



# 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, SEPTEMBER 11, 2020 | EDITION 325

## INVESTIGATION: COLLEGE SECTOR RECRUITMENT HIGHS & LOWS AFTER VIRUS AND EXAMS FIASCO



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## T LEVELS LAUNCH BUT CLASSES NOT FULL



- FE Week survey finds 68% of enrolment targets missed
- T Level in digital is proving toughest to sell to students
- What did Chichester College Group do to buck the trend?

EXCLUSIVE

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## Taking steps; reducing suicide

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# FEWEEK

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# Student numbers soaring at new UTC

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The first new university technical college to open its doors for two years has been deluged with students, while its licensing body says that admissions across the network have shot up after years of under-recruitment.

Doncaster UTC has vastly exceeded its recruitment target of 160 students, with nearly double that number starting lessons this week.

The Baker-Dearing Trust (BDT), which licenses the UTC brand, told FE Week that this tallies with a significant increase in its colleges' total student population across England. It shared statistics which showed a 12 per cent increase as of this September compared with the same time last year, from 14,202 in 2019 to just under 16,000.

Technical colleges have struggled with recruitment ever since their inception in 2010, as highlighted in a report by the National Audit Office last year. It found that the 48 open UTCs were operating at 45 per cent of capacity at the end of January 2019.

BDT chief executive Simon Connell said this year's increase was an "excellent achievement" made through awareness campaigns such as online open days and greater publicity of UTC student outcomes.

He added: "It is also clear that, as the impact of lockdown is felt across the wider economy and students digest the summer examinations debacle, more young people are looking for an education which prioritises the skills and aptitudes they will need in their future careers rather than simply 'teaching to the test'."

Several UTCs have begun recruiting from the age of 13,



rather than their traditional starting age of 14, to try and boost numbers. Doncaster has started with a cohort of 13-year-olds.

Helen Redford-Hernandez, chief executive of the Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust, which now includes Doncaster UTC, said its opening "will provide a landmark event which signals the ever-increasing importance of a need for high quality, technical education". The college "will also be one of the first UTCs to open which is heavily oversubscribed".

Doncaster UTC, the first to open since North East Futures in 2018, will eventually move into a new, £13.5 million building, but at the moment it is teaching students at the nearby National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure.

There are three more UTCs in the pipeline. Last November, Energy Coast UTC applied to open two colleges in Salford and Carlisle, while WMG Academy Trust, which already has two UTCs, has applied for another in Birmingham.

Energy Coast launched in 2014 and is one of a number of UTCs enjoying an uptick in student numbers. The college said this was because it had now become an

established provider.

Cherry Tingle, principal of the Energy Coast, which was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted in July last year, said its overall numbers had risen by almost a fifth, from 301 in 2019 to 352 this year.

She put the rise down to "our now excellent teaching and exam results, the fact the vast majority, 90 per cent in 2019, of our students go on to apprenticeships, and the excellent links we have with employers".

UTC South Durham, an Ofsted grade 2 provider, has seen an even more impressive increase, with a 56 per cent boost on its 2019 numbers – up from 199 to 314.

After a couple of years of student numbers bobbing around the 200 mark, principal Tom Dower said the increase was because the college had become "established, with a really good reputation for technical learning".

He added: "It takes a long time for a new education institution to be widely recognised by parents, students, employers.

"This is particularly a factor when UTC catchments are so wide and parents, understandably, don't think that a UTC is available for their child if they live 40 miles away."

Students are joining the UTC from 45 schools across nine counties this year.



Simon Connell



# Colleges and ITPs miss out again on Covid relief funds

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Exclusive

A cash-strapped college is among more than a quarter of training providers to have had a bid for help rejected as part of the Education and Skills Funding Agency's second Covid-19 supplier relief scheme.

The news came as the country's public spending watchdog revealed that the total estimated cost of the ESFA's financial support scheme for apprenticeships and adult education had dropped by £117 million.

Bradford College, which almost went bust last year, had to make more than 100 staff redundant over the summer after its first application for apprenticeship relief was rejected – a decision the college's principal branded "short-sighted" in June.

The college submitted another bid in round two but this week received the "disappointing" news that it had again been refused.

A spokesperson for Bradford College told FE Week that they knew their bid was "unlikely" to be successful. They said: "We submitted our application based on our requirements for support over the coming months, as we work to recover and strengthen our apprenticeships provision and support our staff and students after a very difficult period.

"However, to be successful, the college needed to meet a set of criteria particularly



around cash in the bank on the precise date of the application.

"This is again a disappointing result for us. During the year ahead Bradford College, along with other colleges across the country, is going to need that vital support from the government more than ever as colleges bear the costs of taking measures to protect staff and students during the Covid-19 pandemic."

The ESFA's second round of supplier relief launched in June and allowed FE providers suffering from reduced learner numbers caused by the pandemic to bid for non-levy apprenticeship and adult education budget funding in advance of delivery for the period July to October 2020.

Data shared by the ESFA with FE Week shows

that there were 112 applicants, but only 83 (74 per cent) were successful.

Seventy seven of the total bids came from independent training providers and 20 of those were rejected,

while 35 applications came from colleges, of which nine were unsuccessful.

The agency said providers and colleges who failed in their bids did not "meet the ESFA's 'at-risk' financial assessment".

The ESFA's first supplier relief round covered the period from April to June. It resulted in 165 applications, a third (58) of which were rejected.

FE Week analysis shows there are 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.

The results of the second round of ESFA supplier relief come in the week when the National Audit Office revealed that the total estimated cost of the scheme had dropped substantially.

The NAO's "cost-tracker", which has been published to provide an independent summary of the estimated costs of the government's response to the pandemic so far, shows that the Department for Education first projected a cost of £144 million – but this dropped to £27 million by August 13.

The DfE did not comment on why the projected spend had fallen by so much at the time of going to press.



Bradford College

# ‘Raising awareness of suicide and focusing on its prevention is vital’



David Gallagher,  
Chief Executive, NCFE

While there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes towards mental health in recent years, many people remain reluctant to discuss their feelings when they are struggling.

A recent report published by the Office for National Statistics revealed that there were 5,691 suicides registered in England and Wales in 2019. This report shows an increment rise in the number of young people choosing to take their own lives, with statistics for both men and women under the age of 25 at their highest since the years 2000 and 2004 respectively.

With 80% of young people recently saying that their mental health has been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic, national awarding organisation and educational charity, NCFE, in partnership with mental health training experts, Big Dog Little Dog (BDLD), have launched a series of qualifications dedicated to suicide awareness and reduction.

Designed to destigmatise conversations around mental health and provide learners with the skills to face these conversations with confidence and positivity, the Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications are the first Ofqual-regulated Awards to be solely targeted at this sensitive and life-saving subject.

Built around BDLD's 'STEPS; Towards Suicide Reduction' model and developed in partnership with suicide survivors, the new qualifications will help learners to consider suicide risk and level of intent, and educate them on how to support individuals at risk.

"Raising awareness of suicide and focusing on its prevention is vital if we are to reduce the number of lives lost to mental ill health," said Kevin Moore, Co-Founder at BDLD.

"By moving conversations around mental health into the mainstream and providing people with the tools they need to identify suicide risk, we hope that our qualifications will go a long way towards reducing the stigma around suicide

and encourage more people to have open and honest conversations about their feelings and plans so they can access the support they need before it's too late."

To maximise the reach and impact of the qualifications, NCFE and BDLD have teamed up with award-winning video production company, LearnBox, to develop a digitised version of the Level 2 Award in Suicide Awareness to make it easily accessible to learners at any time, from anywhere and on any device.

"There is a massive stigma around the subject of suicide and mental health," said Lucy Dunleavy, CEO and Founder at LearnBox.

"Delivering a digitised programme ensures that we can reach a wide audience to educate as many people as possible on the importance of removing stigma and encouraging conversations to help save lives. The flexibility afforded by remote delivery also allows learners to absorb the information and interact with the module tasks at their own pace and in a relaxed environment, different from the traditional classroom format."

David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE, added:

"We're delighted to be working alongside the experts at BDLD and LearnBox to develop this crucially important new suite of qualifications. As an educational charity, we want to do everything we possibly can to make a positive difference in society. Once we understood the severity of the issue and that we could make a difference, we acted immediately. If we can be part of saving just one life, our investment will have been worthwhile. Hopefully, this programme will contribute to saving many more."

