



# FEWEEK

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

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**APPRENTICES SPEAK OF  
'STRESS' AND 'FRUSTRATION'  
AFTER BEING LEFT IN LIMBO  
WITH NO WAY TO TAKE  
FUNCTIONAL SKILLS TESTS**

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## BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE CONSIDERED FOR LEADING ROLE IN FE

- Government looks at German-style solutions for employer buy-in
- 53 local chambers want to work 'collaboratively' with the sector
- Treasury cash settlement needed for investment in new structures

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**APPROVED AND ACCREDITED  
LEARNING CONTENT.**

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## FEWEEK

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# Apprentices stuck in limbo as Covid hits functional skills tests

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From front

Exclusive

Thousands of apprentices are “stuck in limbo” as awarding bodies struggle to adapt their functional skills assessments in the face of Covid-19, training providers have warned.

Leaders of providers, who say they cannot physically visit some of their work-based learners to invigilate their tests especially in the care and health sectors, have described the situation as “heart-breaking” and a “kick in the teeth” for those who are waiting for the exam in order to complete their programme.

Calls have been made for Ofqual to revert to centre-assessed grades for these qualifications but the regulator has rejected the plea and stressed that it is down to awarding bodies to come up with a solution.

One apprentice told FE Week that she feels “frustrated” and “disadvantaged” by the bureaucracy, while another said the delay is causing him “additional stress”.

The Federation of Awarding Bodies has defended its members, insisting that “we need to remember the unprecedented summer just gone” before criticising exam boards.

After this summer’s exam series was cancelled in March due to the pandemic,



From left: HIT Training apprentice Max Turton and his manager at The Eagle & Child Inn Josh Bird

Ofqual moved to a system of teacher-calculated grades for functional skills qualifications.

But since August 1, 2020, the regulator has banned the use of centre-assessed grades for all vocational and technical qualifications, including functional skills.

All functional skills exams must now either be sat in the traditional manner, or awarding bodies must adapt their assessment arrangements to mitigate any impact of the pandemic.

But coming up with an adapted assessment solution for all affected learners has become an issue for some awarding bodies. Many apprentices are being instructed to work from home in line with government guidelines and are being instructed not to travel to centres for exams due to risk of spreading Covid-19.

Some workplaces that are open will not allow assessors to visit as their employees are having to use all available space which is restricted because of social distancing and safety measures.

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers estimates that tens of thousands of functional skills exams, mostly for apprentices but also for some learners funded by the adult education budget, could be delayed from now

until Christmas as a result.

In her update to members this week, AELP managing director Jane Hickie said the delays are “due to a lack of access to workplace settings, learners working from home and some awarding organisations being behind the curve on being able to provide a technology solution, including a lack of proctoring”.

She added that with a “fresh lockdown coming, this is just going to squeeze access and deliverability even more”.

## ‘I feel frustrated and disadvantaged’

Jill Whittaker, the managing director of independent provider HIT Training, told FE Week that she has 360 apprentices who cannot achieve by the end of October as planned, and another 560 who will not be able to achieve by the end of the calendar year owing to these issues.

The majority are in hospitality, care, early years and NHS settings which Whittaker says are all “unable to facilitate being completed in the workplace due to social distancing, and the



Jane Hickie

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## CONTINUED

potential spread of Covid causing a risk to staff, customers, care users”.

Both of the awarding bodies that HIT Training work with to deliver functional skills do not “have a solution in place right now”, Whittaker said, adding that this is “damaging to progression, confidence and achievement”.

She also warned: “Ultimately without an extension to flexibilities, learners will leave the programme, not achieve and it will unnecessarily damage their future prospects at a time when the job market is fragile to say the least.”

Max Turton is training towards a level 2 food and beverage service apprenticeship with HIT at The Eagle and Child Inn in Bury but has had his functional skills exam delayed for over a month now.

“It’s causing me additional stress,” he told *FE Week*. “My trainer Andy has been really supportive and is helping to keep me motivated but things feel like they are starting to drag on a lot further as I don’t know when I can go through my gateway.”

Jacqui Oughton, managing director of charitable provider Ixion Holdings, part of the Shaw Trust, said she has almost 250 learners waiting to sit their functional skills exams in sectors such as health and social care and construction.

One of them is Lisa Jones, a level 3 lead adult care worker apprentice at The Oaks Residential Care Home in Upminster, Essex.

She told *FE Week*: “I feel frustrated and disadvantaged that I am being held up in completing my functional skills qualifications

because of bureaucracy. I understand we are not letting people into the home but surely there are alternative solutions that can be used to allow me to complete my functional skills exams.”

Oughton said it is “essential that all contributory bodies recognise the impact this is having and they need to put themselves in the shoes of those learners who are trying to progress and listen to the frustrations and tears that we are getting from people who are trying to secure their futures”.

Nichola Hay, chief executive of Estio Training, joined Whittaker, Oughton and the AELP in calling on Ofqual to return to centre-assessed grades for functional skills, warning that the response from awarding bodies and government “has not been quick enough”.

### ‘We are working as hard and as quickly as possible to get this resolved’

An Ofqual spokesperson said that since August, awarding organisations have provided functional skills assessments “as normal” for the “majority of learners” and that over 17,000 “live” assessments have taken place.

While a spokesperson confirmed that the regulator is “aware that some learners are facing challenges in taking assessments in their work setting due to coronavirus”, they do “not intend to extend the earlier provision of calculated results for functional skills qualifications”.

Awarding organisations are “working with training providers to put in place arrangements for those learners to access alternative venues or undertake remote assessments,” Ofqual added.

One of those awarding bodies is City & Guilds, which had announced they were set to roll out functional skills tests to be sat at home prior to lockdown.

But the organisation was forced to divert its resource into dealing with the exams fiasco throughout the summer. The at-home tests are still being worked on, but there is no date for their rollout.

David Phillips, City & Guilds’ managing director, said his organisation is “working hard to find additional delivery options as quickly as possible and are currently testing a number of remote invigilation options”.

“We are also assessing the possibility of opening some functional skills test centres across the country,” he added. “We understand completely how frustrating this is for learners and apprentices who are affected, and I would like to assure them all we are working as hard and as quickly as possible to get this resolved.”

Phillips stressed that despite some learners



Jill Whittaker

being affected, “many learners and apprentices are still able to take their functional skills qualifications as usual, using a range of methods, including online E-volve tests, remote assessment of speaking, listening and communicating and by taking tests at their employer’s premises if their workplace is accessible”.

Pearson has also been able to offer adapted online assessment for some of its functional skills learners. For those where this has not been possible, the awarding body is currently working on other options to offer individual centres, including an “online proctoring solution” and scheduling socially distanced exams.

A spokesperson for NCFE said it has amended its assessment variation process to allow for additional and adapted delivery arrangements, which are already available for their paper-based and online offer. The awarding body is also working on a “remote invigilation solution” which they hope to launch at the end of October.

Tom Bewick, chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, said: “Before people start criticising awarding organisations, we need to remember the unprecedented summer just gone. The government’s U-turn on the A-level algorithm and the eleventh-hour decision to use centre-assessed grades placed a massive resource load on an already stretched system. Staff worked night and day to get results out so learners could progress. Inevitably, along with Covid restrictions, this issue has caused some difficult knock-on effects, including a short-term challenge around the issuing of functional skills results.

