their PPE on the assumption they would have until September to source replacements but had to buy it at "phenomenal prices" due to limited availability for the earlier return this week.

The college, which has eight campuses across the West Midlands, has also had to invest in signage, screens and soap as well as £130,000 on hand sanitiser and high-tech heat detectors that cost £800 to £1,200 each.

The move to remote learning has also incurred additional costs for software, online courses and laptops.

Lydia Devenny, deputy



chief executive of Luminate Education Group – which comprises four colleges and an academy trust – estimates that around £60,000 has been spent on PPE, signage to manage walkways and additional cleaning to get 2,000 learners back at a limited number of campuses this week.

It has set aside another £200,000 in the group's estates budget for extra PPE and cleaning across the rest of the year.

Devenny said the sum was "substantial" but added their financial health shouldn't be impacted too heavily as "we're a large group – our turnover will be about £100 million next year".

The college group is also providing protective screens for receptions and other counters in the colleges and campuses, different face masks for people exposed to varying risks, hand sanitiser and temperature guns.

Lewisham College's head of estates Michael Gayle described the extra costs to wider reopening as "astronomical".

To date, Lewisham has spent £9,700 on signage, £8,500 on hand sanitiser refills and stations, £4,800 on PPE, £4,500 on protective screens and £900 on an external security booth hired to manage a new one-way exit system (see pages 12-14).

Lewisham College principal Asfa Sohail warned there will also be ongoing additional costs in September for security, extra cleaning staff, consumables and the purchasing of further stock.

She said if the college had still been a standalone (it merged with NCG in August 2017) they would

have found it "really difficult" to survive owing to Covid-19's "significant" costs.

Zoe Lewis, Middlesbrough College's principal, said she had spent £100,000 on laptops and mobile phones to ensure all staff could work effectively from home during the pandemic, as well as £150,000 to date on students being able to do so.

The college has also set aside £80,000 to replace existing classroom desks with some that are more adaptable for varying social distancing configurations and £50,000 to adapt the campus with screens, signage, deep cleaning, sanitisers and PPE as well as water treatment due to an unoccupied building.

Lewis would like to ask the government to set up a fund to support colleges to implement these measures and added that it is also "important that we see a meaningful commitment to colleges and skills in any future Covid-19 skills recovery budget".

Hopkins believes assurances over guaranteed funding for the next year would be preferable to a social distancing fund, citing concerns that "the real killer" to South and City College Birmingham is likely to be losses due to a potential reduction in adult learning come September.

Similarly, Devenny said Luminate Education Group welcomed flexibilities brought in by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in regard to guaranteeing funding during the pandemic and the pause on audits. She would like those flexibilities to continue next year, as well as an increase in adult funding rates.

The DfE did not respond to requests for comment at the time of going to press.



Zoe Lewis



# Focusing on governance

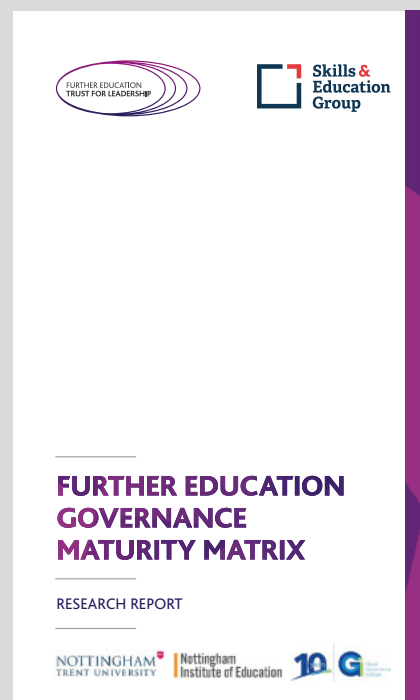
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## The Further Education Governance Maturity Matrix

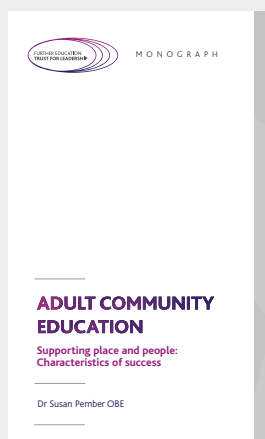
*The Further Education Governance Maturity Matrix*, funded by FETL and developed by the Skills and Education Group, the Good Governance Institute and Nottingham Trent University, draws on interviews with governors to explore what makes for good governance in FE and to ask how governance can be moved on to its next phase, what the report terms 'maturity'.

Dame Ruth Silver, President of FETL, said: 'I very much welcome this report that concerns a topic close to the Further Education Trust for Leadership's core focus and importance: governance. As the authors note, governance is one of the most challenging aspects of leadership in further education. It is also one of the least scrutinised and most poorly understood.'

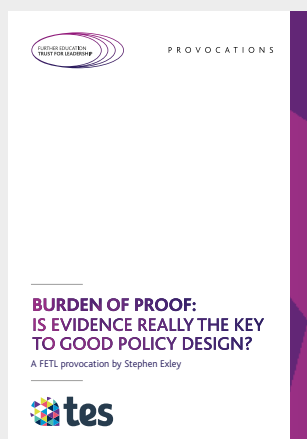
*Dame Ruth Silver is President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership*



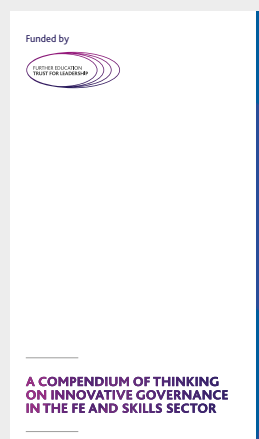
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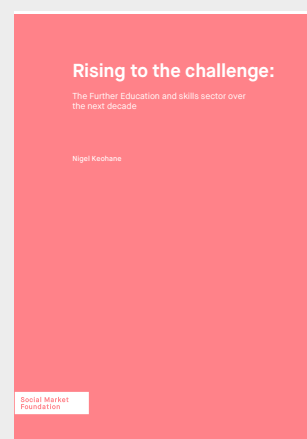
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# Minister forces all employers to drop PhD apprenticeship plans

BILLY CAMDEN

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The skills minister has rejected all plans for PhD-level apprenticeships after concluding that funding them from the levy would not provide "value for money".