In order to evaluate the success of the qualifications post-launch, NCFE, BDLD and LearnBox have partnered with Katrina Thomas, a business psychologist from AELP, who will be measuring the impact of the qualifications within key demographics. Katrina commented:

"This initiative is absolutely vital to break down the barriers, such as the reservation to talk about mental health issues. I am confident that when measuring the impact of these new qualifications, the results will be very encouraging."

For more information, visit: [www.cache.org.uk/steps](http://www.cache.org.uk/steps)

# T Levels launch but classes not full

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Exclusive

From front

Colleges and schools have missed two-thirds of their T Level enrolment targets, with digital proving to be the toughest subject to sell to students, according to early findings from an FE Week survey.

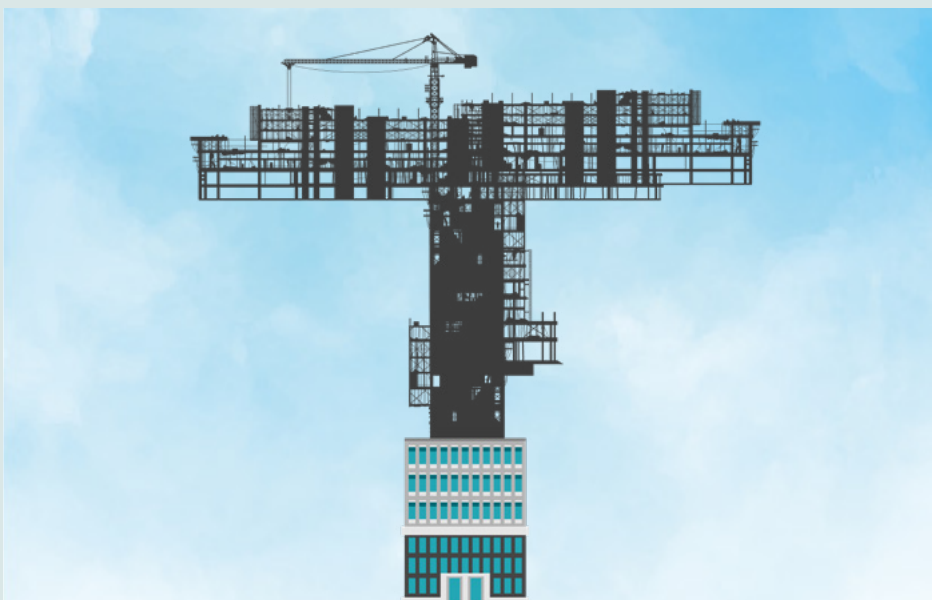
But leaders are still celebrating the initial figures, which could increase slightly as recruitment continues in the coming weeks, considering the impact of Covid-19 and the chaos of this summer's GCSE exams.

Skills minister Gillian Keegan said the early indications were that recruitment had progressed "well in the circumstances" and produced a "viable cohort" across the country.

The first ever T Levels – which have been five years in the making and described as the "gold standard" in technical education to sit alongside their academic equivalent A-levels – launched this month in three subjects: construction, digital and education and childcare.

In what is believed to be the first analysis of T Level recruitment, FE Week asked each of the 44 colleges and schools set to teach the new qualifications how many learners they had managed to enrol against the target they set in each subject at the beginning of the year.

Twelve colleges and four school sixth forms were able to provide breakdowns and, between them, they had set 28 different enrolment targets. Of those, 19 (or



68 per cent) were under target.

Colleges and schools found construction the easiest subject to attract students, followed by education and childcare (see table).

Digital proved to be the biggest challenge. Eleven of the 16 colleges and schools that spoke to FE Week are teaching the digital T Level, and nine of those failed to meet their "modest" targets.

Colleges said that there was an issue with young people's understanding of the careers available through a digital qualification.

When combining all of the data provided by the 16 schools and colleges, the figures show that 143 students have enrolled on construction courses against a target of 118 (21 per cent above target), 267 students have enrolled on the education and childcare T Level against a target of 289 (8 per cent

below target), and 127 have started a digital T Level against a target of 168 (24 per cent below target).

Some colleges were able to buck the trend, however, with Chichester College Group – which is based in Keegan's constituency – standing out in particular.

The group set a target of 12 students for digital but ended up enrolling 21. It aimed for 24 in construction but has taken on 43 students and, for education and childcare, it sought 18 students but actually enrolled 39.

The recruitment success at the group, which encompasses five colleges in the south of England, has led to it forming additional T Level classes to cater for the larger than expected cohorts.

A Chichester College Group spokesperson

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## Student recruitment at 16 T Level providers as at 9 September 2020

T-level route per provider	Digital	Construction	Education and Childcare	Total	
Over target	2	4	3	9	32%
Under target	9	3	7	19	68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>28</b>	

Source: FE Week survey



# News

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## CONTINUED

said they were “surprised” at just how well the recruitment had gone in each subject, and put its success down to an “integrated but consistent” marketing approach over the past year.

This included a “dedicated digital marketing campaign” that mostly involved paid-for social media adverts, targeted at 16 and 17-year-olds mainly on Facebook, as well as Google adverts.

The group’s “robust” school liaison team had also made pupils in neighbouring schools fully aware of T Levels over the past year, including virtually when the pandemic hit.

Chichester’s spokesperson added that the extra time that students and parents had to research T Levels over the summer, as well as the achievement of centre assessed grades – which were reportedly inflated in many cases – will “all have contributed to our recruitment”.

While FE Week’s survey offers an indication of early T Level recruitment, a full comprehensive view of demand is unlikely to be available for some months

to come.

Bridgwater and Taunton College, for example, said it was staggering its enrolment process this year because of Covid-19 and was therefore not yet able to provide any figures for T Levels.

Many other colleges told this publication that their enrolment processes will continue into late September.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, told MPs on the education select committee this week that the early response from his members was that there is “good demand from young people and they’ve got employers wanting to do work placements”.

He added: “It is a good start – but it is very low numbers.”

Hughes continued: “The really important bit is sticking at it and making it work and adapting it over time. It’s very easy just to kick them and say they are wrong.



Havant and South Downs College welcoming their first ever T Level students on Twitter



“Everyone needs to get behind T Levels because we need really good high-status technical education for young people with a sense of a broad programme which helps young people to develop a broad range of skills for their whole career.”

When the timeline for rolling out the

first three T Levels was announced, the Department for Education set a target of recruiting around 2,000 students in the first year.

In order to increase interest, ministers launched a £3 million “NexT Level” campaign in October 2019. This was controversially put on hold in the first few months of lockdown following orders from the Cabinet Office to focus adverts on updates about the coronavirus pandemic.

Answering a parliamentary question from Damian Hinds, a former education secretary, on early T Level recruitment numbers this week, Keegan said: “All indications are that recruitment has progressed well in the circumstances and a viable cohort of young people will benefit from taking these new, high quality qualifications, leaving them in a great position to move into skilled employment or further training.”

The skills minister added that having 44 colleges and schools teaching the first T Levels this September was “testament to the hard work and dedication of staff in these organisations”.

While T Level numbers appear to be getting off the ground slowly, it would appear recruitment of 16 to 18-year-olds across other level 3 courses in colleges more generally are booming, as FE Week found after speaking with seven leaders this week (see page 18).

## Combined enrolment figures from the 16 T Level providers in FE Week’s survey

	Digital	Construction	Education and childcare
Total target	168	118	289
Total actual	127	143	267
% achieved against target	76%	121%	92%

Source: FE Week survey



# Quality of an FE course should be judged by job outcomes, says minister

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The FE sector should judge the quality of its training programmes by the jobs that learners go on to do, skills minister Gillian Keegan has said.

Her comment came in the week that Association of Colleges boss David Hughes told the education select committee that college funding should shift to be based on outcome for students, rather than getting “bums on seats”.

Both Keegan and Hughes made their remarks after being asked what they were looking for in the FE White Paper, which is due for publication this autumn.

After delivering a keynote speech during the Association of Employment and Learning Providers’ (AELP) virtual conference on business recovery from Covid-19 on Wednesday, Keegan was questioned on the role of independent training providers in the White Paper and about the importance of level 2 provision.

The minister said that private providers were a “vital part of the infrastructure” of the sector, adding that there was “no limit” to what they could get involved in when it comes to technical education. She made clear that “quality is what counts”.

AELP chief policy officer Simon Ashworth pointed out that it was “important not to correlate low quality with low level”, to which Keegan hit back: “It is only you and your sector that do that.”