“Awarding organisations continue to innovate by moving assessments online, for example, by adopting a model of secure remote invigilation. What we need from the regulator is flexibility and pragmatism as we look to ensure that no functional skills learner is disadvantaged.”



Jacqui Oughton

# Mergers drag down college Ofsted grades

BILLY CAMDEN

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Exclusive

Ofsted inspection results for the college sector at the end of last year fell for the first time in three years after a substantial number of merged colleges received a grade three.

FE Week's annual analysis of inspection grades shows that 76 per cent of general FE colleges have been placed in the top two grades as of August 31, 2020, down from 78 per cent at the end of 2018/19.

This proportion had been rising steadily since a low of 69 per cent in 2016/17 but appears to have been stifled by a number of merged colleges receiving full inspections for the first time and performing poorly.

However, Ofsted said that as inspections were paused in March 2020, "we should be cautious about reading too much into relatively small fluctuations that have taken place since the suspension of inspections makes it difficult to compare last year with the previous one".

**"We should be cautious about reading too much into relatively small fluctuations"**

FE Week's analysis shows that of the 144 general FE colleges currently with inspection grades, 17 are rated 'outstanding', 92 are judged as 'good', and 35 are 'requires improvement'. None are 'inadequate'.

There were 30 new full inspections during 2019/20, which resulted in three grade ones, 14 grade twos, and 13 (43 per



cent) grade threes.

Of the 30, 19 were first ever inspections of merged colleges and seven (37 per cent) of those resulted in 'requires improvement' outcomes.

The gradual rise in the proportion of colleges rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in previous years was partly because when colleges merge, many of them grade three and four, they are removed from Ofsted's figures. But many of the newly-formed institutions have now been inspected.

Between September 2015 and March 2019 the Department for Education carried out post-16 area reviews, which resulted in 57 mergers by April 1, 2019. An additional 13 college mergers have taken place since then.

There are currently 21 colleges that have no Ofsted grade as a result of these mergers, many of which were due to be inspected between April and July had inspectors not been stood down during the pandemic.

FE Week's analysis shows that two colleges fell out of the top 'outstanding' category last year, with Walsall College receiving a grade two and Gateshead College dropping to grade three.

Ofsted would not be drawn on whether its new inspection framework, introduced

in September 2019, had anything to do with the overall dip in college performance.

## Covid hampering Ofsted's window for merged college inspections

The coronavirus pandemic is causing Ofsted to miss its own window for inspecting merged colleges.

The watchdog's FE and skills inspection handbook states that a "newly merged college will normally receive a full inspection within three years of the merger".

FE Week analysis shows that there are four colleges that have already passed that three-year inspection window, and a further four will exceed it by the end of this calendar year.

Seven of the eight have, however, received monitoring visits since their merger.

Ofsted paused its inspection regime in March when lockdown hit. While a number of "interim visits" are being carried out this autumn at FE providers, full inspections are not set to resume until January 2021.

Calls are growing for the inspectorate to further extend this respite period as the UK battles against a second wave of Covid-19. Ofsted has said the timeline is being kept under constant review.



# Will England take inspiration from Germany's chambers of commerce?

FRASER WHIELDON

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From front

Exclusive

The government's forthcoming FE white paper could hand the British Chambers of Commerce key influencing powers over funding and priorities, *FE Week* understands.

Sources close to policy development say a gap has been created with the demise of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2017, and that local enterprise partnerships have failed to impress.

Utilising the national and 53 accredited local chambers would be similar to the much lauded system in Germany.

The chambers' strong business links are understood to be particularly desired by government as ministers look to align courses on offer closer to those "valued by employers", as prime minister Boris Johnson said during a major speech on the future of further education on Tuesday.

Greater use of chambers of commerce is an idea favoured by Baroness Alison Wolf, who now advises Johnson on skills three days a week.

In a 2015 report, *Fixing a Broken Training System*, she wrote that "powerful chambers of commerce to which all local businesses must belong are one way to secure [business] participation [as in Germany]" in the skills system.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson met this year with the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), which represents the UK's 53 accredited local chambers, to discuss "further education and apprenticeships", according to the latest government disclosures of Williamson's meetings.

This was after the minister promised last year's Conservative Party conference to "overtake Germany in the opportunities we offer to those studying technical routes by 2029".

Williamson laid out the groundwork for handing chambers greater powers at a major speech on FE reform in July 2020 where he quoted the BCC's director general Adam Marshall, saying: "Unless we improve the



transition from the world of education to the world of work in the United Kingdom, we will not fix our long-standing issues around productivity."

The BCC told *FE Week* their members are "open" to exploring how "to use their knowledge, experience and convening power to contribute to the future development of the skills system". It also confirmed that it is speaking regularly with the DfE on the skills agenda because skills are "of fundamental importance to businesses and local economies in the wake of the pandemic".

A Department for Education spokesperson said it has had a "number of conversations" with a "wide variety of groups about the future skills system," ahead of the white paper.

The spokesperson added that involving employers and local business groups, such as the chambers, will be "crucial" for that work, so that "we can make sure we are delivering the skills local communities and our economy need to thrive". They said more details would come out "in due course".

Chambers of commerce, the BCC said, would want to work "collaboratively" with FE colleges and providers, employers and communities if they are given a greater role in provision, but already have "long had a role in the skills systems, shaping local strategies". This has included, for example, organising local skills forums, contributing to the local Skills Advisory Panels, submitting evidence to parliamentary select committees, overseeing links between businesses

and education providers, helping develop university technical colleges, and supporting young people with careers activities.

The BCC is also itself involved in the new Kickstart scheme, getting young people on to work placements that can then lead on to apprenticeships or other training, as a gateway provider, which allows employers who have fewer than 30 placements to take part.

The chambers are groups of local businesses, with varying levels of staff, which can offer their members opportunities at networking as well as advice on legal matters, health and safety, and tax.

Because they charge membership fees, chambers do not receive much in the way of public funding, although they have competed for government tenders, the BCC said.

Chambers may move front of stage for the white paper because it is understood the government has been underwhelmed by the influence of local enterprise partnerships when it comes to FE.

More closely integrating chambers with the FE and skills system in their area would bring England closer to Germany's "world-class" system, which relies on local chambers to approve the trainer, known as a meister (German for master), that every company needs to have apprentices.

Membership of organisations like the chambers are compulsory for firms in

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## The UK's 53 chambers of commerce

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- Cornwall
- Coventry & Warwickshire
- Cumbria
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- East Midlands (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire)
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- Essex
- Fife
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- Greater Birmingham
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- Kent Invicta
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- Liverpool & Sefton
- London
- Mid Yorkshire
- Norfolk
- North & Western Lancashire
- North East England
- Northamptonshire (incorporating Milton Keynes)
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- Renfrewshire
- Sheffield
- Shropshire
- Somerset
- South Cheshire
- South Wales
- St Helens
- Staffordshire
- Suffolk
- Surrey
- Sussex
- Thames Valley
- West & North Yorkshire
- West Cheshire and North Wales
- Wirral



## CONTINUED

Germany and they have to pay fees.

Federation of Awarding Bodies chief executive Tom Bewick, who has worked and written extensively on international apprenticeship systems, said adopting a similar approach here would come down to the capacity of England's chambers.

Germany's are built upon decades of prestige, Bewick says, and as businesses have to pay into the chambers, they are much more focused on its outcomes: "You always feel a little more anxious when it's your money going out the door."