In a letter to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education published and laid in parliament on Thursday, Gillian Keegan said the level 8 programmes are "not in the spirit of our reformed apprenticeships system".

Two PhD-level apprenticeships – for a clinical academic professional and nuclear technical specialist – have been in the works for a number of years after being developed by employers.

The clinical professional standard had progressed the furthest, having been officially "approved for development" by the IfATE.

But the institute itself previously questioned whether the programmes would be in the "spirit" of the government's new apprenticeships system.

The decision never to fund these level 8 programmes comes after the education secretary Gavin Williamson ordered a review of the level 7 senior leader standard that allows apprentices to gain an MBA. The MBA component is now set for the chop later this year.

In Keegan's letter she said higher and degree



level apprenticeships "continue to form an important part of our skills and education system, providing people of all backgrounds with a choice of high-value vocational training alongside traditional academic routes".

However, it is "important that levy funds are supporting those that can benefit most from an apprenticeship, such as those starting out in their careers or helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds to get ahead".

"While we do not yet know the full impact of the coronavirus, our priority is ensuring that apprentices and employers can continue to access high-quality training, both now and in the future," she continued.

"I do not believe that using levy funds for level 8 apprenticeships, which could result in a PhD, provides value for money, nor are they in the spirit of our reformed apprenticeships system.

"Therefore, I am writing to inform you that after careful consideration the department will not fund apprenticeships at level 8. As the powers to take decisions on standards development and approval reside with the institute, you will wish to consider whether you continue to invest resources in the development of apprenticeships at this level."

Keegan said she was "aware" that the employers involved have worked "hard developing not only these level 8 apprenticeships, but also a range of apprenticeships at lower levels that have

contributed to the success of our reforms".

"I want to thank them for their continued commitment to this vital programme."

A spokesperson for the IfATE said: "We accept the decision and will not support the development of level 8 standards at this time.

"We would like to thank the trailblazers for their hard work on the proposals. The institute has been as upfront and informative as possible with them on the funding issue. We requested policy guidance from the DfE and it is appropriate that this has now been issued."

Joanne Cooper, chair of the clinical academic professional trailblazer group, said the news "is disappointing" but the decision did not come as a total surprise.

"We believe that a career combining clinical and academic leadership at this level would provide much needed benefit to healthcare professionals at the start of their career, and to professional groups who have historically been disadvantaged from this career option," she told *FE Week*.

"However, we were aware at the outset that funding was not guaranteed and progressed on the basis of developing a national framework which have given us greater clarity and agreement regarding the knowledge, skills and behaviours of clinical academic roles.

"I am grateful for the support from Skills for Health colleagues and the openness that the IfATE has had along this journey."



Gillian Keegan

# How one college has adapted to welcome back more students

BILLY CAMDEN

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From front

Exclusive

On March 20 colleges closed their doors to most students as the country entered lockdown following the outbreak of Covid-19. But this month one of the biggest steps was taken to ease restrictions: the phased return of schools and other education providers. Billy Camden visits *FE Week's* local college in south-east London to see first-hand how they have adapted

"Excited but nervous" was how 19-year-old Samir Ibrahim felt when he was asked by his lecturer at Lewisham College to return for face-to-face contact after 12 weeks of learning from home owing to a global pandemic.

But the first-year BTEC level 3 IT student says he was quickly put at ease as he walked through the campus doors on Tuesday and saw the lengths staff have gone to in order to keep him and his classmates safe.

Entrances are now covered with two-metre social distancing signs and arrows directing visitors through a new one-way system.



Social distancing markers



Some of the first students to return to Lewisham College since lockdown

Hand sanitisers are on almost every corner, plastic see-through shields protect the reception area, social spaces, including the canteen, are closed, contactless payment has been fixed on items such as vending machines, while communal water fountains have been removed.

## "You can never replace the human touch"

Staff and student entrances have been separated to reduce pinch points, while learners now leave campus from a new exit that will be monitored by a security cabin which also keeps track of who is on site through contactless IDs.

And when it comes to the classroom, each one has a new capacity number based on floor space which tells students and staff how many people are allowed in at one time. Computers and work stations have been separated to the required social distance length, and wipes are provided to clean

OFFICE  
HAS BEEN  
CLEANED

equipment before and after each use.

Lecturers are also asked to arrive early to open the door to allow students in straight away without them all having to touch the handle and to prevent queuing.

The people largely behind this transformation are the college's head of estates, Michael Gayle, director of health and safety Wesley Mason, and facilities site manager Dean Enever.

Their team has been on site around twice a week since lockdown to carry out deep cleans and to ensure the college would be

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



## News

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## CONTINUED

ready to reopen at any time.

After greeting me and before we tour the campus they talk me through their comprehensive 30-point risk assessment that every visitor has to read and sign before coming on site. They are planning to create Covid-19 induction videos for life on campus come September.

Student and staff safety are of paramount importance to principal Asfa Sohail, who has spearheaded the college through the coronavirus outbreak after joining just over a year ago from Havering College, where she was a vice principal.