“I did a level 2, level 4 and 6 as part of my apprenticeship. I more than anyone know that, if the first rung is not there, you cannot move onto the second rung.

“There is this thing within the sector where people do sometimes equate levels with quality.

“I just want to make sure that, when somebody does get a level 2, it is valued by business. What we have seen, and this is something I have said in the past ... we did see too much low-level provision that didn’t



actually fit a business need, and that is where we need to focus and change.

“But how do we judge quality? That someone can get a decent job.”

Quality in the FE sector has traditionally been judged based on qualification achievement rates and Ofsted grades.

Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman has criticised the sector for focusing on enrolling students, rather than on where they end up. She said in January that a minority of colleges were trying to “fill their rolls and attract funding”, whether or not the programmes they offered “open doors for the students that take them”.

Keegan’s comments this week mark the first indication from the government that a shift to an outcomes-based funding model could be on the cards in the FE White Paper.

The Greater London Authority, which controls the capital’s adult education budget, has already made plans to switch its funding model towards payment by results, rather

than for the delivery of qualifications.

Speaking during Tuesday’s education select committee hearing, which focused on the FE White Paper, Hughes said that colleges were “accountable for bums on seats” but not for outcomes, which was what the association wanted them to focus on. He asked: “Are they delivering the right things to the right people to deliver the right outcomes?”

Committee chair Robert Halfon said that moving the focus to outcomes was surely something that the White Paper should cover, and suggested potential quality judgments such as: “Are the students getting good outcomes when they leave the college? Are the colleges meeting the skills needs of the nation? Are they helping the socially disadvantaged?”

Hughes said there was a whole “basket of outcomes”, but “the funding should be supporting the delivery of those outcomes, not bums on seats” which, he said, could deliver “good outcomes – but not always”.

# Apprentices to fill junior exec vacancies at DfE and ESFA

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Staff have been told that they must fill junior executive vacancies with apprentices, as part of a three-month trial in the Department for Education (DfE) and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Skills minister Gillian Keegan said the change in recruitment policy was to show that "we practise what we preach" when it comes to boosting the number of apprentices across the country.

The department is also "actively exploring" the development of a "DfE traineeship" focused on supporting more young people onto their apprenticeship programmes.

Both traineeships and apprenticeships are part of chancellor Rishi Sunak's plan to boost jobs, particularly among young people, following the Covid-19 pandemic.

In his summer statement, Sunak announced that, from August to January, any firm that hires an apprentice aged 16 to 24 would receive a cash bonus of £2,000, while those that hire

apprentices aged 25 and over would be paid £1,500.

Speaking at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers' Covid-19 business recovery conference this week, Keegan said the incentive payments meant it was "a great time for employers to offer apprenticeship opportunities".

She was then "delighted" to report that the DfE was "changing our recruitment approach to support the take-up of new apprenticeships", adding that "we will practise what we preach".

From September 1 to December 31, all junior roles at executive assistant and executive officer level within the DfE and its funding arm, the ESFA, will be filled using apprenticeships for a "trial period".

A DfE spokesperson said: "As the lead department responsible for apprenticeships, we are taking action to support more people to do an apprenticeship and gain the skills they need to start a rewarding career.

"We are starting with a three-month trial covering all junior vacancies in the DfE and ESFA. After the trial period is up we will review its effectiveness before deciding on our next

steps."

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education – the government's apprenticeship quango – told FE Week that, while it was in "close communication" with the DfE about the new apprentice recruitment initiative it had no current plans to take part in the trial.

A spokesperson added that the institute would "continue to look at our own approach and what can be done to employ more apprentices".

Ofsted, a non-ministerial arm of the DfE, told FE Week that it had no plans to take part in the trial. A spokesperson said: "Recruitment at Ofsted has been significantly reduced due to the pandemic, and it is likely to remain limited as we focus on our restart programme. However, we will continue to review whether any new vacancies are appropriate to offer as apprenticeships."

According to the DfE's latest data, apprenticeship starts have dropped by 47 per cent, from 101,300 to 53,530, between March 23 and July 31 this year compared with the same period in 2019, largely because of lockdown.

## 'Disappointing': Funding audits to restart immediately

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**Exclusive**

The Education and Skills Funding Agency's approach to restarting audits is "disappointing" and "untransparent", the Association of Employment Learning Providers (AELP) has said.

New routine funding audits, which were paused in March due to Covid-19, resumed remotely for independent training providers this month – but will remain on hold for colleges until November.

The AELP has taken issue with the last-minute timing of this decision, which was only communicated to providers at the end of August and announced publicly last week.

Following the agency's (ESFA) "unhelpful" approach, the association has insisted that providers "shouldn't be beaten up" for putting their learners first over any audit that

may now be sprung on them.

AELP chief policy officer Simon Ashworth told FE Week: "The agency telling providers on the last Friday in August about restarting in September certainly wasn't helpful. It's disappointing the ESFA didn't follow the transparent approach taken by Ofsted about clearly setting out their timetable and roadmap to recommencing activity, and in doing so giving providers more notice."

He added that, while the ESFA has a duty to protect public funds, he hopes that it takes a "pragmatic and sensible approach" when these virtual visits start. Providers "shouldn't be beaten up for trying to do the right thing by putting the learner first during these unprecedented circumstances, when official guidance hasn't always been in place".

The agency has said that it "recognises the challenges" that training providers face as a result of the pandemic and will be "sensitive to these in agreeing arrangements for both remote funding audits and site visits

with providers" in the future. Any provider selected for an audit will also be given a "reasonable notice period".

While the agency's guidance on audits does not provide a reason for the discrepancy between college and private provider restart dates, a spokesperson told FE Week that staggering audit periods was normal.

"Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, we had planned and were poised to start independent training provider (ITP) funding audits from April 2020 and college audits from September," they said.

"We have taken the same approach now that we can resume audits, by beginning with ITP funding audits in September and college funding audits in November.

"This scheduling ensures that we can complete the number of audits and deploy staffing and resources effectively. This is consistent with the approach we have taken in previous years and helps us to manage the workload efficiently."

# Public ownership of colleges is nothing to fear, Hughes says

BILLY CAMDEN

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Colleges have “nothing to fear” if they are brought into public ownership, the head of their membership organisation told MPs this week, although he refused to give a straight answer when asked whether he supports the potential move.

Association of Colleges (AoC) chief executive David Hughes was one of a number of witnesses to be questioned by the education select committee on Tuesday about the upcoming FE White Paper, which education secretary Gavin Williamson claims will be “revolutionary”.

One hot topic that led to a back-and-forth exchange between Hughes and Robert Halfon, the committee chair, was the issue of whether colleges in England should be brought back into public ownership. The option is being considered by the Department for Education, as revealed by FE Week in May.

After Halfon asked for a “yes or no” answer on whether he supports this option, Hughes said: “I don’t think it is a straight yes or no answer. Sorry, I’m going to be a politician on this. I think what we need is the right relationship. We need the freedoms and flexibilities. We need to get them as strategic players.”

The chair pressed that this was an important issue which would make a difference to college autonomy, control and funding. It was something that the head of the AoC “should be able to give a view on”.

But Hughes insisted that he was “agnostic”, stating that this was a



David Hughes

decision to be made “at the end of the White Paper by the ONS [Office for National Statistics], not a front decision”. He added that it “might be that they [colleges] become public sector” as they are “public ethos institutions”.

The AoC boss said that, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, colleges are in the public sector and are “thriving and doing well”. So there was “nothing to fear about it”.

He continued: “The thing is about the right investment and right relationship. That might mean they get designated ‘public sector’. I think that is fine but what we mustn’t lose is their ability to gain investment from employers.”

Colleges were technically brought out of the public sector nine years ago by the ONS when the

Education Act 2011 was introduced.

This legislation removed the need for colleges to seek

consent before borrowing from banks and limited government powers to intervene where a college is being mismanaged or is performing poorly.

Other witnesses asked for their opinion on colleges being brought back into public ownership included Kirstie Donnelly, chief executive of the City and Guilds Group, and Bill Watkin, chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association.

Donnelly said her “stance is that they [colleges] need to be more owned by the employer ... the employer has to have more say in what colleges deliver”.

Watkin said sixth form colleges, which have had the option of converting to academy status and therefore becoming publicly owned since 2015, have had a “positive experience” of the change.

But he stressed that it was “good to give colleges a choice about whether to join the public sector or not, because local context can be really important in the decision”.

The FE White Paper is due to be published this autumn.