English chambers, meanwhile, suffer from vast gaps in capability, Bewick said: "When you talk about the London chamber of commerce, it's quite a substantial organisation, got quite a lot of staff, quite a bit of money coming through the door."

"But in other parts of the country, the chambers are no more than one man and a dog, with retired Colonel Blimp who used to run a corner shop."

"We just haven't got the level of capacity in



Ewart Keep

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our chamber movement. If it's just a series of talking shops, why would active employers, other than out of the goodness of the heart, get involved?"

Whereas German chambers see themselves as the "paymasters for the apprenticeships system", in England, people look to government as the paymasters, even though the apprenticeship system is funded by employers.

Professor Ewart Keep from the Centre on Skills, Knowledge & Organisational Performance at Oxford University said the compulsory membership element of German chambers renders them "fundamentally different", as they are "embedded" in the local business structure, and the structure of apprenticeships.

"When people talk about copying the German system, I always laugh a bit because it's not really that easy. It's deeply embedded in the structure of their country and the cultural expectations of parents, young people, employers and so on."

But neither Bewick nor Keep believe chambers taking a beefed-up role in FE and skills is impossible. Bewick thinks if the government does give chambers more power it will be because policymakers have realised "the system has gone too far in the direction of being a technocratic-led system, as opposed to an employer-responsive one".

"Employers are engaged quite a lot, but I don't think it's the same as having employer-owned bodies independent of government and bureaucracy that then have some say over how provision is organised and paid for."

"So, I suspect that will be the crux of what they're trying to work through with the chambers."

While it is "not beyond the wit of man" to award those powers to chambers, it would turn them "into quasi-local authorities", and although he is not involved in the chamber movement, "I don't know to what extent there is an appetite to take on that statutory role," Bewick added.

Keep said that in most developed countries there is some kind of local employer-led body that deals with training, which England does not have and "sooner or later we are going to have to tackle that", so the chambers "might be a runner" for fulfilling that role.

Any announcement on the role of the chambers is highly likely to be dependent on a successful DfE bid to the Treasury in the forthcoming spending review.



# Speed read: PM announces 'lifetime skills guarantee'

BILLY CAMDEN

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Prime minister Boris Johnson this week delivered a major speech on how his government will shake

up adult education and end "this bogus distinction between FE and HE".

Called a 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee', Johnson's plans for "radical change" include an expansion in free courses for all adults, a more flexible loans system, changes to the apprenticeship levy and new digital bootcamps.

Here is *FE Week's* run through of the prime minister's key announcements.

## Age cap for first free level 3 course removed

The prime minister's biggest announcement was that adults over the age of 23 in England without a full level 3 qualification will be offered one for free from April.

The policy, which was a recommendation in Philip Augar's review of post-18 education published 15 months ago, will be funded through the government's new £2.5 billion National Skills Fund.

A full list of available level 3 courses for this entitlement will be set out next month, but Johnson said the qualifications will need to provide "skills valued by employers".

These courses will "give anyone who left school without an A-level, or equivalent, the qualifications they need when they need them, helping people to change jobs and find work in the burgeoning new sectors that this country is creating", he added.

Adults up to the age of 23 have been fully funded for their first full level 3 qualification from the adult education budget since 2013, but those aged 24 and over would need to take out an advanced learner loan to pay for the course.

Prior to 2013 and the introduction of advanced learner loans, the government funded half the costs of all level 3 qualifications for those aged 24 and over.

## New 'flexible' loans system

Adults in England will have access to a "flexible loan entitlement" for four years of post-18 study, the prime minister also announced during his speech.



Boris Johnson tries his hand at bricklaying at Exeter College ahead of his adult skills speech

Johnson cited how the Augar review highlighted the complexity of the current funding system, and the "bias that propels young people into universities and away from technical education".

After asserting that it is "time to end that bias", the PM said the government is going to "change the funding model so that it is just as easy to get a student loan to do a year of electrical engineering at an FE college – or do two years of electrical engineering – as it is to get a loan to do a three-year degree in politics, philosophy and economics".

FE colleges will be given access to the main student finance system, "so that they are better able to compete with universities; not for every FE course, but for a specific list of valuable and mainly technical courses to be agreed with employers".

"And in the coming years, as part of our Lifetime Skills Guarantee, we will move to a system where every student will have a flexible lifelong loan entitlement to four years of post-18 education – and suddenly, with that four-year entitlement, and with the same funding mechanism, you bring universities and FE closer together. You level up between them, and a new vista of choice opens up," Johnson added.

This new arrangement is hoped to provide finance for shorter-term studies, rather than

having to study in a single three- or four-year block.

More details about this new loans system are expected to feature in the upcoming FE white paper.

## Apprenticeship levy transfer simplified?

Johnson said the government will "reform" the apprenticeship system so that unspent levy funds can be used "more easily" to support apprenticeships "not just in big companies, but in the small and medium-sized enterprises, where there is so much potential for job creation".

While he did not expand on this during the speech, a government spokesperson said they plan to "look again at the apprenticeship levy and support large employers to spend surplus levy funds with local employers and businesses in their supply chains in bulk, rather than see their funds expiring".

Since April 2019, levy-paying employers have been able to transfer a maximum amount of 25 per cent of their annual funds. They can make transfers from their apprenticeship account to as many employers as they choose.

## Digital bootcamp expansion

Johnson also revealed the government is committing £8 million for "digital skills boot camps", which will expand on "successful" pilots in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

The boot camps are described by the government as "employer-led, short, flexible training courses for adults, linked to guaranteed interviews and tailored to meet business and economic demand". The training is delivered by a range of coding and tech schools.

The first phase of boot camps will start over the next few weeks in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Liverpool with digital courses such as cloud services, full stack, digital for advanced manufacturing and cyber security.

The second phase of boot camps will be trialled in West Yorkshire, the south-west, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

From next year, the government said boot camps will be extended to sectors like construction and engineering.

# Confusion as Williamson claims lifetime skills guarantee for adults will include T Levels

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## Exclusive

It is the government's intention to allow adults to study T Levels in the future, but not by April as suggested by the education secretary this week.

Gavin Williamson addressed parliament on Thursday to outline plans for a new "lifetime skills guarantee", which was first announced by prime minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday.

The plans involve offering all adults in England a full level 3 qualification for free from April if they do not already hold one, with a full list of those available for the entitlement set to be published later this month.

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, asked Williamson to "confirm that the new gold standard T Levels will be available" to adults as part of the level 3 entitlement.

Williamson replied: "I can absolutely guarantee that."

The education secretary's claim baffled the sector, considering that only those



aged 16 to 19 are currently allowed to study for T Levels.

In response, Labour's shadow skills minister Toby Perkins said: "Incredible, and if indeed he is saying T Levels will be available to all adults by April 2021 he's got less idea what's happening out there than I thought."

He added: "It would be hugely welcomed if T Levels were available to all adults by April, but the secretary of state's track record means many will take this announcement with a pinch of salt."

"Certainly he should come out and explain how he intends to deliver that because our conversations with college principals suggest that once again his claims are fanciful at

the current time."

The DfE was quick to correct Williamson, telling FE Week that while T Levels are currently available to 16-to-19-years-olds, they anticipate that the new qualification will be extended to adults in the future.

**"It would be hugely welcomed if T Levels were available to all adults by April"**

But this will not be until all T Levels are rolled out and embedded into the skills system – certainly not by April 2021.

The first three T Levels were rolled out in September, with 22 others due to follow from next year until 2023.