But returning to campus is a "scary" and "worrying" prospect for many staff and students, a fear that was heightened after three Lewisham College staff members died in recent months after the outbreak of the virus.

"It is very tragic, and we had that as a knock-on impact on people. So we have to be very careful and cautious," Sohail tells me, adding that 40 per cent of her staff and 82 per cent of her students respectively are black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) – the group of people for whom Covid-19 death rates are highest in England.

"Considering a large chunk of our staff



Samir Ibrahim

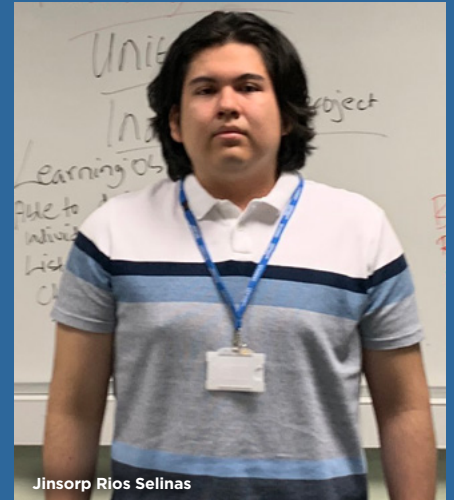
are BAME, reopening is really a concern for us as an organisation and for our unions as well.

"The risk assessment at an individual staff and student level is a time-consuming job, but we are doing it because it's absolutely essential."

The college has around 6,000 learners in total, around 1,175 of whom are aged 16 to 19.

While government guidelines state that colleges can welcome back a quarter of their younger students for face-to-face contact from June 15, Sohail says she will not go "anywhere near" that number.

The college expects fewer than 20 students each day from now until the summer break.



Jinsorp Rios Selinas

On the day I visit, seven are being taught in one classroom from 09.30am to midday, while a second group of seven will replace them on campus in the afternoon slot, leaving by 3.30pm to avoid using public transport in the rush hour. A small group of plumbing apprentices are also on site to complete practical assessments. Just five

**"It is much better to come here than being at home with online classes. It is easier to interact with our lecturer"**

teachers will return for teaching this week.

"Gradually numbers will increase but we're focusing only on those learners who need extra help or to complete their practical assessments to progress next year," Sohail explains.

Those who are coming back are pleased with the decision to return.

Samir Ibrahim tells me: "I'm enjoying seeing my classmates again and catching up with our practical work, which is what we have all missed during lockdown."

His peer, Jinsorp Rios Selinas, also aged 19 and on the first year of a BTEC level 3



Asfa Sohail

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



## CONTINUED

course in IT, adds: "I was feeling worried because it is risky to come here, but the measures the college has put in place have made me feel a lot more comfortable.

"We're doing the practical side of the course here which we can't do at home as we do not have the software.

"It is much better to come here than being at home with online classes. It is easier to interact with our lecturer and ask questions. It is good to be back."

## "There's no way all learners can be on college campuses next year"

As Sohail puts it: "You can never replace the human touch."

According to the government's English Indices of Deprivation 2019 statistics, Lewisham is the 63rd most deprived local authority in England (out of 343).

This is a challenge the college faced pre-Covid, but has been heightened this year as 40 per cent of Sohail's students are in what she describes as "digital poverty". These students have not been able to engage with online lessons through the pandemic as they



Social distancing in the reception area

do not own laptops and other equipment.

While the college has been "innovative" in its attempts to overcome these barriers, by, for example, using WhatsApp and printing out copies of textbooks and mailing them to students at home, it is an issue that is of highest concern to Sohail as she looks forward to a potentially bigger reopening in September.

"There's no way all learners can be on college campuses next year because we know social distancing will have to be maintained," she says.

"One of the models we're looking at is that we run the timetable as normal for 50 per cent of our learners who will come into college, and the other 50 per cent will be dialling in more.

"Now, for those 50 per cent to be dialling in remotely, they will need to have access to devices and digital connectivity, which many do not have.

"I'm asking every single forum, the Association of Colleges, our local authority, we're knocking at the doors of businesses to say 'if you are recycling laptops and computers, could you please donate to us so that we can reconfigure and give to our students?'

"That is my biggest worry for next term."

The wider cost of reopening, including paying for signage, cleaning materials and implementing social distancing measures,

was described by head of estates Michael Gayle as "astronomical".

To date the college has spent £8,500 on hand sanitiser stations and two different types of gel refill stocks (one with alcohol and one without), £9,500 on signage, £4,500 on protective screens, £900 on the external security booth hired to manage the campus one-way exit system, and £4,800 on PPE.

These costs, particularly for security, additional cleaning staff and consumables, will only increase come September.

And all of this unforeseen expenditure must come from the college's existing budget, as the Department for Education has said it will not provide any financial help in this area.

Sohail said if the college had still been a standalone (in August 2017 it joined NCG, one of the biggest college group's in the country) it would have found it "really difficult" to survive, because of Covid's "significant" costs.

Looking ahead to September, Lewisham College is planning for every possibility but hopes to be in a position to reopen its social spaces, including the canteen (with all of the required social distancing measures in place), as well as the hair and beauty facilities – provision which requires students to be in close contact.

But one thing is for sure, according to Sohail, campus will be a "very different place".



Social distancing markers

# Wages for young apprentices to be funded by combined authority

BILLY CAMDEN

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The mayor of Tees Valley has earmarked £1 million to pay the wages of more than 100 young apprentices in an effort to reverse the decline of starts as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Mayor Ben Houchen announced the fund for his region on Thursday after a recent survey by his combined authority found 69 per cent of businesses who responded had furloughed apprentices while more than one-third said they could no longer commit to employing an apprentice.