Robert Halfon



# Catch-up funding for students who passed GCSEs

**BILLY CAMDEN**

**BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

The government has given in to pressure to widen the number of students eligible for 16 to 19 catch-up funding by including those who have already passed their English and maths GCSEs.

The change means that those students who achieved a grade 4, a pass, can benefit from the extra sessions if their learning was disrupted by the pandemic.

The government had previously said that colleges could only spend the funding on learners who had not passed the subjects. Only those with a grade 5 or above in English and/or maths are now excluded from the fund.

## “Providers should prioritise students that will benefit most from small group tuition”

The Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) catch-up funding guidance was updated on Wednesday and said: “Providers should prioritise support for students who have not achieved a grade 4 in English or maths.

“However, further to those students, if providers have funding available within their allocations they should consider whether any young people with a grade 4 also need catch-up support.

“Providers should prioritise students that will benefit most from small group tuition.”

The guidance reiterated that the funding should be used to “support the tuition



activity above and beyond the programmes of education already planned for 2020 to 2021”.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, welcomed the eligibility change. “I am really pleased that our ask for the eligibility to be extended on this has been heard,” he said.

“It gives more flexibility to colleges to meet needs for catch-up with students. Well done and thanks ESFA.”

Ministers unveiled plans for the £96 million one-off fund for 2020-21 in July, following a U-turn on their unpopular decision to exclude providers for those aged 16 to 19 from the £1 billion Covid-19 catch-up fund for schools.

The £96 million comes from a £350 million pot originally allocated for the government's national tutoring programme.

At the time, the government said the fund was to “provide small group tutoring activity for disadvantaged 16 to 19 students whose studies have been disrupted”.

Although the ESFA's initial guidance stated that funding would be allocated on the basis of the number of learners without an English or maths pass, there was no stipulation that the money should only be spent on those learners.

But updated guidance issued by the ESFA in August controversially said that “although the actual tuition does not need to be for GCSE English or maths, the students supported all need to be those who had not achieved grade 4 or above in at least one of those subjects at this level by age 16”.

The change was not welcomed by college membership bodies, however, and was branded “bureaucratic madness”.



# Team UK for EuroSkills Graz unveiled

FRASER WHIELDON

FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The elite team of skilled young people selected to represent the UK at EuroSkills in Austria next year has been revealed.

The 14 members of Team UK will compete in the city of Graz from January 6-10. They will be aiming for a place in the top ten of the 27 European nations competing in the event, having come ninth at EuroSkills 2018 in Hungary.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson told the competitors: "You should all be very proud to have been picked as ambassadors for our country."

"It's fantastic to see such a talented group of young people selected to represent Team UK."

EuroSkills, a companion to the biennial WorldSkills competition, promotes apprenticeships and vocational education and seeks to raise standards in a wide range of skills. It was due to take place this month, but has been pushed back to give authorities time to adjust the competition for Covid-19.

The organisers are considering Formula 1-style safety measures and crowd-less opening and closing ceremonies to keep attendees safe.

Team UK's presence will be significantly reduced from the 22 members that it had 2018, something that WorldSkills UK deputy chief executive Ben Blackledge said reflected the Covid-19 environment.

"We had to look at taking a team from a risk point of view, so we were looking at making sure we balanced the benefit of taking them



Hairdressing competitor Phoebe McLavy

for the young person, against making sure we mitigate all the risks around it.

"In previous years, we've participated in EuroSkills by looking where we have got potential to win medals and where we have got some development elements to the squad as well."

But this year, "we wanted a more focused team. So, we are looking purely at those we think have a strong medal hope."

Participating countries will be reviewing plans for how to run the event later this month, but Blackledge says the opening and closing ceremonies – usually lavish events with each country's team introduced to a stadium of thousands of roaring fans – will certainly "not be done in the same way".

A discussion about whether to allow the tens of

thousands of visitors who usually mill around the competition is on-going. One option is to organise guided tours.

Blackledge said that the EuroSkills organisers had been looking at what Formula 1 did to allow racing to get underway during the pandemic. Social bubbles, testing and strict rules on personal protective equipment are all likely.

WorldSkills International is "going to be watching" for lessons they can learn for the next WorldSkills tournament, which takes place in Shanghai next September. Blackledge said that there was "a real can-do attitude" and "an appetite within the membership to say this is still really

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Skill	WorldSkills UK Training Manager	Competitor	Age of Competitor (as of 10/09/20)	Competitor's Region	Competitor's Training Provider/ Employer
Architectural Stonemasonry	Marc Pate	Jordan Cliffe	20	London	Building Crafts College
Chemical Laboratory Technician (demo)	Dirk Wildeboer	Lewis Dymock	23	Scotland	New College Lanarkshire
CNC Milling	Mike Watson	Abigail Stansfield	20	North West (Lancashire)	BAE Systems
Cooking	Sean Owens	Sam Everton	20	Wales	The Grove
Electronics prototyping	Steve Williams	Rhys Watts	18	Wales	Gower College Swansea
Floristry	Laura Leong	Hannah Beckley	19	West Midlands	Warwickshire College Group
Hairdressing	Linzi Weare	Phoebe McLavy	21	Wales	Reds Hair Salon
Industry 4.0 (demo)	Marcin Regulski	Kamil Zmich	22	Yorkshire & Humber	UTC - Sheffield
Industry 4.0 (demo)	Marcin Regulski	Bradley Ellison	20	Yorkshire & Humber	UTC - Sheffield
Joinery	Andy Pengelly	Ross Fiori	20	North West	Carlisle College / Langley Furniture Works
Mechanical Engineering: CAD	Barry Skea	Lewis Batchelor	21	Scotland	New College Lanarkshire
Mechatronics	Callum Knott	Will Gale	21	East Midlands	Toyota Manufacturing Ltd
Mechatronics	Callum Knott	Josh Sibley	22	East Midlands	Toyota Manufacturing Ltd
Visual Merchandising	Julianne Lavery	Greta Volungeviciute	22	Scotland	City of Glasgow College

## News

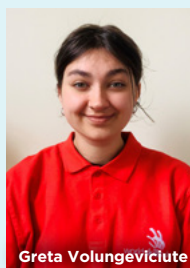
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Abigail Stanfield



Brad Ellison



Greta Volungeviciute



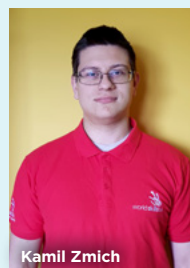
Hannah Beckley



Jordan Cliffe



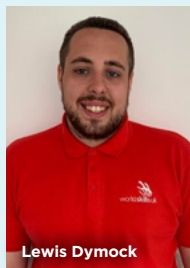
Josh Sibley



Kamil Zmich



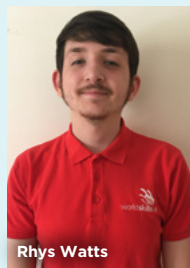
Lewis Batchelor



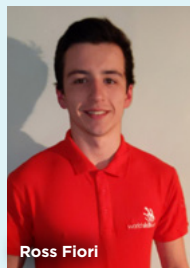
Lewis Dymock



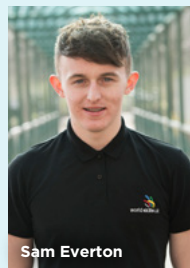
Phoebe McLavy



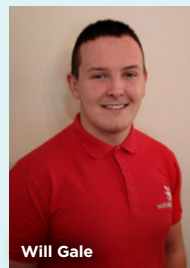
Rhys Watts



Ross Fiori



Sam Everton



Will Gale

## CONTINUED

important”.

He admitted that it would be “fairly naïve” to deny there was a possibility that EuroSkills could either be postponed again, or even cancelled. However he said he was “confident we are doing everything we can to make sure it takes place”.

He added: “We are really excited about EuroSkills and think it is even more important to be representing the UK, with Brexit and in terms of how young people will be absolutely essential in a skill-led recovery.”

Meet members of Team UK:

**Phoebe McLavy**

A key part of Team UK's strategy for winning medals at next year's EuroSkills is using proven competitors from WorldSkills 2019.

Phoebe McLavy, 21, won bronze for

hairdressing in Kazan, Russia, last year and is now working alongside her training manager Linzi Wearre at Red's Hair Company in Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire. She will be competing in the category again in Graz.

She says there was more pressure this time, as “people know who I am, but I am really looking forward to getting back on stage and doing what I love”.

She adds: “I have missed competing. When I came back from Kazan, there was a real big hype and then, going back to normal hairdressing, it was a bit of a downer.