# Ofsted to recruit for degree apprenticeship inspections

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Ofsted has confirmed it will recruit new inspectors with expertise in higher education and will train its existing workforce as they gear up to inspect degree apprenticeships from April 2021.

However, it is not clear whether the watchdog will need to fund the extra resource from its already stretched budget as the Department for Education refuses to say whether it will stump up any new cash.

As revealed by *FE Week* earlier this month, Ofsted will soon become the regulator for all apprenticeships for the first time.

Until now, the inspectorate's remit has only extended up to level 5, while the Office for Students has held responsibility for overseeing higher apprenticeships.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson announced on Monday that Ofsted will be handed powers to inspect level 6 and 7 apprenticeships, both degree and non-degree, from next April.

Concerns have, however, been raised by university membership organisations such as MillionPlus and the University Vocational Awards Council in recent weeks, who both fear that Ofsted does not have enough expertise to inspect degree-level provision.

In a letter to chief inspector Amanda Spielman on Monday, Williamson said this change will "ensure consistency and parity in quality standards across apprenticeships, so that employers and apprentices can have confidence that apprenticeship training is subject to a consistent and rigorous approach to quality assurance, regardless of provider type or the level of the apprenticeship".

He also urged Ofsted to build capacity and capability for taking on this new responsibility by recruiting "additional inspectors with suitable expertise, including



Amanda Spielman

knowledge and experience of higher education, in addition to the upskilling of Ofsted's existing inspector workforce where this is required".

An Ofsted spokesperson said the inspectorate is "very pleased" to take on new responsibility for inspecting the quality of higher and degree-level apprenticeships, which will "ensure consistency in quality standards across apprenticeships at all levels".

The spokesperson added that in order to "make sure our inspection workforce have the right experience and knowledge, we will recruit new inspectors with expertise in higher education and train existing inspectors so that inspections and visits take into account the context in which training is delivered".

Ofsted would not say how many new inspectors it expects to recruit, when the recruitment process would launch, nor whether it would request extra funding to

fund the new resource from the DfE.

A spokesperson for the DfE would also not offer a clear answer and would only say: "The department and Ofsted are working together to ensure that sufficient resource is in place to support this work from April 2021."

Ofsted's budget has been falling sharply over the past decade despite an increase in its inspection activity, including, for example, monitoring visits of hundreds of new apprenticeship providers.

The watchdog's accounts for 2019-20 show that its core funding now stands at £135 million, down from £185 million in 2010-11.

Ofsted's new role means it will soon be able to inspect all universities with apprenticeship provision, including the likes of Cambridge.

Making Ofsted the sole inspectorate for all apprenticeships was a recommendation in Philip Augar's review of post-18 education.



# GB Training goes bust, with 70 job losses

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Seventy staff have lost their job after an independent training provider in Birmingham entered insolvency due to Covid-19's "devastating" impact on its business.

GB Training (UK) Ltd, which had around 500 learners on apprenticeships and courses funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority's adult education budget, announced on its website this week that it has closed.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency and the WMCA are both working with the provider on a "smooth" handover of learners to a new provider, according to GB Training.

The provider's managing director Lawrence Barton said Covid-19 was the "critical factor" in the decision to close the family-run provider, which has trained "many thousands" of people over the past 25 years.

GB Training was able to access financial support from the Education and Skills Funding Agency in its first round of supplier relief, but was ineligible for the second round as it had taken out a government-backed loan "to keep us afloat".

Barton continued: "Ultimately, the balance of income over our outgoings was no longer sustainable." The pandemic "has had a devastating impact on our business", with learner starts and recruitment being "decimated".

These factors contributed "heavily to the painful decision we have been compelled to take", he said, adding: "I have consistently called for the government to deliver more relief funding to the sector to help training providers such as ours."

"We are tremendously proud of all the work we have achieved and for the family of staff who have made this all possible."

Independent training providers have been severely impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak: in June, one of the country's largest apprenticeship providers – QA Ltd – announced

plans to make hundreds of redundancies.

A month later, England's largest apprenticeship provider, Lifetime Training Group, said it was having to slash around 300 jobs – up to a quarter of its workforce.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education published board minutes in July stating that 300 independent training providers were "estimated to be at

risk" of closure.

GB Training said all certificates that have been received by the centre will be issued to learners "quickly", except for all certificates by awarding organisation Skills First, which will deal with those centrally and will contact learners "shortly".

West Midlands Combined Authority has confirmed a small number of people were completing employability training funded through its adult education budget and said they will be transferred to South and City College Birmingham.

The ESFA has said it is "working closely with the provider to agree arrangements for the transfer of learners to alternative provision," so they can complete their programmes.



## Lambeth

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## 'Outstanding' exemption from inspection to be removed next year

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

'Outstanding' schools, colleges and training providers are set to be inspected again when Ofsted inspections resume next year – but it will now take up to six years to get through them all.

The government has published its response to the consultation on removing the inspection exemption for the top-rated providers.

It was introduced by former education secretary Michael Gove in 2011. But a previous *FE Week* investigation revealed how some colleges had been ignored by Ofsted for over a decade.

The government will now seek parliamentary approval to remove the exemption, and pending that will reintroduce inspections for 'outstanding' schools and colleges alongside the restart of routine inspections – slated for January. However,

this date is being kept under review.

The consultation outcome document says 90 per cent of over 3,700 respondents agreed that the exemption should be removed.

But, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the government said that "a longer window is needed to complete the required inspections".

It means all formerly exempt schools, colleges and other organisations must now receive an initial full inspection or short inspection within six years, rather than the original five.

Providers that have gone the longest since their last inspection will be prioritised, starting with those that have not been inspected for a decade or longer.

FE colleges and providers inspected before September 2015 will receive an initial full inspection, while those last inspected after this date will normally receive an initial short inspection.

But where an initial short inspection indicates that outstanding performance may not have been maintained, Ofsted will extend

the inspection to a 'full' inspection within 15 working days.

Ofsted will also aim to organise scheduling so that "as far as possible" schools and FE colleges and providers that were last inspected since 2015 receive an initial inspection within six or seven years of their previous inspection.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said that while he supports plans to remove the current exemption policy, the more pressing issue is "the fact that Ofsted intends to restart routine inspections for all schools and colleges from January".

"This does not seem to be a realistic or sensible plan in light of rising Covid infection rates, and the consequent disruption that is taking place in schools and colleges," he added.

"We urge Ofsted and the government to reconsider this timetable, and to postpone the resumption of inspections until circumstances are more favourable."

## Sky exec is announced as chair of new DfE skills board

**BILLY CAMDEN**  
BILLY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

An executive vice president at international broadcaster Sky has been appointed as the first chair of the Department for Education's skills and productivity board.

Education secretary Gavin Williamson today announced that Stephen van Rooyen (pictured) will lead the new group to provide "expert advice" on how courses and qualifications should align to the skills that employers need post-Covid-19.

Williamson said van Rooyen has a "wealth of experience across the technology, engineering and communications sectors and will be able to share his vital insight and leadership with the panel".

Van Rooyen's full title at Sky is "executive vice president and chief executive officer, UK and Europe, established markets" with responsibility

for Sky Italy, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. He has worked at Sky in various roles since 2006 and before that worked at Virgin Media and Nokia.

The skills and productivity board was first announced in October 2019 and will play a "central role in driving forward the government's ambitious FE reform programme", according to the DfE.