The money will be used to fund "100 per cent" of the apprentices' wages in their first six months of employment, and 50 per cent for the remainder of the apprenticeship, up to a maximum of two years.

The announcement said businesses who sign up to the scheme will be asked to pay the national minimum wage, rather than the national apprenticeship wage, where applicable, and the apprentices will also be employed for a minimum of 30 hours a week.

**"Unfortunately, many businesses are now reluctant to commit to offering apprenticeships"**

The fund will be made available to those aged 16 to 20 and applies to businesses in Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool.

It comes just weeks after prime minister Boris Johnson told the nation during a coronavirus briefing that young people "should be guaranteed an apprenticeship" after warning of "many, many job losses" expected



Ben Houchen

from the fallout of Covid-19. Details of how this would work or whether it is even an actual policy are yet to emerge.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers has since called on the government to set aside £3.6 billion, as part of an £8.6 billion post-pandemic skills package, to spend on subsidising wages for half a million young apprentices to protect them from redundancy.

At the end of May, the Department for Education published statistics that showed from March 23, when lockdown started, to the end of April, a total of 13,020 apprenticeship starts had been reported so far – half of the 26,330 reported for the same period at the same point last year.

Mayor Houchen said: "The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for businesses and local workers. As part of my plan for jobs, we need to make sure that our young people who are part way through an apprenticeship can continue with the qualifications, which will help them for the

rest of their lives.

"Unfortunately, many businesses are now reluctant to commit to offering apprenticeships to young people because of the uncertainty they are currently experiencing and as part of my plan to create local jobs for local people, I'm going to change this."

He added: "By offering almost £1 million and funding the salaries of more than 100 apprenticeships, we can make sure that our talented young people across Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool are getting the good highly skilled, good-quality jobs they deserve and are starting off on the road to a successful career.

"This has been a difficult time for everybody, but we need to make sure our young people are equipped to fill the skills gap which many businesses are crying out for.

"They do not deserve to be disadvantaged because of the coronavirus – they are the workers of the future and we need to do all we can to support them."

A photograph of three young women with long hair, smiling and working together on a project. They are in a classroom or workshop setting with various materials and equipment visible in the background.

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# NHS apprenticeship tender for level 2 administrators

BILLY CAMDEN

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Health Education England (HEE) is to spend up to £100 million on delivering an NHS-specific level 2 apprenticeship for administrators.

From July 31, all starts on old-style apprenticeships known as frameworks will be switched off to make way for the final transfer on to new employer-led standards.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has repeatedly and controversially rejected requests from more than 100 employers, including the NHS, for a level 2 business admin standard to be created, despite the popularity of its framework equivalent.

*FE Week* reported in March that some NHS trusts had found that the level 2 customer service practitioner standard could be used instead, which was backed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. But HEE warned at the time that it could only work for a "limited number of job roles".

HEE has now launched a tender for a training provider to adapt the level 2 customer service standard and then deliver the "bespoke" programme for NHS apprentices from August 1.

The procurement says: "The level 2 business administration apprenticeship framework has been a vital entry-level route into the NHS for many years. With the removal of this framework from July 31, 2020, and no direct replacement apprenticeship standard, HEE wants to ensure that the NHS can still offer a level 2 programme to attract new talent into the NHS and also offer existing staff the opportunity to move into administration roles.

"HEE are therefore launching a national procurement for an NHS-specific level 2 customer service practitioner apprenticeship



standard and welcome bids from national and regional providers to deliver a bespoke programme that will cover the wide range of administration and patient-facing roles in the NHS from August 1, 2020."

The tender continues: "HEE, on behalf of NHS (and other public sector) employers nationally, are looking for suitably qualified apprenticeship training organisations to adapt the customer service practitioner (level 2) standard to reflect the business and operational needs of health and social care, whilst fulfilling all the requirements of the standard.

"This may be either national providers, or a mix of national and regional (including some NHS main providers), and could be either fully delivered by the training provider, or delivered in partnership with the employers where that capability and wish to do so exists."

HEE, which is an executive non-departmental public body of the Department

of Health, added that it will be willing to work with the successful provider to develop and adapt content, but the majority of that work will be expected to be carried out by the provider.

The latest proposal for a business admin level 2 standard was submitted by employers in February but was rejected outright by the IfATE.

The institute claimed the proposal did not meet the required length or quality of an apprenticeship standard, and its chief executive, Jennifer Coupland, told *FE Week's* Annual Apprenticeship Conference the next month that signing off on the standard would "undermine" efforts to create a "well-regarded" programme.

During an *FE Week* webcast last week, she added that she did not regret the decision.

HEE's tender has a closing date of July 10. Providers can bid for the four-year contract by visiting <https://bit.ly/3hDw6ib>

# Free adult digital skills courses go live on August 1

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU

BILLY CAMDEN

NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The government has confirmed that free digital skills qualifications for adults will finally be launched from August 1 – but only one awarding organisation has gained approval to offer them so far.

Adult education budget funding rules for 2020-21 were published on Wednesday and include a “legal entitlement to full funding” for “essential digital skills qualification, up to and including level 1”.

It means all adults without basic digital skills will be able to enrol on the new qualifications free of charge in two months’ time.

The sector has been waiting for this rollout since it was first announced by the government in October 2016. It became law in April 2017 as part of the Digital Economy Act and puts the subject on a par with English and maths.

New “national standards” for digital skills have since been created, which awarding organisations (AOs) must use to develop their qualifications.

However, each AO must go through a “technical evaluation” process with Ofqual to ensure they are “valid and fit for purpose” before being made available to colleges and training providers to deliver.