“So, when I had the opportunity to do it again, I grabbed it with both hands.”

Competing has made Phoebe “really experienced, so I feel really confident in what I do”.

She is “not that worried” about travelling and competing abroad while the virus is still a danger, and adds: “We're in our own area while competing, so it's not like we're mixing with anyone.”

**Kamil Zmich**

One area where the UK is hoping to perform well this year is in the new discipline of Industry 4.0.

The name refers to, as competitor Kamil Zmich, 22, puts it, “a new standard of automation” – with much greater emphasis on information communication technology and working remotely rather than on the production line itself.

Being a new competition area, Kamil admitted: “We're not too sure what the competition is going to be, so we are looking to train in pretty much every aspect of what automation is.”

Covid-19 has meant that Kamil has not had much practical training using equipment and has instead focused on the programming side, with training sessions done over Zoom.

Now a maintenance team member for Toyota in Derby, Kamil started his WorldSkills career competing in national finals in Birmingham in the mechatronics category.

On his medal hopes for Graz, he said: “It's a new competition, so it is a level playing field. Whatever the outcome is, I'm always happy just to be competing and would be even happier if I get a medal.”

**Mike Watson**

A competition as rigorous as EuroSkills requires training equally intensive training – something made difficult when competitors and training managers could not meet during lockdown.

Mike Watson, the training manager for CNC milling, says that, from February until a month ago, all his training had been done online, through Zoom calls and Google Classroom.

There are two parts to CNC milling: programming, which can be done over the web, and the physical machining of components.

“We couldn't get on machines until last month,” he said, “because colleges have been closed down because of the pandemic.”

To get around that, he contacted a work contact, who provided a virtual machine on which Mike's two potential competitors could work.

Online training appears not to have affected the competitors, however. In fact quite the opposite. “They beat the score of a guy who did EuroSkills two years ago by around 25 per cent and they haven't touched a machine since February,” Mike says.

A former competitor at WorldSkills 2015, Mike, 26, eventually chose Abigail Stansfield from BAE Systems to compete at EuroSkills.

The decision came down to each potential candidate's “competition mindset” and so he selected Abigail, 20, who counts stock car racing as a hobby. “She has shown she can deal with pressure,” he says.



CNC Milling competitor Abigail Stanfield



# RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE BETTER

**Are you struggling with reduced teaching hours for your students due to sickness, lockdowns and self isolation?**

We've partnered with NCFE to develop toolkits to support 16-18 students on study programmes. They can also be used for adult learners and apprentices and they cover all the mandatory units. They include useful resources, activities and assessments that can be used in the classroom alongside normal teaching activity or to support flexible blended learning.

We have toolkits available for the following NCFE CACHE programmes:

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- Technical Level 3 Certificate in Childcare and Education
- Level 2 Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care

These resources can be purchased on a license and will be available in hard copy, editable PDF's or available to use as online learning.

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## Curriculum Manager – English

Job Reference: REQ0286

Competitive Salary

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We are seeking to recruit a highly motivated, forward thinking individual as our Curriculum Manager for English, to join our dedicated English and Maths team at our Aylesbury campus.

### What you need to be successful in this role:

- To have a drive, determination and a clear focus on high quality teaching and learning that will lead to high levels of achievement for learners
- To provide leadership and direction, giving team members

clear responsibilities and accountabilities that align to college strategies and values

- Although this is a management role you will be expected to lead by example and teach your students to a high calibre

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For more information or to apply for this role either visit our website [www.buckscollegegroup.co.uk](http://www.buckscollegegroup.co.uk) or email [hr@buckscollegegroup.ac.uk](mailto:hr@buckscollegegroup.ac.uk).



## Director of Data Management & Examinations

£42,835 per annum

East Durham College is looking to recruit to this senior role within the college, due to the retirement of the current incumbent of the post.

The Director of Data Management and Examinations role will have management responsibility for the effective operation of Learner Information Services, in accordance with the strategic direction of the College. They will ensure the College's Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returns are completed in a timely fashion, ensure all management information is readily available

and accessible and ensure the examinations department is run in a timely efficient manner and take responsibility for learner examination and qualification entries and certification.

Qualified to degree level with management experience in a similar role, preferably evidenced through a level 3 qualification or above. Extensive knowledge and understanding of ESFA funding requirements would also be beneficial in the role. Experience of working in an education setting is desirable but not essential.

For more information and to apply, please visit <https://www.eastdurham.ac.uk/job-vacancies>

Closing Date: Tuesday 29 September 2020

# Finance Director

Post Reference: MAN36

Hours: 37 hours per week Monday – Friday with flexibility to meet business needs.

Salary: £55,789 - £60,701 per annum which is Point M21 – M25 on the Management Salary Scale.

**Job Purpose:** To provide a comprehensive and professional financial management control service to Kingston Maurward College.

**Vision:** We are looking for an enthusiastic, self-motivated Finance Director to support the Principal in the strategic financial and risk management of the College. The post holder will work closely with the Strategic Management Team, Head of Estates, Marketing Manager, and Heads of curriculum departments. The role will lead the Finance Manager and Finance team to play a significant role in ensuring effective financial control and seek opportunities to improve processes and enhance services across the College. The person will be a confident, successful qualified accountant with a broad range of financial experience particularly in areas of management accounting, budgeting and cost control. FE experience is desirable and the post holder will be expected to have an understanding of the public sector.

**Status:** Permanent

For an informal discussion about the post, please contact Luke Rake on 01305 215123 during normal working hours.

**The Closing Date for Applications:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at 9:00am  
**Proposed Interview Date:** Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020

### To Apply:

Please visit the KMC website for a College Application Form and a full Job Description.

Please return the completed Application Form by email to [recruitment@kmc.ac.uk](mailto:recruitment@kmc.ac.uk).

Applicants for this position must complete a College Employment Application Form. CVs will not be accepted.

We are not accepting CVs at this stage from Recruitment Agencies.

For further details on application forms or the recruitment process, please go to our website [kmc.ac.uk](http://kmc.ac.uk). Alternatively contact the HR Department by emailing [recruitment@kmc.ac.uk](mailto:recruitment@kmc.ac.uk).







# NHC ACADEMIC COACHING TEAM

<b>Academic Coach</b> Full time salary - £27,000	Permanent post. Full time – but part time/term time working will be considered or a secondment will be considered for internal applicants.	Key job – to provide 1-2-1, small group and class support to develop the academic ability of our students.
<b>Academic Coach</b> Full time salary - £27,000	Fixed term post – until 31 July 2021 Full time – but part time/term time working will be considered or a secondment will be considered for internal applicants.	Key job – to provide 1-2-1, small group and class support to develop the academic ability of our students.
<b>Maths Skills Coach</b> Full time salary - £28,000 - £33,000	Fixed term post – until 31 July 2021 Full time – but part time/term time working will be considered or a secondment will be considered for internal applicants.	Key job – to provide creative and innovative small group skills sessions for our students needing resit maths & English.
<b>English Skills Coach</b> Full time salary - £28,000 - £33,000	Fixed term post – until 31 July 2021 Full time – but part time/term time working will be considered or a secondment will be considered for internal applicants.	Key job – to provide creative and innovative small group skills sessions for our students needing resit maths & English.
<b>Student Progress &amp; Engagement Lead</b> Full time salary - £27,000	Fixed term post – until 31 July 2021 Full time – but part time/term time working will be considered or a secondment will be considered for internal applicants.	Key job – to support our work developing our tutorial programme, lead the development of our work on monitoring progress of students, providing small group intervention sessions on pastoral support.

We are delighted to introduce our NHC Academic Coaching Team for this academic year who will work with our students to make sure they have every chance to be successful.

If you have a real passion for supporting and working with young people then apply now to join our team! Our ideal candidates will be outgoing, degree educated, a great communicator and organised.

The focus of the team will be to support our most disadvantaged students. This might be pastorally, academically or by helping them to improve their maths or English skills. The team will focus on 1-2-1 support, small group study sessions and involvement in cross-college activity.

We also have some casual/hourly paid opportunities so please contact us for more information.

For more information and to apply visit <https://www.nhc.ac.uk/work-for-us/our-vacancies/> today! Start dates – ASAP!