Van Rooyen said: "Given the pace of change in business and in workplaces today, and the economic challenges of Covid, the new skills and productivity board has a key role to play in developing our skills economy for current and future generations. It is a privilege to contribute, and I'm looking forward to working with the panel and the government to drive this important agenda."

Williamson said that van Rooyen is a "keen and proud champion of apprentices, having taken Sky's apprenticeship programme from strength

to strength".

"He will lead an expert panel who will provide important advice on how to tackle the nation's skill challenges," the education secretary added.

"The board will play a key role in helping us to rebuild our economy post-Covid-19 and deliver our bold skills agenda. I look forward to working with him to level up opportunity across the country, ensuring people have the skills they need to progress."

The work of the skills and productivity board will be carried out by a panel of five "leading" skills and labour market economists, supported by Department for Education officials.

The panel will undertake independent research and analysis in response to questions set out by Williamson and van Rooyen.

Applications for panel members closed earlier this month and appointments will be made in due course, the DfE said.

Their appointment will come ahead of the government's forthcoming FE White Paper, which Williamson said will set out "detailed plans to build a high-quality further education system – one that unlocks potential, levels up skills and boosts opportunities for people across the country".



Stephen van Rooyen



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### HEAD OF QUALITY AND CURRICULUM

**Location:** Cumbria, HQ Workington

**Salary:** Circa £50 to £60K plus bonus

**Closing date:** Thursday 8th October 2020

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## Profile

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Introducing...

# JENNA WRATHALL BAILEY

High-performance skills  
coach, WorldSkills UK

'Aspirations grow only  
because you can see  
what's open to you'



JL DUTAUT  
[JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:JL.DUTAUT@FEWEEK.CO.UK)

**JL Dutaut meets a high-performance skills coach whose experience shines a light on the challenges facing the necessary education revolution**

What does it mean to prepare someone for the modern world of work? What does it take to retain skilled staff in an economy increasingly

defined by transience? On many levels – whether it's about tying in with local and national industrial strategies, mapping a broad and balanced curriculum or recruiting and retaining staff or students – these questions are central to the sector.

More than that, they are professionally relevant whether you are in the boardroom, the staffroom or the common room. Perhaps that's in part why Boris Johnson this week chose an audience of students and staff at Exeter College to announce his plans for a new "Lifetime Skills Guarantee".

As the prime minister himself said, "The British economy is in the process of huge and rapid change", and "the [Covid] crisis has compressed that revolution".

In this tumultuous context, meeting Jenna Wrathall Bailey for the first time was surprising on many fronts. To be sure, WorldSkills UK's high-performance skills coach has held her fair share of posts, from lecturer at Preston's College, through curriculum leader at Ashton Community College, to quality assessment coordinator at Myerscough College; and nationally from external



# Profile

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quality assurer for awarding body VTCT to private consultant. So far, so modern.

But a thread runs through her career – one that has already resulted in being awarded an MBE for services to vocational skills. Throughout it all, almost from the moment she passed the A-levels everyone else wanted her to do and made her way on to the college course she'd always aspired to, Wrathall Bailey has been involved with WorldSkills. It is in that long-term partnership that policy makers, not least the prime minister, might find fruitful ideas about navigating the economic straits ahead.

FE Week readers will be familiar with WorldSkills. The international organisation coordinates the efforts of 79 member countries and regions and is best known for its bi-annual championships, last held in Kazan, Russia in 2019 and next due to be held in Shanghai in 2021. But in between the showcase events it does much more than that, and in her new role, Wrathall Bailey is central to this.

As high-performance skills coach, her role at the heart of the organisation's new Centre for Excellence programme, launched this month, is two-fold. First, it is to support colleges, working mainly with lecturers and curriculum leads, "taking everything that we have learned globally and supporting them and saying, we've learned this information, these are the standards we're seeing, these are the techniques we use, the mindsets, methodologies, and



Montage of images, features the Gold winners Jenna has trained at WorldSkills and EuroSkills Competitions since 2015

this might be useful to embed within your sessions." Second is "sitting on various boards and reviewing national occupational standards" across a variety of sectors.

Initially, the Centre for Excellence will work with 20 centres, selected from 55 applicants. The application process means all involved have elected to be there, but Wrathall Bailey doesn't take their engagement for granted. "We're just educators," she says. She is evidently conscious as only a classroom practitioner can be of the barriers the profession sometimes erects to protect itself from external influences that too often border on criticism. "Educators who just had an amazing opportunity to go to WorldSkills and are just basically bringing back what we've learned, and hopefully our passion and our drive will break down barriers and get them hooked as much as we are."

With Wrathall Bailey, that drive and passion are authentic. As is her professional identity as an educator. Though she is no longer practising in the classroom in her role at Myerscough College, she taught altogether 14 years. But Wrathall Bailey is not simply an educator who went to WorldSkills. She is just as

much a WorldSkills competitor who went into education.

Aged 16, Wrathall Bailey wanted nothing more than to study beauty therapy. She'd done so since a neighbour – a beauty therapy lecturer – had taken her to work to be a model for the day. "And I just thought 'oh my God, I really want to do this'. At school I was plodding along, but this put fire in my belly."

**"You can work towards excellence and you can do well in any career"**

That early contact, not just with beauty therapy but with the teaching of it, was crucial for her, as it is for so many at that age. Much has been said about the disadvantage this year's GCSE cohort are at because of the pandemic, but little has been focused on the fact that many will have missed out on work experience. Placements play an important part in creating that opportunity.

Yet, having discovered that passion



Jenna as a child aged 7, taken in 1985

# Profile

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discovered that passion, Wrathall Bailey was put off the idea by a careers interview at school. “The careers advisor told me, ‘No don’t go and do beauty therapy. Your grades will be too high for that.’ So I got shuffled into going to do my A-levels and I really did not enjoy it.”

That experience, unfortunately, remains far from atypical for any student who is remotely high performing. The prime minister’s first job will have to be to tackle the various incentives that perpetuate it if he is ever to deliver on this week’s bold promise “to fix a problem that has plagued this country for decades [...] the pointless, snooty and frankly vacuous distinction between the practical and the academic”.

For Wrathall Bailey, the distinction seemed vacuous anyway. Her grades from Blackpool Sixth Form could have secured her a place at university but instead, she chose her passion. “At age 18, you can start thinking for yourself, and I thought ‘no, beauty therapy is what I want to do’. You can work towards excellence and you can do well in any career. So I went there.”

The lecturers picked up on her passion and potential and introduced her to WorldSkills, beginning a relationship that has lasted 21 years. “Those tutors must have seen something in me, a few attributes that made them think ‘she’s suitable for going off and representing the college’. So I did and I was lucky enough to win it.”

Following her gold medal at the national beauty therapy competition, she was selected

to represent Team UK for the WorldSkills global competition in Montreal in 1999. She took second place in her category. The following year, WorldSkills awarded her for her ‘outstanding performance’ at the skill Olympics.

After that, her focus was on developing her career in education. “Aspirations grow only because you can see what’s open to you,” she tells me, and WorldSkills had opened her eyes, so it wasn’t long before she struck up the partnership again. By 2006, she was a regional judge and in 2007 a mentor for the Team UK competitors in Japan. In various roles, she has supported Team UK in Calgary, São Paulo and Kazan and worked as a training manager for the EuroSkills division too.