The exams regulator published an update on Tuesday which revealed that none of the nine AOs developing these qualifications have gained Ofqual’s approval so far.

But two days later they updated the progress page again to show that one – Gateway Qualifications – has now passed the process after reaching stage 5 on a 5-point scale.

Ascentis looks like it will be next in line to get its qualifications signed off, having reached stage 4, while Pearson has the lowest score of stage 1 – which means the awarding organisation is “yet to submit materials to Ofqual for technical evaluation”.

A number of the others appear to have had their qualifications knocked back by Ofqual.

FE Week asked all eight of the AOs that are yet



to gain Ofqual’s approval if they are confident of achieving sign-off by August 1, but only one of those that responded would comment directly on the timeline.

Lucy Ireland, managing director of BCS Learning and Development Ltd, said: “We are finalising our development of the BCS for Life and BCS for Work qualifications for submission to Ofqual. We are completing our updates, through the technical review, and will be resubmitting shortly.

“Ofqual has been more than helpful in giving us feedback and support; we have shaped our qualifications accordingly, to ensure they are to a high standard that meets the needs of the target audience. We’ll continue to work closely with Ofqual and expect to launch as planned in the early autumn.”

NCFE said they are “currently undertaking Ofqual’s technical evaluation process”, while OCR said the process for approval “is progressing normally”.

Ascentis, OCR, Pearson, NOCN, OCN and The Learning Machine did not respond to requests for comment.

A spokesperson for Ofqual said their technical evaluation process is “not about introducing barriers but ensuring the quality that we would all want and expect from these new and important qualifications”.

“The technical evaluation process in place for essential digital skills qualifications helps ensure provision is right before it’s delivered in centres and the approach taken is in line with that adopted for awarding organisations wanting to offer reformed functional skills qualifications in maths and English,” they added.

“Despite the significant impact of Covid-19, one awarding organisation has already completed this process and we expect others to do so over the summer.”

However, development timescales, which “differ between awarding organisations”, will “continue to be affected by the outbreak of coronavirus and submissions for technical evaluation subsequently delayed while awarding organisations prioritise their response to the pandemic”.

Carol Snape, chief executive of Gateway Qualifications, said: “We are delighted that we have now passed Ofqual’s technical evaluation and can make our essential digital skills qualifications available to providers.

“It has been a rigorous but supportive process to reach this stage and we have found Ofqual very responsive when we have requested engagement with them, especially given the extraordinary demands on them over the past few months.”



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Introducing...

# MATT O'LEARY

Professor of education,  
Birmingham City University



**'Removing observation  
forces people to reflect  
deeply on their practice'**

**JESS STAUFENBERG**  
**@STAUFENBERGJ**

**Matt O'Leary transformed the use of lesson observations in FE, despite sector leaders who were initially reluctant to listen. And he's far from finished, as Jess Staufenberg discovers**

Few academics can point to a seismic change in Ofsted's approach to further education and say

"I did that". Matt O'Leary is probably as close as it gets.

The professor of education at Birmingham City University, whose roots are as an ESOL teacher and teacher-trainer in FE colleges, hasn't looked back since his mid-30s and his PhD on lesson observations. In 2013, two years after he finished his doctorate, he produced a report for the University and College Union with the unassuming title "Developing a National Framework for the Effective Use of Lesson

Observation in Further Education". By 2014, a senior Ofsted bod was tweeting: "Ofsted is to pilot FE and skills inspections without grading teaching in individual sessions". Graded lesson observations were gone the next year.

O'Leary is unassuming about the impact of his research - and even more cautious about how much the policy change has translated into practice within colleges. He comes across as remarkably even-handed, with a sharp, even playful, eye for detail. "One thing to remember is

# Profile

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there was a lot of political brokering going on. While I like to think my research influenced their policy direction, I'm not that naïve that I don't also realise there were a lot of spats... Ofsted partly needed to ingratiate itself to the profession."

Yet all the news stories cited O'Leary's research as prompting the change. To those who hailed the removal of graded lesson observations as a "great victory", he has warned "repeatedly, that we're still in a position where the vast majority of colleges adopt a performance management approach to observation that categorises lecturers in some way."

"There is progress, but this is a slower burner."

O'Leary describes his backstory with a light touch. He was born in Birmingham to Irish parents. His three sisters had one bedroom, his parents the other and he had the box room. He was "banished" from intruding on his sisters' space and spent his primary years "obsessed with football" and "getting in trouble" with his headmistress, who in 1970s Birmingham appears to have been handy with a slipper.

The city also had a darker side: as an Irish family in England during the Troubles, they were often targets of discrimination. "I remember the first time I saw my mother cry when we went through a week of having the milk bottles on the doorstep destroyed. I also



O'Leary with Spanish students at a summer school, 1993

remember people referring to me as 'Paddy' and thinking, 'why are they saying that to me?'"

He developed an ear for languages at secondary school. He recalls a French class going through declensions of *être*. "We got on to 'nous sommes' and the teacher, who was from Surrey, asked if anyone knew what it

meant. The boy next to me says 'wim, Miss'. She says, 'sorry?' and he says 'wim!' and she's confused. He gets really frustrated and says 'we am, Miss!'" O'Leary chuckles happily as he remembers the Black Country dialect of his youth.

He then headed to the University of Southampton to study Spanish and French, the first in his family to go to university. None of his sisters and neither of his parents had higher education: his father was a lorry driver and his mother worked part-time in a newsagents.

A stint in Mexico as a language assistant led to a PGCE from Birmingham City University and four years teaching English as a foreign language in the Mexican city of Toluca.