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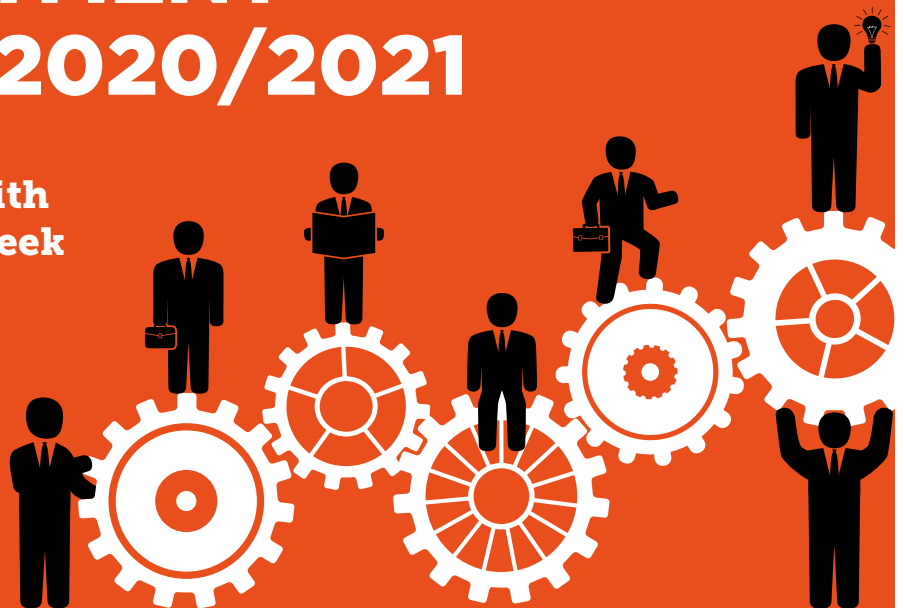
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## Feature

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# Now the real work begins... down to business after summer of strife

JESS STAUFENBERG

@STAUFENBERGJ

## From front

As colleges reopen their doors after a summer like no other, staff have had to cross their fingers and hope that new learners turn up on the right courses for them. The outlook was nerve-racking: schools that would usually hold students' hands until they reached college had not seen their pupils in months; employers normally offering apprenticeships were shutting up shop; then the exam results debacle saw students receive higher teacher-assessed grades at the 11th hour. So, after a mad few weeks of preparing sites, adjusting timetables and redeploying staff, how is the enrolment process now looking? As the numbers come in, Jess Staufenberg speaks to college leaders ... and finds a changed landscape.

## 'Shift up through the levels'

On August 17, the government announced a huge education policy U-turn. After a nationwide outcry, it abandoned the exam watchdog Ofqual's calculated grades in favour of teacher-assessed grades.

As a result, the GCSE grades delivered the



highest pass rates and the highest proportion of top grades seen in England in recent years. About 76 per cent of entries scored a "standard" pass 4, the grade needed to access level 3 courses in colleges. It was a huge, nine percentage points leap from the 67 per cent proportion of the previous year.

Every one of the seven college chief executives and principals to whom FE Week spoke reported a big rise in 16 to 18-year-old level 3 numbers. "We've definitely got more learners on those higher level courses than we typically expect," says Julie Mills, chief executive at Milton Keynes College. Currently there are 193 more learners on level 3 courses at the college this year compared with last year, with 145 more on level 2 and just 81 more on level 1.

Grant Glendinning, executive principal of NCG North, who oversees Newcastle and Carlisle College, has similarly seen a 10-15 per cent increase in numbers of students with standard passes or higher in English and maths.

"We're seeing many more applicants for level 3 courses, as they have got their grade 4 requirement," he says, adding that STEM and engineering courses are particularly popular as learners avoid hospitality, tourism and travel



Grant Glendinning,  
executive principal,  
NCG North



Michelle Brabner,  
CEO at Southport  
College

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# Feature

## CONTINUED

courses in the wake of the pandemic.

It's a "shift up through the levels," says Michelle Brabner, chief executive of Southport College – "particularly on vocational and technical courses. Our level 1 cohort has been much smaller."

As a result, colleges have scrambled to redeploy staff to the fuller courses. Christine Ricketts, chief executive at Brooklands College in Weybridge and Ashford, has added an additional level 2 group of about 20 learners and employed another level 3 lecturer. There are only five learners on level 1 hospitality and catering, a situation which she says is "unheard of".

She adds: "It's a bit of a timetabling nightmare, but we're managing."

The real concern, however, is whether students are arriving with the necessary English and maths skills to handle a level 3 course. College principals are clearly torn between real worry about this and wanting to honour the judgments of their colleagues in schools.

"I am worried that some students will be forced, by virtue of their awarded grade, to enter a higher level than they should be on," Stuart Rimmer, chief executive of East Coast College in East Anglia, says. "A functional skills course might be more appropriate for them, where it's about number handling and sentence structure. Instead they could be stuck doing quadratic equations."

As a result, Rimmer warns that college staff are "going to have to work harder to plan for differentiated learning".



Christine Ricketts, CEO,  
Brooklands College

Yet he notes an unexpected positive to this year's higher grades – fewer students will have to take English and maths GCSE re-sits until they pass (a condition of funding for level 3 courses).

He says: "One of the upsides of the grades inflation is it means students aren't taking re-sits they really don't want to. Some of it is torture for kids."

The other advantage for students is being able to head straight into a higher level course, which could "potentially raise aspirations".

Ricketts is also "less concerned about the level 2 to level 3 shift, and more about those in level 2 instead of level 1. If they've been on a level 1 programme, they develop skills, confidence, resilience – all those things they could transfer to cope better with level 2."

To tackle the issue, Brooklands College is looking at combining level 1 and 2 groups in hospitality and catering and motor vehicles courses. "With this model, they have got the flexibility of moving between levels without students feeling put down."

There is also a worry that some students have remained in schools during pure A-level provision. Claire Foster, who took up her post as chief executive of Boston College in Lincolnshire during lockdown, has seen AS-level numbers halved.

"Our A-level numbers are significantly down – even where they've got grade 3s, they seem to be staying in school more. I think there's a nervousness at the schools about parents, so they've been allowed to stay on. The worry is they may not cope with the A-level provision and we will be taking them



Stuart Rimmer, CEO  
at East Coast College

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Claire Foster,  
Principal and CEO  
at Boston College

in later."

At the same time, Boston College has nearly doubled the numbers on its healthcare courses.

College principals accept that they must honour the grades that students have been given. Brabner says: "We must be really mindful that these grades may be allocated, but they are still the grades the students achieved."

Rimmer echoes her. "I think, as a sector, we should professionally honour and respect school teachers' decisions," she says, "just as we've asked universities to respect ours."

Not all recruitment for level 3 courses is booming, however. An FE Week survey has this week found that colleges have missed two-thirds of their T Level enrolment targets so far (see page 7).

## 'Drop in apprenticeship starts and HE courses'

The area of provision that has undoubtedly taken the biggest hit is apprenticeship starts – not applications, but placements.

At Newcastle and Carlisle Colleges, Glendinning is predicting a 30 per cent decrease in apprenticeship starts this year, based on current job postings. Yet applications from aspiring apprentices are up by about 50 per cent.

"We do have far fewer employer opportunities," he says. "So we're looking at some innovative ways that we can develop

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## Feature

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## CONTINUED

pre-apprenticeship programmes for those young people, using the government's high-value qualifications list, for example."

Similarly, at Milton Keynes College, Mills is considering an apprenticeship theory programme for learners while they wait for hands-on placements to start. "It's so that, if the apprenticeship only starts in six to 12 months, the person has already done all that theory," she explains.

Not all have struggled. Foster says that apprenticeship placements remain strong. But many hope that the government's "kickstart scheme" announced last week, which funds employers to create six-month job placements for young people currently on universal credit, will prompt employers to make enquiries again.

For learners wishing to join higher education courses, however, it looks as though some colleges have lost out to universities this year.

David Lambert, deputy chief executive at London South East Colleges, said his team had seen "fewer higher education students enrol - possibly due to students receiving higher grades than they may have expected and taking up offers at universities, rather than choosing to study locally at college".

## 'Where are the vulnerable young people?'

The group of students that is bothering college principals the most is the one they haven't seen enough of - those at risk of being not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The majority of principals said enquiries from young people in this category seem to be down. It makes flexible timetables and course start times all the more important.

Rimmer says: "The student group I'm going to worry about are those who've not turned up yet. There's a group of NEET learners who will have been mostly cut off from school since March. That's a lot of disengagement. We're behind the curve with that group arriving."

Mills adds that, without summer schools and buddy days, it has been tougher than usual to get the less engaged learners to turn up this month.