## “I’m just glad that I’m part of the movement that’s trying to change perceptions”

All in all, it’s quite a journey for the girl from Poulton-le-Fylde with the “really lovely childhood”, the butcher’s daughter who in so many parallel stories would have ended up at university to fulfil a socially constructed notion of aspiration and success. “I don’t blame that careers advisor,” she tells me. “I’m just glad that I’m part of the movement that’s trying to change perceptions.”

The longevity of her involvement speaks volumes to the overplayed notion of the gig economy. Here too, Wrathall Bailey thinks there’s a problem with perception. “For employers, I think it’s about being brave enough to invest in their employees. I’ve seen it with my competitors. They get chosen for



Jenna with her husband Martin Wrathall and children, taken in 2018

WorldSkills UK, and then the employer thinks ‘they are going to leave me so I’m not going to invest.’”

If this is indeed the case, then it’s little surprise the prime minister’s Lifetime Skills Guarantee pitch is aimed at adults who want to retrain altogether. All well and good for a changing economy, but focusing on sideways movement and subsidising training does little to encourage employers to take responsibility or to help employees and the economy to level up.

On that front too, Wrathall Bailey has been lucky. WorldSkills has demonstrated precisely the opposite approach, and one that is perfectly consistent with its aims and values.

When the letter arrived to inform her of the MBE ex-WorldSkills UK chairman Chris Humphries had nominated her for, Wrathall Bailey thought she was opening a parking ticket. Her husband thought she was having him on. Yet so far she has led Team UK beauty therapy competitors to four gold medals, a silver, a medallion of excellence, two best-of-nation awards and an Albert Vidal Award. In any Olympic sport, she might even be a household name.

If WorldSkills had anything to do with it, she would be.

The prime minister’s plan to “close the gap with other countries that have had the edge on us when it comes to skills and technical education” may very well depend on that kind of revolution.



Jenna collecting her MBE at Buckingham Palace, taken in 2012

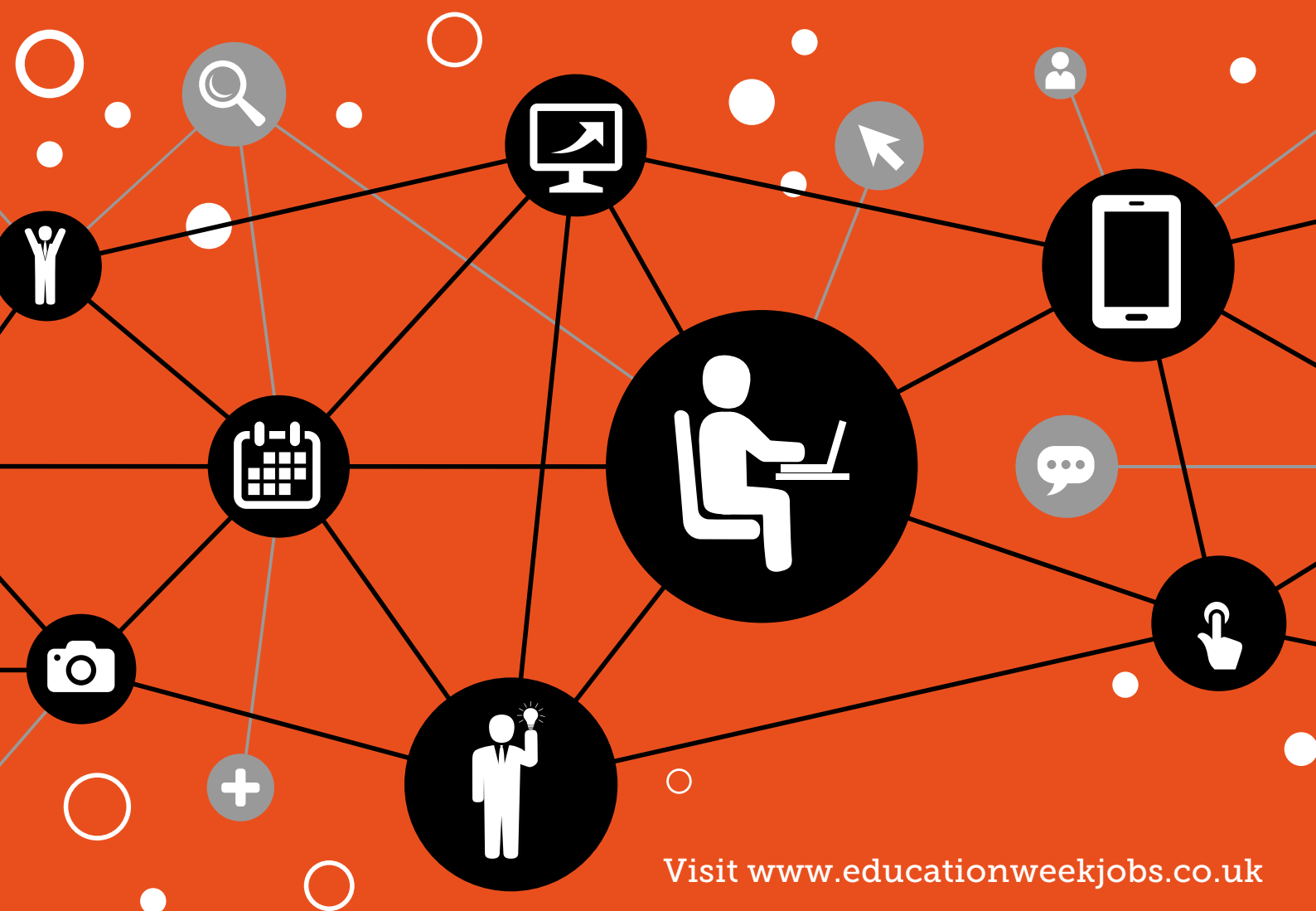


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## DAME GLENYS STACEY

Interim chief  
regulator, OfqualFew certainties, but  
exams are fairest  
and should go ahead

**Schools and colleges can be confident that Ofqual and exam boards have the tools to make summer 2021 exams fair, writes Dame Glenys Stacey**

Teachers, school and college leaders are working in truly exceptional circumstances with students both in college and at home, and to get them ready for GCSE, AS and A-level exams next summer. I know just how unrelenting and demanding this has been since the start of the pandemic — and still is.

The uncertainties we face are unprecedented, so I hope it will be helpful if I state some certainties, from the regulator's perspective.

First, and as we have said publicly, we got it wrong in the summer. Like other regulators across the UK, and with the best of intentions, we worked with school and college leaders, the government and others to build a substitute for exams in the midst of this pandemic. Together we misjudged things.

It is simply not acceptable for a student to be deprived of the chance to show what they can do, and to be given instead the grades that the system thinks they warrant. We are sorry.

If anything, this summer has shown the importance, the centrality, of exams. We saw that despite every effort and good intention, other forms of assessment are likely to be more

inequitable.

We know from research, for example, that non-exam assessment can be subject to bias, with the result that bright disadvantaged students, or students with special educational needs, suffer the most.

This has been a particular worry this summer and we appreciate that asking teachers to take responsibility for determining results for



their students puts them in an invidious position. We are certain that examinations should run next year, and we are working with the government and exam boards on that basis.

Exams are important, not just to allow every student to show knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, but to give a fair representation of the extent of that knowledge and understanding.

The exceptional pressure

on students and teachers this year has been alleviated to some extent and in some subjects by changes to the curriculum already announced. We appreciate, nevertheless, that whatever the assessment regime in place next summer, assessment choices cannot make up for lost teaching and learning. That would be akin to holding a thermometer responsible for fluctuations in temperature.