O'Leary, who had been boxing since his teens, relates with delight bumping into the Mexican world champion Julio César Chávez. In fact, he seems a master of telling a good tale – a master of observation, you might say.

## "There was a lot of political brokering, a lot of spats going on"

Perhaps my favourite comes from his first job back in London in 1996, where he taught a post-16 English access course to Greek and Cypriot students. He tells me of the day he took the cohort to an exam hall. "Within five minutes, the invigilator came out



O'Leary on holiday at Butlins, 1980



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looking furious, saying ‘your students are a disgrace – they’re copying!’ I went in to talk to them and they were completely taken aback, saying ‘what’s the big deal, we’re sharing with each other?’” He hoots with laughter. “It was completely culturally different for them. We just didn’t realise.”

An abiding interest in how humans understand each other seems to make O’Leary tick. Both as head of department for ESOL at a FE college near London, and later as a teacher-trainer at City College Coventry, he revelled in classes filled with multiple cultures and viewpoints.

“From a teaching perspective, it’s like a dream, really. When you set up activities for them you’ve got a headstart, because they have a natural curiosity to find out about each other’s lives.” O’Leary taught and trained teachers to educate everyone from refugees and asylum seekers to au pairs, retired headteachers and vicars. Among the melange, he noticed lecturers’ anxiety about graded lesson observations (internal or for Ofsted inspections). It was soon to become his life’s work.

The practice has a long history. An unloved 1 to 7 grading system was in force under

the Further Education Funding Council’s inspectorate. Similar guises were continued by the Adult Learning Inspectorate and then Ofsted – often so the inspectorate could check the college’s self-assessment, as well as the supposed quality of teaching.

O’Leary’s surveys for his UCU research in 2012 unleashed a tide of frustration. About 1,600 respondents wrote more than 100,000 words in the comments’ box. “The answers ranged from several words to three to four pages. I had to take a moment and step back,” he says. “I thought, the fact they’ve responded with such volume means this is something the sector feels really strongly about.” His report concluded that the views of participants were “divided” between lecturers who criticised the “counterproductive consequences” and senior managers who praised the benefits. O’Leary recommended the sector find “alternative approaches to the use of observation”, which “prioritised improvements in teaching” and which “severed the link” between observations and capability procedures.

This “divide” was soon replicated in the reception of his report. Writing in *FE Week*, Phil Hatton, a former inspector, was not

happy that more lecturers than college leaders were interviewed. “If you cannot put on a performance without notice, there has to be something very lacking in your ability.”

## “Most colleges still adopt a performance management approach to observation”

Meanwhile O’Leary recalls presenting his results to the Association of Colleges’ annual conference in Birmingham. “There was this stony silence. I could almost literally see people looking daggers at me,” he says, chuckling again. “I realised afterwards they weren’t ready to hear it.”

For today’s detractors, O’Leary puts it this way: “Your average main grade lecturer on a full-time contract teaches 830 hours a year. Under the traditional observation model, they might be observed for one of those 830 hours. Then quite an absolutist judgment is made, which could stop you getting a salary increment or put you in disciplinary proceedings.”

Today O’Leary is developing a middle-way compromise, which he calls “unseen observation”. With its roots in counselling practices, it involves a coach and lecturer meeting to discuss the latter’s aims and activities for a lesson, and afterwards to discuss what went well or badly. “The very fact of removing the act of observation makes an incredible difference,” he says. “It forces people to reflect really deeply on their practice.” A highly skilled “unobserver”, however, is crucial.

O’Leary seems to present a powerful lesson: be always interested in the perspectives and experiences of others. It will make you a better observer.



O’Leary meeting professional boxer Julio César Chávez





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## RICHARD MOORE

Ex-Ofsted HMI,  
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consultant



## Remote inspections of 'paused providers' will be challenging, but possible

**Good planning is key, says Richard Moore, especially for off-the-job inspections**

An article in FE Week last week, "Frustration builds as Ofsted refuses to inspect paused providers", got me thinking about how feasible a remote inspection might be in reality.

I have worked remotely with a number of providers since lockdown, carrying out activities that would normally be part of a full Ofsted inspection - although, I should stress, they have not been "mock inspections" per se.

### "Providers have had to adapt their practice, so why shouldn't Ofsted?"

I also worked before lockdown with the provider featured last week and empathise with the financial concerns of new providers over not being able to recruit new learners beyond the six to 12-month window in which the follow-up full inspection should take place. I also recognise the uncertainty this causes for staff who, in most cases, will have been working hard to get their provision up to that magical "requires improvement"

grade they need at their next inspection. This gives them the green light to start recruiting apprentices again.

Let's look at this objectively. Is it possible to do a full inspection remotely? In my view it is. There will be challenges, but no more so than for providers since the lockdown. They have had to adapt their practice, so why shouldn't Ofsted - a valid point made by the managing director of one of the providers affected.

The biggest sticking point undoubtedly will be the inspection of off-the-job training. However, with good planning, it is perfectly possible to observe this remotely, particularly if it is one-to-one in the workplace.

And now that learners are allowed back into training centres, albeit with a number of caveats, this could easily be set up for group workshop sessions. Judgments about online learning, now so prevalent, can easily be made by talking to learners, viewing it and talking to managers about the content and sequencing (curriculum intent). And, lest we forget, inspectors often see no off-the-job training at all on a full inspection anyway, as its delivery doesn't coincide with the dates of the inspection, but still have to make judgments about its quality.

Progress reviews can be observed remotely - many providers record them for their own evidence-gathering. This can



be backed up, or "triangulated" to use Ofsted parlance, by looking at online copies of completed reviews. Again, Ofsted inspectors often don't get the chance to see any live reviews during an inspection if they don't take place on the days they are there.