Adults, meanwhile, seem to be less willing to take on loans, but are still signing up for courses. "We have seen a significant drop in the number of learners taking out loans, with far more self-paying," Lambert explains. He suggests that people may be wishing to avoid debt.

Online adult provision numbers have also risen across several colleges as people anticipate a potential second lockdown.



David Lambert,  
deputy CEO, London  
South East Colleges

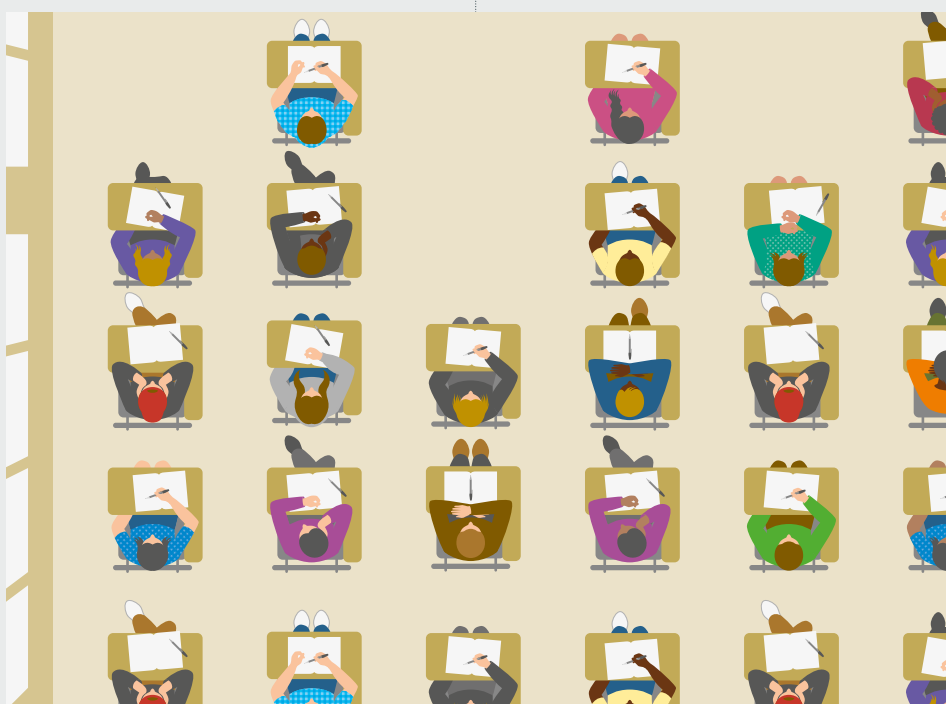
## 'Going forwards'

While college leaders tell FE Week that they are grateful for the £150 "tutoring fund" announced in July for each learner who has not passed English or maths GCSE, the majority warn that it will not be enough. Brabner, whose college is expecting about £190,000, says: "It's not an insignificant amount of money, but we've had very little to support us through lockdown, so it's whether this will be enough to cover everything. We will need to do a lot in terms of mental health."

Overall, however, the sector can breathe for the moment - total enrolment numbers look steady. Colleges have always had to be flexible about courses and timetables, and in this sense leaders only stepped up this year with a skill that they demonstrate every year.

The biggest remaining issue is that a certain cohort of disadvantaged students is quite clearly still left somewhere out in the cold. Alarm bells should be ringing at the Department of Education.

Meanwhile, principals are looking ahead to a year packed with potential - and change. As Ricketts says: "This year, one of our key actions is to really reflect on the lockdown, and think about what worked well and what we want to learn from. And then be flexible going forwards."





# Taking steps; reducing suicide



**The number of suicides continues to rise, with 1 in 5 of us suffering from suicidal thoughts.**

Suicides may not be predictable, but they **are** preventable. High quality education can raise awareness, and equip people with the skills to connect with those at risk.

**Together we're moving forward with suicide reduction; one step at a time.**

We've collaborated with mental health training experts to bring you a package to help save lives. This includes the first regulated awards in the UK, **designed to raise awareness and reduce suicide**, and high quality digital learning resources to support delivery.

**Find out more and make a difference.**



[cache.org.uk/steps](https://cache.org.uk/steps)



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## Opinion

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## ANNE MURDOCH

Senior advisor for college leadership, ASCL



## A financial tsunami is now engulfing colleges

**The government must budge on its refusal to reimburse colleges for COVID-related costs, writes Anne Murdoch**

The start of the autumn term is always hectic for further education colleges with recruitment of new students and induction into their courses. This year, it is accompanied by a financial tsunami triggered by coronavirus.

College leaders are having to cope with the reduction in apprenticeship starts in some industry sectors, the loss of commercial business income due to lockdown, as well as having to put in place extra, very costly measures needed to make the start of term safe for everyone using their estates.

**“Colleges have spent tens of thousands, to hundreds of thousands of pounds”**

At the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), we have been monitoring the increases in costs to both schools and colleges as we become more and more concerned about the rising financial burden of Covid-related measures on education.

It is ASCL's view that all

additional coronavirus-related costs must be reimbursed by the government.

To establish the extra costs involved, ASCL has recently asked school and college leader representatives to tell us the financial impact of the pandemic, including the additional measures needed to ensure safe opening this autumn.

The answers back so far range from tens of thousands of pounds, to hundreds of thousands of pounds depending on size and context. This is not peanuts.

Measures include handwashing stations, higher catering charges because of longer break rotas, increased cleaning contract hours and additional cleaning materials. There are extra costs for key additional posts, such as counselling for those whose mental health has been affected and learning support staff for students disadvantaged by Covid, and for additional transport where this has had to be sourced to distance students.

In addition, in some cases there is the impact of delayed capital works, repairs, and maintenance which have incurred extra costs from contractors.

In the further education sector, where some colleges were already struggling financially before the Covid lockdown, this significantly ratchets up the pressure.

We have to ask: how long can education and skills continue to cope with finding the extra money



needed for Covid measures from hard-pressed budgets?

As principal of Weston College in Weston-super-Mare, Dr Paul Phillips said in an article in the Guardian in July, it is a “very difficult situation”. At that stage, Dr Phillips said his college needed to spend an extra £750,000 on Covid safety adjustments and catch-up courses, at a time when revenue from apprenticeships in some industries has dropped.

But such costs are not the end of the matter. Much of this extra expenditure is ongoing, and likely to increase further as students and parents ask for more measures to be put in place in the event of local spikes in infection rates.

All of this is in a sector that has been under the financial cosh for many years because of low levels of government funding.

The scale of that pressure was starkly apparent in figures given to the House of Commons on Monday by apprenticeships and skills minister Gillian Keegan who said the Department for Education

is supporting 40 colleges in financial difficulty and five have sought emergency funding.

She said: “We have a team including skilled finance professionals who are working very closely to support colleges and we’re also working with banks to ensure access to commercial lending where required.”

Yet, despite all of this, the government so far will not budge on its refusal to reimburse colleges and schools for the significant extra costs associated with Covid-19.

This has left institutions in the invidious position of having to use existing budgets, in many cases at breaking point, to pay for safety measures. Inevitably, that means they have less money left to fund support and provision for learners, the very thing learners most need in this recovery period.

It is, to say the least, a false economy on the part of the government, and it is costing our schools, colleges, and students dear.

AMANDA  
WAYLINGLecturer,  
Brooklands College

## Lockdown learning actually suits some students better

**It's worth bearing in mind the lessons of lockdown as we all return to the 'new normal', writes Amanda Wayling**

There were some very surprising outcomes from our remote teaching and learning experiences over lockdown – including that some of our learners engaged in ways that we couldn't ever have predicted.

The rapport between teachers and students was noticeable. Learners seemed to understand that teachers were working hard to create content amid highly challenging circumstances. Many of them became more cooperative, made suggestions about delivery of classes, created quizzes, contacted students who may have missed a class and were more confident in being part of the learning process. Very oddly lockdown created, in some ways, a deeply communal environment.

Now we're back to the "new normal" as socially distanced colleges, and it's worth bearing some of these lessons in mind. A particularly important lesson we won't be forgetting quickly is around our neurodiverse students.

Some of them told us they enjoyed the distance created by remote teaching. They could choose when to talk and when to be seen by muting or unmuting their microphone, turning their camera on or off and completing their work in the sanctuary of their homes.

One student, completing his course and about to go off to university, said that virtual lessons meant he didn't have to worry as much about participating in groups and trying to read and understand the body language of other students. This kind of virtual delivery fits seamlessly with the complexities of neurodiversity.