But we can take these truly

We are discussing potential options with the Department for Education and exam boards, and I look forward to talking options through with school and college leaders before decisions are made.

**“We can take exceptional circumstances into account at a national level”**

This is an exceptional time. It does not look as though we will be free from the pandemic any time soon. More than anything, we all want to make sure our young people get the best chance they can to show what they know, and what they can do, in the fairest way possible.

Teachers no doubt want certainty so that they can get on with teaching knowing what to expect. Government policy is that GCSE, AS and A-levels should be assessed predominantly by examination, as now. The regulator is of the same view.

We are working hard to make sure we take into account the effects of the pandemic, to make the best contingency arrangements we can, and to make sure the results are fair and command public confidence in this exceptional time.

exceptional circumstances into account at a national level, in the awarding process that is part and parcel of an examination series. We took a similar approach to account for dips in learning in the early years of new GCSEs. We and exam boards have the tools, and the experience.

Contingency arrangements will be required, of course, to cover all eventualities at an individual, local or national level.

## PROFESSOR DAVID PHOENIX OBE

Vice chancellor of London South Bank University and chief executive of LSBU Group



## 7 changes the government must make to grow technical education

**If the prime minister is serious about skills, he needs to take these agreed actions from our latest roundtable, writes David Phoenix**

The prime minister's speech on further and higher education this week and the forthcoming FE white paper present a huge opportunity to grow post-16 technical education. But growing technical education requires local and national change.

In 2019 we launched LSBU Group which is made up of two secondary schools, one FE college and one HE provider, London South Bank University (LSBU). We work closely together to deliver high-quality technical education across the group.

Our partnership offers students easier opportunities to transfer between technical, vocational and academic pathways; and we actively encourage them to take advantage of the wide range of courses run throughout the group.

On June 22, LSBU hosted a policy roundtable, chaired by former education secretary Damian Hinds, to discuss how we can strengthen post-16 technical education. We were joined by Department for Education colleagues, two universities, two FE trade bodies, six education think-tanks' representatives, four awarding bodies, two business groups and a training-provider body.

There was wide-ranging consensus on what is needed to

grow technical education.

First, we must focus the English post-16 technical system on the needs of the UK economy and students, rather than cutting and pasting a system from Germany or elsewhere.

### "The FE white paper is the perfect place to start"

Second, greater collaboration rather than competition is needed between post-16 education providers. In particular, the roundtable called for the reform of the deeply siloed UK education system.

This particularly affects the 60 per cent of learners who do not follow the one clearly mapped pathway – GCSEs to A-Levels to university. The funding can discourage schools from allowing pupils to transfer to other perhaps more skills-oriented provision (for example, from an academy to a UTC) and schools hold on to their

"most able" pupils in sixth form, pushing them towards pre-defined routes (e.g. bachelor degrees at university). Provision needs to be much more closely knitted together, working for the benefit of students, not institutions.

Third, we must resolve the often "disputed territory" between colleges and universities over levels 4 and 5 courses. Many FE colleges have small levels 4 and 5 cohorts and face financial challenges that affect course content, quality and learner progression. Some universities fail to differentiate between standalone levels 4 and 5 and degree programmes. To resolve this we need more collaboration between FE and HE institutions.

The complex quality assurance regimes at levels 4 and 5 also need simplifying. For example, a level 4 Higher National Certificate taught at universities is quality assured by the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, whereas a Higher National Certificate taught at a college is quality assured by Ofqual and Ofsted. The additional cost and complexity makes this a

difficult set-up for universities and colleges.

The fifth point is to make it easier for students to move between standalone level 4, level 5 and degree level. If a college delivers level 4 courses without clear local pathways to level 5 and 6, this can prevent students from progressing.

Our LSBU Group approach would not suit every institution, but it has clear benefits for learners and may provide a model for other institutions. But we can't do it all locally.

The government must make maintenance loans available for all level 4 learners so all those studying high-quality courses at this level can receive support for living costs – not just those on a degree, but those doing a higher apprenticeship, level 4 diploma or level 4 NVQ too.

Our final, and seventh, point is there must be a government register of designated level 4 and 5 provider institutions, enabling them to apply for additional funding. This would strengthen technical education by increasing resources needed to deliver high-quality personalised learning.

On Tuesday, Boris Johnson said FE colleges will "access funding on the same terms as our most famous universities", but we need clear details on this to be published.

Billions of pounds and millions of jobs depend on growing post-16 technical education. The FE white paper is the perfect place to start.





MARK  
ROBINSONChief executive,  
Scape GroupCollege leaders have only a  
tight window to spend £200  
million of capital funds

**The Department for Education should offer colleges a more flexible deadline for completing capital projects, writes Mark Robinson, chief executive at property services and design company Scape Group**

The public sector has enjoyed something of a resurgence in government attention since the arrival of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. For years, the sector has been subject to financial restrictions and ever-diminishing resources. Education has been no exception.

However, the pandemic has caused government to look to the sector as a vehicle for stimulating economic activity – particularly in construction – as the availability of private capital recedes.

For sixth forms and colleges, this is a significant win and what many may consider a timely shot in the arm as the government looks to get spades in the ground, whilst simultaneously upgrading education facilities across the country.

In August, the Department for Education set out plans to fast-track £200 million of infrastructure spend into more than 180 colleges. That funding has now begun to land in college bank accounts across the UK, firing the starter gun on a wave of new projects to help the country “build back better”.

Of those receiving funding, some will no doubt be keen to improve tired learning facilities. For others, it will be about



increasing capacity at a time when the challenges of delivering a Covid-secure environment for students are becoming all too apparent.

But while such a sizeable capital injection will always be welcome, it comes caveated with its own conditions that will no doubt require FE leaders to sharpen their pencils.

Chief among these are the limitations on the type of work the funding can be used to deliver – any activity must replace or improve “failing” facilities.

Then there’s the timescale. The Department for Education is requesting that projects are completed by the end of next March. For anything beyond small-scale renovations, a six-month window leaves very little room for manoeuvre.

This tight timeframe may have partly been suggested because the funding represents an early draw down on the £1.5 billion five-year investment plan for further education announced by Rishi Sunak in the Spring Budget.

Given the funding is being

taken from an investment pot accounted for over five years, it would seem sensible not to impose such a tight deadline in the short-term and allow some flex into the next financial year so colleges can spend it as efficiently as possible.

**“There is a clear mandate from the top to get spades in the ground”**

That being said, there is a clear mandate from the top to get spades in the ground quickly.

Tight timeframes, in the eyes of the government – and, indeed, many economists – are needed to sustain momentum in the construction industry, which has shown signs of slowing in recent weeks.

If colleges are to take advantage of this windfall within the current timeframe, projects will need to

be delivered with efficiency while maintaining high standards in build quality.

Direct-award construction and consultancy frameworks are not a new delivery route for educators looking to accelerate their projects, but they can go some way to take full advantage of the £200 million impetus. In essence, direct-award frameworks present a route whereby colleges can be matched with experienced construction partners.

Since the new funding began to land, we’ve noticed a spike in enquiries from colleges and sixth forms. These tend to fall into two camps.

First are those with a firm view on how to spend the money who need support accelerating the procurement process.

The second group are those who need help in making sure they invest the money on the right elements of their maintenance backlog. For example, some are considering whether to use the funding to tackle capacity issues in relation to Covid-19 or to direct it towards upgrading their energy infrastructure, in line with the wider public sector’s commitments to sustainability.