Telephone interviews with learners and employers are easy to set up: many inspections already feature inspectors telephoning around both parties, having preselected who they would like to talk to to avoid any cherry-picking by the provider. Indeed, on many inspections, Ofsted inspectors do this ringing around from the comfort of their own homes. It's quiet, they can concentrate, it's time-efficient and saves on travel and accommodation. A good example of Ofsted already having changed its inspection practice for good reasons.

Inspectors can look at assessed

work online with members of staff remotely to judge assessment practice - what is known as "joint work scrutiny" - and can easily interview senior leaders, governors and staff about various aspects of leadership and management, including governance and safeguarding, as well as about curriculum intent. Other paperwork can be viewed online as required.

And if, at the end of all that, Ofsted wants any additional reassurance that inspectors have "got it right", it could always instigate a one-day follow-up onsite visit, say, six months after the remote inspection. This could involve one inspector evaluating some key lines of enquiry, either specific to that provider or generic to all as per the three themes for the original short monitoring visit that led to the "paused inspection" in the first place.



## BEV JONES

Chief executive,  
Career Colleges  
Trust



## What might a virtual industry placement project look like?

**The nature of work was forecast to change well before the virus hit. So instead of thinking in terms of 'lost months', let's take this opportunity to provide students with experience of the new workplace roles, says Bev Jones**

There's no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic is having a hugely negative impact on young people's education. While the focus remains on getting children back into school and college safely, those of us in FE realise that there will be many wider implications for post-16 education.

Industry placement plays a vital role in preparing young people for work. The work we do with our Career Colleges has real-life interactions with employers at its heart – but the lockdown has brought many physical placements to a standstill. With more employees working remotely and social distancing measures in place, employers have been understandably less willing and, indeed, less able to take students on.

However, we are encouraging our colleges to view this challenging period as an opportunity to change the status quo and to think outside of the box when it comes to providing students with authentic experiences of work.

The reality is that the nature of "work" was forecast to change well before the virus hit. Digital technology has been having a disruptive effect on every sector

of industry for some years. The inevitable consequence of this is that businesses will change the way they operate. The Bridging the Digital Divide report from the Open University last year stated that 37 per cent of workplace roles would change in the next five years – and this was without the impact of Covid-19.

The workforce of the future will need increased digital skills, as technology is already changing and impacting every job role. So rather than viewing the current situation as "lost months" – we should be looking on it as a great opportunity to provide students with the chance to experience the impact of these workplace changes first-hand.

Experiencing the physical environment of a good industry placement is of course important. But do not forget that it is also extremely beneficial for young people to have interactions with a range of employers. The Gatsby Benchmark recommends two encounters with employers, but the Career Colleges Trust believes students should have far more exposure to industry. Our colleges offer employer-led curricula, with employers engaging students via projects, masterclasses, webinars, as well as physical placements.

Now is a fantastic time for colleges and businesses to work together and develop virtual work experience programmes. These can be delivered effectively through technology that businesses already have established and many



employers are already doing this, including PWC and Lloyds.

So what might a virtual industry placement project look like? It might include:

- An overview of the organisation and sector
- Insight into different departments of the organisation: this is critical as it is not always covered in the curriculum
- Roles and careers in the company – hearing from employees on how they have progressed
- Overview of how technology is used in the industry and opportunity to use technology in a simulated environment
- Learning about sustainability and innovation through research projects – something that may be used as an interview task
- Shadowing online meetings with internal teams or external contacts
- Taking part in projects established before the placement and supported by an

industry mentor

- Digital challenges
- Learning about the recruitment process from HR teams and experiencing an online assessment centre and interview
- Webinar on impact of Covid-19 on the employer
- Virtual tours of facilities

This generic programme can then be adapted for individual industries, such as:

- A project to develop a menu for a restaurant and present online to the chef
- Digital design challenges in construction
- Project on assistive technology in healthcare

Crucially, developing a virtual industry placement programme will not only provide opportunities for students to learn from employers, but will help them develop many other skills. These include developing teamwork, problem solving, decision making, collaborative communication and writing skills. Most importantly, however, it will develop students' use of technology in a way they simply can't experience in a classroom environment.

So at a time when young people are facing huge challenges in terms of progressing into jobs, it's time to do things differently. Colleges must work with employers in a progressive way and make the changes needed to support our future economy.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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## TERESA CARROLL

National head of inclusion, Education and Training Foundation



## We must embrace diversity in the post Covid-19 world

**Let's learn from the pandemic and how it has brought social and economic inequalities into sharp relief, says Teresa Carroll**

More than 30 young leaders in the arts, entrepreneurship, politics, sports and more are featured in Tomorrow's leaders: a world beyond disability ITALS that was published earlier this month. They are all achieving personally, shaping their communities and generally creating a fairer society. And they all have a special educational need or disability.

### "We must listen and learn from people's lived experience"

The publication's inspiration came from two sources: young people telling us that too often society gets hung up on their "need" or "disability", rather than focusing on their aspirations and strengths, and the Power 100 list, ITALS which showcases the 100 most influential disabled people in the UK. The journalist, presenter and comedian, Alex Brooker, (presenter from *The Last Leg* ITALS) was voted No 1 in 2019.

FE is all about harnessing potential. However, as Dame Christine Lenehan says in the publication's foreword, "we still have a long way to go in creating

a world that is accessible and inclusive". Many of the young people in Tomorrow's Leaders ITALS talk about how they faced barriers along the way. As Jabe says (page 10): "I have developed resilience and am able to overcome challenges by accepting my disability and everything that comes with it." Sadly, "the everything that comes with it" is often the expectations and judgments made by others and wider society that can create the challenges in the first place.