Meanwhile, self-motivated and independently minded learners are enthusiastic about learning without distractions, at their own pace, through virtual lessons.

But of course, it's not all positive news. As colleges move to a blended model of face-to-face and online learning, we mustn't forget that students with learning needs can also be overwhelmed by the experience.

Without the one-to-one support they can rely on in the classroom, many found it very difficult to accept that they are on track, despite constant reassurance. Our teachers have, like Spiderman, a 'Spidey sense' about when a student is in trouble, not engaging, or about to switch off, and our

Learner Support teams have worked hard to keep our students connected. But it's still very difficult to replace face-to-face contact.

**“Teenage anxieties, already heightened, seem to get worse in virtual sessions”**

The other big group that aren't ready for a switch to more virtual learning are those with poor attendance records or who struggle to maintain focus. The feedback we've got from them is that they find remote teaching and instruction difficult to manage as they are more engaged by face-to-face attention and encouragement.

Anyone who has tried to 'get in' on a remote conversation will appreciate how hard it is sometimes to interrupt the speaker – as a result, less engaged students often didn't want to ask

questions.

Average teenage anxieties, already heightened, also seem to get worse in virtual sessions. Students turn their camera off if they see others have, leaving the teacher talking to a series of ID symbols on a screen.

On the plus side, classroom management is easier for staff because students only talk to other students in permissible places, like breakout rooms or by using the chat function. This has meant that teachers can focus on teaching and assessment, without having to manage distractions.

So what we need to remember in this new academic year is that remote teaching can be a positive experience. It can enhance learning and allow students to demonstrate their technological competence.

At the same time, the majority of students say they missed being in a class and with their friends. And for neurodiverse students, it has mixed blessings.

This term, we will seek to more closely differentiate and safeguard learners. For instance, we can provide digital backgrounds for the students so that their privacy is secured and still persuade them to turn on their cameras so that the learning environment is alive. We can deliver more flipped learning sessions to challenge and expand knowledge and understanding.

This way, as we begin our blended approach, we hope to ensure no-one falls behind.



## DR NEIL BENTLEY-GOCKMANN OBE

Chief executive,  
WorldSkills UK



## Watch out Europe: Team UK is ready for the winner's podium

**Lockdown hasn't dampened the determination of would-be Team UK members for EuroSkills Graz, says Neil Bentley-Gockmann**

This week we announced the young apprentices, students and professionals who will represent the UK at EuroSkills Graz 2020 in January, which will be the first big skills test of the post-Brexit era.

The team selection for the event in Austria comes against a backdrop of change and opportunity. While team members have been training hard (virtually) during Covid-19, the public health and related economic challenges have refocused minds on the need to transform the quality of technical education. Now is the time, more than ever, to drive up standards across the UK - particularly in England, given there is a white paper in the pipeline.

So Team UK will be the standard-bearers of high quality from the UK skills systems, put to the test against our European competitors. At the previous EuroSkills finals, held in Budapest in 2018, we finished ninth out of 28 countries. Our aim is to finish in the top ten again.

Preparation for this competition has been like no other, with Covid abruptly stopping our usual way of training. But the commitment and resilience of our training and coaching team - and the competitors themselves



- reimagined our training programmes, moving them online. Their determination to further develop their skills in lockdown is why we are doing everything we can to compete safely at EuroSkills.

**“Graz will be the first big skills test of the post-Brexit era”**

All being well, Team UK will demonstrate on the European stage that the next generation is developing the skills we need to build back a better economy and remain internationally competitive.

But more than that, the training and assessment methods designed to support Team UK will also be

used systematically for the first time, as we get ready to welcome colleges into the new WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence. The hope is that the centre will allow thousands of FE students and apprentices to benefit from good practice. In partnership with the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE), the centre will draw on our unique insights into training to international standards and transfer this know-how into everyday teaching, training and assessment. A quarter of all FE colleges across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland applied to be part of the centre's first year, clearly demonstrating real appetite in the sector to drive excellence in technical education.

Meanwhile the Team UK members this year, next year and well into the future will continue to exemplify the benefits of higher quality technical education in terms of enhanced prospects, stellar career paths and setting

up their own businesses. We have already seen such determination and commitment to succeed in all team members, including Abigail Stansfield, who is an engineering apprentice at BAE Systems, representing the UK in CNC Milling and who was determined to get involved in our work after visiting WorldSkills UK LIVE at the start of her apprenticeship.

All Team UK will be focused on delivering a medal-winning performance at EuroSkills, supported by their employers, colleges and training providers, who understand that highly skilled, motivated young people will be crucial to the economic recovery of the UK.

So, as we look towards EuroSkills Graz 2020, WorldSkills Shanghai 2021, EuroSkills St Petersburg 2022 and WorldSkills Lyon 2023, we at WorldSkills UK will be driving to boost innovation and excellence in FE to inspire and develop ever more young people, from all walks of life, to take up technical career routes and apprenticeships.

We will be benchmarking our performance to learn from the best of the rest of the world and will be turning this into practical insights that can be adopted across the UK skills systems to influence change and set higher standards for all. That's the very essence of Team UK and the future of our work at WorldSkills UK - and if you want to be part of it, do get in touch.





## READER'S REPLY

### DfE confirms U-turn over masks in colleges



The problem is that 'the problem' is running faster than the solution. Every day the world at large is breaking new ground. We have to find a way to mitigate risk, and there can be no long-term study on mask wearing as the 'experts' are too busy firefighting. So, students have to return to college. They are in a low risk group. Providing that as many steps are taken to reduce spread and contagion then the system will return to normal. The economy of the UK, and every other country cannot take the strain much longer. We have to live with this dreadful circumstance and face up to the fact that most will survive intact. It's like fighting a war and not expecting any casualties. Managing risk is the new mantra.

Phillip, website



This is an appalling decision, especially as there is no scientific study detailing this risk of mask misuse or their use on mass by the public. All the research done so far is in a clinical setting. There has been no large study of use by the general public and inappropriate mask use is likely to cause more harm than good. I am at a loss as to why we are following the advice of the World Health Organisation, as in March they also said there is no evidence to support the wearing of masks to prevent transmission.

Peter Baker, website

### College leaders called on to help prevent unnecessary surge in coronavirus testing



So go to college and don't get tested unless you've got the most obvious symptoms? Nothing to do with latest worst-ever results for contact tracing.

Rowena House, Twitter

### Ofqual to face grilling by MPs over exams fiasco



I should think so too the young people went through hell and for many they still are. What Ofqual did to them has

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## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### Creating a more transparent apprenticeship funding approach



I think there needs to be a realistic element in each funding band for the ever-increasing administration required per apprentice and the internal quality systems required by training providers to satisfy ESFA, RoATP and Ofsted. The notion that a training provider's role is completed when the apprentice has passed through EPA gateway is also laughable. There is yet more staff time required in dealing with the EPAO and liaising with employers to organise the EPA, and completion of venue health and safety declarations, booking forms, invigilation and provision of resources to administer online exams and for some standards, providing the venue and resources for practical assessments.

Who on earth thought that employers would take on this additional burden? Employers have enough to do in running their businesses, but training providers cannot be expected to continue to administer this for free because someone, obviously far removed from the coal face, thought a new system would have employers rushing to take on this responsibility.

LRW, website

caused unmeasurable mental stress and was totally uncalled for.

Jenny Murphy, Facebook

### Ofqual and the exams fiasco: 8 interesting things we learned



Ofqual needs to focus on its core business for 2020-21 and is ill-prepared to embrace additional duties such as taking over EQA of all apprenticeship EPAs.

Richard Spencer, Twitter

# Bulletin

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# Movers & Shakers

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



## David Williams

Principal,  
Herefordshire,  
Ludlow and North  
Shropshire College

**Start date** August 2020

**Previous job**

Principal, Halesowen College

**Interesting fact**

He used to be a professional musician before moving into further education and still plays guitar in bands



## Jenna Wrathall MBE

High-performance  
skills coach,  
WorldSkills UK  
Centre of Excellence

**Start Date** August 2020

**Previous job**

WorldSkills expert, chief expert at EuroSkills and WorldSkills UK training manager in beauty therapy

**Interesting fact**

She represented the UK in Beauty Therapy at WorldSkills Montreal 1999 where she achieved silver



## William MacPherson

Chair, Learning  
Curve Group

**Start date** September 2020

**Previous job**

Chief executive, QA

**Interesting fact**

He trekked to the North Pole with his two sons in 2015

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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