Undoubtedly, we face a difficult winter ahead balancing the needs of public health and the economy. Further education will play a key role in each.

The sector must have the flexibility and necessary support to finish much-needed capital projects within a reasonable framework.

## Editorial

# Number 10 is driving FE reform too fast and will blame the DfE when the wheels fall off



This week the Department for Education was thrown in to the back seat as the prime minister grabbed the steering wheel and pushed his foot hard on the FE reform accelerator.

A press release from Number 10 confidently announced a new “lifetime skills guarantee” would launch for courses starting next April, just six months from now.

And in a move that looked deliberately designed to lock the doors and make the DfE buckle up for a rocky ride, the “notes to editors” section said: “We will set out details of [eligible] courses next month.”

The guarantee would include free full level 3 courses for adults over the age of 23, to be funded from some of the £600 million per year National Skills Fund, first promised in the Conservative Party manifesto 11 months ago.

This would implement the Augar review recommendation made 15 months ago.

All adults, no longer just those aged 19 to 23, will be eligible for a fully funded (free) first full level 3 qualification.

As an aside, many of us in the sector pointed out that this is not a new policy. Unemployed adults aged 24 and over were eligible to these fully funded A-level or equivalent qualifications until seven years ago, when the coalition government, under David Cameron’s premiership, significantly cut the budget and introduced advanced learner loans.

The lifetime skills guarantee makes adults aged 24 and over eligible again,

but this time from a shiny new National Skills Fund, instead of from the devolved or national adult education budget.

But undoing the damage is being made far from easy, if not impossible by April, for two reasons.

Firstly, if a national skills fund is to be launched for course starts in April, then that is a mammoth task that raises all sorts of questions that simply won’t be answered in six months. There is the formula, the rates, the rules, provider access, data collection, payment mechanisms, audit regime and more to sort. And that’s before the complexity and duplication issues with existing devolved and national funding regimes will need to be ironed out.

Secondly, behind the scenes it seems clear that it is Baroness Alison Wolf (who co-authored the Augar review and works in Number 10 three days a week as an adviser) demanding that only “courses which are shown to be valued by employers, supporting people to train into better jobs” will be eligible for the lifetime skills guarantee.

And Number 10 has said the DfE’s executive agency, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, will need to decide and publish the list of courses that meet this definition before the end of October.

The complexity of the task makes it a deadline they will almost certainly miss, but they do have a head start.

The ESFA’s online “list of qualifications approved for funding”, can be downloaded from gov.uk and contains 13,628 qualifications.

Of these, 4,321 are at level 3 and of

these, 1,249 are eligible for the legal entitlement, making them already fully fundable for 19- to 23-year-olds via the adult education budget.

From this list of 1,249 qualifications, the ESFA is presented with some immediate dilemmas in order to satisfy Wolf’s employability demands.

Do they include any or all of the 537 Access to HE qualifications?

Do they include any or all of the 259 AS and A-level qualifications, and if so, do they stipulate the adult must study at least four AS qualifications or two full A-levels (the definition of ‘full’ at level 3)?

Do they include any of the 55 applied general qualifications, such as the Certificate in Applied Science or the more substantial Extended Diploma in Applied Science?

And of the remaining 347 ‘vocationally related’ and 52 ‘occupational’ qualifications, how do you define which ones are actually “valued by employers”?

These decisions are highly controversial, and the commercial awarding organisations offering the qualifications won’t be afraid to question the legalities in terms of due process, transparency and consultation – none of which can be done quickly.

Number 10 definitely grabbed the wheel and raced forward this week, but in the coming weeks it will be the DfE and ESFA civil servants back in the front seat, and I fear the wheels will inevitably fall off.

**Nick Linford, Editor**  
news@feweek.co.uk



## READER'S REPLY

### Is Ofsted really ready to inspect all apprenticeships?

Universities have to recognise that these are not part-time degrees rebadged but apprenticeships that happen to contain a degree qualification. Further, most universities have very little experience of dealing with SME-sized employers. Universities have much to learn here, not the other way around!

**Just Saying, website**

I'm afraid this is a very one-sided view. Adrian needs to realise there is some brilliant teaching out there in higher education institutions which I have loved observing. And very happy learners. There is also some which is absolutely shocking and learners who are very disgruntled with the standards of teaching and the lack of support they receive. No wonder Ofsted has been given the gig when attitudes like this prevail!

**Richard Moore, website**

### Oh my goodness, I agree with Stefan, that doesn't happen too often!

Main issue I have with the branding argument for public services is, to give an example, here in north London, it's still called Tottenham Tech, even though it's been at least three different names since it was actually that, but none of them has stuck because, at heart, it's the technical college in Tottenham and that's all people need to know (no shade on colleagues at Capital City Group here, I think it happens everywhere!).

**Steve Hewitt, website**

### Ignore the branding revolution at your peril, FE sector

All perfectly true. But brand isn't something that marketing can control per se. Why? Because brand is something that people experience that's way beyond a logo etc. Brand is what people say about us when our back is turned. It's what they feel about us and is the intrinsic output of their total experience of us and with

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?

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## REPLY OF THE WEEK

### Is Ofsted really ready to inspect all apprenticeships?



Ofsted doesn't want to prioritise lower-level apprenticeships. They have never said that. A vocational system should have a clear focus on progression from entry level to the very highest level. Therefore, it's about building a balanced system.

Chris Jones, (former Ofsted specialist adviser on apprenticeships), Twitter

us. Marketing can set the direction and tone of the customer experience but it cannot deliver single handed. Brand is delivered by the organisation when people drive into our car parks, walk through our doors and experience our teaching, estates, wait times on the phone, website, social media and a million other things that is that organisation. The success or failure of a college hundreds of miles away affects the brand perception of all of us. No college is an island!

Some of us have known this for decades. Indeed we have attempted to deliver it as far as we could. The exemplars were some of the land-based colleges where the relationship between dynamic leaders and marketing was strong.

**Stefan Drew, website**

### Tripling traineeships: large colleges refuse to rise to the challenge



This is dispiriting, given all the efforts Nick Linford, I, Mark Dawe, AELP and others both inside parliament and out have made in recent years to highlight role of traineeships for progression/social mobility. But not surprising with past government lukewarm record and Covid pressures, colleges nervous.

**Gordon Marsden, Twitter**

### Putting SEND learners at the heart of the college means all my students are back



What a wonderful story of inclusion, leadership and inspiration. Well done, all concerned!

**Chris Stoker-Jones, Facebook**



# Movers & Shakers

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



## Simon Pierce

Principal, St Helens College and Knowsley Community College

**Start date** August 2020

### Previous job

Deputy principal, The City of Liverpool College

### Interesting fact

A keen cyclist, he has ridden downhill at Whistler and up (and down) Mont Ventoux several times



## Philip Dover

Chair, Derby College Group

**Start date** August 2020

### Previous job

Headteacher, Leesbrook Community School

### Interesting fact

In the 1980s, he played in a band which made a record that was played by John Peel on Radio 1



## Anthony Impey MBE

Chair, City & Guilds Group's Industry Skills Board

**Start date** September 2020

### Concurrent job

Founder, Optimity; Chair, Skills and apprenticeships national policy group, Federation of Small Businesses

### Interesting fact

He ran last year's London Marathon in 2 hours 51 minutes

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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