So how do we get to a world where we begin to see others in their totality rather than particular characteristics? Well, it's not going to be easy. Our reflexive brain (amygdala) is programmed to make swift judgments (based on the evolutionary fight or flight principle). It is involuntary, outside our awareness, irrational, and reactionary, and is typically recruited because it is fast and effortless.

We therefore have to reprogramme our reflexive mind. It is programmed by habits, experiences and information. Becoming aware that this is how we're behaving is the first step in making a change.

We also must listen and learn from people's lived experience. Together we can then remove barriers and challenge structures and processes that tend to maintain and often reinforce inequalities. Jess, a law graduate

and motivational speaker, who is training for the Bar, talks about being referred to as a "triple minority" as a black woman with a disability. "My glass ceiling has triple glazing but, still, I intend to break through it, taking as many people with me as possible!" (page 24). Jess and the other young leaders in this publication show what can be achieved if those of us who work within the systems in place listen to what we're being told and work together to ensure processes and structures work for those they are supposed to serve.

Covid-19 has brought into sharp relief the structural social and economic inequalities in our society: FE providers have worked hard to mitigate them where they can. The Education and Training Foundation's three Centres for Excellence in SEND, which aim to support all FE providers to become inclusive organisations, highlight the reality of home life for many learners. The centres reported the

absence of technological devices and/or the lack of digital skills of parents and carers desperately trying to home school.

By listening to learners, parents and carers, FE and social care professionals worked together to find solutions, including access to grants to purchase laptops and, where not available, supplying laptops for home use. College technicians and teachers supported parents and carers to develop their skills so they might access and use the various digital platforms.

So let's bring what we've learned to the post-Covid-19 world and use it to create a society that is more caring and inclusive. Covid-19 has allowed us to recognise how we might create a world that serves and brings out the best in us all.

I'll leave the last word to Siena (page 32): "Never be ashamed of being different: it is this difference that makes you extraordinary and unique."





## READER'S REPLY

### Frustration builds as Ofsted refuses to inspect paused providers

Alastair Taylor, website:

It strikes me that if colleges and training providers can go to great lengths to take learning online, then the inspectorate should do the same. In these tough times we all must be brave in our approach to keeping things moving forward. As an ex TSC and ALI lead inspector I would definitely have been up for it, and looking back, my boss would have been leading it from the front.

Phil Hatton, website:

Yes, he would have been [Alastair], but that's because he, as chief inspector, actually went out on inspections in the FEFC, TSC and ALI. Ofsted has no real momentum from anyone with such a background. They really should have been using HMI to look at how education and training was being maintained across learning and skills as well as schools, rather than sit back doing nothing at home. This could have been the time that Ofsted surveys really impacted on the sectors that they inspect to help raise standards. I have been helping a range of FE providers with their observation systems for remote learning and assessment, with tools such as e-portfolios providing a wealth of evidence. They will be ready to evidence and evaluate how they supported learners in their 2019-20 SARs, come the end of summer and early autumn.

Darrell Bate, website:

I certainly think a virtual inspection should be considered. I work with a provider that only offers distance learning. At the last inspection, no learner was present – indeed, many could not even be contacted, as they are seafarers. That said, it sounds like all of these affected providers are still within the inspection cycle, so even in normal times may not yet have been re-inspected and are therefore no worse off.

Philip, website:

This article just confirms that Ofsted are still working in

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## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### Frustration builds as Ofsted refuses to inspect paused providers



Richard Moore, website

It really should be possible for Ofsted to carry out remote inspections of all these new providers who are unable to recruit new apprentices due to the outcome of their short monitoring visit. They would only need to get a 'requires improvement' judgment at their full inspection, which really is not that difficult unless a provider has done absolutely nothing to improve since their first visit. I have carried out what are, in effect, several remote mock inspections of providers since lockdown and it has proved to be very successful. I have been as assured of the accuracy of my judgments as I would have been had I been at the provider, face-to-face.

the Middle Ages. I cannot believe in this day and age that Ofsted still take no account of awarding body reports (which would confirm the quality of training), but instead are more concerned with safeguarding, financial management and company hierarchy. Why should an inspector have to see a learner or a premises "live"? Technology seems to be an accepted medium in court cases, job interviews, conferencing and the like. Makes no sense at all.

### The transition to our new normal will not be straightforward



Aptem [a company], Twitter:

These are impressive attendance rates and perhaps suggest that blended learning might be the way forward permanently?

### New free digital skills qualifications given ESFA green light but Ofqual proving a barrier



Tracey Boreman Murray, Facebook:

Just need an awarding body now!!!



# Bulletin

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## Movers & Shakers

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



### Martin Gray

Board member,  
Education Training  
Collective

**Start date** May 2020

**Concurrent job**

Director of Children's Services, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

**Interesting fact**

Martin has done both a skydive and bungee jump



### Carol Thomas

Principal,  
Coventry College

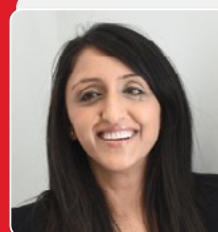
**Start date** August 2020

**Previous job**

Group Director of Curriculum and Performance, Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group

**Interesting fact**

Carol was awarded the 'most hilarious moment' on a trek to climb Mount Kilimanjaro after the camp was woken up one night by screams of 'get it off me' when a giant furry caterpillar decided to take a nap, stretched across her face



### Shru Morris

Governor,  
Blackburn College

**Start date** April 2020

**Concurrent job**

Chief Executive Officer, Napthens LLP

**Interesting fact**

She started life as a chartered accountant and had many education clients including FE colleges and academies

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

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